

MOTHERHOOD: HOW IT AFFECTS WOMEN JOURNALISTS' EXPERIENCES

By

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by

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I would like to dedicate this research to my daughters Kenisha and Kendriana for their patience and to my family, especially my mom, for their prayers and never ending support.

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of motherhood on women in newsrooms. While all of the respondents agreed that the biggest issue faced by women in journalism is juggling work and family responsibilities, they also discussed feasible alternatives that could ultimately retain mothers in journalism professions. Among the suggestions were the implementation of job-sharing policies, as well as flextime and onsite childcare. Job-sharing occurs when two employees equally share the duties and responsibilities of a full-time employee. Flextime is time earned after working over the normal work hours. However, many of the women interviewed believe that those who enter the news business must have a

strong support system in place for their careers to be a success. Interviewees agreed that those entering the profession must understand, beforehand, that the profession is not a traditional nine-to-five job, and in reality, stories still have to be published or broadcast even when a child is ill. Finally, the respondents believe the more understanding upper-level management is about family-friendly newsroom policies, the easier it is for women to juggle family and a journalism career.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Family responsibilities are the biggest determining factor in female participation in today's workforce. The conflict between family and work responsibilities could pose a potential problem for the journalism profession because the news should be representative of its viewers and readers. When covering newsworthy events it is imperative to have a mixture of genders, ideas, backgrounds and ethnicities. News stories and those who write and present the facts should mirror the communities that are covered; this should include women as well as mothers. A survey conducted by Women in Journalism showed that mothers are still being forced out of newsrooms by unsympathetic bosses, and impossible hours (Perkins, 2001). However, newsrooms need to be more than a group of workaholics in their early 20s who have never experienced the joys and pains of parenting or home buying. It is imperative to bring to newsrooms the different experiences of the married mom with kids or the 45-year-old African American dad of a preschooler, as well as the 22-year-old rookie who can easily put in 10-hour days.

According to a *Redbook Magazine* survey, the most common concern of mothers who work full-time is that they're shortchanging their children by not being there for them(Paul,2003, p.169). A 2001 Gallup poll indicates that the number of Americans who believe that a mother or father should be home to take care of a child rose from 33 percent in 1989 to 41 percent today(Paul, 2003, p.169). Statistics from the Census Bureau reveal the percentage of mothers who have infants and hold jobs fell from a record high of 59 percent in 1998 to 55 percent in 2000 (Paul, 2003,p.169).

A 2001 survey, made public by the Media Management Center's Readership Institute, showed that having diverse news staff aids in maintaining readership. In short, the study revealed that certain content made readers read more. Stories topping the list include an intensely local, people-centered story, which includes news about ordinary people and lifestyle news. The positive material results were directly linked to the presence of women newsroom managers. But the number of women in top-ranking positions at newspapers is plummeting because those women are looking for a way out and jobs that give them more time with their families (Gibbons, 2002).

Some television stations have made it a priority to ensure racial diversity and gender equality among their

staff. When a proactive approach is taken, racial stereotypes are dispelled and viewers are empowered. When news beats such as child welfare, education and women's health are addressed an entire community could forever be changed.

For instance the news team at KUVU-TV in Austin, TX, has come extremely close to resembling the demographic makeup of its community. KUVU and its managers have a history of commitment to newsroom diversity. Women make up 43 percent of the newsroom staff (Papper, 2002). News directors at KVUE-TV believe that if newsrooms don't hire with the intent to reflect the community, they cannot expect reporters to understand issues in the community. This reality will also be reflected in newsrooms that don't set policies to retain caregivers on their staff.

The problem that faces many women isn't getting into the journalism business, but finding ways to stay in the business without jeopardizing family responsibilities. Some women have managed to find ways to handle the juggling act with journalism and family but never without paying a considerable career price (Pechilis, 1998).

In the U.S., half of all TV news reporters and anchors are women. Twenty-five years ago, women made up only 13 percent of the television news workforce. This dramatic

increase in the number of women in a once male-dominated profession serves as one result of what is known as the "gender switch," which occurred during the mid-1970s when more women than men enrolled in college journalism and mass communication courses. Research indicates that even though women predominate in journalism undergraduate and graduate programs by a 60/40 ratio, once on the job, they seem to have an eye on putting it aside for a while, if not for good (Pechilis, 1998). While it is not certain which career paths former journalists take, it would be safe to conclude that they would work in careers that offer more traditional eight-hour work-days. Nonetheless, the most common complaints made by women with families working in journalism are the long hours, which interfere with family time, and not having a life outside of work (ASNE, 2001). Long work hours could be defined as days consisting of more than 10 hours. An American Society of Newspaper Editors study (2001) revealed that the irregular hours, which can be defined as hours that are not consistent with a traditional eight-to-10 hour work-day, and stress of the job seem to affect women more than men, especially women who are trying to raise families at the same time. Women often argue that newsroom policies are not conducive to a good work/family balance, and many are frustrated when they

feel themselves stagnating. The departure rate from newspapers is higher for women than men, according to research from the Newspaper Association of America (Hemlinger, 2001).

This thesis will address the results motherhood has on women working in newsrooms and what causes mothers to either stay or leave in the news business. Other principal issues that will be addressed in the research will be gender disparities and media policy changes that have been implemented in some newsrooms across the nation to help keep mothers in journalism professions. The third chapter will discuss the qualitative method that was used to conduct the research. The final chapters will describe the themes that emerged from interviews with nine female journalists with at least one child who either left or stayed in the news business.

The following questions will be examined:

- Q1. What are some of the contributing reasons that mothers are leaving newsrooms?
- Q2. What do female journalists experience when they have children? How does this contribute to them leaving journalism professions?
- Q3. What are some news organizations doing to accommodate the needs of working mothers?
- Q4. Do mothers contribute to newsroom diversity?

- Q5. What alternative career options are available for women who leave the industry?

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Gender Disparities**

An International Media Foundation survey (2002) concluded that the majority of women journalists identified "balancing work and family" as the number one obstacle they encountered in attempting to advance in journalism careers. Other disheartening facts that contribute to the increasing number of women who are leaving newsrooms include the long hours, lack of flexibility and the intensity of newspaper journalism, often labeled "burnout job" and a "young person's profession." These characteristics appear to take a special toll on women in the field (Pechilis,1998).

Discrimination in the areas of pay, promotions and assignments is another reason many women are leaving newsrooms (Walsh-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996). Many of the same situations faced by women in newsrooms mirror those in the broader society, especially as they relate to advancement and pay grade. A survey of men and women in broadcast journalism showed that female journalists with children have more diverse issues to deal with compared to their male counterparts. Of 128 news anchors surveyed, 27

complained about the difficulty in balancing family and work, racial issues such as hiring practices or treatment of minority women and differential treatment based on sex. Women also stated that they experienced discrimination with salaries as well as promotions. In 1991, the median income of women with 10-plus years of journalism experience was \$28,750, while men with compatible experience earned \$34,808 (Walsh-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996). According to a 2002 ASNE newsroom employment census, the percentage of women in daily newsrooms declined slightly from 37.35 percent in 2001 to 37.05 percent in 2002 (ASNE, 2003).

When women are presented with an opportunity to advance in the newsroom, a certain number turn down the promotion because they don't want to put a strain on their families or home lives (Strupp, 2002). According to a study released in June 2002 by the Media Management Center, a training and research program at Northwestern University, the percentage of top editor positions held by women at major newspapers had actually declined by 2 percent over the previous two years, from 25 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2002. The reasons for the declines vary, but researchers say sexism and discrimination can be blamed for only part of the disparity (Strupp, 2002, p.32).

But if women want the privilege of being a successful journalists and good mothers they will have to advocate for themselves. While men dominated managerial positions at the *Boston Globe*, a lot of pressure for change came from reporters and editors seeking flexibility and balance in their lives. But it was up to those desiring flexibility to come up with an offer that would not be refused. They devised a plan that included an outline of their work schedules, pointed out potential problems and provided solutions (Selvin, 1993). The *Globe* was not the only paper trying to achieve a balance between work and family. In 1992, *The New York Times* formed a paper-wide work/family committee and presented a list of policy options and concerns to management (Selvin, 1993).

### **Testimonials**

A study conducted by Erika Engstrom (2000) indicates that being a mother seems to pose an especially difficult challenge for female television anchors. Female anchors who participated in the study mentioned how the evening work hours intrude on family time as well as the difficulty in juggling their roles at work and home. Even those without children acknowledged that balancing a demanding journalism career and family needs could be extremely difficult. Those without children acknowledged the

hardships of female journalists with children with such comments as: "I don't have children, but I don't know how those who do handle it all"and"I am not a mother because I can't imagine being able to successfully do both." "I would be failing in both duties if I were a mother, too" (Engstrom, 2000). Several female anchors mentioned that they have had problems with management based on their having a family.

Both family and work expect you to be there whenever they need you. I can't always do both, and I think that my employers hold it against me. Management says it understands, but neither understands nor forgives when there's a news emergency and Mom is needed elsewhere. (Engstrom, 2000, pp.72)

Unfortunately, some women have left the news industry altogether, at least partly out of the need for a calmer lifestyle. Geneva Overholser, *The Washington Post's* ombudsman and syndicated columnist, left to teach journalism at the University of Missouri. Overholser said she had been offered plenty of editing jobs that she would have accepted years earlier but that she wanted to spend more time with her teenager at home who is now a teenager (Strupp, 2001).

Many women are now joining the growing ranks of freelancers because they feel there is no alternative. Others who work as freelancers by choice point out that

what they gain in flexibility they lose in benefits, such as maternity leave and pay (Perkins, 2001).

ABC anchor Barbara Walters said some changes have been made in the news industry to retain women with children. Walters said things are changing, and the fact that many newswomen bring their children to work is more acceptable today than it would have been 30 years ago.

I used to say that if I had ever brought my baby into the office, it would be like bringing a dog in that wasn't toilet trained. Certainly on the morning shows you have Joan Lunden who used to bring her children in, Katie Couric who had the baby there and Kathie Lee Gifford who didn't do a news program but we heard they work until their ninth month. (Marlane, 1999 p.143)

Cindy DiBiasi, a former reporter for WUSA-TV, a Gannett-owned station in Washington, D.C., is one of the countless women who found that the birth of a second baby and the impossibility of arranging a short workweek to accommodate her family destroyed her career. In 1989, DiBiasi became a medical reporter, but before she started her new position, she learned she was pregnant. She used the birth of her son as a news story. However, prior to her son turning one, her father became ill, and she had to be with him in Illinois; then her nanny was ill. She recalled some advice:

A long time ago a female reporter told me that whenever my child got sick, I should always say it was me who was sick. I remember thinking that's bull ----. How

could they want me to be dishonest? But now I wasn't so sure. (Crittenden, 2000, p. 100)

DiBiasi's story illustrates that the most popular pattern of family planning in the United States and other wealthy countries--two children spaced not too far apart--is incompatible with most women's careers. Even if a new mother and her employer can cope with one child, the second child is often the final straw. The career cost of children has become so high that many American women are not having children at all (Crittenden, 2001).

Andrea Mitchell, an NBC reporter, said she regrets making her job her life. "The major sacrifice was not having children. So I think that's a major sacrifice, not having children during my thirties when I should have." (Marlane, 1999, pp.143)

Susy Schultz, a reporter with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, said women should weigh their options prior to choosing a career in journalism.

I don't think that women go in saying 'I'm going to dabble' ... The stark reality of what this business demands of your time hits them smack dab in the eye in the middle of their career. (Pechilis, 2002, p.2)

Schultz was confronted with that reality in the early 1990s, with the birth of her first son. She took the first year off, knowing that many co-workers never expected to see her in the newsroom again. When she did come back, the

award-winning former metro reporter was demoted to a full-time position on the home pages, despite her inexperience in interior design. Nonetheless, the job was flexible and allowed her to be home with her child (Pechilis, 2002).

Linda Hughes, *Edmonton Journal* publisher believes the real problem is the issue of long hours. Hughes said juggling a journalism career and family takes good coordination, which is something that the journalism professions just don't offer. "No question you can combine a job with being a good mother, but to do that effectively, you need some predictability." (Vlieg, 1999,p.1)

For nearly 20 years at the *Inquirer*, Jane Eisner was afforded the opportunity to tackle jobs no mother had held before. The mother of three became a foreign correspondent when her first child was in diapers and editorial-page editor when her second child was still in nursery school (Eisner, 2001). However, the demands of the job eventually got to be too much. She concluded that children need their parents more as they get older, not less. Eisner said that in some ways, a newsroom is inherently family-unfriendly.

There's a reason it took me three years to finally see one of my daughter's basketball games, and it wasn't that I was a bad mom. It's because I was trying to be a good editor. (Eisner, 2001, p.2)

Eisner realized it was time for things to change so she became a full-time columnist in 1998. "Now the only thing that gets in the way of my work is, well, me. That I can deal with" (Eisner, 2001,). According to Eisner, the newsroom has made progress. Several dozen staff members, including men, work part-time. She says managers are more accommodating, especially with new technology that makes journalists' jobs easier.

### **A Change in Newsroom Policies**

Working Mothers magazine, which since 1986 has published a list of the U.S. companies friendliest to families, included three newspapers companies on its 1998 list of 100: Gannett, which also operates TV and radio stations, the *Miami Herald/El Nuevo Herald*, owned by Knight-Ridder, and the *Seattle Times Company* (Harvey, 1997).

In the early 1990s, several newspapers saw the need to devise a plan to keep mothers in newsrooms. Mimi Feller, vice president of public affairs and government relations with the Gannett news organization, said that a diverse workforce requires employers to have diverse work options (Harvey, 1997). The *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *Seattle Times* have recognized the importance of keeping mothers in newsrooms by offering on-site daycare centers

(Harvey, 1997). The newspapers pay the YMCA to manage their childcare facilities. On average, about 23 employees' children attend the center, which opened in 1985. *The Miami Herald* did something similar by setting aside a small room for back-up childcare for use when a regular babysitter, is ill or when preschool is closed for a holiday or teacher planning day. The children are watched by a babysitter who is independently hired by their parents (Harvey, 1997).

Gannett Newspapers began focusing on bringing women and minorities into management 20 years ago. The organization strives to create newsrooms that provide parents with flexibility and room to balance work and home gracefully. Without that understanding, the media giant officials say, "we lose too many good people and too much valuable perspective" (Wallace, 2002, p.3).

Some papers have embraced part-time scheduling even as others keep their distance. Christine Morris, associate editor for personnel with *The Miami Herald*, said they are looking for more people to take part in job-sharing (Selvin, 1993). Often, more flexible scheduling is prompted when a star reporter or editor comes to a manager and says she just can't handle working full-time while meeting the needs of her children. Slowly but steadily,

part-time schedules for parents of young children have become an accepted feature of newsrooms around the country (Selvin, 1993). Women such as Ellen Graham at the *Wall Street Journal* and Nadine Brozan and Deirdre Carmody at *The New York Times* persuaded supervisors to let them cut back their hours while they raised their children (Selvin, 1993).

Newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* have job-sharing included in their policies. *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* don't. However, all of the newspapers allow part-time employees to have some prorated vacation, sick and personal days (Selvin, 1993).

When employees switch from full-time to part-time employment, they often lose significant benefits, such as medical coverage and vacation time (Selvin, 1993). The loss of benefits often puts a strain on families. Rosewicz and her colleague Gutfeld found that their biggest obstacle to equitable benefits was language in their union contract.

Of the 20 largest U.S. papers, only the *Globe* and *The Miami Herald* have tried job-sharing specifically to keep working mothers on a management track. Job sharing occurs when two employees share the duties and responsibilities of a position once held by one individual. Surprisingly, this heightened awareness came in part from top male managers'

own life experiences as fathers and witnessing the balance firsthand. Five of the papers have formal job-sharing policies. Many smaller papers also have created part-time programs to keep good women journalists from leaving. Nearly all participants have been women with young children. Laszlo Domjan, metropolitan editor at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, said job sharing there began in 1985. He said job-sharing "makes better reporters" (Pechilis, J. 1998).

#### **Technology Makes Mothers' Jobs Easier**

The online revolution in the media and entertainment industries is changing the way journalists work and overhauling the employment patterns and gender distribution of the world's information companies. A number of women also identified as mothers, wives and students said new technology has allowed them to shift identities easily, from career woman to mother (Thiel, 2002).

Margaretta "Meg" Downey, the editorial page editor for the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, was working from home and hospitals even before a formal "telework" policy was put in place in the spring of 1996 by her newspaper's executives. When her youngest son, Evan, now 16, was hospitalized when he was 12 years old with severe asthma, she wrote editorials at his bedside. Even while she recuperated from

a head-on collision, the paper supplied her with a laptop computer connected to the office with a modem. "From the Journal standpoint," Downey says, "as long as I can do the jobs, it's less important where I am" (Harvey, 1997,p.19).

Another advantage new media and new technology offers mothers are career advancement opportunities. A former reporter for *The Detroit Free Press*, realized it might be years before she could advance to the editor level of a major national newspaper. However, when she heard that *The Washington Post* was seeking editors for its online publication in 1995, even though she had had no previous aspirations to move into new media, she jumped at the opportunity (Thiel, 2002).

Threse Hegarty is group production manager for Beyond Production, which produces all genres of television, with a focus on documentary. She said innovative technology allowed her to spend more time working and raising her son and daughter. She said she uses a laptop computer and an Internet connection from home so if she has to walk out of the office with something urgent pending, it's easy for her to pick it up later on that night once the children are in bed. She added, "I find technology such as laptops, mobile phones and the Internet enormously helpful in juggling time

needed for work and the time needed for family" (Visions of Balance, 2002,p.14).

CHAPTER 3  
METHOD

**Cultural Categories**

The Researcher became a journalist after graduating from the University of North Florida in 1998. Six months after completing my studies I started working for a small daily newspaper, where I experienced the hardships of balancing a journalism career and family responsibilities. After two years in the newsroom, my eight-year marriage ended in divorce. I began to endure the struggles of being a single mother and a passionate journalist. I believe newspapers, television stations, and news magazines that are committed to embracing the unique demands of parenting are the ones that will maintain high numbers of viewers and readers. I believe this result could be achieved when racial diversity, gender equality and flexible newsroom policies are proactively addressed by upper-level newsroom management.

**Advantages of Qualitative Research**

This study took a qualitative approach because it allowed the researcher to investigate each woman's individual situation and search for patterns, themes and

commonalities across the group of interviewees. The researcher collected data related to the topic and grouped it into appropriate and meaningful categories that emerged from the data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). Refer to Appendix A for biographies of participants.

### **Methodology**

The primary researcher conducted nine in-depth interviews with female journalists or former journalists who have at least one child while working in journalism. Initial interviewees were women already known to the researcher and/or her associates. Those women interviewed were asked to refer the researcher to others who fit the sample criteria. This sampling method is known as snowball sampling. Interviewees were emailed an informed consent form and a series of 12 questions that were derived from the primary researcher's past experience as a journalist and as a mother. The secondary coder also assisted with the construction and order of the interview questions. (Refer to Appendix B for the list of interview questions).

The researcher decided to conduct the interviews online because she believed that Internet access was easily accessible and practical, especially for female journalists. It would also be convenient for the respondents to respond without having to set aside time to

wait for a phone call. The researcher also wanted to provide the interviewees with the flexibility they needed, as mothers and journalists, to answer the questions at a convenient time and location. For example, the interviewees may have found it convenient to reply easily and quietly once the children were asleep. This technique proved to be less successful than anticipated; this problem is addressed in the Study Limitations section of Chapter five.

The responses to the interviews were printed out and analyzed by the primary and secondary coders. The interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative technique. This technique was used to articulate the information gathered. This practice was first described by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). This technique consists of four steps, which include: comparative assignment of incidents to categories, elaboration and refinement of categories, searching for relationships and themes among categories, and simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure.

Prior to beginning the online interview, respondents were emailed informed consent forms, which had to be emailed back to the primary researcher prior to beginning the interview process. The cyber-agreement allowed each respondent to begin the interview process, expeditiously.

The consent form addressed the length of the interview, risks, compensation and confidentiality, as well as the individual's right to withdraw. This form did not have to be signed, only emailed back to confirm participation.

The purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to the interviewee in the informed consent form. The interview questions and consent form were emailed as attachments. The respondents were given four weeks to respond. The responses were printed out and reviewed by the secondary coder for common themes. After this initial review, a last call was emailed to the interviewees, asking if they agreed with the themes that had been identified by the coders. Follow-up questions also were emailed to the interviewees. Of the nine interviewees who participated, only six responded. They concurred with the themes that the coders had identified.

CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS

The following table contains background information about each of the nine interview candidates who participated in the research. Refer to Appendix A for additional details.

Table 1. Journalists' Background Information.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Journalism Career</b>	<b>Number of children</b>
Mary Bayer	Married	17 years	Broadcasting	1
Cynthia Barnett	Married	17 years	Magazine	1
Charymane Brown	Married	5 years	Broadcasting	1
Shirley Carswell	Married	20	Newspaper	2
Deborah Gianoulis	Married	27	Broadcasting	2
Beth Younggren Glassman	Married	13	Broadcasting	2
Jan Leach	Married	24	Newspaper	3
Nancy Rubin	Married	24	Broadcasting	1
Sue Straughn	Married	30	Broadcasting	1

**Mothers Newsroom Experiences**

While reading each interview, the primary and secondary coders identified reoccurring themes. Each respondent elaborated on her individual newsroom experiences and described how motherhood had affected her job as a journalist. Commonly repeated themes included the

following: motherhood affects story perspective, motherhood affects your work ethic, the balancing act, and so many stories but not enough time, journalists must have a support system (i.e., family, nanny, dependable babysitter), a supportive management team brings balance, and solid family-friendly policies make journalists' jobs easier.

### **Motherhood Effects Story Perspectives**

One recurring theme throughout the interviews was that becoming a mother changes women's perspectives on the news. The majority of the respondents agreed that motherhood changed their perspectives on news stories. Rubin said after becoming a mother, she took her job more seriously.

I think my work as a journalist now carries with it much greater gravity. I am astounded at the depths of my emotion when covering stories that involve human events (almost all do). I cry for parents who lose children to crime or accidents, and I feel profoundly for all the families caught in poverty and war. I think I was much more narrow-minded before I became a mother. Before, I realized there was emotion involved but I didn't actually feel it myself. (Nancy Rubin, personal interview, 8/27/03)

Baer said that once she became a parent, she could better relate to viewers. "I became a parent just like many of our viewers, and so I could relate to many of the stories we report."

Carswell said becoming a mother forced her to become more aware of things going on within the community where she lived.

Many journalists get so wrapped up in their work that they have no outside life. Everything they do is with other journalists or related to their work. Having children forces you to focus on things outside of the business and to spend less time in the newsroom and more time on daily life situations, dealing with traffic, schools, doctors, etc. It (motherhood) helps journalists stay grounded in the things our readers care most about. (Shirley Carswell, personal interview, 7/8/2003)

### **Motherhood Effects Journalists' Work Ethic**

Despite the challenges of balancing work and family duties, another important recurring theme was that motherhood made these women better journalists.

Interviewees expressed a need to cover issues that are important to their families as well as viewers' or readers' families.

Glassman said she lost interest in sensationalism. "I am even less interested in the sensation-based stories. I want to learn about stories that will impact my family. I just want people to have the important information that will help them in their daily activities. I don't have time or interest in stories for mere entertainment."

Carswell, a 20-year newspaper veteran, said motherhood diversifies the journalism experience.

It (motherhood) helps journalists stay grounded in the things our readers care most about. To me, it's easier for men to lose that balance. Women have little choice but to worry about both if they want to succeed in their jobs.

Leach, a newspaper journalist, said that when she became a mother, she became a better journalist because she listened to the people in the community. "I think being a mother made me a better listener, more in tune with regular readers and more responsive to the personal needs of staffers who worked for me."

Rubin, a seasoned television reporter, said she is challenged most by the sheer responsibility of the job. "So many people are getting information from us and so many may be swayed to feel one way or another . . . It is humbling to be in charge of deciding what gets into a story and what doesn't. I take that responsibility very seriously."

### **The Balancing Act**

Most respondents agreed that their biggest struggle had been balancing work and family. Television news reporter Straughn said the unpredictable and long hours, including weekdays and weekends, made it challenging to make sure she didn't miss out on childhood activities. "We succeeded to some extent but, in hindsight, I always wish I could have

done more (with her family).” Brown stated that “juggling my family life, with my career life, challenges me most.”

Gianoulis noted that both motherhood and journalism could be overwhelming at times. She said when she feels the pressure coming on, she requests a schedule change. “When my evening hours became too hard for my family, I negotiated a different shift. Had I not been able to do that, I probably would have changed careers. My family time became that important to me.” She also said the juggling act is a part of being a mother and a journalist.

The daily news business is one headache after another . . . you leave late for the story, the sound is bad, the weather is lousy and you are not getting along with the photographer . . . then the desk calls you off that story for breaking news, yet you still have to get the first assignment on air and you have to reschedule your child’s doctor appointment, plus you’re late for dinner. (Deborah Gianoulis, personal interview, 6/16/03)

Baer said there have been times when she has had to give a story in progress to a producer to finish because her husband was out of town and her child’s nanny was ill. She said when family emergencies come up; women have to plan, think fast and take action.

It (an emergency) happens about once every other week, depending on breaking news or my news director’s changing plans. Usually, if I’m shooting a story early in the day, I’m able to complete the interview or story shoot because I have already planned to have the sitter there. Juggling certainly has its frustrations, but a supportive family and friend-network certainly help me

handle the job. That is the secret to handling the juggling act, in my estimation. (Mary Baer, personal interview, 7/15/2003)

Barnett said because she has a unique work schedule, the juggling act is not as challenging for her.

One way I handle the juggling act is to work odd hours so that I can spend my toddler's awake hours with him. For example, if I have to work in Orlando for a day, I used to travel there the day before. Now, I don't leave home until 8 p.m. so that I can have dinner with my family and share before bedtime with Will. It means I have to drive late at night, but it is worth spending that extra time with Will. (Cynthia Barnett, personal interview, 6/25/03)

### **So Many Stories Not Enough Time**

For television journalists Gianoulis, Rubin, and Glassman, motherhood heightened their recognition that there is not enough time to cover the important stories in-depth. "I have learned to respect the process, the constantly changing nature of all aspects of our lives that simply cannot be told in a 1:30 story. I hope to create a new career in my industry by taking the viewer with me as we explore the complexities and humanity of the issues of our time." Glassman said she is challenged most when she has "complex issues to condense into 1:30 packages." Rubin said:

The time constraints in TV are the toughest part of the job. Sometimes a story or interview that really requires time is cut short because of other news, and that can be frustrating. I try to tell viewers what they need to know and interest them to search for more

information from other sources. (Beth Younggren-Glassman, personal interview, 6/26/03)

### **Journalists Must Have A Dependable Support System**

All of the interviewees acknowledged that having a supportive spouse, family support or even a dependable nanny made their home lives and careers more manageable. Gianoulis said if it were not for additional support from her nanny and husband, she would not be in television business today.

The reality is we are a 24-hour business and parents have to take the primary responsibility for having childcare and back-ups on those days when the news dictates you work beyond your regular shifts. In my case, my career has been made possible by my husband and a devoted Nanny who have packed up kids and cars to escape an approaching hurricane while I was on the anchor desk for hours on end!

Carswell said she would advise college graduates who want to pursue journalism careers and motherhood to find good support systems for childcare, whether it's their parents, their in-laws or a family friend who is reliable and dependable. That way they don't feel so guilty about leaving their child while they work long hours. Leach said that it's "imperative to have a super-supportive spouse/partner and a very flexible editor."

### **Supportive Management Brings Balance**

The participants in this study agreed that having supportive supervisors is the key to helping mothers stay

in journalism. Rubin said her station's management failed to understand her needs as a mother and that's when she left the business to raise her children.

My previous managers at 4 tried to bend with me and did to a certain extent, but I don't think they realized that the intensity of being mother to small children passes as they grow and become more independent. I am willing and able to work more now that my children are school age. If my previous managers had worked with me a little more on a plan for the future, perhaps I would not have left when I did.

Glassman said her supervisor has been very flexible. She also said those who enter the profession must understand that "no matter how management is, you are entering a profession, which requires us to work when most people are at home."

#### **Solid Family-Friendly Policies Help Retain Mothers**

To attract and retain the best staffers, newspapers are making strides to keep working mothers in newsrooms. Papers are extending unpaid family leaves beyond 12 weeks required by federal law. This arrangement gives parents flexibility when raising young children (Harvey, 1997). A large majority of the interviewees also agree that having policies that include job-sharing, flextime and even on-site childcare would help more women to be successful in their careers.

Rubin suggested that if the news business adopted work policies of ordinary businesses, to accommodate the needs of working mothers, more women would definitely stay in news.

Perhaps news has to look at other businesses where parents have been sharing jobs for a long time. If someone is too good to lose as an employee, too much of an asset to the newsroom, why not try something new to keep them?

Carswell suggested that having several alternatives in place would give mothers more options to choose from when it comes to balancing work and family responsibilities.

Most women are experts at multi-tasking. If more women had the option of working from home one or two days a week, I think that would help a lot. Also, onsite daycare is a great benefit that allows women (and men) to spend time with their children during the work day and it cuts down on commuting time, allowing them to put in longer hours on the job.

Carswell also added that *The Washington Post* has a track record of assisting mothers with maternity leave and scheduling upon returning to work. However, Carswell admitted there are some disadvantages.

The *Post* has made it easy for women who go on maternity leave to return as part-time employees while their children are very young. Still, this is a business that relies on reporters traveling a lot and being able to go after the big stories with little advance notice. If you have children and don't have family or other support systems to allow you to do so, you will not be tapped for those big stories. The *Post* has also provided emergency childcare service for occasional use when you're in a pinch. It also allows employees a lot of flexibility in terms of hours so that you can attend

your child's school events, as long as you get your work done.

CHAPTER 5  
DISCUSSION

**Conclusion**

There are signs that the newsroom milieu, especially the kind of everyday emergencies involved in getting a story as it breaks, make journalism a field that is especially demanding of its workers' time and attention. In fact, a study of journalists in the Washington press corps, commissioned by American Women in Journalism, revealed that at the uppermost levels of the profession, even marriage appears to be antithetical to women's success (Pechilis, 1998).

In conclusion, all of the respondents recognized various hardships mothers experience in newsrooms, to some degree. Most of the women offered reasonable solutions such as job-sharing, flextime and on-site childcare. Others recommended building an understanding relationship with the boss. Most of the interviewees said women must have a support system in place, whether it is a spouse, family or a nanny, to be successful in the news business, after they have children.

Throughout the course of the interviews, none of the women said that women who choose journalism as a profession should leave the business once they become mothers; few of the respondents said they had regrets about entering the business, then deciding to become a mother. Some said they wished they had taken more maternity leave time or at least a year off prior to returning to work. Others said they have missed out on significant child-related events such as Girl Scout meetings, classroom activities, sports and some everyday quality time.

Prior to these women having children, they were driven individuals and some appeared to be somewhat numb to the adversities of day-to-day challenges of being a journalist and a mother. However, when women enter motherhood as journalists, some remain driven while others have to have some predictability and flexibility.

Each of the women suggested that having a dependable support network in place, such as a spouse, family, babysitter and boss is imperative to succeed in the journalism business. In addition, respondents believe motherhood matured them as journalists. The women felt that their duties went beyond just reporting, extending to helping families with daily decision-making practices.

Three of the respondents who had been in the business more than 10 years believe there is not enough on air time to cover important issues that really matter to viewers and their families. This is one reason why Gianoulis said she left the anchor desk to pursue more in-depth reporting by means of documentary for Channel 4, in Jacksonville, Florida.

Respondents also stressed the need for family-friendly policies that include on-site childcare, job-sharing and flextime. However, the early results from a Women in Journalism survey of management show that managing editors believe the legal obligation to offer family-friendly support systems has gone far enough, and most regard it as "very difficult" to arrange -especially matching up people for job sharing and part-time working. Other managing editors express support for more flexible policies. These policies help with staff retention and morale (Perkins,2001).

### **Study Limitations**

Each participant originally was emailed an informed consent form as well as 12 interview questions. They also were given an initial deadline of two weeks to respond. This posed a problem because at least half of the respondents were not computer savvy and experienced

problems with opening the attachments, as well as emailing their responses back to the interviewer. Some of the respondents ended up mailing the primary interviewer their responses via postal mail. The primary researcher also believes had the interviews been conducted face-to-face, it would have been more convenient and the information would have been more in-depth. There would have been better responses because follow-up questions would have been asked immediately. For instance, if the interviews were conducted in "real time" the respondents probably would have elaborated more; thereby, giving the primary coder the opportunity to formulate immediate follow-up questions. Also when follow-up phone calls were made during the last call, it was difficult to reach the interviewees due to various reasons, including, full voicemail boxes. When messages were left there was no response.

#### **Future Research**

Future research should be conducted to address the restrictions of this study. Research should include interviews with spouses and older children of female journalists. In-depth interviews also should be conducted with upper-level newsroom managers, to discuss how their news organizations accommodate working mothers. Newsroom policies should also be examined to determine if they are

family-friendly. Another group that should be closely studied is women who left the journalism industry due to concerns about balancing work and family. Finally, the issue of what it would have taken for those women to stay in the industry also should be examined.

In conclusion, there should be diverse research done to ensure that women journalists are not only dominating journalism programs but news organizations are finding ways to keep them.

APPENDIX A  
RESPONDENT BIOGRAPHIES

**Mary Baer** is married and has one child. She has been a professional journalist for 17 years. Baer started her career as a reporter and editor for her college newspaper at the University of Oregon. She is currently the main female co-anchor for WJXT, the number one television station in the Jacksonville market.

**Cynthia Barnett** is married with one child. She has been a journalist for 17 years. Barnett started her career with the *Gainesville Sun* while still in college in 1987. She was eventually promoted to the Starke bureau then to the Tallahassee bureau. She left the *Sun* because she was unhappy with her position as an editor. She relocated to North Carolina and accepted the senior reporter position with The News & Observer. Today, she covers the state for *Florida Trend Magazine*.

**Charmayne Brown** is married with two children. She has been a television news reporter for five years. She started her career while in college as a reporter. She got her first job as a general assignment reporter in Fort

Myers, Florida. Brown is currently the night beat reporter for WJXT Channel 4 in Jacksonville.

**Shirley Carswell** is separated. She has three children and has been a news reporter for 20 years. She started her career working in an entry-level position at Gannett News Service for about 18 months before accepting copy editing jobs at the *Richmond Time-Dispatch*, *Oakland Press*, *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*. Carswell is among 20 assistant managing editors in a newsroom of about 900 people with the *Washington Post*. She manages the newsroom budget, technology, and other support staffs.

**Deborah Gianoulis** is married and is the mother of two children. She has been a journalist for 27 years. Her career began in 1976 when she was hired by WTLV in Jacksonville as a reporter. Within five months she was anchoring Monday through Friday the six and 11 PM newscasts. She relocated to England where she wrote freelance for UPI Audio. She returned to Jacksonville in 1979. Gianoulis retired in May from the anchor desk to pursue documentary special programming.

**Beth Younggren Glassman** is married with two children. She has been a news reporter for 13 years with WCJB Channel 20 in Gainesville.

**Jan Leach** is married and is the mother of three children. Leach has been a journalist for 24 years. Leach has stayed in the newspaper business since she started her career. She's worked at papers in Phoenix, Arizona, and Findlay and Fostoria, Ohio, in various editing and reporting positions. Leach recently retired as editor and vice president of the *Akron Beacon Journal* in Akron, Ohio.

**Nancy Rubin** is married with three children. She has been a journalist for 20 years. Rubin has been a broadcast journalist since graduating from Boston University in 1983. Rubin's first on-air job after college was in Bangor, Maine for the CBS affiliate. Rubin then relocated to Jacksonville to work for WJXT-TV in 1984 and have been associated with the station since. In December 1993, Rubin left full-time employment at Channel 4 to care for her two young children but worked freelance for the newsroom in many capacities. After having her third child in 1997, she cut her hours severely to spend more time with her children. She returned to the newsroom in the summer of 2002, at the request of management, to assist while the station transitioned to an independent news station. Rubin works permanently as a fill-in anchor and reporter during the week.

**Sue Straughn** is married and is the mother of one child. Straughn has been in the television profession for 30 years. She began as a clerk typist and worked her way up the ranks. She's held various positions, including traffic manager, public service director, program director and assistant operations manager. She currently holds the titles of news anchor and public affairs director.

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Marital status:

1-married 2- single 3-separated 4- divorced 5-widowed

Number of children:

Number of years as journalist:

1. Tell me about your career.
2. Why did you choose journalism as a profession?
3. What do you enjoy most? What do you least like about being a journalist?
4. What challenges you the most?
5. Tell me about hour your job/employee relationship, etc. changed after your children were born.
6. How did being a mother affect your work as a journalist?
7. What would it take for you to stay in the business? / Why did you leave? What would it take for you to come back?
8. Tell me about the newsroom where you worked. What percent were men, women, and parents?
9. What would you tell female college graduates about motherhood and journalism?
10. How has management at your newspaper/station dealt with parents' needs, other women's concerns?
11. What could/can editors and news directors do to retain women and mothers? Do you have any suggestions to address this matter?
12. Do you have any regrets?

APPENDIX C  
SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Name: Nancy Rubin  
Today's Date: 8\27\03  
Marital Status: Married  
Number of children: three

1. Tell me about your career.

I've worked as a broadcast journalist since my graduation from Boston University in 1983. My first on-air job after college was in Bangor, Maine for the CBS affiliate. I did general assignment reporting and morning anchoring. After Bangor, I headed to Jacksonville to work for WJXT-TV in 1984 and have been associated with Channel 4 in some way since. I started as a general assignment reporter, was promoted to weekend anchor, then weekday morning anchor and was honored to debut Eyewitness news at 5:30 alongside Tom Willis in 1990. In December of 1993, I left full-time employment at Channel 4 to care for my two younger children, but worked freelance for the newsroom in many different capacities. After the arrival of my third child in 1997 time to work at the station was cut severely. Still in the summer of 2002, the newsroom management contacted me about helping them through the transition to independence and I accepted a temporary post as weekend morning show anchor. I have now accepted that position permanently and work as a fill-in anchor and reporter during the week as well.

2. How long have you been a journalist?/Why did you choose journalism as a profession?

I've been in television professionally since mid-1983, but I have been interested in news since long before that. I worked in radio news for my college station and interned around Boston during my four years at B.U. My first love is writing and I found I could take information and turn it into a short understandable story. I chose journalism knowing that words and

people interested me and in news I could find lots of both!

3. What do you enjoy most about your career? What do you least like about being a journalist?

I enjoy the variety that journalists enjoy. I could not imagine a job that required the same skills day in and day out. As a reporter/anchor I get to think about different topics, meet and talk to different people and come up with different ways to do my job each day. The time constraints in TV are the toughest part of the job. Sometimes a story or interview that really requires time is cut short because of other news and that can be frustrating. I try to tell viewers what they need to know and interest them enough to get them to search for more information from other sources.

4. What challenges you the most?

I am challenged most by the sheer responsibility of the job. So many people are getting information from us and so many may be swayed to feel one way or another. It is humbling to be in charge of deciding what gets into a story and what doesn't. I take that responsibility seriously and it is as it always has been ...my greatest challenge.

5. Tell me about how your job/employee relationships changed after your children were born.

I had always assumed I would continue working after our first child arrived but in late 1991 I learned it is not always possible to imagine what you will feel like after a life-changing experience like becoming a mother. We had interviewed nannies and had planned to have someone come into the home so we could both return to work, but as soon as our daughter arrived I began to have mixed feelings on it. We decided I would talk to the station management about cutting back on my schedule and that is what I did.

6. How did being a mother affect your work as a journalist?

I think my work as a journalist now carries with it much greater gravity. I am astounded at the depths of my emotions when covering stories that involve human

events (as almost all do). I cry for parents who lose children to crime or accidents and feel profoundly for all the families caught in poverty and war. I think I was much more narrow-minded before I became a mother. Before I realized there was emotion involved but I didn't actually feel it myself.

7. What would it take for you to stay in the news business/ Why did you leave? What would it take for you to return to the newsroom?

What it has taken for me to be able to stay in the business is some flexible thinking on the part of my employer, My previous managers at 4 tried to bend with me and did to a certain extent but I don't think they realized the intensity of being mother to small children passes as they grow and become more independent. I am willing and able to work more now that all my children are school-age. If my previous managers had worked with me a little more on a plan for the future perhaps I would not have left when I did.

8. Tell me about the newsroom where you worked or currently work. What percentage would you say are men, women, and parents?

I think the majority of people I work with are not parents. Most are young reporters just starting out. It is difficult to put percentages on the makeup of the newsroom but I would say the women outnumber the men right now.

9. What would you tell female college graduates about motherhood and journalism?

I would tell young women to realize they will have to make some choices somewhere along the line, When I was in school no one asked me what I would do if I had the greatest TV job ever (which I did) and then had children. No one forced me to plan ahead so I just had to wing it. I am sure my decisions are not right for every woman, but being ready for when you get to the crossroads, having something of an ideal of what you want is a good start. Of course, as I said already, nothing can really prepare you for becoming a parent for the first time, so I would also say don't set and plans in stone.

10. How has management at your newspaper/television station dealt with parents' needs and other women's concerns?

It is difficult for any company that has to constantly turn out a product to be totally responsive to a parent's needs. The newsroom has a tremendous burden in the constant demands of filling so many hours of news hold and if your baby is sick that news hole still must be filled and that show must still have an anchor in front of the camera, not to mention shooters, editors, directors, engineers, and producers to put it on the air. Women's concerns are certainly NOT a huge concern, but I do see more compassion for the difficulties of juggling it all. Still if I had to guess I would say most women in news jobs find it too hard to do both and wind up giving up news for a more 9 to 5 business.

11. What could editors and news directors do to retain women and mothers? Do you have any suggestion to address this matter?

I would love to see more flexible schedules like mine available. I think it is doable. I think two terrific women can share a reporter post, with each doing a few days. I think that would also work for anchors. I think managers get too stuck in the old ways of thinking of positions. Perhaps news has to look at other businesses where parents have been sharing jobs for a long time. If someone is too good to lose an employee, too much of an asset to the newsroom, why not try something new to keep them?

12. Do you have any regrets?

My only regret is not being able to convince my old bosses not to let me leave when I did. I would have liked to have contributed to the success of channel 4 during those years. Still, we have three great children and I am so thankful I had time to be with them when they were little so truly I could not have asked for things to work out better. I am now at a stage where I am back giving to the newsroom and the viewers and I am very luck to get a second chance.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kandra Drayton became a journalist immediately after graduating from the University of North Florida, in 1998. After her eight-year marriage ended in divorce she began to endure the hardships of balancing a journalism career and family, as a single mother. Kandra believes newspapers, television stations, and news magazines that are committed to embracing newsroom diversity experience an increase the numbers of viewers and readers. She believes this result is achieved when racial diversity, gender equality and flexible newsroom policies are proactively addressed by upper-level newsroom management.