YOUTH, NEWS, AND COMMUNITY: AN EXAMINATION OF YOUTH-GENERATED NEWS WEBSITES AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR PROMOTING COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

By

JEFFREY C. NEELY

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2011
To my wife, Kendall, for all your love, patience, and support: You are the best chapter in my life. To my daughter, Eden, for your smiles: They helped me remember the truly important things.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to each of my committee members for your guidance and support in completing this dissertation. I feel truly privileged to have been the recipient of your expertise and constructive input.

I would like to thank Dr. Kim Walsh-Childers, my friend and committee chairperson, for being always available when I needed help, always honest about my strengths and weaknesses as a budding researcher, and always supportive of my goals as a scholar.

I would like to thank Dr. Norman Lewis for his office door that was open any time I had questions and for helping to guide me through the waters of academic research and publication.

I would like to thank Professor Mindy McAdams for sharing with me her tremendous expertise in digital media and how it relates to the world we live in, as well as to my research.

I would like to thank Dr. Cory Armstrong for helping me to gain a firm understanding of theoretical frameworks and for her steady guidance in developing much of my literature review.

I would like to thank Dr. Rosemary Barnett for imparting to me both her knowledge and passion for empowering youth and promoting their positive involvement in our communities.

To all the teachers, mentors, and friends not mentioned, I am grateful for the role you have played in my life personally and professionally.
Thank you also to all the teens and adults who were so gracious in sharing their expertise and experiences in creating youth-generated journalism for this project. I applaud the work you are doing to give youth a voice in our communities.

Finally, I would like to thank God, my wife, my daughter, my parents, and all of my dear family for being the sources of strength and support to bring me where I am.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Community: Origins and Arguments</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Attachment as an Antecedent to Community-Building</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Building: A Look at the Behavioral Product of Attachment</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contribution of Youth to Their Communities</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Media and Journalism in Community</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth in Journalism: Scholastic and Non-Scholastic Content Creation</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Media and Their Potential for Promoting Stronger Communities</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Sampling</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic Websites</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-scholastic Websites</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Content Analysis</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflection of the Researcher</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Individual Youth-Generated News Websites</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic Websites</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Argus</em></td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Messenger</em></td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Pointer</em></td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Grantonian</em></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>the broadview: online</em></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>AHSnews.com (The Arcadian)</em></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Bobcat / The Word</em></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Scholastic Websites</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 RESULTS: QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS .................................................. 115

Research Question 1 .................................................................................. 116
   Self-expression ..................................................................................... 117
   Peer Support ....................................................................................... 124
   Virtues and Values .............................................................................. 126
   School Attachment .............................................................................. 132
   Pop Culture .......................................................................................... 139
   Personal Goals ..................................................................................... 143
   Diversity ................................................................................................ 146
   Generational Bridging .......................................................................... 148
   Family Support ..................................................................................... 151

Research Question 2 .................................................................................. 160
   Hyperlinks ............................................................................................ 160
   Photos, Illustrations, and Slideshows .................................................. 162
   Videos ................................................................................................... 164
   Polls/Surveys ......................................................................................... 167
   Audience Comments ............................................................................ 168
   Social Media .......................................................................................... 169
   Other Multimedia Features .................................................................... 170

6 RESULTS: SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS .......................... 172

Research Question 3 .................................................................................. 173
   School Attachment .............................................................................. 174
   Community Networking ........................................................................ 178
   Mentoring ............................................................................................. 180
   Peer Support ........................................................................................ 182
   Personal Growth .................................................................................... 184

Research Question 4 .................................................................................. 186
   Youth Voice .......................................................................................... 187
   Personal Goals ....................................................................................... 191
   Fun ......................................................................................................... 192

Research Question 5 .................................................................................. 193

Research Question 6 .................................................................................. 195
   Busy Schedules .................................................................................... 195
   Teen Limitations ................................................................................... 197
   Funding and Resources ......................................................................... 199
   Multimedia ............................................................................................ 200
Summary of Findings ........................................................................................................ 203
What Youth Care About .............................................................................................. 204
Bridging the Generational Divide .............................................................................. 206
The School Connection .............................................................................................. 209
Growing Pains – The Value of New and Traditional Media ........................................ 210
Theoretical Contributions .......................................................................................... 214
   Community Attachment ......................................................................................... 216
   Lerner’s Theory of Developmental Contextualism ................................................ 221
   Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory ...................................................................... 223
Practical Implications ................................................................................................. 226
Limitations and Future Research ............................................................................. 230
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 233

APPENDIX

A  YOUTH ASSENT SCRIPT ......................................................................................... 235
B  PARENTAL CONSENT SCRIPT ............................................................................. 237
C  ADULT ADVISOR ASSENT SCRIPT ..................................................................... 239
D  SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTH ....................... 242
E  SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADVISORS ................... 244
F  SCHOLASTIC YOUTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE ................................ 246
G  NON-SCHOLASTIC YOUTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE ....................... 277
H  SCHOLASTIC ADULT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE ............................... 297
I  NON-SCHOLASTIC ADULT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT EXAMPLE ......................... 331

LIST OF REFERENCES .................................................................................................... 362

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ............................................................................................ 384
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-1</td>
<td>Total frequency distribution of dominant categories across all sites.</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-2</td>
<td>Total frequency distribution of all occurrences of categories across all sites.</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-3</td>
<td>Frequency distribution of dominant categories compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>Frequency distribution of all occurrences of categories compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-5</td>
<td>Frequency distribution of first-person perspective compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>Diagram of how the category of school support manifested across scholastic and non-scholastic sites as it related to schools in the local community.</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-1</td>
<td>Theoretical model for the contributions of youth-generated news to community attachment as an antecedent for community-building.</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

YOUTH, NEWS, AND COMMUNITY: AN EXAMINATION OF YOUTH-GENERATED
NEWS WEBSITES AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR PROMOTING COMMUNITY
ATTACHMENT

By

Jeffrey C. Neely

August 2011

Chair: Kim Walsh-Childers
Major: Mass Communication

Existing literature suggests that youth of the late 20th and early 21st century feel largely disconnected from their communities. Many scholars and practitioners have suggested that this disconnect is a result of youth feeling uninvited by adults to participate in community-building activities. Regardless of the reasons, the broader communities as well as individual youths suffer when these young people are excluded from discussions of community concerns or not allowed to participate in community-building efforts. Youth-generated news outlets may provide an opportunity to overcome these barriers. Given the broader reach, interactivity, and decreased overhead costs associated with online media, youth-generated news websites show potential to engage both teen content producers and teen audience members in a way familiar to a generation of digital natives.

This study employed two qualitative methods – a qualitative content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews – to examine how and to what extent youth-generated news websites demonstrate the potential for promoting community
attachment as an antecedent for community-building. Seven scholastic websites and seven non-scholastic websites from major metropolitan U.S. cities were randomly selected for this study.

The results suggest that while some differences emerge in the specific ways in which scholastic and non-scholastic sites connect to local communities, the overall categories are consistent across both of these dimensions of youth news. Most notably, youth-generated news websites provide youth content producers with a platform to express a common youth voice directed toward a target audience of their peers. The primary result of this with respect to community attachment is that such sites thus serve as a medium for peer support and youth solidarity among local youth. Communication to an adult audience does occur, but it is generally a byproduct of the primary aim of youth communicating to their peers about teen-relevant issues. The results of this study also suggest that given the importance of electronic media in teens' lives, these websites must make better use of interactive multimedia if they hope to be relevant to youth in the 21st century. The discussion provides consideration of the theoretical contributions and other practical implications of the findings, as well as the study’s limitations and ideas for future research.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) lays out his case for an overarching, empirically observable decline in civic engagement and community relationships beginning in the last third of the 20th century. Specifically, Putnam argues that a generational retreat from dense interpersonal networks and collective commitment to community has led to an American deficiency in social capital – a communal resource of shared value that benefits both the individual and the collective as people live out their lives connected to each other.

Adults of all ages during the first two-thirds of the 20th century found it both important and rewarding to engage in their communities in ways such as voting, belonging to local civic groups, volunteering, religious activities, or even regular informal card games. However, somewhere around the 1960s, members of the Baby Boomer generation initiated a downward trend in civic engagement and community activity. They began favoring individualized activities and more private life experiences over social involvement and service to others. The alarming result, Putnam argues, has been an unraveling of the rich social fabric of community.

If this is true – and Putnam offers a great deal of data to argue his case – then there is serious cause for concern if this trend does not reverse. Upon visiting the United States in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville (1840/1863) commented on the remarkable ability of Americans to organize both politically and through informal associations for the collective good of their local communities. He stated the particular importance of voluntary, informal civic involvement by saying:

If men living in democratic countries had no right and no inclination to associate for political purposes, their independence would be in great
jeopardy; but they might long preserve their wealth and their cultivation: whereas, if they never acquired the habit of forming associations in ordinary life, civilization itself would be endangered. A people amongst whom individuals should lose the power of achieving great things single-handed, without acquiring the means of producing them by united exertions, would soon relapse into barbarism (p. 130).

Tocqueville’s words offer a foreboding glimpse into the possible demise of a democratic society if the values of community are not passed on to future generations.

The roles of communication, media, and journalism in the process of building community have had a rich history in academic scholarship. Dewey (1916/2005) suggested that communication is essential to the well-being of a community. It is through communication that a community’s ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, and opinions are passed from one generation to the next. Communication ties generations together and ties individuals to the community. Putnam (2000) points out that the terms community, communication, and communion are all conceptually as well as etymologically related.

In their study of the connection between communication infrastructure and the sense of belonging experienced by residents of urban neighborhoods, Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei (2001) found that, overwhelmingly, the most significant predictor of a person’s sense of belonging to a neighborhood was the level of integration into its storytelling networks. When there are links between major mainstream news outlets and local media outlets, and when the local media and community organizations encourage local storytelling, people are most likely to feel a sense of belonging to their community. “Probably the greatest community-building payoff would come from interventions to strengthen the neighborhood storytelling links between community organizations and residents and between local media and residents” (p. 419). Media on a broad scale
then, and, even more important, media on a local level are essential in creating community attachment among individuals and in turn fostering community-building.

It is this connection between community attachment and community-building and the role that media can play in bolstering attachment that will serve as the foundation for the examination of this study. That is, before one can begin to talk about building a community or taking concrete actions to better it, there must be some sense of purpose and motivation among community members. Individuals who live out their lives within a community must feel connected, or attached, to the place that they live and the people who live there with them.

Shah, Schmierbach, Hawkins, Espino, and Donavan (2002) point out that increased community attachment can drive various forms of community-building engagement. For example, people who are more attached to their communities are more likely to have social networks and participate in social interaction. Perkins, Hughey, and Speer (2002) also note that members of a community who are active in local organizations tend to have more positive community attachments, such as greater collective efficacy and empowerment, as well as greater community satisfaction. Moreover, they argue that these dimensions of community attachment – along with communitarianism, place attachment, and confidence in the future of one’s community – are not simply correlated to individual and organizational community participation, but are psychological antecedents for it.

Put in the specific context of neighborhood mobilization and “neighboring behaviors,” community attachment and a sense of community among neighborhood residents have proven to be successful predictors of individuals’ participation in
neighborhood activities and associations, changes in political participation, and the success with which neighborhoods can be effectively organized (Bolland & McCallum, 2002, pp. 48-49).

Nearly a century’s worth of research (e.g., Park, 1922; Janowitz, 1952, Stamm, 1985, Janowitz, 2002) has established that communication channels, including mass media and journalism specifically, are integral to promoting community attachment and subsequently building stronger communities. “Communication activities, then, especially the use of public communication media, are seen as essential for the growth and maintenance of attachments to and involvement in the communities in which we live” (Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu, 1996, p. 446).

Shah, McCleod, and Yoon (2001) suggest that people come to symbolically develop their personal sense of community through media discourse. The collection of issues relating to public affairs – those topics and events that are of general interest to members of a community – are too numerous and too expansive to be captured in any one person’s direct experience (McCombs, 2004). Journalism serves as a way to alert people and focus their attention on events and issues beyond their immediate experience. The news signals to individuals what things are important and what issues they need to think about. It also helps people understand the connections between decisions and their outcomes (Friedland, 2000). When the people of a community have a good understanding of how public decisions affect them, they can debate and shape their values collectively to derive the best solutions to common challenges. News media have the power to inform residents about these decisions and their consequences.
If communities are to develop in ways that are beneficial for all their members, then the lines of communication must be used in ways that facilitate constructive civic dialogue. Likewise, as Dewey (1916/2005) points out, the health of a community is dependent upon successfully transmitting collective values from one generation to the next.

The purpose of this study is to examine the current relationships between two critical components of community – youth and journalism. Specifically, this study seeks to examine whether youth in scholastic and non-scholastic contexts are creating online news content that reflects various dimensions of community attachment as an antecedent and motivator for community-building. These concepts of community attachment and community-building, as well as the importance of including youth in the promotion of these phenomena in a community, will be explicated in detail in the literature review. However, it is worth noting briefly at this point what is meant by these terms.

Specifically, this study adopts Weil’s (1996) definition of community-building as referring to the “activities, practices, and policies that support and foster positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighborhoods, and geographic and functional communities” (p. 482). One should note in this definition that Weil’s identification of “activities, practices and policies” places a burden of demonstrated concrete action on the concept of community-building. Thus, it might be argued that any examination of content that did not carry with it corresponding causal relationships to actual community action could not be argued to promote community-building. Therefore,
this study focuses on community attachment as a motivator and antecedent to community-building.

Fried (2000) describes community attachment as a “primordial sentiment” that “points to its origin and meaning in response to the availability of close, local relationships to people and, by extension, to the places of relational interaction” (pp. 194-195). This understanding of community attachment is useful and important for the current study because it situates the concept of attachment squarely within the context of physical places.

Consistent with Fried’s account of attachment, this study focuses on geographically bounded communities, putting aside questions that often arise in studies that seek to examine how various dimensions of community are evidenced or play out online, such as exactly what constitutes geographically unbounded functional communities or communities of interest. It should also be pointed out here that this study does not propose to establish a causal relationship between youth-generated news content and community attachment among its audience members. This would require a study that accessed audience perceptions and behaviors (i.e., via a survey or focus groups), which is beyond the scope of the current study. Instead, the interest here is in whether or not the concepts, categories, and uses identified in the content, as well as youths’ accounts of their experiences in producing online news, are consistent with promoting the concepts of community attachment as an antecedent to community-building.

With respect to youth involvement in the practice of journalism, schools have provided an opportunity for young people to get involved in reporting the news for more
than 200 years (Robinson, 1996). Student newspapers and magazines, closed-circuit television broadcasts, and, more recently, student-run websites have offered youth an opportunity to inform peers and adults about the news inside and outside the school grounds. Scholastic journalism programs can also prepare and inspire young people to pursue journalism as a career. According to a survey by Evanchyk (as cited in Olson, 2000), Dave Barry, Walter Cronkite, James Kilpatrick, Allen Neuharth, and Abigail Van Buren are all well-known journalists who got their start in high-school journalism programs. A national survey of daily newspaper journalists conducted by Voakes (as cited in Olson, 2000) found that 29% said the most influential person in their decision to become a professional journalist was a school newspaper advisor, and 25% said they made the decision to pursue a career in journalism while they were in high school.

However, the value of scholastic journalism is not simply in its ability to cultivate a new generation of journalists. Even if they do not go on to pursue a career in journalism, students with scholastic journalism experience are better citizens from being involved in or exposed to the give and take of exchanging public information in a democratic society (Olson, 2000). In analyzing data from the Future of the First Amendment project, Lopez, Levine, Dautrich, and Yalof (2009) found that high-school students who participate in a school newspaper activity have more positive views of the First Amendment. Similarly, students who attend a school with a scholastic magazine are slightly more likely to have positive attitudes about the First Amendment. Students who are taught journalism skills tend to consume more news and are thus more informed and able to participate in community-building efforts.
Harvey (2007) argues that high-school students with journalism experience perform better academically, learn more about responsibility, and are more motivated and involved in providing on-going service to their communities. High-school journalism programs offer a rich opportunity then to engage students in their formative years for both immediate and long-term contribution to their communities.

Outside of the school setting, other media outlets also have given youth a chance to try their hands at the craft of journalism. Local newspapers around the country have introduced teen sections or even entirely separate youth publications in which the content is wholly or mostly created by youth. The Modesto Bee in Modesto, California produces a teen section called Buzzz in both its print and online publications in which teen authors contribute various news, feature, and opinion pieces. Other examples of such teen and youth newspaper sections include Xtreme, which is part of the Augusta Chronicle in Augusta, Georgia, and The Mash, which is published by the Chicago Tribune.

The motivation for these special sections may be primarily self-serving and profit driven, as newspapers seek to recapture a dwindling youth audience. A survey conducted by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation (2006) found that 75% of adults ages 18-34 who read the teen section of their local newspaper when they were 13-17 years old continued to read the newspaper at least once a week as they got older. In contrast, only 44% of the young adults who did not read the teen section when they were younger read the newspaper on a weekly basis when they got older.

Youth-generated content has been shown to have a significant effect in promoting immediate and long-term news consumption among young people. However, getting
youth hooked on newspapers is not just good for the publishers; it is good for the entire community. A follow-up survey conducted by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation (2007) found that teens who are exposed to newspapers, either through school curricula or through special teen sections in their local newspaper, are more likely to be civically engaged through community volunteering and charitable contributions when they grow up (based on a survey of adults age 25-34 regarding current civic activity and past exposure to news in school and special teen newspaper sections).

Various corporate and non-profit organizations are also empowering youth and giving them a voice through print, broadcast and online media. The digital media giant Adobe partners with non-profit organizations around the world through their project Adobe Youth Voices to help “young people engage with their communities by providing access to multimedia tools, training, and a worldwide network of youth, teachers, and program leaders” (Adobe Systems Inc., 2009, ¶ 1).

The youth news network Y-Press in Indianapolis, Indiana, is a non-profit organization “that stresses youth development and leadership skills” (Y-Press, 2009, ¶ 1) and “gives children a voice in the world through journalism” (¶ 3) via print, radio, and online platforms. Y-Press also partners with the The Indianapolis Star to produce a weekly column in the newspaper, and radio segments from Y-Press youth air on the local station WFYI-FM (90.1). These are only a few examples of youth news organizations that fall under the umbrella term “youth media,” which are media outlets developed and produced by young people (Soep, 2006). The main goals of the youth media effort are youth learning, community and workforce development, civic
engagement, creative expression, and social justice. Here again, one can see the potential for both individual and collective benefits of using media to bolster attachment and participation between youth and their communities.

As demonstrated by Adobe Youth Voices, *Y-Press*, and a number of other youth news organizations (both scholastic and non-scholastic), the Internet and digital media are playing an increasingly important role in giving youth a voice in their communities. One way in which the Internet has the potential to foster community attachment and community-building in youth is by providing them with information on how to translate their personal interests in community issues into action, and by offering relatively easy and attractive ways to get involved (Delli Carpini, 2000).

This idea connects well with Bennett’s (2008) argument that today’s youth will become engaged in community affairs not out of a sense of duty but when opportunities for involvement match their natural interests and provide a real sense of personal fulfillment. Moreover, Delli Carpini (2000) argues that for those youth who are already inclined to be engaged, whether through a sense of duty or some other motivation, the Internet offers “ways for sustaining, expanding, and improving the quality of this engagement” (p. 347) through lowered participation costs, quality improvements, and a greater variety of involvement opportunities.

Thus, there is cause for hope in the potential of promoting community attachment among members of this younger generation. The examples of youth using media for positive purposes in their communities serve as reason for optimism and perhaps even models of success. Similarly, Putnam (2000) offers some hope for the future of youth engagement in communities in saying that “twenty-somethings” in the late 1990s were
more active volunteering in their communities than were people of that same age in the 1970s.

However, it is dangerous to generalize from research focusing on only one dimension of community-building (i.e., volunteering) or from anecdotal evidence to suggest that the entire tide of generational disengagement is shifting. The New Millennium Project found that youths’ volunteer activities in the 1990s generally tended to be more individually focused in a one-to-one setting and are motivated by young persons’ individualistic desires to help others in a personal way, rather than a collective sense of community (National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999).

In surveying high-school seniors every year from 1976 to 1995, Rahn and Transue (1998) found that levels of social trust among youth had gone down significantly. Rahn and Transue’s respondents in the 1990s indicated on the whole that they were less trusting of others and had less faith in the helpfulness and fairness of their fellow human beings. This is particularly noteworthy given that Putnam’s (2000) concept of social capital is based upon a system of mutual trust and reciprocity. If citizens lose faith in their neighbors, they will be less inclined to serve others and the bonds of community will break down.

More recent research also suggests that youth are less civically engaged on the whole today than their counterparts of 30 years ago were because the transition from adolescence to adulthood has changed in dramatic and significant ways (Flanagan, Levine, & Settersten, 2009). Because civic and political participation traditionally accompanies the concerns of adult life, and because life experiences like leaving home, finishing school, marriage, and having children all now tend to occur later in an
individual’s life than they did in the 1970s, it is not surprising that today’s youth are less engaged than their predecessors. However, this explanation for youths’ lack of involvement does not ameliorate the fact that their absence from public dialogue and deliberation means that their perspectives and concerns are generally unrepresented. It also does not suggest that such disconnected individuals will become civically involved as they grow older because they may not develop the necessary attachment to their communities and the habit of service at an earlier, more formative age.

In recent years, American youth have indicated less national pride and less sense of importance or responsibility to be involved in the democratic process than adults (Delli Carpini, 2000). In the late 1990s, less than 20% of young people ages 15-24 had ever participated in a political march or demonstration, volunteered in a political campaign, or joined a political or government organization (National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999). In the years between 1966 and 2004, the number of college freshmen directly out of high school who thought it was important to keep up with politics dropped from 60% to 34%, and those who discussed politics regularly dropped from 33% to 22.5% (Galston, 2004).

In the face of such declining interest, Youniss et al. (2002) point out that the challenge of bringing youth into civic discussion is compounded by the fact that the global political dynamics of the 21st century have changed drastically from what they were a generation ago. The Cold War has ended, and in its place the nations of the world face the nebulous tensions of terrorism, theocratic extremism, neo-liberalism, and neo-conservatism. The complexity of such dynamics can be daunting and unappealing to youth.
In his essay *The Moral Equivalent of War*, William James (1906/2007) argued that if youth are enlisted early in life in service to their fellow citizens, the result will be personal development for the individual and greater common good. By committing their time and energies to service, youth develop greater sensitivities to the realities of life, as well as to the challenges and concerns of others. Such real-world experiences foster understanding and generate new ideas to solve a myriad of social ills, James argues.

Flanagan and Faison (2001) state that the values youth develop early in life will serve as the foundation for their future political views and the society they eventually create. As civically engaged youth grow to become adults, they create a pool of citizens equipped for service and leadership for years to come (Youniss et al., 2002). Engaging youth during their formative years can develop “lifelong identities as active, responsible, ethical participants” and is the most effective way to enhance a civil society (Levine, 2007, p. 70). Conversely, a failure to engage youth can lead to a generation of disconnected and apathetic citizens.

However, soliciting youth involvement in promoting community attachment and constructive community service activities solely as a means of preparing a generation for future leadership is to miss the value that young people bring to the table today. Zeldin (2004) argues that youth have a fundamental right to be represented in decisions that affect them, and community organizations function better when all perspectives, including those from youth, are represented in governance and decision making. When youth and adults partner together for the good of their communities, both groups come to recognize and reinterpret their previously existing stereotypes. From this understanding, youth and adults can move forward together with more accurate
perceptions of the other, which then results in more effective outcomes for the community, Zeldin argues.

Traditionally, young people have been seen by their communities as problems and not as assets or resources (Benson, 2006). Youth development efforts often have focused more on stopping or containing the ills of adolescence rather than on activating the potential within these youth for constructive contribution to their communities. Moreover, even the “good” youth are seen as passive, deficient, and ultimately useless (Kretzmann & Schmitz, 1995). Kretzmann and Schmitz suggest that the belief has been that somehow at age 18, individuals magically move from being consumers to contributors. As a result, they contend, not only do youth lack confidence in their civic value and their ability to contribute to the community, but the community loses out on the benefits these young people bring through their unique skills, talents, and perspectives. A thriving community – both in the present and the future – depends upon the contributions of all its members, including its youth.

While the focus of this study will concentrate on the collective impact of youth involvement in promoting community attachment as an antecedent to community-building (i.e., how youth participation benefits the community they serve), there is also a significant benefit of their participation in promoting positive development on an individual level. Scales and Leffert (1999) point out that when a community values its youth, sees them as resources, and provides ways for them to serve others in a safe environment, youth acquire a sense of empowerment that contributes to their healthy personal development and mitigates the risks of destructive behaviors.
Similarly, youth involvement in activities that strengthen their communities can provide valuable supportive relationships with other adults who may serve as positive role models, which also encourages positive personal development. Engaging young people in activities that strengthen their communities provides them with constructive uses of their time, helps them develop a healthy system of personal values, provides avenues to learn social competencies, and fosters a positive sense of personal identity. Youth who experience healthy personal development are in turn more likely to be valuable contributors to their communities in the present and as future adults.

The Internet offers youth a variety of ways they can get involved in positive community-focused activities to varying degrees. As an asynchronous communication tool – one that is not bound by the limitations of time – youth can access news content about their communities at their convenience. As a synchronous communication tool – one that allows for real-time interaction – the Internet also offers youth a way to provide immediate coverage and feedback regarding community issues. The Internet can serve as a passive medium for those individuals who wish only to consume civic information, or it can serve as an active medium for those who wish to offer their insights through original journalistic content, e-mails to community leaders, online polls, or comments on news stories.

Likewise, youth can choose whether they want to confine their civic participation to the online world or use the Internet as a resource to foster involvement in offline community-building as well. In a survey of youth participation in online political campaigning, Levine and Lopez (2004) found that the most popular forms of
participation for young adults are the online platforms of chat rooms and blogs, as well as real-world “meetup events” organized through the Internet.

In the case of online youth-generated news, the Internet provides a way for youth to get involved in covering the issues and events in their community without the prohibitive overhead costs of traditional media. It also provides a way for youth to speak to and reach other youth in the media environment where they have already proved themselves the dominant presence. Survey results released late in 2007 by the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicated that 93% of all American teens use the Internet (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007). Moreover, 64% of these teens have created their own content online in such forms as web pages, blogs, photos, videos, stories, and the remixed works of others. Teens want information written by their peers, and they are going more and more frequently to the Internet to get this information and to interact with other teens (Grusin & Edmondson, 2003).

Therefore, the production of journalism content online by youth in both scholastic and non-scholastic contexts appears to be fertile ground for examining whether or not the products and experiences that come out of this youth participation demonstrate the potential for promoting community attachment. This study employed a qualitative grounded theory methodology as an overall framework for understanding the relationships between the production context of youth-generated online news and the capacity of the content to promote community attachment as an antecedent to community-building. The data for generating this grounded theory was collected through a qualitative content analysis of youth-generated news web pages and semi-structured in-depth interviews.
Specifically, 14 youth news websites (seven scholastic and seven non-scholastic) were selected to investigate how content, both in substance and form, reflected dimensions of community attachment. Textual content on these sites was examined using a qualitative, inductive content analysis to determine what elements of community attachment emerged in the stories, comments, discussions, and resources put forth by youth online. Likewise, this study examined how and to what extent these sites made use of the Internet’s multimedia capacity to present information in a variety of forms. Finally, in-depth interviews with youth journalists from each of these publications and with adult advisors from eight of these sites were conducted in order to assess youths’ motivations for creating online news content, their perceptions about the benefits and challenges to working within a scholastic or non-scholastic setting, and how, if at all, they perceived their role in promoting community attachment.
The Concept of Community: Origins and Arguments

Some of the earliest sociological work in the discussion of community is Tönnies’s (1887/2001) *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, which in English translates to *Community and Civil Society*. Tönnies identified community as life experience that is characterized by intimate personal ties with others. To Tönnies, community life is organic life and is the hallmark of rural culture. It is the mutual possession and enjoyment of goods held in common. Community in this sense is the life experience defined by our relationships with family and close personal friends. It is tied to an individual’s sense of place, but it is not solely defined by place. Proximity is necessary and facilitates the development of community, but only to the extent that it promotes mutual encouragement, gratitude and loyalty.

In contrast, Tönnies’s civil society is the life experience found in post-industrial urban areas and is characterized by associations built upon a common goal. There is no sense of familiarity or intimacy in civil society. Rather, individuals’ relationships are based upon a mechanical construction of associations that are understood to be mutually beneficial. There is nothing in civil society that is more important to an individual than himself. Tönnies saw civil society as the medium of urban culture where people live with, but independently of, one another. Whereas community is genuine and enduring, Tönnies saw civil society as transient and superficial.

While offering seemingly less moral judgment, Wirth (1938) similarly describes urban life as “a series of tenuous, segmental relationships” (p. 23). Moreover, Wirth argues that those living in an urban environment are “subject to manipulation by
symbols and stereotypes managed by individuals working from afar or operating invisibly behind the scenes through their control of the instruments of communication” (p. 23). It important to note, of course, that the “instruments of communication” to which Wirth refers are the traditional, one-to-many mainstream media, which require the possession of substantial financial capital to operate. Wirth might take a different view of communication channels and their influence in an urban setting and include a more nuanced perspective in today’s age of many-to-many digital media. Wirth’s argument about the role of mainstream mass media may still be valid, but the interplay between these channels and the grassroots communication channels available through digital media need to be considered in today’s communication context.

In his historical account of community in America, Bender (1978) notes that the way people experience community has changed over time. He points out that many scholars, including Wirth, who have sought to build upon Tönnies’s work have cited the rise of urban culture as an indication of the collapse of community. However, Bender suggests we need not jump to this conclusion. Community and civil society, while mutually exclusive, can simultaneously coexist. That is to say, within any culture – urban or rural – an individual may have close intimate relationships that characterize community life, while at the same time also having relationships that are based upon civil structure.

Moreover, Bender argues that a person may experience community, or *gemeinschaft*, in different areas of his life. A man or woman may have close personal relationships with his or her family, co-workers, members of a social club or fellow congregants at a place of worship. While a person may also have a number of civil,
more institutionalized relationships with people in these settings, he is experiencing community in the midst of civil society, or gesellschaft, if he develops deep and meaningful personal relationships with a set of people who regularly interact with one another.

In his epilogue, Bender takes great pains to respond to a modern tendency for scholars to blur the distinction between community and civil society. He suggests that it is a nostalgic impulse to associate everything within contemporary culture to community. This impulse, he argues, will only intensify our sense of nostalgia and deter us from experiencing real community. It is the civil society, he argues, not community, which provides the basis for public and political life. We do not need personal knowledge of or familiarity with those we elect to office. Rather, we need to understand their policy positions and intentions for governing in order to make effective and informed decisions. Thus, for example, notions of the “community” of New York City, or the general Jewish community, would, to Bender, be contradictions in terms.

It is worth recognizing Bender’s criticisms of these applications of the concept of community. And it is to Bender much more than simply an issue of semantics. Nonetheless, when we examine both common parlance and the current literature, it is indeed this broader idea of community to which people often appeal. Specifically, while intimate personal relationships may be a part of community, they are not the sole indicator of it. Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg (1996) refer to community as a collection of interlocking subcommunities (i.e., families, churches, special interests, and various other associations) in which people understand that they “share certain common conditions and fates” (p. 10). In a report from the Texas Cooperative Extension (2005),
Taylor defines community development as drawing upon three primary types of resources available in a community: economic resources, such as businesses and jobs; human resources, which comprise the skills and contributions of the people in the community; and physical, natural, and cultural resources, which may be man-made or come from the natural environment.

MacQueen et al. (2001) seek to flesh out a definition of community in order to promote more effective public health practices. In their study, they analyzed 118 responses to the question “What does the word community mean to you?” The common definition that emerged for community was “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are united by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (p. 1929). This is certainly a more general, and perhaps more casual, definition of community than what Tönnies, Wirth, or Bender describe. Community in this broader sense incorporates a wider range of shared experiences and spheres of interaction. Specifically, when scholars like those mentioned above speak of community, they seem to mean something less familiar, less intimate than Tönnies’s, Wirth’s, or Bender’s idea of community, but they also mean something more personal to an individual than the cold, mechanistic organization of civil society.

From the more traditional perspective, community and civil society are fundamentally distinct entities, even if they overlap in the way we experience daily life. However, it is the opinion and position of this researcher that human experience is too diverse and varied to be isolated, even conceptually, into a dichotomous distinction between community and civil society. For one, individual relationships are circumscribed
by the social structure in which they exist. Political ideologies, laws, and social norms influence our interactions with others from the earliest stages of socialization. Conceptions of love and intimacy in the patriarchal context of ancient Athens were vastly different than they are in modern America. Notions of justice, citizenship, and the greater good are fundamentally different in a Marxist society as compared to a libertarian one. Thus, the experience of relationships is necessarily different and defined, at least to some degree, by the social, cultural, and political context in which people live.

Second, levels of intimacy shared between people may vary depending upon stages of life, spheres of interaction, and specific topics. A woman may share feelings of low self-esteem or frustration with her body image with a close co-worker that she would never share with her spouse, but may feel uncomfortable talking with that same co-worker about meaningful issues of religious faith, which she discusses very naturally at home with her family. A man facing the final stages of terminal cancer may emotionally express his fear of dying with his doctor, but feel obliged to “stay strong” in front of his wife and children. Certainly, there are the personal secrets that youth share with one another that they dare not disclose to their parents, but for broken bones or broken hearts, youth may likely run to the consolation of their parents rather than to their peers.

Therefore, it is the argument presented here that defining community according to levels of shared intimacy is false in its premise. Instead, MacQueen et al. (2001) offer a definition that serves as a more appropriate and useful understanding of community - “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are united by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings”
(p. 1929). If a person refers to a community business in this broader sense, he does not necessarily mean that he has a personal relationship with the owners. If a person refers to local emergency services as vital to his community, he is not suggesting that he is on a first-name basis with all the local police officers, firefighters, or paramedics. Rather, he expresses a connection, a sense of solidarity, built upon the fact that members of a community partake in a common meaningful life experience, such as an attachment to a geographic location. Feeling a sense of community attachment or belonging to the physical, social, and cultural atmosphere of a place is something that people can share even if they do not know one another personally. It is this broader conception of community that will be used in the current research.

Before moving on to a discussion of how people become attached to their communities and how community is built, it is important to note here that a key element of the definition of community provided by MacQueen et al., which is used in this study, is that it places community explicitly within defined geographical space. Thus, it excludes communities of interest; communities defined solely by cultural, racial, or other non-spatial demographic factors; or communities existing only in the virtual realm. While the capacities of the Internet allow for a great deal of flexibility in time and place, the examination of community attachment and community-building in this study will focus on how online youth-generated news content can be seen to facilitate, or not facilitate, strengthening a local geographically identified community.

This is a distinction of both convenience and conceptual understanding. Tying community to a geographical location helps to provide concrete definitional criteria to what is meant by the concept of community. To the extent that all the communities
compared in this study share a geographical component, there is consistency in how this term is applied. This task becomes more difficult when the geographical component is removed and communities must be identified solely on shared characteristics of familiarity among members, common interests, or other more nebulous dimensions.

Friedland (2001) points out that in much of the post-industrialization scholarship on community from a communications perspective, a sense of place has been substituted by communication networking. In this sense, social structure is defined not so much by geographic boundaries, but by the structural ties of communication networks. Certainly new technologies and globalization have made dealing with the concept of community more difficult, particularly when one considers ethnic diasporas. However, Friedland argues that if a sense of place with geographic boundaries is abandoned in the understanding of community, then it becomes unclear what community actually means in this new sense.

Thus, it becomes not just a matter of convenience, but a matter of consistency and common understanding in the concept of community to ascribe to it this geographical component. It seems that community too often becomes a convenient means of referring to relationships that people desire, but which in actuality no longer exist. Friedland argues that community is inherently tied to a sense of geographical place, even though this understanding has become more complicated through complex patterns of mobility and migration, expansive communication systems, and voluntary associations based on social networks.

**Community Attachment as an Antecedent to Community-Building**

When considering which factors make up a vibrant, thriving community and which factors contribute to positive community development, scholars have appealed to
theoretical constructs such as community attachment, community integration, community-building, resource mobilization, and civic engagement. While these perspectives tend to have significant overlap, the concept of community attachment carries with it a distinct and unique focus on the internal psychological processes of individuals as they experience feelings of connectedness to their community. Specifically, this study adopts the definition of community attachment provided by Rothenbuhler et al. (1996).

Community attachment is conceived as identification with the community combined with an affective tie. Attachment implies feeling a part of the community - seeing oneself as belonging. Attachment also means that this sense of belonging is positively evaluated, that one is happy and proud to belong. In this way the community and self are articulated together with the community being a contingency for one's own happiness (p. 447).

In contrast, concepts like community integration, community-building, resource mobilization, and civic engagement carry with them a dimension of active physical involvement in community processes and events. Weil (1996) states that "Community building [original emphasis] refers to activities, practices, and policies that support and foster positive connections among individuals, groups, organizations, neighborhoods, and geographic and functional communities" (p. 482).

Weil’s identification of “activities, practices, and policies” shows the concept of community-building as distinct from attachment in that it is not merely psychological or attitudinal feelings of belonging. Rather, community-building necessarily involves some form of action on the part of community members. In order to build community, it is not enough to simply care about or feel connected to the people that one share’s local life experiences with. A person must do something to help strengthen interpersonal
community bonds and the places, events, and cultural products in which shared life experiences are played out.

However, one of the most powerful and effective ways for individuals to become motivated to take voluntary action in building their community is for them to have a personal emotional investment in it. That is, people who are attached to their communities will be more likely to get involved building their communities. Focusing specifically on the physical dimension of place as it relates to community attachment, Manzo and Perkins (2006) point out that, “Our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about our local community places – what psychologists call ‘intra-psychic’ phenomena – impact our behaviors toward such places, thus influencing whether and how we might participate in local planning efforts” (p. 336). They go on to say that attachment and a sense of community manifest themselves behaviorally through participation.

In looking at ways to improve neighborhood revitalization efforts, Brown, Perkins, and Brown (2003) found that positive personal bonds of attachment and a sense of community among residents can be an important means of strengthening efforts to improve both the physical spaces and social relationships in a community. For example, they argue that individuals who feel attached to their neighborhoods will be more likely to have the commitment necessary to improve or maintain their homes, to work with fellow residents to preserve community history, or to engage in other activities with local residents or agencies to better their neighborhoods. Beggs, Hurlbert, and Haines (1996) propose from their findings that “understanding the mechanisms of community attachment may be a step toward building a base of citizens who will work to foster community development” (p. 424).
While this study maintains that community attachment is a motivator and an antecedent to active community-building, this is not to say that influence cannot work in the other direction. That is, to be sure, often times involving individuals in community-building activities can be a way of strengthening their sense of community attachment. Indeed, Beggs, Hurlbert, and Haines (1996) suggest that one of the most effective ways to promote broad community attachment is to encourage participation in community groups among a diverse range of individuals. Dubow and Podolefsky (1982) hold that individuals' voluntary involvement in anti-crime community groups can be as much a cause as a consequence of community attachment. The fact that participating in community-building activities can strengthen individuals' attachment to their communities does not negate, but rather complements, the power of community attachment as a motivator for involvement.

While community attachment has been shown to be a motivator for involvement, this is also not to say it is the only motivator. In many cases, people may get involved with community-building activities based on extrinsic motivations or hoped-for rewards (Arensberg & Niehoff, 1971). Research has suggested that youth tend to be motivated to volunteer in their communities more by individualistic desires to help others in a personal way, rather than a collective sense of community (National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999). McLellan and Youniss (2003) point out that a great deal of youth volunteering activities tend to be a result of school policies requiring youth service. Many critics have argued that such compulsory community service is an oxymoron and takes the “voluntary out of voluntarism” (Bandow, 1999, ¶ 9). Putting these debates aside, the important point for the current study is that community
attachment is one powerful and effective motivating factor for community-building activities.

Turning again to the competing concepts of community and civil society, the argument against the traditional dichotomy of these two concepts is effectively articulated by Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), who suggest that the *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* distinction is fundamentally flawed because it is based on normative and moralistic assumptions that are not historically grounded. Pre-industrial societies – those seen as epitomizing true community in Tönnies’s model – were always dependent upon bureaucratic and associational structures to some degree and were thus not as removed from institutionalization as this model suggests. Moreover, the false distinction between community and civil society does not account for the complexity of community organization in modern societies. Kasarda and Janowitz suggest that this linear model of community attachment, where urbanization necessarily leads to a substitution of formal for informal associations, is false and not empirically supported. They argue in favor of an alternative, systemic model of community attachment that offers greater consideration of the diverse dynamics associated with modern life.

The local community is viewed as a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and formal and informal associational ties rooted in family life and ongoing socialization processes. At the same time it is fashioned by the large scale institution of mass society. Indeed, it is a generic structure of mass society, whose form, content, and effectiveness vary widely and whose defects and disarticulations reflect the social problems of the contemporary period. (p. 329)

Kasarda and Janowitz suggest that in the systemic model, the length of an individual’s residence, position in the social structure, and place in the life cycle (most specifically age) are the key factors associated with community attachment – not the degree of population density and industrialization as suggested by the linear model.
Thus, while urbanization may contribute to residential instability and a greater number of marginalized groups, it is not necessarily deterministic. If individuals can maintain gainful employment in a community, they will have less need or motivation to move away and may in turn become more attached to their community.

Moreover, increased community attachment may compensate for other motivations that may compel people to move away. A person who knows that he could make more money in another town may decline an attractive job offer if he is highly attached to his current community. The resulting residential stability is in turn supportive of further attachment, and thus the process is cyclically reinforcing. One can see the converse of this process easily as well. Similarly, those concerned about bolstering community attachment may also be able to compensate for the fragmenting effect of urbanization by making deliberate efforts to include marginalized groups. If individuals feel valued as part of the social structure in a community, they will develop a greater attachment to the community, even if the community has a dense population.

If Kasarda and Janowitz are correct in proposing that these factors are key to developing community attachment, one may think there is little hope and little motivation for youth to develop a sense of attachment to their communities, given that they lack social status and do not have a lot of shared community concerns (e.g., owning a home, local taxes, etc.). Indeed, research has shown that current social norms and trends suggest a disconnect between youth and their communities (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Flanagan, Levine, & Settersten, 2009).

However, Otis (2006) suggests that this disconnect is often a result of youth feeling ignored and disrespected by the adults around them. Youth who want to be
involved in their communities may feel they lack guidance and encouragement from adults and may feel powerless to effect real change. Scales and Leffert (1999) argue that youth feel empowered when they have meaningful roles to play in their families, schools, and communities. More directly, Scales and Leffert state that “adults empower youth by ensuring they have a chance to add their voices to decisions that affect them and that they have opportunities to define and act on the priorities in their lives” (p. 51). This is why efforts to get youth involved in their communities may be so important. If youth are given more recognition and status in the social structure, and if a community can cultivate among youth an attitude of concern about community issues, it may be possible to overcome the traditional lack that has characterized youth in respect to these factors.

Sampson (1988) also supports the argument in favor of a systemic model of community attachment and reinforces the notion that residential stability is a primary factor in promoting community attachment. One reason for this, Sampson claims, is that individuals living in areas of high residential turnover will have fewer opportunities to form friendships and participate in local affairs. Higher rates of residential mobility lead to greater personal and institutional instability. Furthermore, people living in areas of high residential turnover are likely to have less motivation to form friendships and feel less sentiment for their communities because they know such associations probably will not last. Riger and Lavrakas (1981) describe the two fundamental factors influencing community attachment as “physical rootedness” and “social bonding” (p. 55), where physical rootedness refers to residential stability and social bonding refers to the level of involvement and the development of relationships in the community.
Brehm, Eisenhauer, and Kranich (2004) argue that the concept of community attachment involves an even more diverse array of factors, including cultural traditions and beliefs, economic activities, political engagement, social ties and the physical attributes of a local area. Connecting the concept of attachment directly to community-building, Brehm, Eisenhauer, and Kranich suggest that effective community-building requires an understanding of what characteristics of a community its members truly care about and the nature of their connections and emotional attachments to the place where they live.

In applying community attachment to levels of environmental concern in communities in the western United States, Brehm, Eisenhauer, and Kranich (2006) found that significant factors indicating a social dimension of community attachment were: having friends close by, family ties, local culture and tradition, and opportunities to be involved in community projects or activities. Likewise, significant factors for a natural environment dimension of community attachment were natural landscapes/views, presence of wildlife, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. An economic dimension was also identified by economic opportunities and the ability to earn a living off the land.

Thus, if one heeds the suggestion that effective community attachment and community-building are based on the concerns expressed by community members, a diversity of factors linking these two concepts begin to emerge. For example, activities that promote local friendships, reinforce or express value for family ties, local culture, or community traditions, and the promotion and publicizing of community projects may all be successful for fostering both attachment and community-building behaviors from a social standpoint. Likewise, efforts to preserve or clean up the local environment may
stem from and reinforce a sense of attachment to the community from natural resources perspective. Efforts aimed at supporting local businesses may be seen to demonstrate community attachment from an economic perspective. While specific concerns will vary in both importance and detail from place to place, it is reasonable to generalize that factors such as these are important for building attachment among community members, who may then be motivated to take action to better their community.

**Community-Building: A Look at the Behavioral Product of Attachment**

McKnight and Kretzmann (1996) argue that the most important asset in the process of the community-building is the people of the community. In seeking to develop communities, individual members must be given the ability to use their skills, talents, knowledge, and expertise to be productive contributors. Accessing local human resources in community-building includes empowering members who have been excluded from community life by being labeled and marginalized (e.g., elderly, mentally ill, disabled). Based on literature previously mentioned, we can also extend this assertion to apply to local youth. McKnight and Kretzmann also argue that activating human resources in community-building means recognizing the importance of locally owned and home-based businesses to a flourishing economic environment in a community.

Fraser and Kick (2005) claim that community-building initiatives have the potential to “increase neighborhood organization, connect neighborhood actors with existing political-economic structures at the city level, enhance neighborhood-level infrastructural development, increase community surveillance of crime and provide new homeownership opportunities” (p. 23). However, they argue, this potential is often left unrealized because members of the community cannot come together on a consensus
regarding the needs to be addressed, and community-building efforts often end up serving those who are already advantaged instead of being a catalyst for economic and political change that helps the poor and underserved. Thus, effective community-building requires the integration of all community members and their perspectives into a common discourse and any efforts for community change. Failure to do so will result in perpetuation of the status quo to the detriment of the community.

An individual’s integration into a community takes both intrapersonal and interpersonal forms (McLeod et. al., 1996). That is, feelings of psychological attachment or ties to the community provide people with a sense of belonging and personal identification with their community – an intrapersonal dimension. However, true community integration also includes the physical involvement of individuals with the social networks that concentrate attention on a community’s concerns. Community forums, local civic associations, churches, social service organizations, and other formalized social networks provide traditional avenues for individuals to participate in community-building.

McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) argue that citizens become involved in community-building efforts through a “dynamic process of information and motivation” (p. 316). If people lack local social networks or ties to the community, participation is difficult and undesirable. However, both interpersonal and mass communication channels offer a way for individuals to learn about local concerns and opportunities to get involved in change efforts. That is, communication channels provide an information base for individuals to use in making decisions.
McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy suggest that when the infrastructure of community integration – the existing social networks and community ties – do not extend to certain people, media and interpersonal communication can provide alternative routes for information and motivation. Individuals who are marginalized or feel excluded from the existing social structures can still learn about the issues confronting the community through communication channels. They may then be spurred to pursue existing opportunities for participation with more determination, or, instead, choose to develop their own new change efforts. In turn, as these formerly marginalized individuals become integrated into the community, social networks and community ties expand to become more inclusive, and community-building efforts become more effective as a whole.

The role of media in promoting community attachment and community-building will be discussed more specifically later in this literature review. For now, it is sufficient to recognize that healthy communities promote an environment where individuals feel a strong sense of personal, psychological community attachment; where social networks are broad, inclusive, and focus collective attention on important community concerns; and where mass and interpersonal communication channels also draw attention to these concerns and provide information about ways to get involved.

In their seminal work on resource mobilization, in which they discuss the development of social movements, McCarthy and Zald (1977) suggest that there is always enough discontent present in a society to provide grass-roots support for social movements if the people involved have access to the necessary power and resources to effect change. People who are attached to their communities want to see them
change for the better – decrease crime, improve economic conditions, increase volunteer service and other cooperative activities, etc. – and will work to make it happen if they believe they can succeed and have access to the right resources. Because the costs and risks associated with social change are too great for any one person to bear, these resources must be aggregated so that there is collective support for a change movement.

Additionally, McCarthy and Zald argue that in order for change to occur, aggrieved parties must not be the only ones contributing to and participating in these efforts. Individual and organizational “conscience constituents” (p. 1216) may also provide significant moral, financial, volunteer, or other material support for change efforts. To the extent that any given concern is promoted and embraced by a larger cross-section of the community, change is more likely to succeed. As long as those advocating for change remain on the fringes of the community dialogue, their efforts will gain little traction and ultimately fail.

At the same time, individuals participating in a social change movement need to feel a sense of agency (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996). That is, people need to feel empowered that their individual efforts make a significant difference in their community. Klandermans (1984) argues that participating in social change is determined by a rational cost-benefit analysis. The success of any change effort depends upon the ability to persuade individuals that the benefits of participating outweigh the risks or costs involved. Individuals who are attached and invested in their communities are more likely to see the value of their participation. Klandermans suggests that persuading individuals of both the legitimacy of a particular change effort and of a sense of
collective support requires that agents of a social movement have access to one or more media outlets.

In her examination of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Barker-Plummer (2002) argues that the organization’s success in attaining media access has been due in part to its ability to mobilize the material resources of money, skills, technology, labor, organizational structure, and information to serve as a reliable news source for journalists. Additionally, the organization has mobilized its knowledge of the routines and discursive structures of news and reflected these routines and structures in their own communications, she states. Barker-Plummer argues that access to the news is a critical political resource because it gives people a chance to have their “voices and experiences included in an influential public communication forum” (p. 188). For those seeking change, access to news is essential because it provides citizens with new information and new interpretative frameworks.

Tied to the concept of social change movements, at least in democratic societies, is civic engagement. Members of a community must be given opportunities and then take up the responsibility to be actively involved in the process of development and improvement. It is in the process of civic engagement that the move from attachment to community-building can be seen most explicitly.

A starting point for civic engagement is inclusive civic dialogue. McCoy and Scully (2002) point out that while it is important to consider how community organizers will bring people into the conversation about various public problems, efforts must go further to consider how the community context will be structured so that the conversation has an actual impact on public life. “[Civic engagement] implies voice and agency, a feeling
of power and effectiveness, with real opportunities to have a say. It implies active participation, with real opportunities to make a difference” (p. 118). It is not enough to simply talk about the problems facing a community, structures and opportunities need to be in place so people can do something about these issues.

In examining the effect of individualistic versus societal values on levels of civic participation, Funk (1995) measured civic engagement by three independent variables – working on a community problem in the past year, volunteering time, and giving money to charity. Her results revealed a connection between societal values (a personal commitment to the collective benefit of the community) and working on a community problem and donating money. Therefore, while it is clear that efforts to increase civic engagement among community members must be personally appealing to them and provide opportunities for real change, even more preliminary efforts to promote societal values (i.e., community attachment) among community members is important to increase their general predispositions to participate in more specific civic efforts.

In a longitudinal analysis of the association between Internet use and civic engagement, Jennings and Zeitner (2003) used 14 behavioral and attitudinal variables to measure civic engagement. These variables were grouped into four general categories of civic engagement. The first category, media attentiveness, included newspaper reading, magazine reading, television viewing, and radio listening for the purposes of following public affairs, politics, and the news. The second category, political involvement, included interest in public affairs, internal and external political efficacy (i.e., a personal sense of civic empowerment and perceived responsiveness of government and community leaders), political knowledge, community problem solving,
and political activity (e.g., voting, persuading others to vote, working in a political campaign, displaying campaign buttons or stickers, writing a letter to the editor, taking part in a demonstration). The third category, volunteer activity, included organizational memberships and volunteer activities. The fourth category, trust orientations, included political trust and social trust.

Controlling for pre-Internet levels of civic engagement and socioeconomic factors, Jennings and Zeitner found that Internet access has a positive effect on several civic engagement indicators, including interest in public affairs, external political efficacy, and organizational involvement. Jennings and Zeitner also found no significant negative associations between Internet use and civic engagement. They argue that the results of their study indicate that pessimistic views of the Internet as a detriment to civic engagement are not empirically supported.

A report from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) assessing youth involvement in politics and their communities, as well as youths’ attitudes toward government and current social issues, found that there is broad engagement among American youth in various forms of political and non-political civic activity. However, 17% of the youth (ages 15-25) surveyed indicated that they had not participated in any form of civic involvement in the last year (Lopez et al., 2006). The study also found that 72% of American youth report paying attention to politics and following the news, but that actual political knowledge is generally low and youth tend to be misinformed about governmental issues. Youth who participate in civic activities are generally better informed, and youth who follow the news are more likely to be civically involved.
Thus, it seems (at least from their self-reports) that there is interest among youth in civic affairs, and there is reason to believe that this interest can translate into involvement, but the actual level of political knowledge these youth are deriving from their news consumption is low. This may indicate that youth would like to believe they are more attentive to the news and public affairs than they actually are, or it may also mean that their news sources, either mainstream or alternative, are failing to provide them with important information about political issues or how government works. Either way, this would seem to indicate an opportunity for more effective efforts at attracting youth to the news and providing them with more useful information through these channels about their communities and the broader social and political structure.

**The Contribution of Youth to Their Communities**

There is a considerable amount of literature pointing to the benefits of engaging youth to become attached and active in the positive efforts of their communities. Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert (2003) point out that historically in America, youth were integrally involved in their communities from the time of early settlement through the late 19th century. Young people worked side-by-side with their parents and other adults on farms and in the mills and regularly interacted with adults at community celebrations and rituals. With the advent of the industrial revolution, youths’ contributions of labor were no longer as necessary, and indeed labor laws eventually prevented them from being involved in the daily work of the community. Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert suggest that as a result, young people were shuffled into more formal educational paths to prepare them for their lives as future adults. Thus, a clear separation and often a loss of meaningful interaction developed between young people and the adults in their families
and communities. In turn, youth lost access to the social roles and networks essential to promoting their integration in the community.

Brennan, Barnett, and Baugh (2007) argue that the collective action of community members of all ages and backgrounds, where individuals are allowed to “participate in the creation, articulation, and implementation of efforts to support local change” (¶ 6), creates a civic whole greater than the sum of its parts. Including youth in positive community activities contributes not only to the development of the community, but also to the social and psychological development of these young people. Moreover, when youth and adults work together, they develop greater mutual understanding and a shared sense of norms and values (Barnett & Brennan, 2006). Camino and Zeldin (2002) argue that often efforts to involve youth in community development risk becoming tokenistic by providing young people with the techniques for civic engagement, but not with the knowledge and experience of leadership and administration. Camino and Zeldin suggest that in order to successfully engage youth in the process of community-building:

- They must be given ownership of the roles and assets necessary for them to participate.
- Adults and youth must form partnerships that provide apprenticeship and experiential learning opportunities.
- Public policies and structures need to be established that provide broad-based scaffolding for the vision, articulation, and support of civic youth programs.

Camino (2000) points out that developing effective youth-adult partnerships does not come without challenges. Envisioning youth as contributors and valuable assets in a community goes against the norms and trends that have developed over more than a hundred years. Bringing youth and adults together in the process of community-building
defies the notion that youth need to be either protected or controlled. Many adults may find it difficult to accept youth as meaningful players in the community, and many youth may have trouble moving beyond seeing adults as authoritarian figures who are out of touch with their personal needs and perspectives.

Kim and Sherman (2006) argue that teenagers and young adults are not interested in superficial busywork or participating on the margins of difficult social problems. Instead, they look for consequential involvement in the issues that are most important to them, such as education, jails and detention facilities, crumbling communities, and social inequality and a lack of dignity for youth. Programs that capitalize on these interests not only meet youth needs, but also cultivate new leadership for continuing civic advancement in these areas. Levine (2007) argues that engaging youth during their formative years can develop “lifelong identities as active, responsible, ethical participants” and is the most effective way to enhance a civil society (p. 70).

Likewise, Cahn and Gray (2005) argue that youth want more than a voice in community issues and more than programs aimed at them (programs intended to promote positive youth development in a one-way, top-down direction). Youth want specific roles and ways to contribute. They seek the training, resources, and leadership opportunities to be active participants in their communities. They have a great deal of potential to contribute to the healthy development of their families, neighborhoods, and overall communities, but they need the guidance and empowerment from adults to make this happen. Cahn and Gray suggest that effective involvement of youth in community-building efforts requires a reward system to encourage participation and an
attitude of service, but such rewards must not simply serve as extrinsic motivation. Rather, extrinsic rewards should promote intrinsic benefits of personal empowerment and a sense of identifying with the community.

Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss (2002) suggest that there are three motivating factors that inspire youth to get involved in their communities. The first is the satisfaction that comes from doing good works and helping others. However, there is a great deal of individual variation in the degree to which youth derive satisfaction from serving the collective needs of the community. Pure altruism is not a reliable motivator for youth participation. In contrast, the feelings of efficacy derived from having a voice in the community conversation – the sense of empowerment that comes from being able to speak and act in one’s own interests – serve as the second, and more reliable, source of motivation for youth civic engagement.

Lastly, Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss suggest that youth can be motivated by the fact that when they contribute to a sense of shared values, they will feel more comfortable and more at home (i.e., more attached) in their communities. Participating in civic processes brings people of like minds together and helps those of differing opinions negotiate common ground. When youth are involved in this process – when they take part in shaping community norms and standards – they will feel more a part of that community.

In a similar vein, a report from the Pew Charitable Trusts contends that “engaged citizens are made, not born” (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002, p. 28). The authors suggest that one of the primary ways youth learn the habit of civic engagement is through their families. Parents who are involved in their communities set a positive
example and tend to raise children who are involved in their communities. Youth with civically engaged family members tend to participate more in community activities, as well as pay more attention to news about politics and government, the report suggests.

However, the home is not the only place where youth can acquire an attachment to their communities. Schools are also a strong resource for instilling civic attitudes and behaviors in youth. However, requiring youth to pay more attention to politics and community affairs through traditional civics courses is insufficient for increasing attachment or involvement. Instead, Keeter et al. argue, it is when teachers encourage open discussion about community matters that students are more likely to participate in real, hands-on involvement outside of the classroom. Schools can further serve as an institutional link to teach students specific civic skills (e.g., give a speech, take part in a debate, write a letter to someone they do not know), as well as provide direct pathways for youth to get involved in their communities.

The Pew report further suggests that other organizations besides families and schools can have a significant influence on encouraging youth participation in the community. Specifically, youth respond positively to simple and direct invitations to participate in civic activities. When active youth are asked how they got involved in volunteering, 59% report that either an outside organization contacted them, or a third party connected the youth with a community service activity. It is the rare exception that a young person will take the initiative to make the first contact to get involved. Thus, in addition to encouragement from families and schools, a deliberate effort from religious institutions, policy organizations, and other groups to reach out to youth is essential for
creating a collective sense of community attachment among young people and mobilizing them to become involved in community-building activities.

Nitzberg (2005) proposes five goals for effectively incorporating youth in the community-building process. The first goal is to have young people develop “a sense of belonging and a stake in the place in which they live” (p. 13). Here again, community attachment is seen to serve as a powerful precursor to community involvement. Second, “schools, city agencies, and other organizations collaborate with youth to plan, develop, and deliver effective responses to the needs of young people and the people who work and live with them” (p. 13). Partnering with youth to address the needs and concerns important to them invites them into the community-building process, but it also equips both youth and adults with important skills and knowledge to mobilize young people for service.

Nitzberg’s third goal is that “young people develop social, personal, and related skills for independent and successful community living” (p. 13). A healthy community is, at least in part, characterized by the positive transitioning of youth into independent adults. Directed efforts to equip youth with interpersonal and intrapersonal skills will help prepare them to be contributing community members as they reach adulthood. Fourth, “young people are assisted in the transition toward economic independence” (p. 14). Successful transition from youth to adulthood will not only require personal and social skills, but also economic opportunities and stability. It will be difficult to get young adults involved in their communities if they are preoccupied with how to pay their bills. Finally, any barriers to the “safety, well-being, and engagement in family and community living arrangements” must be addressed and reduced (p. 14).
The Role of Media and Journalism in Community

The study of media’s role in promoting community attachment and involvement has a rich history in mass communications research. Dating back to the sociological research of the Chicago School, Robert Park (1922) found that within immigrant communities, the local immigrant press served as a vehicle for citizens to preserve the culture, heritage, traditions and language of their old country. However, looking specifically at immigrants to America in the early 20th century, the community press also served to help these groups assimilate, integrate, and acclimate to their new society. Park (1929) likewise argued that in the post-industrial age of urbanization, mass media, along with interpersonal communication, serve as a primary resource for the functioning of a community. In a time when people have a great deal more flexibility and convenience to travel in and out of the geographic center of a community, people rely upon mass media, such as newspapers, to serve as a reliable source of community information. Thus, from Park’s point of view, media use, specifically newspaper use, was a means for individuals to build and maintain ties to their community.

Janowitz (1952), who also rejected the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* dichotomy, likewise saw media – specifically newspapers – as a way of integrating individuals into a community. Janowitz proposed that individuals participate to varying degrees in the process of community integration, or identifying with the facilities and institutions of the local community. The local community press serves to facilitate this integration by meeting “the information requirements of local residents” (p. 25); emphasizing common values; and connecting newspaper personnel, community leaders, and readers together. Moreover, Janowitz argued, the local press can facilitate patterns of media consumption within the community and further serve as a vehicle for attachment and
integration as individuals pick up these patterns. Janowitz went on to say that individuals who strongly identify with the local community have a higher sense of political competence necessary for democratic consensus than those individuals who are disconnected from their communities.

In his study of the eastern seaboard town of “Rovere,” Merton (1949) suggested that community ties can serve as the antecedent for media consumption. That is, people may read newspapers or national news magazines for different reasons, based upon the nature of their various relationships and community ties. Looking specifically at local opinion leaders, Merton proposed that there were essentially two types of people who exerted influence in the community: “localites” and “cosmopolitans.” While the scope of an individual’s influence is confined to the local community in both cases, localites are those opinion leaders who identify and are specifically concerned with the issues and events of the local community. They “are great local patriots and the thought of leaving Rovere seems seldom to come to mind” (p. 191). Localites are those opinion leaders with deep local community ties. The cosmopolitan, on the other hand, is concerned with the issues and events of the “Great Society," or the world outside the local community. They have been more mobile, arrived more recently to the local community, have lived all over the country, and are much more likely to consider leaving than the localites. Thus, the types of news that a localite consumes and pays attention to are very different from those of the cosmopolitan.

Stamm (1985) suggests that both perspectives – community ties as the antecedent and product of newspaper use – are partially correct. That is, they are components in a more accurate model that sees community ties and media
consumption as reciprocally related. Community ties foster specific individual interests that spur people to read a newspaper, which in turn creates further community ties. Stamm points out that in order to understand such a cyclical model appropriately, one must recognize the changing nature of both community ties and readership. Stamm is not suggesting that we should interpret evidence of association between specific variables relating to community ties and newspaper readership in a circular manner. Buying a home cannot be seen as both a cause and a consequence of reading a newspaper. However, Stamm argues, an individual may buy a home in a local community, which will provide him with an interest in local affairs and cause him to read the local newspaper, which may in turn inform him of community concerns and inspire him to become involved in a local neighborhood association.

In the 1960s and 1970s, with the increasingly pervasive presence of portable video equipment and cable television networks, media studies came into what Jankowski (2002) calls the Second Wave. Local citizens took the reins of a wide range of media platforms – radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and later electronic networks – to produce what was called “community media.” Public broadcast stations are a prime example of the movement for locally controlled community media. Members of the community, working together with professional staff, are responsible for day-to-day station operations, content production, and long-term policy matters. Sometimes community media outlets have been used as simply a means to inform citizens about local issues, while at other times they have intentionally aimed to mobilize residents for change through direct appeals or messages embedded in the programming.
While having a multiplicity of voices contributing to the public dialogue is consistent with the principles of community attachment and community-building, it is unclear how effective community media have been in reaching their intended audiences and actually motivating them to effect positive change. Jankowski (2002) suggests that community media are most successful in facilitating community ties in situations where a strong sense of community already exists. For those communities that are deficient in community ties, community media are not effective in overcoming these deficits, Jankowski argues. While it is reasonable to believe that community-based media cannot, on their own, solve the challenges of a community or repair all broken social ties, it is also reasonable to contend that any effective holistic approach to promote community attachment and community-building will necessarily require the integration of media.

Greer (1962) suggests that the community press – hyper-local residential publications – relies upon and facilitates the interdependence of community activities. It connects local organizations and reflects the social nature of the community and its actors, whether they would be business owners, bureaucrats, organizational leaders, or otherwise. Greer relates the community press to a stage upon which the events and drama of a community are played out. This is not to say, of course, that mass media can take the place of interpersonal communication and relationships. Indeed, personal relationships have proven to be more influential than mass media in affecting attitudes and behaviors among individuals (Lazarsfeld, 1948; Beniger, 1987). However, the media can serve as a source of original information and focus the points of community discussion to facilitate more effective collective action. Rothenbuhler (1991) argues that
“communication is the beginning of community involvement” (p. 75). However, he points out that it is not simply any kind of communication that is important. Rather, it is the combination of keeping up with the news – a mass media channel – and interacting with others – an interpersonal communication channel – that facilitates individuals’ community involvement.

Stamm, Emig, and Hess (1997) identify four ways in which media can contribute to community involvement. First, media can provide individuals with an understanding of how community issues are relevant to their personal lives by bringing attention to community problems and communicating their consequences. Second, local media can mobilize collective action by pointing out and bringing together community groups that are, or could, make a positive difference to address community challenges. Third, local media can promote the capability of individuals to have a role in solving community problems. One way media can do this is by providing people with the information, context, and alternative perspectives they need to make up their own minds about an issue and how they might get involved. Finally, through the development of media habits, individuals can set aside time on a regular basis in which they attend to community concerns. That is, if a person develops a routine of watching a local newscast when he comes home from work or reading the newspaper each morning with coffee, then this is time in which an individual is regularly bolstering a personal sense of community attachment by learning about and thinking about the needs of his community.

Directed efforts at utilizing mass media have proved effective in community education campaigns. Palmgreen and Donohew (2003) argue that media use can be
effective in reducing community drug use when it provides widespread, frequent, and prolonged exposure to a message; targets specific at-risk populations; and is constantly informed by research on audience segmentation, message design, and channel selection processes. Farquhar et al. (1994) found that mass media are useful in reducing smoking behavior and the risk of cardiovascular disease in communities, particularly when these media efforts are combined with face-to-face intervention strategies. Media campaigns have also demonstrated positive results in informing communities about child sexual abuse and ways to prevent it (Self-Brown, Rheingold, Campbell, & de Arellano, 2008). Likewise, media campaigns have been shown to reinforce news information about seat-belt laws, and, in the case of radio messages, even serve as a reminder for drivers to buckle up (Gantz, Fitzmaurice, & Yoo, 1990).

Outside of public health and safety, media campaigns have also been shown to have less direct influence on citizens’ behaviors. In a study of the effects of a media campaign by the Dutch Ministry of the Environment, Staat, Wits, and Midden (1995) found that knowledge and awareness about an environmental problem, specifically the greenhouse effect, were not enough to elicit more environmentally conscious behaviors among citizens. Instead, people wanted to know how behavior changes will affect them personally, mostly in the short-term, and what contributions they could expect from others around them.

Thus, it is not that media cannot serve an effective role in the context of a community challenge like environmental concerns, but rather the strategies involved need to be more directed to matching the dispositions of the audience. Fung and O’Rourke (2000) point out that media campaigns have also been implemented by
citizens’ groups to target egregious corporate offenders of sound environmental practice. For example, after the Consumer Policy Institute of Brooklyn, New York, launched a media campaign to spotlight the Ulano Corporation, an art supplies manufacturer, as the top industrial air toxic polluter in New York City, the State Department of Environmental Conservation forced Ulano to use a new incinerator that reduced toxic emissions by 95%. By bringing these problems to the fore, the media can be used to spur political leaders to step in to impose necessary changes. In addition, businesses and other organizations who are fearful of such negative publicity may be motivated to behave in ways make them appear concerned about the community.

Within the context of media as a collective factor for promoting community attachment, journalism specifically plays a crucial role as a channel for vital community information. In order for citizens to be civically engaged, they need to have access to reliable information and analysis to serve as a starting point for productive discussions with other people who think both similarly and differently (Swanson, 2000). It is in this capacity that journalism serves a vital function.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) state that the “primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (p. 12). They argue that journalism helps define and build our communities by providing a common language and a common knowledge based in reality. Journalism amplifies the conversation of citizens. They further suggest that history shows that the more democratic a government is, the more news it will have.

Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg (1996) argue that journalism has the potential to “reinforce, enhance, and connect communication that occurs through a community's
interpersonal and organizational channels” (p. 10). By identifying the overall common areas of concern or interest, journalism can connect people, groups, and places that have been formerly disconnected. Waisbord (2007) likewise recognizes the historical function of the press to provide a common language for civic dialogue and adds that news and news organizations create a shared sense of time and space for members of a community.

Numerous journalism scholars have argued that journalists do not simply report reality, but also construct it (e.g., Tuchman, 1978; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1998; Durham, 2001). This is not to say that they conjure reality, Schudson (2003) suggests. The events reported in the news actually did occur. However, “by selecting, highlighting, framing, shading, and shaping in reportage, they [journalists] create an impression that real people – readers and viewers – then take to be real and to which they respond in their lives” (p. 2). And while the occupational culture of professional, mainstream news organizations may tend to favor a top-down approach to news gathering, which privileges official sources and bureaucracy as a starting point for stories, these news organizations nonetheless provide a common reference point for important information about a community. Moreover, these news organizations sometimes engage in investigative reporting that serves to keep those in power accountable. The news media in a democratic society, when working as they should, give voice to the major interested parties, as well as perhaps smaller dissident groups, which alerts citizens of the political decisions that affect them (p. 209).

However, the preceding discussion of community attachment and community-building suggests that a news media environment that is more inclusive of diverse
voices will be more effective for promoting stronger communities. Swanson (2000) argues that in the modern media environment, there is a great diversity in both the number and forms of news sources citizens can access to get information. However, he also suggests that the quality of news has deteriorated as a result of this diversity. In the need to compete for a scattering audience, mainstream news sources are loosening their journalistic values to produce more sensationalized news and infotainment.

Meanwhile, there are nearly limitless options people can turn to for information. These include 24-7 cable news and entertainment channels, political talk shows, and Internet sources that provide customized information gathering for virtually any niche consumer, he argues. Therefore, there is cause for concern that citizens are losing a reliable source of common information to serve as the basis for common civic discussion. However, Swanson also points out that those who are most likely to be civically engaged are also most likely to seek reliable political information and speculates that the weakening of traditional journalism’s influence in facilitating the civic discourse may also lead to the disappearance of negative press practices like horse-race political coverage and sound-bite news.

Looking specifically at online news, a report from the Center for International Communications Research argues that, contrary to the enthusiastic expectations for new media to expand the issues and voices present in the public sphere, the online news environment shows little diversity of content (Paterson, 2006). Instead, the report contends that the big players of traditional news media remain the privileged and dominant disseminators of news information online. Despite a plethora of information resources available on the Internet, this argument suggests that online news is
nonetheless homogenized and dominated by a few traditional news organizations, which have the benefit of established, effective, and economical systems of news gathering and production. “The internet has fully transitioned into what we have traditionally regarded as ‘old media:’ it is now, for most users, a mass medium providing mostly illusory interactivity and mostly illusory diversity” (p. 21).

If we look at the broader context of our modern media environment, however, things are not as absolute as Swanson or Paterson makes them out to be. Certainly, there is a great deal of online news that never reaches an audience of more than a handful of people. Likewise, there are also the big stories and big players that seem to dominate news both online and offline. However, there are also examples of stories that originated in relative obscurity, but which grew in popularity to the point that they were thrust onto the mainstream news agenda. Conversely, there are also examples of stories that originate in traditional media but are more widely developed in online media.

Perhaps one of the most famous examples was the sex scandal of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. This story was not broken by the established elite media, but by a blogger named Matt Drudge who was relatively unknown when he dropped the online bomb about the President’s affair (BBC News, 1998). Similarly, when 60 Minutes aired a report on September 8, 2004, questioning President George W. Bush’s military record, it was bloggers who brought it to national attention that the documents upon which CBS had based its story were bogus (Folkenflik, 2008). When Trent Lott publicly pronounced at Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday party that he was proud that his home state of Mississippi had voted for Thurmond and his segregationist platform in the 1948
presidential election, the story would have died on the vine and disappeared had bloggers not picked it up (Rosen, 2004).

In all of these cases, the interplay between traditional journalism and blogging was crucial to the full stories unfolding for the public. In the case of the Clinton scandal, Drudge did not collect the original information himself. Instead, the story posted on his blog simply reported that Newsweek had killed the story that investigative journalist Michael Isikoff had committed the time and shoe leather to developing. Likewise, had mainstream media outlets not picked up on the Drudge report, it is unlikely that the story would have ever made its way into the popular lexicon and history.

The same applies for the CBS story. While bloggers did their own research in “poring over decades-old typefaces and fonts” (Folkenflik, 2008, ¶5) to determine that the documents Dan Rather cited were forgeries, they were responding to a story that originated in traditional media. However, the real story that resulted and which was publicized in every mainstream media outlet in the world was not about Bush’s military record, but the embarrassment of CBS and then-anchor Dan Rather in too hastily airing a major story that had not been properly fact-checked.

In the case of the Trent Lott story, the entire Washington press corps was present at Thurmond’s party when Lott made his remark, but it was only one “young ‘off-air reporter’ for ABC News” (Rosen, 2004, ¶3) named Ed O’Keefe who picked up on it as newsworthy and put an article on ABC’s website. Ignored by the rest of the mainstream media news outlets, the story would have died had bloggers not picked up on it, circulated it within the blogosphere, and stoked a response. Only then did major news organizations pick up the story and give it real play.
The story, then, of the interplay between mainstream and grassroots journalism is a complicated one. It is difficult to quantify the sum total effect of either one for local communities. However, academic literature regarding communications and community studies, as well as anecdotal examples from the modern media sphere, suggest that a robust civic discussion that incorporates interpersonal communication channels, grassroots or community media channels, as well as mainstream media outlets will be most effective for the overall strength of a community.

**Youth in Journalism: Scholastic and Non-Scholastic Content Creation**

Youth-created content is not a new phenomenon in journalism. There is an established history of more than 200 years of teens and young adults reporting news in school newspapers for their peers. According to Evanchyk, the first school newspaper ever published was the *Student Gazette* in 1777-78 at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia (as cited in Robinson, 1996). In 1916, the first scholastic press associations were founded in America to help guide and develop student journalism. The Oklahoma Interscholastic Press Association was developed at this time from a model set forth by the short-lived Texas Interscholastic Press Association at Baylor University – the first scholastic press association in the country. The Oklahoma association held its first meeting on May 6, 1916, and is still in operation (Pedersen, 2007).

In their 1999 study, Bruschke and George found evidence to suggest that by participating in high-school journalism programs, students may improve their verbal skills. Tate (1998) argues that scholastic journalism has the potential to create stronger reporters, create more enlightened readers, and ensure an appreciation and understanding of a free press. Mueller (2003) suggests that scholastic journalism
provides a way to attract young people to newspapers so that they maintain interest and readership as they grow older. Students who take a course in journalism and have experience at their school news publications are also 10 times more likely to major in journalism when they go to college compared with students who do neither (Dvorak, 1999).

Yet many high schools around the country are cutting their budgets for funding journalism programs (McDonnell, 2004). Such schools are opting for a back-to-basics approach that focuses on outcome measures and standards-based testing and rarely recognize the value of scholastic journalism programs. However, McDonnell argues that the conversational but exact style of journalism offers a constructive complement to the traditional “formality of academic essays and the looseness of poetry” (p. 109). Journalism, she holds, teaches students intellectual rigor, clear expression, fairness and accuracy, separation of fact and opinion, and the understanding that a writer serves an audience – all of which can improve a school’s overall outcome measures. Thus, one way in which scholastic journalism serves to promote stronger communities is through better educating students as critical thinkers, strengthening local schools, and preparing student journalists to be civically aware citizens and perhaps future journalists.

In a study comparing the quality of news in six Midwestern private-sector community daily newspapers with the news of six Midwestern university student newspapers, Bodle (1996) found there were few significant differences with respect to the substance of their content. Content in the private-sector newspapers and the student newspapers was found to contain basically the same level of story interest, with an equal number of stories ranging from “dramatic” to “dull.” Furthermore, both
categories of newspapers were found to have no significant differences regarding their thoroughness, measured according to the type and amount of information presented. From at least these criteria then, it seems that scholastic journalism can be at least as good in quality and public appeal as general community newspapers.

Samway (1968) proposes that among the goals of a scholastic journalism course, students should be introduced to the theory, purposes, and social responsibility of journalism; learn how to use mass media to become citizens informed about current events; and promote respect for the historic role journalism has played in building America. Pointing to examples of communities where the traditional local newspaper has gone under, Harvey (2007) suggests that scholastic journalism can and has filled such gaps by providing citizens with important information about local events and issues. At the same time, students working in these scholastic publications are given the opportunity to participate in exciting service-learning activities. “The students are compelled to leave their comfort zones in the name of benefit to their communities, while the businesses, organizations, individuals and professionals of these communities provide the youngsters with realistic experiences outside the school walls” (p. 16).

As discussed in the previous section of this literature review, the purpose of journalism in promoting community attachment is to provide citizens with the information they need to be self-governing, and, at least in part, to hold the powerful accountable. For scholastic journalism to be fully effective in providing youth a role in this process, students must have the opportunity to discuss topics relevant to their lives and to the community, even when their views are controversial or critical of school administrators. This was the reasoning behind the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in the *Tinker v. Des*
Moines School District case in 1969, where the Court ruled that students wearing black armbands in protest of the government’s policies in Vietnam were protected under the First Amendment. However, in the Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988) case, the Supreme Court pointed out that educators may have certain legitimate pedagogical interests in restricting what students may and may not publish in scholastic journalism programs. Thus, it is evident that even for the most well-intentioned school administrators and journalism advisors, bringing youth fully into a rich and constructive community dialogue is a challenging task.

In a survey of 230 high-school journalism programs, Lain (1992) found that the autonomy experienced by students writing for the school newspaper was directly related to financial factors and advisor characteristics. Specifically, high-school newspapers that make a profit (and are generally funded primarily by advertising rather than administrative subsidies) and have advisors who are more experienced as teachers, better educated in journalism, are affiliated with journalism associations, and have worked professionally as journalists proved more autonomous. Such high-school newspapers were less likely to have a principal or the advisor kill a story and less likely to have teachers or administrators review a story before it was published. Controversial stories that covered abortion, birth control, political endorsements, school board endorsements, or were critical of the school board, administration, or teachers were all more likely to be killed than stories about drug problems in the school or general stories about teens, sex, and pregnancy. Stories about drugs or teen sex seem to have become more commonplace in high-school newspapers but were still unlikely to be permitted in about 14% of the newspapers surveyed. Given these restrictions to
autonomy and the fact that much of the content in scholastic journalism focuses on the issues and events in an individual school, the youth-generated content in scholastic settings may be limited in its scope or ability to contribute to community attachment.

Outside the school grounds, there are other opportunities for youth to have a role in their communities’ media. In some cases, non-profit organizations are leading the charge to create unique channels for youth expression and commentary. In other cases, local mainstream media outlets are providing a chance for students to get out of the classroom and report on their communities. The concept of involving youth in the process of community development has helped to spawn the movement known as “youth media,” which are media outlets that are developed and produced by young people. The primary goals of youth media are youth learning, community and workforce development, civic engagement, creative expression, and social justice (Soep, 2006, p. 34).

Youth media production outlets are generally characterized by what Soep calls “collegial pedagogy” (p. 38). This concept frames young people as valuable assets to community development through their access, understanding, experience, and analysis relevant to youth-related issues. Likewise, adults involved in the youth media production mentor these youth and provide access to equipment, expertise, advice, creative collaboration, and outlets for the work young people create. A third component of collegial pedagogy is that youth who are more experienced in media production teach peers who are less experienced. In these ways, collegial pedagogy not only allows youth to have a voice in the dialogue of community development, but also supports their
educational and professional opportunities, promotes a sense of attachment and social responsibility, and allows them to participate in positive social change.

The process of collegial pedagogy also helps to hold accountable those involved in the production of youth media. As youth and adults work together to provide a platform for youth to participate in the public dialogue of community development, they come to hold each other to high standards of media production, constantly weighing decisions based on established standards, including accuracy, originality, aesthetics, rigor, and matters of social impact (Chavez & Soep, 2005).

When youth media outlets engage young people in projects such as covering local government or youth agency meetings, or interviewing residents about the needs of the community, they build bridges between these groups and their constituents. In doing so, attachment is strengthened as the community comes to see youth as valuable contributors, and young people begin to recognize the local resources available to them (Tarpley, 2009). Goodman (2003) points out that youth media offer an opportunity for young people to document and encourage various kinds of youth community service. Thus, youth media serve as both a direct channel for young people to get involved in their communities, as well as an opportunity to cover and promote other community-service activities that these youth and their peers are involved in. “Providing youth with the technical, creative, and intellectual tools of media production and analysis gives great power and focus to their civic engagement” (Goodman, 2003, p. 105).

Because youth younger than 18 are not allowed to vote, they are often the helpless witnesses and casualties of bad public policy, whether it be the result of a depressed economy, inadequate healthcare, educational inequalities, or other social ills
Youth media have the potential to empower young people to have a voice and help solve the problems of their communities. While fellow youth are usually the primary target audience of youth media outlets, the aim of those working at youth media organizations is often to reach adults with young people’s messages as well. Additionally, many youth media organizations have identified secondary target audiences consisting of adults in roles like educators, social workers, parents, policymakers, and media professionals.

In their framework for conceptualizing youth media impact, Inouye, Lacoe, and Henderson-Frakes (2004) identify three levels of impact – individual, collective, and systemic. Additionally, they suggest that on an individual level, youth media can have an affective, cognitive, or behavioral impact. That is, youth media have the potential to affect the way people feel about certain issues, the way they think about and understand these issues, and the way they act in response to the information presented to them. On a collective level, youth media have the potential to create a greater sense of community and attachment among their audiences and to improve the collective perception of youth, both among adults and the youth themselves. On a systemic level, youth media offer an opportunity to integrate youth perspectives and concerns in the media, increase the engagement of underrepresented groups in the community discourse, and increase accountability to youth by the systems that serve them.

Coryat and Goodman (2004) note that the field of youth media is currently being influenced by globalizing forces and trends. Digital media technologies have allowed youth media organizations to produce broadcast quality media, connect with new audiences, and produce and distribute content on the Internet, all at much more
affordable rates than in the past. While these opportunities have resulted in arguably more high-quality youth media available than ever before, today’s mainstream media environment is characterized by unprecedented corporate consolidation that views youth as consumers and clients, rather than contributors, and perpetuates their disenfranchisement. Coryat and Goodman suggest that the role of youth media in “opening spaces for young people to articulate their concerns, represent themselves in the media, [and] build community through collective endeavors” is more important now than ever (¶ 4).

Of course, corporate consolidation of major media conglomerates is not the only challenge facing youth media. According to a 2006 report from the Stuart Foundation, a philanthropic organization that helps fund a number of youth media projects around the country, “the heterogeneous nature of the field makes it hard to have a shared vision, common principles and best practices, and makes it difficult to assess collective impact” (p. 7). Likewise, more established youth media outlets are often asked to provide technical assistance to smaller organizations, but rarely have the funding support to do so. Keith Hefner (2004), executive director of Youth Communication, says that it can be difficult to recruit and train quality adult staff to work in the field of youth media. “Youth media is a low prestige, low paying, low visibility field, which, paradoxically, requires highly skilled staff. It is very difficult to find staff who have strong journalism and youth development skills, and very expensive to train them” (¶ 17). Likewise, generating youth media content can be expensive when considering the staff hours, overhead, and production costs involved. Recruiting capable adult staff is further plagued by the perception that youth media is written by people who are too young and too
inexperienced, and many adults do not consider it a serious endeavor. Hefner also states that finding an audience is becoming increasingly more difficult as interest and inclination among both youth and adults to consume youth media is being crowded out by other forms of information and entertainment.

While youth media face a number of obstacles, they still present a significant opportunity to bring youth into the process of promoting community attachment and community-building. The underlying philosophy of youth media and the platforms for participation they provide offer potential to encourage both youth audiences and youth producers to connect to and engage in their communities. However, in order to do so, these organizations must forge effective youth-adult partnerships and find ways to compete with other forms of media for audience attention. The Internet and digital multimedia technologies, with their lower overhead costs, flexible capacity for customization, and appeal to a youth audience present one possible way to overcome some of the barriers facing youth media and to promote community attachment among young people.

**Digital Media and Their Potential for Promoting Stronger Communities**

Some scholars have argued that digital media, by virtue of their form, actually increase the opportunities and potential for citizens to be involved in building their communities. Jenkins (2006) suggests that the convergence of old and new media has created new opportunities for participation and collective intelligence. Whereas the one-to-many model of traditional media, with its accompanying barriers to individual access, is limited to the expertise of a few select content producers, the many-to-many model of digital media allows a multitude of people, including those previously excluded from contributing to the body of knowledge, to bring their knowledge and expertise to the
The resulting collective intelligence is thus greater than that of any one person, and the expanded power of people to participate holds traditional sources of power and information more accountable.

Similarly, in a study employing in-depth interviews with 69 people participating in online political discussion groups, Stromer-Galley (2003) found that participants generally appreciated the wide range of topics and viewpoints they encountered online, as well as the opportunity to interact with a diverse array of people. Stromer-Galley also suggests that, in some cases, the Internet offers participants a voice in, and access to, organized dialogue that is absent in their real-world communities. These online discussion groups offer new ways for people to have their voices heard and to learn about common issues of concern from a variety of viewpoints, which in some cases fills a void in people’s experience of community discourse. Considering McLeod, Scheuffle, and Moy’s (1999) assertion that communication channels can serve as alternative sources of information and motivation, one might consider such online venues as a hybrid between mass and interpersonal communication.

In describing what she calls virtual democracy and the multimedia public sphere, Youngs (2007) argues that the Internet provides citizens with many new sources of information with differing emphases on locality and particular purposes. This allows citizens to compare message frames from different national mass media sources, as well as explore alternative message frames from sources such as non-governmental organizations, social movement groupings, and activists, which have in pre-virtual times been excluded or marginalized in national mass media.
In their typology for online free expression, Gangadharan and Ananny (2007) propose that blogs that make use of multiple forms of media indicate to contributing users that the blog is not simply dominated by textual content. Therefore, such blogs invite contribution from a wider array of participants who might not engage in a text-only discussion. They also suggest that when blogs include embedded hyperlinks to content outside of the site, it signals to users that there is a relationship with information beyond the limited discussion on the individual blog. While the presence of such embedded hyperlinks does not necessarily indicate that the blog fosters a truly diverse and inclusive range of perspectives, the absence of such hyperlinks can be seen as restrictive and contradictory to diversity and inclusiveness.

The advent of digital media has also revolutionized the way journalism is practiced. Multimedia technologies are now part of the broader concept of convergence, in which previously distinct news platforms like print, television, and online media combine with respect to their technologies, products, staffs, and geography (Singer, 2004). Journalists and news organizations are having to learn how to blend various kinds of media formats (e.g., text, video, audio, animations) in the storytelling process (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006). Quinn (2005) describes a multimedia mindset that involves, in part, an appreciation of each medium’s storytelling capacity and the strengths that each medium brings to this process.

Thurman and Lupton (2008) point out that news corporations around the world are increasingly incorporating more video, audio, and interactive graphics in their online products to complement the traditional formats of text and photos. Likewise, journalists are now encouraged by their employers to find new ways to appeal to audiences who
are spending more time in multimedia online environments. Deuze (2004) suggests that today’s news consumer is characteristically active and multitasking. In any given online session a person may bounce around among various tasks – checking e-mail, searching websites, or visiting chat rooms, just to name a few. Online news consumers have more choices about how they access information than with any other single medium (Zerba, 2004). While many news websites may not fully realize the potential of digital media to offer a more customized experience, online consumers are increasingly coming to expect more interactive options in how they obtain their information.

Chung (2008) states that interactivity “fundamentally challenges the traditional one-way directional flow of news by providing news audiences with increased choice options and even allowing them to participate in the production of information” (p. 658). In a survey of online news consumers, Chung found that while interactive capabilities are not necessarily utilized consistently and uniformly by all users, certain audiences are likely to use certain interactive features of news websites. Of particular interest to the current study, her results revealed that younger individuals, users who view online news as a credible information source, and users who are involved with their communities and are politically engaged are likely to use interactive features that allow them to express their personal opinions. Such features might include hyperlinks to e-mail content creators, comment fields attached to news articles, or blogs intended to promote online discussion among consumers.

Other aspects of interactivity include the ability of a user to navigate through the online environment to pursue information in a non-linear fashion, opportunities to play a role in creating original content for a website, opportunities for synchronous and
asynchronous interaction with content creators and other users, and customizability of online information sources (Yun, 2007; Repman, Zinskie, & Carlson, 2005; Chung, 2008). The collection of interactive multimedia experiences in the online environment serves to better meet the wide range of needs and desires of individual users. Ha and James (1998) identify how specific aspects of interactivity appeal to different categories of users. For “self-indulgers” and “Web surfers,” the playfulness and choice provided by interactivity fulfill self-communication and entertainment needs. For task-oriented users, a sense of connectedness to the outside world fulfills information needs. For expressive users, collecting information and the opportunity for reciprocal communication allows them to interact with website representatives and other users with common interests.

Looking at how average citizens are using online media to cover their communities, Fanselow (2008) suggests that bloggers who are not professional journalists, but who have a desire to see their communities do well, provide hyper-local coverage of communities that traditional media do not provide unless there is a horrible crime or other major incident. Similarly, Niles (2009) argues that journalists in the modern mainstream press are too transient to be familiar with their communities. In an industry where upward mobility is often determined by a journalist’s willingness to move to larger markets, reporters are often imported from outside the area and do not stay long enough in a community to become familiar with it. Niles suggests that those working in online news – a medium not entrenched in the industry culture and practices of traditional media – have an opportunity to learn from these mistakes and not repeat them.
Thus, capitalizing on local citizens to cover the news in their own communities, either professionally or non-professionally, may fill a void left by unfamiliar or uninterested journalists working for the mainstream press. However, in examining political discussions on Chinese newspaper websites, Zhou, Chan, and Peng (2008) contend that the diffusion of new technologies will in itself not extend the public sphere, but instead citizens must want a more participatory and robust civic environment. Those participating in online civic discussions will need to engage in higher level rational-critical discourse if the civic potential of online media is to be realized.

Even if citizens make use of new digital technologies to address civic issues with a higher level of rational-critical thought, there has been some question as to how community discussion online translates into real-world involvement. That is to say, just because someone is involved in the discussion of community issues online or seeks information online, this does not necessarily mean that he will actually become physically involved in the community-building activities. This, of course, goes back to the need for the distinction in this study between community attachment as an affective, emotional phenomenon, and community-building as active behavioral participation. Thus, in many ways this is not a new debate. One might easily offer the same objection to traditional media. That is, just because someone reads a newspaper or watches local television news broadcasts on a regular basis, this does not necessarily mean he will get involved in efforts to make the community a better place. Sandman (2009) suggests that much of current journalism practice fails to provide audiences with “mobilizing information” about ways they can get involved in a particular cause or concern. The
result is that “instead of feeling a civic obligation to do something about issues, we feel a civic obligation to know about them” (¶ 20).

Sandman’s criticism is worth acknowledging and offers guidance on how to improve the civic potential of the news. However, as discussed earlier, journalism and media channels can and do offer the prerequisite information base for citizens to engage in civic discourse. They can also promote a sense of connection and belonging among community members who feel they collectively share in local experiences. Thus, they offer a means to provide a number of necessary conditions for community attachment and eventually overall effective community-building.

Still, the interactive nature of the Internet and digital media has complicated this debate. With the creative potential of digital media, consumers now can also be contributors in the community conversation through discussion groups, comments, signing online petitions, publishing videos recorded on their cell phone, or a myriad of other participation opportunities. Yet, true community attachment and community-building must constitute something more; they cannot be isolated to the virtual sphere. Thus, the question remains as to how participation in a virtual community, or virtual community-building efforts, is related to the functioning of physical communities, which is the focus of the current study.

Brandtzaeg and Heim (2008) point out that members of virtual communities often lack loyalty and lose interest in a virtual community fairly easily. Fernback (2007) argues that it is unproductive even to discuss online social interactions according to a nostalgic and inappropriate concept of community. She suggests that “the metaphor of ‘community’ in cyberspace is one of convenient togetherness without real responsibility”
Wellman, Quan Haase, Witte, and Hampton (2001) found that heavy Internet use is associated with low commitment to online communities. However, the researchers point out that this does not indicate a general rejection of community by heavy Internet users. Indeed, only online communities seem to suffer from this lack of loyalty and commitment. Yet, the authors argue that the individualization of the Internet and the increased likelihood of anti-social behavior afforded by the Internet’s anonymity make further fragmentation and individual isolation a genuine concern for real-world communities.

On the other hand, the empirical evidence from Wellman et al. (2001) suggests that more moderate Internet use is positively associated with maintaining real-world social ties. People tend to supplement their real-world relationships through online communications. Just because a person e-mails or chats on the Internet with a friend does not mean that he does not also engage in face-to-face communication with that person as well. Finally, Wellman et al. found that “Internet use increases participatory capital. The more people are on the Internet and the more they are involved in online organizational and political activity, the more they are involved in offline organizational and political activity” (p. 450).

In fact, the implications of the Internet for real-world communities are likely not as bad as the doom-and-gloom naysayers fear, nor as idealistic as the brave-new-world utopians would like to believe (Putnam, 2000, p. 171). The Internet offers opportunities to cut across time and space to bring a more heterogeneous and egalitarian group of people together around specific interests and concerns. On the other hand, the “digital divide” between those who are younger, wealthier, more highly educated, and more
active online and those who are older, poorer, less educated, and less active online may lead not to greater equality and diversity, but to further class separation and exclusion in the civic dialogue. Likewise, the tendency for people to congregate online around very discretely specialized interests may lead to more fragmentation than diverse discussion.

Putnam argues that the anonymity offered online may actually provide some strengths for democratic process, as people will feel freer to discuss issues with greater frankness and honesty, so that people can get to the real heart of the matter. However, the low threshold for participating in online discussion may also lead to a cacophony of uninformed voices that creates more confusion than productive deliberation. Along the same lines, the Internet may provide greater opportunity for people to contact their elected leaders, for example by sending them an e-mail, but this may only create an illusion that their voices are being heard. The amount of attention a politician gives to such an e-mail is uncertain, and the overall effect of sending it even more so.

Putnam suggests that the question is not what the Internet will do to communities, but rather what communities will do with it. How will citizens make use of the Internet to improve their communities and tackle the challenges they collectively face? Carter (2005) argues that online interactions are not distinct from everyday, real-world life. They are, in fact, a part of everyday life. Discussing specifically the way youth make use of social network sites in developing their identity, boyd (2008) suggests that the online lives of young people is a direct extension of their offline peers and social network. Thus, it is the overall social context in which people use the Internet that is relevant to community attachment and involvement.
Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) provide empirical evidence to suggest that use of the Internet as a resource for information seeking and as a forum for interactive civic messaging both strongly influence civic engagement, in many cases even more than traditional print and broadcast media, or face-to-face communication. In a study seeking to flesh out linkages between specific Internet uses and dimensions of civic engagement, Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, and Dunnsmore (2005) found that information seeking, e-mail with interpersonal sources, political activity like writing a politician or visiting a political advocacy website, and online community-based activity were all positively related to all dimensions of civic engagement – community involvement, group membership, and political activity. They argue that their findings suggest that the time people spend online may complement, not replace, traditional civic engagement depending on how one uses the Internet.

There is evidence that the Internet is particularly attractive to youth as a vehicle for community attachment (Horrigan, 2001). While young people generally gravitate to using the Internet to interact with others about similar hobbies and personal interests, “they also are much more likely than other users to report that the Internet has helped them become more involved in organizations in their community and connect with people of different generations, economic backgrounds, and ethnic groups” (p. 6). Coleman (2008) refers to the application of digital media technologies to engage youth in civic discourse as “youth e-citizenship” (p. 189). Because the virtual public sphere is cheaper and less burdensome to participate in compared to the traditional, physical public sphere, it is particularly attractive to young people who may otherwise be excluded from civic participation.
Moreover, the Internet provides an opportunity for youth to be involved in community discussions without being immediately judged on the basis of their age. When a young person contributes to the civic dialogue online, his words are evaluated on the merit of their meaning, not on the appearance of the speaker. Rheingold (2008) describes modern youth as “digital natives” who have grown up “learning how to learn” new technologies (p. 99). The Internet has always been a part of their lives. While they are able to master digital media with ease, Rheingold argues these skills do not necessarily translate to civic engagement. Youth are self-directed and have high aptitude in acquiring the skills to participate in the online civic discussion, but they need guidance from adults to find ways to apply these skills so that they facilitate genuine civic engagement.

In a study of more than 300 websites created by and for young people, Montgomery (2008) found that youth were participating in what could be loosely referred to as “youth civic culture” (p. 28). Some of these websites targeted youth as a broad audience, while others focused on the needs of specific youth communities, including urban, rural, or minority youth. While most sites were little more than “brochureware,” Montgomery states that there were also many examples of “innovative uses of interactive digital technologies for a variety of civic and political purposes” (p. 27). Some of these uses invited audience participation and expression through technologies like online polls and questionnaires, invitations to submit original literary and artistic works, and discussion boards for collaboration and debate about civic issues.

Research Questions

A review of the literature suggests that a general comparison and contrast of scholastic and non-scholastic youth news websites will be valuable for understanding
how youth are currently using these venues and what this might suggest regarding the potential of these sites for promoting community attachment as an antecedent to community-building. Schools, community organizations, and local professional media all serve as valuable platforms for youth journalism initiatives but also have their limitations. As the literature review has shown, schools face legal and bureaucratic hurdles, non-profit youth media outlets face questions of sustainability, and professional news organizations have profit interests to look after. Therefore, the first research question, which was addressed using a qualitative content analysis, asked:

- **RQ1**: What are the overall differences and similarities between online news content produced by youth in scholastic vs. non-scholastic settings with respect to the potential for these websites to promote community attachment as an antecedent to community-building?

  The literature suggests that multimedia and online technologies provide promising opportunities, if used effectively, to increase community attachment, particularly among youth. Thus, the second research question, which was also addressed using a qualitative content analysis, was:

- **RQ2**: What are the differences and similarities between online news content produced by youth in scholastic vs. non-scholastic settings with respect to how they use different multimedia features (e.g., photos, videos, animations, etc.)?

  Based on the findings of the content analysis, as well as the information derived from the preceding literature review, this study sought to understand how youth in both scholastic and non-scholastic production contexts described their experiences in making the news. To this aim, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with youth working at each website in order to connect their perspectives with the evidence of community attachment, or lack thereof, in the content the youth produce. Thus, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5, and RQ6 were addressed by means of in-depth interviews.
• RQ3: How are youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings similar or different in the way they describe their experiences in producing online news? How do they perceive their role promoting community attachment, if at all?

• RQ4: What do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings express as the motivating factors associated with their involvement in news production?

• RQ5: Who do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings see as the target audience of their work? Are they striving to reach other youth or adults with their content?

• RQ6: What do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings describe as the challenges and benefits to participating in news production?
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods qualitative design in order to provide the components of a grounded theory to understanding the capacity of youth-generated online news for promoting community attachment. Specifically, the research used a qualitative content analysis of the substance and form of online youth-generated news sites, combined with semi-structured in-depth interviews with youth and advisors involved in producing this content. While the preceding literature review provided a context of the existing body of knowledge in the areas of community attachment, youth involvement in communities, and the role of media in promoting strong communities, a qualitative grounded theory methodology was chosen for its interpretive flexibility to identify the capacity of these websites to promote community attachment outside of pre-selected constraints.

Grounded Theory

In their seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that social science should be as interested in discovering theory as testing it. Consistent with this study’s derivation of a general theoretical base from a review of literature in various fields and disciplines of social science, a grounded theory method was considered appropriate for examining the overall context and content of youth-generated news websites because it allowed for further theoretical understanding derived inductively from observation (Patton, 2002). Moreover, a grounded theory approach expresses explicit concentration on objectivity, thoroughness, and systematic rigor. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define grounded theory as consisting of three primary steps: description, conceptual ordering, and theory. The first step is fairly
straightforward. “Description draws upon ordinary vocabulary to convey ideas about things, people, and places” (p. 16). Conceptual ordering moves beyond simple description to organize data into discrete categories based upon the properties and dimensions of those categories. Description is used to further elucidate these categories. Finally, theorizing involves formulating concepts “into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme” (p. 21). Theorizing provides statements about the relationships and interplay between concepts.

At the heart of any grounded theory application is the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method follows Strauss and Corbin’s three steps of grounded theory, while offering more methodological detail. Glaser and Strauss (1967) outline four steps involved in the constant comparative method: 1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) writing the theory. The first step involves qualitatively coding data into as many categories as possible as they emerge or fit into an existing category. During this process, each incident coded into a category is compared with previous incidents in the same category. This constant comparison generates theoretical properties of a category. The second step, then, involves the comparison of emerging category incidents with the specific properties of the category. In this way, more specific relationships among incidents, categories, and category properties can be identified. In the third step, delimiting the theory, a researcher identifies underlying uniformities of categories or properties, and builds the emergent theory with fewer, but higher level, concepts. This achieves both the parsimony and scope necessary for a good theory.
The final step of writing the theory involves offering a systematic, substantive theory that would be useful for other researchers in the same field.

While the steps of the constant comparative method and grounded theory provide a systematic approach to examining social phenomena, Charmaz (2006) points out that even Glaser and Strauss suggest researchers use these tools flexibly and in their own way. Charmaz suggests that grounded theory methods offer a set of principles and practices, not prescriptions or packages. It is in this vein that grounded theory was applied as an overarching methodology for this study. That is, grounded theory and the constant comparative method were used to assimilate the findings from this study’s qualitative content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Existing mass communication theories addressing the relationship between mainstream media and community attachment fail to acknowledge the distinctive dynamics of youth involvement in media production. Likewise, existing theories of community attachment may emphasize the need for youth involvement, or recognize the role of media in the process, but they fail to bring these components together in a cohesive theoretical form.

**Population and Sampling**

The population for the qualitative content analyses of this study consisted of online youth-generated news websites from around the United States. Specifically, these sites were selected from a list of high-school and teen-journalism websites provided by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) High School Journalism Initiative. This list, found online at www.highschooljournalism.org, was appropriate for a number of reasons. First, ASNE has been an established, reputable, and influential professional journalism organization for more than 80 years (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 2009). Second, the High School Journalism Initiative is funded by the John S.
and James L. Knight Foundation. This foundation is also a well-established and esteemed organization that provides millions of dollars in grant money for projects focusing on journalism and communities (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 2009). Third, at the time of preliminary site selection, the High School Journalism Initiative’s list included more than 2,700 high school and teen journalism websites, making it the most extensive single list found of youth news websites – both scholastic and non-scholastic.

Using a random-number generator, 14 total websites – seven scholastic and seven non-scholastic – were selected from this list. While this study was qualitative in nature, random selection based on detailed criteria provided more rigor to the study and offered a more accurate representation of the population of youth-generated news sites than a purely purposive sample would have. Selection criteria were also imposed in order to ensure a proper comparison among sites.

First, sites had to be geographically based in a major metropolitan area. Because differences in culture and funding available for online youth-generated news initiatives may exist between rural and urban communities, comparing differences in content among sites in both kinds of settings was deemed inappropriate. In order to control as much as possible for these differences, only sites in metropolitan areas were examined.

Second, the ASNE High School Journalism Initiative provides a template available as an easy way for high schools to get student media on the Web. While this template offers the capability for a variety of multimedia features and an examination of the ways in which various high schools are using this template would be interesting in its own right, for the current study sites using this template were excluded, as they did not
demonstrate the overall variation and context of youth-generated news websites across the country.

The third criterion for selection was that websites had to have content that could be identified as having been posted within the preceding six months. Moreover, sites must have had at least 10 web pages available to be coded. Sites with no content, or none within the specified time frame, were considered questionable as to their continuing operation. Fourth, some of the sites on the High School Journalism Initiative list were general school websites. That is, rather than focus specifically on news produced by teens, these sites provided general information about the school and resources for administrators, teachers, parents, or students. These websites were also excluded because the purpose of this study was not to examine official high-school websites, but youth-generated news websites. Fifth, a number of youth-generated news websites simply provided access to PDF versions of print publications. While this is a relatively cheap and easy way for schools and organizations to get started in providing youth-created content on the Web, it essentially serves as little more than a repository of a print product. Because the purpose of this study is to examine the unique context of youth news websites and their use of multimedia, sites providing only PDFs were also excluded.

The sixth criterion for selection was that sites could not be based upon a primarily video or audio youth news production platform. That is, many high schools and non-profit organizations are engaged in dynamic and interesting youth-generated news projects like Internet radio broadcasts, or an in-house student news video broadcast. However, a content analysis of a website that focuses on video or audio production
would look very different from one based upon print or text-based production. Therefore, for the sake of consistency such sites were excluded. This is not to say that selected sites could not include video or audio materials. Indeed, part of the purpose of this study was to examine how youth are using multimedia tools to get their messages out. One qualification should be made here. One of the sites – *The Bobcat* from Grandview Heights High School in Columbus, OH – was a primarily text-based online-only news site at the time of initial site selection. However, between the time of coding the site's content and the interviews with the youth and advisor from this site, the operation merged with its sister project, a video-based operation, and assumed the same name – *The Word*. 

The seventh criterion for site selection was that content must have been primarily created by teenage youth. Therefore, any websites on the High School Journalism Initiative list that clearly indicated that a significant portion of the content was created by individuals younger than 13 or older than 19 were also excluded. Eighth, because the scope of this study was to examine youth news sites in the United States and their local capacity for promoting community attachment, any sites that were primarily internationally focused were also excluded.

Ninth, a number of newspapers around the country are taking the reins in providing youth with an avenue for participating in news production and for publishing this content online. However, many of these newspapers provide only a page or section within their general website for youth content. Such sites were excluded because they provide less opportunity for youth to make full use of the capabilities of the Web. Newspapers and organizations that provide teens with their own website demonstrate a
greater commitment to youth-generated news and offer more opportunity for them to work in online media. Another reason youth news publications wrapped into an existing mainstream media website were excluded was because web pages examined in this study were systematically selected based upon the site navigation. If youth news sites were housed in a more general newspaper website, then it would have been difficult to maintain a consistent system of selecting news content created by youth and not adults. The details of this systematic selection of web pages will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

The final criterion for selection was that no more than two websites were selected from any one state in the country in either the scholastic and non-scholastic categories individually. This was particularly important because youth-generated news sites tend to be more heavily concentrated in California, New York, and Chicago. Because of this and the fact that scholastic sites far outnumber non-scholastic sites on the High School Journalism Initiative list, it was impractical to limit the sample to one site from each state. However, it was assumed to be an unfair and unbalanced comparison to examine scholastic sites from eight communities across the country with eight from communities in only a select few states. Once two websites had been randomly selected from any one state, no further websites from that state were allowed into the sample.

The selection process described resulted in the following list of youth-generated news websites. It is important to point out that the scholastic sites on the ASNE list vastly outnumber non-scholastic sites. In fact, the non-scholastic sites listed below were the only ones on the ASNE list that met the above criteria.
Scholastic Websites

- The Argus – Bel Air High School, El Paso, TX
- The Messenger – Calvary Christian Academy, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- The Pointer – Sparrows Point High School, Baltimore, MD
- The Grantonian – Grant High School, Portland, OR
- the broadview: online – Convent of the Sacred Heart High School, San Francisco, CA
- AHSnews.com (The Arcadian) – Arcadia High School, Phoenix, AZ
- The Bobcat / The Word – Grandview Heights High School, Columbus, OH

Non-scholastic Websites

- L.A. Youth – Los Angeles, CA
- VOX Teen Newspaper – Atlanta, GA
- The Mash – Chicago, IL
- Teens in Print – Boston, MA
- Teenlink – Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- HarlemLIVE – New York, NY
- New Youth Connections – New York, NY

Qualitative Content Analysis

Patton (2002) describes qualitative content analysis as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Krippendorff (2004) notes that one of the characteristics of a qualitative content analysis is a “close reading of relatively small amounts of textual matter” (p. 17). In this study, an inductive approach was used in the analysis of content on the selected sites by examining specific web pages and their components to derive abstract theoretical categories with broader explanatory power.

Thus, the unit of analysis for the qualitative content analysis was each selected individual web page in a given website examined. The researcher systematically selected web pages from each site by first analyzing the home page and any news
stories that were directly promoted and linked from the home page. Next, content on all main navigation links was analyzed. Main navigation links were defined as those that were persistent and followed the basic elements of navigation convention (Krug, 2006). Links contained in drop down menus, or secondary navigation links, were not included as part of this sample selection criteria. In the event that a primary navigation link led to an index of articles or other codeable web pages, the three most recent pages in that index were coded. No more than 50 of the most recent web pages were coded for each site.

This selection process resulted in 393 web pages, with scholastic sites providing 150 of those pages and non-scholastic sites providing 243. The number of pages offered by each individual site ranged from 14 to 50. The researcher personally coded all content so as to draw upon his own experience and knowledge in deriving emergent themes and topics in the content, which is consistent with the qualitative methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

With the exception of pages from one website in the sample, the web pages collected were all printed in hard copy on November 4, 2009, in order to be captured at the same time for coding the text of these pages. The site in exception was The Argus of Bel Air High School in El Paso, TX. This site was selected after it was determined that a separate and previously chosen site would not fulfill the requirements of the study. Specifically, there was no one who worked at the previously selected scholastic youth news website who was willing to participate in the in-depth interviews that needed to accompany the content analysis. Thus, pages from The Argus included in this sample were printed on May 21, 2010. The textual content for The Argus was coded in the
month of May 2010, while the text for the remaining 13 websites was coded in the months of November and December 2009.

Due to the fact that no software was found sufficient for capturing all multimedia features of a website at one time, coding of these multimedia features was done live on each respective site. Again with the exception of The Argus, all initial multimedia coding was done in November 2009. Coding of the multimedia features on The Argus was done in the May 2010. Given the changing nature of the Web, the sites were revisited in January 2011, after initial data collection was completed, to verify that no significant substantive changes had been made in the application of multimedia in the sample. In the few cases in which a site had added multimedia that had been previously coded as absent, appropriate revisions in the results were made.

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

The qualitative method of in-depth interviews provides a researcher with an opportunity to learn about people’s interior experiences (Weiss, 1994). It allows one to learn about how people perceive and interpret different events in their lives. As a means of comparison, quantitative survey methodology allows a researcher to collect information about persons’ experiences, attitudes, preferences, etc., in a way that can be statistically tested. However, it does so at a price. Quantitative survey methodology necessarily limits the scope of responses that subjects may give about their experiences. In-depth interviews, while not conducive to statistical analysis, allow subjects to more freely express the range of their experiences and allows the researcher more flexibility in probing for these details on an individual basis.

McCracken (1988) suggests that there are four steps involved in the interview process. The first is a review of literature that alerts the researcher to analytic
categories that scholars already have identified. McCracken argues that this is important because it makes the researcher more receptive to surprise. That is, when the researcher is aware of the findings already present in the literature about his topic, he is more keenly attuned to information that arises in the interview process that contradicts or does not conform to these findings. A good literature review also aids the researcher in developing an interview guide. The second step in the interview process is a review of the cultural categories in order to give the researcher a more detailed appreciation of his personal experience with the topic. McCracken suggests that this step involves the researcher asking questions of himself regarding the social and cultural context of the topic. What place does this topic hold in daily life? Who is involved and with what consequences? Given the interpretive nature of this study as a whole, a review of the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity will be provided in the following chapter to provide context for both the content analysis and the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The third step in the interview process, according to McCracken, is the discovery of cultural categories. This step moves the study beyond a review of literature and categories to developing an interview guide and conducting the interview in a way that lets “respondents tell their own story in their own terms” (p. 41). The fourth step in McCracken’s interview process is the discovery of analytic categories. This step moves beyond respondents’ personal revelations and mere data collection to the reasoned interpretation of those responses. “The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informs [sic] the respondent’s view of the world in general and the topic in particular” (p. 42).
Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) suggest that in what they call a “focused interview,” the interviewer must constantly assess the interview as it is in process. They propose that there are four criteria for a productive interview. The first is range. The interview should allow respondents to express the full range of “evocative elements and patterns” in their experience with the topic of interest (p. 12). The second criterion is specificity. The interview should elicit specific responses about the topic, while at the same time allowing the respondent to express the ideas that are most important and relevant to him. The third criterion is depth. “The interview should help the interviewees to describe the affective, cognitive, and evaluative meanings of the situation and the degree of their involvement in it” (p. 12). The fourth criterion is personal context. An effective interview will draw out the details of an interviewee’s prior experience that serve as the personal context for the meanings he or she ascribes to the topic.

For this study, a total of 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted over the phone. Sixteen of these interviews were conducted with youth involved in producing news on the selected websites, and eight were conducted with the adult advisors who work with them. The interviews ranged in length from 17 minutes to 76 minutes. The mean length for a single interview was 49 minutes. Youth interviewees were referred by their adult advisors, with the understanding that the advisors would best know which youth were most involved in their particular program and would thus be able to address questions most effectively. Adult interviewees were selected solely on their availability and willingness to participate.

Initial coding of the content analysis portion of this study was completed prior to conducting the interviews. That is, the content analysis helped to inform the questions
asked of the interviewees. An interview guide was developed that provided questions to serve as an outline for the semi-structured interviews and ensure that all relevant issues were covered. However, consistent with the goals of qualitative research, this guide was not a prescriptive questionnaire and the researcher maintained the flexibility “to take full advantage of the contingency of the interview and pursue any opportunity that may present itself” (McCracken, 1988, p. 25). Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and coded, again using the constant comparative method, so as to determine emergent categories (themes) and their properties. The entire data collection process, including the interview guide and consent forms for all participants and their parents (in the case of minors), was approved by the institutional review board at the researcher’s home university.
CHAPTER 4
THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY

Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that theoretical sensitivity involves two primary components. First, it involves the personal and temperamental bent of the researcher (and an understanding of those dispositions). Second, it involves the ability of the researcher to have theoretical insight into his area of study, “combined with an ability to make something of these insights” (p. 46). Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that among the characteristics of grounded theorists are an ability to critically analyze situations, an ability to recognize a tendency toward bias, and a sensitivity to the words and actions of respondents in a study. Glaser (1978) notes that grounded theory includes a reliance on the social psychology of the researcher, including his skill, fatigue, maturity, motivation, life cycle interest, and insights into the data (p. 2). Entering into research with an explicit understanding of some these contextual factors can help the researcher engage in reflexivity and remain open to new theoretical possibilities (Charmaz, 2006).

Thus, this chapter aims to do two things. First, I, the researcher, seek to lay out an explicit understanding of my own experiences as they relate to my interpretive framework, potential biases, and motivations in this study. Second, this chapter provides a brief description of each website involved in this study to show the distinctive context in which youth in each setting are producing online news content.

Personal Reflection of the Researcher

Motivation for the current study initially sprang from my combined professional experience in communications and social work. I worked as an editor and reporter for two years, mostly in community news, for newspapers, local magazines, and websites
in Florida. It was during this time that I came to recognize the potential for local media to serve as communication channels to promote a positive sense of community and belonging among local residents. It has been my experience that in a time when consumers are presented with nearly infinite options about how they receive what kinds of information, people crave and embrace local news about the people, places, and events that collectively create their immediate community.

As a social services professional, I worked hands-on with youth in the foster care system to assist them in achieving various practical goals associated with leading stable and productive lives. In these efforts, I found that one of the most powerful ways to achieve broad-based support for these youth is to allow them to tell their own stories. When youth are able to express themselves and be open about the challenges they face, they gain a sense of empowerment. Moreover, when they are able to obtain an audience with community leaders, legislators, policy makers, and other adults, their stories in their own voice can be one of the most powerful catalysts for change regarding the issues that affect their lives. Likewise, when youth are given a forum to express themselves among their peers, they create a support network based on shared experiences.

So I recognize that I have approached the study of these youth-generated news websites with a certain degree of optimism. This is not to say, however, that I am ignorant of the challenges that exist for efforts to include youth in positive community-strengthening activities. Indeed, factors such as juvenile delinquency, a relative lack of life experience, and civic apathy are legitimate obstacles when it comes to trying to include youth in constructive community dialogue and participation. However, I maintain
that these factors should be seen as considerations to be addressed, not prohibitive barriers to involving youth in promoting community attachment.

Lastly, I acknowledge that my own background and experiences may shape my interpretation of the data in this study. I am a 33-year-old white male who comes from a middle-class suburban family. My view of the world is without doubt different than that of other people, including many of the youth involved in the news websites examined here. However, throughout the course of this study, I have made every effort to objectively examine and check my own biases in order to minimize the degree to which the findings of this research would be inaccurately influenced by my own assumptions.

**Explanation of Individual Youth-Generated News Websites**

While the selection criteria and the random sampling methods employed in acquiring the websites used in this study helped to ensure representativeness of the sample for the universe of youth-generated news content online, the 14 websites examined each had a number of characteristics that deserve some discussion. In the paragraphs that follow, a brief explanation of each website and the specific contextual factors that surrounded the process of youth news content production is provided.

**Scholastic Websites**

*The Argus*

*The Argus* is produced at Bel Air High School in the form of both a printed magazine and the website. While much of the textual content appearing online also appears in the print edition of *The Argus*, the website incorporates unique multimedia features such as podcasts. Bel Air High School is a public school in the Texas border town of El Paso and part of the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD). The school houses a number of specialized programs under its Career Pathways initiative,
including the YISD Health Professions Magnet; the Academy of Math, Science, and Engineering; Global Enterprises Inc.; the Academy of Professional & Public Services; and the Academy of Arts, Media, & Communication (Bel Air High School, 2010). Among teachers in the Ysleta school district, 62.3% are Hispanic, 34.6% are White, and 2.1% are African American. Among students in the district, 91.88% are Hispanic, 5.06% are White, and 2.27% are African American (Ysleta Independent School District, 2010). The 2009 population estimate for El Paso was 620,440, with the population in the total metropolitan area being 751,296 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The Messenger

The Messenger is the high-school newspaper and online school news website for Calvary Christian Academy in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a city in the sprawling metropolitan area of South Florida’s east coast. Calvary Christian Academy is a private school serving children from pre-school to high school. It is part of the Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale church, which is affiliated with the international Calvary Chapel association of evangelical, non-denominational Christian churches. According to The Messenger (2010) website, it is a publication “written by students for students” (¶ 1), although it also states that some of the articles and commentaries are written by adults on the faculty and in the administration.

While The Messenger is distributed to all students in the school and their families, the student staff is composed entirely of high-school-aged youth. The Messenger is distinctive from journalism programs in secular schools in that the website explicitly stated: “We exist to make disciples of Jesus Christ, writing His message and glorifying His name in everything that we do” (¶ 2). The 2009 population estimate for Fort Lauderdale was 184,906 with the population estimate for the Miami–Fort Lauderdale–
Pompano Beach Metropolitan Area for the same year being 5,547,051 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**The Pointer**

*The Pointer* is the online student news publication of Sparrows Point High School in Baltimore, Maryland. The website states:

*The Pointer* staff seeks to serve the students, faculty, and community of Sparrows Point High School by providing current news, facts, opinions, and stories about the school, its activities, and its people. *The Pointer* staff is committed to ensuring accuracy, fairness, balance and good taste in reporting news and features. (Sparrows Point, 2010, ¶ 1).

Students who are not on staff at *The Pointer* are allowed to contribute personal essays, opinion articles, and letters to the editor, with the understanding that the decision on whether those submissions will be published remains up to the staff and the advisor of *The Pointer*.

Sparrows Point is home to the magnet program SPECIES (Sparrows Point Educational Center in Environmental Studies), which is designed for students who are particularly interested in science and the environment. The school’s website describes Sparrows Point as being a “a small distinctive community-based school” with an aim to “enable students to reach their maximum potential as responsible, productive citizens and life-long learners by developing content knowledge, skills, and attitudes within an expanding multicultural world” (Sparrows Point High School, 2010). The 2009 population estimate of the independent city of Baltimore was 637,418 with an estimated population in the surrounding area of Baltimore County (which is home to Sparrows Point High School) of 789,814 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), and a total population in the greater metropolitan area being 2,690,886 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
The Grantonian

*The Grantonian* is the high-school newspaper for Grant High School in Portland, Oregon. While *The Grantonian*’s website provides an online presence for the newspaper, the publication is primarily print-based. However, some of the articles that appear online are exclusive to the website and not published in print. The publication is largely funded through revenue generated by advertising sold to local businesses. Because they attend a public school in Oregon, students at Grant are given extended press freedom through anti-Hazelwood legislation. Specifically, in 2007, the state passed the Oregon Student Free Expression Law, which provides greater freedom of speech to student journalists in school-sponsored media, regardless of whether the program is financially supported by the school (Hudson, 2010).

According to the school’s website: “The Mission of Grant High School is to graduate students able to excel in both the workplace and higher education with an enduring love for learning and ready to contribute as citizens of diverse communities” (Grant High School, 2010). The advisor to *The Grantonian*, Dylan Leeman, was himself a graduate of Grant High School. The 2009 population estimate for the city of Portland was 566,606, with a population in the greater metropolitan area of 2,241,913 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**the broadview: online**

*the broadview: online* is the high-school news publication of the Convent of the Sacred Heart school in San Francisco, California. While the publication had 19 regular staff members at the time of examination, it also invites contributions from other students. Convent of the Sacred Heart is an all-girl, private Catholic school serving students in grades K-12. It is part of the local Schools of the Sacred Heart in San
Francisco, which also consists of an all-boy school called Stuart Hall. The Schools of the Sacred Heart in San Francisco is furthermore part of the larger nationwide Network of Sacred Heart Schools. According to the website for this network, the organization is committed to educating students in: “a personal and active faith in God, deep respect for intellectual values, a social awareness which impels to action, the building of community as a Christian value, and personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom” (Network of Sacred Heart Schools, 2011, ¶ 2).

According to the website for the Convent of the Sacred Heart specifically, the school "offers a forward-thinking and demanding curriculum that prepares young women for competitive college entrance, while giving them the confidence to think critically and reflect thoughtfully on the big questions of life” (Convent of the Sacred Heart High School, 2011, ¶ 1). The website also states that 100% of the girls who attend the school go on to attend college. While the Convent and Stuart Hall schools in San Francisco are committed to a Catholic philosophy, they also propose to “maintain a global, ecumenical perspective” and received no money from the Roman Catholic Church (Convent & Stuart Hall, 2010, ¶ 2). The 2009 population estimate for the city of San Francisco was 815,358, with a population in the greater metropolitan area of 4,317,853.

**AHSnews.com (The Arcadian)**

*AHSnews.com* is the online home of the high-school newspaper, *The Arcadian*, at Arcadia High School in Phoenix, Arizona. *The Arcadian* is also published in a third format as a magazine. Along with a biotechnology program, Arcadia High School has specialized academic programs in Media Communications and Advertising Arts/Graphic Design, both of which are housed in the Scottsdale Media and Arts Technology (S.M.A.R.T.) Center, a “convergence center” that includes “classrooms, labs, meeting

The school is part of the Scottsdale Unified School District, which includes most of the city of Scottsdale, most of the town of Paradise Valley, a section of the city of Phoenix, and a section of the city of Tempe (Scottsdale Unified School District, 2010a). Among the students in the 2010 graduating class, 59% intended to go to a four-year college, with an additional 32% intending to go to a two-year college. The 2009 population estimate for Phoenix was 1,593,660 with the population for the total metropolitan area being 4,364,094 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The Bobcat / The Word

At the time the websites were selected for the sample in this study, The Bobcat was the text-based online news publication for Grandview Heights High School in Grandview Heights City, an independent municipal suburb of Columbus, Ohio. However, after the site was selected for this study, The Bobcat merged with its sister project at the school, a video-based program, and was subsumed under its name, The Word, to create one converged online student journalism product. The student staff of this combined program composed of an editorial team, a Web team, a video team, a graphics team, and a marketing team (The Word, 2010). Grandview Heights High School is the only high school in the Grandview Heights City Schools district. The district also includes one elementary school and one middle school. The 2009 population estimate for Columbus was 773,021, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 1,801,848 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
Non-Scholastic Websites

L.A. Youth

*L.A. Youth* is a youth media program involving teenagers from all of Los Angeles County, California. According to its website, *L.A. Youth* is a publication “by and about teens” (L.A. Youth, 2010a, ¶ 1) but promotes itself as being for all people, including parents (L.A. Youth, 2010b, ¶ 1). At the time of this study, *L.A. Youth* had five full-time adult staff, more than 80 teen staff members, and purported to reach an audience of roughly 350,000 youth in L.A. County. The site is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and is supported through advertising, individual and corporate donations, and foundation grants. Content appears in both print and online formats. In addition to its regular publication, the organization also has a special program called the Foster Youth Writing and Education Project aimed at “giving youth in the foster care and probation systems an opportunity to tell their personal stories” (L.A. Youth, 2010c, ¶ 1). *L.A. Youth* also provides resources specifically to help teachers with ideas on how to use *L.A. Youth* stories in their classrooms. The 2009 population estimate for Los Angeles County was 9,848,011, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 12,874,797 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

VOX Teen Newspaper

*VOX Teen Newspaper* is a youth news publication involving teens in the greater Atlanta metropolitan area of Georgia. According to its website, it is “a non-profit youth-development organization … dedicated to giving us teens the skills and resources to raise our voices about issues that most matter to us” (VOX Teen Newspaper, 2010, ¶ 1). The site further claims to be the “only uncensored, citywide forum for expression created by teens for everyone,” and to reach “80,000 of our peers each month during
the school year, and is available free for teens in more than 300 schools and organizations” (VOX Teen Newspaper, 2010, ¶ 2).

Along with its print and online publication, the organization conducts various community programs – like a summer program for aspiring writers and artists, a special girls’ support group, a project called Graduation Countdown designed to prepare youth for their future careers, an online resource guide for teens needing assistance with personal issues, and community workshops led by the VOX teen staff. The site also provides free lesson plans for teachers who wanted to incorporate VOX articles into their coursework. At the time of this study, VOX stated on its website that it had 15 adult staff and volunteer members and more than 100 teen participants over the course of a given year. The organization is supported through private donations and fund-raising events. The 2009 population estimate for the city of Atlanta was 540,932, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 5,476,644 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

As a special note, in addition to the VOX website examined in this study, the organization also has a separate blog. Content on the blog was not coded, as it was not directly linked from the website listed on the High School Journalism Initiative website. A casual scan of the VOX blog site indicated that the organization uses some multimedia capabilities in the blog format not used on the main website, which was the focus of this study’s examination. Modupe Alabi, a 16-year-old intern at VOX, stated in an interview that part of the organization’s strategic plan was to make the website more interactive.

**The Mash**

The Mash is a teen news publication in Chicago, Illinois. It is published by The Tribune Media Group, and teens meet at the Chicago Tribune Building. The Mash is a Chicago Tribune website and the teen publication also partners with the Chicago Public
Schools. A video on The Mash website tells teen viewers that it is “for you, by you, about you” (The Mash, 2010, ¶ 3). It is published in print in the form of a weekly tabloid-style newspaper as well as online and is supported in part through advertising revenue. The website claims that the print circulation of the newspaper during the school year is 125,000 copies per week (The Mash, 2010). The paper is distributed every Thursday to more than 160 Chicago-area high schools, including schools within the city as well as in the suburbs. Regular teen contributors are selected through an application process. The 2009 population estimate for the city of Chicago was 2,850,502, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 9,580,609 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Teens in Print

Teens in Print (T.i.P.) is a youth news publication in Boston, Massachusetts. The organization is a partner of the Boston Globe Foundation, Write Boston, and the Boston-based organization Artists for Humanity. According to the website: “T.i.P unites Boston teens to create an outlet to inform, communicate, and provide positive change through written expression” (Boston Teens in Print, 2010, ¶1). At the time of this study, roughly 30 teens attended staff meetings every week at the Boston Globe office. Teens in Print is published four times every academic year and is distributed to every Boston public school, local libraries, and a number of community centers. The publication has regular staff writers but also welcomes submissions from other youth in the Boston area as long as they meet the submission guidelines. At the time of this study, 336 students from 25 schools in the Boston area had contributed to Teens in Print since it started in May 2004. The website claims a total single-copy distribution of 830,000. The 2009 population estimate for the city of Boston was 645,187, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 4,588,680 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
Teenlink

*Teenlink* is a free weekly teen newspaper in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, published by the South Florida *Sun Sentinel*. According to the *Teenlink* website, it is “by and for high-school students in Broward County” (Teenlink, 2010, ¶ 1). Youth contributors to the teen newspaper work with professionals from the *Sun Sentinel*, as well as *South Florida Parenting*, a magazine also published by the *Sun Sentinel*. *Teenlink* is distributed at all Broward County public high schools and some local private high schools. At the time of this study, the publication had five adult professional staff members, and youth staff members were selected through an application process. Students who participate in *Teenlink* are required to come to at least one monthly evening meeting and a Saturday training session every other month. Funding for the publication comes in part through advertising revenue. *Teenlink* offers an activity guide for teachers who are interested in using the newspaper in their classrooms. The publication’s website incorporates a variety of multimedia features like blogs, photo galleries, polls, links, and interactive search functions. As noted above, the 2009 population estimate for Fort Lauderdale was 184,906 with the population estimate for the Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach Metropolitan Area being 5,547,051 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

HarlemLIVE

*HarlemLIVE* is a 501(c)(3) non-profit “journalism, technology and leadership program” (HarlemLIVE, 2010a, ¶ 4) for youth in New York, New York. It was created in 1996 by Richard Carlton, a public school teacher who “was responding to a need: With dwindling funding for high-school newspapers, fewer teenagers in low-income neighborhoods were being exposed to journalism at an age when they might become interested and motivated to consider communications a career goal” (¶ 2). At the time of
analysis, *HarlemLive* boasted more than 60 student volunteers hailing from more than 30 schools across the five boroughs of New York. While the program involved youth ages 13-21, the vast majority of the content was produced by teenagers. At the time of this study, *HarlemLive* had four adult staff members and other adult volunteers, some of whom were media professionals from organizations like the *New York Times*, *Vibe Magazine*, and *Bloomberg News*. However, *HarlemLive* promotes itself as youth-led, with students assuming various hands-on roles such as reporter, editor, designer, and technician.

The organization’s website also states that youth participants acquire skills such as desktop publishing and Web design as they engage in “an ongoing ‘dialogue’ with Harlem” and encourage “accountability in their schools, political districts and neighborhoods” (¶ 6). Most of the youth who participate in *HarlemLive* are minorities. Specifically, 58% are Black/African American, 38% are Hispanic/Latino, and the remaining 5% are Caucasian, Asian and other races or ethnicities (*HarlemLive*, 2010b, ¶ 4). The 2009 population estimate for New York City was 8,391,881, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 19,069,796 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**New Youth Connections**

*New Youth Connections* is a website associated with a general interest youth media magazine written by high-school students in New York, NY. It is part of the larger non-profit youth media organization *Youth Communication*, which also publishes *Represent*, a magazine by and for foster youth, and *Rise*, a magazine for parents who have children in foster care or who receive family support services (*Youth Communication*, 2010). According to the *Youth Communication* website, *New Youth
*Connections* was started in 1980, and at the time of this study had a readership of more than 200,000 people in New York. The Youth Communication website also states that the organization promotes reading and writing skills among teens by training them in journalism skills, providing a printed platform for their work, and encouraging youth-adult partnerships. The organization's core values include youth expression, personal reflection, peer interaction, experiential learning, and the importance of information provided to youth from peers’ perspectives. At the time of this study, there were 12 adults on staff at Youth Communication, but only two were explicitly identified as working with *New Youth Connections*. Approximately 15 or 16 youth write regularly for the magazine in a given semester (M. Glancy, personal communication, February 18, 2010).

*New Youth Connections* is published seven times during the school year and is distributed to all New York City public schools, local libraries, and various community centers in the metropolitan area. While the publication maintains the website examined in this study, *New Youth Connections* is primarily a print-based product, and the website serves mostly as an online presence for the content that appears in the magazine. Youth Communication also conducts workshops and other programs to promote literacy throughout the year. The organization offers teachers a variety of lesson plans and other resources for those interested in using Youth Communication materials in their classrooms. As noted above, the 2009 population estimate for New York City was 8,391,881, with the population for the total metropolitan area being 19,069,796 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
CHAPTER 5
RESULTS: QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

The qualitative content analysis component of this study examined seven scholastic and seven non-scholastic randomly selected websites. In total, 393 web pages were examined from all 14 sites, yielding an average of nearly 28 pages per website. The actual number of web pages coded from any one website ranged from 14 to 50. While differences emerged in the specific ways in which categories manifested themselves in scholastic and non-scholastic online youth-generated news content, the overall emergent categories were generally consistent across both types of youth-generated news websites. Interestingly, many of these categories were echoed or reinforced in the results of the semi-structured in-depth interviews, which will be presented in the following chapter.

The content analysis produced nine emergent categories with respect to how these websites served to promote community attachment. The four most prevalent of these categories were self-expression, peer support, virtues and values, and school attachment. While a general concern for community service or local involvement occasionally emerged under the virtues and values category, most web pages examined did not explicitly address issues or concerns that could be seen as of broad interest to the local community. However, the youth-generated news content often did address concerns related to local schools or express a sense of school attachment, which can be seen as a component of community attachment particularly relevant for teens. The category of self-expression emerged as a vehicle for promoting youth voice and tied in closely with youth content creators expressing the importance of peer supports.
After the emergent categories were derived for the greatest degree of abstract theoretical description and explanation, the content of coded web page in the sample was coded for basic frequencies of presence of categories in the content and for their dominance. In keeping with the qualitative design of this study, these frequencies were coded according to the interpretative assessment of the researcher. No intercoder reliability measurements were conducted on these frequencies, as they were not intended to serve as a basis for statistical analysis. The frequencies calculated for these categories were simply intended to provide a reference point for how prevalent they were across the content.

Likewise, dominance was determined through an interpretive assessment of each item of content. For each web page, content was examined to determine which of the nine categories manifested in themselves. Then, out of those categories that were present in a given web page, it was determined which one was the most dominant or seemed to carry the most emphasis and importance in that specific item of content. Thus, for example, a web page consisting mostly of an article about how much youth enjoy spending time with their friends might also reference the importance of family to teens. In such a case both the peer support and family support emergent categories, which will be discussed in further detail in this chapter, would be coded as present in the content, but the dominant category would clearly be peer support.

**Research Question 1**

RQ1 of this study asked:

What are the overall differences and similarities between online news content produced by youth in scholastic vs. non-scholastic settings with respect to the potential for these websites to promote community attachment as an antecedent to community-building?
The following categories address this question by demonstrating the overall emergent themes in the content on websites included in this study and how these themes manifested in scholastic and non-scholastic sites.

**Self-expression**

As demonstrated in Figure 5-1, the most dominant category across all the website content was self-expression. Teens seemed to gravitate toward online youth news venues as a way of fulfilling their “passion,” “love for writing,” or a desire to express their feelings. The self-expression category was marked by a clear intention in the content for either the writer to express himself or herself about a particular issue, or in some cases, by a recognition that other youth whom the writer may have interviewed or written about shared in the strong desire for self-expression. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this category connected closely with the value that these youth place on the opportunity to have their voices heard.

The self-expression category was present in 72% of all web pages analyzed (Figure 5-2) and was the dominant category in 22% of these web pages. As shown in Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4, among scholastic sites, this category was present in 58% of the web pages and dominant in 19% of them. The self-expression category was even more prevalent among non-scholastic sites, where it was present in 81% of the web pages and dominant in 24% of them.

Throughout the content, this category manifested across various topics and forms, including news stories, feature stories, sports articles, personal essays, poems, and art. When websites included a page dedicated to brief biographical sketches of individual youth staff members, teens often took the opportunity to provide very candid, casual,
and personal first-person accounts of their interests and activities. One student at *The Pointer* wrote as part of her individual bio:

Hey, what’s up!!! My name’s Alissa =) I’m athletic fun, and entertaining. I’m a cheerleader, I play soccer, and I do gymnastics. I love texting and hanging out with my friends. I enjoy listening to music and playing my violin. You may think I sound geeky but I’m really not! =) I dress like a prep but my personality is more tomboy. I’m in Journalism because I wanted to improve my writing skills and work for the school website. I’m not shy even though I come off that way I’ll talk if you talk to me first. I’m not mean I’m actually very nice but if your not on my bad side. Well this isn’t myspace and your not here to read all about me so that’s all!! Peace! (; (The Pointer, 2009d, ¶ 10)

This sentiment was echoed in a humorous staff profile at *AHSNews.com*, which read:

Valerie plays soccer. She has a quick wit and a clever mind. She enjoys walks along the beach at sunset, is in an open relationship. Her interests include singing, photography and writing. If she could be a sock on any foot it would be on Sadie’s foot because Sadie has been in every club in Barcelona. She wears autobiographical jewelry. Overall, Valerie is a perfect 10! (AHSNews.com, 2009, ¶ 20)

While this type of informal personal expression might not be found on a staff profile page for a professional adult publication, teens do not have a wealth of professional experience to draw upon in writing their biographical sketch for a news website. Thus, it was not surprising that they instead drew upon what was most familiar and available to them – their interests, activities, and views of themselves. Moreover, the style and content of such self-descriptions emphasized the importance of fun and humor for teens. While a publication may aim to inform visitors of the website about issues and events in the school or community, for the teen creators there was a clear sense that their involvement provided them with an opportunity for personal fun and fulfillment in expressing themselves.

One of the most direct indications of the self-expression category was in the use of first-person perspective. Forty-six percent of all articles examined for this study included
the author’s first-person perspective, with non-scholastic web pages using it considerably more than scholastic pages. A first-person perspective was found in 59% of all the non-scholastic pages examined, compared to only 25% of the scholastic pages. A graph showing the frequency distribution of the use of first-person perspective in scholastic and non-scholastic websites can be found in Figure 5-5.

One article in the VOX Teen Newspaper titled “Heck Yeah, I’m Adopted!” was a first-person account by a teen who had been adopted through the foster care system (Wright, 2009). In the article, the youth recounted her experience of adjusting to a new family and the novelty of affectionate parents who gave her “lots of hugs and kisses” (¶ 2). Throughout the piece, the teen described the challenges she had in overcoming personal fears and insecurities so that she could trust and open up to her new parents. In concluding the article, the youth shared her curiosity to meet her birth family and show them that she was “not the same scared, timid little girl they once knew,” and that she had matured into a person with many friends, numerous personal accomplishments, and “a loving and supportive real family” (¶ 14).

Similarly, in a story for New Youth Connections titled “The Right Choice for Me,” a teen took an introspective look at his decision to go to college (Holoman, 2009). He pulled in a family dynamic to the story as he wrote about pressure from his parents and grandparents to go to college, the influence of his brother’s example of poor study habits, and his desire to set a positive example for his younger siblings. However, the central thrust of the article was dedicated to this teen’s internal struggle with academic planning, living up to his potential, and reconciling his own decision on whether to go to college. The author ultimately decided to go to college, but emphasized that it was
critical the decision was his own. “I’ve made myself proud. My future is all up to me, and I know I’ve made the right choice for myself” (¶ 25).

Throughout articles like these, the self-expression category emerged with almost a therapeutic quality to it. In this transitional period of life from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence, these teens seemed to be using the platform of youth-generated news outlets to express themselves and work out issues of identity, self-esteem, life goals, family dynamics, social relationships, and even their overall world view as a tool in their personal development.

In the case of *L.A. Youth*, youth-generated content was written almost exclusively from a first-person perspective and focused on stories written about things like “teens’ experiences with college stress, racial identity, homophobia, censorship, broken families and many more topics” (*L.A. Youth*, 2010a, ¶ 1). The site also stated that the youth participants had “investigated serious problems in our community such as teen pregnancy, teen prostitution, drug addiction and dilapidated schools” (¶ 1). In addition to *L.A. Youth*’s normally produced general teen-generated content, the organization ran the Foster Youth Writing and Education Project, which was directed specifically at giving youth in foster care and probation systems “an opportunity to tell their personal stories” and “an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and a forum to voice their concerns, while also informing others about the system and the challenges they face” (*L.A. Youth*, 2010c, ¶ 1).

Thus, it seemed that self-expression was not inconsistent with informing youth news audiences about topics both weighty and whimsical, but rather served as an effective vehicle in this genre of journalism for discussing these topics. The detached
objectivity of mainstream professional journalism seemed in many cases to have been put aside in youth-generated journalism in favor of the authenticity provided by first-hand anecdotal examples that the audience (particularly other youth) could relate to. In this way, the desire for youth to express themselves through their online content was to a large extent complementary to the goals of journalism to provide people with information they need to understand the world around them.

Indeed, while the category of self-expression often manifested in terms of introspective personal accounts by the youth authors, there were also a number of instances in which youth expressed their own personal views about various school and social issues. In an opinion article on The Bobcat, one student spoke up about her feelings regarding the school’s dress code (Tasso, 2008). While she noted that the dress code wasn’t necessarily unreasonable, the author candidly expressed her frustration that the rules were not consistently enforced.

Likewise, in an opinion article on The Grantonian, a student provided commentary about current social conventions in teen culture, specifically for teen girls, in celebrating Halloween (Quinn, 2009). The writer told of the peer pressure among high-school girls to dress “slutty” for the holiday. Interestingly, in this particular publication, the teen was allowed a great deal of latitude to speak very frankly about her experiences. She wrote about how in going to a Halloween party of her peers the year before, she was confronted with a “hot sweaty hump mass” of “horny adolescents” and said, “as a 16-year-old girl, I was supposed to be wearing lingerie” (¶ 1) instead of the more conservative self-made cat costume she had chosen. As the article progresses, the author concedes that in spite of recognizing and disapproving of this objectifying
practic, “this year I dressed up as Tinkerbell because I wanted to show skin. For one
day out of the year I wanted to be desired… But where does that leave girls who are not
comfortable conforming?” (¶ 1). Here again, there was a clear intersection between the
youth’s interest in self-expression and the function of journalism to inform others, in this
case about a significant social issue of particular relevance to fellow teens.

Even in a number of web pages that did not include a direct first-person
perspective, the self-expression category and the importance of individuality was still
evident. One example of this was in the student spotlight pages called “Mashstar of the
Week” on *The Mash*. On these pages, a teenager in the Chicago area was recognized
and his or her answers to a few questions were posted along with the student’s picture.

One interesting observation about these pages was that there was no stated
reason why the student was chosen as the focus for the spotlight. There was no recent
accomplishment or admirable action offered as the justification for recognizing the
selected student. It seemed to be enough that this was a teen with individual interests
and unique talents. The questions that these “Mashstars of the Week” answered
included, “What’s your nickname?” “What is your pet peeve?” “What is your guilty
pleasure?” “What is your secret talent?” and “What have you done recently that makes
you proud?” In this way, the youth content creators again confirmed the importance of
self-expression, and in cases like these, recognized it as important for their peers as
well as themselves. Youth supported their fellow youth by allowing them an opportunity
to broadcast their individuality to a Web audience.

On the whole, the articles examined in this study showed little evidence of
applying the category of self-expression directly to community attachment. That is to
say, few articles were found that used self-expression as a means for youth to provide commentary or perspective on an issue or event in the local community. However, there were some exceptions. One student at Teenlink posted an article called “This is our generation, people” on a Ning blog linked from the main navigation of the publication’s homepage (Radman, 2009). In the post, the student expressed her concerns about a rash of teen-on-teen violence taking place “merely minutes” from her home in South Florida. Her general sentiment was one of befuddlement and alarm. She questioned the roots of this social ill specifically in her local community, as well as among an entire nation of young people, and what implications it had for their future.

This is morally wrong. This cannot be how our generation is turning out. We are the ones who will be taking charge soon. Are we going to let this continue? Are we going to raise our own kids in a crime driven, violence induced world where acts such as these become commonplace? (¶ 7)

An article in the broadview: online used a slightly different application of the self-expression category to cover a relevant issue in the local community. In “Graffiti’s popularity grows as art form,” the teen author provided information about how this once deviant practice of street art had been transformed into a constructive means of community revitalization (Pinard, 2009). In fact, graffiti artists were being commissioned in San Francisco to paint murals on “grimy buildings.” While this served to help beautify the community, it also served as a means for the artists to express themselves and have a large portion of the local public see their artwork. The writer described how graffiti served as a political communication channel for minorities and a way for graffiti artists to “express their creativity” in the late 1960s. Demonstrating how art can be a grassroots communication channel for self-expression and commentary on community issues, the writer concluded the story with a quote from a fellow student who said, “Art
has many forms and is a major way for people to express themselves ... Graffiti art represents one of those art forms, giving a voice to the people who need it” (¶ 12).

**Peer Support**

Connecting to the community attachment dimension of friendship networks (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), the category of peer support was only slightly less prevalent in overall occurrences and in terms of dominance across content, as shown in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2. The peer support category was present in 71% of all web pages analyzed and was the dominant category in 19% of these web pages. Specifically, teens involved with these publications consistently demonstrated through their content the tremendous importance of relational ties to their peers. The peer support category expressed the collective sentiment that teens need to help each other, that they share in the experiences that are unique to being a teenager, and that they understand one another in a way that members of both the older and younger generations cannot.

The content consistently proved that youth were using the platform of these websites as a support resource for their fellow teens in the community. They expressed a sense of shared experiences and a message that youth in their audience were not alone in their interests, emotions, and struggles to grow into adults. As shown in Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4, peer support was the most frequent and most dominant category in scholastic content, where it appeared in 72% of all web pages and was dominant in 25% of them. It was also present in 59% of all non-scholastic web pages and dominant in 16% of them.

One web page on *The Mash* demonstrated this category through its discussion of shared fashion tastes among groups of friends at different local schools (Bator &
Thompson, 2009). Along with a small photo gallery showing teens posing together in similarly styled outfits, the article described how members of various high-school “cliques” used fashion as a way to identify with one another. “They do it to express themselves and grow closer,” the article read (¶ 3). One group of girls even gave itself a name, “Pretty Fly Chicks,” or “P.F.C.,” and served as the primary example of these cliques in the article. “We want everybody to see us as a classy group of young ladies and want to inspire other girls to dress appropriate and original,” one of the group’s members was quoted as saying. “We want other cliques to realize that friendship is important, and when you find a group of close friends, you need to hold on to them” (¶ 14).

Demonstrating a connection to another emergent category in the content, pop culture, which will be discussed below, an article on The Bobcat explained how local music concerts serve as social events (Hord, 2009). “Fans meet other fans, as well as use concerts as a place to hangout with their friends,” the article read. “Abby Cohen, a senior at GHHS and concert enthusiast, has said she has met many good friends at shows” (¶ 4).

One web page from Teenlink’s Ning℠ blog demonstrated an intersection between the school attachment category, also discussed below, and the peer support category. In a post titled, “Chronicles of an Observant Senior,” the teen author looked back on her high-school experiences to reflect on how her school peers had shaped her life (Mehrotra, 2009). “As I sifted through the memories, I realized how little time we had left with each other,” she wrote (¶ 5). The author described thinking ahead to how the memories she had made with her peers will be some of the most important experiences
of her life. She further challenged her youth readers to cherish their own memories with their friends and classmates. In a clear indication of the role that peers play as a support network among teens, she wrote, “Each person counts on the next for company. Some are closer friends than others and some only interact when necessary but regardless we all are classified as a collective” (¶ 3).

Another way that peer support was evidenced was in focusing on topics that had a unique appeal and relevance to youth. That is, youth content creators seemed to make use of the platform of these online news sites to reach their target audience with information and discussion about teen-specific issues. For example, one article on AHSnews.com offered a brief report on dangers of personal injury involved in cheerleading (Alexandre, 2009b). While cheerleading does have some relevance for adults (e.g., professional cheerleaders), it is a particularly pertinent topic for teens who may cheer, or who likely know peers who cheer, at their high school. Thus, even though the article did not specifically mention teens, given the target audience of the publication and the nature of the content, the peer support category was clearly present in such web pages.

**Virtues and Values**

A third prominent category that emerged consistently across both scholastic and non-scholastic websites was the promotion of virtuous character traits and positive personal values. That is, a number of the web pages examined in this study emphasized the virtuous attributes and positive values of both fellow teens and adults. As can be seen in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2, this category was the third most prevalent of all categories both in terms of dominance and overall occurrences. Specifically, this category emerged in 54% of all web pages examined and was the dominant category in
17% of the total sample. Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4 show that among scholastic sites, the virtues and values category appeared in 43% of the web pages and was dominant in 14% of them. Among non-scholastic pages, this category emerged in 61% of the web pages and was dominant in 19% of them.

One of the forms in which this category emerged most clearly and consistently, particularly for scholastic news websites, was in the way youth sports were covered. Sports were one of the most frequently covered extracurricular teen activities across all websites. However, for the most part, sports were not simply covered in terms of performance or wins and losses. On many occasions, sports coverage was a vehicle to extol virtues like cooperation (usually in the form of teamwork), personal commitment, perseverance, discipline, neighborliness (in the form of sportsmanship), and leadership.

The connection between the promotion of virtue and sports coverage was perhaps most distinctly evident in content on The Messenger, where it tied into the publication’s overall mission to promote Christian living. In a story about the school’s cross-country team, the teen writer praised team members for making “an effort to show Godly character to their opponents as they exhibit sportsmanship and a positive attitude” (Brown, 2009, ¶ 2). The author went on to use words including “determination,” “group effort,” and “encouragement” to show how the students were successful in “overcoming adversity” in the oppressive 96-degree Florida heat of a recent cross-country competition. A particularly interesting point of this article was that while the author included the fact that the team won the event, this fact was significantly downplayed compared to the importance of the virtuous characteristics the team members displayed.
Similarly, a spotlight article on *the broadview: online* provided recognition of the school’s volleyball captain for inspiring her teammates, having a positive attitude, and “unifying and motivating the team,” which she praised for having “so much potential” (¶ 3). The article described how through the captain’s own personal commitment to practice and training, she demonstrated leadership and set an example for her teammates to emulate.

Though not as common as in scholastic sites, the promotion of virtuous character traits through sports stories specifically was also found on non-scholastic sites. One example of this was in a story on *The Mash* titled “Tale of the tapers” (Nichols, 2009). In this article the writer went beyond the typical coverage of high-school sports and looked at teens who were volunteering their time behind the scenes. The “tapers” in this story were the teen trainers who worked as aides for high-school sports teams. These trainers were responsible for “helping athletes stretch and taping up elbows, ankles or other parts before practice and games” and did “everything from filling water coolers to watching games, and helping the adult trainers if anyone gets hurt” (¶ 7). The writer described how through their volunteering, these teen aides learned interpersonal skills as they dealt with “parents who want their kids to play, students who want to play and those who just want to get out of practice” (¶ 10). They also learned to work hand-in-hand with adult coaches and trainers, bridging the generational divide to promote youth-adult partnerships. A quote from one of these teen trainers also promoted the intrinsic reward and motivation for volunteering: “Knowing that you’re helping and making a difference makes it so worth it” (¶ 9).
Apart from sports stories, the theme of virtues and values was a theme woven through all types of content examined. In a story on AHSNews.com that looked much like the kind of straight factual account one might see in a mainstream professional newspaper, the youth writer told of the tsunami that struck Samoa in September 2009 (Alexandre, 2009). Although the promotion of virtue was less explicit through the use of specific terms in this article, the piece as a whole clearly promoted a sense of empathy among readers. Through details about the damage and death toll incurred from the tsunami, the author provided the audience with an international perspective and the real-life consequences of this disaster for the people who lived there. The last paragraph of the article read, “One woman quoted, according to the BBC, ‘we’ve lost everything. Our whole village is gone. It’s all sand and fish in what’s left of the houses’” (¶ 3). In this story and through this quote particularly, the author allowed the reader to hear the voice of a direct victim, who painted a poignant picture of the devastation in only a few words. Thus, the story promoted the positive values of concern and empathy for the hardships of others, even those in another part of the world.

An article on The Bobcat publicizing the school’s book club also intertwined the promotion of virtue into its discussion of the club’s value for students (Crawford, 2009). Specifically, a social virtue of civil discourse emerged in the article as the writer explained how students were able to use the club as a forum for the open exchange of ideas about topics covered in the books they read.

Book club generates a lot of conversation about controversial issues such as euthanasia and civil rights. Book club encourages students to voice their opinions and debate. It creates an environment of openness and freedom of thought. (¶ 2)
The writer went on to describe the book club as a “great way also to meet new people while sharing ideas” (¶ 3) and how the discussions were arranged in a circle so that participants didn’t “feel like one person is running the whole club. Now everyone can be seen and heard” (¶ 8).

In an article on \textit{The Argus}, which once again demonstrated a bridging of the generational divide between youth and adults, a student writer spotlighted a teacher who recently had won a district-wide teacher of the year award (Rodriguez, 2010). Along with being praised by her students for being diligent, “fun” and making her class “interesting and understandable,” the teacher was noted for her “leadership skills, her positive attitude, and the passion she has for her work” (¶ 11). In this case then, the positive attitude and actions of an adult are used as an example to reinforce virtuous character and personal values among the youth audience.

Some of the web pages examined in this study showed the category of virtues and values in forms that were more explicitly relevant to community attachment, although these pages were relatively infrequent when compared to the overall sample. Non-scholastic sites tended to demonstrate the category in this way more often than the scholastic sites. One example of this was found on the “Volunteer” page of \textit{Teenlink}’s website. This web page was entirely devoted to listing 127 local organizations and opportunities where youth could get involved volunteering in the community. These volunteer opportunities were organized under the headings of “Working with the Elderly,” “Homeless,” “Arts,” “Outdoors,” “Buddies and Teaching,” “Animals,” “Hospitals and Healthcare,” and “Other.” Through this extensive listing of volunteer opportunities organized by categories, \textit{Teenlink} promoted not only an awareness of specific needs in
the local community, but it also provided a direct resource to facilitate teen involvement in meeting those needs. That is, clearly community service and concern for the needs of the local community were values promoted through this website.

Two other non-scholastic websites that clearly demonstrated the promotion of virtues and values directly related to community attachment were HarlemLIVE and Teens in Print. In one article on HarlemLIVE, the youth writer profiled a long-time community resident who was working to help local youth by engaging them in performing arts (Webster, 2009). The subject of the story, a man by the name of George Faison, was described as being “a pioneer trying to make Harlem a better community” (¶ 2). The article described how Faison had bought a local theater, “a staple in the community,” (¶ 5) and founded The Respect Project in 2000, “giving young adults the chance to express themselves through arts and culture” (¶ 1). The story concluded with the following paragraph:

Faison plans to continue to help the community. He has done many important things with the youth of Harlem to help better equip them for real life experiences. We never found out if he could still dance, but he’s doing so much more for the community, I guess it doesn’t matter. (¶6)

Here again, by spotlighting Faison as an exemplar of commitment to building a positive community, the article clearly promoted values of community attachment and neighborly concern.

Similarly, an article in Teens in Print described a Boston summer youth program in which teens learned about the value of healthy eating and specifically about the importance of locally grown fresh produce (Pandey, 2009). Moreover, teens involved in the program educated their peers on the issue. Here again, the article could be seen to encourage community attachment and neighborly concern as these youth worked to
promote public health and environmentally responsible local farming practices. The article also provided the youth writer’s commentary and call for awareness about a lack of healthy eating options in the community as she wrote: “In some neighborhoods, supermarkets – let alone farm stands – are scarce” (¶ 8). The writer went on to quote a teen source who participated in the program as saying, “There should be more farms in the community, not just corner stores” (¶ 8). Thus, the article as a whole was seen to promote direct concern and involvement in overcoming community deficits and supporting positive community activities.

School Attachment

A category that emerged in the content and which strongly related to community attachment was school attachment. While direct references to the local community at large were not particularly common, a number of articles did discuss various topics related to local schools. That is, both in and outside of school hours and the school grounds, teens seem to enjoy talking and writing about school activities, their fellow classmates, school policies, and other issues and concerns related to their schools. That is, the school is one of the primary, if not the primary, community node for teens. It is where they connect with their peers and other non-familial adults, and is one of the primary sites for learning about social norms. Thus, school issues hold particular importance for teens. They take pride in the positive attributes of their school, and they express genuine concern about issues that they see in their schools as affecting them and their fellow students. As shown in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2, the school attachment category was found in 50% of all web pages examined and was dominant in 13% of them.
Certainly the presence of a school attachment dimension was to be expected in scholastic youth news content. It is, after all, the primary purpose of a high-school news organization to cover the events and issues related to that school. As shown in Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4, this category was explicitly present in 49% of all scholastic web pages examined and was dominant in 22% of them. However, while less dominant than in scholastic web pages, support for the school attachment category also emerged as a broader cross-sectional representation of local schools in the non-scholastic content. That is, even when the expanded coverage provided by a non-scholastic website offered teens the chance to write about things not related to their school, many times youth chose to write about things happening in local schools anyway. Specifically, 42% of all non-scholastic web pages demonstrated the school attachment category, but it was dominant in only 7% of them.

One of the primary ways in which school attachment was demonstrated on scholastic sites was through coverage of school events or recent accolades for other students, teachers, or the school as a whole. One article on The Pointer publicized a project recently completed in the school's science magnet program, SPECIES (The Pointer, 2009c). The story covered the work of students and their teacher in making bird feeders, but it also did so using a very positive and supportive tone. Spelling and grammar considerations aside, the story provided thorough reporting of this school project but even more distinctly offered praise and positive recognition for the work of the students and the teacher. “Talented species students made very creative bird feeders,” read the lead. “From on litter soda bottles to crab buoys. The bird feeders were very thought out and creative” (¶ 1). The article also pointed out that after these
projects were completed, they were hung in the school courtyards – a proud display of student work.

In a similar article on the same website, a youth writer described, again with the same positive and supportive tone, how the SPECIES program was engaged in a tree-planting project (The Pointer, 2009a). An interesting note about this article was that the focal project was part of an effort to “save Chesapeake Bay,” which demonstrated a dimension of environmental concern regarding the local community. Moreover, the story pointed out that money for the project came from the sale of license plates with Blue Herons on them. “People in our community help to pay for this project without even realizing it,” the author wrote (¶ 3). Thus, while emphasizing school attachment through the promotion of student work, this article also provided an example of how school attachment can link to broader community attachment.

A number of other scholastic web pages also evidenced the school attachment category. One story on The Bobcat promoted peer solidarity by introducing readers to new students at the school (Byerly, 2009). “These students have come from as far away as Germany and as near by as Grove City to this very high school and it is time we learned a little about them” the Bobcat author wrote (¶ 2). A number of articles on The Messenger also demonstrated a church attachment dimension as an extension of school attachment because the private school was part of a Fort Lauderdale church. For example, one article on the site’s news section covered a recent skateboarding evangelism outreach sponsored by the church (Israels & Reeder, 2009), while another article on the site’s fine arts section profiled the popular Christian music artist Charlie Hall in connection with a recent concert he had performed at the church (M. Smith,
In each of these cases, the stories were written with a positive and supportive tone. However, on other limited occasions, some web pages examined in this study demonstrated the school attachment category through more critical scrutiny. That is, on some scholastic websites, youth writers used their platform to express an opinion critical of a school policy or consider a school issue in a more objective and less congratulatory way. In an article on AHSNews.com, the student writer expressed his opposition to teachers' use of Turnitin.com, a website designed to check student work for evidence of plagiarism (Coppersmith, 2009). The teen writer stated that he was “hesitant” to submit his work to Turnitin.com because of “the presumption of guilt, my privacy rights, and the commercial nature of the website” (¶ 2) After providing some information about the legality of the software and commenting on what he sees as privacy violations, the writer stated, “Turnitin.com balances on a moral tightrope and it is frustrating that no one has acknowledged this” (¶ 6).

On The Grantonian, while a number of stories expressed praise for various events and people in the school, some also took on this tone of critical accountability. In one article on the website, a youth writer described how the school’s soccer team recently had lost funding to use buses to travel to away games (Watkins, 2009). “However, this is unique to the soccer program,” the student wrote. “Other sports such as football and cross-country are provided buses to all games and meets, regardless of the distance” (¶ 1). While the writer conceded that “the cross-country and football teams are more dependent on the buses due to their size,” he also argued that the buses “were essential in building team chemistry and getting the team pumped for a big game” (¶ 1).
In the last sentence of the piece, the captain of the soccer team was quoted as saying, “I adore the team bus rides, and they are a staple of my high-school experience” (¶ 1).

Expanding this critical consideration to the district level, another article on *The Grantonian* described the frustration of students and teachers alike with the fact that Portland Public Schools (PPS) had decided not to let schools out early on the day of the upcoming Junior Rose Parade (Robinson, Swift, & Bailey, 2009). The writer contended that the tradition of attending the parade was something that members of the Grant High School community had looked forward to every year. The article even claimed that “Principal Joseph Malone seems to almost encourage students to arrange an excused absence on June 3” (¶ 3). While the writer identified the bureaucratic reasons for the PPS decision, the article was clearly framed in opposition. The story ended with a quote from a Grant High School teacher who said, “PPS has decided to rain on our parade.” The last four words of this quote also appeared in the story’s headline.

It is important to note, then, that these articles that expressed a critical perspective can still be seen as promoting school attachment because they were supported by a discussion of relevant facts. While the logic of these arguments was in many cases far from iron-clad, these oppositions were not merely based on invective. These youth writers were expressing sincere concerns about school issues that were relevant to them. These articles were critical but constructive. These youth writers can be seen as taking up these issues not because they wanted to tear down the administrative structure of their school or school system, but rather because they wanted their school to be the best it could be from a student perspective. The teens seemed to be
encouraging other students to share these concerns, thus promoting attachment to their school.

One non-scholastic example of this category was a Q & A story in *New Youth Connections*. The article profiled Jorge Collazo – or simply “Chef Jorge,” as the piece referred to him – the executive chef for all of New York City’s public schools (Turton, 2009). Along with providing information about Collazo’s job responsibilities and how the school food system worked in New York, the piece encouraged teens to get involved in their schools and push for effective management in their cafeterias. Collazo pointed out in the article that sometimes local students received limited lunch options because school kitchens stopped making food before the last lunch period began. “That’s mismanagement,” Collazo was quoted as saying. “I need your help to fix that. I’m pushing down from above, but real change happens in each of your schools when you talk to the school manager. Challenge them; it’s your cafeteria” (¶ 12). Through this article, the teen readership of *New Youth Connections* was encouraged to get involved and take ownership of the issues that affected them in their schools. That is, the youth writer and Collazo were clearly promoting a sense of personal investment and school attachment among all students of New York City schools.

In other cases, the school attachment category was demonstrated on a broad basis through the fact that youth often identified themselves and fellow students by the school that they attended. For example, in a story on *VOX Teen Newspaper* about the dangers of stereotypes, the writer quoted five teen sources – four from the same school – and referred to them as “a 17-year-old senior at Miller Grove High,” “a senior at MGHS,” “fellow MGHS senior,” “MGHS senior,” and a “DeKalb School of the Arts junior”
(Ridgeway, 2009). Likewise, in a story about teen thrift-store fashion trends on The Mash, the writer referred to the student sources in the story as “senior Jasmine Prapuolenis of Glenbard South,” “Glenbard South junior,” “a Whitney Young senior,” and two sources were referred to as Oak Park and River Forest seniors (Popova, 2009). In both of these examples, the stories themselves were not explicitly about specific school-related issues. However, the writers made it a point to indicate where these youth went to school, which seemed to point to the significance that school plays in the lives of teens. It is where they spend much of their time and interact with many of their friends. Thus, such examples of the school attachment category suggested that school was not just a place youth go for learning, but it was a part of how they viewed their identity.

A slightly less direct way in which non-scholastic websites demonstrated the school attachment category was through providing resources for teachers to use their materials in the classroom. New Youth Connections provided a downloadable “Tips for Teachers” PDF to accompany every monthly issue. This resource detailed activity plans that teachers could follow to incorporate articles from the publication into their lessons. L.A. Youth, VOX Teen Newspaper and Teens in Print also provided lesson plans with each issue, and Teenlink provided 39 classroom activities – one for each week of the school year – that could be used with any issue of the publication. Incorporating the teen-relevant materials of these youth news publications into the classroom was seen to promote school attachment among students as it made a connection between their school lives and the common concerns of teen life experiences expressed by students’ peers in the publication.
Pop Culture

While much of the content examined addressed weighty issues of personal reflection, self-expression, virtue, and values, a great deal of it was also concerned with the much less high-minded topics encompassed by the category of pop culture. That is, celebrity, professional sports, popular music, movies and other forms of popular culture were all topics that often appeared as things these teens were interested in and felt compelled to write about. As Figure 5-1 shows, the pop culture category was the fifth most dominant of all categories that emerged in the sample. In terms of overall occurrences, pop culture was tied with generational bridging as the fifth most prevalent category, as shown in Figure 5-2. It emerged in 30% of all web pages examined and was the dominant category in 11% of the sample. The appeal of pop culture is, of course, not unique to youth journalism. The popularity of television shows like Entertainment Tonight, magazines like People and Us Weekly, or websites like TMZ.com attests to the prevalence of pop culture coverage in mainstream adult media. However, particularly on non-scholastic websites, pop culture seemed to play an especially important role.

As can be seen in Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4, the pop culture category appeared more often in non-scholastic content than scholastic, and it was slightly more likely to be the dominant category in non-scholastic web pages than in scholastic ones. Among non-scholastic web pages, pop culture appeared in 35% of all articles and was the dominant category on 13% of them. By way of comparison, this category was present in 21% of all scholastic web pages and the dominant category in 9% of them.

In one article on The Mash, the youth writer alluded to the highly publicized domestic violence between rapper Chris Brown and R&B singer Rhianna to discuss
issues of redemption (Stennis, 2009). While the article did not go into a great deal of depth, the writer praised Brown for his artistic abilities and apparent contrition in his single, “I Can Transform Ya.” The youth writer suggested that the song demonstrated that Brown recognized “mistakes made in love,” as well as his need to “crawl' to find happiness in love” (¶ 2). In another article on The Mash, the importance of popular television was evidenced as the writer quoted sources expressing the common interest and bond that youth find in the experience of televised pop culture (Myatt & Pollard, 2009). “It’s always a good conversation starter,” one local high-school student was quoted as saying with reference to the hit series “Glee.” “When you know you have nothing to talk about, you can always mention something about last night’s episode” (¶ 4).

The website L.A. Youth also demonstrated support for the pop culture category through its monthly book, movie, and CD reviews. In addition, articles like “Rap that makes me think” expressed both the importance of pop culture for teens and its ability to provide a relevant hook to discuss other important issues (Ellison, 2009). In this first-person article, the writer stated, “Music is one of the things I live for, from turning on old Wu-Tang Clan songs while I work out to blaring System of a Down every morning before I start my school day” (¶ 1). However, the young author went on to express how he was frustrated that much of today’s pop music, and rap specifically, is void of lyrics with any intellectual value. “The rap music being played on the radio is all idiotic,” he wrote. “If rappers aren’t making songs insulting women, then they’re glorifying gang culture and drug dealing or talking about their cars, rented mansions and jewelry” (¶ 2).
The writer went on to describe how his frustration caused him to turn away from mainstream rap and start listening to underground rap.

When I listen to new underground rap I see what seems like a rebirth of where N.W.A., Run-DMC and Public Enemy left off, talking about issues of the time and what is going on in life. Back then, rap was more than just something you could play at a party and dance to, it was rebellious, anti-establishment, religious and political. It focused on the hardships of people in the urban ghettos and the inequality they had to deal with. (¶ 9)

Here again, pop culture could be seen as an important part of teens’ lives, but in many cases, it was more than just entertainment. It was a means by which they sorted through the complexities of life, connected to their peers, expressed themselves, and found emotional resonance to the issues and concerns they experienced personally.

One example of a scholastic article demonstrating the pop culture category came from AHSNews.com. Titled “Dave Has a Secret…” the article recounted the events surrounding David Letterman’s revelation in late 2009 that he had been unfaithful to his wife and subsequently the victim of an extortion plot (Padilla, 2009). In the second paragraph of the article, the author wrote: “What do Oprah, LeBron James, Kim Kardashian, Jay-Z, Anna Wintour, Matt Damon, Rachel Ray, and most recently President Barak Obama have in common? They’ve all been guests on CBS’s Late Show with David Letterman.” What was interesting about these sentences, which followed a 10-word, single-sentence lead, was that they had little to do with the actual focus of the story – Letterman’s scandalous revelation. What they did demonstrate was how familiar the youth writer was with these various celebrities and the significance that pop culture held for both the author and the article’s youth audience. It seemed as if the writer felt the need to set up the relevance of the article to a youth readership by connecting Letterman to other familiar celebrities.
In a story on *The Argus*, a student writer discussed the upcoming release of “New Moon,” the second movie in the popular young-adult fiction Twilight saga (Ramirez, 2009). While the article began with some basic information like when the movie would open in theaters and how the official website described the upcoming movie, the sources quoted in the article consisted of four students providing their opinion about whether or not they thought they would like it. One student, a junior at the school, was quoted as saying, “I saw the first one and I thought it was horrible but hopefully New Moon should make up for it” (¶ 6). In contrast, a sophomore at the school was simply quoted, “I think it is going to be a horrible movie” (¶ 8). While the content of this article did not offer any terribly thoughtful analysis of expectations for the upcoming movie, it did demonstrate that the release of this movie seemed to be an issue of fairly popular interest among students at the school.

Some articles examined in this study did, however, go into more depth in discussing and evaluating popular media. The pop culture category was also evidenced in *The Grantonian* in a movie review of “Where the Wild Things Are” (Quick, 2009). This first-person article expressed the author’s conflicted opinion about the film, as it had not fit into her initial expectations. The writer noted that as a classic children’s novel, the movie adaptation clearly had immediate appeal to a young audience. However, the writer expressed frustration that the filmmakers “took a much deeper, more sinister and intimidating look to childhood,” and that her “inner child cannot embrace these deep, unsettling attempts of a child to escape and then confront his deepest fearful emotions” (¶ 1). Thus, while the pop culture category clearly emerged in this article, it also did so in a way that provided entrée into more complex considerations of human psychology.
A staff editorial on *the broadview: online* (2009) also demonstrated the importance of pop culture for youth by expressing a collective frustration that some local concerts had age limits. The first four paragraphs of this article showed explicitly how important pop culture, and specifically pop music (this term being used broadly), was to youth.

Music is there for teens at times when their worlds are collapsing and changing as they grow – those times when they begin to ask, in the words of Tegan and Sarah, “Where does the good go?”

In brooding over a first crush or a bad grade or a fight with parents, an emotionally unstable adolescent can simply switch on the radio or an iPod and listen to her favorite artists sing about her own troubles mirrored in the lyrics.

And concerts, those often massive gatherings of fans and music-lovers coming together in the name of dancing and singing at the top of their lungs with a performance of favorite songs played at ear-splitting decibels, are musical experiences that fill listeners with adrenaline and provide an escape from the trials of growing up.

But some fans are being cut off from seeing their favorite bands live. California law states if a venue serves liquor and no food, then it can only be open to ages 21 and older.

These words indicated clearly the important role that pop culture and pop music plays in the lives of teens. It is a common bond that they share to both celebrate their youth and to comfort them through the trials of adolescent development. As boyd (2008) puts it, “music is cultural glue among youth” (p. 122).

**Personal Goals**

Across both scholastic and non-scholastic websites, the category of personal goals clearly emerged as a topic of interest for youth. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this category also emerged in interviews with youth and adult participants of these publications. A number of web pages examined in this content analysis reflected decisions facing youth such as whether and where to go to college,
efforts to obtain immediate employment, what kind of long-term career youth wanted to pursue, and relational goals. As a common experience among teens, looking ahead toward personal goals seemed to be a topic that youth content creators and the youth audience could relate to. However, as Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2 show, this category was less prevalent in terms of overall occurrences and dominance than the other emergent categories. This category emerged in 21% of the total content and was dominant in 7% of all web pages. As shown in Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4, it was slightly more prevalent on non-scholastic websites, where it appeared in 27% of the web pages and was dominant in 9%. However, this category also manifested in 13% of all scholastic web pages and was dominant in 3% of them.

One of the clearest ways this category emerged on both types of websites was through pages that listed direct resources relevant to typical teen goals. On its “Cool Links” page, L.A. Youth provided teens with links to resources like job search websites, Southern California colleges and universities, testing services, and scholarship information. Likewise, on Teenlink, along with links to web pages on topics like teen health, social networking sites, political activism, and technology, the website provided links to resources relevant to teens’ personal goals in the areas of college, career, getting a driver’s license, dating, and sex education. Under the “News” section on The Pointer, the website provided a web page simply titled, “Scholarship Opportunities.” The page stated that a list of available scholarships would be continually updated and that seniors and juniors should visit the page every week. The page specified the monetary amount of each scholarship, how to apply, and the application deadline.
On a number of other pages, youth writers directly expressed the common teen focus on achieving personal goals. In a story on HarlemLIVE's "Memoirs" section, one youth writer shared his story about living with a shunt that prevented water from getting to his brain. The shunt developed a life-threatening crack when the youth was 17, and he had to have surgery that left him with scars (Batson, 2009a). He wrote:

I don't like having scars because it is always hard to answer questions about them. However, looking back to that experience I still remain positive and optimistic. Despite what happened that year, I still have my life and I am thankful for that. I will strive to achieve my goal to do bigger and better things like attend culinary school and become a chef. (¶ 5)

In these words one can see that personal goals served as a point of context for the teen to relate a traumatic experience, and they served as a source of strength in dealing with the scars he is left with.

In an article on VOX Teen Newspaper, two youth writers laid out exactly how high-school students should start planning at each grade level to prepare for college (McCall & McCall, 2009). The article encouraged freshmen to map out their high-school courses and start involving their parents in the decision-making process. Sophomores and juniors were exhorted to “keep up a steady pace” (¶ 4) as they explored extracurricular activities and prepared for college, and seniors were prodded to apply early to the school of their choice. The web page also provided links to resources like the College Board for information on taking SATs, the ACT website, and the federal website for financial aid.

In a story on New Youth Connections, one youth described her experience of finding out that her boyfriend was in a gang (Youth Communications, 2009b). As she recounted her personal struggle to decide whether or not she wanted to stay with him, at one point she wrote:
If he doesn't get out of it in a year or so, I will reconsider building a future with him like we've been planning, because that's not something I would want to be around for the rest of my life. If we were to have a family together, I would not want that kind of lifestyle shown to my children or passed along to them. (¶ 36)

Thus, for this teen, college and career was not the only important personal goal in her life. She also expressed ambitions and desires to find a person to marry and to have a family.

**Diversity**

A seventh category that emerged in the content analysis was diversity, which addressed issues including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and general personality uniqueness. This category emerged more often and was more dominant in non-scholastic sites than in scholastic sites. As shown in Figure 5-1 and Figure 5-2, diversity appeared as a category in 26% of all the web pages and was dominant in 5% of them. However, Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-4 show that it appeared in 35% of all non-scholastic content and was dominant in 6% of it, whereas it appeared in only 10% of all scholastic web pages and was dominant there in only 3% of the content.

One article on VOX demonstrated the importance of diversity through an African-American teen’s encouragement for her fellow black peers to take pride in their heritage and to honor that legacy by exhibiting good character and taking their education seriously (Bryant, 2009). “African Americans need to look at one another, not as threats to our own success, but as partners in bettering ourselves and our community,” the author wrote. “We need to help one another instead of tearing others down. We can begin by appreciating what we already have, so that when we gain more, we will know how to take care of that, too” (¶ 12). In a book review also on the VOX website, a teen author described how reading a book about the challenges of a transgendered teen
made her more aware of the need for diversity (S. Smith, 2009). “I have seen plenty of instances where people who are different are discriminated against. At my school, for example, students picked on this guy because he was gay,” the article read. “That was wrong, but more wrong was the fact that the students thought their actions were O.K.” (¶ 8).

In a story on Teenlink, one youth gave an account of her experience moving from South Florida – an area known for its ethnic diversity – to go to school at Central Washington University (Calavia-Lopez, 2009). The teen writer, whose father was Spanish and mother was Nicaraguan, told of how she discovered that the intricacies of Hispanic culture, which comprises a variety of nationalities, were not as well-known everywhere as they were in South Florida. “At Sedano’s supermarket, a Cuban-owned supermarket chain popular in South Florida, Hispanic and American products have always sat side by side,” she wrote. “A can of Folger’s coffee next to a can of La Llave or Bustelo has always been what’s normal to me” (¶ 15-16). The author goes on to describe how when she went with her Japanese roommate to a meeting of foreign exchange students, she found that they automatically associated her with being Mexican or Cuban. An interesting point in this teen’s article was that while she discovered many people didn’t understand the differences among various Hispanic cultures, she also came to realize a new part of her own identity in the commonalities she shared with other Hispanics.

Since coming to the West Coast, I’ve met a lot of nice people and had much fun. I know my experience here will be one I will treasure forever, and I hope to discover more about myself while living here.

And I feel more than reassured in how proud I am to be Hispanic-American, a term I’d never before entertained in my mind or felt the taste of in my mouth.
But I can’t lie, I kind of like it. (¶ 23-25)

One scholastic website that demonstrated the diversity category fairly often was the broadview: online. One example of this was an article informing readers that the artwork of Maurice Sendak, author of Where the Wild Things Are, was being exhibited at the local Contemporary Jewish Museum (Helms, 2009). The article described how Sendak’s artwork reflects his childhood in Brooklyn, New York, as the son of immigrant Polish Jews. Thus, Sendak’s artwork provides insight into not only his culturally distinct experiences, but also spotlights the unique experiences of children in their “vulnerabilities and emotional struggles” (¶ 5).

Other stories on the broadview: online emphasized the diversity category through coverage on issues facing the homeless in the local community and discussion of the destructive consequences of popularizing and minimizing words like “ghetto” as mere fashion terms or cliché adjectives. Tying to the unique context of the broadview: online as being the student website for an all-girls school, another article stressed the importance and value of empowering women and recognizing their success in society (Herlihy, 2009). “Because not all women are receiving recognition for their work, this should be a call to action for young women to make a bigger issue of the situation,” the teen author wrote. “If this is the land of opportunity, we should be equal by now. We are only limited by what we decide to be” (¶ 10).

**Generational Bridging**

A category alluded to earlier in this chapter that emerged in the analysis of the websites was bridging the generation gap between youth and adults. While youth clearly identified themselves through the content as a unique social subgroup, they also tended to emphasize youth-adult partnerships and constructive youth-adult relationships
more than generational opposition. That is, while teens emphasize that their experiences, concerns, relationships, perspectives, ambitions, challenges, and their quest for independence are uniquely related to this adolescent stage of life, they also express the idea that they want adults to take them seriously, and they want to work constructively with adults. This tendency was consistent across scholastic and non-scholastic sites. While dominant in only 3% of both scholastic and non-scholastic web pages (Figure 5-1), this category emerged in 42% of the scholastic content and 23% of the non-scholastic content (Figure 5-4), for an overall presence in 30% of the total sample (Figure 5-2).

The fact that this category appeared more in scholastic content is explained by the high frequency of stories on these sites that discussed teachers, students, and other school officials working together in school-related activities. More specifically, within scholastic news sites, one way in which this category emerged was through recognizing a coach or teacher in the school for a commitment to students or personal accomplishment. In one article on AHSNews.com, the youth writer profiled the school’s basketball coach who had recently assumed the role of host of an Internet radio talk show. The article read:

Coach Lovely is well known by Arcadians and is a valued teacher, but his career list doesn’t stop at teacher and coach. His career history is diverse and interesting, ranging from cop to motivational speaker. Now Coach Lovely will be known all throughout the state of Arizona as its newest sports radio host. (Mettler, 2009, ¶ 1).

An article on The Pointer detailed how students and faculty in the school had worked together to raise money for Breast Cancer Awareness Month (The Pointer, 2009b). “Raising over six hundred dollars, Mr. Russ Lingner, the man in charge of the athletic department as well as the coordinator of the Breast Cancer Awareness
fundraiser was extremely proud,” the student wrote (¶ 2). Further down, the article read, “Along with Coach Caitlyn Brennan the girls’ soccer [team] did their part in raising money and wearing pink, too” (¶ 3).

In an article on The Grantonian, the category of generational bridging emerged as the writer described a recent high-school reunion held by the Grant High School class of 1949 (Lewis, 2009). Throughout the article the writer provided colorful quotes of these senior citizens recounting what it was like when they were teenagers. She also communicated a clear sense of respect for this older generation, which was seen in the last sentences of the piece: “Sixty years later, the same youthfulness ran through them as all their childhood moments came back to life in the East Moreland ‘party’ room. Never once did their happiness dwindle. In the end their dreams were pursued” (¶ 1).

An article titled “Fame, The legend comes to a new generation” on AHSNews.com demonstrated an intersection between the pop culture category and generational bridging (Knoble, 2009). This story was particularly interesting because it showed how the release of the new film represented a generational progression in pop culture. “It’s not really a remake,” the film’s director was quoted as saying. “It’s more of reinvention…a whole new movie!” (¶ 3). Thus, while the new film built upon pop culture history, it also added something new to it. A similar story on the non-scholastic site Teens in Print pointed out how much of modern pop music has its roots in the 1980s (Taylor, 2009). The article showed how artists like Kanye West, Lady Gaga, Beyonce, Linkin Park, and Jordin Sparks were sampling or remaking songs by artists from two decades earlier, including artists like Pat Benatar, Run-DMC, and the Eurythmics.
On non-scholastic sites, the generational bridging category was evidenced through profiles of adults in the broader local community. These stories often focused on these individuals’ successes or their personal contributions to the community. On HarlemLIVE, one youth writer told the story of Evelyn Cunningham, a 93-year-old Harlem resident who had worked for more than 50 years as a media professional (Crosdale, 2009). The writer provided a reverential and glowing account of this woman’s life as a journalist during the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and her travels around the globe. An interesting note about this article is that it not only bridged the gap between generations, but also did so in a way that reinforced the youth writers’ participation in journalism as a mechanism for social change.

**Family Support**

While the primary relational ties for youth in their teen years are the ones they share with their peers, family remains an important facet in their lives. A fair amount of the content examined in this study demonstrated this importance of family for teens, connecting to the community attachment dimension of kinship networks put forth by Kasarda and Janowitz (1974). In the process of trying to find their independent selves, youth often refer back to the lessons they’ve learned or the relationships they’ve built in their families. In some cases, the content examined demonstrated the importance of family support through teens’ expressions of sadness, frustration, anger, or pain as a result of family supports that broke down or were never there in their lives growing up. While this category was not nearly as prevalent as most other categories in the content, and it was the least dominant, it still manifested as a significant concern, particularly in non-scholastic content. Figures 5-1 and 5-2 show that the family support category emerged in 24% of all web pages examined and was the dominant category in only 1%
of the total sample. However, as shown in Figure 5-4, this category appeared in 33% of all non-scholastic web pages and 11% of all scholastic pages.

While many articles expressed youths’ personal struggles for independence and the parent-child conflict that is characteristic of family dynamics during this period of adolescent development, on the whole the web pages examined portrayed family ties in a positive light and as holding a special place of importance for youth.

On the website *L.A. Youth*, which was composed largely of personal essays, the importance of family support was evident on a number of web pages. In one first-person story about a teen turning over a new leaf to pursue academic success after years of low effort, the author mentioned on numerous occasions the important role that her parents played in holding her accountable for her grades (Chavarria, 2009). “I visited my dad's family on the weekends and they would tell me how proud they were of me for trying to learn math,” the article read at one point (¶ 13). In another section the author wrote about what seemed to have been a turning point for her.

I decided to tell my mom everything because I couldn’t live with the lies anymore. That afternoon while I waited for her to get home I was trembling. We sat down and I told her that I had been ditching school for more than two months because school was stressing me out with all the exams, grades and homework. My mom yelled at me and told me that school was important for my future. She told me that she only wants me to do better than her. (¶ 15)

The teen demonstrated clearly in the article how her mother in particular was an important support for her to ensure that she succeeded in getting an education. Beyond just holding the girl accountable, the mother stayed home when her daughter was sick, talked with the guidance counselor, kept track of her child’s report cards, and offered positive reinforcement when she did well in school. The importance of family bonds in
the life of this teen is further demonstrated through the fact that eventually the author came to focus not only on her own schoolwork, but also on helping her sister do hers.

In a *HarlemLIVE* blog post, a youth author connected family and friends directly as being a part of her interpersonal support network as she wrote about her upcoming graduation from high school (HL Blog, 2009, ¶ 1).

So I am glad that school is almost over since I am so tired and stressed out, but have to admit that I am going to miss my friends at school. I know that for the most part I am not going to be in contact with most of the people that I talked to. I know that I am going to cry during graduation because all those memories with friends are going to come to my mind. I know my mother is going to my graduation and that’s the most important thing that matters to me.

Two articles on *New Youth Connections* vividly demonstrated the category of family support from the perspective of the consequences of tragedy and abuse in family dynamics. In both cases, while the authors address the negative effects of painful breaks in family ties, the articles also show how family ties with other family members can be built in the process. In one article simply titled “Losing Mom,” the author describes the profound sense of pain and loss she experienced when her mother unexpectedly died of septicemia (Fields, 2009).

My heart was shattered. It had really happened, my mother really had passed away, and I didn’t even get to say goodbye, it was so sudden. At that moment, no words could make me feel better. For the first time in my life, I truly felt alone. (¶ 21)

As the story goes on, the author describes how she went to live with her aunt and uncle after her mother died. She writes about how she started to learn more independence by doing chores she never had to do when she lived with her mother and by having to help care for her 2-year-old autistic brother. Still, the author notes that the loss of her mother
has left an emotional hole in her life. “Time spent with anyone else isn’t the same as the time I spent with her” (¶ 29).

In another story on *New Youth Connections*, an anonymous author describes in painfully vivid detail her experiences of being sexually and emotionally abused by her stepfather (Youth Communications, 2009a). The young writer describes the profound sense of broken trust that she experienced when her stepfather, who had previously been so supportive and nurturing, started abusing her. She explains how she maintained her silence about the abuse because she believed she “was making a sacrifice for my idea of a perfect family” (¶ 15). However, when she realized that her sister could also be in danger of this man’s abuse, she decided to tell her mom, who told her that she had gone through a similar experience with an uncle. The mother and two daughters moved out of the house to get away from the perpetrator, and the author writes about the support she experienced from various members of her family throughout the painful ordeal. At the end of the article, the author says that writing this story for the publication was therapeutic for her and helped her feel better about her decision to come forward about the abuse.

Overall then, the content examined in these web pages suggested that while teens are most acutely focused on their peer relationships, the roots of family ties – or in some cases, the lack thereof – remain a frequent point of interest for them, even if they are not a dominant focus.
Figure 5-1. Total frequency distribution of dominant categories across all sites.
Figure 5-2. Total frequency distribution of all occurrences of categories across all sites.
Figure 5-3. Frequency distribution of dominant categories compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.

*Percentages for scholastic and non-scholastic sites add to 100% due to 1% lost in rounding.
Figure 5-4. Frequency distribution of all occurrences of categories compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.
Figure 5-5. Frequency distribution of first-person perspective compared across scholastic and non-scholastic sites.
Research Question 2

In addition to the categories that emerged connecting these youth news websites to community attachment, the content analysis also provided insights about how the websites made use or, as the findings suggest, failed to make use of multimedia. On the whole, web pages examined here were primarily static online repackaging of a print product. While there were some exceptions, both scholastic and non-scholastic websites tended to do little in the way of applying the multimedia capabilities of the Web to their online content. The multimedia features that were most often applied, such as hyperlinks and photos, tended to be those that required a less daunting technological skill set and learning curve.

RQ2 of this study asked:

What are the differences and similarities between online news content produced by youth in scholastic vs. non-scholastic settings with respect to how they use different multimedia features (e.g., photos, videos, animations, etc.)?

The most striking result of this content analysis with respect to how these youth-generated news websites make use of multimedia features is quite simply that, on the whole, there was a considerable lack of multimedia application. With scattered exceptions, the web pages examined on scholastic and non-scholastic websites were predominantly text-based and, in some cases, following a print tradition, included photographs.

Hyperlinks

One of the more common ways that websites in this study used the multimedia capabilities unique to an online platform was the inclusion of hyperlinks. Of the 14 sites examined in this study, eight of them used hyperlinks inside the main body text (e.g.,
links embedded in the main body content of a story), and 12 of them used links outside of the main body text of the web page. On *The Messenger* and *The Pointer*, both of which used a template designed by School Newspapers Online, web pages contained hyperlinks outside the body text that provided the visitor with a list of “Other stories that might interest you…” and the most recent five stories in that section (i.e., News, Sports, etc.). Similarly, on *The Grantonian*, the design of the website allowed visitors on each page an option to click on links that directed them to other internal web pages, as in the links listed under “Latest News” at the top of every page. In addition, *The Grantonian* also provided links in the side columns that led to external web pages. In the right column, links to online school resources were listed, including a schedule for parent conferences and fundraising events. In the left column, links were listed to sports stories on *OregonLive*, an online partner of the local newspaper, *The Oregonian*. Similarly, links in the left-hand column of *The Bobcat* provided visitors with resources for “Community News,” including the website for *The Columbus Dispatch* and the local community newspaper, *Tri-village News*.

When hyperlinks were found within the body text of a web page, it was most often on non-scholastic pages dedicated to providing visitors with information about helpful resources. For example, on *The Mash*, a dedicated events calendar provided visitors with a list of local activities with internal links to pages that provided more information about each event. *VOX Teen Newspaper* provided a page listing various programs the organization offered with links to more information about each program. On *Teens in Print*, the “About Us” web page included a list of the teen staff with hyperlinks to a page that provided brief biographical information for each youth staff member.
There were, however, a few occasions in which web pages incorporated hyperlinks embedded into the body text of articles that offered additional information or resources on the topic the teen author was writing about. For example, on *L.A. Youth*, the book and movie reviews provided links to pages on AmazonSM where the reader could purchase the book or album that the youth was reviewing. Similarly, in another article on *L.A. Youth* in which the teen writer described his interests in underground rap music, keywords in his article were linked to pages such as musicians’ websites, MySpaceSM pages for artists, YouTube™ videos, and Pandora™ (Ellison, 2009). In an example from a scholastic website, in the lead of one article on *the broadview: online*, the name of a local food bank is hyperlinked to the organization’s external website (Quierolo, 2009).

**Photos, Illustrations, and Slideshows**

Photos and illustrations (e.g., cartoons, photo illustrations) accompanying text were another of the most common forms of multimedia application found in the content. Of course, given that this follows an established print-based tradition, it is debatable to what extent this qualifies as multimedia. However, as a point of contrast, of the 15 pages examined on *AHSNews.com*, there were only three photos, and of the 20 pages examined on *The Grantonian*, there were no photos, illustrations, or slideshows. This predominance of text on web pages was not isolated to scholastic sites. *New Youth Connections* was also almost an entirely text-based site. While the homepage for the publication included images of the illustrated covers for each print edition, aside from graphical navigation icons, there were only two illustrations found in the other 49 web pages examined.
When photos or illustrations were included on the websites examined in this study, they were generally relevant to the textual content of the web page. Thus, the significance of how these images were used in the context of community attachment depended upon the topical nature of the articles or other text-based content on the pages. For example, an article on HarlemLIVE discussing the historical roots of a local neighborhood, Sugar Hill, included modern photos showing views of the sidewalks and row houses in that area (Batson, 2009b). These kinds of shots were common on the website, although other shots of people, both posed and in natural action, also accompanied some articles. On The Messenger, other than the “About Us” page, every page included a photo or illustration of some kind. Stories on the website that covered ministry events associated with the school or church would show a photograph taken during that event. Sports stories generally included an action shot taken during a sporting event or a head shot of a profiled athlete.

The use of photo galleries was fairly rare on scholastic and non-scholastic websites, although they tended to be slightly more common on non-scholastic sites. When they were provided, they supported the categories identified in answering RQ1. For example, on Teenlink’s “Things 2do” page, there were links to photo galleries that supported the pop culture category by featuring “The Top 10 Summer Concerts,” and the “Teenlink/Vans Warped Tour 09.” On another Teenlink web page, which covered local high-school swim teams, there was a link to a photo gallery with pictures of swim meets for the school district, thus demonstrating support for the school attachment category (Davis, 2009). Likewise, photo galleries on The Mash like “Curie Seniors,” “Spirit Week at Carver Military Academy,” and “Sojo (Social Justice High School)
student after a benefit show” also demonstrated support for the school attachment category. Galleries like “Celebrity shots” and “Oprah and Olympic Athletes” proved further support for the pop culture category, and other galleries containing friendship photos of teens demonstrated evidence of the importance of peer support.

The use of slideshows was even rarer than photo galleries, but when they were used, they tended to highlight recent stories or various snapshots of friends or school activities. Slideshows found in this content did not demonstrate an intention to cover an issue or tell a story specifically using the slideshow medium. That is, slideshows were used only as a promotional device for text-based content on the website or as a way to present various unrelated photographs. Slideshows were not used to compile a series of related photographs together under one common focus in telling a distinct story. Only one site in the sample, The Messenger, was found to use a slideshow accompanied with audio. This slideshow, which was actually displayed in the “Video” field of the template but which included no motion picture content, consisted of various school-related photos set to contemporary Christian music.

Videos

Of the 14 websites examined in this study, at the time of analysis, three scholastic and three non-scholastic sites made use of videos. Applications of the video medium varied among the sites in both how often it was used and for what purposes. The most basic application of video on a scholastic website was found on The Pointer, which featured a home-video-style recording of the school's band performing with the color guard. While crude in its production quality, the promotion of school spirit communicated by this video could be seen to demonstrate the school attachment category.
On *The Bobcat*, links to two videos were listed in the right column of the homepage; however, the link to the “Prom Preparation” video was broken. The video that was accessible on the website at the time of data collection was called “A Look at Young Life” and covered the activities of a local church youth group. While religious participation did not appear frequently enough across all content to merit the construction of a new independent category, this video could be seen to function in the same way as much of the content on *The Messenger* in that it connected to and supported a church organization in the broader context of the local community. The other notable factor about this video was that it was fun and whimsical. In contrast to the serious, stoic demeanor of many professional broadcast journalists, the youth reporter was laughing and smiling, and the video showed other light-hearted footage like a three-legged race and a humorous drama skit.

*The Argus* was the only website in the sample that featured podcasts, all of which were in video format. These videos were well-edited and included coverage of a recent awards ceremony for scholarship recipients, student reactions to the school’s new yearbook, and a profile on the teacher of the year. One video titled “School Remodeling Reactions” demonstrated support for the categories of school attachment and generational bridging. In the video, the student reporter interviewed fellow students on how they felt about recent efforts to remodel the front of the school. One student interviewee replied that he thought it was great and that the whole school should be remodeled because it’s “falling apart.” When the reporter interviewed a teacher about the issue, she said that she understood why it was necessary, but she was also saddened because she was an alumna of the high school and the front of the building
brought back many memories for her. “But memories are inside the building,” she said.
“It’s not the cement.”

Among the three non-scholastic websites that featured videos, HarlemLIVE did so the most. Each of the 22 videos coded on the HarlemLIVE site tended to be one of two kinds. The first was man-on-the-street interview videos. In these videos, youth reporters from HarlemLIVE would ask people who appeared to be randomly chosen how they felt about a particular issue. In one such video, youth journalists for the organization traveled to Washington, D.C., to cover the presidential inauguration of Barak Obama. The video featured both a male and a female teen reporter who asked attendants of the inauguration how they felt about Obama. The interviewees were white and black women, including a 17-year-old who said that if she could have voted, she would have voted for Obama.

While the video did not adhere strictly to traditional journalistic objectivity – one reporter commented that she agreed with an interviewee who said, “He’s an inspiration every time he opens his mouth” – it provided support for the categories of self-expression, diversity and generational bridging. Moreover, the video demonstrated clear evidence that HarlemLIVE was directly engaging youth in a collective discussion about civic affairs. Making this same connection specifically to the local community, another video on the website conducted similar man-on-the-street interviews with Harlem residents and was titled, “Harlemites talk about Obama becoming prez.”

The other type of videos common on HarlemLIVE was typically better edited and followed a more traditional newscast format. That is, the youth journalists would integrate a researched written script narrated over B-roll footage and live interviews to
tell a news story. One such video examined a local governmental effort to institute a tax on plastic shopping bags. Another covered the dedication of a local Harriet Tubman memorial and included an interview with a state senator and United States congressman who were present at the dedication. Other videos also covered community issues and events, like a local protest and cultural parade. Thus, *HarlemLIVE* stood out among other sites, both scholastic and non-scholastic, in its application of the video medium for purposes explicitly related to community attachment. *The Mash* and *L.A. Youth* each featured one video, which were well produced, but less relevant directly to community attachment.

**Polls/Surveys**

Of the websites examined in this study, four scholastic and three non-scholastic sites used polls or surveys. Interestingly, the polls on the non-scholastic sites were more fun and light-hearted than those on the scholastic sites. For example, whereas polls on the non-scholastic sites asked visitors their thoughts on pop culture topics, like “What’s your must-see TV?” and “Will the Lakers win the title again this year?” scholastic polls asked visitors for feedback specifically about what kinds of stories they liked to read on the website, whether readers thought students at their high school were “civil enough,” and whether or not students agreed with a proposed local law. While the appeal to more lighthearted youth interests is certainly a reasonable approach to engage a youth audience, these results suggest that polls on scholastic sites could promote a higher level of rational-critical discourse; however, with so few examples to draw from, these results cannot be assumed to be representative.
**Audience Comments**

Almost all of the sites in this study provided some means for visitors to contribute their feedback to content on the website. In many cases this came in the form of comments attached to stories. Four scholastic and four non-scholastic sites offered comment fields attached to every article. The scholastic site *The Pointer* also highlighted recent comments across articles in a persistent “Recent Comments” feed that was part of the website template. At the time of the coding, only five comments were found on the site, all of which were included in this feed. In these comments, students generally spoke in support of or agreement with the student writer. On *the broadview: online*, visitors were invited to add their comments and subscribe to an RSS feed for comments but were also cautioned to “Be nice. Keep it clean. Stay on topic. No spam.”

Some of the websites examined did not provide a direct opportunity for visitors to comment on the content but would invite visitors to send an e-mail to the publication staff. For example, *New Youth Connections* provided at the bottom of every article or illustration an invitation for youth readers to “write a letter in response to this story” and stated: “If selected, your letter could be published in the next issue of NYC.” This invitation for readers to contribute content was hyperlinked as a mail-to link to the editors. While the *VOX Teen Newspaper* site did not provide comment fields or mail-to links with every web page, the “Contact Us” page stated, “We at VOX want to hear what you have to say! Any questions or comments can be sent to us right here, with the click of a button,” where the word “here” served as a mail-to link (VOX Teen Newspaper, 2009, ¶ 1).
Lastly, two non-scholastic websites, *Teenlink* and *The Mash*, also provided opportunities for visitors to add their “shout outs” to those from other visitors to the site. These shout outs included any statement of personal expression that a visitor wanted to add to the site’s content. On *The Mash*, these comments required registration, were featured on the homepage, and tended to emphasize teen unity, thus indicating further evidence of the peer support category. On *Teenlink*, these shout outs were displayed on a separate dedicated web page, but also emphasized teen unity and support, as well as school attachment. Some examples of shout outs on *Teenlink* were “happy birthday, bestie!!!” “SHOUT OUTS TO ALL DA FREHMENS!!!!!!!!!! CLASS OF 2013…. “i want tO givea shOutOut tO my grilysz scOtt, brittany Star , and B breezy . I love yall tO DEATH !” “go mavericks” and “ I WANNA GIVE A SHOUT OUT 2 DBHS C/O 2011!! GO BUCKS!!!” (Teenlink, 2009b). Shout outs on *Teenlink* required students to identify what school they went to and were reviewed by the website’s operators.

**Social Media**

Relevant to the prevalence of teens’ use of social media, two scholastic sites and five non-scholastic sites provided links to various forms of social media. The scholastic site *the broadview: online* provided the most links to social media outlets as it featured a Twitter℠ feed of previous live news coverage comments on sports stories on its homepage and linked icons attached to each article that provided visitors an opportunity to post the content on Twitter℠, Yahoo! Buzz℠, Delicious™, Digg℠, Facebook™, MySpace℠, Ping.fm™, Redditt℠, and StumbleUpon℠. *L.A. Youth* provided a large link in the right-hand column for visitors to “Find us on Facebook” and another that directed visitors to the organization’s Twitter℠ page. Likewise, *VOX Teen Newspaper* had a link
on its main menu for “VOX ON FACEBOOK,” and *Teenlink* provided links to Facebook™, MySpace™, and Twitter™ under the main navigation on each web page.

Among the sites in this sample, then, it seemed that scholastic sites tended to be less likely to network their content to other social media outlets. In contrast, non-scholastic sites tended to recognize that to be an authentic part of teens’ lives and to have a youth audience engage with their content, these sites had to provide direct connections to the social media platforms where youth are already involved and invested. However, across both scholastic and non-scholastic sites, even those that did not provide direct hyperlinks to social media platforms would often include stories that covered the importance of social media in teens’ lives.

**Other Multimedia Features**

Nearly all of the websites examined in this study consistently included some basic multimedia features such as archives, a search box with the capability to search the entire website for specific content, and RSS feeds or e-mail subscriptions. Many also provided links for visitors to e-mail an article to a friend. Thus, while these are relatively simple applications of the multimedia technology afforded by the Web, they nonetheless represented an opportunity for visitors to enjoy greater autonomy in customizing their information-gathering and information-sharing on these websites.

One multimedia feature that was for the most part absent across all websites in the sample was the use of audio media. While videos were typically accompanied by audio content in some form or another, information presented in a strictly audio medium was found only once in all the web pages examined. This example was found on the homepage for *New Youth Connections*, which was, on the whole, among the least active of the sites in the sample with respect to its application of multimedia. This sole
example of audio media presented a teen contributor reading her story of how much she enjoyed being single.
CHAPTER 6
RESULTS: SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in this study provided a rich complement to the results of the qualitative content analysis discussed in the preceding chapter. Of particular interest, many of the categories that emerged in these interviews reinforced, expounded upon, or put into detailed context many of the categories identified in examining the web page content. For example, the school attachment and personal goals categories both emerged in the manifest content that teens produce through online youth news websites as well as in how these teens describe their experiences working with these publications. Similarly, the findings of the content analysis suggested that peer support is an important theme for youth, and interviews with teen and adult participants suggested that positive peer support is particularly important for this age group. With respect to the use of multimedia, many of the interviewees in this study indicated that this was an important factor for engaging a youth audience online, but many also acknowledged that their websites were not where they would like them to be in terms of multimedia application.

One of the most striking correlations between the findings of the in-depth interviews and those of the content analysis was in the intersection of self-expression, which emerged in analysis of the web pages, and youth voice, a category that emerged in the interviews. Specifically, while teen content producers and adult advisors readily confirmed in interviews that self-expression was an important motivator and opportunity that youth value in their participation with these websites, this desire was not purely self-indulgent. That is, the common sentiment expressed among those interviewed in this study was that it is precisely through the vehicle of self-expression that teens are able to
relate to and support one another. Content that may come across as self-involved in an initial reading is cast in a much more collective and inclusive light when these youth describe their experiences in producing these websites. Given that the developmental process in adolescence carries common experiences that a general teen audience can relate to, public expressions of individuals' personal experiences can actually serve as a source for broad-based peer support. As teens read or hear about the struggles and successes other youth are experiencing, they gain a sense that they are not alone in their own similar experiences. Youth and adult participants interviewed in this study were keenly aware of this phenomenon, which seemed to be a primary purpose of the work that they are doing in producing these websites.

In total, 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by over the phone. Sixteen of these interviews were with youth involved in producing news on the selected websites, and eight were with the adult advisors who work with them. Youth interviewees – one male and 15 females – ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old. Interviews with these teens ranged in length from 17 minutes to 76 minutes. The mean length for a single interview was 49 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded for emergent categories by the researcher.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question of this study asked:

How are youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings similar or different in the way they describe their experiences in producing online news? How do they perceive their role promoting community attachment, if at all?

The following categories address this question by demonstrating the themes that emerged in the analysis of the interview transcripts.
School Attachment

Congruent with the findings of the content analysis, participants in the in-depth interviews consistently indicated that school attachment was an important category of the youth-generated news production experience. As Figure 6-1 shows, scholastic youth news sites tended to promote school attachment for the high school with which the publication was directly connected, while non-scholastic sites tended to provide a broader sense of school attachment among local youth and all, or at least a number of, schools in the community. Regardless of whether youth worked in a scholastic or non-scholastic context, the importance of school in the life of a teen, and the solidarity of that high-school experience among teens in the community, was repeatedly emphasized in subjects' responses. Anca Vlasan, a 17-year-old intern at Teenlink, put it this way: “As high-school students, that’s, that, high school, high school’s our love. You know, that’s where we go to school. That’s where we know all our friends. That’s kind of where everything happens for us.”
Not surprisingly, the most direct, localized, and explicit evidence of this category came from youth at scholastic sites. That is, it was frequently mentioned among both students and advisors at scholastic news sites that the primary purpose of a high-school journalism publication is to inform members of the school community (students, parents, teachers, administrators, etc.) about issues and events concerning the school. In addition, interviewees at scholastic sites also commented that the aim of their publication was to promote “school spirit” and publicize the accomplishments of students, teachers, and other members of the school community. Alexandra Welch-
Quarm, a senior at Bel Air High School in El Paso, TX, and editor-in-chief of the school newspaper and website, *The Argus*, described this kind of good-news function of her website as she discussed how the publication recognized exemplary teachers. In telling about a story of a teacher in the school who had won a district-wide award, Welch-Quarm said:

> She’s a really hard-working teacher, and I figure that she should deserve credit. I mean she won the award; she put her best to it. So it’s not only giving kudos, but it’s also letting people know we do have excellent teachers, we do have excellent programs, and we are active here in the school.

Other examples of this promotional type of content can be found in the results of the content analysis in Chapter 5.

While news about issues off school grounds is not entirely outside the scope of scholastic journalism programs, interviewees from scholastic sites often indicated that such stories needed to demonstrate some relevance to each individual’s school. “When we choose to write stories about things that are going on in the community, we really work hard to find the student angle,” Zoe Newcomb of *the broadview: online* said. “We always try to look for that connection, but at the same time, we don’t want to just be writing about things that are going on around us that are, that students already know about.” In other cases, participants indicated that their scholastic news sites would include occasional stories on broader local, national, or international topics with less direct relevance to the local school, as long as school news was first being covered adequately.

The manifestation of the school attachment category among interviews with subjects in non-scholastic sites demonstrated a broader local community connection. Specifically, non-scholastic sites bring together students from different schools and
provide a common platform for each teen participant to reach a wider audience with news about his or her school. Thus, youth from across the community are able to learn about the experiences of students in other local schools, thus creating a common connection among schools in the community. Lynda Lopez, a youth writer at *The Mash* in Chicago, said that reporting on stories about schools around the community is one of the things she liked best about her work at the site.

With writing for the newspaper I actually get to interact with students from other schools and you get to learn from them as, just rather than being in the bubble of your own school. I think that's my favorite part of *The Mash*, definitely, that I get to interview so many students from across the city and suburbs and I get to meet a lot of people. And, I don't know, I really, I really think that's exciting because you get to learn from each other.

Mike Fricano, adult co-managing editor at *L.A. Youth*, expressed how the connection of his publication to local schools has in the past demonstrated an observable effect of creating positive change across all area schools.

I think the story most recently that's made the biggest difference was a student who, um, was harassed at school because he was gay, and this story ran several years ago. Um, and, you know, some of this would happen in the presence of teachers, but the teachers just ignored it. Well, after he wrote his story, every teacher at his school had to go through diversity training, and the district as a whole was like, “We’re not doing a good enough job. This is unacceptable.” So, you know, it definitely can make a difference.

The final way in which interviews confirmed the school attachment category as a phenomenon of youth-generated news sites was through the incorporation of content into formal and informal learning in the physical school setting. That is, in interviews from both scholastic and non-scholastic youth news contexts, there was consistent mention that content from these sites was either directly incorporated into classroom curriculum and discussions, or it spurred informal conversations among students and teachers at the school. At *The Grantonian*, a themed edition of the newspaper on drug
and alcohol abuse prompted not only discussion of the issue in various classrooms, but also an invitation from the parental advisory council for members of the newspaper staff to speak on the issue at one of its meetings. Modupe Alabi, a 16-year-old intern at VOX Teen Newspaper, which is distributed to local schools in Atlanta, said that along with teachers using it directly in their curriculum, sometimes students will read it on their own during silent reading portions of their class time. “They’ll just grab an issue of VOX and then as they’re reading, they’ll get really into it and be like, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize that this was out!'” Alabi said.

**Community Networking**

Another category that emerged in the interviews with both youth and adults involved in youth-generated news production was community networking. While this category did not express itself in the same explicit form in the content analysis as the school attachment category did, the emergence of community networking in the interviews can seen to connect closely with the element of community attachment and neighborly concern as part of the virtues and values category of the content analysis. Specifically, a number of interviewees indicated that the publications they worked with often connected to other local organizations and members of the community to provide mutual support for community-building efforts. The theme of community networking was considerably more evident in comments from youth at non-scholastic sites, although there were some examples from scholastic sites as well.

One of the most active sites with respect to community networking was HarlemLIVE. Sixteen-year-old Nyiesha Showers, a youth journalist at the site, said that networking with other people and organizations in the community is one of the things she liked best about her work there.
It’s basically, it’s building a relationship. So it’s a symbiotic relationship. We help each other out, especially in the community of Harlem because, you know, they have, it’s a bunch of different non, non-profit organizations in Harlem for like media and stuff and, you know, different things like that. So, we try to, you know, um, collaborate with just about all of them.

Along with non-profit organizations like the Harlem Children’s Zone, HarlemLIVE also had connections to local businesses and academic institutions, including Columbia University, which provided equipment and assistance in producing online youth news videos. At New Youth Connections, also in New York, adult editor Marie Glancy said that as part of the program, youth would often take field trips in the community, which exposed them to places like a local theater or a sustainable farm in the community and the people who work there.

Another way that the community networking category emerged in the interviews was through the connection of youth-generated news sites to other local media outlets. For those sites that operated as part of an initiative of a professional newspaper (i.e., The Mash, Teens in Print, and Teenlink), youth often met in the newspaper’s office building, and in some cases, youth-generated content even spilled over into the newspaper’s other publication arms. For example, adult Jennifer Jhon, youth editor at Teenlink, said that there had been occasions when the website for the Sun-Sentinel in South Florida had picked up stories by her youth writers. Similarly, Erinn Hutkin, the adult assistant editor at The Mash, said that some of the youth participants had done work for the RedEye, a publication put out by the Chicago Tribune targeting roughly a 20- to 30-year-old demographic. From a scholastic context, The Word’s adult advisor, Mark Johnson, said that he provided youth-generated video content to the local public access television channel so that it could be broadcast to a wider audience in the community.
In other instances, mostly at non-scholastic sites, teens’ participation in youth-generated news programs had itself been the subject of local media coverage. In these instances, teen participants were often interviewed by professional reporters, thus providing another outlet for youth voice in the broader community sphere. Modupe Alabi at VOX said that for those teens who come into the office regularly and who are more active with the publication, there can be a lot of opportunities. For example, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* once interviewed youth participants and did a story about VOX, while another time *Atlanta Magazine* did a photo shoot with teens involved with the publication. In addition to this exposure to professional media, Alabi said that youth participants often have a chance to get directly involved in the community through activities like volunteering at the Atlanta Community Food Bank and leading workshops at local youth conferences.

**Mentoring**

A third category that emerged in the interviews, and one that demonstrated a considerable amount of nuance with respect to how it manifested at scholastic versus non-scholastic sites, was mentoring. Whereas the content analysis evidenced a general category of generational bridging, the interviews reflected the value of more personal experiences of positive youth-adult relationships and close mentoring between adults and teens. All participants – both youth and adults – indicated that youth and adult participants enjoyed a positive relationship. While non-scholastic sites seemed to be slightly more conducive to more personal mentoring relationships, this only applied to youth who came to the office more frequently and were highly involved in the program.

As will be discussed in the results for RQ6, non-scholastic sites faced a unique barrier to this type of one-on-one mentoring relationship in that their youth participants
are geographically spread across their respective metropolitan communities, and for
many, coming to the office is either not possible or terribly inconvenient. In contrast,
respondents from scholastic sites were more likely to indicate that the youth-adult
relationship was more similar to a conventional, less personal student-teacher
relationship than a close mentoring relationship; however, because the journalism
program was part of the teens’ regular school activities, students were more frequently
physically present and had more one-on-one interaction with the adult advisor.

Chantel Morel, a 17-year-old youth writer at *New Youth Connections*, said that her
adult editor had not only helped her improve her writing, but had offered personal
guidance through the process of choosing a college.

> The editors here aren’t, the adults here aren’t judging and they’re more sort
of like your friend. And, you know, they listen to you, and like, you don’t get
in trouble here, or, you know, they’re just more supportive. They’re fully
supportive of you. It’s more like of a closer relationship than with, you would
say, teachers.

Mike Fricano of *L.A. Youth* mentioned that the level of mentoring varies for each
individual teen based on a number of factors, including their level of involvement, their
personalities, and the nature of the stories they write.

> A lot of the stories we do are very personal, uh, and very revealing. You
know, we may be writing about religion; it may be a student who’s gay
writing about what it was like to come out, or that, you know, no one really,
you know, not a lot of people know. Um, students have written about being
physically, emotionally, sexually abused, um, you know, really heavy topics.
And I think that when you work with a student on a story like that,
particularly through our process, which is where we’re asking a lot of very
deep and probing questions … I think you can’t help but become close to a
student, um, you know, because if there wasn’t a closeness and a trust, I
don’t think that student would be willing to work with you on that story,
period.

While, generally speaking, personal mentoring seemed to be slightly more
frequent at non-scholastic sites, there was a considerable amount of variation among
individual sites, both scholastic and non-scholastic. That is, some interviewees from non-scholastic sites indicated that the youth-adult relationships they experienced were more formal and professional, and some students from scholastic sites said that they had very warm, friendly, and close relationships with their journalism advisors.

Alexandra Welch-Quarm at The Argus described her journalism teacher, Ms. Viescas, as the “most awesomest teacher” she’d ever had. “She’s not only taught me everything about everything,” Welch-Quarm said, “she’s has taught me a lot of the maturity and what I need to run this.” However, regardless of the context, all participants agreed that youth respond positively when they are treated as adults. “I don’t feel like I need to condescend to them,” Fricano said. “They can detect that, and the second you do that, you’re done. You’ve lost all credibility.”

Peer Support

In addition to mentoring, interviewees consistently indicated that youth-generated news, both in terms of production and content, promotes positive peer support among teens in the community. Reinforcing the findings of the content analysis, which revealed that the bonds of peer support are an important topic in youth news content, the interviews suggested that youth content creators find tremendous value in the opportunity to share in the common experiences of adolescence with their teen audience. One of the strongest dimensions of this category was found in the fact that youth journalists target other local youth as the primary audience of their content, a point that will be discussed further in answering RQ5. Participants of scholastic and non-scholastic youth news publications stated that one of the greatest values of the work they do is that it helps their teen readers know that there are other teens in their community who share similar experiences. Chantel Morel of New Youth Connections
expressed this idea when she described a story she had written about a friend who had been evicted from her home right before the beginning of her senior year in high school.

She went through a lot, and I think it’s a story that, you know, um, it’s not really out there. But I feel teenagers do go through it and it’s good for them to read it and know they’re not alone because, you know, it does happen. You do get evicted and then right in senior year it affects your life, and my friend went through a lot when everything happened.

Another way the teen-targeted content of these sites was seen to promote peer support among young readers was by providing positive examples of youth who were constructively involved in their communities. A number of youth interviewees said they felt their participation in a youth news publication empowered other teens to believe they could accomplish similar successes. Lynda Lopez of The Mash said she was inspired to start writing for the publication when she saw another teen’s name in the newspaper.

The first thing that made me want to write was because I, I saw the byline. It was by a high-school student, like, oh, this person’s name and then their high school. It was like, “Wow,” like “She can do this. Why can’t I?” So it really, it kind of motivates students to actually, like, “Wow,” like, “I can actually do this, too.”

In other cases, youth interviewees indicated that they enjoyed the fact that their work at a youth news site might inform and inspire other teens to get involved in community activities not directly related to their publication. Danielle Germaine of The Messenger said that teens are best able to relate to teens and promote involvement among their peers.

We want them to get involved with the things we’re talking about a lot of times. You know, when it comes to community outreaches and, you know, ministry opportunities, you know, we want them to read it, look on, and, and see what can I do to change this, or, you know, how can I get involved.
In addition to serving as a positive peer support for teen readers, youth involved with these publications also indicated that they experienced peer support from the other youth with whom they worked. Shanasia Bennett described the youth staff at *Teens in Print* as being like a family.

We all get along. We love each other and, you know, we go to, we travel together after TiP is over, you know, we take the train together, we sit together. And we just really have a bond here, and we have laughter, but we also have our serious moments where we’re trying to get the, um, you know, articles, our articles individually done. So it does go beyond just professional, I think.

Following with the tremendous value teens place on self-expression and youth voice, one of Bennett’s fellow youth writers at *Teens in Print*, Roxanne Taylor, 18, noted that even though the teens argue sometimes, they are always respectful when it comes to story ideas. “Everyone believes that everyone is entitled to their own opinion,” Taylor said. “And it’s their idea, so they should be able to express it how they feel. So everyone is respectful in that sense.”

**Personal Growth**

The fifth category that emerged in the interviews was that of personal growth. This category took on a wide range of dimensions, but consistently referred to the personal benefit that youth receive through their participation in scholastic and non-scholastic journalism programs. One of the most significant aspects of personal growth that interviewees mentioned was a greater sense of commitment and responsibility. Here again, a connection between the emergent categories of the interviews and those of the content analysis can be seen, as the theme of personal growth often manifested in interviews as relating to the acquiring or reinforcing of possible personal values and character attributes. Charlene Lee, a 17-year-old youth writer at *L.A. Youth*, said that
many times teens don’t realize how much commitment is involved with being a part of the program.

It actually just takes dedication, ‘cause, like, my article, my first article I took I think about a year to write, and, you know, for a teen to stick to something for a whole year, that’s, that’s kind of asking, uh, you know, for most people that’s asking a lot. Uh, the dedication to actually go into the office or send your editor back edits and things like that.

Similarly, Maritza Cosano-Gomez at The Messenger said she tells her students, “If you’re looking for, just to, you know, to add a, a good grade on your transcript, this is not the class to take because this takes a lot of work.”

Particularly for scholastic publications, where students interact with each other more regularly and have more assigned roles as editors, reporters, photographers, etc., the concept of teamwork also manifested as a dimension of personal growth. Through accountability to their peers, youth learn that other people rely on the work they do. They also benefit from collective brainstorming, collective decision-making, conflict resolution, and the productivity of collaborative work when everyone does their share. Rosa Smith, a 16-year-old junior reporter and copy editor at The Grantonian in Portland, OR, said that the aspect of teamwork was what really attracted her to the journalism program. “I want to be a writer when I grow up, but I can write, um, you know, as much as I want in all my other classes,” Smith said. “But what I think is really interesting about (the) newspaper is that it’s a whole bunch of people who come together and have this, um, common goal of, of producing the newspaper, and um, and they create something together.” In some cases, the principle of teamwork even extended beyond students’ immediate classmates, as they volunteered to help other programs, usually yearbook programs, with work that needed to be done.
Along with learning the value of commitment and teamwork, teens also acquire a number of practical skills through their participation, interviewees said. Both teens and adults indicated that youth involved in journalism improve their writing and research skills, pick up technical skills like video production or how to use design programs on the computer, develop professionalism and better social skills through interactions with sources and fellow youth journalists, and increase their ability in critical thinking and problem solving.

In addition, a number of youth interviewed said that they had learned more about the journalism field itself – what goes into it and why it is important. Chantel Morel noted that as a result of her involvement at New Youth Connections, she had become a more regular news consumer.

I'm just more aware of what's going on in the news. You know, I read the newspapers more, actually. And, and I, I like, I'm aware, like, I know what's happening in my city. And you know, like, I speak about it, I have an opinion.

Similarly, Jennifer Jhon at Teenlink said one of her goals as an adult editor was to get teens to understand that journalism means more than self-expression.

I think that people come in because they want to write or take photographs. What we really want them to do is thinking about the reader ... I mean, the whole point of journalism is really being that voice for the people who don’t, who can’t say it themselves, or being that, the eyes into something.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question of this study asked:

What do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings express as the motivating factors associated with their involvement in news production?

The following categories address this question by demonstrating the themes that emerged in the analysis of the interview transcripts.
Youth Voice

Connecting closely to the category of self-expression that emerged in the content analysis, interviews with adult and youth participants of both scholastic and non-scholastic websites indicated that youth voice was one of the most prominent categories associated with youth motivation and involvement. Teen participants of these publications consistently indicated, and the adults working with them reinforced, that the opportunity to provide a youth voice for their readers was one of the things they valued most. Shanasia Bennett, an 18-year-old editor and staff writer at Teens in Print, said:

I love the fact that, um, I just have the opportunity to actually write at this age and at, um, just in order, like, because I’m in high school, um, you know, teens don’t always get opportunities to actually have an article published at such a young age unless they’re in college and writing for a college newspaper. So I love to deliver the news and to give teens a voice that they, they may not have or they may not have the courage to speak up for.

An interesting point brought out in this quote, which was echoed by many of the subjects interviewed, is that for youth journalists, there is no contradiction between personal self-expression and serving as a spokesperson for other members of their generation. That is, it is precisely through the act of these individual teens expressing themselves and commenting on the things that concern them – both lighthearted and weighty – that they serve as representatives for a collective youth perspective on these topics. “Well, I think that teens are, are, um, often ignored or overlooked or dismissed,” said Jennifer Jhon at Teenlink. “They are dealing with a world that many of us grow out of and then immediately forget.”

Thus, giving youth a platform to have a voice on issues that concern them provides an authenticity on teen-relevant matters and a diverse perspective from what is offered through other communication channels. “I think that when I have teen writers
who are talking about an issue that they, um, they just have a different approach,” Jhon said. “They think about things differently.”

Along these lines, scholastic and non-scholastic youth news outlets offer a contrast to the perspectives and ideas of professional media organizations, which are dominated by adult content producers and cater to a mostly adult audience. Interviewees consistently mentioned that a youth perspective is absent in these adult-centric channels and that youth news publications help to fill this gap. Beyond mere neglect of youth concerns in these information outlets, some interviewees suggested that professional, adult-driven media sometimes see youth as simply a commercial market. Thus, such publications may target teens based not on what is best for the youth and the concerns they express, but on how to persuade them to buy advertised products. A number of interviewees indicated that youth-generated news publications provide credibility to a youth perspective, constructive discussion of topics relevant to legitimate teen concerns, and an opportunity for youth to dispel stereotypes of superficiality and speak up about the things that matter to them.

Of course, as pointed out through the content analysis, it is disingenuous to assume that youth are not also interested and concerned with lighter, more superficial issues of sports, pop culture, and the like. However, any quick survey of mainstream news broadcasts, magazines, or newspapers proves that these topics are likewise of tremendous interest to adults. Entertainment is certainly a considerable focus of both scholastic and non-scholastic youth news sites. In fact, the appeal of youth having greater access to movies, concerts, and even celebrities for reviews and profiles is one of the things youth interviewees often indicated as being a fun part of working with their
publication. However, an interesting context of this entertainment content is that it occasionally ties to more weighty issues. For example, during the time that pop music celebrities Chris Brown and Rhianna were in the mainstream news for domestic violence, Shanasia Bennett used the incident as a hook for a story in *Teens in Print* about domestic violence and how it relates to teens. The story drew the attention of another community organization that worked with teens to address domestic violence locally, as well as the *Boston Globe*, and the three organizations together put on a community forum for adults and youth to discuss the topic together.

Looking specifically at the scholastic context of youth voice, students who participate in a high-school journalism program have an opportunity to provide a youth perspective on things happening in their schools. Zoe Newcomb, student writer at *the broadview: online*, said in an interview:

> This is not all of the time, but I know a lot of the time adults who are running something may not have a perspective that students have, may not understand exactly how their decisions are affecting students. So by no means do I want to cut out the adult authority in school because I think that’s really important in helping, like, kids to develop into adults. But at the same time, there are things that adults don’t understand and they don’t always make decisions that will best suit students. So when students are involved, they’ll, they’re able to work with administrators and teachers to create an atmosphere that is best for growing and learning, which is, I mean, ultimately the most important thing about schools and student newspapers and any kind of organization centered around youth, is helping those youth to grow and develop.

Similarly, Sarabeth Knoble, a junior at Arcadia High School in Phoenix and editor of the *AHSNews.com*, expressed how student concerns are a part of broader local community concerns. “We’re going to be running schools one day,” Knoble said. “We’re going to be members of the community. We already are, and I feel that our voices should be heard in decisions that will affect us as students.”
Of course, student input and voice about school issues is circumscribed by the extent to which they are able to freely express themselves, which differs from school to school. At Grant High School in Portland, OR, students are provided a unique level of legal protection through the Oregon Student Free Expression Law, which extends legislation to counteract restrictions implemented by the Hazelwood decision. Moreover, the journalism advisor at The Grantonian, Dylan Leeman, described himself as an advocate for the First Amendment. “I believe that the First Amendment wasn’t created for adults only,” Leeman said. “And I believe that we can’t ask students to use and respect the First Amendment if we don’t trust them to use and respect the First Amendment.”

However, Leeman also indicated that imbuing students with legal power raises the difficulty of steering them away from publishing content that might be considered unprofessional, drive away advertisers, present ethical complications, or even pose potentially libelous pitfalls. “So sort of I’m doing a dance the whole time,” Leeman said. “I’m applying pressure to, um, to make the publication as professional as I can, um, while still respecting the fact that the students have a, really have the power, um, in what they run and don’t run.”

In contrast, at Fort Lauderdale’s Calvary Christian Academy (CCA), a private Christian school serving students in preschool through 12th grade, the restrictions are unsurprisingly tighter than they are at a school like Grant. The mission statement for the school’s student journalism website, The Messenger, states: “We exist to make disciples of Jesus Christ, writing His message and glorifying His name in everything that we do.” Thus, the idea of comparatively unbridled student free expression is simply not
consistent with this vision and the pedagogical purposes of the school. Maritza Cosano-Gomez, the teacher and adult editor-in-chief at *The Messenger*, said that in the past students had tried to challenge these restrictions, and she had to explain to them why it would be inappropriate for them to vent personal frustrations with the school through the website. However, Danielle Germaine, a senior at CCA and managing editor of *The Messenger*, said such instances were rare. “Like, we have, um, a pretty small team. It’s about seven writers, and we begin our class with prayer,” Germaine said. “I think by the first class they know what they got into at the beginning of the year. So they have the opportunity to leave and, um, they’re still here, so I, they really are on board.”

As a final note about the category of youth voice, some interviewees indicated that a perceived difference in voice, as compared to actual substantive differences in perspective, may also be an important factor in attracting a teen audience. That is, the very fact that a teen is reporting on a certain issue may carry a lot of currency with a youth audience, who might look upon the content as being authentic to a youth mindset simply because it is coming from one of their peers, even if, in fact, the material expresses similar concerns and opinions as would an adult-focused publication.

**Personal Goals**

Again reflecting the results of the content analysis, a second category that emerged as a motivating factor for youth participation was personal goals. That is, a number of interviewees stated that a big attraction of youth journalism programs, both scholastic and non-scholastic, was that they were beneficial for teens in preparing for the future. Specifically, youth were often drawn to teen journalism programs because their participation would look good on college applications and personal résumés. In
some cases, interviewees indicated that teens get involved specifically because it will help prepare them for a future in journalism. Modupe Alabi of VOX put it this way:

It’s definitely very important for teens to try and not, not just wait and say, “I want to be this when I grow up,” but just try and start working on my goal now, which is something that I was like, I don’t want to wait until like 25 to become a journalist. I want to do it now, and that’s what I’ve really been able to do here. So this just really enables me to get a jump start on my career by being involved with it when I’m young. So when I’m applying to colleges, I have all this experience and then when I’m applying for internships, I kind of get a leg up than the people who are just now starting kind of have, I already have this experience in my pocket.

For youth interviewees who said they had a specific interest in journalism, some at non-scholastic sites indicated that they chose to pursue a journalism program outside their school because they were not impressed with their school’s program, because there was no journalism program at their school, or because they couldn’t fit journalism into their schedule of courses. Thus, it seemed that for such teens, they were willing to commit extracurricular time to fill an interest that their school was unable to meet.

Charlene Lee said that writing for L.A. Youth allowed her more freedom than she would have had at her school to write about things that she was interested in.

I used to write for my school newspaper, and I would never in a heartbeat write about, like never criticize my teachers, um, um, being too focused on standardized testing in my own school newspaper ‘cause that would not get published. Um, I know for sure that the editors would scrap that, the advisor would, and definitely the principal would. And, you know, um, L.A. Youth is my place where I can really get out, you know, what I want to write about.

Fun

While not as prevalent as the previous categories, a final category that emerged as a motivating factor for youth participation in these sites was fun. Perhaps the clearest expression of the value for fun came from Conner Sarrich, a 16-year-old sophomore
and video producer at *The Word* of Grandview Heights High School in Columbus, OH.

When asked what he enjoyed about working for *The Word*, Sarich said:

I guess, uh, like other people’s, like, videos are fun to watch and, it’s, it’s good when, like, someone, like there’s a lot of good people I guess in the class that make good videos that are just entertaining to watch. And, uh, I, it, it takes time to learn how to make a good video ‘cause the first one I made was kind of boring, but, uh, the next one I made was much more interesting to watch and better for the viewers, I guess. And, so, just, I guess, yeah, the, the interviews when you’re interviewing people is, uh, fun too just ‘cause, I mean, sometimes they say funny things and it’s just, uh, humorous.

**Research Question 5**

The fifth research question of this study asked:

Who do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings see as the target audience of their work? Are they striving to reach other youth or adults with their content?

Without question, the most prevalent answer from interviewees regarding the target audience of their publication was youth first, adults second. That is, while teen participants were particularly interested in having an opportunity to express themselves and provide a youth voice and perspective on issues relevant to their lives, the primary intended audience was fellow teens. More specifically, youth and the sites they work with were, on the whole, primarily concerned with reaching other youth in the local community, or in the case of scholastic publications, other students at their school. Anca Vlasan of *Teenlink* said:

The people that read teen, that, uh, *Teenlink*, uh, um, are all the teens throughout, um, throughout South Florida. Um, so, I, I mean, to me I’ve seen, um, I’ve seen a lot of my friends read it and what they get from it is that it’s, um, it’s kind of interesting to see, to see, um, a teenager’s, or, a teenager being so mature about topics and being able to write how they feel and just express themselves and, and a piece in *Teen Link*, which goes out through all the schools in South Florida. So you can really, I mean, you can really voice your opinion … I think that *Teenlink* gets a lot of,
gets all the people talking about more things than, like I said, than just what they did this weekend or something superficially.

However, even though the target audience for content on these sites was mostly other teens, both youth and adult participants noted a keen awareness that their messages do sometimes reach adults as well. Maci Zellers, a 15-year-old sophomore and student writer for *The Pointer* at Sparrows Point High School in Baltimore, MD, said:

> We expect our students in our school to read it, but everyone, if, if you have a son or daughter here, we want you to read it too. It’s based for everyone. It’s information for everyone. If you have a kid on the soccer team, you might like to read about the soccer team article about them. Like different things, it all depends on the article, if you might want to read it, but we mainly go for students’ attention.

Similarly, Roxanne Taylor at *Teens in Print* said:

> I’d say it has a, like, a important role in the local community because, like, although our articles are geared toward teens, not just teens read them. Like, adults do read them and, you know, they have commented on the articles and, you know, said this is interesting. They have never heard about this before. And it, it just made a, like, lasting impact on everyone in general. But it’s mostly interesting because it’s written by teens for teens.

Thus, it seemed that promoting cross-generational dialogue, while it does happen and participants were aware of that potential, was a secondary goal of these youth-generated news publications. That is, making adults aware of a youth perspective, particularly on those issues close to teens’ hearts, is a byproduct of youth voice in the content. Again, the main objectives seemed to be connecting to a local teen audience to promote a sense of youth solidarity, an ability to relate in the discussion of issues, and a sense of sharing in the unique experience of being teenagers.

While this was overwhelmingly the general indication from interviewees regarding the target audience, it should be noted that there were exceptions at both scholastic and
non-scholastic sites. That is, some teens interviewed stated that they aimed to reach youth and adults alike with their message. “The target audience for our work is definitely our students as well as our parents, the parents of our students,” said Sarabeth Knoble of AHSNews.com. “We really want to make sure everyone’s involved in this, and we really want the, the parents to start being involved in reading our newspaper more.” An interesting point about Knoble’s aim to reach parents is that she noted one of the benefits of doing so was increased opportunity for financial sponsorship of the publication.

**Research Question 6**

The sixth research question of this study asked:

What do youth in scholastic and non-scholastic settings describe as the challenges to participating in news production?

The following categories address this question by demonstrating the themes that emerged in the analysis of the interview transcripts.

**Busy Schedules**

Overwhelmingly, the foremost obstacle expressed by interviewees to teen participation in youth-generated news publications is that teens have very busy schedules. Within a scholastic context, students found it difficult to fit journalism into their curricular plans over their four years in high school. Additionally, being a part of a student news publication is not something that generally can be isolated to the allotted class period. Reporting, editing, layout, distribution, publishing content online, and other aspects of producing a scholastic news product are time-consuming and often required students to give of their time after school to get the work done. Alexandra Welch-Quarm
at *The Argus* described the challenging workload of being a student editor-in-chief this way:

I’m not only editor of *The Argus*, trying to get everything done as much as possible, I’m also the editor of the Chanter (the school’s literary magazine), I directed a musical this year, I’m in two choirs, and I also have to, you know, my friends. So between all of that, it was really, really difficult trying to balance everything and make sure that it (*The Argus*) came out as professional as I could make it come out.

While interviewees indicated that learning to balance commitments was stressful and challenging for youth, they also suggested that it could serve to promote responsibility and time management. Danielle Germaine at *The Messenger* said:

As a high-school student who’s involved with, um, a lot of other classes and, you know, extracurriculars, it can be hard to get that one piece in time, um, you know, by the, by your deadline, by the end of every week. It’s, it can definitely be difficult juggling so many things on top of that. Um, and I, and I see that, you know, in the other writers’ lives as well. But, you know, they are faithful and it’s so cool to see how responsible they are in being able to handle it.

However, some interviewees also mentioned that being spread so thin can lead to a lack of attention to their journalistic work. Rosa Smith of *The Grantonian* said:

It’s more of a, of a side thing and sometimes it, it doesn’t always get our best work, to be honest because, like, if we’re worrying about, like, our AP classes or our giant thesis that’s due really soon or whatever, you know, But um, I, so yeah, I think we’re not as serious about it as adults, but, um, I feel like we might have more fun.

The problem of a busy schedule seemed to be compounded for youth participants at non-scholastic sites because they had to take time after school hours to participate. With all of the non-scholastic programs generally involving some level of face-to-face interaction – usually at least once a month – youth had to find not only the time but also the means of transportation to go to the publication’s office. At *Teens in Print*, where youth were required to come into the office twice a week, Roxanne Taylor said
sometimes she wouldn’t get home until seven or eight o’clock at night. “There are times when I get really stressed out and I can’t do, sometimes I have to, you know, say, well, I can’t come to Teens in Print this week,” Taylor said. “Or times where I have to be up really late at night doing homework because I get home late or I’m exhausted.”

The challenge of a busy schedule was not limited to the youth participants at these publications. The adults interviewed also expressed that they, too, face the challenge of a lot of work without a lot of time or manpower. Marie Glancy at New Youth Connections described the difficulty of balancing the responsibilities of working one-on-one with youth, planning editorial content, putting the publication through production, and recruiting new advertisers and youth participants. “It’s a lot of hats to wear,” Glancy said. Simiarly, Jennifer Jhon at Teenlink said that the more popular the publication had become and the more youth who had gotten involved, the more difficult it was to work one-on-one with them. “The (adult) staff is so small that we are not able to coach as well as we used to coach,” Jhon said.

**Teen Limitations**

A second category that emerged in response to the challenges facing youth-generated news sites was the limitations of teens in terms of skill as well as maturity. Interestingly, it was not just adults who recognized these limitations; many teen interviewees referenced them as well. One limitation noted was the challenge for teens to look at and cover an issue objectively. “Things may affect us differently than adults, and, you know, with certain stories, we may get emotional, or, like, um, biased in a way to it,” said Nyeisha Showers of HarlemLIVE. Similarly, Alissa Deane, a 14-year-old freshman and writer for The Pointer at Sparrows Point High School in Baltimore, MD,
said, “I’m a very opinionated person. So I, like, I have trouble to not put my opinion in, but I can do it.”

However, Deane also noted that her teacher would often allow students to do two stories on one subject – a straight news article and an opinion piece. Offering this allowance suggests that the teacher recognized the strong desire – the need even – for teens to express their opinion and gave them an outlet to do so, while at the same time challenging them to think critically and factually about the topics they covered. Other interviewees in the study further mentioned that the challenge for objectivity, or at least measured consideration, in stories can be even more difficult for topics that are more personal in nature. That is, the challenge to govern their emotions in their writing is especially difficult for teens when they are writing about sensitive personal experiences from their own lives.

In addition to the challenges of emotional maturity and objectivity, a number of interviewees commented that teens simply do not have the same level of experience or skills as professional journalists. Erin Hutkin of The Mash said:

We do expect a lot of them, and, you know, sometimes it just takes a while to figure out, you know, who is capable of doing what. If they’re assigned, you know, a story, it, you know, does take some time to figure out, OK, well, are they going to be able to do it? And, just because, again, we don’t see them, you know, I don’t see them doing interviews or overhear them doing interviews. So it’s hard to know like, OK, are they asking the right questions. Are they asking everything they need to ask? Are they, you know, doing a phone interview when I asked them, you know, to do a phone interview and not just e-mailing this person and getting the interviews that way?

Likewise, Marie Glancy at New Youth Connections said that while youth were not given a writing assessment as a criterion for participation, those who had particular deficits in this area could be very challenging to work with. “If you’re struggling to understand what a writer is trying to say in their writing, that’s a problem,” Glancy said.
Funding and Resources

A third category that emerged as a challenge in producing online youth-generated news was a lack of funding and resources. As indicated in the category of busy schedules, human resources were among those lacking at youth news publications. A number of adult interviewees indicated that they simply did not have enough adults on staff to do things the way they needed to be done. In addition to a lack of human resources, interviewees at both scholastic and non-scholastic sites indicated that they did not have the most desirable technological resources. “I try to keep my baling-wire-and-duct-tape network running, and the school won’t buy me new computers,” said Dylan Leeman of The Grantonian. “So I’m buying new computers with newspaper money, and I can ill afford to do that.” The problem of keeping up to date with the necessary technology further complicated the challenge of youth limitations, as new technology often meant teaching teens new skills, which could be challenging given the busy schedules of both youth and adults.

As reflected in Leeman’s comments, the challenge of staying current with technology resources was then closely tied to the challenge of obtaining funding – a problem for both scholastic and non-scholastic programs. Mark Johnson at The Word said his understanding was that funding limitations were the primary reason for the school’s decision to move to an online-only publication format. Given these barriers, interviewees pointed out that involvement from youth and adults alike in youth-generated news publications was in many ways a labor of love. Aisha Al-Muslim, a 24-year-old alumna and adult staff member of HarlemLIVE, said:

*HarlemLIVE has always, I would say, has always struggled to have funding. And, you know, HarlemLIVE has been in existence since 1996, and somehow, and you know, we have made it happen; it’s still here. And even*
though *HarlemLIVE* was going through a lot of financial troubles before, you know, the students still kept coming. We still kept fundraising, and we made sure that *HarlemLIVE* was still around for these other students.

**Multimedia**

Connecting to the previous challenges of busy schedules and funding and resources, the final category that emerged in the interviews as an obstacle to producing youth-generated news sites was the application of multimedia. Interviewees generally agreed that developing a more dynamic multimedia online presence was important for the future of their publication. They noted that a strong online presence provides for greater audience reach, fewer space constraints, more interactivity, and keeps with the current trends in professional journalism. Some interviewees also commented that social media and multimedia are particularly important for a target audience of digital natives. “Kids, we Facebook™, Twitter℠, MySpace℠ (used as verbs). That’s, that’s just what we do. That’s part of our generation,” said Nyiesha Showers of *HarlemLIVE*. “I’m not going to just go through a newspaper, just sit back and flip the pages. No, I’m sorry, and I don’t have time.”

However, interviewees also consistently expressed a struggle with how to incorporate multimedia in their websites, a fact borne out in the lack of multimedia application found in the content analysis. One of the reasons interviewees found it difficult to include multimedia in their online publications was, again, simply a lack of time and personal familiarity with the technology. “I know that the future of journalism is on the Web, um, and yet to me it feels like one more thing that I don’t have the time or resources to, to focus on,” said Dylan Leeman of *The Grantonian*.

Even beyond the time and skills involved in multimedia production, interviewees also indicated that they were struggling with the appropriate ways to use multimedia.
“When it comes to video, we try to be very judicious in our decision-making, um, what stories really lend themselves to it,” said Mike Fricano of L.A. Youth. “We’re not just going to do video for the sake of video.” Moreover, Fricano said that while the organization was always looking for constructive ways to apply multimedia in its content, the primary mission of L.A. Youth is to focus on writing, and it was important not to deviate from that mission. In response to the idea that youth aren’t interested in printed media anymore, Fricano said:

You know, that’s a question we get. Like, “Well, do kids want to keep reading?” Um, our experience has been yes, absolutely. If you give them good stuff to read, they will read it. I think quality is so underrated or under-considered when it comes to trying to reach youth.

As an interesting example of this kind of technological pushback from youth as well, Chantel Morel of New Youth Connections described a story that she once wrote about her dismay over the idea that e-readers seemed to be replacing books, even in high schools.

I just wrote about how books are actually very important in our lives and how, um, one of those Amazon e-readers can never replace a book. Like, you know, it’s just a special bond sometimes you have even as a kid when your parents read stories to you or something. And I wrote about how important and special a book really is to the world and reading.

Indeed, this sentiment of the continued power of printed media also ran as a consistent parallel to the aims and efforts of interviewees with respect to applying multimedia. A number of subjects noted that their target audience was either unaware of or uninterested in their website. In contrast, many interviewees commented that having a printed product immediately available and physically visible to their readers was one of the most powerful ways of getting them to actually read the publication. Thus, while a dynamic multimedia website provides a greater variety of content delivery methods in a
more widely accessible form, these benefits are moot if there is no audience for them.

The consistent theme among interviewees seemed to be that, ideally, print media and online multimedia should be used in ways such that they capitalize on their respective strengths and complement each other. Alexandra Welch-Quarm of The Argus said:

I think as the pair they work completely wonderful, but if they were separate, it wouldn’t be nearly as strong. Um, because like the magazine, it helps them that they actually have something in their hands, they have something that they can carry. So if they don’t have access to the Internet, which, um, at our school is actually a problem ... Um, having something in their hands makes it easier for them actually to be able to look at it and learn more about it. Having the Internet as well has it so that it has more of an outreach so those who don’t get a copy or who have lost their own can look on, or also search for different stories, different ways to look at life, the podcasts or what not. You know, it, it gives variation.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Both the interviews and the content analysis of this study revealed that, without question, one of the primary motivations for youth participation in journalistic programs, both scholastic and non-scholastic, is that involvement provides a direct outlet for self-expression. This is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Content-creation by youth – whether it is online in youth news websites, social networking sites, chat rooms, or offline in traditional print media – is largely characterized by individual expression. In truth, media – online and offline – simply provide extensions for the characteristic need of teens for self-expression. As Livingstone (2008) points out, “young people have always devoted attention to the presentation of self” (p. 394). Digital media have simply changed the forms available for youth to accomplish this aim. Referring to her study looking at teen content-creation on social networking sites, Livingstone says:

For teenagers, the online realm may be adopted enthusiastically because it represents “their” space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance, an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence – to construct, experiment with and present a reflexive project of the self in a social context (p. 396).

Tobin (1995) suggests that the value of self-expression is something engrained in American students due to a pedagogical and cultural emphasis on personal voice. From an early age, Tobin argues, children are taught in schools the importance of sharing their feelings, expressing their hopes and fears, and narrating the events of their lives. Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer (2004) argue that structured outlets for creative expression help “young people release tension and explore their individuality” (p. 62).
What Youth Care About

Whatever the reason, it is clear that youth value the opportunity to have their voices heard. In a society in which youth perceive themselves as victims of “adultism,” or systematic discrimination by adults whereby teens are “searched, followed, monitored, disrespected, and silenced” (Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008, p. 187), youth journalists place a tremendous importance on expressing their opinions and presenting a youth perspective. Particularly within a non-scholastic context, youth often enjoy the freedom of writing from a first-person perspective and sharing personal experiences or viewpoints.

However, to assume that this emphasis on self-expression is purely narcissistic and self-serving is to miss the broader picture of youth voice. That is, teens engaged in producing online journalism often see themselves as spokespersons, role models, and positive supports for their fellow youth. That is, through their common shared value of self-expression, these youth communicate to their teen readers and viewers that they are not alone; other teens out there are going through the same or similar things as the readers are. These youth journalists believe their work creates a sense of solidarity among youth, particularly local community youth, and validates common teen thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

At the same time, they strive to empower and give hope to their youth audience members by serving as real-life examples of teens who are out in the community having their say about issues relevant to them. In a media environment where most messages are generated by adults and are either for other adults or unidirectionally channeled at teens, these youth news publications provide outlets for authentic and constructive messages to which a teen audience can relate. Moreover, with the Internet providing
greater availability for teens to access content focused on sex, violence, commercialism, and other objectionable material (Turow, 2001), the positive messages put out by scholastic and non-scholastic teen journalists provide constructive alternatives to these negative influences.

While some of the topics teens choose to cover in the online news they create, such as various aspects of pop culture, might be considered superficial, more often they are discussing significant issues associated with personal values, virtuous character traits, current events, or things going on in their schools. These may be, for example, weighty emotional issues of mental health or sexuality; social issues close to their heart, such as homelessness, juvenile justice, or environmental awareness; or practical concerns about their personal goals to attend college or find a job. Moreover, many times these youth journalists use the common interests of sports or pop culture to draw their teen audiences into a more serious or thought-provoking conversation. While more prevalent in non-scholastic sites and less evident than other categories in this study, diversity is also a theme that a number of teens seem to value and emphasize in their work.

Thus, through an overarching paradigm of self-expression, youth creating content online provide an informal support to their fellow teens and promote positive messages to a generation bombarded by commercial exploitation, materialism, dangerous sexual attitudes, a glorification of deviant behavior, and negative assumptions about youth influence on communities. Stern (2008) notes that “youth authors are distinctly aware of the relative shortage of spaces for them to publicize their thoughts and lives amidst an increasingly mediated culture” (p. 104). Stern also proposes that, like “zines” of the
Looking then at the historical context of youth-generated media content, it is clear that the importance of self-expression, youth voice, and peer support are not new phenomena that have arisen with the advent of the Internet or other digital technologies. Rather, youth have for a long time made use of the media tools available to them to provide a platform for their personal perspectives and opinions, as well as those of their generation collectively. In her conversations with zine authors, Chu (1997) found that these low-budget, underground niche publications, which arose in the 1970s and gained popularity in the 1990s, provided a means for youth to articulate their need to carve out a place of their own and to provide support for the members of their generation. They allowed, in Chu’s words, “an intimate arena for young publishers to make their own sense of ‘youth’” (p. 76). Looking specifically at the ways in which young girls used zines for self-expression, Ferris (2001) argued that these publications allowed girls to be themselves and to challenge the dominant discourse about how girls should define themselves. Other underground media, such as graffiti and underground student newspapers, both of which were important communication channels for youth movements in the 1960s (Starr, 1974) and the 1970s (Miller, 1993; Ferrell, 1995), have also been instrumental as vehicles for self-expression among members of society’s younger generation.

**Bridging the Generational Divide**

However, Stern (2008) points out that because today’s youth have, on the whole, through the pervasive availability of the Internet, had greater access to outlets of self-
expression than their traditional media counterparts of earlier decades, today's youth do not tend to see the content they create with the same sense of rebellion that earlier generations did. While most of the teen journalists interviewed in this study indicated they were targeting their peers, broadly speaking, as the primary audience for their work, they were also keenly aware that their messages sometimes cross the generational barrier to an adult audience. The opportunity to have a say about important issues in their school, communities, or other spheres relevant to their personal lives is one that is not lost on them. Likewise, the knowledge that they may help change adult perceptions about the legitimacy of youth perspectives or about the potential for teens to contribute positively to their community is a strong secondary motivation for many of these teens. However, the general attitude with respect to this cross-generational dialogue is more one of cooperation, partnership, and a desire for mutual understanding than of opposition and resistance, which characterized youth-generated content of previous decades (Stern, 2008).

This constructive crossing of the generational divide is one that manifests in youths' descriptions of their journalistic experiences as well as the content they create. In their interviews, teen journalists indicated that they enjoy meeting and working with adults in a professional manner. With respect to the adult advisors and/or editors with whom these youth work directly, these interactions sometimes develop into close, personal mentoring relationships and other times are somewhat more formal. However, every interview conducted in this study – both with adults and with teens – indicated that these relationships are categorically positive. In youth-generated content, teens often signal that they value constructive and mutually respectful youth-adult partnerships. In
scholastic content, these partnerships are most often evidenced through descriptions of positive teacher-student projects and other forms of collaboration.

In both scholastic and non-scholastic content, youth often use adults as well as fellow teens as sources in their stories to incorporate a cross-generational perspective on the topics they are covering. Through these positive interactions with adults, then, youth not only help dispel the false stereotypes some adults have about teens, but they are also exposed to the maturity and knowledge that comes from adults’ greater experience; in the process, they also may overcome some of their own false assumptions. In turn, as youth journalists tell these stories of positive youth-adult partnerships to a primary audience of teens and a secondary audience of adults, they promote healthy cross-generational appreciation among both age groups.

Zeldin, Camino, and Mook (2005) note that public policy and mainstream media portrayals of youth generally “reflect the implicit view that young people are objects of concern, lacking the motivation and competency to work collaboratively with adults on collective issues” (p.122). Thus, bringing teens and adults together through scholastic and non-scholastic youth journalism in effective partnerships serves to counter and dispel this stereotype. Norman (2001) points out that truly effective youth-adult partnerships allow youth to take real ownership of the work they are doing, which is significantly different from mere tokenism. For example, Norman says, some youth programs utilize teens to make media appearances, but provide them with no voice “in developing the messages, programs, or policies that the youth are expected to talk about” (p. 13). In contrast, a hallmark of the youth journalism publications examined in
this study is that both adults and teens are strongly motivated to promote an authentic youth voice.

Sherman (2002) echoes the principles set forth in Soep’s (2006) concept of “collegial pedagogy” (p. 38) in noting that programs that promote youth-adult partnerships, including youth journalism programs, allow young people to recognize their potential for leadership and civic action, while also providing them the support of adult “allies” and organizational staff members to offer access and guidance (Sherman, 2002, pp. 66, 80). Through a series of extensive case studies, Kincaid and Macy (2003) found, among other things, that adult allies who do more than simply provide funding but who also open doors of access and audience reach are important for the success of a youth media organization. Libby, Rosen, and Sedonaen (2005) argue that:

The most effective way to work with young people [is] to see them as experts in their own experiences, as members of the community with an important perspective and a right to share it, and as energetic and innovative resources to each other and to adults in their communities (p. 112).

Here again, then, it seems clear that bridging the divide between youth and adults for constructive community efforts, as has been demonstrated in both the scholastic and non-scholastic sites examined in this study, serves not only as an effective means for positive youth involvement, but also provides local adults with the value of youths’ perspectives and contributions.

**The School Connection**

The theme of generational bridging ties closely with the category of school attachment found in this study, as youth-adult connections among students, parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, policymakers, and other vested parties, all of which are promoted and reinforced by youth journalism, help to facilitate broad inclusion
in building better schools. The fact that school attachment appeared as a category in more than half of all the web pages examined clearly indicates that students want to be a part of strengthening their schools. While this category was, not surprisingly, far more dominant on scholastic websites, total occurrences of the category appeared with nearly equal frequency in the scholastic (49%) and non-scholastic (42%) web pages. That is, even when youth are not in school, perhaps to many educators’ surprise, they are still thinking a lot about school. They’re thinking about, writing about, and photographing school events, high school sports, school food, school board policies, classroom experiences, and the relationships they live out in their schools.

The importance of school attachment in the lives of youth has been documented in numerous studies. Teens with higher levels of school attachment (composed of factors such as regular school attendance, feelings of closeness with people at school, and feeling a part of one’s school) have been found to have lower levels of drug use and general delinquency (Murray & Belenko, 2005). With juvenile delinquency having been shown to be associated with adult criminality and overall social disorganization of a community (Sampson & Groves, 1989), school attachment serves not only as an individual protective factor for youth, but also as a support for overall healthy communities. Also, as one might well expect, youth of all races and ethnic backgrounds who have higher levels of school attachment are less likely to drop out of high school (Perreira, Harris, & Dohoon, 2006) and, in turn, are again less likely to engage in criminal activity and drug use (Crowder & South, 2003).

**Growing Pains – The Value of New and Traditional Media**

With respect to the use of multimedia, youth and adults who work at these scholastic and non-scholastic sites all seem to agree that including multimedia is an
important goal for their publication, but most also seem to be struggling with how to
make it happen. Indeed, most of the websites examined in this study evidenced minimal
use of multimedia online capabilities. The interviews in this study suggest that
participants at youth news websites are, for the most part, still trying to figure out how to
overcome deficits in technically skilled staff, funding, and time in their efforts to create
current, engaging, and interactive websites. These findings are consistent with existing
literature, which suggests that in the quest to apply digital media technologies for
engaging youth in community projects, there is a desperate need for skilled
professionals who understand not only the technical aspects of these technologies, but
also specific ways of applying them to community outreach, as well as the diversity of
the youth population they must work with (Wolske et al., 2008).

Many of the interviewees in this study maintained that multimedia is the future of
journalism, and they want to stay up to date with the industry trends. Many also
recognized that online content provides them greater audience reach, frees them of
space constraints, and offers lower overhead costs than traditional media platforms.
Others commented that reaching a generation of teen readers requires a dynamic
multimedia website because that is what youth are accustomed to in this day and age.
At the same time, some participants pointed out that they want to use multimedia in
effective ways, not just to show off bells and whistles. Along these lines, participants
indicated a genuine emphasis on quality of content, rather than flashy presentation, as
their primary aim.

Both youth and adults involved with these sites on occasion pointed to an enduring
value of reading and writing – a value that some of them see as often dismissed,
overlooked, or minimized in a time when the digital revolution seems to crown multimedia content as the *de facto* king. While a website may overcome barriers of time and distance to reach a broader audience, it also requires that people know about the website and are inclined to visit it. A traditional print product, on the other hand, is something producers can put directly in the hands of teens, teachers, parents, or policy makers. At the end of the day, however, the primary purpose is giving youth the most effective voice possible, regardless of how it is delivered.

The struggle to apply multimedia to journalistic products is certainly not unique to youth-generated news. Indeed, the general field of journalism and communications — professionally and academically — continues to grapple with how to apply the variety of multimedia tools available to convey targeted messages most effectively. “The key to the future of quality journalism around the world is the quality of the reporting, generated by intelligent, dedicated reporters and editors” (Quinn, 2005, p. 196). Sundar (2009) suggests that multimedia hold the potential to “stimulate effortful consideration of mass-communicated content or detract users from meaningfully engaging with it” (p. 141). The key value of these multimedia features, Sundar argues, is in the extent to which they can focus users on quality content.

Thus, it seems that while youth news participants have done well to set a foundation in focusing on quality content as their primary objective, the results of this study suggest that there is a desperate need for more multimedia content to engage a youth target audience. Data from the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicates that youth aged 12-17 and young adults from 18-29 are the most active age groups online, with 93% of both groups using the Internet (Purcell, 2010). Moreover, 75% of
teens have a cell phone and the average teen sends 50 texts a day. After texting, the most popular use of cell phone among teens is the taking and sharing of photos. Among online youth aged 14-17, 82% use a social network site compared to only 30% of online adults who are 30 or older. Perhaps most relevant for the current study, the Pew data indicates that 62% of teens get their news about current events and politics online, 31% get health, dieting, and fitness information online, and 17% go online to get information about sensitive health topics.

While the Pew data also suggests that there is still a digital divide among youth of higher and lower socio-economic statuses, it is clear that youth as a whole are immersed in digital, interactive technology. The rise of cell phone use among teens also means that youth are taking their media with them. They are not simply sitting behind a computer terminal to get on the Internet at specific times of the day; they are carrying it on their person. They are weaving their use of digital technology into the very fabric of their daily lives.

Thus, a successful youth news operation in the 21st century must make use of the available digital technologies that members of their target audience are already immersed in. This is not a call to abandon the advantages and the value of traditional media forms, nor is it by any means a suggestion that quality of content ever suffer for the sake of new media application. It is a practical call to action for youth news participants to actively seek substantive, engaging, and consistent ways to use digital media in realizing the full potential of the unique benefits provided by youth-generated news. The challenges of available funding, technological resources, technically skilled staff, and a general lack of available time for both youth and adult participants are
clearly very real challenges to applying multimedia. However, they are challenges that must be overcome for the future success of these publications.

**Theoretical Contributions**

The results just summarized, then, suggest significant contributions for the theoretical framework of community attachment as an antecedent for community-building, the theoretical focal point of this study. Specifically, the categories that emerged inductively out of this study provide direct support for various component concepts of community attachment (e.g., peer and family ties, diversity, access to communication channels). In addition, the results suggest support for and a broadened understanding of two other well-established theories in the areas of human development and social psychology – Lerner’s theory of developmental contextualism and Bandura’s social cognitive theory, respectively. Figure 7-1 illustrates the theoretical model derived from the inductive analysis of the data in this study, combined with an informed perspective from existing literature.
As shown in the model, the immediate outcome of teens’ participation in youth news websites is that it provides them an opportunity for self-expression, which then gives rise to a collective sense of youth voice. Sometimes pop culture is used as the vehicle for this self-expression and helps to attract and engage a youth audience. Youth participation with these publications also provides opportunities for mentoring, which can guide self-expression, but also help to directly facilitate virtues and values in the youth, as well as personal growth and bridging the generational divide between teens and adults. Peer support is the strongest outgrowth of the youth voice generated in
youth news, but other components of community attachment promoted through teen involvement include school attachment, diversity, and family support. Strong communities are built through an appreciation of the diversity of their members and the inclusive dialogue and participation that this promotes. Likewise, family support is instrumental for youth to feel they have a structure of kinship ties that gives them roots in their local communities, as well as to promote teens' positive personal development into constructive, contributing community members. Finally, connecting attachment to community-building, the youth news websites examined in this study were seen to facilitate positive personal goals for teens, as well as a positive network of various non-profit organizations, businesses, individuals, and leaders in the community. Thus, while the primary strength of these publications as they relate to promoting positive communities lies in their serving as catalysts for community attachment among teens, these sites also begin to open doors of opportunity for youth to move beyond mere positive sentiments related to their communities and begin to actually pave the way for their involvement with community-building activities.

**Community Attachment**

Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) point out that community attachment within an urban setting is most appropriately qualified as applying to what Janowitz (1952) calls communities of “limited liability.” That is, residents may “participate extensively in local institutions and develop community attachments yet be prepared to leave these communities if local conditions fail to satisfy their immediate needs or aspirations” (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974, p. 329). This concept of limited liability is essential to understanding the role of community attachment in the lives of youth. With their futures ahead of them, plans to attend college, and desires to see the world, few of the teens
interviewed in this study suggested that they knew for certain they wanted to stay in their current community and live there as they entered full adulthood. However, almost all of them expressed pride in, appreciation for, and a personal responsibility to contribute to their communities while they were there.

Indeed, it seems that the general concept of community is very important to teens involved in youth news production, as they routinely promote community attachment in their content. Theodori (2001) argues that one’s satisfaction with and attachment to his or her community is positively and independently associated with that individual’s well-being. Other research suggests that attachment to community institutions like schools, faith-based organizations, families and other community nodes is a core human need (Eccles & Appleton, 2002). In this vein, while some of the content examined in this study evidenced direct and explicit reference to the community at large, the concept of community attachment was most often identified in the work of these teens through such component parts that collectively create community attachment.

Specifically, one of the most direct ties between youth-generated online news and community attachment is in the emphasis on building and reinforcing peer ties. As shown in Figure 7-1, the opportunity for youth to express themselves in both scholastic and non-scholastic youth news publications gives rise to a collective sense of generational youth voice, which then serves as a conduit for reinforcing positive peer support among teens in the community.

In many cases, both the content analysis and interviews of this study suggested that teens hold very dear the close, personal, and socially constructive friendships of peers with whom they go to school, attend church, play sports, or work. A vast body of
literature supports the general hypothesis that close friendships are particularly important during adolescence (e.g., Weimer, Kerns, & Oldenburg, 2004; Shulman, 1993; Buhrmester, 1990).

However, the content analysis and interviews revealed that even outside of the close personal relationships that teens share with their friends, youth also place a tremendous amount of importance on a broad-based network of support for teens in their community. That is, youth who are involved in producing online journalism express a particular intention to reach other local teens, including those they have never met, and to promote a sense of youth solidarity regarding issues common to the adolescent experience. Moreover, the content these teens generate demonstrates that youth not only want to have a voice on teen-specific issues, but they want to serve as examples for their generation that the collective youth voice has legitimate, even if limited, perspectives on issues of common community, national, and global concern.

Felix (2003) points out that the strong desire for members of a younger generation to have their own voice in society is not a new phenomenon.

My parents, aunts, uncles, and a few colleagues have painted rather vivid images of 18-25 year olds during the 1960s initiating a struggle to establish voting rights and equal rights among all people living in America. It was the first time in Baby Boomer history — and possibly that of their parents — that the power of a collective young voice was realized. The motives of this cohort were clear: they sought the same equality and respect afforded to adults. No longer were they satisfied with being told what to do without opportunities to offer their input. (p. 3)

Felix goes on to describe how in the 21st century, youth as a generation face additional social challenges, such as metal detectors in schools and an increased proportion of single-parent households, yet their desire to have their voices heard by adults remains. “This generation, however, seeks to have their opinions, concerns, and input respected
at levels of decision-making that not only affects [sic] them as individuals, but also affect the schools they attend, organizations they patronize, and communities they grow up in" (p.3). The findings of this study, then, can clearly be seen as consistent with such perspectives. Namely, the needs for self-expression, recognition, and agency in social dialogue are important for youth, but these are not simply self-serving desires. Rather, they reflect a sense of collective concern and solidarity among members of this generation to have a unified voice on issues that affect them and others.

With respect to family ties, Youniss and Haynie (1992) point out that while peer influence increases during the teen years, parents continue to serve as “strong socializing agents throughout adolescence” (p. 59). Figure 7-1 shows how the vehicle of youth voice was also applied to reinforcing the importance of strong family supports among youth in the community. The youth news websites examined in this study occasionally served as outlets for the teen content creators to express their gratitude and appreciation for positive, supportive family members who modeled and encouraged constructive, pro-social personal attributes. Many times these family members were the youths’ parents; however, sometimes teens also wrote about how a supportive network of extended family nearby was an empowering resource for them. Hall (2007) points out that both immediate parental attachment and extended kinship ties serve as important protective factors for a variety of environmental adversities youth may face.

Still, home life for many teens is not always positive and not always supportive. This also manifested in the web pages examined in this study. That is, in some cases, youth-generated news websites served as a platform for teens to share their personal stories, the stories of others, or a general topical discussion of lacking positive family
supports, thereby acknowledging the importance of these kinship ties, even if by way of negative example. Kidd (2003) notes that negative home experiences of abuse and neglect are associated with a variety of other problems, such as poor school performance, conflict with teachers, and other conduct issues, and frequently lead to youth homelessness as a result of teens running away or getting kicked out of their homes. Thus, youth journalists who give voice to these issues help not only to raise general social awareness of these problems, but they also express to teens going through such serious home-life problems that there are people out there, their peers, who care and understand what it is like to live with these painful family relationships.

Along these lines, perhaps the strongest connection then between the results of this study and the theoretical concept of community attachment as an antecedent for community-building is that the process and product of youth-generated news promotes a broader and more diverse inclusion of perspectives into the general social dialogue. The tremendous importance placed on youth voice in these publications not only provides an immediate communication channel for the actual teen content producers, but as they serve as representatives for their generation, these youth offer a collective teen perspective on issues in the local community and broader cultural, bureaucratic, economic, and institutional social contexts. While youth may lack access to and representation in the traditional social networks of a community infrastructure (i.e., They are not part of the formal decision-making networks in their schools, churches, transportation systems, etc.), these youth-generated news publications provide an opportunity for them to share and receive the information and motivation necessary for community involvement (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). It is youth voice that
activates the various dimensions of community attachment to manifest as a result of
teen participation at these sites.

Moreover, while the findings of this study suggest that teen content producers are
primarily targeting peers with their messages, Figure 7-1 shows that cross-generational
communication does occur. The mentoring and youth-adult partnerships that arise in the
process of youth news production, as well as those partnerships promoted more
generally through the content, serve to combat the disconnect Otis (2006) describes
between youth and their communities. These publications help give teen journalists and
their teen audiences a sense of agency for community change (McCarthy & Wolfson,
1996), encourage them that they can have a voice in decisions that affect them, and
assure them that there are adults out there who seek to empower and support them in
the process (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Likewise, the youth-adult partnerships promoted
through these publications help to develop greater mutual understanding among teens
and adults and provide a shared sense of norms and values across the generation gap
(Barnett & Brennan, 2006).

**Lerner’s Theory of Developmental Contextualism**

In addition to these direct connections between the results of this study and the
theoretical framework of community attachment explicated in the literature review, the
findings suggest support for and broadened application of Lerner’s theory of
developmental contextualism. Lerner’s theory of human development, which builds
upon Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, suggests that the interaction of specific
factors and subfactors associated with individual growth and environmental influences
collectively shape personal human development (Muus, 1996). Looking specifically at
adolescents, Lerner proposes that within a general ecological macrosystem comprising
culture, society, and community, a youth’s personal and social development are
determined by interactions among the immediate networks he or she regularly
encounters. For example, characteristics of the individual teen (e.g., personality,
temperament, values, health, biology), of the parent, of a school network (e.g.,
relationships with teachers and classmates), of a social network (e.g., relationships with
peers), and of other family relationships (e.g., siblings, extended family) all work
together to provide the context for the youth’s development. The more positive ties a
teen has within and among these different networks, the more positive his or her
personal development will be.

While Lerner’s theory focuses on individual development, the focus on
contextualism emphasizes that the individual and interpersonal relationships are not
isolated from one another, but are necessarily dependent on one another. That is, a
strong and thriving community is dependent upon positive school networks, positive
social networks, positive family networks, and positive personal development. Along
these lines, Watson-Thompson, Fawcett, and Schultz (2008) argue that “engaging
youth in planning and community action is a promising approach for community
mobilization for change and healthy youth development” (p. 72).

The findings from the current study suggest that the primary community institution
supported by youth-generated news is the school network. Specifically, through building
positive school attachment between teens and their individual schools, as well as the
local school system at large, youth news publications help to promote strong school
networks that contribute to positive individual youth development and positive
community development. Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, and Wong (2001) found that
positive school attachment among adolescents decreased their likelihood of involvement with deviant behaviors, such as cigarette smoking, alcohol use, marijuana use, delinquency, and violent behavior. Clearly, fewer instances of deviant behaviors among youth in a local community are important not only for the future success of individual teens, but for the overall well-being of that community, present and future.

**Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory**

Turning lastly in the discussion of theoretical contributions to Bandura’s social cognitive theory, the findings from the current study demonstrate how youth-generated news publications can promote both direct and socially mediated communication channels for positive community change.

In the direct pathway, communication media promote changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding audience individuals. In the socially-mediated pathway, media influences are used to link participants to social networks and community settings. (Bandura, 2004, p. 76)

As a psychological perspective, social cognitive theory holds that people have individual agency and can influence their own behaviors and life circumstances intentionally. In this way, social cognitive theory offers a direct contrast to functionalist and behavioral psychological perspectives, which essentially suggest that human behavior is simply governed response to environmental stimuli (Bandura, 1999). Social cognitive theory holds that people act as a result of the intersection of three means of influence – internal personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental events. Thus, this theory serves to bridge sociostructural theories (which for the purposes of the current study can be seen to include a focus on the broader structure of a local community) and psychological theories focusing on individual-level processes. While Bandura notes that these two schools of thought on their own are often considered as rival conceptions of
human behavior, social cognitive theory provides an integrated perspective that embraces the value of both.

Within this integrated context then, individuals can learn about their environments and act accordingly through either direct experience or social modeling (Bandura, 2004). That is, people can either learn through a process of personal trial and error, which can be both tedious and costly when mistakes can result in injurious consequences, or by observing the successes and failures modeled in the lives of others. Looking specifically at social modeling, learning through the experiences of others can inform individuals, motivate them to act according to behaviors that produce shared desired outcomes, prompt and guide people to behave according to socially predominant norms, and further shape social constructions. However, the application of this learning as actual behavioral change is dependent upon a person’s sense of individual and collective efficacy, his or her goals and aspirations, the perceived outcomes of given behaviors, and perceived facilitators and impediments to success.

Bandura (2004) suggests that effective social change efforts must utilize a variety of communication channels to influence learning through a direct path of informing individuals, as well as through modeling the desired behaviors. He goes further to argue that popular entertainment can be particularly effective in communicating to youth through what Singhal and Rogers (1999) call entertainment-education. Specifically, Bandura proposes that infusing popular entertainment, such as music concerts, videos, and audio recordings, with positive themes addressing important social issues like substance abuse, violence, teen sexuality, and gender equality can serve as a valuable communication resource for reaching youth with messages of social change.
The categories that emerged in the content analysis and in the interviews show that youth-generated news platforms are fulfilling both the direct and socially mediated functions of media in a community. Clearly, the emergence of the pop culture category in this study, as it was often shown as a vehicle for attracting youth interest in significant social and community issues, is in direct alignment with Bandura’s and Singhal and Rogers’s propositions about the power of media to apply entertainment-education as an effective communication channel for reaching youth populations with social change messages. The content’s promotion of school attachment and of virtues and values, which included the importance of community involvement and concern, shows that youth news participants are making significant efforts to inform, motivate, and guide a targeted teen audience with respect to opportunities for community betterment.

At the same time, the interviews conducted in this study suggest that both the product and process of youth-generated news help to promote discussion among community members about teen-relevant issues and connect various community institutions together for a common network of support. The positive mediated messages put forth in youth-generated news provide the audience with a means of learning through the transmission of direct information, but these messages also help to model pro-social behavior as youth read about and see examples of their peers who are positively involved in the community. Moreover, these messages can empower self-efficacy, promote a sense of collective efficacy among youth and adults alike, and even facilitate the attainment of personal goals among teens, all of which are important for putting learning into action and achieving social change under Bandura’s (2004) theory.
Practical Implications

The results of this study suggest that youth-generated news publications in both scholastic and non-scholastic settings do indeed serve a positive function in promoting community attachment and that they offer a great deal of potential to activate local youth for even further contribution to their communities. However, in order to build upon the strengths of youth news operations, it is important that the adults who work with these teens not impose strict professional preconceptions about what constitutes journalism. Certainly, youth should be challenged to think outside themselves and evaluate issues from a variety of perspectives. The encouragement of critical thinking is, after all, one of the benefits teens can derive from producing and consuming youth news (Goodman, 2003). However, if youth are not given an opportunity to express themselves and their opinions to some extent in the work they create, this study suggests that they are not likely to participate. Moreover, a youth news publication that looks and sounds too much like a professional, adult-generated news product is unlikely to appeal to a youth audience.

Along these same lines, while scholastic and non-scholastic youth news sites might benefit from a bit more consideration of targeting an adult audience, the results of this study suggest that shifting the primary focus away from teen consumers would be detrimental. One of the greatest strengths of youth-generated news is that through the vehicle of self-expression, it allows youth in a local community to share in their common experiences and to support one another in the process of growing up. Abandoning this peer support network in favor of a publication aimed primarily at adults is likely to come across as contrived and inauthentic. However, given the fact that adults are a secondary, perhaps incidental, audience for these youth news outlets, there is a
potential for youth voice to reach the adults in positions of power, which should not be ignored. Youth and adults involved in these publications should emphasize to participants that while the priority should remain reaching an underserved audience of community teens, their messages also carry the power for systemic social change when they effectively communicate to the decision-makers of older generations (Inouye, Lacoe, & Henderson-Frakes, 2004).

Youth news publications must also make allowances for the busy schedules teens face. Given that journalism is not their full-time profession and that they continuously juggle numerous curricular and extracurricular activities, teens must be allowed a degree of flexibility in their participation while at the same time learning accountability. Furthermore, as noted by Hefner (2004), there is a desperate need for more adult involvement in producing youth journalism as well. Youth news organizations tend to suffer from a significant lack of funding, which means there is little money to go around in paying the salaries of adult editors and advisors, not to mention acquiring necessary physical and technological resources.

A successful youth journalism program, scholastic or non-scholastic, must have the support of external partners, be that in the form of advertisers, philanthropic donors, or even volunteers. This means not only is it important for businesses, foundations, and individuals in the community to step up and invest in the work of these publications, but the youth and adults at these sites must be proactive in making their needs known to these potential partners. Coordinated public relations efforts that promote the value of youth-generated news and its potential to strengthen the community are essential to the success of such programs.
The importance of community partnerships and funding are even more important if youth news publications are to follow through with their intentions to reach teens through dynamic multimedia websites. The technological resources and skilled staff members required to bring youth news fully into the current digital age mandate that these publications have the support of community partners. While this study points out that reports of print journalism’s death may be greatly exaggerated, it also points to the fact that creating engaging multimedia news outlets is and will be an important part of the modern journalistic milieu, arguably even more so for publications aimed toward youth.

Lastly, the results of the study suggest that the primary way teens use these platforms to connect with the institutions of their communities is through promoting school attachment. While school attachment has been shown to be an important component of both community attachment and individual adolescent development, it is the suggestion of this study that youth news publications, particularly non-scholastic publications, might consider ways to connect teens more directly with community networks beyond their schools.

Specifically, helping youth look beyond their immediate microcosms of school and peers and toward broader community involvement may help to promote greater overall awareness of community issues, a broader-based sense of community attachment, and a more long-term view of community involvement. Evans (2007) notes that a wide array of research has demonstrated that youth community involvement and community service promote numerous benefits for adolescents, including pro-social development, greater self-efficacy, moral-political awareness, civic identity, political
identity, decreased likelihood of dropping out of school, and an increased likelihood of activism in adulthood. Expanding these benefits to the broader community level, Evans goes further to argue that:

If what makes communities strong are collections of people who feel connected, responsible, supported, and influential, then we should make considerable effort to create environments for and with young people that promote the development of these characteristics. Too often young people get excluded from matters of community yet are expected to behave in ways that are respectful, caring, and responsible to community. In addition, those young people who do get opportunities to be involved in community are often from privileged families, leaving out those who could most benefit from feeling a sense of belonging and purpose. (p. 697)

Thus, diverse and inclusive participation of teens in youth-generated news publications has the potential for positive individual and community-level outcomes, if youth are challenged and encouraged to engage actively in the local community. Non-scholastic publications are particularly ripe for promoting this type of involvement because they are less confined in terms of topics that must be covered and generally attract a more heterogeneous group of youth participants.

Within a scholastic context, it is to be expected that the promotion of school attachment will remain, as it should, one of the strongest values of student-produced content. Again, it is the primary purpose of high-school news outlets to cover the events and issues directly relevant to the home school. However, this study suggests that there is still room for expanding coverage in high-school publications to consider topics and promote teen involvement in the general local community, particularly when there is a connection back to the school. Encouraging high-school students to engage in their communities means that scholastic journalism programs must be deliberate in looking for these topical intersections between school life and that of the general community, while at the same time not neglecting their unique purpose of covering the people,
issues, and events of the school. Here again, given the important role that school plays in teens’ lives, youth news publications must find a balance. A youth news program – scholastic or non-scholastic – that seeks to engage teens in the community without acknowledging the importance of local schools in that process does so with dangerous disregard for the organic social networks already in place.

**Limitations and Future Research**

As with any qualitative examination, this study is limited by the inductive interpretations of the researcher. While the results presented here offer rich authenticity, nuance, and detail in understanding the connections of youth-generated news and community attachment, they are not generalizable. A thorough interpretative analysis of the 14 diverse sites examined in this study does not support assumptions that examination of other potentially selected sites, even those in metropolitan settings, would follow the same patterns of emergent categories. Moreover, given the lack of controls such as inter-coder reliability entailed in quantitative content analyses, the findings of this study must be considered in light of the fact that they are the product of the sole researcher’s interpretation. However, given that the emergent categories are consistent with existing literature, there is good reason to stand confident in the validity of the findings.

Nonetheless, future studies examining the contribution of youth-generated news to community attachment should consider employing generalizable quantitative methods. Possible methods for future research in this area might include a quantitative content analysis of youth news web pages or a survey of youth news participants about their experiences based on theoretically derived variables. Given the particular prevalence of self-expression as a vehicle for youth voice and peer support that emerged across the
findings for the content analysis and interview findings in this study, these categories seem naturally conducive to a follow-up quantitative analysis. Likewise, the importance of school attachment revealed in both scholastic and non-scholastic sites suggests that this is another category that should be investigated through quantitative methods. In addition, a separate quantitative study that focused explicitly on the application of multimedia features across a larger sample of youth news websites would provide a broader understanding of how these capabilities are being used – or, as this study suggests, are not being used – on youth-generated news websites more generally.

Another limitation of the current study is that it assumes, based on a thorough review of existing literature, that indicators of community attachment in content and interview responses suggests these concepts will likewise manifest (at least potentially) among consumers of youth news. This is, of course, an untested assumption in this study. It is conceivable that youth news content could do very well in promoting community attachment but that the consumers of these teens’ work are not stirred to be more attached to or more involved in their community. A future survey of youth news consumers to examine their levels of attachment and involvement with the community is necessary to make valid and reliable statements about the presence or absence of these attributes in the audience. However, unless one can control for time and other influences in such a study and assure that any increase in community attachment among members of the audience is subsequent and tied directly to their consumption of youth news, then researchers will still be left unable to make causal statements among these variables.
A further limitation of this study is that all but one of the youth content producers interviewed in this study were female. While three of the eight adults interviewed were male, only one youth interviewed, Conner Sarrich, a 16-year-old sophomore and video producer at The Word of Grandview Heights High School in Columbus, OH, was male. Despite the fact that interviewees came from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, this overrepresentation of female perspectives in the interviews suggests that results for this portion of the study may likely have been different had more males been included.

For example, Campbell and Lee (1990) point that women typically tend to maintain social contacts with their neighbors more than men do, a phenomenon that appears to be associated with gender roles even when controlling for other factors. Thus, it may be that males have more individualistic motivations for participating in youth-generated news production and are less concerned about serving as a peer support or having their voice heard. The sole interview with a male in this study indicated that, for him, the fun of the process of producing youth news content was a primary motivator for his participation. However, it should be noted that while no other males were interviewed in this study, many of the articles examined in the content analysis – which produced self-expression and peer support as the most dominant categories – were generated by male authors.

A final limitation of this study, and one that is common to research on online content, is that it only provides findings about the sites examined for a very specific point in time. With the fast-changing nature of the Web and all digital media, there are inherent concerns that the results are outdated before they are written. Moreover, the
fact that content from one of the 14 sites, *The Argus*, was collected roughly six months after web pages were captured from the other 13 sites, there is some question about whether it provides a valid comparison for the other sites in the sample. However, these limitations of the changing nature of the Web are mostly relevant for the technological questions addressed in this study. The categories that emerged in the content analysis regarding the nature of the content and in the interviews regarding teens' journalistic experiences are less likely to be influenced by the changing nature of the Web than are the modes of delivery.

**Conclusion**

As far back as 1942, Campbell noted that as an outlet for students' self-expression, scholastic journalism helps youth to integrate their personalities and strengthen personal character. It serves to provide “unique adventures in the discovery, exploration, development, and utilization” of teens’ interests and abilities (p. 707).

It not only develops to a high degree the pupil's proficiency in reading, listening, speaking, and writing, but also "enriches personal living and deepens understanding of social relationships." Direct contact with life both in individual projects and in co-operative activities in journalism courses and on publication staffs stimulates the development of qualities of character and personality desirable in citizens of a democracy. (p. 707)

Nearly 70 years later, though youth journalism has expanded to include non-scholastic forms of youth media and though it makes use of modern online technology as a delivery medium, these same principles espoused by Campbell likewise emerged as categories in this 21st-century analysis of youth-generated news content.

The strongest take-away point of this study is that youth thrive when given an opportunity to have a voice on issues they care about, and communities are better for it when they provide youth with opportunities to do so. Allowing youth to express
themselves constructively and with the guidance of supportive adults through media production can serve as an effective vehicle for promoting broad-based youth inclusion and attachment in local communities. It can create and strengthen positive connections between youth and important community ecologies, including school networks, family networks, peer networks, and the collective sphere of community service organizations. Challenging youth to move beyond pure self-expression and to apply journalistic standards for thinking critically about these issues can further aid in developing youth content producers and content consumers to become civically engaged and informed adults.

The tools of this communication will continue to change. The continuous evolution of digital technology proves that new media formats and easily accessible global information networks will continue to expand the ways in which people send and receive messages. Research indicates that it is youth who are leading the way in adoption and application of these technologies. It is critical that these young people have knowledgeable and supportive adults to guide them in applying their technological aptitude in ways that serve their communities. Youth-generated news – both in and outside of schools – offers a rich mine of opportunities for this aim.
I am a student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

I am doing a research project that studies how youth are making news on the Web. As part of this project, I am interviewing youth around the country who are involved in producing online news. In addition to looking at the online work created by youth like yourself, I am also interested to understand your experiences in making the news.

With your permission, I will conduct a recorded phone interview regarding your interests and insights related to online youth news and how it impacts the community. Only I will have access to this recording and after the interview has been transcribed, it will be erased.

The length of the interview will depend on how much you would like to say. However, I expect it to take between 30 and 45 minutes. I may also ask to speak with you later in the future as a follow-up to our interview.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may decline to answer any question you feel uncomfortable about. You may also stop participation at any time during the interview. After you have completed the interview, you may ask to have your answers dropped from the study.

There is no payment or direct benefit to you for participating. However, I believe this research may help people better understand the ways youth media operate and can contribute to their communities. There are no risks to you for participating in this study.
With your permission, your name or other basic identifying information may be used in articles resulting from this research. These articles may be presented at academic conferences or published in academic journals. If you prefer, I will withhold any identifying information about you and use only general, non-identifying descriptions in discussing our conversation today.

If you have any questions about this study before or after the interviews have been completed, you may contact me at: [redacted]. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Walsh-Childers, at [redacted]. For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Florida IRB office at (352) 392-0433 or P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

Are there any questions I can answer for you before we begin the interview?
I am a Ph.D. student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. My supervisor is Dr. Kim Walsh-Childers, a Professor in the college.

I am doing a research project that studies how youth are making news on the Web. As part of this project, I am interviewing youth around the country who are involved in producing online news. In addition to looking at the online work created by youth like your child, I am also interested to understand their experiences in making the news.

With your permission, I will conduct a recorded phone interview with your child regarding his or her interests, motivations, experiences in both rewards and challenges related to producing online news, and other perspectives and insights regarding what he or she feels is the impact of the news product on the community.

The length of the interview will depend on how much your child, the participant, wishes to say. However, I anticipate that the interviews will take between 30 and 45 minutes each. It is possible that I would interview your child a second time as a follow-up to our initial interview.

It is important you know that your child’s participation is completely voluntary. If your child agrees to participate, he or she may decline to answer any question he/she does not wish to answer. Your child also may stop participation at any time during the interview. After your child has completed the interview, you or your child may ask to have his/her answers dropped from the study.
There is no compensation for participation and no other direct benefit to you or your child for participating. However, I believe this research may help both academics and practitioners better understand the ways in which youth media operate and can contribute to their communities. There are no risks to your child for participating in this study.

With your permission, your child’s identity, such as name or status as a student, may be used in articles resulting from this research, which I may submit for academic conferences or publications.

I intend to make audio recordings of interviews for this study. Only I will have access to the audio files. After the interviews have been transcribed, the files will be erased.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me by email at: [redacted] or by phone at (352) 273-1639. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Walsh-Childers at [redacted]. For questions regarding your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Florida IRB office at (352) 392-0433 or P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

Are there any questions I can answer for you at this time? Do you give your permission for your child to participate in this study?
APPENDIX C
ADULT ADVISOR ASSENT SCRIPT

I am a Ph.D. student in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. My supervisor is Dr. Kim Walsh-Childers, a Professor in the college.

I am currently gathering data for research regarding youth-generated online news in both scholastic and non-scholastic settings. As part of this data collection, I am interviewing youth who are involved in producing online news, as well as their teachers, advisors, or mentors who supervise their news production activities.

The purpose of this research is to examine the content that youth are producing on scholastic and non-scholastic youth news websites, as well as to understand the ways they describe their experiences in producing online news.

With your permission, I will conduct a recorded phone interview with the youth under your charge regarding his or her interests, motivations, experiences in both rewards and challenges related to producing online news, and other perspectives and insights regarding what he or she feels is the impact of the news product on the community. I am interested in also potentially interviewing you, the advisor, separately in order to gain your perspectives on the experiences of youth in producing online news and its impacts on the community.

The length of the interview will depend on how much the youth participant or you wish to say. However, I anticipate that the interviews will take between 30 and 45 minutes each. It is possible that I would interview you or the youth a second time as a follow-up to our initial interview.
It is important you know that participation in this research is completely voluntary and subject to yours and the youth’s approval. If you and/or the youth agree to participate, either or both of you may decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You and/or the youth also may stop participation at any time during the interview. After the interviews are completed, you and/or the youth may ask to have your respective answers dropped from the study.

There is no compensation for participation and no other direct benefit to you or the youth for participating. However, I believe this research may help both academics and practitioners better understand the ways in which youth media operate and can contribute to their communities. There are no risks to you or the youth for participating in this study.

With your permission, yours and the youth’s identity, (e.g. name or status as a student or youth media advisor), may be used in articles resulting from this research, which I may submit for academic conferences or publications. If you prefer, I will withhold any identifying information about you or the youth and use general, non-identifying descriptions to reference your participation.

I intend to make audio recordings of interviews for this study. Only I will have access to the audio files. After the interviews have been transcribed, the files will be erased.

If you have any questions about this study before or after the interviews have been completed, you may contact me at: [redacted]. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Walsh-Childers, at: [redacted]. For questions regarding yours and the youth’s rights as
research participants, you may contact the University of Florida IRB office at (352) 392-0433 or P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

Are there any questions I can answer for you before we begin the interview?
APPENDIX D
SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTH

1. Tell me about a typical day for you?
   - Probe on activities related to journalism

2. What do you like about writing/photography/working on the website? Why?

3. How did you get interested in working with your website?

4. Describe your newsroom (or classroom) for me?
   - Probe on peer interactions
   - Probe on interactions with advisor, teacher, principal, staff, other adults
   - Probe on comments related to community

5. How does what you do affect others?

6. How do you think your website affects your local community?
   - Probe on comments related to community building

7. How would you describe your personal role as a teen journalist to the community?

8. What does it mean to you to be a journalist? How would you describe your experience as a teen journalist?
   - What is the greatest compliment that someone could give you about the work you do with the website?

9. What are the differences between you and an adult journalist?
   - Do you think you bring something different to the table?

10. Who would you say is your target audience?
    - Probe on comments related to youth audience or adult audience

11. Are there any challenges or barriers to doing your work?
12. Do you feel valued and respected by your peers at the website? By the adults that work with you?

13. Do you feel free to write/video/photograph the things that you want to?

14. How do you think what you’re doing now will affect you as an adult?
APPENDIX E
SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ADVISORS

1. Can you tell me about a typical day at (publication)?
   - Probe on activities related to journalism

2. Describe your newsroom (or classroom) for me?
   - Probe on peer interactions
   - Probe on interactions with advisor, teacher, principal, staff, other adults
   - Probe on comments related to community

3. Can you describe your operation to me? (deadlines, staff meetings, how do
   youth get assigned stories, do youth do just writing and art or are they involved
   with production?)

4. What is the primary purpose of your publication?

5. How did you get interested and involved in working with (publication)?

6. Why do you think youth are interested in working with (publication)? What
   motivates them? What do they like about it?

7. What would you say is the primary value of your publication? Who is the
   primary beneficiary of the work you do at (publication)?
   - For youth – writers and audience
   - For others – community?

8. How do you think your website affects your local community?
   - Probe on comments related to community attachment

9. Do the youth there refer to themselves as journalists? What do you think that
   means to them?

10. How would you describe your experience in working with these teens?
- What are the ages of the youth you work with?
- What is the greatest compliment that someone could give you about the work you do with the website?

11. How does youth media or youth journalism differ from mainstream adult media or journalism?
- Do you think they bring something different to the table? Do you think it primarily benefits youth or also others in the community?

12. Who would you say is your target audience?
- Probe on comments related to youth audience or adult audience

13. Are there any challenges or barriers to doing your work? What are they?

14. Do you think the youth there feel valued and respected by their peers at the website? By the adults that work with them?

15. Do you notice any generational barriers in working with these youth? How do you overcome them?

16. How would you describe the value of youth-adult partnerships?

17. How do you think what these youth are doing now will affect them as adults?

18. Do you think your publication is a positive contribution to your community? Why? How?

19. What is your title?
- How long have you worked with (publication)?
- How long have you lived in the community?
- Do you mind if I ask your age?
Zoe Newcomb – Youth journalist

The Broadview – Convent of the Sacred Heart High School, San Francisco, California

Interview date: May 17, 2010

Researcher: All right, looks like we’re running. Um, ok, so, uh, I thought to get started if you could, uh, maybe just tell me a little bit about a typical day for you at the, uh, at The Broadview.

Newcomb: At The Broadview, ok. Well, on days that we have full-day layouts and work, um, workdays laying out the paper, we usually start in the morning kind of getting together a plan for what needs to get done for the day and have a meeting with the editors. And then, we, um, all kind of, all start working on the individual pages that we are assigned, and it’s kind of, it’s pretty casual. I mean, there’s some staff that are a little more, um, strict about what they’re doing, but it’s kind of casual just working on what needs to get done and if you need help you talk to one of the editors or you talk to our advisor. And, uh, so, yeah, I mean, what kind of, what, what do you want to hear about during the day.

Researcher: Oh, uh, well, uh, I, I guess, the, by asking you that question it’s sort of to see, uh, you know, kind of where you, you know, where you go with things and then I, you know… I’m trying as much as possible to let you, you know, to, to ask questions but let you steer the conversation according to what you think is important. But, um, so, uh, but, I mean, I can ask you more specifically, what, what, um, got you interested in, in working at The Broadview?
Newcomb: Um, well, I had done journalism in middle school because then, it really… I got interested in it because it kind of gave me an opportunity to learn about things that nobody really had answers to and kind of give a voice to things. A lot of people don’t really know about what’s going on. So, when I was looking at high schools, applying to high schools, that was definitely a priority for me. And so, I, that was one of the major reasons I actually chose the high school I go to was because of our newspaper. It’s, um, the support’s there from the advisor and we have a lot of resources and the ability to kind of learn about things and get opportunities that you don’t get at a lot of other schools, um, which is something that was really important to me. And, since being on The Broadview it’s really, it’s a… Being a part of a newspaper is a good place to kind of plug in in your school and you kind of have your home and your family with the people on the staff. And, it gives you a place, you know, to go. At the end of the day, you’re with your friends and you’re working on something together. And so, it’s not like, it’s kind of a place to hang out as well as do work.

Researcher: Um hum.

Newcomb: Um hum. And, um, yeah, so that’s kind of how I started getting interested in it.

Researcher: So, can you tell me a little bit more then about… You said, um, uh, when you got started in middle school, you, uh, one of the things you like about journalism is being able to give a voice to things and to tell people about what’s going on ‘cause you said they, often times you feel that they sort of don’t know what’s going on. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? What do you mean by give a voice to things?
Newcomb: Ok, well, in middle school it was, I mean, definitely smaller scale. I know moments like the big story when I was in seventh grade I was, I don’t know, like twelve, thirteen years old, I, I had a story that I was writing just about like the, it was about the bathrooms in the public schools and about how they’re, in the school district there are all these regulations for how clean the bathrooms are supposed to be and what they’re supposed to have in them and stuff, and how the bathrooms weren’t meeting up to those standards. And so, that was just a really interesting place for me to start out at, kind of, you know, point out the fact that, you know, the schools weren’t meeting up to the things that they were supposed to and pointing out, you know, the bathrooms are just a really important part of the school there. So then as I got older and you kind of learn about things and you’re opened up to a bigger world, um, it’s really interesting to learn about issues that are going on, you know, in third-world countries that maybe people in the school don’t know about and if you write a story about it, it kind of opens people’s eyes and allows them to get involved in the things that they might not have known about. And, um, so now, I mean, we’re writing stories and it’s writing about things that, I mean, specifically, I recently was writing a story about how I go to an all-girls school, and how it’s, they’re creating co-ed classes with our brother school. And, nobody really knew what was going on and the administration wasn’t really talking about it. And so, I wrote a story and it kind of had all this interesting information that nobody knew but they wanted to know, and when the administration read the story they kind of freaked out because they realized themselves that they didn’t really know what they were doing. So, it can really change people’s perspectives a lot to read a story. Not only
will it help them learn about new things, but it can help them learn about themselves and how they’re doing things and create a better environment.

Researcher: So, what was the administration’s response when they, when they read this story?

Newcomb: Well, um, we are a prior review newspaper. So, they, um, actually pulled the story a couple of hours before it was supposed to go to print, so we had to fill it with another story. But the response, it was actually kind of, very condescending response from them. I sat down with the head of school and she kind of just told me that it was nothing I had done, and it just wasn’t the right time for them to have that information out in the open, which didn’t really make any sense because it was just information like where the classes would be taking place, who the teachers would be, how people would be getting from the different campuses, et cetera, that sort of stuff. And then, um, the head of school actually went on to blame it on the director of, there’s a director of four schools who basically is in charge of our brother schools and the elementary schools, and the head of my school actually blamed it on him, and then I spoke to him later and he blamed it on the head of school at my school. So, it was just very interesting to see the lack of communication and kind of definitely the fear of the student newspaper in the administration.

Researcher: Um hum. Do, I mean, do you know what their specific objection was to, to… You said that it, from what you could tell it seemed like what you were writing was fairly benign, but evidently they had some sort of objection. Do you know what it was?
Newcomb: Yeah, I think ultimately it was just they were afraid of the response because they knew they wouldn’t be getting a good response from people and they really wanted to not, they wanted to keep it in the dark as much as possible so that they could kind of just get it over with and they didn’t want to have to take the criticism from people was kind of what they were saying basically.

Researcher: So, so, I mean, what, what, I mean, what was it that they were afraid that they would not be getting a...

Newcomb: They were, I think they were afraid of the alumni and parents just because they were essentially making an all-girls school into a co-ed school without really consulting anyone about it.

Researcher: Aha… I see. Um hum. Um, and so what was your, how, how did, how did you feel when, when they told you that?

Newcomb: Um, it was definitely hard for me because I felt like I put a lot of time into this story. It was a really important story to me and I know to my classmates. And, definitely it was very eye-opening to me to kind of help me realize that, you know, adults don’t always do the right thing. And so, when I had interviews with all of these administrators they had spoken freely with me, and then when I, when they saw their words put in, into a story, they kind of backpedaled and didn’t really want to talk about it anymore. So, it was hard for me but then now I feel like it gives me a, more motivation to do the same things, to find these stories that people aren’t talking about and write about them because they are important and people need to know about them, even if the administrators or the person in charge of it doesn’t really want to talk about it.
Researcher: So, what, I mean, what’s, um… So, so you do these stories and then, what, uh, I mean, how, how do you, how do you go, how do you get them out there if, um… I mean, do you think this is sort of an isolated incident that they, that they pulled the story, or do you think that, uh, I mean, is, is this something that you’ve run up against in the past or that you foresee running up against, um, as, as you do these stories that you feel are important to get out? I guess what I’m curious about is do you think this is sort of going to be a constant butting of heads.

Newcomb: Um, no, it’s certainly not isolated. Um, since that happened I’ve actually sat down with the head of my school to try and figure out what the next step should be. Um, we kind of come up with recently, several weeks ago, come up with a plan. They had, before each issue came out had reviewed the mock ups of the page. So, that included the stories, the pictures, the captions, everything that was going into the paper. And so, we’ve kind of come up with an agreement to, that they will be reading some of the bigger stories as well as the columns and then they like have approval of like editorial cartoons as well, which may still seem like a lot, but it’s definitely a big step for a paper from going from everything being reviewed to just particular things. So, to me, like, that’s hopefully the first foot in the door to getting rid of the censorship so that we do have the freedom to write these stories that are important. And then also, another outlet kind of for these stories is online, which I eventually was able to write that story about the co-ed classes, but had I not been able to write that, I probably, my next step would have been to turn to publishing the story online, or, you know, send, like giving people copies of the story to read because I do think it was important for them to hear about the information that affected them.
Researcher: Um hum. So, a, a couple of things then. Um, one, just so I understand what you’re saying, um, so now the, the administration has agreed to, uh, basically have prior review to the things that you mentioned – the columns, the, the big stories, editorial cartoons – but, uh, sort of the, the regular flow of, of news articles and feature stories that you might do, uh, for the newspaper, those they’re, they’re, they’re taking their hands off of that. Is that right?

Newcomb: Yes, that’s correct.

Researcher: Ok. And then, when you say, uh, um, go, go to publish it online, do you mean, uh, The Broadview online or do you mean through another publication outlet?

Newcomb: I mean from another publication outlet, be that, you know, creating an entirely new website for the story, or even, you know, through Facebook™ or some sort of website like that, that definitely… It wouldn’t have been a very formal, like, it wouldn’t have been like publishing it on The Broadview website, but I think just the idea of having the story out there so that people could read it was the important idea behind it.

Researcher: Um hum. So, the, the stories that actually go on The Broadview Online have gone through the same, uh, editorial vetting process as, as the stories in print?

Newcomb: Correct.

Researcher: Ok. Um, so, uh, what, where does, I mean, obviously, you know, you, you seem to be, uh, you know, relatively unique in, in that you, you know, um, have, have an interest in, you know, really, uh, getting voice out there, uh, you know, even
perhaps more than other, other youth that I’ve talked to. So, can you tell me a little bit about why it’s important for youth to have a voice in, in this dialogue?

Newcomb: Um hum. Um, in the dialogue do you mean in learning about new things or in just being about a part of the decision-making process in their own lives?

Researcher: Yeah, let me, let me rephrase the question. Um, why is it important for youth to have a voice on topics, uh, that are relevant to them and their schools and/or their communities, um, and, and the events and the, the issues that surround them?

Newcomb: Ok, well, I mean, this is not all of the time, but I know a lot of the time, adults who are running something may not have a perspective that students have, may not understand exactly how their decisions are affecting students. So, by no means do I want to cut out the adult authority in school because I think that’s really important in helping like kids to develop into adults. But at the same time, there are things that adults don’t understand and they don’t always make decisions that will best suit students. So, when students are involved they’ll, they’re able to work with administrators and teachers to create an atmosphere that is the best for growing and learning in, which is, I mean, ultimately the most important thing about schools and student newspapers and any kind of organization centered around youth, is helping those youth to grow and develop.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and so, so then on the whole, I mean, do you feel that the work you’re doing there at The Broadview, the work that you and your peers are doing there at the, at The Broadview, um, do you think that it is effective in accomplishing that purpose?
Newcomb: Um, I think it’s not as effective as I would like it to be, especially because of our, the censorship surrounding it and those issues, but I would like, what I would like in an ideal situation is for our paper to be able to grow and have every story have the kind of same impact that my co-ed classes story had so that we really could be writing about things that do matter because I know, well in the past because we know that we have censorship we choose not to write about stories that would otherwise be relevant because we know that they would just be pulled and it really wouldn’t, would be pointless to have the story pulled and thrown away. But it would, I would like for the paper to be able to develop to the point to where we have control over what goes in so we actually can have an effect on the decisions being made and like what senior administration is thinking. Because I know when they read the co-ed classes story it, they, it challenged them to think about it in a different, from a different perspective. And, if all of our stories could have that same impact, I think we really would be able to have a pretty good, great influence on the community.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and you, you mentioned that they, they, the different administrators and different, uh, uh, heads in your school that they, that they were willing and, and talked to you freely, they, were they aware that you were working on a story when you were talking to them?

Newcomb: Oh yes, they were completely aware. It was set up as an interview for the newspaper, I was, I was writing down their quotes. I was, I mean, they knew what the story was about. The quotes were in the words that they said and completely related to the story. And, the administrators volunteered information that, you know, probably wasn’t appropriate for them to be volunteering if they didn’t want the information to be
public, which, I mean, I don’t know if that was because, you know, I was a student and they didn’t think that I would actually write a story that had very big influence, or if it was because they just weren’t thinking about what they were saying. I’m not sure.

Researcher: And, and what about the other students there that you work with? I mean, do they sort of share the same, um, mindset and, and outlook on, on stories and, and on your, your role and, and your purpose in, uh, in, in putting out the school newspaper? I mean, do they want to, do they want to tell these sort of stories or do you, do you feel and, and find yourself sort of, um, uh, you know, do you, do you ever, do you feel alone in, in the, your desire to get these stories out? Are they more interested, I guess, in, you know, sort of more fluffier or casual stories?

Newcomb: Well, I know there’s a small group of people who definitely feel the same as I do, but then again there’s a very large group of people on staff who are a lot more casual about the journalism, and they’re just, to them it’s just another class, just another something, assignment that they have to write to get a grade. But to me it’s more than that. And, I think that that’s, I mean, I’ve always interested in journalism, so that’s not something you can force upon a person, but I do feel like there’s only a few people who feel the same way that I do.

Researcher: Um hum. And, and so what, I mean, what got you interested in journalism even in, in middle school?

Newcomb: Um, well, it was actually the advisor at the newspaper in middle school was a teacher that I had had in sixth grade before I joined in seventh grade. And, I think just the influence of a teacher who even as a seventh-grader treated me as though I had some sort of influence and power to write about something and actually effect
change was very important for me and it definitely shaped how I grew up in high school and the things that I chose to involve myself in, which just even like having, you know, in middle school to have somebody treat you that way and kind of guide you and respect you was very influential.

Researcher: Um hum. So then, the, was, was this a, mostly, primarily a, a single individual teacher slash advisor at the middle school newspaper that, that sort of had this influence and, and, uh, impact on you?

Newcomb: Yes, but then as I kind of continued in high school it became more than just a single advisor but about journalism and newspaper as a whole.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and, and so the, specifically the, the teacher in middle school, so was it a male, female, he, she?

Newcomb: Oh, it was a female teacher.

Researcher: Yeah, ok, so she, did she, so did she have this sort of, um, I mean, did she, did she communicate this same sort of mindset or, or attitude about the role of journalism being sort of, uh, an ability to hold powerful accountable and to, to impact change and that sort of thing? I mean, did she sort of, uh, did, did she sort of communicate those same sorts of ideas and principles?

Newcomb: Yeah, I mean, she did communicate those principles directly in speaking to us and through the way her actions and the way that she worked. And, I mean, this is not directly about journalism, but she was a like Ivy-league educated Ph.D. from Harvard teacher teaching at a public middle school in San Francisco when she really could have been teaching, I mean, university courses. And so, just to see that working to do something that you love and working for something that matters is more
important than just doing something because it has to be done or doing something to make money or something like that, which is also part of what inspired me because I really began to love journalism, so it’s not about kind of doing what everybody else is doing or doing what people say you should be doing. It’s about kind of following what you love and telling people about the things that influence you and the things that matter to you and getting those out there so other people can learn about them the way you have.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and so, I mean, are you considering a career in journalism or what’s your future plans?

Newcomb: Um, I’ve considered a career in journalism. I’m not sure right now. I’m also, um, seriously considering a career in international relations, which is the same sort of field in kind of getting involved in NGOs and organizations that work to help people who have less than you have, so, not exactly the same as journalism, but the same concept that you’re getting out there and trying to help people through whatever tools you have.

Researcher: Um hum. And, and what about your advisor now, how would you describe your relationship with her?

Newcomb: My advisor now has been a really interesting relationship actually. It was, uh, very shocking coming from an advisor in middle school who had really kind of like, I don’t want to use the word coddled, but that same sort of like she was constantly helping you by your side, to my advisor now freshman year who definitely was very strict and she was straightforward and she wasn’t, um, I mean, lying to help your feelings. And, that really did help me grow as a journalist and has improved my writing
and it made me stronger and it gave me the confidence to go out and interview people and talk to people that maybe before I had been a little more timid and afraid to talk to. And, I think ultimately that atmosphere, which was a little bit tougher and a little bit more realistic, has helped me grow a lot more.

Researcher: Um hum. So, so, you would say that that, that her approach has been constructive and empowering in, in the way that she’s gone about doing it and, and not the other way around? I mean, it’s, it’s been a positive thing?

Newcomb: Yes, it has been a positive thing. And, I know some people, I mean, not, there have been a lot of people who have seen how tough my advisor is on the journalists and say, “Wow, I can’t… I mean, how do you do that? That must be a lot of work. It must be really stressful.” And, it kind of scares a lot of people off from joining or staff, or it kind of scares them off at the beginning. But I think when you stick with it, it really is so, it, it really is so beneficial because it has helped me grow in so many ways, not just in journalism.

Researcher: Do, do you feel generally, uh, valued and respected and appreciated by your, by your advisor currently?

Newcomb: Oh yes, certainly. It’s not at all that she doesn’t appreciate you. It’s that you kind of can tell that she appreciates you so much and she understands like your values so much that she’s pushing you to grow and to be better than you are.

Researcher: Uh huh. Um, and, and then what about, uh, I mean, do you think that your, um, and, and I’m, you know, just using The Broadview… Actually, I tell you what, before I ask you that, let me… You mentioned that everything on the website has gone through the same vetting process as, as the things in the newspaper. Are, are you, are
you doing anything differently with the website? When I say you, I mean, you know, the staff there, you guys collectively. Are you doing anything differently with the website than what you are putting out in print?

Newcomb: Um, well, we would like to be doing more than we are. And, we do Web briefs that do not go in the paper, but the main, the stories over five, six hundred words, all of those stories are, um, come from print. So, it’s not, there’s not a whole, we don’t have a whole online staff, or, and we don’t write major breaking, we don’t write as many major breaking stories as we’d like to.

Researcher: So, um, I mean, are there, so, um, aside from the staff, and, and you said breaking news stories?

Newcomb: Um hum.

Researcher: Yeah, other than that, what, I mean, are there other sorts of things that you’d like to be doing online that currently you guys aren’t?

Newcomb: Um, well, it would, we’d like to kind of have it more, a little more interactive so we can actually get the student body involved, so be that getting students just commenting on stories, or, you know, just taking a poll that we have on the website, or even just, I’m not sure but like somehow connecting students so that they actually rely on the website for news, not just go there because it’s the school newspaper website.

Researcher: Gotcha.

Newcomb: So, I’m not sure we, how we would go about doing that, but that’s definitely something that we are working on and working towards.
Researcher: Um, I mean, do you think that the, that, that the website, uh, does it, I mean, does it play a different function in that capacity in getting students involved or feeling connected to the school than the print product does?

Newcomb: You know, I think it does. I think people as of now are more likely to read the print newspaper and get their information from that, but if we were able to build the website in a way that it was more interactive and people really wanted to go to the website and spend time on the website, I think that would be an even more useful tool because people are always online. People are always on Facebook™ or writing papers or researching online. So, just to be able to open up a window in the background and have your news right there would really engage a lot more people. I think the issue is trying to bridge that gap though to get people to go to the website and like somehow trying to motivate them to go to that website in the first place is the biggest issue.

Researcher: Um hum. So, um, I mean, the, the print product, uh, the newspaper, do you think that it’s, uh, I mean, is it, is it pretty widely read? Is it embraced by the students there in the school?

Newcomb: Yeah, it is embraced by the students in the school and it’s, I mean, it’s a very small school but it’s read by everyone in the school and then it’s sent out to, um, I think it’s alumni in the past fifteen, twenty years or something. So, it’s definitely widely read. I don’t think we get as much of a response from the students as we do from alumni and adults, which it would be nice to have a greater response from students but people do read it and people do appreciate the stories and we hear back from the stories. And, so we know that people are reading and learning from it and it is a helpful resource to them.
Researcher: So, who, who would you say is your target audience for the work you do either in print or online.

Newcomb: The target audience is definitely the students first. That’s the most important part in a student run newspaper in a high school. We want to target the students because that’s primarily who it’s for. And then I think past the students kind of targeting parents so that they know what’s going on in the school, and then also administrators so they know, they have feedback and know maybe what they could do better or issues that are going on that they didn’t know about would be, those would be the people that we would target second.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and, and so, you said it is, it is widely read, um, the, the newspaper, um, and, and yet you’d like to do these other things, um, you know, online to, to get people more connected or, or more involved or, or feel, um, that that’s sort of the, the, uh, go to place to, to get the, the, the, the work that you guys are doing. Um, is that, I mean, is that particularly important for having a primary target audience of students?

Newcomb: Um, is it particularly important to get them to the website because that’s our student audience?

Researcher: Yeah, is it particularly important to develop the website in, in the ways that you, you mentioned that you would like to, um, as it relates to the, to the student population?

Newcomb: Yeah, I mean, I really think that it, it’s, it should be. I feel like it should be one of our biggest priorities because we’re only putting out a paper every six weeks, and there’s so many things that happen in between those six weeks that get overlooked.
or don’t get the recognition that they deserve. And, if we had a website that was
developed enough that students were going to it, we would have these stories on there
and there would constantly, students would constantly know what’s going on and be in
the loop on these things that I see get overlooked every day.

Researcher: Um hum. And, and so what about, um, do you think, do you think, uh,
the, the newspaper, the work that you guys are doing at The Broadview – and, you
know, just using that, your, the name of your publication collectively to include both the
website and the newspaper – do you think that that’s, um, that it connects to the general
local community and, and if so how, and if not why not?

Newcomb: I think it does connect to the general local community. I think our paper
does, from a lot of the other student papers I’ve read, I think one of our strengths is
actually writing about things that going on in the community and kind of getting students
involved, as well as getting other organizations involved in what students are doing. I
know we, we recently wrote a story just about a tea room that students go to a lot, and
now our review is hanging in the window of the tea room. Or, we wrote a story about all
the farmers’ markets around the city and since then I’ve heard of like multiple students
who have gone to check out the farmers’ markets and have gotten really into them. So, I
think we definitely have a perspective beyond what’s going on in our school and that
may be partially because it’s such a small student body and, I mean, there’s only two
hundred girls in the school, so at some point you kind of have to start looking outside
the school. And then, also we live in a big city. There’s a lot of things going on that
maybe you wouldn’t get in a smaller town, which is also part of the reason it’s such a big
part of our newspaper.
Researcher: And, is, is that, um, external focus and, and the, uh, inclusion of stories outside of the school in the general local community, is that, uh, encouraged or, uh, is it encouraged by the, by the advisors or by other adults in the school?

Newcomb: Um, it is encouraged by other adults in the school, but to a degree. I mean, they encourage us... A tea room or a farmers’ market is relatively harmless, but I know there is concern sometimes when maybe we write about a concert that’s at a venue that has a reputation for not being that great of a venue or something. Or, writing about a TV show that has, that.portrays, I mean, teenagers engaging in illegal activity or something, that kind of brings concern from adults. But at the same time, I think they do appreciate us not just writing about ourselves and our school, but having a focus on what’s going on around us as well.

Researcher: Do you, do you know of or do you get any sense that, uh, that your work is being read by people outside of the school and, um, and in the local community besides just parents or, um, you know, the administrators and that sort of thing?

Newcomb: Um, I do think we have maybe a not a significant amount of readers in the local community, but I do know that it gets read because we do have comments and letters from people who aren’t related to the school who just happened upon the story or something, who are interested by it, or, you know, have concern or have some sort of feedback. So, we do get that, but definitely not a large amount of people.

Researcher: Um hum. So then, so, so then these stories that you do on the, on the local community, how, uh, how do, how do they connect then? I mean, you told me a little bit about the students going to the tea room and, um, that sort of thing but if, if people in the general community, uh, aren’t by and large reading or accessing the
material that you guys are, are putting out, and it’s primarily the students and the parents, so, um, so then how do, how do those stories in the community, uh, relate to your audience do you think?

Newcomb: I mean, I think that’s part of choosing the stories, when we choose to write stories about things that are going on in the community, we really work to find the student angle. So, we recently wrote about – this is just one example to kind of illustrate what I’m saying – but we recently wrote about a Haiti drive that, um, was going on in the community and it was getting a lot of interest and generating a lot of interest in the community, and I don’t know if the San Francisco Fire Department was getting involved in it, but the connection was the woman who was running it for, has a child in the elementary school, or something like that that kind of brings it back to the school so that students realize that it’s connected to us somehow and that it’s anchored back with us. It’s not just some random story about someone doing something somewhere. And so, we always really have to try to look for that connection, but at the same time we don’t want to just be writing about things that are going on around us that are, that students already know about. It has to be something that is new so that they’re learning.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and you mentioned about the, uh, uh, the, the adult, the, your advisor there and that you feel generally respected and appreciated by, by her. Is, is it just Tracy that, uh, works with you there at the, at the newspaper?

Newcomb: Yes, it is.

Researcher: Or, Ms. Sena I assume you probably refer to as.

Newcomb: Yes, Ms. Sena.
Researcher: Um, uh, so what about your, the, the, the peers that you work with? Uh, and, and you told me a little bit about them, but do you feel generally respected by them? You mentioned that one of the things you like about the newspaper is, is the social aspect. Uh, can you, can you elaborate a little bit about the, the interactions you have with your peers there?

Newcomb: Yeah, um, since our newspaper is so small, we really only have a small amount of people per grade. I know there’s two seniors right now and then there’s two other juniors aside from me who have been on staff for all the past years with me. And so, although there are new people coming in, there’s this core group of people that I’ve got to know really well. And, we work well together and they kind of understand the things that stress me out and I understand the things that stress them out. And, we’re able to work and help each other and it’s really like created a friendship that goes beyond friends sort of but outside of the classroom, which is really great. And, I think it also helps us as students when there are new people coming in learn to interact and problem-solve and help other people, which is an important tool for anything in life, not just journalism.

Researcher: So, how many total, uh, total students are there working at the paper?

Newcomb: Um, I think right now it’s about twenty something students on staff total.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and, and what about being at an all-girls school, how does that, how do you think that changes your experience specifically working with the, with the newspaper, either in the content that you put out or in the actual, uh, process of, of, you know, reporting the stories and writing the stories. How, how do you think that, um, you know, being an all-girls school affects that?
Newcomb: Um hum. Well, I think in choosing the content, it’s interesting because we have to watch and make sure that we’re not just writing fluffy kind of stereotypical all-girls school stories. I know we wrote a story about the, about adopting kittens at the pound or something along those lines. And so, it’s really always making sure that we’re finding an angle that doesn’t just portray us to be just girls, but actually serious journalists who are writing about things that matter. But at the same time, we still want to appeal to our audience with stories that relate to the students. So, a tea room might not have been written about in a co-ed school, but in a school with all girls where girls like to drink tea, that’s something that was relatable. And, then I think when we’re going out to write our stories and when we’re doing interviews, it’s an interesting response that we get from people in the community when we tell them we’re from Convent of the Sacred Heart High School. I feel that the people we’re interviewing kind of trust us more because they think, “Oh, she’s from the all-girls school. How cute. How sweet.” Whereas, I mean, I’m, I’m not sure but I’ve seen other newspapers in the city kind of have a harder time getting people open up from them, to them so that they can get a good story. And so, I think we do get a very different response from the people we’re interviewing than other co-ed schools in the city.

Researcher: So, from your, from your own personal experience, do you, do you find, uh, working in an all-girl atmosphere to be, uh, a positive thing or a, a, something that holds you back, or something in between?

Newcomb: Um hum. Well, you know, I have been in school, the majority of my education has been in the co-ed school, so it has been very different going to an all-girls school. But, I mean, I, I love it. It’s, I don’t think it hurts my work as a journalist, but at
the same time I don’t know how much more it helps. I mean, I think I work probably
basically the same in, in the atmosphere. But I do love working in an all-girls school
with, on the newspaper with just girls because we are all such close friends and we all
get along and there’s no, I mean, issues that you might get in a co-ed school with, I
don’t know, people dating or breaking up or things like that aren’t issues with us, which
really I think is pretty beneficial.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, so other than the, the issues of, uh, prior review and
that sort of thing that you mentioned, what are some other challenges or barriers in, uh,
putting out your stories and, and the work that you guys do?

Newcomb: Um hum. Um, I think one of the biggest issues is balancing journalism
with all of our other classes because, I mean, most of the people on staff do take pretty
rigorous schedules and they’re taking a lot of classes, a lot of APs, they’re involved in
sports and other activities, and journalism is very time consuming. You spend a lot of
time laying out the paper, writing the stories, all of that. So, finding a balance and trying
to help other people on staff get their work done and do the things that they need to do
as well as help them balance their other work and not slack off in their other classes is
really the biggest challenge.

Researcher: And, do, I mean, do you feel that generally the students there are
invested and committed in, in doing that work.

Newcomb: Yeah, I mean, if students weren’t invested in their journalism, they
wouldn’t be doing it. It’s not like we’re at a school where we’re forced to take classes
that we don’t want to. So, if the students are invested in the schedule they’re taking and
the journalism course, I mean, they wouldn’t be there. So, that’s definitely very helpful, it’s just finding the balance. So, students are motivated, it’s just working to get it done.

Researcher: So, so, do you, do you girls, do you help each other out with sort of those other things? Do you do study groups or, uh, try to help one another with, you know, the other both curricular and extracurricular responsibilities that you might have?

Newcomb: Yeah, we do. And, I know even just, and when we’re doing journalism, if we’re having a work day and we’re laying out the paper, there have been times when we’ve taken hour and a half with just a couple of people who are taking the same class to do the homework or study for a big test that’s coming up. So, they really do rely on each other for the classes, the other classes and, I mean, there’s always people around who can help you with homework you don’t understand or to study for a test or something. So, yeah.

Researcher: Any, any other challenges or barriers that you can think of to the, to the work that you do that pop out to you?

Newcomb: Um, well, I think this isn’t as, nearly as big of an issue, but just finding stories that are actually interesting and relevant and aren’t repeating something we’ve already written about before is something that’s hard because if we don’t have a connection to the school then we can’t really write about it. And so, that definitely cuts down on the options that we have to write, the stories we have to write. So, that’s another barrier.

Researcher: Um hum. What, um, how, how do you think what you’re doing now will affect you as you go on to be an adult? You mentioned, you know, your, your possible, uh, career interests in, uh, international relations you said?
Newcomb: Um hum.

Researcher: And also possibly journalism. So, generally speaking, how do you see the work you’re doing now at The Broadview affecting you as you, and, and, uh, what effect do you see it having on what you do in the future?

Newcomb: Um hum. Um, well, I know interviewing has given me the confidence to, you know, go up and talk to people on the street or talk to people in power or something, which is something I never would have considered doing before I started journalism. So, I think that will really benefit me as I go to college and, you know, start a career is kind of having the confidence to approach people who you might not know to, you know, strike a conversation or, you know, create a connection with somebody for some reason, which is very important. And then also, I noticed my writing ability has grown so much since I was a freshman and I started on staff. And so, writing is such an integral part of life and all aspects of life. You’re always writing for something, in college be it papers or in a career you’re just writing an e-mail. I have so much better, I’m so much better at just writing all around, which I think will be really helpful. And then also, I think, well, finding stories of things that are going on around me, so maybe I’m not doing journalism but still, you know, finding things that matter and kind of getting involved in them, which maybe I had, I wouldn’t have paid attention to if I hadn't done journalism.

Researcher: And, you, you’ve mentioned that a couple of times, getting involved. Why do you see that as important?

Newcomb: I mean, I think it’s really important not to just live in a bubble and just do things that you’re supposed to do. I think finding for yourself the things that you’re interested in are what shapes you as a person. And, if you’re just doing something
because it seems like the right thing to do or other people tell you to do it, you’re not going to get as much fulfillment out of life and you’re just, you’re not going to kind of follow the things that interest you, which is, is what really life is about. And so, yeah.

Researcher: Um, and, when, when you, when you say, uh, getting involved in things that you’re interested in, um, and you had mentioned third-world countries, are, are you, are you talking about, um, like service to others sort of things or are you talking about more generally finding things that you’re interested in, in being a part of? Or, or can you tell me, tell me a little bit more about that?

Newcomb: Um, I know, yeah, personally for me it’s definitely about service to other people is a really big thing for me. Um, I’m really involved in the organization Invisible Children, who they work in Uganda with child soldiers and that’s something that I really care about. But, it doesn’t, it isn’t necessarily service to others. It might just be maybe you’re doing a story about, I don’t know, about eating disorders and you get really passionate about helping other people’s disorders. You, that might be something that you pursue as a career or just something outside, kind of helping people just get past that. So, it’s just really, it can be anything because journalism opens so many doors, you never really know what you’re going to encounter and those encounters really can shape what you do.

Researcher: So, um, I mean, just to follow-up then on your eating disorders as, as an example, um, it, I mean, it, sounds like even if, if it’s not directly related to service to others when you talk about getting involved in things that you’re interested in and becoming aware of these things, it sounds like it still incorporates at, uh, at least a
concern for others. Is that, am, am I correct in understanding you that way or am I misreading you?

Newcomb: I mean, yeah, I think that’s true because journalism, that’s, I mean that’s a really big part of what journalism is. It’s writing about things other than yourself. Otherwise, you wouldn’t need to write about them because, I mean, you already know about them because it’s yourself. So, that really is the core part of what journalism is. So, that is if you learn from journalism it is going to somehow be related to what other people outside of kind of your group or social circle.

Researcher: Sure. Ok. All right. Um, and, what would be the greatest compliment that somebody could give you in the work that you do at The Broadview?

Newcomb: The greatest compliment. I think the greatest compliment that I could receive would be for somebody to tell me that my story that I’ve written changed their perspective or changed how they thought about something and caused them to, or helped them to learn something new. That’s the biggest part for me. I want people to kind of question what’s going on around them or learn about something that they didn’t know about before. And do, if I could accomplish that, that means a lot to me.

Researcher: Um, and, and then also, uh, do you yourself and, and do your peers around you, do you refer to yourself as, as journalists or do you refer to yourself as, as something else, as writers, or, uh…?

Newcomb: Um, I know my peers and I refer to ourselves as journalists, but we do get a lot from other adults in the school and other teachers who refer to us as writers. So, I mean, for us, we took specifically journalism, so that’s, we’re going to call ourselves journalists and a lot of other people don’t really understand the distinction.
Researcher: And, and what is the distinction as you see it?

Newcomb: I mean, distinction, writers, I mean, they write about, they can write about anything. They can write poetry about a flower or something, but journalism is really about writing about the news and writing about things that are going on around you and informing other people. And, a lot of writers, that’s not really their goal.

Researcher: Um hum. And you concentrate, uh, specifically on, I, I mean, within the context of journalism, you, you concentrate on reporting and writing. Do you do any photography or videography or anything like that?

Newcomb: Um, I mean, I, we obviously have photography in our journalism program. I personally, um, I’ve just recently started with photography, but it’s something that I’ve been picking up and I’ve really gotten interested in it recently.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and how old are you Zoe.

Newcomb: I’m sixteen.

Researcher: Sixteen, ok. And, uh, so are you a junior or senior?

Newcomb: I’m a junior.

Researcher: Junior. You got college plans after this?

Newcomb: Um, I’m not sure. I’m looking at colleges. I, there’s a lot of options. I don’t know, I’m really interested in Georgetown right now.

Researcher: Um hum. But you, you do think you’ll end up going to college somewhere?

Newcomb: Oh, yes. I’ll definitely go to college.

Researcher: Uh huh. Um, and, uh, have you lived in the San Francisco area all your life?
Newcomb: Yes, I have.

Researcher: Uh huh. Um, and, I mean, what, what do you think about San Francisco?

Newcomb: I love San Francisco. It’s a really unique city. I have, I don’t have any family in the city. They’re all, um, a lot of family in the Oregon and kind of spread around the country. So, I have gotten a very different perspective on life from visiting that family. But I think it really has been very beneficial growing up in San Francisco because I kind of have been exposed to things that a lot of other people my age haven’t, which can be both scary to some people as well as beneficial. But I’m really happy about that because I feel like now after kind of having lived in a city where there’s so much diversity, I can go into any situation and be able to kind of find my way and find a place.

Researcher: Um hum. And, what, what about, uh… I’m sorry, I, my little earpiece just fell out… Um, and so what about when once you get older and, uh, you mentioned if you go to Georgetown obviously, excuse me, you’ll be moving out of state, and, uh, but, I mean, do you, any ideas? I understand obviously you’re young, you’ve got your whole life ahead of you, so, uh, um, I realize there’s a lot of, uh, a lot of, uh, you know, uncertainty and excitement about what may happen, but any ideas about whether you think you’ll come back to San Francisco or look to live elsewhere, or…?

Newcomb: Um, I’m not sure. I know a lot of, in the international relations profession, a lot of the organizations involved with that are on the East Coast. So, I’m certainly thinking a lot about living on the East Coast. But, I mean, I’m not really sure. It’s not… Right now, I’m thinking mostly about college.
Researcher: Sure. Right. Um, and, and then you said what’s the organization, you said you’re really involved with, uh, what, what was the organization again?

Newcomb: It’s called Invisible Children and, um, they work to end this war in northern Uganda. And, um, it’s been going on for twenty three years, I think, something like that. And, one of the biggest issues with the war is that it’s, um, led by this man who kidnaps children and turns them into soldiers. So, it’s been a really big issue in Uganda because there’s hundreds of thousands of children being kidnapped and never heard from again because they’re turned into soldiers in this army.

Researcher: Um hum. And, and when you say you’re really involved, how, how, how are you involved.

Newcomb: Um, well, I’m the head of the club that we have at the school. And so, we have fund raisers. We have, they, one of the primary purposes of the organization is they create documentaries about what’s going on. That’s actually how it was these guys started the organization after traveling to Uganda to create a documentary. So, we’ve had screenings of that and that’s kind of, talked with people in their head office. They’re very into kind of developing relationships with the people involved. So, I’m friends with a lot of the people who work at the organization and I know them on a first-name basis. I talk to them, so, not only in my school but just as a social relationship as well.

Researcher: And, and where are they located at, their main office?

Newcomb: Um, their headquarters are in San Diego.

Researcher: San Diego. Ok. Do they have a, uh, in addition to your, uh, club at school, do they have a, like a local chapter or a local office there?
Newcomb: Um, they have not a permanent office, but they have what they call roadies who are, they’re mostly, you know, young college interns who travel around the country. And so, there’s a specific kind of northern California group of people who I’ve gotten to know who are kind of what you would consider the local chapter of the organization.

Researcher: Ok. All right. Um, and so, so you’re involved in that. Any other service organizations or anything that you have any involvement or interaction with?

Newcomb: Um, I’m really involved with, um, my church and I do, um, over the past kind of couple of years, I’ve done, um, service trips to, um, South America, which has been something that I’ve really been interested in.

Researcher: Um, and is, uh, the church that you go to, is it affiliated with the, the school?

Newcomb: No, it’s not. It’s, um, it’s a non-denominational, evangelical Christian church.

Researcher: Ok. Um, ok. All right, is there anything that I’ve missed or, uh, that you think is important for me to know about, you know, about your experiences and about the, the work you’re doing there at The Broadview or anything that we’ve been talking about that you, you want to let me know about?

Newcomb: Um, I don’t think so. No.

Researcher: Ok. Well, um, if you, you know, if you have any questions or, or want to, you know, follow, follow up with me, uh, you know feel free to give me a call. And, I’m calling you actually from my wife’s phone number right now. She has more minutes on her plan and yada yada. Um, so, you can either call, uh, this number or you can call
my cell number, which I, I think I gave you, um, or you can also call my office number. I’m, I’m in and out of my office but I, or e-mail is probably the most reliable way to reach me. Um, but, uh, you know, feel free to, you know, get in touch with me if you, if you think of something after we hang up.

Newcomb: Yeah, I’ll do that, definitely.

Researcher: Um, and, and so, uh, sort of in that vein, if I happen to have a, a follow-up question, is it ok if I contact you and, and ask you that?

Newcomb: Yes, that’s perfect.

Researcher: Ok. All right, well, thank you so much, Zoe. You’ve been really a, a pleasure to, to speak with and I sure appreciate it.

Newcomb: Yes, thank you.

Researcher: All right. Take care.


Researcher: Bye bye.
Anca Vlasan – Youth intern

Teenlink – Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Interview date: March 16, 2010

Researcher: Um, all right, well, uh, I guess to get started I thought, um, maybe if you could, uh, sort of tell me about what a typical day is like for you.

Vlasan: Um, for me, well usually on the days that I intern, I go to school in the morning, I, I dual-enroll, um, meaning that I take some college classes. So, I take three classes at my high school, and then afterwards, I, I usually get out of school at one. And then, and usually go eat, and then I drive to, um, Deerfield Beach, which is like 40 minutes away from where I live. And I go to the, I go to my internship at Teen Link. And, at first, I would check in with the editors, um, see what needs to be done. We always have a budget, which, um, explains everything that, um, everything that has to be done for the issue, usually by, by that week, or by that day. And, um, yeah, that’s pretty much… I usually have to do, um, on Mondays, for Teen Link, I usually have to, um, get the photos that, that other students have taken. And I edited them so, so that they can, um, look better when the print. Or, um, or I would get pictures from, um, sites like Merlin, or, um, uh, I don’t, I can’t remember what it’s called, but either Merlin or, um, Metro Creative, which is different places to get pictures. And then, um, I usually photo edit them with Photoshop. And then, um, I, I do the layouts for, um, the, the pages with the, the pictures from school, and, um, pictures from, of, we do this thing called polls.

Researcher: Ok, and, and what, what is that?
Vlasan: Oh, polls are, um, we ask, uh, we just ask a question, um, like a, a question that can be answered, uh, like with a short response. Like, I think last week, it was, “What was the, was your worst spring break?” And then one time before it was, “What’s your favorite word?” And, um, we came up with the idea, um, my art director and I, we came up the idea that, um, [indecipherable] should write it, and they would hold it up with a sign, um, because usually we always take a picture and it could just be any picture, but now we, um, we thought it would be cool if they wrote their name, if, I mean, if they wrote their answer on a piece of paper and held it up while we take their picture. And, um, most of the time I have to go back and edit the writing with Photoshop because some, like, sometimes it’s not visible. So, um, that’s what, that’s like it with polls. Sometimes we do, um, Top Ten, which are, um, it’s like top ten selections of, um, of any given topic. Like, uh, I think when we give, uh, top ten celebrations for high school, um, and then the week is top ten random holidays. Um, so different things like that, and then I usually have to go and, um, get images, um, that correlate with what the, um, with what the article says. And then, um, I, I put them all in the layout for the page using InDesign. So, and then, um, I also do that for the Senior Year page, which is where students, um, upload pictures from school or from classes.

Researcher: Um hum.

Vlasan: And, um, I, I take them from, um, from My Capture, which is where the students submit them. I edit them and then, um, I, I arrange them in the newspaper, you know, in layout in InDesign.

Researcher: Uh huh. Um, so you’re primarily involved with the, uh, with the photos, and the images, and the, and the layout, and the design, that sort of thing?
Vlasan: Yes. Um hum.

Researcher: Ok. Do you do any writing at all? Or, or just the your focus…

Vlasan: No, I do do writing. I started out with Teen Link as, um, as a writer. And, um, I, I was also interested in graphic design, um, when I first started. So, I, I talked to the art director and, um, she told me that I should also sign up for photography because and then that way I could get, um, opportunities to, um, to work with, uh, photos and graphic design. Um, so, after doing that for about a year, um, I, there was one, there was one, um… We had a prom photo shoot, and, um, last year I was really into fashion. So, um, I wrote an article about, um, places that you can get affordable dresses, and then, um, I took the pictures for it. And then, I asked my, Reese, which is my art director, if I could come in and, um, also do the graphic design, like the layout for the page. And I was kind of really proud of that because I did all three things, um, just for, for a page and an article that I wrote with the pictures and the layout that I designed. So, it was really cool. And, um, and then afterwards, I, um, Reese offered me the internship position, and I took it, and I love it. It’s a lot of fun, and I learn so much that I couldn’t have learned in school.

Researcher: Um hum. So, um, can you tell me a little bit more about that? What is it, uh, particularly that you enjoy about the, the work that you’re doing there at Teen Link?

Vlasan: Um, I guess the one thing that I, that I, that I enjoy most is, um, I can, I can, uh, I think I’m a very creative person, and I can come up with any idea for a layout, or for a photo, or for an issue, and, um, I can just go to my internship, talk to, um, my editor and my art director about it. And, they always consider my ideas, they, and they
help me work with it so that it works for, um, a newspaper, well magazine, such as Teen Link. And, um, yeah, it’s just really cool to have your ideas heard because as a teenager, and, I mean, in my high school we have a journalism program but I’m, I’m not involved in it at all because I feel that the students there, they’re, um, they’re limited, like creatively, and about what they, what they get to write about and so, the photos are just taken off of, like, Google. There’s no, there’s no creativity in it and there’s no student input. So, um, with Teen Link it allows me to do that and that’s what I love about it.

Researcher: So, um, you, you said, uh, at your high school they’re limited, um, and there’s no teen input, you said. Uh, can you, can you tell me sort of specifically what you mean by that? How, how do you feel that, um, the, the journalism program at your school, uh… Why, why is it that you say that you think the teens are limited?

Vlasan: Well, I can’t, I mean, I, I’ve never taken the class, so, I, I can’t say from experience. But what I’ve heard from other students, and I’ve, I’ve sat in one of the classes before I actually took it. And basically it’s just, um, it’s, like students are just assigned, uh, just assigned an article, and not many, um, students kind of take the class seriously. And, um, I mean, obviously because if you’re just, if you’re just assigned an article, and then it’s just homework. It’s not, it’s not something that you enjoy doing. Teen Link allows you to, to take something that you’re interested in, or something that you’re curious about that you’ve never, that you’ve never like been able to research before and talk to somebody about it first-hand, and talk to students and other people in your community about it. So, I think, I think it could, I think it’s more, um, it’s, it’s more how, how it would be in real life. I mean, I, I understand that you’re going to have assignments, um, where you’re not going to, I mean you’re not going to fully love that
assignment. But at least, but you have some options, and you have, and you have your own input that you can, that you can talk to people about and you can, and you work with people. When we have meetings for, for Teen Link, which is, um, with other teenagers, we all, um, we go to a conference room in, um, Ft. Lauderdale, for, at the Sun-Sentinel building. And, um, for about an, for about like two hours I think, we just sit and we discuss, um, ideas for issues. We always plan two issues. And, um, we can just sit there and talk about anything that we’ve had a good idea about, or anything that we’ve seen recently at school, or around our community that interests us. And then, we can make, and then we can make a whole issue about it. And we can discuss it and see all the different angles and how, how other students may see it. And then we get to go and, and interview the people from all parts of the community. Because, I mean, I’m, I primarily, I live in Miramar. But there are other students that live in, um, Coral Springs, and Plantation, and other places around South Florida that I, I don’t go to and it, it’s interesting to see how, how they view it. And it’s really interesting to know that it’s, it’s written by somebody that I work with, by another teenager that I work with.

Researcher: Uh huh. And, and how, how do you think that their perspective, um, influences you, or, or what impact does that have on you, ‘cause you, you said that it was interesting to see kind of how they see these things and how they talk about these things. What, what value does that have for you, specifically?

Vlasan: Um, I think that because South Florida is so different. I mean, you can just, even to just a different area of South Florida and it will be a completely different place. That you can’t, but, it’s, it’s nothing like where I live. Um, and I think that, by, by, like each school is kind of its own community, like it kind of, kind of, um, sees things in a
different way. And it, it’s just cool to see all the different aspects. And then maybe, um, maybe some school is doing, like let’s say community service, maybe some school is doing a community services project completely different than how your school does it. But you can, but you can take those ideas and improve your own way, your own system and your own way of doing things, and that, that’s just because the school right next door is doing something differently. Like, I think that’s really interesting and that’s why I love to read Teen Link.

Researcher: Uh huh. So, um, how then do you see the, the work that you do at Teen Link and, and the work that in general is being done by the, the youth there at Teen Link… Uh, you’ve mentioned a couple of different aspects of sort of, um, how it connects to the local community… Can you tell me more about how you see, uh, what you guys do there, um, as, as impacting the community or how it connects or relates to the community?

Vlasan: Um, I think that as teens we don’t often get a lot of say about what’s going, about what goes on or about, just about what we think because, I mean I get it, we’re young and everything, but I, I feel like we have opinions that we can, that we should be allowed to voice too, and I think, I think that that’s what Teen Link does and just to hear everybody else’s opinion. And it’s, it’s kind of like your own community of teens. Like, um, we’re all kind of going through the same thing through high school, and we’re growing up, and, and to see all those different views on whatever issue that, or, topic that we’re talking about. It’s just, it’s, it’s kind of enlightening ‘cause it opens your eyes to so, so many things.
Researcher: And would you, so, um, in addition to the, the other teens’ perspectives, would you say, um, that you learn about your local community through your work at Teen Link, and, if, if you do how, how do you think you, how do you think that happens?

Vlasan: Um, well, I think, I learn about my community, um, just based on things that happen. We always have, um, an events page. And, um, I’ve, like, I, I mean, I live in South Florida, but I, you never really, there’s, you never really know how many things go on. Um, there’s always, like, different culture fairs and there’s always different, um, rallies, and, and just, a, just a lot of things going on. There’s like, and there’s so much to do for a teenager besides just to go, go to the movies or something. So then I can… broaden your horizons. That’s what, and that’s like, Teen Link opened my mind to that, to know that there’s, that there’s a lot more than just going to the mall every weekend or there’s a lot more than just talking about whatever weekend plans I have. You know, because the, the topics that that, that we [indecipherable]. One issue, one issue we had, uh, we had a politics issue during the, uh, during the election. And, um, we just, we just have a lot of, we just have a lot of issues that are, are not, are not as superficial as many, as other people think that, as other, as others think people think teens talk about. So…

Researcher: And, and, you mentioned a little bit, but, uh, how do you think then that, um, what you have to say, uh, how, how do you think that affects others that read the content there in Teen Link?

Vlasan: Um, well, the people that read Teen, that, uh, Teen Link, uh, um, are all the teens throughout, um, throughout South Florida. Um, so, I, I mean, to me I’ve seen,
um, I’ve seen a lot of my friends read it and what they get from it is that it’s, um, it’s kind of interesting to see, to see, um, a teenager’s, or, a teenager being so mature about topics. And being able to write how they, how they feel and just express themselves and, and a piece, in Teen Link, which goes out through all the schools in South Florida. So, you can really, I mean, you can really voice your opinion. And, I think that that is kind of what most teens really look forward to. I mean, we have, um, a Faceoff page, which is where, um, two teens can basically write, um, an editorial about a topic. And then, one, uh, one person writes about, uh, one view and then another person writes about another view. And my friends always love to read those because sometimes they can be witty, and they can, they always start a discussion. So, that’s, and, and that’s… I think that Teen Link gets a lot of, gets all the people talking about more things than, like I said, than just what they did this weekend or something superficially.

Researcher: And, and by people talking, you mean primarily teens, uh, both…

Vlasan: Yes, teens, teens, yeah.

Researcher: Ok, and is that teens both, uh, that work there at Teen Link as well as teens that don’t work at Teen Link?

Vlasan: Um, yeah, most of, I, I don’t know anybody else at my high school that, um… I go to Everglades High School, I don’t know anybody else that, um, that works for Teen Link that’s at Everglades High School. I, I don’t think there is. And, all my, I, I, the reactions that I said I had before were from, um, friends that read Teen Link that are not, that are not interested in, that are not really interested in journalism as, like, a career or a major or anything. They just read it for fun and they learn something new when they read it, and they see things, they can see things in a different way.
Researcher: Uh huh. So you said they read it for fun. What do you think is fun or attractive to the youth, um, uh, about, about Teen Link, the, the youth reader?

Vlasan: Um, well, I mean, we always take, um, a topic that’s kind of, um, I think like can apply to everybody, but then we kind of fit it for teens. Um, like when we were, like when we, we recently had, um, about like a fitness issue. And of course everybody now is very into the whole, like, fitness craze. But then we made it, we turned it into, um, something that teens can do. And how, um, and how school sports comes into that. And how teen activities throughout your high school go into that. Because, I mean, as high-school students, that’s, that high school, high school’s our love. You know, that’s where we go to school, that’s where we know all our friends, that’s kind of where everything happens for us. And Teen Link allows, like, different high schools and different communities to connect, and, and see how, how things are in another place.

Researcher: Gotcha. Um, and, uh, so would you say then that the primary target, uh, the target audience for your, um, your publication it sounds like is, is other teens then in South Florida, is that right?

Vlasan: Yes, yes.

Researcher: Do, do, um, you guys write with any, uh, uh, thought or, uh, expectation that adults also will read it or is there any, is there any targeting of adults in the content or is it, is that not really a consideration.

Vlasan: Um, to us, we always, um, we always kind of keep in mind the fact that, that, um, this is being written for a teenage audience. Um, I mean, when we, when we talked, I mean when we had our fitness issues, we had, um, I mean, we had, we have
adult input in there, and, um, of course we have like medical input and things like from adults, but it’s more about, um, it’s more about what teens, but it’s more about the teens that read it. Um, adults don’t usually read it because they’re usually not at high schools. So, uh, yeah… heh, heh.

Researcher: Um, do, do any of the… Let me ask you this, uh, Teen Link is, uh, I, I, obviously I know that it’s, um, there’s the Teen Link website. Is there also a, a print edition that you guys put out?

Vlasan: Yes, there’s um, there’s a print edition that comes out once a week and it goes out through all the high schools, through all the high schools in South Florida. Um, in my school they’re distributed throughout our, um, throughout our classroom usually every Friday because it’s like the end of the week. And, um, yeah, and… But, in some schools, um, they’re just out in media centers or out in, um, or in offices. But in our school it gets delivered to all the classrooms. And, some teachers even use Teen Link to, um, I know some reading teachers use it in their, um, in their either discussions or assignments. So, um, yeah Teen Link just goes out through all the high schools in South Florida.

Researcher: Ok. Uh, so then, um, first question then in relation to that, uh… Is the content that’s in the print edition the same as the content that’s on the website?

Vlasan: Yes.

Researcher: Ok.

Vlasan: Yes, we have another intern, um, Julia, who I work with. And what she does is she puts, um, all the things that, that were in, um, the Teen Link of that week, um, she uploads them onto the website.
Researcher: Ok. And then, there are also additional features on the Web, is that right, um, that, that you guys do through Teen Link, um, that, that are not in the print edition?

Vlasan: Um, yeah, I think, sometimes we, um, sometimes if, uh, with a review or something can’t fit on the page, um, we’ll have on the page we’ll say, “Oh, go online and check this out.” And it will be, and then, then there will be a link to a movie review that was written, or an interview, or something like that. And, online we usually have a lot of, um, giveaways and places for people to sign up, and, yeah.

Researcher: Uh huh. Yeah, I notice you also do the, the Shout Out online?

Vlasan: Yeah, the Shout Out. That’s also done by, um, Julia, well that actually that now this year, um, is also, uh, through texting. You can, um, send a, a, a text to, uh, a number, and it will go to the, um, to the Shout Out box. So it can be done online and through texting.

Researcher: Ok. Do you ever publish any of those in the print edition? Or are they, are they…

Vlasan: Yes.

Researcher: Ok.

Vlasan: Um, where we have the table of contents, um, and, um, and the masthead, that’s where we have the, um, we, we have like about, I’m going to say like 10, maybe more, um, different shout outs from people.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and then, do any of the stories or does any of the content ever, um, appear in the, uh, in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel that you know of?
Vlasan: Um, I, I’m not sure if it’s, if it appears in, in print, but I know, I’ve seen a lot of, um, the things that I’ve written, uh, go onto the Sun-Sentinel website and onto many other websites.

Researcher: Uh huh. And do you have any idea, like, how that, how they pick that up, or, um, how, how it is that your work gets published on, on those websites, I mean, specifically the Sun-Sentinel site?

Vlasan: I’m, I’m not really sure, but I know that, um, Teen Link is a Sun-Sentinel publication, um, so, I’m, I’m guessing that’s how and often it’s something that can, um, that can apply to, um, to an audience, that, that’s not just, that doesn’t just consist of teenagers, um, or, or be an interesting topic… I mean, I think, one time I wrote about, um, there was, there was a fashion game online that was for young, um, for younger adults like middle school children, and I wrote an article about that and that appeared on the Sun-Sentinel website. And sometimes if I write, well, I’ve written reviews for concerts and that, that’s appeared on the Sun-Sentinel website, like some of my photos have gone on there, so…

Researcher: Gotcha. Ok, um, uh, ok. And, I’m, I’m sorry, so you said you are doing an internship. Now, I, I gather that that is different than from, uh, not all teens that work with Teen Link are doing an internship, is that right?

Vlasan: No, Right now we only, we have three interns. Um, I handle most of the photos, um, most of the photo work. Uh, another intern handles, um, the Web. And, another intern handles, um, the celebrity, um, the things that go on in the celebrity world, and, um, and he also writes a column.
Researcher: Ok. So, when you say internship, what, um, I mean, how does that work as far as is this for, like, uh, are you getting a class credit for it? Or…

Vlasan: Uh, no. I, we get paid. It’s a paid internship.

Researcher: All right. So, that’s, that’s primary, the primary difference then between, uh, the interns and the other writers is obviously you have a higher level of involvement but you’re also paid whereas they are not paid, is that right?

Vlasan: Um, well, actually all, um, Teen Link writers and photographers get paid for what’s published. And, um, so, I, I write, I photograph, and then I work as an internship, as, uh, as an intern. So, I think I am really involved with Teen Link, um, but they all, all students, um, all student writers and photographers are paid.

Researcher: Ok. So, so, they get paid by the piece, and then you would get paid, uh, sort of, uh, a regular paycheck along with…

Vlasan: Yeah, by the hour.

Researcher: Ok, by the hour. And then you also, do you also, get paid, uh, by the piece for photos and, um, pieces that you write?

Vlasan: Um hum. So, like freelancing.

Researcher: Um hum. Ok. Um, all right, well, thanks for that, that, that helps sort of clear up, um, I, I was a little uncertain what you meant by internship specifically.

Vlasan: Oh, ok.

Researcher: So, so yeah, thank you very much. Um, so what do you see, as the differences between you and, uh, say an adult journalist? What do you, what do you think you bring to the table that they don’t bring?
Vlasan: I think I see an outlook that’s very, um, that’s very different from, um, some other journalists. I mean, I, I see things, I guess I see things differently because I’m, because I’m younger than adult journalists. And, but I think, but I think that Teen Link helps me mature a lot especially in my writing. And, um, I mean, I, I guess that’s pretty much it. I think it’s just, I just see things differently because of the age difference, and, I mean, I see how, I, I kind of tend to see things, um, how they’re going to affect the future. I mean, like, especially now since I’m in high school so I think a lot about the future, and like about college and things. So, whenever I see, um, like, a news topic or something like that, I always, in my head, like I immediately think about how this will affect me in the future, and when I grow up, and how it affects others, and, yeah.

Researcher: Uh huh. So would you say then that you, you think that an adult journalist maybe doesn’t have that same long term perspective?

Vlasan: Well, I mean, I can’t, I mean, I can’t say that for sure, but I, I mean, I think that, um, adult journalists, they, they can do that, but I think for me, it’s more, um, for me it’s kind of the first thing that pops into my mind because I am getting ready to go off on my own, you know?

Researcher: Uh huh. Um, and, and what about, uh, so, as far as the, the, you work with the photography and the design and the layout. What do you see as the importance of, of the technology involved with, uh, Teen Link there and, uh, the work that you guys do online? Do you see, uh, do you see technology playing a, a specific role in that work?

Vlasan: Um, I think so because a lot of, um, especially now a lot of, uh, teenagers use the Internet a lot more than they did before. And, that’s, that’s what I think is kind of,
um, important about our website. But then we kind of, I mean, you always here, oh, newspaper is dead, and things like that. But every time it’s delivered to our classrooms on, on Friday it’s always, like, it’s always gone by like, in ten minutes. Because, I mean, I guess, students just kind of look forward to in and something interest to read. And, you know, but I, but I think, but I do think that the website is really important in helping us, um, reach a, reach a larger audience. Because, I mean, there are some schools that yes, they have Teen Link, but, I mean, it’s not just, some schools don’t deliver to every classroom. And not every student picks one up. So, that’s where I think the, the website comes in. Um, and but that’s like technology wise, I mean, as a photo intern, I’ve learned a lot with like, um, Photoshop and InDesign, and, um, Illustrator. And these are programs that I never thought I’d be able to use. I mean, I remember being a sophomore and, um, I’m, I’m, I was in my art class and students were using it and I had no idea what that was. I had no idea how to even like begin using it. And, my, my art director taught me, I, I mean, I learned from experience. And it, and it wasn’t that difficult. And, it just, it helped me, it helped me realize a lot about graphic design and learned a lot, a lot more about layouts and the, the layouts of a, of a magazine.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, do you see, uh, so would you say then that, um, most teens in South Florida, uh, do you, is your impression that they, uh, access your content, uh, through the print edition or do you think most teens go to the website?

Vlasan: Uh, definitely through the print edition. It’s more, it’s more readily available and then I guess the students [indecipherable] are really interested in Teen Link, they’ll go onto the website.
Researcher: Um hum. Gotcha. So, so, the website serves more to, uh, if I hear you correctly, sort of fill the gap maybe for those, uh, students in South Florida that, uh, you said it doesn’t go to every classroom, so, maybe students that are missed with the print edition, uh, or for, for students that are, uh, particularly, uh, involved or interested in Teen Link, then the website, it serves them as well. Is that right?

Vlasan: Yeah.

Researcher: Ok. Um, are there, uh, are there challenges or barriers to the work that you do there at Teen Link, um, or to the, generally to the work that, um, uh, that, that the youth do, uh, there at Teen Link? What, do you see challenges and barriers to, to making, uh, Teen Link what it is, and, and if so what are those?

Vlasan: Um, I mean, I guess that the only challenges that I can really notice, um, is that some students, although they’re, although they’re interested in Teen Link they may not be as, um, ready to, to participate and like, um, sometimes a lot of students have trouble finding sources. And, um, because we work with a, a more limited audience. I mean, they all have to be in high school. And, um, we have, I mean we have friends that are in college, and, and, so I mean, friends that, that are older than us that can’t go in Teen Link and that maybe also, uh, can be used as sources. And sometimes, um, teens don’t want to be put in, um, put in Teen Link. I mean, which is fine, but, sometimes they don’t, um, we, we have to e-mail each other and, it’s like frantic, it’s like ten o’clock at night and we’re trying to find somebody that knows somebody from a random high school. So, that, that’s the only thing that I would say. And I think it’s because that we’re, we’re so spread out, I mean, throughout, throughout all the different high schools, that, that we can’t, um, that we can’t always find exactly who we want to talk to.
Researcher: Uh huh. So, what, what is the, the policy then, I, are, are all sources in Teen Link stories, um, do, do all sources have to be teenagers or in high school?

Vlasan: Um, I mean, unless, unless it correlates to, um, the topics that… I mean, if, if we’re doing a, a medical issue, and, I mean, and we, and we talk to a doctor or something, then that’s just fine. Or, if we’re talking, uh, if we have an issue with parents, um, or an article about parents, and we want to get a parents perspective on something… Um, but most of the time, they’re in, they’re in, the students are in high school. And they have to be in, um, in a high school in South Florida.

Researcher: Ok. So then sources would, uh, adult sources would be sort of more confined to, um, expert or, uh, authoritative sources…

Vlasan: Yeah.

Researcher: Uh, whereas if you were just sort of wanting perspective on a story, that would, that would have to come from a teen source, is that right?

Vlasan: Yes.

Researcher: Ok. Unless, like you say, unless it was a special topic, like with parents or something…

Vlasan: Unless it was like… Yeah.

Researcher: Ok. Um, uh, what, um, I’m sorry, I’m just looking over my questions here. Um, how, how do you think what you’re doing now will affect you, uh, when you’re an adult?

Vlasan: Um, I think, I mean, journalism is something that I’ve, that I’ve been wanting to do for a really long time, but because I, I realize that I didn’t get involved in my high-school journalism because I, I, didn’t really think that it would, it would benefit
me in any way. I thought it would stifle me more, create, creatively. Um, and I think Teen Link gave me, uh, a full view into the journalism world. I mean, I’ve gone to events, and I’ve, I mean, I never even [indecipherable] before I, before I got into Teen Link. Um, and it teaches you a lot about, about the ethics of journalism, how to talk to somebody, and, um, I mean, I guess how to, how to, how to write for your, for a target audience. You know, because I mean, well, I mean, some students, well, I mean, I’m taking AP English, but I can’t, I can’t write with that level of, uh, I can’t write about poetry or something like that. Uh, um, I’m so sorry. Could you hold on for just a second?

Researcher: Sure. Um hum.

Vlasan: Hello.

Researcher: Hello.

Vlasan: Hi, I’m sorry. I’m, um, actually, I’m about to step into class. Um, in about ten minutes though, so it’s fine.

Researcher: Ok. All right, well, I will try to wrap this up quickly then.

Vlasan: Ok, thank you.

Researcher: Uh, so what’s the greatest compliment that someone could give you about the work you do there at Teen Link?

Vlasan: Um, well, for me, it’s, I mean, when, when I see other students that they come up to me, and some of them I don’t even know, and they’re like, “Oh, I, I read your article and I, I agree with this and I, I don’t agree with that.” And it just, it just gets a, a, a discussion going. And, it’s, it’s really neat just that your, that your work is actually being read. And, um, I mean that, that’s, that’s the biggest thing. And also, as a, as a photographer, I mean, I can be as creative as I want, and, as, I’ve learned so much from
my art director and that when she tells me that, oh that’s an amazing, that’s a really good photograph and it, it really explains the story. That’s what really, um, that’s a really big compliment for me.

Researcher: Um hum. And, do, do you feel that you’re generally respected by both your peers and the adults that work with you there at Teen Link?

Vlasan: Yes. Um, the two, the two adults that I, that I mainly work with are, um, Jennifer Jhon and Reese Chiavari. And they, they’re my editor and my art director. And they just, I mean, any idea that I have or any idea that other, that another teen will have, they will listen. Um, they often me questions, “Oh, how is this affecting you? What do you think about this?” And, um, it’s really, it’s really exciting to see that they have, that they want to see, they want to hear my input and the things that I have to say. I mean, I, the teacher at my, my high school in, in journalism, I don’t think she really listens to, um, really listens to those students. It’s just kind of, “Oh, well, whatever movie’s out this week, write about it.” And, that, that’s, it’s not something that, um, you can, you can also be creative in. And that’s what Teen Link does. It listens to your ideas and whatever you have to say.

Researcher: Uh huh. And so you initially got interested in working with, uh, Teen Link through the, I mean, did you just hear about it or know that it was out there, uh, and did you personally pursue it or did someone pursue you?

Vlasan: Um, well, I had a, um, I had a friend who did Teen Link and she was also involved in the journalism club. And it was getting towards my, end of my sophomore year, and I, I was starting to think about college and things like that and how I hadn’t really had any experience in journalism, and this is, I, this is what I thought I wanted to
do with my life. And, um, she told me that I should apply for Teen Link in, instead of going for the class. And, so one time I, I sat in on um, on the journalism class at my high school and, it, it was really disappointing and I, I didn’t like it at all. And then, um, I, I looked at the Teen Link website, and then I applied, and, um, once I got hired and I went to a meeting, and I met all these, all these other students, and I, I read a Teen Link for the first time, I knew that it was something that I was going to, um, be really great for me.

Researcher: Uh huh. And so are you considering a career in journalism?

Vlasan: Uh, yes, I am. Uh, um, I’m sorry could you hold on a second.

Researcher: Yep.

Vlasan: Um, yeah, uh, I think I, I actually have to step into class right now. I’m sorry.

Researcher: Ok. No, that’s fine. Can I just get your age real quick?

Vlasan: Oh, yes. I’m 17.

Researcher: 17. Ok. Wonderful. All right, well, thank you so much for your time, Anca. I appreciate it. Vlasan: No problem.

Researcher: All right. Thank you.

Vlasan: Ok.

Researcher: Bye bye.
Dylan Leeman – Teacher and advisor

The Grantonian – Grant High School, Portland, Oregon

Interview date: May 20, 2010

Researcher: Looks like we’re running. Um, so to get started, I was wondering if maybe you could just sort of tell me a little bit about how the operations work there at the Grantonian.

Leeman: All right. So, that’s such, kind of a big question, I’m not sure where to begin. Um, uh, I’ll start with money. Um, so the school pays my salary and gives us a classroom. But outside of that, um, we’ve got to raise fund for ourselves and most of that we do through, um, advertising, um, and subscriptions to parents. Um, so, it costs between four hundred and a thousand dollars per issue and we do ten issues per year, so between four thousand and ten thousand dollars, uh, the students sell in advertising. And, I’ve done that a bunch of different ways. I’ve had all of my journalism students have to sell a small part of that, and I’ve had a small core team of people who do nothing but sell advertising, and both of them have met with consistently mediocre results. But, um, and then, um, Oregon is one of, um, I think fourteen states that has post-Hazelwood, um, First Amendment extension laws, such that, uh, it’s really explicit that the First Amendment decision are student decisions, um, and that this a forum for student expression. So, we try to model that at every level, um, of the process. So, from the story generation process, um, the, it’s a student-led brainstorm, um, to when the students decide what stories they’re going to run, um, uh and then, uh, and, and so, so the student decisions are made there. And then, uh, the students go out and write the
stories and I work with them and coach them and talk to them about appropriateness and I argue for stories that I want and I coach them on the stories as they write them. And, um, and, uh, but the students are doing the work. And, then I’ve got them divided into sections and, uh, within each section I have a section editor. Um, the section editors are coaching them and working with them on the stories. And the section editors are responsible for ensuring that certain beats are covered, uh, between their sections. Um, and so we spend a couple of weeks researching and writing and then we spend, um, a week refining and editing and then we spend a week in layout production. Um, and we put out about one issue a month.

Researcher: Ok. Uh, so, how, how does that, uh, you mentioned a little bit, can you tell me a little bit about, more about how you see your role then in light of, uh, Oregon’s laws, uh, extending the, the Hazelwood decision. And, um, and then you also mentioned that you coach them about appropriateness. So, how do you see your role fitting in there?

Leeman: Sure. So, um, so one thing that the, uh, the attorney for the district pointed out after the new law was passed was that the law doesn’t say anything about how I grade them. So that, you know, while they may, once I, once I name student editors I, I imbue them with legal power, I still have the power to say that if they’re not meeting the standards of, of, um, of journalistic ethics or responsibility, that I can give them low grades. Um, I don’t have the right to keep them from publishing something if, if it’s not any of a list of conditions, if it’s not, for instance, libel. Um, but, so sort of I’m doing a dance the whole time, and I’m applying pressure to, um, to make the publication as professional as I can, um, while still respecting the fact that the students have a,
really have the power, um, in what they run and what they don’t run. So, um, so from, at every level then, I’m talking to them about, you know, is it a good idea to write this story? What are the pros and cons? In what ways could we get ourselves in trouble with a story? Uh, if we do this we’re going to face a situation with, with libel. If we do this, we could face a situation with defamation. If, um, and so how to avoid those pitfalls even in just how to select the story, but then also in working with the writers, how to, well yeah, all right, so you’ve got the word bullshit in your, in your piece. So, let’s talk about that. I mean, maybe, you know, we could apply the AP style and, and strike that out. We could, um, we, we could argue that we don’t want to do that. So, what are the pros? What are the cons? Um, how do we want to be perceived in the community? Who is our audience? Uh, how are advertisers going to see decisions like that? And, uh, and constantly coaching both the editors who make the final decision and the writers, um, uh, as they go to, uh, to make really solid decisions as journalists, but also to make decisions that, that will be well regarded by the community. And, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t.

Researcher: Um hum. So then, the administration, the principals and etc., are they, I mean, are they hands-off both formally and informally?

Leeman: So, my current principal is pretty hands-off. I mean, um, you know, a principal’s, one of a principal’s main jobs is to make a school look good and, um, student journalists love most in the world is to make a school look bad. Um, so there’s an inherent conflict there. What I get from principals consistently is a, is a pressure to, uh, write positive stories that make the school look good. Um, my last principal was really good at unspoken pressure. And, she would, uh, she would criticize the paper,
um, without telling me not to run things. She would say things like, um, “I've got a lot of parents who are going to read this and, uh, and, and say that, um, that we’re not doing a good job educating children as a result of this article. And, I know that you don’t think that we’re not doing a good job educating children, but that’s how this story is going to be perceived.” Um, my current principal, um, isn’t as strong and he, and he pretty much, uh, just stays out of the way. I try to let him know what’s coming, um, after it’s too late to change and walking a fine line between being polite and letting him know what’s coming and not falling into the trap of prior review. Um, but, uh, but mostly, um, if, uh, if there’s too much sex or too much negativity, uh, principals complain a little bit, but, but with this new law, they pretty much stay of my way.

Researcher: Um hum. And, and, so, I mean, from your perspective, uh, I mean, do, do you see this as a, as a positive thing? I mean, does it seem to be, uh, productive and, uh, effective, you know, to, to allow the youth that latitude and, and legally to, to give them some, some footing in, in what they’re able to, to do and write about?

Leeman: I think, I think absolutely. Um, I believe that, that the First Amendment wasn’t created for adults only. And, I believe that we can’t ask students to use and respect the First Amendment if we don’t trust them to use and respect the First Amendment. So, I believe that students aren’t going to appreciate, or use, or appreciate, um, the First Amendment if they don’t get to practice it. Um, if they get, if they get a kiddie version of it, um, I don’t, I don’t think we’re effectively teaching the concepts. So, um, is it dangerous, and difficult, and painful, and complicated? Yes, everyday. Um, and I think it’s amazing, and wonderful, uh, and, and, uh, and democratic at the same time.
Researcher: And do you feel like you’ve personally been able to sort of provide, uh, or, or help, uh, steer them? Do you, do you, do you feel, uh, satisfied, you know, generally speaking, uh, you know, when you go home that you’re able to sort of help steer them and guide them to, to understand, “Ok, so we don’t, you know, we don’t want to just, uh, laden all of our articles with profanity and shock value and, you know, because we can.” Do you feel like you’re, you’re effective at getting that, that balance across to them.

Leeman: I do think so. I think, strangely, I’m such an advocate of the First Amendment, but, I think that I still err on the side of too much influence. Um, and I don’t think my administration would agree. I think they would say the opposite. But, um, I teach my students that they are the final arbiters of what we publish. But then, I continue to apply really strong pressure in the way that my old principal used to apply to me. I say, “You know that that’s not the kind of, the kind of paper that we want to be.” And I say, “No, we shouldn’t do that.” Um, and I leave it to them to decide when to really get their backs stiff and really fight me on stuff. Um, I tell them that if, that if they don’t disagree with anything I say then they’re not doing their jobs. And, I tell them that, that, uh, that I’ve named them and given them legal power about what we publish. Um, but I flex my power too. I say, “That’s not a good idea.” And, I say, um, “People are going to read that as this.” And, I say, “Let’s not do that.” Um, and I flex a lot of power in the classroom. Um, and I don’t know. I don’t always know if I’m using that appropriately. I don’t know. Sometimes I think that I, that I push too hard, that I use too much. But, um, but at least that’s coming from an advocate of the First Amendment and not an advocate for the school looking good.
Researcher: Um hum. Sure. Um, and then you, you mentioned also that, uh, you said, you know, one thing that you, you ask them is, uh, you know, how’s it going to be perceived in the community, so, and, and you also mentioned who is your target audience. So, so, I guess my question is two-fold. Who is your target audience? And then, how does that, how, how do you see the Grantonian, uh, relating then to the broader local community if, or, or does it?

Leeman: Um hum. Well, and, and I think that who is our audience is a complicated answer. Um, you know, students really want to write to their peers. Um, and so, uh, you know, that’s sixteen hundred students here at Grant High School. Um, we mail off the Grantonian to twenty other schools who send us their school papers. Um, so at least the publication staffs at those papers are looking through our paper as well. But then, um, I’ve got four hundred parents who subscribe to the Grantonian, um, and a number of advertisers who also get subscriptions to the Grantonian. Um, and then there’s two hundred staff in the building. So, I think the audience is a big mix. Um, and, and I believe that there’s room to, that there’s room to meet multiple audiences. Um, you know, we spent December working on a drug and alcohol issue. And, the students conducted a survey of, uh, five hundred, um, uh, students here at Grant about their drug and alcohol habits. Um, and we worked with the, um, the math department to make sure that our statistical analysis was, uh, was accurate and, uh, and effective. Um, and we did a really, really in-depth profile of a student alcoholic who can’t stop drinking, uh, and, and doing cocaine. Um, and, um, and when we were done, I think that maybe students were reading with a, with more of a, of a giggle and a titillation. And, parents were reading with shock. And, teachers were reading with a, “Wow, we’ve really got a
problem.” Um, but I think that it, it simultaneously reached multiple audiences in some really powerful ways.

Researcher: Do you, do you get feedback from, uh, parents and or advertisers or people outside of the school about what you guys are doing?

Leeman: You know, I don’t get a lot of feedback from advertisers. Um, my editorial staff has an invitation to the LSAC meeting – and I’m worried you’re going to ask me what that stands for and I don’t know, but it’s a parent advisory group – um, next week to, um, to speak to the research that we did on that drug and alcohol issue four months ago and to talk about, um, teen perceptions of drug and alcohol, drugs and alcohol in our school. So, not only did the parents read and appreciate that article, but they’ve invited us to a professional forum to discuss the work that we’ve done. Um, but I get, um, I get, I think, constant feedback from other faculty and parents, um, every single month, um, about things we’re doing well or things that we’re not doing, uh, up to, up to how they think they should be done.

Researcher: And how do you handle the feedback? What do you generally, how, how do you generally respond to it?

Leeman: Well, however I respond, I lose a lot of sleep over it all. Um, but uh, you know that a school paper, um, is always pissing people off. Um, people who don’t get covered are pissed and people who do get covered are pissed about how they’re covered. Um, and, um, you know, I had a, one of my students wrote a really amazing piece, uh, around Halloween about the pressure that teen girls face to dress slutty. Um, and it was really honest and she talked about the pressure that she felt and how she was, she had thought about not succumbing to the pressure but when she had done
that last year she had been mocked, so that she was going to go as a, as a slutty something instead of a something. Um, she, and she went really in-depth into that and talked about the social pressures, and the, the, and the pain that she felt and the social awkwardness, and the costumes that were available. Um, and, uh, and then I had an anonymous critic highlight the word slut every time it appeared in the article and put it in my mailbox – cut it out and, and highlighted the word slut every time it appeared. And, um, and so, uh, I was so furious, um, that I, uh, I wrote a response and published it in the next issue of the paper, um, defending what the student had done and saying that the anonymous critic had failed to, to really read, which is what I’ve tried to teach my students to do, um, instead of just to see the word to see that the story was in fact a criticism of that social pressure. But normally, I don’t write in the student paper. Normally, I, um, I talk to people. Um, I’ve invited people to come in and talk to my staff. Um, I’ve taken, when the principal has been upset sometimes, I’ve invited the editors in to meet with the principal, so that then the two parties interested are actually talking instead of both just venting at me. Um, and, uh, and I find that getting people talking is generally the best way to, to realize, to have it stop having it be, uh, where people are angry and using words like them and they and have them actually see someone else’s perspective and, and talk about the issues involved. Um, but uh, but most of what I get is positive feedback.

Researcher: Do you, do you guys cover any, uh, stories outside of the school that, do they, do the students go and do stories on the, the more general local community there?
Leeman: Uh, they want to. Um, I really push them hard to have everything that they’re doing have a connection to school. Um, my philosophy is that there are, um, you know, twenty or thirty professional journalism organizations here in the city that are going to outdo us at, at, at a lot of other stuff, but what we can do is we can outdo them at Grant. Um, and, and when the two worlds collide, then that’s our opportunity to take a look at how things here interact with the real world. Um, with the kid whose dad is serving in Afghanistan, or the, um, or the guy in the neighborhood who, um, who stands out at the street corner panhandling, um, with a, with a sign about being too ugly to prostitute himself. Um, and so, so, what I tell students is that, is that we’re storytellers, and, um, and, and where the, where the real world collides with the Grant world we, then we cover that, but otherwise we’re, we’re covering the Grant world because that’s what we’re experts on. But again, that’s me setting rules that I don’t have the legal authority to set. But they follow ‘em.

Researcher: Um, and, uh, uh, what about the, the, uh, website and, and the online, uh, component of what you do. How do you see that fitting into your work?

Leeman: So, my predecessor started the website, um, about fifteen years ago. She was really an early starter on that. And, um, and in fact she was reporting on, so, she would publish to the Web a couple of times a week, and, um, and the Oregonian was actually pulling sports coverage from her sports coverage. Um, I wasn’t able to keep that up. Um, and now I’ve maintained an online presence and, um, and now, um, all I’m really doing is I publish, uh, uh, I republish text of all of my stories and pictures, um, onto a, onto a pretty simple blog format website. Um, and, uh, and I haven’t given that website a lot of love and as a result I don’t think it gets a lot of readership. Um, and
I know that, that the future is there. One of my reporters said to me just the other day, she said, um, we have a, uh, Westboro Baptist Church is coming to protest my high school, ‘cause my high school has a, a gay-straight alliance and, and so the, this really radically conservative religious group out of Kansas is coming to protest the, the school. And, they’re famous for interrupting soldier funerals all over the country, um, and, uh, and, and do other really, uh, antagonistic stuff. So, my students are all up in arms about that. And she, my student said to me, she said, “You know, most of the stuff on the Internet about this, about this agitation group is, um, is videos, and, uh, and they’re really fun to watch.” And she said, “You know, when we cover this, we’re going to cover it in text and photos, and that’s just not how people are consuming their media these days. And, we’ve got to find a way to take video of them protesting in front of the school and calling the entire country a fag, um, which is one of their things, um, and we got to, we’ve got to put that video on our website. We just have to. So, um, so, I sort of, I, I know that the future of journalism is on the Web, um, and yet to me it feels like one more thing that I don’t have the time or resources to, to focus on. But, um, have I answered your question?

Researcher: Yeah. So, I mean, it sounds like, uh, the, the, it’s a logistical barrier then developing the website.

Leeman: Right. Well, logistical, financial, and technological, and, um, and frankly, I mean, I, I’ve made websites, but I’m, but I’m, uh, you know, I’m not, uh, I’m not brilliant at the Web side of the technology. Um, you know, I sort of have to be a, the journalism teacher is the jack of all trades and I’m teaching photography and Photoshop and InDesign and desktop publishing and I try to keep my bailing wire and duct tape network
running and the school won't buy me new computers, so I'm buying new computers with newspaper money and I can ill afford to do that and the keyboards are breaking, and the… so… uh, I'm whining now, but um, but so, so, I think that I feel like now I'm going to have to also become an expert on, uh, on Web hosting and Web videos and, uh, video blogging and, um, and, and probably upgrade our hosting so that it can handle more of that. And, um, I think that that's where it's going to go. I think that is going to be how we can reduce that thousand dollars a month publishing cost and make our advertising dollars go a lot further. Um, I just haven't, I really haven't fully explored that yet, but I know that I have to and I'm a little afraid.

Researcher: Ha ha… Uh, just as, as a caveat, uh, details never bore me so, uh, you know feel free to, to, you know, share whatever you feel is important. And that’s really my purpose is to try to get, uh, you know, the perspective of the interviewees, yourself and the youth as well.

Leeman: Ok.

Researcher: So, um, so, uh, so then just sort of backing up then as far as the finances, so if, without advertising dollars then, and, and the subscriptions and sort of the, uh, the, the internal fundraising efforts, uh, the, the newspaper would cease to exist?

Leeman: Well, on paper it would cease to exist. My paper publishing costs, um, you know, is four hundred to a thousand dollars a month. But if, the more of my stuff I move to online, I mean, uh, comparatively I can, I can publish online for next to free. Um, and, if I can find a way to make publishing online still pay me in advertising dollars, so far I haven ‘t been able to do, which is sort of a, um, a chicken and the egg kind of
thing, um, because I can’t get anybody onto my website, uh, to look at advertising, um, because I don’t, I don’t have really anything exciting there, ‘cause I’m, I really don’t have anybody going to my website, so I can’t get advertising there. So, but it’s, so there’s a circle effect. But, um, but if I can, if I can find a way, and papers are still experimenting with this, you know, the, the New York Times I think it was experimented with, um, with paid service and now they’re experimenting with, um, with more of a Google style of, um, of linked content. I think now they’re putting green links into their stories, um, and you can click on the green link and it takes you to, right in the middle of a story about, uh, teens drinking soda pop, and there will be a link on soda pop and it takes you to, uh, to a Coke website or something. Um, and, and I think the professional journalists are going to forge the way and then I’m going to, I’m going to have to follow. Um, but once I can get advertising dollars to pay for my online, and I could, I could do that now by using print advertising to pay for my online. But, um, but the online is so cheap, even fancy expensive online is so cheap compared to paper printing. Um, and then, and then that’s of course talking about, about traditional measurements of costs. If we talk about externalized costs, um, and, you know, environmental resources, um, of course the online, uh, I think, I think comes out even stronger.

Researcher: Do you think, I mean, um, do you think that, uh, if you went to, uh, even, uh, primarily online, uh, if you, if you sort of moved over into, to online and even sort of used that as the substitute for, for the print product, um, I mean, do you think that that is, uh, is something that the, the youth would or could eventually, uh, embrace more than they do the print product, or do you think that they, they still like the print product and that they would miss something if that was gone.
Leeman: I don’t know. I mean, my students don’t read print publications other than mine. All the rest of the media consumed is, is, uh, comes to them over an electronic device. Um, more and more, they’re not even buying music, um, but they’re, they’re streaming it right off of Youtube and, and Pandora. So, um, I think that everything else that they are doing in their lives are coming off of the Internet. And, um, and I’ve got them reading a print publication because I put it in their hand. But, I don’t know how much longer that can last. I, I feel like I’ve got to, to really to be effective in the long term, I’ve got to be in the world that they’re in. Um, and they’re, they’re reading articles from other publications on their cell phones and on the computers in my room. Um, but more and more and more, um, I’m watching everything that they’re doing come in the form of, of, uh, of streaming audio or video or both. So, um, and, and I think that that’s what I’m more afraid of. Um, I’m afraid of the fact that I haven’t studied, um, writing for radio, and I haven’t studied, uh, videography, and I haven’t, um, I haven’t studied video or audio editing, um, and so, and so in addition to the hosting and the, the other technologies, I’m afraid of, of video and audio editing as just a whole new, a whole new skill set I’m going to have to pick up.

Researcher: Sure. Um, do you ever feel that there’s any generational barriers in the work that you do with the youth?

Leeman: Oh, I don’t know. Um, of course and no. Um, I think the generational barriers are my favorite part. Um, it’s the, it’s arguing about generational difference and it’s the, it’s, uh, communicating about it. You know, the teens dance nowadays, um, by, by pelvic thrusting their dance partners.

Researcher: Heh heh heh…
Leeman: And, administration is, uh, is really up in arms about it and the students are, are really militant about not changing and, um, and we’ve run a whole series of stories about that and in the process of those stories I get to have the, the most inappropriate and hilarious discussions with my reporters. Um, and we argue and we laugh and, um, and we mock each other, and, um, and we argue about whose generation is better and whose is more appropriate and whose is more honest about sexuality. And, um, and, and their conversations that I might not get to have with students if I wasn’t doing newspaper. So, no, I think that, I think that the generational difference gives school papers, um, you know, energy and, and verve, and, um, and, and that’s sort of a big part of the whole point. Um, and, uh, and they don’t, well, I, students don’t really want to read what adults have to say, um, and yet, I’m still, I’m continually impressed by how many students in this school are reading the school paper itself.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, so, in, in that, in that vein, uh, I mean, do you see youth as bringing something, the students bringing something different to, um, to, to the other students there in the school, or, uh, or, or even to the product in general. How, how do, how do, how does what they do, uh, differ from what adult journalists do?

Leeman: How does what they do differ from what adult journalists do? So, I think that there’s a difference in voice. So, sometimes even if they’re saying the same things, I think that they’re going to say them in a way that, that people of their own generation will relate to better. Um, I think that in content that my students err on the side of, um, of, of being a little more salacious and muck-raking, um, which is only different in kind from some adult publications. Um, and I think that, I think that most of the differences in
voice, and maybe a perceived difference that makes teens more likely to consume it, since they know it’s written by teens for teens. Um, that some of the difference is just perceived as well. Certainly, I’m constantly pushing my students to read more like the journalism that I consume, which is adult designed and, and made and marketed. So, um, so somewhere in the middle we, I think we produce a, a good product most of the time.

Researcher: Uh huh. What about your, uh, you mentioned a little bit earlier, but how, how else would you describe the, the student, uh, teacher relationship and dynamic there in, in your classroom.

Leeman: Um, well, I’m pretty informal with all of my students. And, they like to come up with cool new nicknames for me. Um, and, um, and, uh, and I can, I, I maintain somewhat of a balance. Um, but, um, but I, I like to feel that I need to be someone who can get mad at them when they’re not doing what they need to do, but someone who they come to when they’re having a crisis and talk to about their problems. Um, and, so that’s the line I’m constantly trying to walk. But we spend a lot of time together. And sometimes at, um, nine or ten p.m. on a late night, we’ve all been at school all week and, um, and things are going wrong, um, and all of our, all of our, all of our defenses are down a little bit. And, um, you know, students will burst suddenly into tears and, or I’ll, I’ll forget to edit out my F-bombs, uh, or fail to edit them out. Um, and, uh, and I think that then that process, having gone through that for all of these late nights all year long, it just makes us very, very close. Um, it’s, and I think it’s sort of a coach-student relationship maybe more than a teacher-student relationship at that point. Um, and, you know, there’s a, there’s a student on my staff who is a phenomenal reporter, who is, uh,
who has an A in the class and, uh, is really a coach to my, to my younger writers. Um, and he’s failing all of his other classes. And I’m, I stalk him, I, I show up and see if he’s attending his other classes, I, I call his mom a lot despite his A with me and, um, and really try to, try to make sure that I’m working hard in the way that I think coaches have an obligation to do to make sure that he’s being successful in all other aspects of his life.

Researcher: Um hum. And what about the, the peer interaction, the, the student to student interaction, how would, how would you describe that?

Leeman: I mean, complicated, you know? I take, I take students who have some leadership skills that I see, but mostly students who have a really good attitude and are really dependable. And I, I put them in charge of other students in ways that, that they don’t always encounter. Um, and, um, and they have to, they have to speak, they have to argue with each other about whether a story stays in the paper, or whether a sentence stays in a story, or what the headline’s going to be, or whether, whether their excuse for not being at the late night was appropriate. And I, I sort of force them into, into interacting with each other on levels that they’re not comfortable doing. Um, they’d really rather talk to me about why they weren’t at late night. They don’t want to have to talk to my editor about it. But I, I make them do that because I’ve put them into these, into these roles. Um, and, and I see that, for the most part, I see that working really well. Uh, I don’t think I adequately teach leadership. I don’t think I have time. I think that’s a, an error in my system. But, um, you know, uh, last month I had a student being ill, really inappropriate, um, and, and it was a, sort of a mess that I had made. One student, uh, hadn’t finished his work and, uh, and hadn’t been here to finish his work. And so, I
asked another student to finish it. And she said, “Well, what about, what about when he comes back and he’s mad at the changes I’ve made?” And I said, “Well, that’s his problem; he should have been here.” So, then I ran upstairs for an hour and left my students unattended, um, trying to be in two places at once and be in a, in another student’s parent meeting. And, it was after school. And, in the meantime, the boy came back and said, “What are you doing to my page?” And the girl, instead of saying that I told her to, started criticizing all the things wrong with his page and all the things wrong with him. And, then, um, everyone else in the class started criticizing her and she left in tears and I came back to a big mess that I’d helped make. And, so, um, I sat down with, with all kinds of people separately and talked about, um, ways in which they were right and ways in which they were wrong, and ways in which they had hurt other people, and different ways we could have handled the situation. And, but I, and in the end, some apologies were issued and people got over it, but I’m reminded that I can’t just leave the room even with my, my really sophisticated students. But, but for the most part, I think the student interactions work really, really well. Um, you know, they don’t all like each other and they don’t all trust each other and there’s cliques and sub-groups and politics of course. And, I’ve got a big staff. I’ve got a staff of thirty five. Um, but, um, but the students communicate really well and I think that on average that, that teens communicate really well with each other and are, and are I think really skilled communicators. It’s when they’re communicating with adults I think that they, that they start to fail and have to really be pushed on that.

Researcher: Um hum. So, uh, but, uh, there is, would you say there’s some degree of, uh, of peer, uh, peer-to-peer learning involved, peer teaching involved.
Leeman: Oh, absolutely. And, I make them, I make them do peer teaching. Um, I take my second year students on the paper and I have them, they teach classes during my summer camp, um, and do a summer day camp in August. And my editorial board teaches classes. Uh, so my photography editor will teach, um, Photoshop and fundamentals of photography and how students are to submit their photos once they’re taken and how they’re to edit them and sort them. And, uh, copy editors will teach, uh, the fundamentals of AP style. And, uh, uh, sports editor will teach a sports writing and jargon, uh, class and AP style for, uh, uh, for numbers and, um, and stuff like that. And, so I make them teach and I’m constantly making them partner up for skills that I don’t have time to teach, uh, them one-on-one. And, um, and that’s the role of the section editor also is to really conference with that reporter, say, “All right, so who have you interviewed? Have you thought about interviewing this person? Have you thought about, um, about this point of view in that story? And, uh, and so there’s supposed to be a constant, I don’t know if it always, it doesn’t always work as it’s supposed to, but there’s supposed to a constant student interaction based around, uh, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring.

Researcher: And, going back briefly to the, uh, the anecdote you were telling me about the, the guy that, uh, wasn’t at the meeting and had his work changed and came back and he was upset, what struck me was it sounded like, um, if he was, you know, upset, if he was upset enough, you know, to, to say what he said and, and to have this sort of drama unfold, it sounds to me that sort of the, the silver lining there is that the youth are genuinely invested and, uh, you know, take value and pride in, in, in the work that they do. Is that a fair assessment from what you were telling me?
Leeman: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And, um, and, and so that means that, you know, newspaper pages come in multiples of four. Uh, to buy another sheet of paper from the printer, uh, means four pages of newspaper. Um, and that means that we’re always doing a, a tap dance about space. And, um, and if we have, and then our advertisement, uh, [indecipherable] percentage is constantly changing month to month. Um, and, uh, and you know, I, I afford my students a great deal of flexibility in when they write stories. So, uh, I offer a certain amount of points for a story and, um, and more if it’s, if it’s really amazing. And, I offer a certain amount of points for a photo shoot and a certain amount of points for them coming in to the late nights and doing layout and design. And so, my students sometimes take a whole month off from my class, um, to focus on their senior thesis or their trip to Africa, um, and then they come back and they know that they’ve got to do twice as much for the next issue, which also is another way in which, um, we don’t always know how much we’re going to get. So, we’re constantly juggling space. And suddenly, we’ll, we’ll be on a late night and we’ll say, “We don’t, we don’t have enough space for all these stories.” And then, we’ve got to talk about stories that teens are really invested in and we’ve got to cut one and we’ve got to cut the one that’s not as good or not as long or doesn’t have a great photo with it. We’ve got to cut one and then one student has to make an explanation to another student about why their work of two weeks, um, is gone. Um, and those are painful discussions. So, I would say that to a fault students are, uh, absolutely invested in what’s going on, and, uh, and vividly and viciously and passionately, uh, caring about the topics that they’re writing about. And that, that, that there’s exceptions to that. Um, you know, I, I think that a lot of that comes from how much freedom I give them to write about what they want.
Um, I’m not, I don’t really pigeon-hole them to their beats very, very much, and I don’t, I don’t make them write stories they don’t want to write, which leads them to be more passionate about their stories. Um, but that doesn’t always happen. You know, we push people into writing about the school play and then we get a mediocre story about the school play, of course. But, uh, but I think that there’s a lot of investment.

Researcher: Um, do the stories, when, when they do have to get cut, do, do you put them online or do you, or do they just get cut period.

Leeman: Um, well when we’ve cut them for space reasons, we run them online. When we cut them for quality reasons, um, we don’t. Sometimes when we cut a story for quality reasons, it’s apparent to me that with a staff of thirty five and, uh, you know, uh, four other classes and a total of two hundred students and two little kids at a home, that if I had been doing a better job earlier in the session with that one reporter that that story would have been better. But, um, but when we cut them for space reasons, we absolutely run them online.

Researcher: Uh, you mentioned a staff of thirty five, is that all during one class period time, or are they broken up over multiple different sessions?

Leeman: That’s all during one class period. I have another forty four beginning journalism students who are in another class, um, who for the most part don’t write for the Grantonian. Uh, that’s a, an introductory prerequisite class. Um, and, uh, and I’m training them all year and then from that class, they apply to be on the school paper. Uh, that class right now is producing the final issue of the Grantonian in an event that may kill me. Um, and, but, but for the most part it’s just those thirty five students for one
period working together every day. And, I’ve done it with, with them in two different periods and that was awful.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and, and are, you’ve mentioned some, are there any other, uh, challenges or barriers that you can think of to the work that you’re doing there?

Leeman: Um, I mean technology continues to be a barrier. Um, you know, I’ve got, you know, with thirty five people I don’t have thirty five amazing computers. Um, I’ve got, I’ve got thirty five computers in my room. They’re all purchased by newspaper or yearbook. Uh, about five years ago, I moved from this beautiful suite of classrooms that the newspaper had been in for the past hundred years. Um, and I moved down into the basement, um, to be, to share a space with yearbook. And I, there was this, I’m in this cool giant room and we painted it and made it funky and ours. Um, but now I share a space with yearbook. And I did that so we could, ‘cause yearbook, I have a, you know, I run about a ten thousand dollar a year budget and yearbook runs about a hundred thousand dollar a year budget. So, I moved down here to, to siphon off of their money. And so now, we have a one combined photo closet. We share all our cameras and, and we team up on computer purchasing and, uh, laser toner purchasing. Um, so, um, and I’m really happy with that decision. That decision has left me, you know, where I’ve got, I’ve got thirteen really top of the line, uh, wide screen Macs in this room. So, um, so I can have thirteen students or pairs of students working on really top of the line computers at any given moment. And then, the rest of the computers are old aging stuff that we use for word processing. And then, then one of the coolest things about that is I teach three sections of regular sophomore English a day, um, to some pretty
impoverished kids. And then, the cool thing is for that, those classes then, I have my own integrated computer lab and other teachers don’t have that. They’re fighting over, over lab space in the rest of the building and, and I’ve got my own and that’s glorious. But in terms of desktop publishing, really only these thirteen will run what we need to run in, in, uh, in Photoshop and InDesign, um, and Internet access speed. So, um, so the, I spend a lot of my money on technology. Um, and, you know, we’re, we’re dependent upon a mediocre server in the building and it goes down and, um, and, uh, and I need, you know, I need another four or five of those computers next year, and, um, of those good ones and, you know, they’re twelve hundred dollars apiece. Um, so that’s a hurdle. Um, I feel like I might could do a better job with the paper as a whole and with student improvement if I had fewer students on newspaper, but then fewer students would be getting to experience newspaper. Um, so that’s a, a hurdle. Um, when, before the recession, I was, uh, I was publishing, um, twenty and twenty four page issues, um, and selling, and selling, uh, a lot of advertising every year, and now I’m down to eight and twelve page issues. And, you know, every newspaper in the country is thinning out, but I don’t have to pay my staff. So, I don’t know, it’s like the, I’m, I’m saddened a little bit by the fact that, that we’ve, uh, we’ve had to curtail our work so much.

Researcher: Um hum. What, and so on the upside, what are, what would be the greatest compliment that someone could give you about the work that you do with the students and with the newspaper.

Leeman: Um, you know, I love it when our articles, um, when our articles lead to an entire class period of discussion in another course. And, I love it when parents call
me and they talk about how that article led to a really amazing conversation they had with their teens about the issues. Um, my vice-principal has a student at the school and she told me that, um, that that article about slutty Halloween costumes had led to a two-hour-long conversation with her and her daughter about, um, about teen pressures to, to dress provocatively. Um, those are the compliments I seek the most. Uh, another colleague told me that another story by someone really needed to be, to be sent in for an award or, or sent to a, to a national publication. And, so that’s what I’m seeking. I’m seeking, um, to get people talking about the issues to... Oh, and I was recently given, the Grantonian was given credit for, um, for the school changing the final schedule. The school was sticking with this really inane final schedule and we ran six different articles about that and two different opinion pieces and, um, and finally they, they changed it. Um, and when they changed it, the administrators who changed it actually gave the Grantonian credit.

Researcher: Ah, that’s fantastic.

Leeman: Um, we ran a, a series of articles about, um, about some really subtle ways in which, uh, there were still hurdles. The school had claimed that they were getting rid of the requirement that students get a signature in order to take an accelerated class. So, the school policy was that students no longer needed the signature in order to take an accelerated class. And, that was a policy that was intended to make it so that accelerated classes were open to all students. But, students were reporting that that wasn’t really the case, that, that they were still, they still had to get a signature. What had changed was that the signature was no longer required, but you were still required to have a conference with your teacher and that then they had to sign
that they had had the conference. But during those conferences, the teachers would make it out as though the signature was about whether or not you could take the class. And it, there was still pressure being put on those students to take accelerated or not take accelerated. Maybe that was appropriate and maybe it wasn’t. And, um, and an African-American student at my school did his senior thesis about pressure he’d faced to not take accelerated classes that he attributed to his race. And, he felt peers who he thought were, um, were not his intellectual equals who were white who were encouraged by white teachers to take accelerated classes. And, he did his senior thesis on that. And, we ran, uh, about forty percent of his senior thesis in the Grantonian, and we ran a whole series on examining subtle ways in which, um, in which students still had to run through hurdles to take accelerated classes and ways in which that the school’s policy had loopholes. Um, and the school changed the, the registration process for accelerated classes as a result.

Researcher: Huh, that, yeah, that’s, uh, that’s always fabulous and rewarding, I know, whenever you can actually see and, and recognize an impact of the work that, that you and the students there have done. Um, what about your background? Uh, are you, uh, from a journalism background? You mentioned that you teach English. Are you from an English background, and how did you get interested or, and/or involved, um, in teaching journalism?

Leeman: That’s a good question. So, um, when I was at, I was a student at this same high school. So, when I was a student at this high school, um, I was involved in the yearbook. And, I was the editor and I went to the summer camps and I was really involved in it and really loved it. Um, and I worked very closely with, um, the woman
who was my predecessor as the advisor on the paper here, um, and shared a computer
lab with her. And, um, and, and then, uh, I went away for a while. I was the editor at my
college paper and, um, and, and then, um, and then really focused on English other
than that in college, um, and on writing, and really came into teaching thinking of myself
as a writing teacher. Um, and, uh, and then when I was, when I came to student teach, I
ran into, uh, the woman who, who had been the newspaper advisor when I was doing
yearbook and who I had worked really closely with in that capacity. And, she was
going to retire. And, uh, she saw me and was really excited about my taking
over the, the newspaper. Teachers who have worked for years and years to create
programs at schools are really terrified that their retirement means the death knell for
that program. Um, and often administrators without enough resources to spread around
will use a teacher’s retirement to, uh, cut or curtail a, a longstanding program. Um, and
so, uh, she basically told me that if I was willing to do the Grantonian newspaper that
she would ensure that there was a job for me, and that was a time when jobs were
really scarce. Um, so at first, it was something that I didn’t want. And, the more I thought
about it and the more involved I got in it, um, the more excited about it I’ve, I became.
And, um, I really enjoy the way it enables me to have different interactions with students
and I really enjoy the way that it has me teaching different styles of writing. But in terms
of formal education, um, you know, my education is, is all on the job. And, um, and, and
I’ve spent a lot of time and effort studying First Amendment and, and trying to catch up
on journalistic ethics now, um, that I, since I didn’t study journalism in school.

Researcher: Sure. Um, and, uh, so you, you said you’re an alum of, uh, of Grant
High School there?
Leeman: Yes.

Researcher: How long have you lived in the, the Portland community there, Grant and Portland?

Leeman: Oh, all my life. Um, you know, I, I was a kid in this community and then, um, and then I went to high school here. I was away briefly in the Army. And, um, and then, uh, and then back here for college and, uh, and graduate school and live in the community now.

Researcher: Was it, was it deliberate to, to come back to the community or was it just sort of things turned out that you, you stuck around.

Leeman: No, it was very deliberate. Um, you know, when I was, um, a student sitting in school, I would fantasize about coming back to this school to teach. I knew that what I wanted most in the world was to be an English teacher in this, in this great old building. Um, and when I went to graduate school, um, they told me that I would receive my student teaching placement from them, uh, at a time of their announcement. And, I told them that that was great but that I, I had an arrangement with Grant High School and I really needed to student teach at Grant High School. And, they said well that was well and good but that student teachers don’t choose their placement, they’re given them, and you can’t, you can’t student teach at Grant High School ‘cause we’re going to give you one and anyway, um, that’s just not the way it works. And, I danced with them on that for four months. And, I, I danced with them on that for four months. And, I said, “You know, Grant wants me there. I want to be there. Nothing else makes sense. I’m giving you guys thirty thousand dollars. You got to find a way to make this work.” And, they told me that I couldn’t and I told them that I needed to, and eventually they, they let me. Um, but that was four months of my
not knowing where I was going to work. And then, and then actually my story at Grant started well before that. I got a, I found out when I was a junior in college at Portland State University, I found out about a scholarship opportunity that was a, it was a full ride scholarship plus stipend to be an assistant teacher for some college freshman inquiry classes. And then, there was an outreach program that had some of those college freshman inquiry classes taught in local high schools, one of them was at Grant High School. So, I pretty much spent an entire semester of college making sure that my application for that scholarship was better than anything they had ever gotten. Um, and got that scholarship so I was an assistant teacher here at Grant for a year. And, um, and then the year after that I applied and became the registrar, uh, the counseling office secretary, um, which was harder than being in the infantry, um, fortunately I was laid off from that after just a couple of months. Uh, but the, I was, the same forces that, the No Child Left Behind forces that moved students from another school to Grant, uh, led me to be laid off when another teacher at, or another secretary at the first school was, uh, was laid off and she bounced me out of my job. But that same force gave Grant a bunch of money and Grant used that money to make me, uh, the technology coordinator here for a year. I wasn’t a licensed teacher yet. So, I did the technology coordinator job for a year and in that capacity they had me teaching illegally without a license web page design and computer repair. And, uh, and I did that for the rest of that year, and then, um, had a really strong relationship here with Grant when it came time to student teach. So, I sort of, I, I think of it like I put my foot in the door and kept it there until they had to hire me as a teacher.
Researcher: And, why Grant? Why, why were you so insistent? What is it about, that, that you love and enjoy so much about that school and that community?

Leeman: I think that what I love most about Grant is that, uh, is that Grant has a really successful and I think unusual mix of, um, high and low socioeconomic kids and white and black kids. Um, you know, on the West Coast… Um, well, I guess I don’t about California… In the Pacific Northwest, um, rich kids go to public schools, and I think that that’s fairly unique in the country. Um, and of course, there’s segregation among the public schools that’s leftover from redlining. But, um, but my school has been gerrymandered a little bit to the point that, uh, it’s about twenty percent African-American and, uh, and, and with small percents of Hispanic and Asian and a large White population. Um, and, and a pretty, pretty neat mix of rich and poor. The rich and the poor really rub elbows at my school. Uh, I’ve got the, the son of a Supreme Court, or Oregon Supreme Court justice, um, in my class, uh, and they live in a two million dollar house up on the hill overlooking the school, um, and I’ve got a kid in my class who I just fill out financial aid forms for college whose single parent made twelve thousand dollars last year. Um, and, I find in that mix something really magical, something working. Um, and, and it’s not that I think my, the school has all the answers. There’s still a lot of problems with tracking and the rich kids, um, are still taking the, the, uh, the accelerated classes almost exclusively and the, and the poor kids are not almost exclusively. And, um, but, but I feel like there’s something really magical here. And, I feel like the staff is really supportive of each other and we’ve had really tremendous administrators for decades and decades. And, um, I feel like it’s a, it’s a system that’s working in, in, in a, in a world in which many schools are not.
Researcher: Um hum. And your, your title there is, uh, as far as it relates to the newspaper is, is advisor?

Leeman: Is, is advisor and teacher. So, I teach the class and I advise the paper. Uh, in exchange for advising, um, I receive a stipend, which is twelve percent of my base pay. Um, I think it was, I think it was, uh, ten percent for a year and then eleven percent for a year and then twelve percent every year after that. Um, and that makes me, um, about thirty five hundred, uh, additional dollars a year, which I try not to divide up into an hourly rate, which is about, uh, you know, uh three hundred fifty, four hundred dollars a month.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and how, how, so, how long have you worked there specifically, uh… How, how long have you worked at Grant as a teacher and how long have you worked with the, uh, journalism program?

Leeman: Sure. So, the journalism teacher wasn’t quite ready to retire when I was ready to start teaching. So, I taught for a year without doing the journalism. Um, so I’ve been, this is my seventh year teaching and my sixth year advising the school paper.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and do you mind if I ask your age?

Leeman: Oh, I don’t mind at all. Thirty eight.

Researcher: Thirty eight. Um, and, uh, obviously I’m getting down to technical details here. Your name is D-Y-L-A-N last name Leeman, L-E-E-M-A-N?

Leeman: Yes.

Researcher: Ok. All right. Uh, and what about, is there anything that, um, you know, we haven’t talked about? I mean, you’ve, you’ve really been a very, uh, a very, uh, enlightening and articulate, uh, uh… You know, you’ve really given me a lot of
substance in our interview here, but is there something that I haven’t asked you or that we haven’t talked about that you think is important for me to know?

Leeman: I mean, I, I think the one area that we didn’t go really deep on that haunts journalism advisors is, um, is, is, uh, is getting’ it wrong, and the ways in which First Amendment and libel cross, um, and the terror of screwing that up, um, either printing something that’s not accurate, or defaming someone, or getting sued, or having to have a battle with an administrator about whether or not something can be published. And, um, you know, there’s, I feel like that very often I’m, I’m in a really rough situation. Um, I’m an employee of the school and as an employee of the school, I can be told what to do. Um, but also as an employee of the school, um, I have been tapped with promoting student First Amendment rights. And so, what happens when my principal tells me not to publish something that, that I perceive that the law allows the student to publish, but I’m not a trained attorney. Um, the Oregon law says… Let me actually go and read it… The Oregon law says that student journalists have control of, and then it lists a bunch of categories of the paper. It’s not up here on the wall where I thought it was. Um, no, it lists, uh, the forums section, it lists the news section, it lists a bunch of stuff like that. Um, it doesn’t, it doesn’t say anything about advertising. So, um, you know, a couple of years ago, a student, um, wanted to publish an advertisement for his, um, for his off-campus party, which was certain to be inappropriate and, uh, and alcohol-centric if not, if not acid-centric. Um, and my students really wanted to publish that ad. Um, and my students really wanted to, to publish that ad. They felt like they were free to, to publish ad and the Oregon law and the First Amendment gave them the right to, to, uh, solicit the advertisement that they sought, and that what if the school was telling us not to
accept advertising from an abortion clinic. You know, would we, would we roll over then? And the principal, um, was certain that, that we didn’t have the right to publish that ad and that if, that that was absolutely unacceptable. Can you hang on a second?

Researcher: Sure.

Leeman: Um, and, uh, and so, you know, I went into a meeting with the, with the principal and he said, “Well, you guys, you know, the, the , uh, advertising isn’t covered in the Oregon law.” And, I said, “Well, it isn’t named. That doesn’t mean it’s not covered.” And I was, I was really torn there. And, um, I feel like, you know, the Student Press Law Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center offer some resources to, to teachers and to students on that regard, but, uh, but they run a, they run a pretty, a pretty tight ship and it’s not always possible to get someone on the phone. So, I’m often calling other advisors in the district, or my mentor who’s retired, and, or my friends who are smarter than me and, and trying to figure out what to do because that can be a real, a real fine line. You know, my students wanted to run a story about, um, about a, a coach who they thought had, um, had gambled with students. And, in the process of reporting that story, um, the coach got word of it. And, as far as I could tell, it hadn’t happened; it was rumor and hearsay. Um, but even just in the process of reporting the story, the, the coach hasn’t spoken to me in two years. Um, he was convinced that I was out to, to defame him where I was out to maybe do the opposite. And yet, I felt that if it had happened that, that I would have had an obligation to run the story and I would have, I would have fought to the death to, to publish that story if I thought that it had happened. But even just in the process of exploring whether or not we thought it had
happened, um, I think we made the rumor worse and, um, and, uh, and we, we pissed a lot of people off.

Researcher: Does the, uh, does the school district, uh, have, have an attorney or any sort of counsel that, that is at your disposal for issues like these?

Leeman: They sure do. Um, and I used her a lot in my early years. What I’ve now discovered though is that her answers are always predictably beneficial to the district. And, when I ask her questions, um, she, she’s, she, and she’s under the employ of the district. I mean, that’s her job. But that, uh, but that, uh, what I’ve learned is that she’s not on my side at all, she’s on the district’s side.

Researcher: Um hum. Um hum.

Leeman: So, I’ve, I’ve actually stopped going to her except with, uh, Freedom of Information Act requests.

Researcher: Um hum. So, uh, I mean, with, with the… Generally speaking, how do you feel with your, with your colleagues there in the, in the high school? Do you feel, uh, do you feel like an outsider or do you feel just sort of that you play a different role but that you’re generally accepted? How would you, how would you describe your, your fit in with the, the other teachers there?

Leeman: I think I work really hard to be a member of the teaching community here and I think I’m viewed as such. Yet, I mean, um, you know, you know, um, last week I had a fight with a counseling office secretary, um, who hid the Grantonian [indecipherable] in her counseling office because the word sex appeared in two hundred point font on the cover. Hang on one second.

Researcher: Sure.
Leeman: All right. Um, uh, I lost where I was.

Researcher: Um, you were just talking about, uh, work, working really hard to try to fit in with the teaching community and you said and yet...

Leeman: And yet, so I, I had a fight with the counseling office secretary because she hid the Grantonians we put in there because they had sex in two hundred point font on the front cover and she didn’t like that. Um, and I wasn’t able to get her to read the story to see that again it was critical of teen sex pressures. But, um, but my students always want something real titillating on the cover. So, um, and then, and then today, uh, I had a colleague come and see me and he’s frustrated that the cool things he’s doing aren’t, aren’t being covered. And, he was frustrated that the story we were writing about him in the April Fools edition didn’t get run. And, um, he was worried that the district is trying to get him fired, and that more coverage in the Grantonian would help him. And, I told him that the story from April Fools wasn’t run because of space issues, but that my fear about it was exactly the opposite of his. My fear was that he was the laughing stock in my story and that, um, and that pulling the story benefitted his reputation and standing in the school, not the other way around. Um, you know, the drama department is angry that, that they don’t get adequate coverage in the paper. And, the cheerleading department is similarly frustrated. But, um, but, um... [side conversation with student]. Ok. So, and, and, you know, when I call my predecessor at the paper, my mentor, um, she tells me that that’s the plight of the journalism teacher is to have people mad at you. So, I work hard when I’m not doing journalism to make sure that I’m earning people’s respect. And, I work really hard when I am doing journalism to
do damn good journalism so that I’m earning people’s respect. And then, um, and then I go home and can't sleep because of people who are pissed off at me.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, it, it sounds like a, a bit of a rock and a hard place, even when you’re, you’re trying to help people out. Sometimes they, uh, it sounds like sometimes they don’t, they don’t recognize it.

Leeman: Right.

Researcher: Um, I, uh, I don’t have any, any other questions specifically that I was, uh, you know, that I had for you. But, uh, again, I mean, if there’s anything that, um, you know, you, you think is important for me to know or that we haven’t talked about, I mean, I’m open to, you know, anything you, you would like to tell me.

Leeman: No, I think we covered it.

Researcher: Ok. Well, Mr. Leeman, I really, uh, genuinely appreciate your time. I, uh, I know you’re a busy man and I appreciate your taking the time out to talk with me.

Leeman: Right on. Hey, thank you.

Researcher: All right. Take care.

Leeman: And you’ll, uh, you send me a copy when you’re all done?

Researcher: Yes, I will. I will, uh, um, I think I’m going to just try to plan to send it out it to all my interviewees. So, I, yes, I will make a note to, uh, to send it out to you.

Leeman: Right on. Hey, thank you very much.

Researcher: All right. Thank you. Bye bye.

Leeman: Bye.
Researcher: All right, it looks like it’s running. Um, ok, well then, uh, I thought to get started maybe you could just tell me a little bit about a typical day, um, at the Mash there.

Hutkin: Ok. Um, all right, well, we, um, I’ll tell you a little about our staff. We’ve got, um, a staff of four adults and then, um, about seventy high-school students who works for us as our reporters and bloggers and photographers. And, um, and then the adults, we’ve got, um, one, one of us is in charge of, um, designing the paper. Uh, we’ve got one, um, assistant editor who deals mostly with the, um, you know, the website, the Facebook™ page, and all of the, um, blogs, most of the, you know, online world. Um, I deal with the students who write for the, you know, the print product. So, it’s a lot of editing their stories and coordinating with them to make sure they’re talking to who they’re supposed to be talking to and, um, uh, making sure their stories are coming along. And then we have a, um, editor who just kind of oversees us all. He helps out with putting, uh, some of the content together for the page, and, uh, manages the general, uh, day-to-day operations of the whole, um, the whole paper. Um, and like I said, I can mostly, you know, speak for myself, but basically, um, we, um, we publish each Thursday. So, um, usually, um, you know, the, uh, most of the week is spent, um, you know, editing the stories that come in from our students, or taking blog posts that they send in, um, and put them on our website, you know, updating our website after
the print product comes out each Thursday. Uh, we meet with our students, um, once a week, we, well a group of students. Our, our staff is divided into four groups. So, we meet with one of those groups each week on Thursday for two hours to, uh, to plan out [indecipherable] the print paper and the website. Um, and so basically, you know, every, the day-to-day operations involve that. Uh, you know, moving the, moving the story to the page and then, you know, the designer takes it from there to lay it out. And then, you know, um, go from there each week.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and, and how did you get involved and get interested in working uh, with the Mash?

Hutkin: Oh, ok. Uh, well actually, uh, the paper where I worked for, um, I was a reporter before I worked here at a paper in Virginia and part of my job there was, uh, serving as editor for a, um, page of the paper, teen page that came out once a week. And, I actually heard about the Mash as it was starting up. Um, we started in September of, uh, 2008. Uh, I found out about it by I was at a, a conference for editors, um, who deal with youth publications and, um, uh, found out about it that way and just, you know, sent my resume and, uh, you know, things moved forward from there.

Researcher: Ok. Uh, and so, um, what is it that attracts you to, to working with teens?

Hutkin: Um, well it’s just, uh, I, for me, I just like seeing them get, um, excited about journalism. Just, uh, you know, a lot, all of us here, uh, for the most part, worked for, you know, traditional newspapers at some point. Um, and it’s just, you know, um, [indecipherable] seeing the kids, um, get excited and passionate about it, just like you know, adult journalists do. Um, and it’s just, uh, to me it’s fun to help them, um, you
know, you know, [indecipherable] see the inner workings, how a newspaper works, you know, like this is how you find a source and interview a source and put a story together. Um, and you know, I like hearing their ideas. You know how they have a, you know, being young and they have a, a very different take on things than most adults do. So, um, you know, but I enjoy that too, just kind of seeing their energy and excitement and, uh, some of the things they want to write about.

Researcher: Um hum. So, you say they have a different take on things. Can you tell me a little bit about what you mean by that?

Hutkin: Oh, sure. Um, they do, well, you know, things that, um, it’s interesting, you know, a lot of the things they care about are, um, you know, obviously they care about like movies and music and pop culture. But, it’s interesting too, it’s, they do care a lot, also about a lot of things, um, that, you know, adults would care about that I wouldn’t normally think, like, you know, programs at school being cut, or, you know, teachers being cut because of lack of school funding, or, you know, the way the, um, you know, public transportation cuts in the city impact, you know, the students having trouble getting to school, that sort of thing. So, and, a lot of times teenagers do get labeled as, you know, dumb or lazy, but [indecipherable] teens that work for us, a lot of them are a lot deeper than that and just, um, you know, care more about than just, um, something that’s going on in entertainment right at this moment.

Researcher: Um hum. So, but you say the entertainment does seem to be something that they’re, they’re interested in as well. So how, do you, do you try to strike a balance in the content that comes out in the Mash both in, in print and online? Um, and, and, how do you see those, sort of those different topics working together?
Hutkin: Yeah. Well, I mean, we operate a lot, um, yeah, like a traditional newspaper does. We have, um, we have a, you know, pages dedicated for news. We have a page dedicated for sports. We have one page for music every week. We have, um, you know, at least one or two pages dedicated to entertainment. And, um, you know, we're, we're a tab versus like a traditional broadsheet newspaper, but we still have all those different, um, areas. So, we'd like to, obviously, you know, we realize that not every kid out there is going to pick up the Mash and read every story, but, you know, just like a traditional newspaper we do try to appeal to, you know, a lot of broad interests in order to, you know, attract, um, a wide range of readers. And, um, we do, we try to strike a balance. We have sometimes when we meet with the kids and they come in with all these really newsy ideas that, um, and you know, some of them are great and some of them, you know, not so great. And, you know, if that's happening, we're like, “Ok, well some of these are good too, but what else is going on, and what's big in the movies, what's big in music? We, you know, we need to have a little of both in each paper 'cause obviously not every, we want to, you know, try to appeal to more than people who are just interested in news.” Um, so we do try to strike a balance. But, I think that's important too. I mean, and, especially with high-school students, they're in school all day. Um, they might not always want to, you know, while they're sitting there at lunch, read about something that's really serious and hard-core. I think they, they do, like adults, they want to have a little escape from that sometimes. So, I think it's really important to get a little of everything.
Researcher: Uh huh. So, that’s interesting then. It sounds like you’re, you’re saying that, um, in some instances you actually have to steer them, uh, towards writing about things about things that are, are less newsy as you say.

Hutkin: Sometimes, yes. Not every, not every time, but it, it’s happened. Um, and, you know, that’s the thing about kids, is, that teenage group too, I mean, sometimes they go and, um, you know, tackle stories that are, you know, thicker or more complex than they’re capable of handling. So, um, so, you know, [indecipherable] they get those ideas set about things more often about topics that are, are newsier. Um, and so, with any story, you know we give a little preview, try and make sure that is, you know, realistic, that they can actually do it. It’s like, you know we try to reason with them, like, “Ok, well that’s a good idea, but, so when you call up and talk about, you know, cuts in the public transportation system, but, you know, what are they going to say? They’re not going to say, yes, you’re right, you know, because they made cuts students are missing, getting to school late.” So, we try to, you know, let them see both sides of the story before we figure out what we’re going to write about.

Researcher: Um hum. So, do they, um, by and large, do they bring the story ideas to the table, or, um, is it more assignment based, or how do you guys work that out?

Hutkin: Um, last year, which was our first year, um, you know, we are still new so we’re still kind of making the rules as we go to some degree. I know last year for our first year, um, it seemed like idea, idea generation was a little more of a problem and it was a little more of us adults saying, “Ok, well why don’t we write about this?” Um, but it is their newspaper and I know I really want them to take ownership of it. And, I think one way to make that happen is for them to be writing about their own ideas. And I think that
brings, you know, I know when I was a reporter I was usually more invested in a story if it was something I came up with myself and something I wanted to do. Uh, so what we've done this school year is, um, when we meet with the group each week, they are kind of assigned, so to speak, to come to the, uh, to their meetings with us, uh, with at least, uh, at least three ideas. And so, we spend the bulk of our meetings just, um, you know, going around the room and having people share their ideas. And, you know, sometimes they're great ideas, sometimes they're not so great, sometimes they're, you know, we'll be talking about one thing and a whole different idea will pop up. But, I think that's helped the, the generation of ideas, just, um, you know, just having them, you know, making them think about it beforehand, you know, having something to bring with, uh, with them and discuss, and then that discussion, you know, often, you know, like I said, will sometimes will lead to something that, um, totally new and different and [indecipherable] really excited about.

Researcher: Um hum. And, you said that you think that it's important, you feel that it's important for them to take ownership of their newspaper. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by that and why you think that's important.

Hutkin: Ok. Um, well, you know, like I said, it is, you know, it's our newspaper. It's, um, being written by teenagers and it's essentially read by a teen audience. And obviously, um, I think it's important that, um, they do come up with a lot of their own ideas because, you know, they are the teenagers. They're the ones that are in high school. We're a bunch of old people sitting in an office all day. They know a lot more about what's going on in schools than, than we do. So, um, you know, if it's something that students are talking about and students care about, um, I think that they should be,
you know, writing about it if it’s something newsworthy. Um, and like I said, I, or just, if it’s just about adults saying, “Here, do this,” you know whether they want to or not, they may or may not do a good job on that story. And, I think that if it’s something they are passionate about it and something they want to write about, then they’re more like to put a lot of, a lot more care and time into it and produce better work in the end.

Researcher: Uh huh. So, both from a perspective of sort of authenticity, uh, in, in the, uh, in the content as well as, uh, genuine motivation for them to do a good job, it’s important then for them to take ownership, is that…?

Hutkin: Yeah, and I know, like I said, that’s, uh, my background is in reporting and, you know, a lot of times, you know, one of the things that annoyed me about editors when I was a reporter is that, you know, editors have a lot of time to sometimes just sit around and think about ideas that may or may not be legit. Um, you know, and I don’t want to be one of those editors who’s just saying, “Ok, here do this because I said so whether it’s a story or not.” And, um, you know, like I said, if they come up with an idea of something, it’s usually something that people are talking about. And, you know, sometimes it’s worth exploring, sometimes it’s not, but we at least want to hear, you know, what they’re hearing and, you know, what’s important to them because if it’s important to them it might be important to other teens out there too.

Researcher: Um hum. Do the youth that work there, um, do, do they refer to themselves or consider themselves journalists? Or how do, how do they refer to themselves?

Hutkin: That’s a good question… ha, ha, ha, ha. Um, I think they consider themselves, like, you know, student journalists. Um, I don’t think they really consider
themselves, like, you know, um, you know, they obviously, they know they’re not professionals and, you know, they don’t do it full-time. Um, some of them more than others are really capable of doing a lot of work on their own. Some of them, like Linda who you’re going to talk to on Monday, Linda is probably as good as any college journalist out there and she’s still in high school. And, some of them need more guidance. Some of them, um, you know, we start them out with little assignments that are easier because they’re, you know, either their, their, uh, knowledge base or their skill level just isn’t quite there yet where they can work really independently. Um, so, like I said, I think they consider themselves student journalists kind of like they would for writing with their high-school paper or their college paper. Um, but like I said, some of them are, you know, would have no problem going to a college paper and fitting right in and doing a good job.

Researcher: Um hum. So, along with sort of the technical aspect of, of writing the stories – grammar, spelling, style, that sort of thing – uh, how, how else, what, how else do you serve or what’s your role, um, in sort of guiding them and, and grooming them, if you will, in, in their work there at the Mash?

Hutkin: Ok. Well, that depends on the person, too. Like I said, um, some students, um, you know, like, I’ll use Linda as an example again. A lot of times Linda, for instance, will even come to me with ideas and say, “Hey, this thing is going on at my school. Can I write about it?” And, I’ll say, “Fine. Yeah. Go do it.” And, um, you know, she’ll turn in a story a week later and it’s great, and then all I have to do is do a spell check and it’s pretty much good to go. And, um, other students, um, you know, I’d say she’s kind of in the minority. A lot of our students need a little more guidance than that. And so, what we
try to do, especially, um, we have the one big story each week that goes on our cover. And, um, so a lot of what I do involves, you know, working with students on those bigger stories. Um, and so, what we’ll try to do, for instance, is, um, what I’ll do is maybe help them with a little research and they… You know, for instance, we did a story a story on the cover a couple of weeks ago about, um, teens and caffeine. So, um, you know, I, you know, Googled a little bit and [indecipherable] on that story and some other stories that had been done about the issue, and said, you know, “Hey, here’s some facts you might want to look into,” or, “Here, read these stories so you can get yourself a little up to speed on what this issue is about.” Um, we’ll usually work with them to, um, locate experts for whatever it is they’re writing about, whether it’s, you know, caffeine addiction, or right now we’re working on, um, finding, um – I’m trying to think what else we’re working on – you know, finding, um, you know, like I said, finding experts, you know, professors or doctors or, um, people working in the field of whatever it is that they’re writing about. And, um, you know, we’ll usually, you know, find the expert and a lot of times I’ll even, you know, touch base with an expert and say, “Ok, well, we’d like to have a student interview you. What’s a good day and time?” Um, you know, it up to them to actually, you know, follow through, do the interview, and then, um, take the notes and then incorporate that information into a story and, um, you know, attribute it correctly. Um, and like I said, it just depends on the student the amount of guidance they get. Um, you know, for some students who might not, might be new to the program, or whose skills aren’t quite where we’d want them to be, there’s a little more guidance. I’ll say, “Ok, well, you know, here’s some background information on this expert I want you to interview. And, you know, before you interview them, why don’t you
come up with a list of stories that, or not stories but questions you’d like to ask them and we’ll go over them and make sure you’re on the same page.” So, um, so there is a decent amount, but like I said, the amount of guidance kind of varies from student to student that, and, depending on their skill level.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, so does, and, and guiding students, is, do you see that more sort of in a professional sense, if you will? I mean, is it more akin to a traditional, uh, editor-reporter relationship in a newsroom or is it, uh, does it bleed over into, uh, generational issues or does it bleed over into sort of personal life issues at all?

Hutkin: Not usually. I, well, I mean, I… Can you explain what you mean by that? Or…

Researcher: I guess what I’m kind of, I guess what I’m kind of wondering is do you see yourself and, and the work that you do, is it sort of more of the, uh, uh, technical journalistic, uh, guidance, um, or, you know, or in your working with youth, being a unique, uh, population, do, do you sometime serve as a sort of counselor, or, uh, if that makes sense?

Hutkin: Yeah. Um, not a lot. Um, I guess it’s a little different than, you know, a traditional editor-reporter relationship in the fact that, you know, well, you know, they aren’t in our newsroom everyday and so a lot of our correspondence is done over e-mail or the phone. And, then, you know, they come in for their meetings, uh, once a month and then we see them face to face then. Um, so, and, and again, it just kind of depends on the student. Sometimes, you know, students will talk to us about, um, you know, uh, “Well, hey, this happened at school.” But, um, it’s not like, you know, I mean, at least up until now, we haven’t had students really come to us and say, “Hey, I’m having a
problem with this thing in my life.” It’s mostly like, “Hey, I’m having a problem with my story.” And, you know, just in the course of chit-chat they’ll, they’ll might be like, “Oh, well, yeah, this is going on at school.” Or, um, you know, sometimes they’ll, um, you know, like I said, there’s, I haven’t had anyone really go in depth. It’s more like, um, just, you know, casual stuff, like, “Oh yeah, I’m going to the prom.” Or, “Hey, I got accepted to college,” that sort of stuff.

Researcher: Um hum. Um, and, so who would you say then is the target audience for the work?

Hutkin: Um, it’s high-school students.

Researcher: So, it’s for, for students by students.

Hutkin: Exactly.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and is there any, any intention or direction towards, uh, also adults in the community, whether it be teachers or general, uh, adults in the population, or is it more explicitly focused on youth only?

Hutkin: Yeah, it’s, like I said, it’s mostly focused on youth. One thing we do try to do, though, is, um, we [indecipherable] teachers can use in their classroom. Um, like, for instance, some weeks we have like, um, on one of our news pages we have a news quiz, which is, you know we ask students multiple choice questions about current events. And, you know, that’s something that we’re hoping, you know, maybe teachers will see that and maybe use it in their classroom. Or, we’ve heard that, uh, we have a feature called Pro/Con every week where, uh, two students debate an issue. And, it can be a serious issue, um, or it can be, you know, a not-serious issue like, you know, “Is cheerleading a sport?” or, “Should you go to prom without a date?” Um, but we’ve
heard about students using that too, some of those topics as, you know, to
[indecipherable] spark classroom discussion. Or, um, we have a feature called Mash
Stars, basically like a student of the week, where we just, you know, interview a random
student each week and just throw out all sorts of questions. And we have, I've had
some teachers, you know, had their class, you know, fill out Mash Star questions and e-
mail them into us. So, like I said, the main audience is teens, but, um, teachers have
been participating to some degree. But, um, you know, I think, and I wasn't here when
the Mash, you know, the idea was born, but I think the idea is that, you know, adults
already have so many, uh, publications out there, we want something, you know, to
engage teens.

Researchers: Um hum. So, can you tell me then a little bit more about then what
you see as the sort of primary value, um, of the Mash for the teen readership?

Hutkin: Yeah, sure. Um, well, you know, it's, excuse me, we're hoping to some
degree it's educational. Um, you know, like I said, we do have some news stories. Um,
we try to write, um, you know, we pick up some stories that run from the Chicago
Tribune about issues that are affecting, you know, the Chicago public school system, or,
you know, just teenage issues in general. Um, you know, for instance, we had a, um,
case that happened in September where, um, a teenager was beaten to death by other
teenagers outside school. So, we did a lot of coverage with that, a lot of it from the
Tribune, because, you know, that was something that a lot of teens were talking about.
And, I'm sure there were, you know, rumors going around. And, you know, we wanted
to have something put out there that did get the facts and not just the rumors. Um, we
also want something that is entertaining and that's why we incorporate more than just
news. Um, we also, um, we’ve, you know, from visiting schools and talking to students, we’ve heard that, you know, students are really curious about what goes on in other schools and what other teens outside their own school are talking about. And, the Mash is one of those places that can kind of give them a little insight into what other teens are talking about and doing. Um, we even have a feature called Schooled where we send a reporter to a campus that’s not their own to talk to students and teachers and kind of compile a profile of what a different school is like. Um, and, for instance, and we even try to, um, you know, kind of instill some school pride in some ways too. We recently, um, we’re in the middle of a, a contest here called Promathon. And, we basically, we send one girl, um, to prom for free. We pay for her outfit. And, um, so we have an, a hundred girls enter to be our prom queen and we picked four finalists all from different schools. So, we, um, but in addition to sending the girls to prom for free, we also announced we were going to give that girls school a thousand dollars toward their prom. So, and it was interesting to see when the voting took place to choose, among students to choose which girl would be our prom queen. You know, for instance, we saw Facebook™ notes and messages and students saying, “Ok, well, vote for her. You know, if she wins that’s money for our school, too.” And, um, a lot of students were saying, “Well, you know, our school deserves to win this. We’re a small school. We don’t have money for prom.” So, we saw that as kind of a uniting factor bringing a lot of students together. So, um, so, we’re trying to, we’re always looking for ways to make the paper and our website more interactive and bring more interaction from students, but those are some of the ways it’s been happening already.
Researcher: Um hum. Does, uh, does content ever flow, uh… Do youth articles ever have, uh, any, any exposure or publication in, in the Tribune, or has there ever been any, uh, any crossover or bleedover into the, the mainstream publication.

Hutkin: A little. Um, not so much the Tribune, but, um, we actually are, um, a sister publication of the Chicago Redeye.

Researcher: I’m sorry, the Chicago what?

Hutkin: Redeye. And, it’s, um, the Redeye is, um, basically free, um, a free tab that the Tribune started I believe seven or eight years ago. And, it’s basically the youth oriented, you know, the young adult oriented commuter paper and you know whoever picks it up and reads it on the train. And, it’s geared toward, you know, twenty and thirty somethings living in the city. And, um, and it’s, you know, tries to do kind of what we do only for a little bit of older crowd because it’s entertainment, news, sports, um, on a local, national level. So, we’ve had, um, some of our students, um, participate with some of the features that appeared in the Redeye. Uh, for instance, their, the Redeye runs something every day called 5on5. And, it’s basically, you get five people, um, who, uh, have to answer a question related to sports, and their answers are particularly funny and snarky. So, we’ve had some of our students participate in 5on5 and, um, get some exposure that way. Um, one of our students did a story, uh, before the Olympics. He wrote about Chicago area athletes who were competing in the, in the Olympic games in Vancouver. Um, and we got him an interview with Patrick Kane who plays for the Blackhawks, and, um, his story was actually picked up by the Redeye, um, I think the day before the Olympics started. So, um, like I said, we’re still new, so there have been, you know, these small victories. Um, we haven’t had any of our students contribute
anything to the Tribune yet, it’s more the other way around. Sometimes we’ll pull their stories and use them in our paper.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and, and so then how do you see the Mash fitting in with the, the general Chicago community there?

Hutkin: Um hum. That’s a good question. Well, like I said we do, we are, you know, we are a niche publication and we are, um, really at this point just focused on high schools and teenagers. Um, but there are other, like some of the things we are doing, like the prom contest I just told you about, um, we actually had a lot of participation from that event outside the school community. Like the girl who won, for instance, um, uh, she’s Polish and I guess somehow, um, one of her friends or family members, um, contacted one of these local Polish radio stations and they were talking a lot about our contest. And, um, actually a lot of the members of the Polish community were voting for this girl even, you know, some people I guess they didn’t know her. So, that’s one thing that I thought was interesting. It was meant toward, you know, just to get students involved and it actually got people in the community involved as well. Um, you know, like I said, most of our efforts, we’re still new, so most of our efforts up until this point, we’re still trying to, you know, get all the schools to realize who we are and all the students to realize who we are. But, um, I think in some ways we have kind of, um, you know, I think it’s, we’ve, since our focus is giving teens, um, a place for their voice to be heard no matter where they live in the city or suburbs, and I think a lot of teens want that. They want to see other people their age in the paper. They want to hear what they have to say and what they think and read about what other people their age are doing. So, um, even though we might not be appealing to the community as a whole just
yet, I think we are giving teens all over the area a voice. And, um, like I said, some people still don’t know about us yet, but we’re slowly trying to get the news out that we’re here and, um, this is what we can offer you.

Researcher: So, do you think then that the, the work and the stories there in the Mash, um, do they contribute to a sense of, uh, uh, teen community in Chicago?

Hutkin: I think so. I think so. Like I said, we’re still new. Um, like I said, it’s still, we’re still new and we’re, a lot of students, and schools, and principals, and teachers are still learning who we are. But, we’ve got some really devoted fans. Even right from the start, we had, you know, we have teens who, uh, you know, would, uh, you know, since we have, uh, we have, the way teens interact with us by sending in their photos or shoutouts, things like that. And, right from the start we had some fans who, we would, we’d always see sending in photos or sending in shoutouts. Um, so, and I think that’s only going to increase as more students know about us and know what we do.

Researcher: And, the, so, you mentioned that, uh, there’s been a number of local events, um, that you guys cover. Um, is there a, a concentration on trying to provide local coverage, um, or, or a local angle on stories?

Hutkin: There is. There is. Um, especially, um, you know, we do run like on our news pages or sports pages, we will say, well, sometimes have stories about something that’s happening nationally or, um, you know, even internationally. But, especially with stories that our students write, you know, stories that appear on the cover, uh, we really try to make sure there is some sort of local angle, whether it’s, OK, you know, um, talk to teens who are local. And, like, especially if, you know, if it’s talking to an expert, we don’t, it doesn’t matter to us so much if they’re from outside the area, but we don’t want
them talking to other students outside the city. We want them talking to teens in Chicago unless there’s some reason why they wouldn’t. You know, if they, the only reason we wouldn’t is if we’re doing, I know, is for about teens leaving home for college, which is a story we did a few weeks ago. So, we talked to some teens that were from the Chicago area who had left the city. But, we do try to make sure there is some local connection with, um, our student written stories.

Researcher: Um hum. Have any of the teens, uh, covered any sort of, uh, uh, local public affairs? Have they done any interviewing with, uh, local leaders?

Hutkin: Um, some. I’m trying to think of some off hand. We, um, more of the, um, I mean, well as far as like local leaders, most of the people they’ve talked to are like principals. Or, um, I’m trying to think of anyone else. I know last year we were trying to get a, some students to interview, uh, Ron Huberman, who’s the CEO of Chicago Public Schools. That hasn’t worked out. We’re still trying. Um, as far as, there’s not been some, a lot of interviews with, you know, politicians and that sort of public figures, but, um, like I said, they have talked to a lot of experts, not necessarily local. They’ve, um, we do, um, give the students the chance to do a decent amount of celebrity interviews if some celebrities come to Chicago or athletes come to Chicago, which, you know, they get very excited about. Um, and I’m hoping we can give them more opportunities to do things like that as we continue to grow and expand and more people, um, know about us and hear about us.

Researcher: Um hum. And, what would you say is the primary benefit or the primary value for, uh, the youth that are working there at the Mash? What is the primary value of their involvement?
Hutkin: Oh, well, I think there’s lots of benefits. I mean, we do have, um, lots of kids who do want to, um, go into journalism or think they might want to go into journalism. We try to give them a really, you know, even though they’re not in our office every day working, we try to make this as much like a real, real live newspaper as possible. I mean, we expect them to meet deadlines. We expect them to, you know, talk to a variety of students, not just talk to their friends. Um, when they did assignments, you know, we even told them, “No, you aren’t allowed to talk to more than, you know, one person at your school. You have to go out there and talk to strangers. Um, and, you know, if they, you know, turn in a story and it needs work, we expect them to do more work on it. We don’t really let them, you know, half-ass anything, for lack of a better word. Um, you know, we tell them, “We want, you know, your school newspaper covers just the things in the school, but we’re bigger than that. We want to appeal to teens all over the city. We, you know, what’s going on in your school is nice, but we’re bigger than that.” Um, so, for students who do want, um, to pursue journalism, I think some of them are really going to have some great clips. If, um, they want to try to get jobs at their college paper, they’re going to go in knowing a lot about the field and whether this is something they want to pursue, and, or not pursue. Um, and, even if they don’t want to go into journalism, I think there’s lots of benefits. They get to meet new people. They get to, you know, get exposed to people, students from other schools. Um, they might get exposed to, um, you know, they might get to interview people they might not interview otherwise. You know, if they get to interview an actor who’s, you know, in a movie, you know, they probably wouldn’t have gotten that just working at their school paper or just being part of the drama club or whatever. Um, they have to learn how to
talk to people. That’s going to be beneficial no matter what field they go into. They are, we’re hoping, well, you know, we try to improve their writing skills and no matter what they go into, I think that’s going to be valuable as well.

Researcher: Um, what, uh, do, are the, are the youth generally, I mean, you told me a little bit already about kind of how you guys discuss the, the stories and that sort of thing, but are they, um, would you say that you’re generally flexible and that they’re allowed to write about the topics that they want to? More specifically, are there, are there topics that are taboo, or that are inappropriate, or that they’re not, that they’re not allowed to write about?

Hutkin: Yeah, and that’s something that we’ve been struggling with, honestly. Um, I mean, it’s not like we ever sat down and said, “Ok, we can and cannot write about this and that.” Um, and we have, um, yeah, I think when we first got going we were a little more conservative with what we wrote about just because we wanted to, you know, build an audience first and, um, um, just to get ourselves off the ground. But, as, the more, you know, the longer we do this, I think the more we’re willing to tackle. Um, for instance we recently ran a story on, um, you know, teens who are married or engaged, which, you know, we were a little iffy about and we, uh, actually Linda who you’re talking to is the one who did that story. Um, and we were a little worried like, “Oh, well, you know, how are some of these conservative principals going to react to this?” But, you know, the story ran and it was fine. And, um, I think the only rule is that if we are going to tackle a topic that might be a little controversial, we, um, well, we have to have a good, you know, a good reason for doing it. We’re not just going to do something just to do something. There has to be some sort of reason. And, um, it has to be something
that, um, you know, the reporter who’s assigned to work on that, um, has to know that, you know, they have to do their homework. They can’t just, you know, write their opinion. They have to interview people. They have to interview students. They have to get statistics. They have to back what, what they say with facts. And, you know, they have to be prepared that, you know, when we look at that story, we’re going to look for holes, and that we expect them to fill any holes that are in that story. Um, so, and a lot of times, you know, we do get kids to come in for meetings and they come in with all these controversial ideas. You know, like, “Oh, well, we want to write about, you know, kids with fake IDs,” for instance. And, we’ll say, “Ok, you know, well, that sounds good, but we would need to, you know, talk to some students who have fake IDs. And, you know, we don’t use anonymous sources. We would have to find kids with fake IDs who want, are ok being interviewed, and ok with having their name in the paper, and ok with, uh, you know, interviewing their parents as well to, um, make sure they know, ‘Hey, your kid has a fake ID. What do you think about it?’” And, a lot of the times when we, you know, let them know the reality of the situation they’re like, “Uh, well, maybe not.” So, um, like I said, we just try to, you know, make it, before we even get to the point of assigning anything, we want to make sure they know what we expect from them and then they can decide, “Well, is this something we really want to pursue and can we realistically pursue this?”

Researcher: Um hum. So then the, the barriers then to, uh, covering a topic like that sound, sound like they would be more logistical than it would be, um, that it’s an inappropriate or too sensitive of a subject matter?

Hutkin: Um, well, it depends. It depends. I think it’s a little of both.
Researcher: Ok. Um, are you there?

Hutkin: Yes. Yes.

Researcher: Oh, ok. All right. Uh, um, ok, so it's a little bit of both, both the, uh, but that it sounds like then there's some openness, um, to discuss the topics on a case-by-case basis then, and then...

Hutkin: Right.

Researcher: Ok. Um, can you tell me a little bit about the peer interactions among the, the youth that, that work there at the Mash? Now, I know you said that you, I believe you said seventy high-school students work there?

Hutkin: Yeah.

Researcher: Um, and, and that some of them, you know, uh, the correspondence is by e-mail. But, am I correct to assume that there is some, uh, interaction among the teen writers, uh, there in, in your office, in your newsroom?

Hutkin: Oh, yeah, definitely. Um, you know, a lot of them, we, we break our staff down into four groups. So, there's, you know, fifteen, twenty different students in each group. So, I think a lot of them do, um, you know, kind of become friends with people, and in their group especially. Um, you know, I get on Facebook™ and I see a lot of them, you know, talking to each other on Facebook™, or, um, you know, making plans to, you know, “Hey, after our meeting let’s go do this,” that sort of thing. Um, and, you know, a lot of the time that does happen with students from different schools. And, um, I know we even have students, like, two students from the same school, I think we do have some cases where, you know, maybe two students who go to the same school and write for the Mash are, maybe they don’t know each other that well at school, but,
you know, through the Mash they kind of get to know each other better. Um, and, you know, ‘cause you’d probably be better off asking the students more about that, but from what I see and observe and, you know, see on Facebook™ or whatever, um, that definitely does happen.

Researcher: And, uh, do you guys have a fairly diverse, uh, staff of youth writers there?

Hutkin: Yes. That’s one of the things we try to do. Um, I mean, for instance, last year when we started, um, gathering applications from students to work for us this year, you know, we would get some schools would send us, you know, we’d get students, you know, fifteen applications from students at one particular school. But, our rule is, you know, we try to keep it to maybe three or four from the same school. We don’t want this to be just, you know, whatever high school, an extension of whatever high school’s student paper. We do want to get geographic diversity. We want diversity of grades, you know, boys and girls. Um, and that’s something we really pay close attention to when we are choosing applicants.

Researcher: Um, and, and, uh, so, have you seen a, a value of that diversity in the interaction among the youth? Do you think that they learn, uh, I mean, I hate to sound like I’m asking a leading question, but do they, do they learn, uh, more about people of, of, you know, that are different than themselves through that interaction.

Hutkin: Oh, I hope so. I hope so. Um, it’s, uh, it’s interesting to see, well, I think, I think it ought to be more interesting to see next year actually, because right now, um, the first year, to give you some background, we just, um, circulated the paper just to schools within city public, you know, public schools within the city. Um, this school year
we’ve expanded to, um, in addition to being in schools in the city, we expanded to schools, some of the schools in the suburbs as well as private schools. And, uh, for logistical reasons, the way our students are set up, um, they’re grouped by city and suburb. Like, for instance, we’re meeting with a group of students today from, uh, the suburbs, and next Thursday we’re meeting a group, with a group from the city, and then next, you know, the week after that, another group from the suburbs. Um, next year we’re thinking of just mixing it all up. You know, ok, you come in and we have a group of city and suburban students in one room. So, I think that’s when we’re going to see it more, ‘cause there is a decent bit of difference between, um, you know, well, there’s a lot of similarities too, but I think that’s when we’re really going to see it, when we’ve got all those kids in the same room sharing their ideas and see what comes of it.

Researcher: Um hum. At this point, have you noticed any conflict as a result of the differences among the youth?

Hutkin: No, not that I’ve seen.

Researcher: Uh, and, what about, uh, among, between the youth and then yourself and the other adults that work there, have you noticed any, uh, any barriers to sort of communicating across that generational gap?

Hutkin: Uh, not so much. I mean, we’re lucky. We, for the most part, we’ve got a group of really good kids who work for us. You know, for the most part, they want to be here and they’re pretty eager to do what we ask them to do. Um, but again, it just depends on the kid. I mean, some students, you, you know, like any kid, you just tell them over and over and they, not to do something and they do it anyway. Or, you know, we’ve had some kids who are just, you know, we know they’re going to miss deadline.
Um, so it’s more that. It, it’s not so much generational conflict, it’s just like, “Ok, well, you
didn’t do what you were going to, what you said you were going to do,” or, “You didn’t
do everything I asked you to do,” that sort of thing, more like, you know, teacher-student
type of conflict.

Researcher: Um hum. Would you say that you learn things from the youth, uh,
through your involvement there?

Hutkin: I think so. Um, yeah, I think so. I mean it’s just, uh, um, trying to give you
some examples. Like I said, I think it’s, one of the interesting things is, you know, I think
it’s interesting to see what they’re talking about and see what’s important to them. Um,
you know, um, I’ve learned a little more about, you know, what, what they’re into, you
know, more, a little more about pop culture, a little more about, you know, how they
think and how they process things. So, I think it’s, hopefully it’s going both ways, that
we’re learning from each other.

Researcher: Um hum. Do, does any of the, the, uh, awareness or the things that
they’re talking about, particularly if it involves, like, local, uh, local issues, so, um,
changes in school policy, school board policy, uh, that sort of thing. Uh, have, have any
of the youth taken their involvement outside of the, the writing? Um, I assume that you
can’t speak to the youth audience, but for the actual youth participants there at the
Mash, has their interest or participation ever extended, uh, to, like, you know, going to a
school board meeting, or speaking, you know, in front of a group of teachers, or, or
something like that? Has it ever taken form in the sense of them actually sort of putting
hands and feet to actual action?
Hutkin: Um, that’s, yeah, that’s a good question. I am, not that I know of. Um, or not that I’ve heard of anyway. I think it’s more the other way around, like, “Hey, you know, I’m involved with this group at my school and they’re doing such and such a thing so we should write about it.” That’s what I see more often and the other way around.

Researcher: Ok. Um, uh, are, are there, uh, other obstacles and barriers to, to the work that you do there with the youth and what are they?

Hutkin: Um, let’s see. Um, and there are. Like I said, I think the fact that, you know, that we don’t see them every day, um, that does create problems sometimes. You know, sometimes they’re not always quick to respond by phone or e-mail. You know, like, where, you know, a grown up editor, you know, with a staff of grown up reporters can just, you know, look across the room and, you know, find their reporter and ask them where their story is. You know, we don’t always have that option, so that makes it hard. Um, and like I said, just the fact that we do rely on, you know, e-mail and phone communication, um, you know maybe what I’m trying to tell a kid, maybe it doesn’t always come across, or you know maybe what they’re trying to tell me something over e-mail and it’s like, “Well, what are you talking about?” So, you know, it’s just kind of difficult with technology. Um, what else, and just, um, like I said, we do expect a lot of them, and, you know, sometimes it just takes a while to figure out, you know, who is capable of doing what. If they’re assigned, you know, a story it, you know, does take some time to figure out, “Ok, well, are they going to be able to do it?” And, just because, again, we don’t see them, you know I don’t see them doing interviews or overhear them doing interviews. So, it’s hard to know like, “Ok, are they asking the right questions? Are they asking everything they need to ask? Are they, you know, doing a
phone interview when I asked them, you know, to do a phone interview and not just e-mailing this person and getting the interviews that way?” So, so, a lot of this is because I, you know, I can’t see them, I just don’t know a lot of times how they’re working or how they’re getting their information sometimes and sometimes that is the problem.

Researcher: Um, you mentioned the different, like, individual capabilities of, of doing a story or, or writing something. Do, what standard, uh, are these youth held to in, in respect to, uh, are they, are they held to the same sort of professional journalistic standard, uh, of, of, of grammar, and spelling and style, or is there more latitude? I mean, is it expected to be clean copy or is it, is there more latitude that ok, these are youth and they don’t have mastery of the English language the way a professional journalist would?

Hutkin: Right. No, we, I mean, we actually do have, hold these kids are pretty high standard. And, we even tell them when we hire them that, “You know, we expect you to do more than you would do say for your college paper, and the writing you do for us is very different than probably that what you would be writing for you English class. Um, and to some degree, there is more, um, latitude, like, “Ok, well, you know…” Like, let’s say someone’s kind of new, like, “Ok, they didn’t know to do this or that, um, you know, that they were supposed to attribute their information. Or, they didn’t know they were supposed to, you know, quote just people that go to schools other than their own.” Um, I think where, um, where that leniency ends is if you, if we talk to the kids and we say, “Ok, this is what you did. You know, you’re supposed to do it this way instead. Don’t do it again.” And, then if they keep doing it, if it’s going to be the advice we give them or the instructions we give them, you know, if it kind of falls on deaf ears and they keep doing
it, that’s I think when we’re like, “Ok, well, we’ve talked about this and you’re still doing it. Um, we got a, we’ve got a problem now,” that sort of thing.

Researcher: Uh huh. So, the first story then would run as is basically and then it would be don’t do it in the future and if it did continue then that would be addressed at that time.

Hutkin: Right, well, we try to address things as they happen. Um, and, I mean, you know, and if a story is just, you know, it’s not in any condition to be printed, we don’t print it. We either give them another chance to work on it, and if they can’t get it the way we need it, then it doesn’t run.

Researcher: Um hum. And, so, how do you think what they’re doing now will affect them as they, uh, as they become adults?

Hutkin: Um, well, like I said, I think, um, you know, some of the kids who are really involved and who, you know, want to pursue journalism, I think this is really going to help them. I mean, I wish, you know, when I was in high school that there had been a program like this, um, ‘cause I think that they’re getting a lot of real-world experience that most high-school students normally wouldn’t get. Um, so, especially if they do plan to pursue journalism, I think they’re going to have, um, you know, a leg up on other people just because, um, like I said, we hold them to high standards. We, um, you know, want them to talk to and do interviews with people outside their school, whereas if they’re working for the news, for the school newspaper I don’t know if they’re necessarily expected to do that, to, you know, find people outside their comfort zone and go talk to them. Um, so, I think, you know, a lot of our students if they want to work for a paper in college, they’re going to have an easier time with that. And, you know, for
the students who don’t want to pursue journalism, hopefully, we’ve taught them a little more about good writing and speaking to people and just, you know, being able to interact with people who are outside their comfort zone.

Researcher: Um hum. And, so, you guys do the online and the print editions. Um, how, how do you see technology fitting into the work that you guys are doing there?

Hutkin: Well, it’s a big part. And, you know, the generation we’re dealing with, you know, they’ve grown up with e-mail, and Facebook™, and Twitter℠ and all that stuff. So, um, we’re constantly looking for ways that we can engage them online. Um, we do have a website, um, that started at the same time that we started our paper. Um, we’re actually going to be moving to a, um, a newer website I think in May. Excuse me, and, uh, I think it will be more interactive than the website we have now. Um, we’ve been, starting this year, we’ve having some students work for us as bloggers. Um, we don’t really have like a regular blogger like writing about sports or fashion or whatever. Instead, we just say, “Ok, well, if you want to write a blog entry about whatever, just send it to us.” And, so, we have several different bloggers just writing about, you know, whatever is on their minds. Um, we started a Facebook™ fan page this year, that’s, at the beginning of the school year, that’s got a little over three thousand fans, um, especially because of the prom contest I told you about. Um, people could vote, um, on our Facebook™ page. They could go to our website and vote. Um, and, you know, some days we were getting thousands of votes a day or thousands of hits a day on our site or on our Facebook™ page. So, you know, we realize that, you know, this is how this generation operates. And, that’s one of the things we’re constantly trying to do is like, “Ok, what can we do new online? What can we do new as far as our blogs?” We’re
trying to add more video to our website. We’re trying to, um, just you know, keep up with what they’re doing as far as technology goes and make sure that we’re, we’re relevant and that we’re offering things on the Web that they’re going to use and that they’re going to come to us and look for us online.

Researcher: Um hum. And how is the print, uh, edition distributed?

Hutkin: Um, it goes directly to the schools. Um, we have an agreement with the Chicago public schools that says ok, you can put your paper in our schools. And, so, that covers all the schools in the city and then as far as the suburbs go we just kind of went district by district. Um, and, you know, our general manager and editor, um, met with a lot principals and superintendents and, um, just told them about the paper and the benefits of having students work for the paper and for having students at their schools get, read the paper. And, so, um, we just went about it that way. So, then every Thursday it was just delivered to, directly into campuses. And, um, all the schools do have racks, like, in the library, or the cafeteria, or by the main entrance, um, where the paper is displayed. Um, you know, it’s supposed to be in a spot where students can see it. And, it just, you know, it varies school by school. Some schools, you know, everyone knows where it is, at some schools, you know, not as much. And, that’s something we’ve been working on since the beginning to make sure, you know, that schools are displaying it so students know where it is, know where to find it, and know where they can pick it up.

Researcher: Um hum. So, your sense right now, um, is, would you say that, uh, the youth readership is accessing your content more through the print edition or through the online edition?
Hutkin: Um, well that’s a good, I think it might be more, uh, through print but, um, you know, it’s hard to tell, you know, from here, uh, you know, not being inside the schools and knowing. I mean, we do have some people who, um, you know, who go to our website or submit things through our website pretty regularly. Um, and, you know, especially with, um, just things again like the prom contest. Uh, we’re trying to really increase our online audience. And, it’s, you know, it’s happening. It may be a little slower than we would like, but it is happening.

Researcher: Um hum. And, what’s the greatest compliment that somebody could give you about the work that you do there at the Mash?

Hutkin: Oh, wow. Ha, ha, ha. That’s a good question. Um, that’s a good question. I guess that, um, you know, that we got it right and they like what they see.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and, what, what’s your actual title there?

Hutkin: Oh, I’m, uh, one of the assistant editors.

Researcher: Ok. Um, and, I’m sorry you said it started how long ago?

Hutkin: Um, we started in, uh, September of 2008.

Researcher: And, you’ve been with them that, the whole time?

Hutkin: Uh huh.

Researcher: And, you, did you say you were with a teen edition at the Tribune prior to the Mash?

Hutkin: No, that was at a different paper in, uh, Virginia.

Researcher: Ok. And, uh, so you worked prior to, uh, overseeing youth publication you also worked as a, as a reporter yourself?

Hutkin: Um hum. Yes.
Researcher: How, how long have you been, uh, in the field?
Hutkin: Uh, let’s see, for about, uh, almost twelve years.
Researcher: Ok. Um, and so, you mentioned you were at, in Virginia previously, so you are not native to Chicago, I assume.
Hutkin: No.
Researcher: How long have you been in Chicago?
Hutkin: Uh, since, uh, since I came here to take the job in, uh, August of, uh, O-8.
Researcher: August of O-8, ok.
Hutkin: Um hum.
Researcher: Um. Ok, and, uh, do you mind if I ask your age
Hutkin: Uh, no, I’m thirty four.
Researcher: Thirty four. Ok. Um, ok, is there, so, uh, what else have I missed, or what else is important for me to know about the work you guys are doing?
Hutkin: Huh… I think that about covers it.
Researcher: Ok. All right, well, uh, then, Erinn, thank you so much for your time. And, if, certainly if there’s anything that, uh, you know, you think of afterwards, feel free to give me a call or e-mail me. And if you don’t, if you don’t mind, if something, if I realize I forgot to ask you an obvious question that I should have asked you, if you don’t mind if I follow up with you.
Hutkin: Yeah, yeah, that’s fine.
Researcher: Ok. All right, well again, thank you, Erinn. I sure appreciate your time.
Hutkin: Ok. No problem. Thank you.
Researcher: Thank you. Bye bye.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Lain, L.B. (1992, August). A national study of high school newspaper programs: Environmental and adviser characteristics, funding, and pressures on free expression. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeff Neely was born in Newport News, Virginia, but has spent most of his life as a Floridian. His professional experience in journalism, public relations, and social work provided the inspiration for this dissertation.

Through his work as a reporter and editor, Jeff saw the power that local media can provide in shaping and building strong communities. Likewise, as a former caseworker and resource development specialist serving youth in Florida’s foster care system, Jeff has seen the tremendous need for empowering youth. When teens are given the opportunities to tell their own stories, the potential is there to change both hearts and policies.

In addition to his research interests in youth-generated news, Jeff has also explored topics in mass communication like the pedagogical potential of virtual worlds, the role of social network sites in the civic engagement of college students, ethical considerations in journalists covering mass tragedy, and blogging trends among newspaper editors. Along with contributing to the body of mass communication knowledge, he enjoys incorporating his research into the classroom to help budding journalists be skilled, responsible, and compelling storytellers.

Prior to pursuing his Ph.D., Jeff received a master’s degree in journalism and media studies from the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, in 2006. There he had the privilege of being mentored by brilliant scholars, such as Professors Deni Elliott, Bob Dardenne, Jay Black, Mark Walters, Mike Killenberg, and Edgar Huang. Jeff also completed bachelor’s degrees in psychology and philosophy at the University of Florida in 1999.
As of fall 2011, Jeff will be an assistant professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He is very much looking forward to starting this new chapter of his life with his wife, Kendall, and his daughter, Eden. He is also thrilled that he will be living less than 30 minutes from the beach and will be able to continue surfing.

If you would like to know more about Jeff, you can visit http://www.jeffreyneely.com.