

THESIS

NEWS IN A TUMULTUOUS BORDER REGION:
HOW JOURNALISTS AT THE *EL PASO TIMES* REPORT ON THEIR JUAREZ
NEIGHBORS

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ABSTRACT

NEWS IN A TUMULTUOUS BORDER REGION: HOW JOURNALISTS AT THE *EL PASO TIMES* REPORT ON THEIR JUAREZ NEIGHBORS

This ethnographic study examines the complexity of reporting the news in a tumultuous border region. Using observation and in-depth interviews, it reveals how reporters and editors at the *El Paso Times* define their roles and responsibilities as they cover both the violence and the daily life on both sides of the United States/Mexico border. It investigates the way journalists attempt to meet the needs of the community, which in this case encompasses two major cities, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas. Ciudad Juarez, where thousands of men, women and children have been murdered in recent years, is one of the most dangerous cities in the world. The *El Paso Times* newsroom is seven blocks from Juarez. This study was conducted in the *El Paso Times* newsroom during October and November of 2009. It documents journalists at the *El Paso Times* as they attempt to accurately cover Juarez, despite the danger.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Journalists and newsroom employees strive to serve people on both sides of an international border. Media often focus on the local community, but the definition of local community in border cities is complex, and often nebulous. The resources, families, and geography of these areas provide a strong base for intercommunity ties. However, the same groups of people that rely on one another within these communities are often in conflict when they must compete for environmental and economic resources (Venkatesh, 2003). Journalists incorporate common routines and practices as they identify, structure, and write news stories. Yet, a multitude of processes and powers exert control as coverage decisions are made (Breed, 1997). Even within common newsroom practices, decisions become difficult when writing about an international border community that lacks the traditional stabilization of common government, police enforcement, working conditions and wage enforcement.

Purpose

This ethnographic study explores the complexity of providing news at a difficult international border, where one side is relatively calm and peaceful, and the other is overwhelmed by violence and brutality. Although many global regions face similar circumstances, this study is focused on El Paso, Texas, in the United States, and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, in Mexico. Journalists at the *El Paso Times* provide news every day about this single metropolitan area, which is situated in two different countries. This

research examines the complex structure and resulting culture of the *El Paso Times*' newsroom, and provides descriptive information about those journalists.

On an international border, community is not easily defined. Both sides rely on and influence each other. They share the social ties of friends and family. They share the same geography and climatic environment (Venkatesh, 2003). The people living in border areas have both common and conflicting cultural values. Religion, family, politics, and patriotism influence their feelings and behavior (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009). El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico is an example of a border space that has the disparity of two separate governments, and yet the people living there maintain close associations. A reporter and columnist at the *El Paso Times* described the border experience at El Paso and Juarez by saying, "We share the same air.... We are totally linked." The health problems and medical services for all those in the area are interconnected. A comprehensive border economy keeps the commerce in both cities functioning. Family and friends are connected by cultural beliefs and religious practices. Despite the commonality, the Rio Grande, which separates the two communities, is bound on both sides by a fence crowned with barb or razor concertina wire.

Background

The region of El Paso and Juarez was originally known as Paso del Norte. Prior to 1848 the border between the United States and Mexico was the Arkansas River. At that time the area of the Rio Grande valley provided support for numerous indigenous tribes, settlers, and travelers. The first European explorers came in the middle of the sixteenth century, establishing agricultural settlements along the Rio Grande. Among these settlements, the El Paso/Juarez area was one of the largest. The river provided rich

agricultural growth, a means of transportation, and was an important stop on the Santa Fe Trail.

When war broke out between Mexico and the United States it ended in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo, which established the Rio Grande as the international border. This treaty ceded over 30 percent of Mexican land to the United States (Krauze, 1997). The political boundary divided the area of Paso Del Norte into Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to the south and El Paso, Texas to the north. The two cities have a combined population of approximately two million people (El Paso Chamber of Commerce, 2011). El Paso and Juarez are part of the Chihuahua high desert. Franklin Mountains rise 7,000 feet north of El Paso. The Rio Grande River bisects the two cities (El Paso Chamber of Commerce, 2011). The people already settled in this fertile area share a rich cultural and economic history (Krauze, 1997).

An example of the modern history of family and friends in El Paso and Juarez is shared by Hector Tobar in the Los Angeles Times' story, "An Image of Border Harmony" (Tobar, 2010). Tobar reflects on the photograph of his wife's grandparents as they walk down a busy street in El Paso. They both lived and worked in Juarez, but had apparently come to El Paso for a stroll. Hoping to share the family history with his children, Tobar and his family traveled to the El Paso/Juarez area. "I wanted them to understand that when their great-grandparents passed through those border towns, they were a place of hope" (Tobar, 2010, p. 1). When he tried to take his children to see their great-grandmother's birthplace, he was warned to stay away from Juarez. He laments that the current violence and politics separate the two cities.

“Today, more than ever, the cities of our Latin American past and the cities of our U.S. present are separated by powerful barriers.

“It wasn’t always that way.

“Once a young Mexican postman of limited means could take his girlfriend on a trolley across the border for a strawberry soda” (Tobar, 2010, p. 3).

In the last three years Juarez has become the violent epicenter of a struggle between two powerful drug cartels, both fighting to gain control of profitable smuggling routes into the United States. In the article “Special report: Juarez deserves the title of most dangerous city in the World” (Borunda, June 7, 2010), cites the public service organization Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Publica Justicia Penal. “Juarez deserves the title of most dangerous city in the world not only for its homicide rate but also suffering very high numbers of other violent crimes.” This organization reported 2,658 homicides in Juarez during 2009. With an estimated population of 1,388,955, the homicide rate is calculated at 191 per 100,000 residents. The media in El Paso and in Juarez watch and try to accurately report this violence as part of the reality of the area (Ortega, 2010, p. 3).

An editorial staff writer for the *El Paso Times*, (2009), shares the concern of many:

“It is clear that drug cartels continue to rule wherever they choose in Mexico and for some two years now they have chosen our sister city of Juarez. Stopping that is a must. Trade with Mexico, via Juarez, is vital to El Paso’s economy and we are close-knit with family and friends in Juarez; so many of us fear a loved one will be caught in the crossfire of bullets. Some have – and died” (Muench, 2009).

Significance of the study

The *El Paso Times* building is seven blocks from the border crossing to Juarez. The journalists at the *El Paso Times* juggle responsibilities of providing both accurate and balanced reporting for the city of El Paso as well as fair and much needed coverage for their Juarez neighbors who are struggling for survival.

The primary researcher for this study traveled to El Paso, Texas, to study how journalists at the *El Paso Times* regard their role in covering their border community. The study considers the challenges these journalists face on a daily basis as they deal with the violence, as well as the safety issues, for themselves and the individuals in both communities.

The author can see relevance of this study transferring to journalists in many areas of the world. Journalists often face the dilemma of fair and accurate reporting in the face of danger. The author hopes this study will discover insights that will give journalists resources for continued authentic, safe reporting.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Community theory

Community plays a role in the mission of the *El Paso Times*: “We will continually strive to improve our profitability, while being a strong community partner.” (MediaNews Group, 2007). The tie of family and friends between El Paso and Juarez is reflected in the *El Paso Times* coverage of Juarez. The editors and staff report on a wide range of community issues unique to the border of El Paso and Juarez.

The responsibility and definition of community is part of a normative value. The early American philosopher, Thomas Paine, describes an ideal model of community in his 1776 essay “Common Sense.” He takes a rational approach in describing community as people who come together to pursue their common good. This was one of his many arguments for “enlightened” humanity. He believed that all people could understand the need to work for a common purpose (Paine, 1776 /1975).

George Wood and Juan Judikis (2002) define community as consisting of residents, groups, and organizations. They define it as a group of people with common interests and purpose who acknowledge not only their interconnections, but also their mutual responsibility and commitment to the well-being of each other and the group. The researcher Murali Venkatesh (2003) stated that a community respects individual differences and the well-being of all individuals in the group.

Community on an international level can continue to reflect narrow local concerns, or larger and broader areas of common interest (Little, 2002). Adrian Little asserts that communities are formed on the basis of shared principles and values. He further contends that community principles can be spiritual or secular, and built through “friendship, voluntarism, sharing, mutualism and cooperation” (Little, 2002, p. 26). His theory is opposed to the notion that the definition of community should somehow be tied to economic organizations, markets, nationalities, or governments. He believes community is instead a basis for the “social welfare” of all the members of the community (Little, 2002, p. 26).

Border theory

Defining community in border spaces is complex, and challenges the traditional notion of combined welfare. The countries on both sides shape the relationships that develop at international boundaries. The political divisions are both physical and symbolic, however, humans create all borders and as such, they are “social constructions” (Diener & Hagen, 2010, pp. 4-5).

In many cases, unpopulated geographical features or world landmasses are the natural basis for territorial or international divisions. In other cases, the boundaries of countries are created in already populated areas. They are either created in agreement with the population pattern, or are superimposed without regard to the existing cultural group (Morehouse, 2004).

Each border area is unique but theorists have identified important attributes. In her essay, “Theoretical approaches to Border Spaces and Identities” (2004) Barbara Morehouse contends that the construction of boundaries rests on “...the analysis of the

historical, geographical, and socioeconomic contexts within which they exist” (p. 20).

She identifies several important attributes that affect life on a border. She labels these as: “Boundaries as barriers; boundaries and natural law; boundaries as filters; boundaries as expressions of nationalism; boundaries as points of conflict; boundaries as points of contact and cooperation; and boundaries as contexts” (pp. 23-28).

When identified as a barrier, borders are perceived as a place where danger would be stopped and the people living within the area protected. This physical line may stop the flow of undesirable goods, people and resources however; it also stops the flow of elements that would be advantageous to a society. Identified as a filter a political boundary would not stop, but instead control the flow of goods, resources and people. It would regulate social systems through cooperation. This is evident in shared responsibility for economic, health, and environmental welfare of the people in both countries (Morehouse, 2004, pp. 23-25).

Often the power of a boundary is the belief it will provide identity protection and shelter. The focus of a boundary as an expression of nationalism can affirm the cultural uniqueness of a population. It can also be a source of conflict and dispute. Morehouse (2004) contends that aggressive nationalism’s of the nineteenth century “...generated serious border confrontations in Europe.” She further says that in Latin America and Africa today, boundaries “...continue to be a source of actual and potential conflict” (p. 21).

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, globalization of trade and work forces has resulted in economic cooperation between many countries. Theorist Alejandro Lugo says that border areas should be defined as inclusive spaces, and recent globalization

makes cooperation relevant for people and their governments (Lugo, 1997). The increased need for cooperation makes the borderlands a key area for contact.

The maintenance of the political divisions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries varies. Some governments choose to use physical, military, and technological barriers to maintain their sovereignty. In other cases governments allow for more fluid commerce at its political edge.

Internationally, governments are unique. Political ideologies, military systems, law enforcement procedures, economic structures, environmental practices, educational opportunities, and healthcare provisions can be vastly different. Yet, for all their differences, the communities that develop on the border have many commonalities. The man-made divisions do not confine environments, economics, language patterns, friendships, families, and shared religious and cultural values. Pavlakovich-Kochi, Morehouse, and Wastl-Walter (2006) believe that, “Understanding borderland dynamics from any perspective requires taking into account all those factors (politics, commerce, and culture), as well as the recursive relationship that the borderland has within its boundary. In other words each influences and affects the other “ (p. 33).

The juxtaposition of two countries creates a combined community that is not exclusive to one side or another. It becomes an area where the needs of those in both countries overlap. The people have relationships that are not tied to political agendas. Border theorists Michaelsen and Johnson (1997) argue that intercommunity ties along borders develop because, “humans share an emotional structure that makes multiculturalism possible” and that “...multicultural inclusivity is grounded in legible human emotion” (pp. 23-24).

The *El Paso Times*' news coverage reflects how the welfare of those in El Paso, United States, and Juarez, Mexico, is connected by the shared economic organizations and financial markets and is separated by political ideologies and rules. The newspaper covers news from the local, state and national governments on both sides of the international border. Their news coverage of these issues provides the public with an all-inclusive view of the border.

Newsroom process

Communication researchers have examined ways that professional routines and social control in the newsroom can shape the news. The *El Paso Times* manages information and news using processes that are common in global newsrooms.

Newsroom sociology has been examined as a set of routines, practices and values. observed as a process of who does what, when, where, and how. Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) described the organizational scheme of media as a hierarchy of influence. This basic structure of influence provides a clear model that shows the influence in a newsroom first, and the integration and overlapping of activities next.

Gaye Tuchman (1973/1997) observed and described how routine is used as a way to control the news flow within an organization. An unending amount of raw data passes through the newsroom on any given day. It is the job and priority of the press to sift through this data and provide the public with important news in a timely manner. Tuchman studied how routine activities manage this flow. She observed that typifying them along several dimensions creates news assignments. By using bureaucratic structures to allocate practical tasks and embedding unexpected events into these tasks, the news can accommodate for a variety of unexpected events. Editors cannot predict the

catastrophes and accidents in the world, but specific assigned routines can control the need for special case reporting (Tuchman, 1973/1997). Tuchman describes this process as news typification.

News staffs organize a continuous flow of information choosing what to publish and how to publish it. Journalists strive to be fair and objective, but Pamela Shoemaker (1996) states that news media are often accused of bias simply through the selected publication of news events. She and Stephen Reese described the power of even unintended media bias in *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Context* (1996). “One of the most obvious ways media content structures a symbolic environment is simply by giving great attention (in the form of more time, greater prominence, and so on) to certain events, people, groups, and places than others” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 37).

The process through which media content is formed and delivered has broad impacts; it can correlate with the perceptions people have about the impact of news events on their own lives, as well as change attitudes and behaviors (Shoemaker, 1996).

“If content does not perfectly describe reality, then what does it describe? Media content may be based on what happens in the real world, but it singles out and highlights certain events over others; and the Media’s own structural logic is imposed on those elements” (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 37).

In 1963 Bernard Cohen coined the phrase, the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (1963, p.120). In the case of El Paso and Juarez, it is difficult to accurately portray an area besieged by extreme violence and brutality

accurately. The editors of the *El Paso Times* have expressed their desire to avoid presenting the picture of the violence simply as a body count (personal communication, October 2009).

Media organizations have become increasingly corporate in nature. This imposes additional priorities that have less to do with the news and more to do with business. Both internal and external pressures place constraints on media decisions (Berkowitz, 1997). Some critical scholars maintain that these embedded structures influence the way media is subordinate to more powerful forces (Gitlin, 1980). Regardless, ownership does exert constraints on everyday operations of the newsroom based on advertising expectations and governmental agendas (Thussu, 2006).

Many sources that provide information can also influence media choices. On international borders government sources are valuable resources. Use of these sources is often necessary and sometimes vital to gathering large amounts of information. However, when staffs work closely with government, military, law enforcement, judicial and medical institutions, new sets of values and controls are added. Sometimes sources share common values with media organizations and with the culture as a whole (Gans, 1979). Unfortunately, source values are rarely explicit but still influence news by what they choose to tell the journalist, and what they choose to ignore (Shoemaker, 1996).

In order to understand journalistic choices in news organizations, it is necessary to comprehend the complexities of the sociological network of media. Sociologist Warren Breed (1997) described how newsroom culture functions. He looked at the way professional and community norms contributed to news content, and publication (Berkowitz, 1992). Breed observed the way policies set by the owners and publishers of

media are followed by the journalists. His research also examined the way that new employees are likely to conform to the policies and norms of an organization. He attributed this conformity to the following specific factors of socialization: “Institutional authority and sanctions; feelings of obligation and esteem for superiors; mobility aspirations; absence of conflicting group allegiance; the pleasant nature of the activity; and news becoming a value” (Breed, 1997, pp. 111-113). Breed also determined that influences on journalistic decisions are shaped by society’s conception of the press. He examined how newsroom traditions, professional dedication to other journalists, rigorous attention to objectivity, and community values and expectations have an interconnected influence on what is considered to be news (1997).

At every level of media production, traditions of newsroom practices manage the amount of news that reaches publication. Organization of news and staff management at the *El Paso Times* follows many of the same organizational procedures.

Journalistic ethics

As researchers continue to study influences on news choices, they need to examine the manner in which journalistic values and social beliefs affect decisions of the media systems, and how they affect daily reporting decisions (Hanitzsch, 2007).

Conducting themselves in a professional and ethical manner is important to all journalists. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) has identified and continues to promote accepted key ethical news principles. Their standards are voluntarily accepted by journalists and news media organizations. These primary values include seeking the truth, minimizing harm, acting independently, and remaining accountable. Most journalists and

news organizations attempt to follow these guidelines (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996).

Accuracy is considered a primary responsibility. As journalists report the news they exercise care to avoid errors, and misrepresentation. If a mistake is made, they try to quickly identify and correct it. When possible, they identify the subjects and sources of news stories, and give those who are named in a story the opportunity to respond. Safety is another important news value.

Journalists are also careful to not impose cultural values, and avoid interactions that would create a conflict of interest or compromise their credibility. They work to ensure that public business is conducted in the open and that government records are available to everyone. Ultimately, journalists try to maintain high standards of correctness and accountability set forth in the SPJ Code of Ethics (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996).

While the SPJ ethical principles are useful guidelines, they are not intended to substitute for the daily deliberations individuals journalists make when facing complex ethical dilemmas. In his book, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning* (2009). Clifford Christians agrees that institutional standards are important, but that the “...ultimate responsibility finally rests on individuals” (p. 27). Journalists are part of the larger connection with their news institution, but each person makes judgments that must be socially responsible and ethically justified. Researchers have examined how individual journalists understand their responsibility, and how their personal values and cultural beliefs become the basis of global choices and practices in journalism (Christians, 2009).

Journalists cover a wide range of news events, however, stories describing and explaining violence and trauma require additional ethical considerations (Simpson & Cote, 2006). The stories that a news institution chooses to report and the information provided in a story has the power to shape what people remember. In the book *The Warriors Honor* (1997) Michael Ignatieff warns that the consequence sensational reporting is to create in the public a “single banalized commodity of horror” (p. 29). This is an important consideration when reporting on extremely violent events.

Herbert Gans observed four different news organizations between 1965 and 1978. He was interested in how news media covered important national events. “I sought to study what this society tells itself about itself through the news and why, and I decided to focus on domestic news reported by the national news media,” said Gans about his study (1979, p. xi). His findings, however, can also be applied to the coverage of international events. Gans spent hours sitting in newsrooms watching the routines and structures of the environment. His conclusions focus on the manner in which the values of journalists become homogenous, and how the shared value system of the news staff is reflected in the selection and presentation of news events.

In 1998, David Weaver collected and published case studies of global journalists. His research shows that although differences persist, journalists worldwide appeared to have a shared ideology. This supports Gans’ earlier findings. Weaver updated his view in a more recent publication, *The American Journalist in the 21st Century* (2007). He found that globally, journalists believe in providing public service by getting objective and credible information to the public in a timely manner (2007). He also found that global

journalists value autonomy and the ability to conduct their business in a professional manner.

Journalists attempt to provide an objective, value-free account of the facts, but they understand that the process through which media content is formed and delivered has a broad influence. It can correlate with the perceptions people have about the impact of news events on their own lives, and can alter their attitudes and behaviors (Shoemaker, 1996).

Thomas Hanitzsch (2007) researched the manner in which individual journalists hold certain values that can drive their decisions about what they believe are ethical choices. He found that news practitioners realize how nations and cultures shape ethical decisions, but most believe that it is the media's response that defines ethical choices for the public.

Media can determine political decisions and direct the public awareness of important issues. It becomes part of an event because it has the potential to shape that event for the public, and prompt active participation (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Ideally, journalists are in a position to provide fair and equal reporting of cross-border issues, but Herbert Gans' research revealed that journalists do not operate in a vacuum; they are constantly barraged by a multitude of sociological influences (1979). These influences include, but are not limited to, commitment to the local community, newsroom controls, personal values and role perceptions, and demands of economic entities. Stephen Reese (2001) also concluded that media influences such as government, advertisers, public relations, influential news sources, interest groups, and even other media organizations, also shape newsroom decisions. Media has an obligation

to juggle these influences and still answer to a public that relies on clear and objective coverage.

Research concerning journalistic role perception and individual value systems shows the importance of the inner forces that shape a journalist's choices. Patrick Plaisance (2003) uses quantification to identify value systems of journalists and show the relationship between these values and the "roles they embrace" (Plaisance, 2003, pp. 835). His research found that newsroom socialization does not solely shape individual value systems; rather, general values seem to be shaped by families and cultural environment. This suggests the importance of the individual identity of journalists who make decisions about their responsibility and work.

Several values emerge from research, but a prominent value appears to be objectivity. Journalists are guided by the belief that events can be observed, described, and understood. The common routines and practices impose an objective standard for evaluating events (Reese, 1997). Stephen Reese refers to Gaye Tuchman's description of objectivity as the product of "strategic ritual" (Reese, 1997, p. 423). Objectivity in the newsroom was described by Gans (1979) as the exclusion of personal values when gathering the facts and reporting the news. Journalists understand that objective guidelines are important, yet even when following common routine practices this is not a cut and dry issue. They select the story they believe needs to be told and try to uncover the reality behind the events (Breed 1997). The story that needs to be told, however, is not always the same on both sides of an international border.

News coverage in El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico, is a responsibility of the journalists at the *El Paso Times*. Exemplary ethical practices are important when covering

events in both towns. The choices made in this combined municipality hold unique challenges. Journalists from the United States are conscious of the different requirements of the Mexican government, different expectations between the U.S. and the Mexican public, and different safety considerations needed in Juarez, a town besieged by violence. The ethical choices have broad consequences.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Qualitative methodology

The research study, “News and Community in a Tumultuous Border Region: How Journalists at the *El Paso Times* Cover their Juarez Neighbors,” makes use of specific qualitative methods to examine the complexity of providing news at an international border. The methods include participant observation, informal interview, and in-depth interview. These methods explore the daily work and decisions of the journalists at the *El Paso Times*.

This study makes use of the accepted standard of qualitative research, which has proven to effectively examine newsroom operations. Two classic qualitative studies were those of Warren Breed in 1955, and Herbert Gans in 1979. In 1955, Warren Breed interviewed 120 newsmen in the Northeastern United States. His study, “Social control in the Newsroom,” provided a picture of newsroom controls and implications for how the individual journalist comes to understand those controls (Reese, 2001). Herbert Gans used the method of observation to determine how media applied specific newsroom routines and structures to cover important national events (Gans, 1979). Qualitative research is an established method used to study basic structural images of media staff and newsroom operations.

The method of research for this in-depth study is designed to examine smaller units of analysis referred to as micro-ethnography. This is considered suitable for

communication research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 143). This modified ethnographic immersion has the advantage of providing relevant data based on the actual participation of the researcher. Theorists Denzin & Lincoln (2005) support this approach. They commented, “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Adler and Adler (1998), add, this type of immersion research provides data that is legitimate because it is a study of the “natural stream of everyday life” (p. 3).

Given the complex nature of a newsroom, multi-level qualitative methods helps make sense of individual and group decisions at the *El Paso Times*. It provides a rich context for discovering ways in which journalists regard their role as part of media on the international border of Juarez, and El Paso. The information and ultimately the insights gained in this study are grounded in the observed behaviors and the stated viewpoint of the *El Paso Times*’ news staff.

Research questions

The following research questions served as a general guide to develop and analyze themes regarding news coverage at the international border of Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas. The questions were not inclusive of additional concepts generated from the study’s participants. The researcher modified questions or added new questions in order to appropriately explore emergent ideas that the staff being interviewed found important (Altheide, 1996, p. 21).

Research Question One: How does the staff of the *El Paso Times* define community at the El Paso/Juarez border?

Research Question Two: How do journalists adapt newsroom practices to accurately report on events in Juarez, Mexico?

Research Question Three: As they investigate and write stories about the death and violence in Juarez, how do the journalists at the *El Paso Times* take into account the possibility of violence to themselves, their families, or their co-workers?

Research Question Four: How do journalists at the *El Paso Times* perceive their ethical responsibility regarding coverage of Juarez, Mexico?

Setting and access

The qualitative study, examining community and news production at an international border, focused on the news coverage of El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico. El Paso and Juarez are both relatively isolated from other large cities in the United States, and Mexico. According to Google maps the combined metropolitan area is located approximately 233 miles from Chihuahua City, the capital of the Mexican State of Chihuahua. The closest large cities in the United States are Phoenix, Arizona, which is 350 miles west, and Austin, Texas, the capital of Texas, which is 576 miles east (Google maps, n.d.). This research examines the newspaper and the daily operation of the *El Paso Times*, one of the main media sources serving this international area.

The *El Paso Times* office is at 300 North Campbell St., El Paso, Texas 79901. It is situated seven blocks from the Rio Grande River. The river separates El Paso and Juarez. Ray M. Stafford publishes the paper. It was founded in 1881 and joined the MediaNews Group, Inc. in December 2005. It currently employs 423 people and has a circulation of 73,204 daily and 88,880 on Sundays. The *El Paso Times'* journalists cover stories in El Paso, Texas, United States, and in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico (MediaNews Group, 2007). Commitment to the local community is part of The

MediaNews Group's corporate mission statement. They state that it is their responsibility "...to enhance our content and services while integrating our content for dissemination across all available distribution platforms in our markets, starting with the local newspaper." (MediaNews Group, 2007). The mission statement of the MediaNews Group in its entirety is as follows:

Our corporate mission is to be the leading provider of local news, information and services in our strategically located markets by continually expanding and leveraging our news gathering resources. We will proactively identify and develop strategic partnerships and relationships to enhance our content and services while integrating our content for dissemination across all available distribution platforms in our markets, starting with the local newspaper. We will continually strive to improve our profitability, while being a strong community partner and strengthening our work environment for our employees (MediaNews Group, 2007).

The executive editor granted access to the research site, and communications regarding the logistics of the project were shared with him. The editors and staff at the *El Paso Times* welcomed the researcher. Negotiations of entry within the actual facility were based on the journalistic principle of transparency. The editor was willing, and appeared eager, to provide full access to all areas of the news operation. He immediately provided the researcher with an access badge, a parking space, and a scan card for late-night entry privileges. He also provided the researcher with a desk wired for Internet access. He introduced the researcher to several editors and asked his office manager to make introductions.

Human subject privacy and protection

Ethical concerns for this particular study included the right to privacy and protection from harm for all involved. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that in a qualitative study everything becomes data, therefore, participants were given a clear statement of the aims of the research and how the data would be gathered and used. Those who agreed to take part in the research process were asked to sign a consent form. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw consent, to withdraw any data they had provided, and to stop participating at any time during the research. They were guaranteed of their right to be respected as individuals and participants in the study.

In an effort to protect all participants, a safe locked box stored handwritten notes, computer files, and recordings. The Internal Review Board at Colorado State University reviewed the final decisions regarding protection. (See Appendix A: Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project).

The executive editor supported any employee's decision to participate in the study, but he reiterated that their participation was completely voluntary. The researcher provided a letter of introduction and a consent form to the newsroom staff. The researcher personally checked that each participant felt free to deny participation, and emphasized the voluntary nature of the research.

The site of the research, the *El Paso Times* in El Paso, Texas is well known. For this reason, the participants were informed by the researcher and in the consent form, that those who read the final document could possibly associate their name with observations and comments. They were informed that if they did not want something to be recorded or used, it would be removed from all research documents, recordings and notes. The

researcher discussed the research consent form with each participant. The entire consent form can be found in Appendix A, but the section of the consent form that addresses this issue is as follows:

Because of the public interest in and the nature of this study, please be informed that your name and position may be associated with the findings. In other words, the interviews and observations will be “on the record,” unless we make other arrangements. The *El Paso Times* will be identified as the location for the study. As a journalist you are very familiar with reporting and journalistic techniques, and what constitutes “on the record” and “off the record.” We believe you are knowledgeable about the techniques employed in this study. Thus, if you want something to not be recorded or used in any way, please let us know. Likewise, if you don’t want your name associated with particular aspects, let us know and we will keep those research records private, to the extent allowed by law. To our best abilities, we will keep private information out of the results as well as sensitive business information. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. We may publish the results of this study. If you have indicated anything is “off the record,” we will keep your name and other identifying information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

Throughout the research the names of the participants were used with care. In most cases journalists were referred to as “...the journalist, or the reporter, or the editor.”

When the information or data was unique to a particular person, or when the name of that person could be easily determined because of a job description or a publication, their name was used. The research document also includes articles published in the *El Paso Times*, and the journalists' by-lines are included. These articles are also referenced with the published name.

Participant observation

The study began with the investigator/researcher reading and examining The *El Paso Times* each day for three months prior to field research. This was the initial method of collecting data. The purpose was not to create statistical tables, but rather to gain a primary understanding of the types of stories chosen. It was also a means to become acquainted with the work of the staff at the *El Paso Times*. The daily newspaper was read and examined. The researcher took notes on the general format of the paper and the topics of stories written about Juarez and El Paso, both as separate cities and as a joint community. This daily evaluation continued during the time the researcher was in El Paso, and continued for four months following the on-site investigation.

On the first of October 2009, the researcher traveled from Sterling, Colorado to El Paso, Texas to gather data and begin an on-site investigation of the *El Paso Times*' news operation. During October and November 2009, the researcher went to the *El Paso Times*' newsroom each day to study the operations, journalistic decisions and overall coverage. This total immersion provided in-depth information about how the *El Paso Times* covered events and issues involving Juarez, El Paso and the United States/Mexico border. Using participant observation and interview, both formal and informal, the

researcher focused on the specific cultural context of the journalists as they worked in the El Paso/Juarez community.

Arrangements to meet with the executive editor were made for day one of the on-site research. The building that houses the newspaper has an extensive security station located just through the main doors in the foyer of the building. The foyer is a large circular room. The security station is also circular and it encompasses the entire area. Security personnel called the editor to check on the appointment that had been arranged. The researcher was then directed up the stairs where she was greeted by the editor and invited into his office. The editor was kind and professional. He made sure there was complete access for the researcher and invited her to attend any and all of the meetings in the building. Later he explained that it was important that a newspaper operate with complete transparency. He invited the metro editor into the office to make introductions. The metro desk editor was curious about the research, and he quite frankly asked why the researcher, who had been in the field of education, would make a “major shift” to journalism. He also warned about the difficulty of observing coverage of Juarez. He explained that the reporters spent the majority of their time on the phone and on the computer trying to get accurate information. He questioned the ability of research to accurately portray the process of gathering news and covering stories about Juarez. Next the researcher was introduced to the receptionist who introduced her to the staff, and helped her find a desk. The receptionist then directed the researcher to security for paperwork and access badges. This was the first step and the beginning of the observation that would last through November 2009.

As an observer at the *El Paso Times*, the researcher assumed the accepted qualitative guideline to limit involvement in the "...central activities while assuming responsibilities that advanced the group without fully committing to members' values and goals" (Adler, 1998, p. 85). The news day operation included attending two daily editorial meetings. During these meetings the researcher observed the routines and patterns of interactions, carefully noting how decisions were made regarding coverage of Juarez. The researcher attended both daily meetings. The exceptions were when she went on location assignments with the reporters, or when she conducted scheduled interviews. The executive editor and the metro editor were present at each meeting. The various section editors, the photographers, the historian, the page and web page designers also attended the meetings on a regular basis. The executive editor sat at the head of the table and facilitated discussions. The researcher watched, listened, and took notes. The editor encouraged her and all those in attendance to contribute ideas. The researcher respected this request but limited her participation in order to more fully understand the news routine.

The large newsroom is arranged in an open concentric pattern. Most of the outside rooms are used for communal areas and interview space. Only several of the outside rooms are used for offices, and the rest are designated for interviews or impromptu meetings. The central and open arrangement of the room made it easy for the researcher to observe behaviors, watch encounters and listen to conversations between the individuals in the general newsroom.

Upon initial introductions the entire staff was polite. Some of the staff approached the researcher and asked researcher about the apartment she rented. They were interested

and anxious to be of help. Other staff members were friendly and asked about the living arrangements of the researcher. They essentially made “small talk” common to initial introductions. Several of the staff members invited the researcher to lunch and offered information about places of interest in El Paso, Las Cruces, and Juarez. Most however, advised against traveling in Juarez.

Within a week most of the staff at the *El Paso Times* seemed relaxed and natural around the researcher. Work proceeded as usual. The reporters spent the majority of the time following leads on the phone, researching on the computer, discussing assignments with the editors and writing the stories. There appeared to be little time for casual conversation with each other. Informal discussions with the staff occurred when the staff members and the researcher had lunch or coffee together. The staff tried to be helpful by answering questions and sharing information with the researcher.

The researcher increased her participation when she was invited to travel with the reporters on assignment. The ride along assignments included trips across the border to Juarez, news conferences at the University of Texas at El Paso, and various conferences concerning life on the United States/Mexican border.

The researcher attended a bilingual conference about the dangers and problems of reporting in Juarez. This conference addressed the specific dangers of reporting in Mexico. It was a rich source of information for the research. The conference was attended by reporters and editors from the *El Paso Times*, the Associated Press, *El Diario El Paso*, *El Diario Juarez*, and other border news sources. The researcher took notes during the panel conference and later spoke to individual journalists.

In-depth interview

Twenty-five interviews were scheduled and conducted with the staff at the *El Paso Times*. They included editors, reporters, photographers, editorial staff, copywriters, web page designers, receptionists, and other available personnel. The publisher and editor of the paper agreed to allow interviews during the newspapers working hours. It was fortunate to have the support of the editor and the publisher because this created a relaxed atmosphere where job pressures were not a pressing concern. Interviews were set during the business day at a time that would be most convenient for each individual. Often the interview time needed to be changed to accommodate the fluid nature of newsroom operations.

Interviews were conducted concurrently with observations. Data obtained and analyzed during observations and informal interviews along with the established research questions guided the researcher as she developed appropriate interview questions. The questions are listed in Appendix B. These questions were used as a guideline for the formal interviews. According to qualitative scholars, the aim of qualitative analysis is to be “systematic and analytical but not rigid” (Altheide, 1996, p. 16). As recommended, the questions listed were changed as needed to allow for further discovery.

The interviews provided a wide range of information not otherwise observed or shared. They helped the researcher more fully understand each journalist’s perception of their responsibility as they work on the border of El Paso and Juarez. As a methodology they allowed an additional view of the operations of the newspaper helping to generate ideas, further helping the researcher to analyze the data.

The researcher took handwritten notes during the interviews. Some of the staff interviewed did not want the researcher to use a tape or video recorder. They said that because of their position on the staff they were vulnerable to reprisals from the drug cartels. They chose their words carefully and told the researcher when they did not want to talk about sensitive issues. In some cases they were comfortable giving information but asked the researcher to not identify them as the source of the information. The researcher referred to the “Who will see the information that I give” section in the consent form, and assured those interviewed that anything they wanted to be kept private or off the record would not be written or typed as part of the data collection. The researcher also told the participants that in most cases, information would be included in the document as general observations, and participants would not be identified without their expressed consent. They were also told that much of the conversations would be written as “he or she said.” In many cases this was reassuring, and the interview became relaxed and open.

In order to remain consistent, the researcher decided to make use of handwritten notes for all of the interviews; however, the final notes were typed and categorized by the researcher within an 18-hour period. By immediately transcribing and organizing the interview notes the researcher was able to remember the conversations and check facts, comments or general impressions with the person interviewed. This increased the accuracy of the data.

As suggested by qualitative studies, the interviews proceeded in an open-ended manner, encouraging a more reflexive approach (Adler and Adler, 1998). The researcher started each interview with general questions about the person’s current and past positions in the news industry. These questions helped create a relaxing and comfortable

atmosphere, and led to questions about the responsibility of the journalist in the newspaper and in the community. The researcher asked all of the staff members about their view of Juarez as part of the community. Staff members were questioned about difficulties they faced when reporting in a different country. They were also asked to discuss the unique ethical choices they considered, and the dangers they encountered when reporting in Juarez.

The time frame for the interviews varied between 30 to 90 minutes. This time was flexible depending on the person being interviewed. As the interviews progressed the person interviewed seemed grateful to have the opportunity to tell their story. At the end of the interview the researcher thanked them and asked them to contact her with any new information they might think of. Some of those interviewed said they felt honored to be part of the study. One editor said, “Thank you for shedding a little light on our corner of the world” (personal communication, October 28, 2009).

Follow-up interviews were scheduled as new information from Juarez was acquired. The information from these interviews was added to the final research document. As a record of discourse, it was combined with, and become part of, the observation addressing coverage of news events in Juarez.

Analysis

Qualitative research defines meaning by analyzing and interpreting the information collected. According to scholars Denzin and Lincoln (2005), gaining control of data is the first step towards meaning. Data for the study was collected during the two months of on-site emersion. Additional data was collected from stories about Juarez in the *El Paso Times* and other published sources. Analysis of the information was ongoing.

Analysis and coding research information occurred throughout data collection, examining field notes, observations, and interviews. Much of this was done as an in-process memo. Sometimes a note was included as an aside of what the researcher found interesting or important. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that these memos help focus attention on particular themes or issues that helped show larger meanings in association with other related data. This in-note process started the early categorization. At the end of each day when the notes and memos were typed, patterns and themes started to emerge. As suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the analyses moved through a descriptive process of labeling and breaking down, or to decontextualize the raw data. Next, the data was reconstructed into patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions.

The process of analysis in qualitative studies is recursive rather than linear. Analysis begins when the researcher makes the first contact with the people and the materials being studied. In the case of the study how journalists at the *El Paso Times* cover their Juarez neighbors, it was the first reading of the paper the *El Paso Times*. Ideas, information, themes and questions emerged from these first readings. Those ideas and themes were part of a pattern that sometimes changed and other times remained constant. Many ideas emerged and they all became part of a developing picture of how the *El Paso Times* covers Juarez. Following the advice of Denzin (2005), the researcher used naturalistic observation, attempting to keep an open mind without forming quick conclusions. The early stages of the observation were descriptive and unfocused. They provided a point of reference where initial themes were recognized guiding further observations and interviews. The themes were not exclusive. The researcher encountered new data constantly, and this data provided additional insights.

Short notations were part of the first stage of organization. These early, informal memos were created while reading the newspaper, observing newsroom organization and interactions, and interviewing staff. The notes were included in the transcriptions of events and interviews. The following is a list of reoccurring words and phrases identified during the early examination of the information. The following words and phrases are part of the preliminary descriptive process for the research:

Lawlessness; geography; trauma care; health care; animal control; border; passports; education; transportation; illiteracy; culture; bias; cooperation; accountable; environment; Rio Grande; sympathy; informing the public; frustration; violence; sources; crime: corruption; follow-up; investigations; trends; weapons; cartels; drugs; fear; risk; safety; trust; time; language; traffic; officials; relationships; commitment; trade; family; history; economy; friends; poverty; logistics; man power; perception; accuracy; Mexican Government, US Government; Mexican officials, Mexican military; Chihuahua State Police; Juarez police; Border Patrol; Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE); Mexican Media; border crossing; illegal immigration; legal immigration; the Wall; *El Diario*

All of the observations, interviews, and written citations became field notes for the research. Lindolf and Taylor (2002) refer to these notes as raw data that is the permanent record for the research. Using this data, a simple categorization of ideas was defined and used as a tool for linking ideas. The original research questions provided an organizational starting point for the second level of analysis. These questions, however, only served as a general guide. The actual observations and interviews guided the final

discussions and findings of the research. Because of the inquiry nature of qualitative research, this is the last time in the process of analysis and evaluation that the original questions are considered.

Research Question One: How does the staff of the *El Paso Times* define community at the El Paso/Juarez border?

The analysis for the first research question takes into account the proximity and resulting community of the two international cities. The data gathered illustrates important links between El Paso and Juarez. The staff of the *El Paso Times* reflects these connections in their behavior, their conversation and their work as journalists. Their stories reveal the community commitment to the environment, to healthcare services, to educational responsibilities, to child welfare programs, to economic interdependence, to family ties, to cultural interests, and to historical background.

Research Question Two: How do journalists adapt newsroom practices to accurately report on events in Juarez, Mexico?

The staff of the *El Paso Times* use many standard practices to gather and report news about El Paso. Information from Juarez is likewise also sifted through common newsroom procedures, but additional measures are required when working in a foreign country where the government and the public have different rules and expectations regarding media coverage. Several consistent categories emerged from the study. These categories involved working with a foreign legal system, finding reliable sources, understanding the local language patterns, and overcoming logistic difficulties.

Research Question Three: As they investigate and write stories about the death and violence in Juarez, how do the journalists at the *El Paso Times* take into

account the possibility of violence to themselves, their families, or their co-workers?

Providing professional and realistic news coverage about the events in Juarez is a priority for the editors and staff of the *El Paso Times*. At times, however, this requires the journalists' to become immersed in the details of the violence and death that accompany the cartel violence. The physical and psychological safety of safety of El Paso Times staff members is a part of the newsroom reality, and it is clear the threat of violence impacts the *El Paso Times* newsroom. The staff expressed a variety of concerns regarding their own safety and the safety of their colleagues and the safety of their families. Further observation and interviews provided evidence of the importance of this issue.

Research Question Four: How do journalists at the *El Paso Times* perceive their ethical responsibility regarding coverage of Juarez, Mexico?

The ethical choices journalists make when reporting on an international border have a broad impact. Their stories reach a wide and enduring audience, creating documents that record those bi-national events. Journalists' at the *El Paso Times* work to accurately depict important events in El Paso and Juarez. Juarez has become a dangerous and violent city. Seeking the truth, trying to minimize harm, and acting independently while remaining accountable to the public is a constant priority for the staff of the paper. Predominate categories in the research emphasize the difficulty of providing objective news in an area plagued by violence.

Throughout the descriptive analysis, the researcher adjusted, changed and added to the categories as needed. Actual observations and conversations helped to clarify and explain the perceptions and attitudes of the individuals at the *El Paso Times*. In addition

to addressing the four research questions, the goal of the final analysis was to also, “gain insight into the obligations, constraints, motivations, and emotions that members experience as they complete actions” (Lindolf and Taylor, 2002, p. 105).

Themes

The themes emerging from this study center on the actual experiences of journalists who work in the El Paso/Juarez border area. The final chapters of the research document are a descriptive analysis of journalists at the *El Paso Times* who report on a community where ties are close, where information gathering is unpredictable, where facts are difficult to verify, where violence demands a constant vigilance, and where ethical choices are never clear-cut. They are the result of a deliberate inductive process that moves from specific to general. They include specific dialogues and actions of the staff at the *El Paso Times*. These themes are the focus of following individual chapters in the research document:

“Chapter Four: Definition of community at the *El Paso Times*”

“Chapter Five: Adaptation of newsroom practices in Juarez”

“Chapter Six: Challenges and dangers of reporting in Juarez”

“Chapter Seven: Ethics and journalism while reporting on Juarez”

These chapters make use of the analyzed data to explore and explain the multiple processes involved in newsroom decisions, and journalistic choices on an international border. They specifically depict the staff of The *El Paso Times* and describe the reality of events in the border cities, El Paso, in the United States, and Juarez in Mexico.

Discussion

The last step in the analysis of the research is the narratives in each chapter. The narratives are not an ending point, but rather, as Denzin & Lincoln suggest, the starting point for further research and investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This research is intended as a comment on more than just the immediate social action of news production. Clifford Geertz (1973), a well respected anthropologist, states that “Small facts speak to large issues...” (Geertz, 1973, p. 23). It is not an answer, but instead it creates questions that can be “...constituted in the record of what man has said” (Geertz, 1973, p.30). The observations and communications attempt to help illustrate events at an international border. The analysis provides a document that is part of an overall statement about news production. It is a starting point for further questions and investigations. Geertz (1973) warns against regarding the data and its interpretation as anything more than the inscription of an event. Yet he also states that, “Behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation” (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). This research and its written representation analyze the culture in a specific newsroom. The information, as Geertz advised, is inherently inconclusive and yet could be considered part of “...a profound statement of social reality” (Geertz, 1973).

CHAPTER FOUR: DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY AT THE *EL PASO TIMES*

Border community

Political borders define a country's separate sovereignty. They help shape and maintain the laws and rules of individual governments. They often provide a unique identity for those who live on either side. Governments attempt to control movements across their border in order to maintain a safe area that offers protection against terrorism and unwanted outsiders (Papademetriou & Meyers, 2001, p. 80). In urban areas, such as that of El Paso and Juarez, physical barriers are created. Entry points between the countries regulate the trafficking of people and goods that move in and out of both countries. Borders, however, cannot separate common geography, erase family ties, or limit universal human emotions (Michaelson & Johnson, 1997, p. 24).

Those who live in these border spaces experience a blending of cultures. Families and friends often unite them. They share natural and man-made resources. Their language patterns are common and develop simultaneously. Their historical ties precede the political demarcations. Their cultures are intertwined and are part of the border experiences. The ties that unite are evident as the staff of the *El Paso Times* makes coverage choices reflecting the diverse relationship of the citizens in El Paso and Juarez.

The editor of the *El Paso Times* newspaper compared the connection between the people of El Paso and Juarez as a bond between twins. He said, "Twins want to take care

of each other. If my twin brother were hurting, I would want to be there for him, to help him out. If he was hurting I would be hurting. El Paso can't cut itself off ... the reality is, we are one" (personal communication, October 28, 2009). Another reporter agreed, saying that everyone in El Paso and Juarez "breath the same air" (personal communication, November 2009). The two cities are located in the Chihuahua desert, the desert landscape, and as stated, the same desert air.

Another staff member emphasized the importance of reporting the news from Juarez saying that what happens in Juarez directly affects El Paso. He described the border relationships as being interdependent, stating that people on both sides rely on each other, "...they cross back and forth for business reasons, for family, for education, for health, and the list goes on." He continued to say that because of the history between the cities, El Paso needed to make sure Juarez did not fail. "Juarez is part of the total lifestyle and economic engine of the entire area" (personal communication, October 28, 2009). It is because of these ties that he and the staff at El Paso are dedicated to accurately reporting the news from both El Paso and Juarez.

Geography and Environment

Geographically, Juarez and El Paso are isolated in both the United States and in Mexico. The cities are approximately 600 miles from Dallas, Texas, 350 miles from Phoenix, Arizona, 300 miles from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and 233 miles from Chihuahua City, Mexico (Google Maps, 2011). Both reporters and editors indicated that this isolation is also found in the political interactions between the cities and the federal agencies in both the United States and Mexico. They added that the *El Paso Times* receives many letters that show the resentment people living in El Paso and Juarez feel

toward officials in Washington DC and Mexico City. In reference to the violence and dangers perpetrated by the drug cartels, a staff member on the editorial board said, “The United States government doesn’t seem to fully understand the depth of the problems. They (the federal agencies located in Washington DC) pay lip service (to the problems in the border area) and have many border conferences here, but when the politicians leave nothing is done. It is a very complicated situation with no pat answers.” It is his impression that neither the United States government nor the Mexican government seems to be looking for real solutions (personal communication, October 2009). As stated, the community voices this frustration in their letters to the editor. A reporter who has citizenship in both countries said that the people in the area have a strong sense of pride. They understand that the federal government can’t or won’t help them. “If El Paso needs fixing” he said, “it is on us” (personal communication, October 2009).

The *El Paso Times* reports that bi-national environmental groups like The International Boundary and Water Commission is one area where both governments work together successfully. The Water Commission is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties, and maintaining border sanitation. The International Boundary and Water Commission removed the sewage from the Rio Grande River and continue to work bi-nationally to keep it clean (International Boundary and Water Commission, 2011).

Health

In considering the example of community health, it is clear that a border does not separate disease and health problems. Reporters at the *El Paso Times* cover a wide range of health issues endemic to the entire population. During one news meeting, the editor described El Paso as a “living laboratory.” He explained that the medical community in

El Paso treats many cross and multi-border health issues (personal communication, October 2009).

The researcher was encouraged to visit El Paso/Texas Tech University Medical Center. This health complex is the only academic healthcare setting in far West Texas and Southern New Mexico. It houses the only Level 1 trauma facility within a 250-mile radius of El Paso. Federal research programs at the medical center help fund the study diseases, environmental illnesses and trauma endemic to the border (University Medical Center of El Paso, n.d.). Reporters regularly visit and report on events at the medical campus.

The recent outbreak of H1N1 in Mexico and the United States is an example of an infectious disease that knows no border. The initial identification of the H1N1 virus was in Mexico, and was first called the Mexican Flu. A reporter at the *El Paso Times* attempted to cover the story on both sides of the border. She said it was difficult to get information from the Public Information Officer in Juarez (PIO). When she called she was told that the PIO officers weren't available. When she finally did reach them they didn't offer all of the information. She explained that the medical community in Juarez is not used to a transparent government that informs the public. They were secretive and didn't want to provide information. She understood that this was a sensitive topic in Mexico. They did not want to be viewed as responsible for the deadly pandemic virus. Even though she understood the reasons for the lack of cooperation from the Mexican health systems, she was frustrated by her search for helpful information. She said that as a journalist, her goal was to help the communities on both sides of the border.

In Mexico the estimated population is 111.2 million, and approximately 43.9 million people lack access to basic health care (United States Embassy – Mexico, 2010). A member of the *El Paso Times* editorial staff said that the hospitals in El Paso offer indigent care for people from both the United States and Mexico. They do not turn anyone away (personal communication, October 2009). According to the University Medical Center of El Paso’s mission statement, the medical district is committed to “...making high quality, affordable health care services accessible to all” (University Medical Center of El Paso, n.d.).

The staff of the *El Paso Times* regularly discusses and covers stories regarding the physical and emotional health of the children in Juarez. An example of this was a story about a young girl from Mexico who had a rare and deadly form of cancer. She was brought to El Paso where a doctor treated her illness. The doctor and the hospital donated the medical services and treatment to the girl. Ideas’ regarding the story’s presentation was a topic in daily meetings. The staff considered the aid to this child an important humanitarian gesture. The story showed the caring commitment of the news staff as well as that of the El Paso community.

Education

Education is another shared responsibility on the border. Although Juarez has three major universities, poverty and lack of education still plague the city. The national school dropout rate in Mexico is 21.7% (United States Embassy – Mexico, 2010). This is more than twice the dropout rate in the United States, which in 2008 was measured at 8% (United States Department of Education, 2010). Both editors and reporters in news meetings and personal interviews emphasized that children from Juarez who live close to

the border often attend US schools. Buses from Juarez bring children to private and public schools in El Paso each day. The schools generally do not ask where a child lives. A member of the editorial board told the researcher that letters to the editor indicated that most of the people in El Paso believe educating all of the children in the border area is the only hope for a better border area. He said most letters agree that it is key to solving many of the problems plaguing the city of Juarez. Many students from Juarez attend the various community colleges in El Paso, the University of Texas at El Paso, and both the medical school and the nursing program at the University Medical Center campus.

Economy

The border economy is another shared issue for people in both El Paso and Juarez. *El Paso Times* business reporters said that economic interests between Juarez and El Paso form a strong market tie (personal communication, November and October 2009). Geographically, both El Paso and Juarez are isolated from the larger cities in Chihuahua and Texas. This geographic isolation forces the cities to become more reliant on each other. The newsroom staff at the *El Paso Times* views Juarez as an important part of the total economic community. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the United States is Mexico's largest agri-food trading partner. The United States buys "... 76 percent of Mexican exports and supplying 73 percent of the country's imports" (United States Department of Agriculture, 2010). The *El Paso Times*' night editor said that the news staff understands the importance of covering economic issues that affect the trade between Mexico and the United States (personal communication, November 2009).

According to the business reporters, the El Paso business community understands that the Juarez business economy is vital, and they rely on business news for both sides of

the border (personal communication, November 2009). Large and small retail businesses, automotive dealers, and the service industries all rely on business from Juarez. Assembly plants created by foreign investors, designed to return the finished product to a foreign market are called maquiladoras. Train cargo from these maquiladoras travel regularly across the border carrying billions of dollars worth of goods. Trucks and storage containers routinely pass through the border. During the holiday season, buses from Juarez and other parts of Mexico come to El Paso for shopping weekends. Malls, Wal-Mart, Target and many other retail stores profit from Juarez.

The business editor said that the current recession in 2009 did not affect El Paso, as adversely as it did the rest of the country, and even though many people in the El Paso area are poor, the latest recession did not dramatically change unemployment figures. He attributed this to the way commerce on the border provides an economic buffer, saying that border trade is fairly consistent. El Paso does not see the big swings, either up or down, in the economy. He also said that foreclosure rates were not as high as in other areas throughout the United States. El Paso has smaller mortgage companies that do not make as many loans. This helped keep the effects of the housing crisis small. It is the combination of influences that creates the need for proper economic reporting in both El Paso and Juarez (personal communication, October 2009).

Another staff member at the *El Paso Times* explained that historically commerce between Juarez and El Paso changes and evolves because of international politics and events. The staff member explained that about 25 years ago, there were many clothing-manufacturing companies in El Paso. He said because of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), companies like Levis, Wranglers, and Ferris relocated their

manufacturing plants in Juarez. Although initially jobs and trade in El Paso were lost, the industries were replaced by a large group of bilingual call centers. The reporter said that this is an example of how El Paso and Juarez adapt to economic changes (personal communication, October 2009).

After the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, trade between the two countries changed again. Increased security measures created to protect the US border slowed all traffic. It increased the amount of time it took for trains, trucks and cars to transport goods. Commerce slowed. It simply takes longer to do as much business between El Paso and Juarez. In 2003, China became a player in world trade. Many companies found it more economical to use the large and inexpensive work force in China. As a result, production in Juarez was reduced (personal communication, October 2009).

Escalation in cartel violence altered the economy once more. Several reporters talked about rumors of widespread extortion robbery in Juarez. One staff member said she heard of a man who said he no longer had the money to pay the gangs. He didn't pay, and as a message to others, they killed his daughter. Stores and businesses have closed. Many people have little cash and now use a barter system. There are also rumors now that some of the citizens are fed up and have become secret vigilantes, taking matters into their own hands. The staff and the people of El Paso hear these rumors, but it is difficult to confirm these stories.

What the reporters and editors of the *El Paso Times* can confirm is the mass closing of business in Juarez (personal communication, October 2009). The crossfire violence has convinced some business executives to close the large manufacturing

maquiladoras. Adriana Gomez Licon references the Mexican Social Security institute in her *El Paso Times*' article "Juarez mayor was overseer of city in crisis." The article reports that from 2008 to 2009, approximately 83,000 people lost their jobs in the maquiladoras. The violence and the maquiladora shut downs caused another 10,000 business to also close. Professionals, who work at the remaining maquiladoras, live in El Paso to escape violence. New businesses are afraid to come to Juarez (Licon, 2010).

The reporter for the Living and Culture section of the newspaper said that restaurant and entertainment industry is historically important to the economy in Juarez. People in El Paso traveled to Juarez to go to the many fine restaurants and nightclubs. Before the cartel danger, *El Paso Times*' reporters regularly wrote stories about the restaurants, nightclubs, and cultural events in Juarez. Now, people are afraid to cross the border for entertainment or cultural events. Some of the nightclubs and restaurants had clubs in both Juarez and El Paso. Most of these businesses have moved out of Juarez and now operate only in El Paso. When asked if the cartel is involved in legitimate business ventures in El Paso, one staff member said that there were always rumors that can't be confirmed. He added that the drug business "...is so lucrative it probably doesn't bother to hide its activities or money" (personal communication, October 2009).

Even though the border area has seen many problems and changes, the business editor said he believes the economy between El Paso and Juarez remains strong because of the business communities' ability to adapt. He has lived in the area most of his life and believes that businesses historically change and adjust to the political and financial circumstance in the United States, Mexico and the world (personal communication, October 2009).

Art and Culture

One reporter who covers fine arts, performance art, and literary events for the *El Paso Times* described how a border does not bind cultural influence. He explained the role geography plays in the area's culture. He says that because El Paso and Juarez are remote from other cities in their countries, they have developed a strong, progressive intercultural tie. In El Paso and Juarez, the art and cultural life reflect the integrated character of the border.

It is important to the staff at the *El Paso Times* to cover the many intercultural events. There is a small international film festival in El Paso that is attended by people from around the world. A Spanish language Music Theater in El Paso is also well attended. The entertainment reporter said that the people in the area enjoy a wide variety of music. Tejano music style is a popular blend of pop rock and traditional Mexican music. Many of the musicians are of Mexican descent. Latin music is also popular in both El Paso and Juarez. A large concert called Exa is held in El Paso each year. It is an international Latin music event. The reporter commented that there is misconception regarding the type of entertainment people at the border enjoy. He said that in both El Paso and Juarez the people value Latin American events, but they also like mainstream events. Mainstream arts may be secondary but still important to residents in El Paso and Juarez (personal communication, October 2009).

Families in both El Paso and Juarez have strong religious ties. Stories about churches and religious events are common in the *El Paso Times*. Stories about the history of the area and the events commemorating the history are carefully researched and written. Cultural events are important part of life on the border. The website,

Exploring the Southwest Dessert, USA (2011) promotes events in the area and stresses the importance of the border culture it states that "... with its classic Western geography and because it shares at an international border with Ciudad Juarez, Mexico's rich culture pervades everything in El Paso, from its art and architecture to its celebrations and cuisine."

A reporter who has lived and worked in this border area for most of her life said that although Juarez has always been a place of drug trafficking, it is a community with a rich religious and culture life. There are three universities, and numerous art and musical events. She expressed sadness, saying that because of the drug violence "everything else" is being ignored. Another reporter who covers cultural events said that now in Juarez "...all we hear about is the violence: The violence has affected the mindset of the people in El Paso" (personal communication, November 2009). She said that before the spread of violence, people would cross the border all the time for cultural and religious events. When she sees people from Juarez now, she thinks they all just look sad and that makes her feel sad, too. She said that, "sadly we are missing the beauty of the culture in Juarez" (personal communication, October 2009).

Family

Many of the people interviewed at the *El Paso Times* have family ties to Juarez and other cities in Mexico. Some of the journalists at the *El Paso Times* grew up in Juarez and their parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles or cousins still live there. For them, community is interwoven into their personal history. The following stories describe how commitment to the Juarez community is more than just a function of responsibility. It is an act of love for family, friends, and for a way of life.

An education reporter describes himself as bi-national /bicultural. “Juarez is a part of my life.” He has dual citizenship in the United States and Mexico. Born in El Paso, his family moved back to Juarez when he was three days old. He lived in Juarez until he was 12. At that time his family moved back to El Paso. He considers both El Paso and Juarez his home. His parents now live in El Paso, but his family still own businesses and property in Juarez. He says that the situation in Juarez is disheartening and sad. He remembers 20 years ago, when as a child he could play outside until midnight and be safe. Now it is not the case “at all” (personal communication, November 2009).

According to this reporter the military troops in the city do not help the people to feel safe. On the contrary, the troops are foreign and frightening to the people. He said that they have never been a part of what the Juarez people feel as normal in their life. Even though as an American in El Paso he is comfortable seeing soldiers in uniform in the grocery store and other places, when he is in Juarez, he is afraid of the Mexican military. He recounts an incident when he was driving through a neighborhood in Juarez. He was at a red light and noticed a van full of men. He thought about it, and was not frightened at that point. He did remain aware. Next, a truck with Mexican military pulled up behind the car and ordered the men in the van to get out. He was worried that there would be shooting and other dangers. He said when the light changed he was very glad to get out of there. “A red light becomes frightening in my own city,” he said somberly (personal communication, November 2009).

When asked how people in Juarez deal with the current level of violence, he said, “We have a life to live and we must go on. We can’t let this beat us.” He thinks the media is doing a fair job of representing the situation. “It is a dire situation...can’t sugarcoat it.”

He thinks the fear people accuse the media of creating is "...legit. People are and should be scared" (personal communication, November 2009).

Another reporter who is from Mexico talked about when she was in high school in Obregon, a city in northwestern Sonora. Her personal story shows how community ties can also be interwoven with the operating cartels in Juarez. She said that those who were in the narco (narcotics) business had the best homes, cars, and livelihood. They were rich and were considered by others as the elite. Teenagers always wanted to be invited to their parties. My mother and my friend's mothers always worried, she said.

She went to school with Edgar Guzman, Joaquin Guzman's son. Joaquin Guzman is the head of the Sinaloa Cartel, which is now at war with the Juarez Cartel. The fighting for the drug routes through the El Paso/Juarez corridor is considered root of the drug violence. She said that Edgar was a good friend and a nice kid. She emphasized that he was a good person who was just following Mexican traditions. "You take your family's business and continue it, trying to improve it, and make it better." He was allegedly murdered by Juarez Cartel in April 2008. This created a rift between the Sinaloa and the Juarez Cartels. She said that May 2008 marked the escalation of the violence that exists in Juarez today.

A staff member who reports on food, culture and art events in the area also has close ties to Juarez. Her parents are from Juarez. They are traditional conservative parents. Her father was a good mechanic in Juarez. He was highly skilled, and was recruited by a company to work in El Paso. The company provided the necessary visas needed to

work in the United States. She was born in El Paso and has five siblings; two were born in Mexico, the rest in El Paso. Growing up, her parents were always clear about what was right and what was wrong with their country. They always said that corruption was a serious problem in Mexico. They did not hide these political realities from their family (personal communication, October 2009).

As a child she had fun visiting family in Juarez. She liked to shop there. In her 20s she went to clubs with friends. Once when she was there with two friends they were stopped by a policeman who had no markings on his car. Nothing happened, but when her parents were told about the incident, they were frightened by the potential for danger. After she was married she would go to Juarez with her sisters or her husband. Everyone enjoyed going to the restaurants, shopping, and having fun. Now, the cartel violence keeps them from crossing the border. The violence in Juarez has touched her life and the lives of her friends.

She said that now she will read through the reports of those killed looking for names she might recognize. She remembers when the nephew of an El Paso priest was killed in Juarez. She knows about girls from El Paso who have disappeared. She knows a child whose family members were killed in Juarez, and the rest of the child's family packed quickly and moved to El Paso.

She told the researcher about family whose little girl saw a black Hummer drive by with a man holding a gun to the head of a man who was tied up. They had to leave their home in Juarez. She emphasized that most of the 'exiles' who have been forced to leave Juarez want to go home, but can't. They feel offended when people carelessly ask them if they are going to go back. She said that most miss their home and are sad to be

away. They hope that someday they will be able to return to Juarez (personal communication, October 2009).

Prior to the current violence in Juarez, she remembers that reporters wrote stories about the trolley that ran from downtown El Paso to downtown Juarez. There were stories about shops and restaurants in Juarez. She said that recently there was a suggestion for a story covering a charity benefit for an orphanage. Unfortunately, now reporters must think: “Is the story worth risking my life.” There are many different points of view regarding this in the newsroom. She says that she personally doesn’t feel the need to be put in harm’s way for a light feature story that is not unique (personal communication, October 2009).

An *El Paso Times* reporter who was born and raised in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico covers special events in Juarez. She and another reporter from Mexico wrote a story about a group called *Siguiendo los Pasos de Cristo*. This charity group builds homes for the poor in Mexico. The reporter was able to spend two days helping the group build a home. She told the researcher that now, because of the violence, this type of story is not written. Because of the dangers in Juarez the group has stopped their work in Juarez.

The reporter is from a small town in Mexico south of Juarez near Chihuahua City. Her mother still lives in this town. She was formerly a reporter for *El Diario*, a Spanish newspaper in Juarez and El Paso, and has written bi-national stories for both newspapers. Now she works exclusively for the *El Paso Times*. She said that she would like to write stories that are not connected to the violence. She thinks it is important to support the

idea of community by covering things happening in Juarez that are not related to the violence but are important to people in El Paso as well as in Juarez.

She thinks the paper should avoid connecting all of the stories about Mexico to the cartel violence, and would like to see stories that connect both El Paso and Juarez as one area. Some examples she gave were of financial stories where both El Paso and Juarez are involved, stories about how the economy in Juarez affects El Paso, stories about those who have lost jobs in both cities, and stories about those people from Juarez who are being treated in El Paso hospitals. She would also like to write more about the shared history of the area and how it affects life today.

Stories like those mentioned are being written. The *El Paso Times*' night editor summarizes the common feelings of the staff. "El Paso and Juarez are one big community: tourism, religion, health, politics, culture, family, everything." He, too, points out the need for diverse coverage (personal communication, October 2009).

Discussion

Culture at the international border of El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico is one of immersion. It is a fusion of ideas, beliefs and experiences. After observing and interviewing the news staff at the *El Paso Times*, the researcher better understood the bi-national connections in the El Paso/Juarez community. The journalists' perspectives characterize the way in which they present news for the combined community. Their commitment to inclusive news coverage is grounded in a sense of caring for the welfare of the people who live on both sides of the border.

The news from Juarez is harsh, and those who do not have immediate family ties look intellectually at the responsibly to provide important news coverage. They are

committed to the well-being of their neighboring city. As the theorists George Wood and Juan Judikis (2002) contend, they can act on their mutual responsibility and commitment to the well-being of each other and the group. They model the theory of “enlightened humanity” that Thomas Paine described in his 1776 essay “Common Sense.” Yet, those whose lives include Juarez and Mexico talk fondly about their families and friends. Grandparents, parents, sisters, brothers, and friends are all part of their memories of Juarez. Community commitment for these journalists is more than a commitment to the well-being of a common group. Community for them is the intimacy that only family and friends can understand and share.

The many and varied community ties on the El Paso/Juarez border are considered an important factor in determining news coverage. According to the staff, most of the people living in El Paso understand the unique relationships on this international border. Many feel connected to Juarez and have loved ones who live there, but some who subscribe to the newspaper do not have those close relationships. The majority of news in the *El Paso Times* is about events in and around the city of El Paso. Across a bridge, however, is Juarez. It is not a world away even though the differences in government, economic levels, and safety might create that illusion.

The journalists and editors at the *El Paso Times* who sit working at their desk are always aware of the dichotomy. They are not afforded the luxury of just providing hyper local coverage of El Paso. They view Juarez as part of the border community, but understand that there are no easy answers. A reporter who has worked at the *El Paso Times* for seventeen years said that Juarez is “...just difficult to cover... Period...” He also said that the violence is overwhelming, and “... to report on Juarez as such is an

injustice to the city” (personal communication, November 2009). Another editor agrees, but adds that the carnage has become “...so large, it can’t be ignored” (personal communication, October 2009).

CHAPTER FIVE: ADAPTATION OF NEWSROOM PRACTICES IN JUAREZ

Common organizational practices

Providing news about a city in Mexico, where media operate with different customs and conventions, requires modification of the routine practices followed by the press in the United States. The staff at the *El Paso Times* adapts its newsroom structures to accurately portray news for the border area of El Paso/Juarez. Journalists carefully sort through the information from Juarez and provide news about a city where violence and chaos oppress the people, the government, and the press.

Gaye Tuchman (1973) observed that routine activities manage the flow of information in newsrooms throughout the United States. These common media practices help journalists provide accurate information to the public. For this study the researcher observed the organizational methods used at the *El Paso Times*. These methods guided decisions for the daily newspaper that serves residents in far West Texas, southern New Mexico, and the northern state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

The work and the assignments for the paper are organized by two daily news meetings: one at 10 a.m. and one at 2 p.m. These meetings provide the foundation necessary to create each daily publication. Encouraging a lively and active exchange, the meetings are open to anyone. However, their purpose is to organize the news and produce a high-quality daily newspaper. The executive editor moderates and controls the flow of these meetings. Everyone in attendance is expected to participate by voicing his or her

ideas and concerns. The metro desk editor, the night editor, the weekend editor and individual editors for the specific news sections attend the meetings. The online programmer, the photographers and the news historian are also important members of the daily meetings. Editors and other news staff members bring what they considered relevant information about news stories and ideas for the El Paso/Juarez area.

Those in attendance talk about current and future stories. Ideas for news coverage from both El Paso and Juarez are presented and discussed. Much of the border news is managed in these daily meetings, and all in attendance are committed to “hammering out” the details for the published and online editions of the *El Paso Times*. Breaking stories in the evening are assigned and given priority by the night editor. Even though he attends the afternoon meetings, he is expected to make the final judgment call regarding breaking news. This is important when covering Juarez, because much of the violence occurs in the afternoon and evenings.

Regarding Juarez, editors emphasized that the news staff understands that the bloodshed and carnage of the drug war cannot be ignored. Consequently, the violence represents much of the news from Juarez. However, not all of the daily murders there can be investigated; some of this news is placed in the paper’s section entitled “In Brief.” In an interview, the night editor addressed the appalling numbers. He said that sometimes they will look at five or six murders that happened in the afternoon and just place them in a news-sidebar (personal communication, October 2009). When possible, the violence and its aftermath are carefully investigated and documented. The information is published at a later date, providing more fair and honest reporting. The journalists at the *El Paso*

Times attempt to organize the daily paper in a manner that provides a realistic perspective of the violence.

The researcher observed that the editors and the staff continually express their desire to present more than drug cartel violence and the subsequent body count from Juarez. Four examples of the types of ideas considered during the researcher's attendance were, business initiatives in Juarez, development of the area surrounding the U.S. consulate, shared politics and history of Mexico and the United States, and stories about the children of Juarez. The editor suggested a story that would investigate the psychological and physical effect of the violence in the lives of children in Juarez. These and other ideas slowly materialized and became part of the *El Paso Times* newspaper.

The *El Paso Times* editors constantly sift through the information and story ideas they receive from their reporters, from official sources, from personal contacts, from phone tips, and from wire services. The appropriate section editors make news decisions. They determine which stories will be published immediately, which stories will be investigated and written for subsequent publication, and which stories will be included in an ongoing story line. They then confer with the other editors. The tasks and responsibilities for the stories are then assigned to the appropriate journalist.

One journalist said that the *El Paso Times*' editors follow a top down management style. He said that reporters often wait until the editorial meeting is over to learn about their news assignments. At times the editors dramatically change the story angle. One example was when a story about a thriving business area in Juarez was changed to include information about the ever-present threat of violence. The reporter knew this threat was present but wanted to develop a story that did not have a connection

to the violence (personal communication, November 2009). In most cases however, the reporters felt their leads and ideas were generally accepted, and that most changes had to do with style and space.

The process for making news decisions at the *El Paso Times* is not unique. Stephen Reese (2001) stated that media have an obligation to juggle various influences in the newsroom and answer to a public that relies on clear and objective coverage. In the case of the *El Paso Times* and Juarez, routine newsroom activities categorize, interpret, and distribute information from Juarez.

Gathering information in the Mexican state of Chihuahua

At the time of the researchers visit to the *El Paso Times* the current executive editor had been working there for approximately eleven months. Several reporters told the researcher that the previous editor limited trips to Juarez and cut back on overall coverage of the area. The reporter who lived and reported in Juarez was no longer on the staff of the *El Paso Times*. The researcher asked both editors and reporters why the former editor decided to restrict coverage of Juarez, but no one shared an answer. The new executive editor said that coverage of Juarez was important and necessary. He wanted to find a reporter who would live and work exclusively in Juarez, but both he and the metro editor told the researcher that finding the right person was a difficult task. Knowing the language, knowing the area, knowing the people and understanding the Mexican political system are necessary, and at that time they did not have a reporter for the position.

The journalists from the *El Paso Times* talked about the challenge of gathering and confirming news from Juarez. It is difficult to obtain accurate information from the

El Paso office, but it is also difficult when in Mexico, and the decision to travel to Juarez is not taken lightly. The researcher noted that many of the reporters used phone and Internet sources, as well as academic contacts to obtain and confirm information. Some of the reporters said that friends, family, photographers, and sources from Juarez also provided data. One reporter said that when he was in Juarez he consciously developed a wide variety of sources that could be contacted from El Paso. Most of the reporters added that they agreed it was necessary to find a reporter who would report exclusively from Juarez. A few confided that they would like to be the Juarez reporter, but they had not been asked by the editors to do this.

Whether in Mexico or in the United States, gathering accurate information about Juarez is complicated. Journalists said that information about the drug wars comes from the Mexican military, the Juarez police, the Chihuahua state police, and United States law enforcement agencies. Some information comes from human rights organizations, and a small amount comes from academics and researchers. The journalists explained that it is difficult to determine the best source for reliable news. Additionally, in a city of one and a half million people trying to connect with the correct public or government officials is difficult.

There are layers of security surrounding Mexican officials. One reporter said, “You can’t just go to an event and catch-up with them.” Many of the journalists said that creativity and organization are important when traveling to Juarez for interviews. One staff member said that he first gathers information on the phone, and when possible, interviews sources in El Paso. He then tries to connect with a photographer in Juarez to complete the news story (personal communication, November 2009).

The night editor has reported on Mexico and Latin America for the past thirty years. He said that sometimes, Mexican officials are better than law enforcement agencies in the United States at providing information. News releases from Juarez and other parts of Mexico are often accompanied by videos, photographs, and computer feeds. He added however, that their response is not consistent, saying that sometimes, Mexican officials will not answer a very simple question. This is often the case when officials believe the information might present their country in a negative way. He agreed with other reporters that one of the biggest problems when reporting in Juarez is getting to the right person. He said that sometimes it is very difficult to get to the person you need to talk to, "...but when you do, they are by and large straightforward." It is his experience that they will tell you what you need to know. "...pretty much what they have they will share" he said. He added, however, that in Juarez, "... the rules of the game are vastly different than those in the United States" (personal communication, October 2009). For example the Mexican government is not always forthcoming with their people. They do not feel obligated to provide negative information about government officials or unsuccessful military operations.

A police beat reporter said that the legal system in Juarez is changing. Even though it is becoming more open, there are many crimes that go unreported. He said the *Times* doesn't report and isn't much interested in common robberies and domestic abuse cases. With the overwhelming number of violent crimes it would be very difficult to keep up on and follow most cases. For now, he said, other crime reports are not sent to United States media sources (personal communication, October 2009).

Most of the journalists at the *El Paso Times* agree that it is initially difficult to cover and obtain follow-up information about the murders in Juarez. News about drug related arrests are from the military, and these reports are usually available. However, information regarding the aftermath is not. Many questions go unanswered. What charges are made after the arrest? Are the charges changed or dropped? How is the court process proceeding? Is a verdict reached? Is the person found guilty? What is the punishment? One of the police beat reporters said that in the unusual case of a conviction, information, often accompanied by photographs and videos, and is given to the press (personal communication, October 2009).

There are so many murders in Juarez, that often; Mexican officials have very little information. The reporter who covered the story about the murder of a United States military serviceman explained this reality. Staff Sergeant David Booher was killed in a Juarez bar in November 2009. The reporter said initially it was difficult to get any information, because of misunderstandings and reports from a Mexican media source. A report by the *El Mexicano*, a news source in Juarez, “got it wrong,” she said (personal communication, November 2009). In an attempt to get the news out fast, they first reported that two servicemen from the United States were killed. This made the Mexican government reluctant to release any more information. In order to get the story, it was necessary for the *El Paso Times* reporter to go through a chain of people. The reporter said she first talked to officials at the Juarez City Hall. They told her to call the state offices in Chihuahua City, where a secretary kept asking, “who wants to know?” From there she was directed to the state police who sent her to the municipal police. Next she called the spokesman for the federal military troops. She felt like she was sent around and

around. She finally connected with the Juarez investigator who was processing the crime scene. Even though he was willing to talk with her, she said it was hard to get enough information to write a reliable story. She asked him when the investigation would be complete. The officer told her investigations in Juarez usually take 48 hours, but he added, “We have so much going on we may never have any information.” He confided that in Juarez, officials were simply not capable of investigating most of the murders. The reporter said it seemed that everyone she contacted was simply overwhelmed by the enormity of the violence (personal communication, November 2009).

Verifying information

Editors at the *El Paso Times* are conscientious about verifying information. The metro desk editor said that one of the greatest risks when reporting in Juarez is the risk of publishing inaccurate information. He said that with so many murders and a lack of direct access to those in charge, it is hard to find out about the victim. Important information like the name of the victim, where he or she is from, if there is a connection to drugs, and if there is a connection to El Paso, are questions that often go unanswered. He believes that the sheer volume of killings makes coverage of “sides” difficult. He also said that it is also hard to determine if killings do or do not have a connection to drugs. He compares the violence in Juarez to other large cities in the United States, and says “It is a big city: homicides happen” (personal communication, October 2009).

Obtaining and then verifying information at the *El Paso Times* is a collaborative process. In the newsroom reporters gather leads from their sources and suggest ideas to the editors who assign the story. The reporters continue gathering necessary information, and work with the editors to properly verify the news. Their goal is to publish stories that

are accurate and compelling. In the case of Juarez, special consideration is given when judging the accuracy of the information. The executive editor said he does not like to rely on the government and politicians for information. He is cautious of the intentions of those in power. In Juarez, however, it is difficult to get information from sources other than the local, state or federal officials. Several of the journalists interviewed said that at every level of government in Mexico, the possibility of corruption makes the information they receive suspect. While the journalists do not want to rely exclusively on these official sources, often it is their only avenue for documentation. One reporter said when he writes stories he tries to clearly cite the official office that provides the information. He stated that it is up to the reader to decide if the information is reliable (personal communication, October 2009).

The journalists at the *El Paso Times* also develop networks of personal sources within the city of Juarez. Much of the time these sources cannot be named for fear of reprisals. Those who do not want information to be made public have made good on their threats. In some cases the source and their family have been kidnapped and killed for minor comments published in newspapers (personal communication, October 2009). The information from unnamed sources, however, still needs to be confirmed. The reporters say that most of the time their only choice is to gain confirmation from government officials such as police spokesmen, public information officers for the city, and state justice officials. The *El Paso Times* staff ultimately make choices, and rely on journalistic routines and best practices to help guide their choices.

Logistical difficulties

Working directly in Juarez is considered the most reliable way to cover news there. However, journalists at the *El Paso Times* discussed the obstacles. A veteran reporter who has spent time in Juarez says, “The challenge is time. It’s not easy. It is a different government with another system. Accidents (auto etc.) are costly, and traffic is hard to drive in” (personal communication, October 2009).

Even though the United States/Mexican border is within walking distance of the *El Paso Time’s* building, crossing this border to report on the news there, takes patience and time. The bridges are generally backed up with constant car and truck traffic. The International Bridges Director in El Paso, Texas, Said Larbi-Cherif, P.E., coordinates information about bridge traffic with assistance from the Mexican Aduana (Customs). In a correspondence with the researcher, he said that the southbound passenger vehicle traffic at the Bridge of the Americas, El Paso averaged 17,000, vehicles a day in 2008, and 14,000 vehicles a day in 2010 (Larbi-Cherif, P.E., Said, International Bridges Director, personal communication, November 29, 2010). It is also difficult to gauge the amount of time needed when crossing. A reporter whose wife is from Juarez, said he was almost late to his own wedding. He thought he left El Paso in plenty of time, but the unpredictable traffic held him up. He laughed, saying that everyone at the church was worried he wasn’t coming (personal communication, November 2009).

Understanding the language in a country can also become an obstacle to good reporting. All but three of the reporters interviewed at the *El Paso Times* understand and speak Spanish, but many said the reporters who grew up in Mexico were more suited to reporting Mexico’s news. Communication in Juarez requires proficiency in the Spanish

language and familiarity with the dialectic idiosyncrasies in northern Mexico.

Understanding every nuance of the language spoken in Juarez is important when relaying difficult and dangerous news. The *El Paso Times*' staff is careful to avoid misunderstandings, which could create a misrepresentation of the news.

The researcher experienced firsthand the common problems faced when reporting in Juarez. She traveled with a journalist who was from Mexico and often covered the news in Juarez. The journalist had worked for the *El Diario* Spanish newspaper before working at the *El Paso Times*. To save time the reporter and the researcher walked across the Paso Del Norte/Santa Fe pedestrian bridge. Once in Juarez they walked a short distance to the city municipal building. The reporter had scheduled an interview with the spokeswoman for the coordinator of General Public Information of Urban Development. (Coordinadora Tecnica Direccion General de Obras Publicas y Desarrollo Urbano, and Vocero de la Direccion General de Obras Publicas y Desarrollo Urbano). Her assignment was to find out about the recent development of the area surrounding the American Consulate.

When the researcher and the reporter arrived at the Juarez city office they were questioned and sent to another employee who questioned them again. This process of being routed to employees and being questioned each time, took about an hour. Another hour was spent waiting. When the correct Public Information Officer (PIO) arrived, both the officer and her interpreter were gracious and helpful. They greeted the reporter and the researcher with the customary hug and kiss on the cheek.

The interview was conducted in Spanish with an occasional English translation directed toward the researcher. The officer was happy to share information. She said that

it was important to report on the positive aspects of Juarez. As the reporter and researcher were leaving, the PIO asked the researcher about the focus of the academic study. She specifically asked if the study was about the drug cartels and the killings. She said that Juarez was a place of beauty and hoped it would not be portrayed simply by the current violence. She said that her city was a good place to live, and her people were kind and caring (personal communication, October 2009). This concern was voiced by many of the people the researcher met who had ties to Juarez. Their pride in this city is obvious and they want its reputation protected.

After the interview, the researcher and the reporter met with a freelance photographer from Juarez. They all drove to the American Consulate. Even though it was midday, there was bumper-to-bumper traffic. The main roads were six lanes wide. There were very few traffic lights and cars were switching from lane to lane with very little notice. The side roads were small, narrow and not in good condition. The photographer however, knew the city, and navigated the congested streets with ease. The area around the consulate provided lodging and services to the people who traveled from all over the world to obtain the visas and the paperwork necessary to enter the United States. There were hotels, restaurants and retail stores that could accommodate all income levels. A shopping mall in the area had a new Wal-Mart store as well as a large Macy's and Dillard's department store. Both upscale restaurants and fast food establishments were available.

The American Consulate in Juarez is the third largest United States' consulate the world, and officials there told the reporter that about 15,000 people are processed there each day. Lines of people extended for five blocks. Others were waiting in the consulate

holding areas. The photographer took pictures and the reporter interviewed the American officials and the people who were waiting. Upon leaving, the photographer was stopped by consulate security officers who wanted to see the pictures. He was shown the pictures and the press credentials from the *El Paso Times*, and the reporter explained the type of story she was covering. The photographer later told the researcher that the need for security around the consulate was important, because of possible terrorist actions. This is a general security measure at consulates around the world.

Before returning to El Paso the photographer and the journalist took the researcher to lunch. They were both from Mexico and had grown up in the state of Chihuahua. The reporter told the researcher that she wanted her to experience real Mexican food, which she thought was much better than the Americanized Mexican food served in the United States. Before returning to El Paso, they went to the tourist area near the pedestrian bridge. Many of the shops were closed, and empty. The Mexican vendors who were open were anxious to make a sale. Both the reporter and the researcher made a purchase. The personal exchanges with the citizens of Juarez were enjoyable, and helped the researcher further understand the strong pride of the people.

Crossing the bridge back into the United States went smoothly. American border officers were fast and efficient. The entire trip brought awareness to the logistical difficulties encountered when reporting in Juarez. The interview yielded valuable information for the reporter, but time is expensive when newspaper resources are limited. Regardless of the cost, the editors at the *El Paso Times* know the importance of first hand reporting. The executive editor told the researcher that the paper was committed to the kind of high-quality reporting that happens when “feet are on the ground” (personal

communication, October 2009). Therefore, reporters obtain as much information as possible in El Paso, and travel to Juarez for information that can only be accessed there.

Discussion

The study of the newsroom procedures at the *El Paso Times* raises awareness of the difficulties involved when attempting to accurately report border news. The findings demonstrate the importance of investigating multiple sources in order to provide information that is not skewed.

Downsizing, which has occurred in the news industry around the country, has also affected the *El Paso Times*. There are many empty desks and work areas, but the reporters who remain work tirelessly following proven newsroom routines that have evolved to meet the needs of the bi-national border. The room is generally quiet except for the sounds of typing and phone calls to various news sources. There is not much time for conversation between the employees. However, when the staff members do talk with each other there is a strong sense of support. One reporter said that the people he works with are like his family. He said that the staff is committed to each other. They provide each other with the support and expertise needed when reporting on and traveling in Juarez. This camaraderie helps the journalists excel in the endless task of bringing news to the border community. The collegiality and regard among the journalists helps promote a seamless connection in the news operation.

The journalists work diligently using proven news gathering strategies. They look objectively at the unique problems of gathering and presenting news to the bi-national border of Juarez/El Paso. They understand the importance of comprehensive and unbiased reporting. They work to provide the public with timely information and provide

history with an accurate record of events. They are meticulous and careful. In El Paso, they check their facts and confirm the information. When in Juarez, they protect each other, their sources, and themselves. Their stories show that the violence in Mexico isn't just statistics. It is mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and babies and families. If knowledge of the violence is prohibited because of the danger and difficulty for journalists, the human effect will be violated. Ultimately, they protect and publish important news stories from the El Paso/Juarez border.

CHAPTER SIX: CHALLENGES AND DANGERS OF REPORTING IN JUAREZ

Impact of fear

Journalists value their watchdog role. They are hyper vigilant as they work to inform the public. When this responsibility is weighed against the real fear of torture and death, however, the decision to cross into a dangerous territory becomes extraordinarily complex. Those who report on violence, terrorism, and the accompanying lawlessness are often caught in the physical and psychological cross fire created by the disregard for life. This is true of the staff of the *El Paso Times*, yet regardless of the dangers and trauma, they accept their responsibilities with dignity and professionalism.

An important consideration when reporting in any area immersed in violence is safety. At the *El Paso Times* journalists report on one of the safest cities in the United States, El Paso, Texas, where the FBI reported only 12 murders in 2009 (United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Yet, in stark contrast, they also report on a city that is arguably one of the most dangerous in the world, Juarez, Mexico, where there were approximately 3000 murders in 2009; these murder statistics are calculated at the rate of 191 per 100,000 residents (Ortega, 2010, p. 3). The researcher asked the reporters and editors who covered Juarez if they were afraid that the drug cartels' members would harm them or their family. Each staff member voiced various concerns, but they all took the issue of personal safety seriously.

When questioned about issues of safety, many talked openly about their experiences and feelings. Through the course of the individual interviews, staff members discussed specific dangers and threats that either they or their colleagues had received. They told the researcher about concerns they had for others in the newsroom. They talked about safety measures they felt were important. Some were clear that the violence would not stop them from living their life, and doing their job. Yet, even as they said this, the majority of the journalists interviewed admitted they were afraid.

Even though the staff felt wary of the danger, most did not believe that cartel assassins would cross the border in order to kill a journalist. The reporter who was responsible for much of the coverage of the violence in Juarez said that he and another colleague had discussed the possibility of being killed in El Paso because of stories they wrote about the drug cartel violence. He said they agreed that the danger was minimal. Other reporters said that the drug cartel was not careless, and they would not kill a journalist in the United States. One said she believed that the United States government would descend upon the cartels in full force if such a murder took place on American soil. Not all of the reporters felt this sense of safety. They said that the drug cartels played by their own rules. The general theme of most in-depth interviews however, was one of apprehension and uncertainty.

Obviously, the dangers in Juarez affect the attitudes of individual journalists. They each struggle with the difficulties of living and reporting on this violent border. They have their own opinions, their own perception of danger, and their own coping mechanisms. Their beliefs and motivations guide the overall journalistic commitment of

the newsroom staff at the *El Paso Times* as they attempt to accurately report the news from Juarez.

Regardless of the different opinions, no one on the staff of the *El Paso Times* minimizes the danger. The personal responses from individuals on the staff best illustrates the common concerns and attitudes that influence the news coverage from Juarez in the *El Paso Times* newspaper.

Individual responses

During the first week of the researcher's emersion in the *El Paso Times* newsroom a veteran reporter approached her and said, "I will tell you about reporting in Juarez." He expressed his opinion regarding the realities and the risks encountered when a journalist reports on the drug cartels. He said that his fears were not for himself but instead for his family. He said that reporting on the cartel puts his wife and children in jeopardy. He said he is unwilling to risk their lives. He believes that reporting in dangerous places where your family does not live is different. This, he said, is the responsibility of journalism, but he said "it is a different story when your family is threatened" (personal communication, October 2009). He added that the cartel has proven they are willing to kill a person's family as reprisal for what they consider unacceptable news coverage. "I'll cover a war anywhere in the world, that is what I signed up for, but I will not do it when there is a chance my wife or child will get killed"(personal communication, October 2009).

He also talked about how these threats have changed the way media covers the news in Mexico, pointing out the lack of investigative reporting. "Now no one investigates the cartel crime," he said. "Newspapers in Mexico and the United States used

to investigate and even tried to find the murderers before the police, but now it is too dangerous.” He added that if the police do not investigate a crime in any city in the United States or most parts of the world, the media asks why, but in Juarez no one dares to ask. Most of the media in Mexico now only dare to report the “day-to-day,” news activity. Even the government is afraid to ask. He said that journalists in Mexico have been killed as a result of their work (personal communication, October 2009).

The Committee to Protect Journalists confirms that in Mexico 24 of the 56 journalists murdered between 1992 and 2010, were killed as a direct result of their work. The motive for remaining 32 murders is still unknown. In the past three years two journalists in Ciudad Juarez have been murdered. Both journalists worked for *El Diario* de Ciudad Juarez. Armando Rodriguez Carreon, a veteran crime reporter, was gunned down in the driveway of his home on November 13, 2008 while his eight-year-old daughter watched. Luis Carlos Santiago, a photographer for the paper, was driving the *El Diario* editor’s car on September 16, 2010 when he and another reporter were shot in the parking lot of a local mall (Committee to Protect Journalists, January 2011).

The *El Paso Times*’ journalist said that, “The Juarez media get daily threats. They take it seriously” (personal communication, October 2009). Even though this reporter was candid about his opinion regarding writing stories about the violence in Mexico, his byline is found on many stories about Juarez. “Drug Cartels plunge Juarez deep into Chaos” was picked up in *The Denver Post*, December 27, 2009. He clearly understands the enormity of the risk, yet despite his fears, he continues to report on the cartel violence and its effect on the lives of the people.

The most senior writer on the staff of the *El Paso Times* began working in the El Paso area in 1975. His examples and thoughtful perspective reveal the challenges and responsibilities of providing ethical news coverage in Juarez. He told the researcher about threats made against his life. He said one threat was a Web posting. It was his daughter who first discovered the threat. He talked about the pressure of these frightening warnings for himself and his family (personal communication, November 2009).

He told the researcher that, “The cartels have proven they will retaliate. It used to be that anonymous calls were considered to be prank calls...now they are taken seriously. When a call says I am “investigando” you, the Spanish translation means I am watching you. The threats are taken seriously.” He explained that the phrases “I am watching you,” or “Be careful of what you say” are the type of warnings that reporters in Mexico received before being kidnapped and/or murdered. The reporter said that most of these threats come from “Caller Unknown” as do all calls from Mexico (personal communication, October 2009).

He explained how journalists balance the responsibility to investigate and write a story from Juarez with personal safety. He said that he tries to be realistic and cautious. His family and friends no longer cross the border for “trinkets.” He was talking about actual family excursions into Mexico to buy souvenirs and less expensive merchandise. He then discussed reporting on minor stories like restaurant openings and other “light” stories that he believed were no longer worth risking a reporter’s safety. He described the sense of danger a person feels in a violent city. He talked about the possibility of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and about dying in one of the many accidents that are associated with the extensive violence. He explained that the responsibility of a journalist

is tempered with fear. “I would not want to be tortured or murdered, but this is part of the risk of working on a border” (personal communication, November 2009).

When he received a death threat over the Internet it was in response to a “tongue in cheek” column he had written. The threat was reported to the police in El Paso who did the initial investigation. Next, a court order was issued to search for the server/originator of the threat. It was tracked down, and the source of the message was from either Juarez or Baja, Mexico. The investigation stopped at that point. He said that the police told him when the threat is from Mexico there is nothing they can do about it.

Fear for one’s own safety is just part of the pressure he and other reporters feel. The journalists are also cognizant of the impact their stories might have on the people they write about. The reporter told the researcher about a story he wrote about a prominent businessman who is connected with the business community and maquiladoras (bonded assembly plant) in Juarez. He said the man’s daughter insists that he leave Juarez at night and live in El Paso. The reporter said that there is no security at the man’s home in El Paso, but when he travels to Juarez, bodyguards escort him across the border and travel with him in Juarez.

The businessman told the reporter that his biggest fear is of being kidnapped, because it would affect his family. In a somewhat contradictory statement, however he said that if the cartel wanted to hurt him they would have already done it. The businessman was candid with the reporter, and said that the violence in his country could not be solved until it is solved at every level of government. In his interview he also said the violence creates a sense of lawlessness beyond just the drug cartels and now includes the thugs who take advantage of the lawlessness. Because the businessman was so candid

and had made a reference to possible corruption, the reporter said he received calls from angry readers saying “How can you put this man in danger” (personal communication, November 2009)?

The reporter explained how reporters at the *El Paso Times* try to minimize their personal risk. He used a current assignment with a connection to Juarez as an example. The editors asked him to write a story about an El Paso man who is helping children in Juarez. Concerned about being caught in the crossfire, he decided to do the initial interview in El Paso, and then link up with the man and a photographer to get the rest of the story (personal communication, November 2009). His story, “Ex-postal Worker Serves Disadvantaged: Community Center Built on a Trash Dump is an Island of Hope,” was subsequently published on Christmas Day, 2009.

This reporter believes that everyone at the *El Paso Times* does and should take threats seriously. He said that he looks over his shoulder and pays attention to suspicious cars. “You never know,” he said. Regardless, he still writes stories and columns about the people in Juarez and how their lives are impacted by the violence.

Another journalist who has worked in El Paso for many years said that journalists are simply never safe. He asks the same question many staff members ask; “Does the story that one writes justify the risk that one takes” (personal communication, October 2009)? He said he is terrified for anyone who goes to Juarez.

This reporter worked for the competing newspaper, the *Herald-Post*, in El Paso until it closed in 1997. He then began working for the *El Paso Times*. He spoke of several dangerous incidents at the *Herald-Post*. He recalled the time a newspaper carrier from the Post was grabbed off the street in Juarez. He said another time a photographer from the

Post took a picture, and inadvertently captured the image of a cartel member. The photographer was kidnapped, stripped, harassed, and left naked in the desert. It was during this same dangerous time that another journalist from the *Herald-Post* was threatened and harassed because he wrote about the drug king pin, Pablo Acosta, who controlled crime along the Rio Grande River. The journalist was threatened and harassed by the drug cartel. The threats were serious, and the police authorities in El Paso checked his car everyday for bombs. He left El Paso and lived in hiding with his family for many years (Poppa, 2004).

This *El Paso Times* journalist's attitude toward safety comes from his experiences in the El Paso, Texas, news industry as well as his experience growing up in El Paso. His parents knew several immigration officers, and even as a child he was told about the lack of safety across the border. As a teenager he was told not to cross. A friend of the family who worked for the Drug Enforcement Agency told him "I can't tell you why, just don't go" (personal communication, October 2009). Even though today El Paso is relatively safe, the journalist thinks the day will come when it will no longer be safe. He knows of businesses in Juarez that have already been approached by cartels that offer "protection." He emphasizes that now El Paso has honest local, state and federal law enforcement officials, but he said this could change. "All the cartel needs to do is threaten a person's family, and sweeten the deal with money" (personal communication, October, 2009).

Varying opinions

A reporter from a small town close to Chihuahua City, in Chihuahua, Mexico explained the complexities and dangers involved when reporting in Juarez. She worked for the Spanish newspaper *El Diario* before coming to the *El Paso Times*, and has written

bi-national stories for both papers. Her work includes stories about the increase of Mexican troops in Juarez, a story about a demonstration led by medical professionals in Juarez who were protesting the cartel violence, and stories about changes in the gated entertainment centers and nightclubs in Juarez

She said she has felt threatened as she covered border news for both the *El Diario* and *El Paso Times*. When she covered the protest by the doctors of Juarez, she was frightened because of rumors that cartel members were going to “Take care of the crowd.” She noticed suspicious looking men who were on the edges of the protest looking menacingly on. After the first speakers the police surrounded those who looked suspicious. She was worried that there might be a “shoot out” because it had happened before. The protest however remained peaceful. Even though she was frightened, she said that she did not want fear to control her life.

During her ethnographic immersion at the *El Paso Times*, the researcher traveled with the reporter in Juarez. During the trip the reporter told the researcher that Juarez was dangerous but she, “...would not live her life in fear.” She believed that fear should not stop reporters from doing their job; if she could not control the dangers; she would not be ruled by the fear (personal communication, October 2009). While in Juarez the researcher saw the confident determination of this reporter. She was smart and aware, but not immobilized. She understands the people, the culture and the language at a more intimate level than those who grew up in the United States, and said that she would like to live in Juarez as a reporter for the *El Paso Times*.

Another reporter interviewed said he did not feel fearful of going to Juarez for personal activities. He said he goes there to shop or to eat in a restaurant once or twice a

month. He thinks the greatest risk is being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He thinks people who live there are like people who live in a crime-ridden neighborhood in any city. They are just trying to survive. Traveling in Juarez as a journalist might pose a greater risk, but he emphasized that he refuses to feel afraid. He believes going across the border is a responsibility for all of the reporters at the *El Paso Times* and he values the risk. "I wouldn't like myself if I felt that way (afraid) about going to the Mexico. To not go is not terribly noble thinking. It is the journalist's job to oversee governments," he said (personal communication, October 2009).

A reporter who has family and friends living in Juarez talked about his solidarity with the journalists there. He thinks that the reporters at the *El Paso Times* do not feel the immediate fear of reporting on the narcotics traffic. He said that newspapers in Mexico are different. After the killing of a journalist from the *El Diario*, Armando Rodriguez, their fear is more real. "Those reporters know a fear that we can't imagine. They are afraid in their day-to-day operation. In Juarez the violence has hit them hard. The violence is part of their day-to-day operation" (personal communication, November 2009).

While in El Paso, the researcher attended a panel discussion entitled "Violence Against Journalists." The discussion was on November 3, 2009, at the University of Texas at El Paso. This event was in conjunction with the "Dia de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) altar created by University students for the Juarez journalist, Armando Rodriguez, who was killed outside of his home on November 13, 2008. The panel was composed of reporters and editors from Juarez and El Paso as well as an Associated Press reporter from Mexico City. The participants were asked to give their opinion regarding

how the situation in Mexico was affecting reporting and the freedom of the press. The panelists discussed the dangers.

An Associated Press reporter said, “In Mexico just carrying a pen can make you a target,” She added that being a journalist in Mexico was even more threatening than reporting in Iran and Afghanistan where reporters are, for the most part, protected by the military.” Several panelists said that they believed they would inevitably become victims of the violence. A journalist from Juarez said that he couldn’t even go home, because everyone knows where he and his family live, where they go, and what they do. The Associated Press reporter described the situation as not ‘if’ something would happen but instead ‘when’ (November 3, 2009).

A former male employee of *El Diario* was seeking political asylum in the United States. He made an impassioned speech about journalists murdered in Juarez. He spoke specifically about the murder of Armando Rodriguez. He said the Mexican government will not protect journalists and therefore journalists are forced to protect each other. The reporters at the *El Paso Times* for the most part do not feel the urgency of the violence experienced by those who report in Mexico every day. Some do not think that the cartels would be willing to kidnap or kill an American journalist. Several journalists told the researcher that they believe killing an American journalist would create a risk for the cartels, and possibly create an international issue. One journalist said, “If violence would spill over to El Paso all hell would break loose – the US would squash it, and the cartels are not stupid, they know this” (personal communication, October 2009). A reporter who has spent time in Juarez and works on the police beat said that he has never had a direct

threat. He said, “Those guys are too busy surviving for their own lives to be killing reporters” (personal communication, October 2009).

Psychological Effects

Editors at the *El Paso Times* may have different attitudes about sending reporters to Juarez to cover events, but they all are aware of not only the physical danger but also the psychological effects. One editor said that reporting in an area where the numbers of deaths/murders are unimaginable affects a person. He added that when a person actually sees the victims and dead bodies, the reality is “shocking” (personal communication, October, 2009). He does not take lightly the emotional toll of reporting on crime in Juarez.

A reporter who traveled to Juarez to ride with a Juarez police officer during his night shift talked about her own psychological and physical reaction to the danger. She didn’t tell her family. She knew they would be worried and try to convince her not to go. She cancelled her first meeting because she did not personally know the photographer who would be going with her. She said she would feel more secure being with a friend. She rescheduled the ride for a week later so she could be with a photographer she knew. The reporter said that while she planned the trip and during the days before she went, she spent many sleepless nights. As she crossed the bridge into Juarez, Mexico, she said she was sick to her stomach. She was afraid of what would happen, what she would see, and what could happen to her while there. She met with the officer in his home, and said once she got on the road she became so involved in the story that she forgot the fear and worry she experienced at the bridge. This example demonstrates the difficult decisions

journalists make when choosing to report on the violence in Juarez. Both the reporter and their family feel the impact of fear.

When traveling in Juarez with *El Paso Times*' reporters, the researcher also felt insecure and uncertain. The striking presence of the Mexican federal military was an eerie presence not experienced in the United States. The soldiers were at bridge entrances to Juarez, and were a constant presence throughout the city. Five minutes did not pass without seeing federal soldiers. They were everywhere, and were constantly driving through the busy streets. Mounted on their vehicle were guns so large the soldiers seemed small. One reporter told the researcher that most of the soldiers' were 17 to 18 years old. They were dressed in camouflage uniforms with black masks covering their faces. Their hard hats covered the rest of their heads. The uniforms are designed not only for safety, but also to hide their faces from cartel members who might later try to kill them. Even though the researcher did not witness any real danger, the presence of the troops made the potential for danger more real.

There were complaints about human rights abuses at the hands of the soldiers. One reporter said that she knew some young college boys from Juarez who were picked up by the army and accused of having drugs. She said they were blindfolded, handcuffed and taken to a room where there were other captives. She said they were held for three days and were repeatedly questioned and threatened. At the end of the ordeal they were taken outside the city and left with no shoes to find their way back. These types of accusations were common, and were considered part of the distrust and corruption many believed contributed to the chaos in Mexico.

Corruption

Reporters who have lived and/or worked in Mexico say that corruption has always been part of life in Mexico. Some feel that this corruption helped to create the current violence. One reporter described the historical corruption in Mexico as “La Mordida” which translates as “the bite.” An example of this is when someone is pulled over by the traffic patrol; they are expected to offer money to the officer. That is their “bite. When speaking of the problem one reporter said, “...it (corruption) has been a part of life in Mexico for many, many years, but now the corruption seems more severe (personal communication, October 2009).

One veteran reporter said that the corruption in Juarez has caused a break down in the justice system. It, in part, contributes to the lack of investigation procedures. She reported extensively on the femicides in Juarez where more than 400 young women have been murdered or abducted since 1993. She said that the violence against women and the lack of follow-up were in her opinion, precursors to the current violence. She said that the murders and deaths of the women were not taken seriously or investigated properly (personal communication, October 2009).

A reporter who worked in Juarez before the current violence said that he noted in 2007 what he thought was a precursor to the present violence related to the drug business. He told the story about some bodies that had been dumped on the road. He said that when the police arrived to clean things up, some thugs drove up and held the police at bay while they took the bodies and left. He said that even now it is hard to know how the government in Juarez works. Sometimes they will pick up cartel suspects and then just hand them over to the competing cartel (personal communication, October 2009).

He also noted other changes in the cartel violence. He said over the past two or three years the murders have become continuous, and there is no effort to conceal the violence or the impression of cartel involvement. He added that there was a small let up in the summer of 2009, but it quickly got bad again. “In September 2009, there were 304 dead and those are only the ones we know about. It is not uncommon to dig up someone’s patio and find bodies” (personal communication, October 2009).

Discussion

There are differences of opinion in the El Paso newsroom about crossing the border to cover stories in Juarez. Even the editors voiced different perspectives. The metro editor said that they do not force their reporters to go to Juarez. He talked about the real trauma of witnessing a death. However the night editor said that when a reporter did not want to go to Juarez, he would say, “sorry, that is what we do” (personal communication, October 2009).

Reporters talked about the stories they felt were important enough to risk traveling to Juarez. Some journalists on the staff said it was not necessary for them to actually cross the border to cover a story. During the individual interviews many staff members’ comments reflected the unease and uncertainty of working at this violent border. They openly explored their own conflicting attitudes toward working in Juarez. They all understood the importance of the decisions they made.

Even though no journalists from the *El Paso Times* have been injured or killed, journalists in Juarez have died trying to find and tell the truth. Journalists are faced with difficult choices. An *El Paso Times* journalist who had worked for the media in Mexico said that while working there, she had been followed, harassed and warned about

reporting in Juarez. She said it is dangerous to know or report anything negative about the “rich and powerful.” She said it is “sometimes safer not to know” (personal communication, November 2009).

The public relies on the fearless reporting of difficult and often dangerous stories; however, they remain unaware of the effect on the individual journalists. When confronted with the direct effects of violence, the staff of the *El Paso Times* was required to deal with the trauma of those they encounter, as well as their own emotional response. In the book *Covering Violence* (2006), Simpson and Cote discuss the importance of paying attention to the emotional needs of the reporters and photographers who often arrive with the first responders at difficult scenes of violence. They suggest that it is important for news editors to provide advance trauma training for staff members. They recommend providing adequate backup at the scene, and they discuss the need of attending to the emotional needs of the returning journalists. While the researcher did not see any direct or formal attention to these complexities, it was clear the news organization was sensitive to the risk of trauma on the journalist. The editors considered the reporters and photographers willingness to report in Juarez, and did not force their staff members to immediately travel to scenes where they would encounter death and destruction. The reporters were brave, but they were realistic. They talked frankly with the researcher about their reaction to the pain of those living in Juarez. Perhaps living on the EL Paso/Juarez border has created a deep understanding of cruelty and its psychological effects.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ETHICS AND JOURNALISM WHILE REPORTING ON JUAREZ

Journalistic decisions

Every decision journalists make requires them to be mindful of the consequences of their choice. The journalists at the *El Paso Times* contemplate difficult ethical choices each day. They understand that their narrative of events in Juarez provides a description for their readers. They grapple with the accepted standards: seeking truth, minimizing harm, acting independently and remaining accountable to the public (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). They also attend to the additional responsibility of reporting in Juarez where the powerful criminal element uses brutality, intimidation, threat of harm, and lawlessness to intimidate and terrorize the people.

Those who commit extreme acts of violence and brutality are often sending a message or warning to others. This is true of the current drug cartel violence in Mexico. “Terrorists want to undermine resolve, create fears, and destabilize life in the civilian population” (Simpson & Cote, 2006, p. 62). Accurate reporting is important and would include information regarding these acts of terror; however, if reality is often simplified and sensationalized, the reporting becomes an incomplete representation of the events.

Sensationalistic reporting is the result of inattention to the comprehensive nature of any conflict. News stories that jump from one act of violence to another create a misunderstanding of the culture, history and values of those people caught in the conflict.

It has the potential to create a lack of concern (Simpson & Cote, 2006). Michael Ignatieff (1997) writes, “When all we see beyond our borders is chaos, the temptation of disgust becomes irresistible” (p. 99). The authors of *Media Ethics* describe a sense of “compassion fatigue... editors and public are weary of a complex conflict with no end in sight” (Christians, Fackler, McKee, Kreshel, & Woods, 2009, p. 77).

The journalists at the *El Paso Times* strive daily to provide legitimate perspective and avoid sensational and unneeded scare reporting. During individual interviews, the executive editor as well as the metro desk and night editor emphasized that when reporting about Juarez, it is difficult to avoid sensationalism (personal communication, October 2009). The journalists are careful to avoid reporting that might glorify the cartels, or allow them to use media accounts as a way to threaten their enemies.

Accountability

An *El Paso Times* reporter who has worked in newsrooms throughout the United States said that to be ethical newspapers everywhere must deal with the cultural uniqueness of the area they serve. He said that although Juarez and El Paso are both unique, they also have strong commonalities, and all the issues must be equally understood and covered accurately (personal communication, November 2009). He added that the challenge of media everywhere, including border communities, is to provide good solid reporting of all issues. He also believes that when reporting about Juarez or any other city, it is important to inform the public using as much detail as needed to ensure accuracy. He said it is media’s responsibility to “...hold accountable the powers that be,” and “... to be zealous and report important information widely” (personal communication, October 2009).

Other journalists at the *El Paso Times* agree that ethical decisions for news organizations everywhere are similar. They concur that it is important to remain accountable and objective when gathering and writing news stories. They understand that clear attribution and identification of the sources is a part of the process of accountability, knowing that when sources and information are kept “secret,” the information becomes suspect (Christians, 2009). When reporting in Juarez, however, both reporters and editors at the *Times* believe a competing news standard requires journalists to minimize the harm that might befall the sources or the subjects of their stories. This sometimes requires them to keep “secret” the names of the witnesses and sources.

The *El Paso Times* news staff agree that media are accountable for rescuing and documenting information that might otherwise be lost forever. One reporter said that in Juarez the police and government often lose or destroy information. She believes it is important to employ many tools to preserve the information; recording, photographing, writing, and filming are part of a journalist’s responsibility. She voiced what journalists strive to accomplish as they report news, “It might never be this way again. Be a friend of history” (personal communication, October 2009).

Reporters at the *El Paso Times* work to gather and deliver objective news about a city immersed in violence. The metro editor, however, said that objective reporting in Juarez is not as straightforward as reporting on the different “sides” of an issue. He explained that it was very difficult to provide accurate context regarding events in Juarez. He said, “It is difficult because of the sheer size of the slaughter. It is important that the humanity of the story is not lost. It is imperative that the staff does not become jaded to

the violence and begins looking at one day of slaughter as if it is no different from the rest” (personal communication, October 2009).

A common goal of the journalists is to remain autonomous. The reporters at the *El Paso Times* fearlessly and independently investigate the stories that affect the public. This is difficult when one fears for his or hers safety. One journalist voiced the frustration of reporting in Juarez. “As a human the violence affects you. As a journalist, you always want freedom to report whenever and wherever.” He added, “Don’t tell me what to say” (personal communication, November 2009). He believes in the necessity of a free and independent press, but he said as a human, it is normal to think, “Is this story worth my life?” Even so, he said, when reporting on the drug war it is his responsibility as a journalist and he would “go” (personal communication, November 2009).

Source protection

Gathering the narratives from those who have experienced violence and trauma require sensitivity to the both the safety and the pain of those interviewed. In their book *Covering Violence* (2006), Simpson and Cote emphasize the importance of understanding the toll of trauma on victims and survivors. They suggest a list of ethical considerations. These include expecting “...a range of emotional responses from witnesses and survivors,” sharing “...control with the people who have suffered trauma,” knowing “...the three symptoms of severe emotional injury – intrusive memories, heightened anxiety, and avoidance of reminders,” and expecting “...that anger and shame may be part of a person’s response to a traumatic event” (Simpson & Cote, 2006, p. 269).

The researcher observed the staff of the *El Paso Times* gathering information about Juarez, both in the newsroom and on-site in Mexico. She observed their sensitivity to the people as well as their commitment to the safety of their sources. At times this commitment hampered their ability to gather objective news and deliver it in a timely fashion. Remaining safe and protecting sources, however, are values they refuse to compromise. When working in Juarez the journalists consider the risks for themselves, their colleagues, and the family and friends of each source. They measure the potential for retaliation. During an in-depth interview one reporter discussed the need for credibility and transparency in journalism, but explained careless reporting has resulted in the murder of witnesses.

One journalist interviewed said that her philosophy when working with sources in Juarez is to establish relationships of trust and credibility. She said for her this is a process that "...must be attended to carefully." She emphasized that in order to remain accountable to the people in El Paso and Juarez, it is necessary to adapt to the problems caused by the violence there. "I understand that there are no guarantees. Journalists accept the risk. They must become street smart and know that the people they trust will guide them." She maintains integrity and professionalism while gathering information, understanding it doesn't give the whole picture. "One gets pieces of the puzzle over a long period of time. Things don't come quickly or even at the same time. It takes time and patience" (personal communication, October 2009). By working conscientiously she has gained the respect and trust of many families in Juarez. She has been threatened by the cartel, and can no longer travel across the border without jeopardizing her life and the lives of her friends, but because of her care to protect her sources, she is still able to

contact them. She refuses, however, to ever compromise their safety, aware that their decision to talk to her could cost them their life. Once when she was talking with a police official she asked about an unsolved murder case. She asked, “Why don’t you solve the murder?” His response was, “They know where my family lives.” She explained that fear for one’s family is a constant reality in Juarez.

The researcher observed this adherence to protecting sources one reporter met with National Public Radio (NPR) journalists from Washington, D.C. They were researching a story about an U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) informant who had committed several murders while working for these federal agencies. The reporters planned to travel to Juarez to view the place where these murders took place, and wanted to talk with people in the neighborhood. In the story the reporters wanted to include sound bites that expressed the people’s sense of outrage. They repeatedly asked the *El Paso Times* reporter for names of people they might be able to interview. The reporter was quietly polite but would only direct them to academics from various universities. She said many professors were studying the effect of violence on the citizens of Juarez, and they might provide insight and background. She never gave a name (personal communication, October 12).

Justice

Journalists value the ability to provide justice and expose evil events that might otherwise go unnoticed. This is especially important when an individual or a powerful group like the drug cartels gain power or wealth by keeping important truths hidden. Exposing violence and evil, however, often has unwanted or unanticipated consequences. In his essay “The Media in Evil Circumstances,” Robert Fortner examines the difficult

and often contradictory role of media. He uses several classifications to analyze media's role: "Media as participants in evil... Media as dupes in evil circumstances... Media as signalers of evil... Media as legitimizing evil... Media as sensationalists" (Fortner, 2009, pp. 340-343). Journalists in El Paso and Juarez carefully consider these unwanted impacts as they report on the warring drug cartels. They report the facts and reveal the violent events that affect the people in the El Paso/Juarez; however they realize that by reporting these atrocities, they are in danger of legitimizing the cartels and giving them the publicity they seek. They balance all the potential problems as they report the news. They study the current violence and its repercussions. They carefully write and publish stories that show how this violence has changed the lives of those living in the area. During an interview one reporter said that *El Paso Times* coverage is especially important because "...the national news doesn't pay too much attention to the border." He said he believes it is important that the *El Paso Times* provide much of this information, because otherwise the violence could go unreported (personal communication, October 2009).

In an effort to explain the dangers policemen in Juarez face, one reporter gained permission to spend a night riding with a Juarez police officer. She was afraid and aware of her own personal risk, but said her goal was to help her readers understand the emotional state of the officers who daily risk their lives as they protect the people in Juarez (personal communication, November 2009). She spent an evening with the officer. She was with him as he left his wife and child at home. She listened as he prayed for safety. She rode in the back of his police car as he patrolled the streets of his city. She tried to understand how he felt about working in the most dangerous city in the world, and then wrote a story that would allow others to understand the physical and emotional

toll of his work. The reporter said it was the duty of journalists at the *El Paso Times* to provide a narrative for the people who struggle to live and work in a dangerous city that is only seven blocks from the *El Paso Times* building (personal communication, November 2009).

Another reporter told the researcher about Lomas de Poleo, a place called Juarez's little concentration camp. She said that the situation there is a clear case of abuse of power and wealth that should be exposed by the press. She referred to the story, "Protection for people of Lomas de Poleo sought," written by a colleague. This story was published in September 2009. She told the researcher there is a law in Juarez that states if a piece of land has not been used for five or more years people can work the land and settle there.

She told the story of land in Lomas de Poleo which the family of Pedro Zaragoza Vizcarra abandoned. In 1975, the Mexican government officially declared it as public land. Over 100 families moved there and built homes. From the years 2000 to 2003, wealthy investors developed the land surrounding Lomas de Poleo. This increased the value of the settlement, and because of its increased value, the family of Pedro Zaragoza Vizcarra declared ownership of the land. They tried to get rid of the people who were living there. They cut off electricity and water. They bulldozed or set fire to homes and used other similar intimidation tactics to retake the land. Most of the families who lived in the settlement left their homes. Those who didn't were harassed and tormented. The Zaragoza Vizcarra family had a fence constructed around the area. They hired armed guards to patrol the perimeter. The people living there could neither come nor go. Approximately 20 families are still in their homes, but according to the reporter their

houses are substandard, and the guards hired by the wealthy and powerful family harass them. The officials in Juarez refuse to help the people of this town. The article states, “Juarez city authorities said they consider the dispute to be a private matter and no longer send patrol cars when residents call the police” (Valdez, 2009). This is just one example of the corruption and abuse of power that reporters at the *El Paso Times* expose.

Reporters at the *El Paso Times* all agree that there are important stories that need to be investigated more thoroughly. One reporter told the researcher that there were several stories he would like to cover. He would like to gather information and write a story about cross-border monetary investments and banking practices. He believes investigating and writing a story about this would help inform the public. He thinks that immigration reform is another neglected topic. He believes that the media in the United States reflects the negative bias present in much of the political rhetoric. He thinks that media should gather and write stories that present a more balanced account of immigration issues. He also said that he personally would like to go to Mexico City to report on nonprofit organizations, looking specifically at those who work hard every day trying to improve conditions for others. He would also like to investigate the way drug trafficking permeates the American society. He, like many other journalists interviewed, said the public needs to better understand how drug use in the United States has consequences elsewhere. He thinks that more investigative reporting would better inform the public.

Ethics and electronic media

A reporter who regularly covers the violence in Juarez commented on the different standards of the *El Paso Times* newspaper and the various broadcast media

sources. He feels that broadcast media throughout the United States is at times reckless in their rush to provide “timely” news. National television stations often rely on stringers out of Mexico. He said that their information is often premature and incomplete. Their inaccuracies in Juarez have often made problems worse, sometimes creating heroes out of the villains (personal communication, October 2009).

In the book *The Warriors Honor* (1997), Michael Ignatieff comments on the ethical problems created by television news sources. He says that, “...a dishonor is done when the flow of television news reduces all the world’s dishonor to identical commodities” (Ignatieff, p. 30). He writes that sensational television media does not allow the audience to experience the humanity of those who are victims of violent events. He states that all media forms should adhere to “...the minimum moral requirement of engagement with another person’s suffering.” He adds that those in media need to, “...spend time with them (the victims), enough time to pierce the carapace of self-absorption and estrangement that separates us from the moral worlds of others” (Ignatieff, p. 29).

This type of careless reporting also frustrates *El Paso Times*’ reporters. One reporter commented that many times television networks throughout the United States would drop stories about Juarez and would fail to follow up on even the simplest things. Additionally, he said there is such a rush to get information out on the television and Internet that they do not check all the facts. They use only the information supplied by one agency or source. At other times they supply names, and sometimes they don’t even get the names right. He said that this has created dangerous situations for many of the people living in Juarez. He pointed to an example of a news story broadcast on the day

before his interview. He said that El Paso police named a witness and the TV stations ran it. “We won’t do that. We protect witnesses” (personal communication, October 2009).

In a climate of fast and sensational news, those at the *El Paso Times* still maintain their commitment to their neighbors in Juarez. They check their facts, they consider consequences and they strive to maintain their integrity.

Ethics and Mexican media

The *El Paso Times* newspaper shares news coverage with media groups in Mexico. In order to assess the content of news in Mexican media, reporters at the *El Paso Times* explain that it is important to understand how the style and emphasis of news coverage is different. Several reporters said that often the decisions made by the media in Mexico are in sharp contrast to the practices in the United States. One reporter commented on the type of coverage in the *El Diario* newspaper in Juarez. He said that their coverage of the drug violence is very graphic. He said that a lot of the information in their reports is opinion based. He sees this as a stark ethical difference. “In the United States we need proof to publish a story” (personal communication, October 2009). He remarked that Mexican media had published names, and sometimes will identify or closely describe the witnesses, “The *El Paso Times* is careful to protect the witnesses by not publishing identities, but the Mexican media usually is not” (personal communication, November 2009).

Two reporters interviewed worked for the media in Mexico before working at the *El Paso Times*. They both talked about the dangers when reporting in Mexico, but they also talked about the different pressures placed on the reporters and photographers. Some of the differences make the press more vulnerable to those in power. A reporter who

worked throughout the state of Chihuahua said that the journalists in Mexico have different standards and expectations that affect the values and style of newsgathering. She said that reporters face great market pressures. The editors there are very demanding, and reporters and photographers are expected to get the story before other news agencies.

One reporter said she would be asked, “How come so and so had a story and you don’t? Are you sleeping?” She felt she had to push and be aggressive in order to get the story the editors wanted. She said, “It was terrible to find out competitors got the story and you didn’t! I would want to die on the spot.” There is an urgent sense of competition to be the first news agency at crime scenes. She explained that if reporters and photographers want to keep their job, they needed to continually focus on pleasing the editors (personal communication, November 2009). These pressures alter the dynamics of news coverage and can affect accuracy.

Mexican media has become the specific target of the drug cartels. The cartels expect compliance from journalist and when they do not get the amount and type of coverage they want, they target specific journalists and their families. While the statistics of those killed in cartel violence varies, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) report that since 1992, 56 journalists and media workers have been murdered in Mexico. They have confirmed that 24 Mexican media workers were killed as a direct result of their work. The motive for the remaining 32 murders is as yet unconfirmed (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011).

In a special report to the CPJ, Joel Simon reports that more than 30 journalists have been murdered or have disappeared since 2006. As of 2010 eight of these journalists

have been confirmed to be murdered “in direct reprisal for their work” (Simon, J., 2010, p. 1). The report to the committee, *Silence or death on Mexico’s press*, says that Mexican press has long been used as a tool of the cartels the familiar mantra “Plomo o Plato,” lead or silver, has plagued the Mexican press. In 2004, Joel Simon went to Tijuana to investigate the murder of journalist Francisco Ortiz Franco. He discovered that drug cartels would order reporters to suppress stories about their own violence, and then pay them to write about the savagery of their rival (Simon, J., 2010, p. 1). The alternative to obeying the cartels demands is “Plomo,” lead. The cartels threaten and do kidnap or kill journalists and their families. Simon reports that, “...in addition to those who have been murdered dozens of journalist have been attacked, kidnapped, or forced into exile” (Simon, J., 2010, p. 5). This intimidation has created a self-censorship throughout the country. Many news sources in the extremely dangerous areas no longer cover the murders and kidnappings.

In his essay “The Media in Evil Circumstances,” Robert Fortner describes the danger of media becoming the “...dupes or sensationalist-even when they are the critics” (Fortner, R., 2009, p. 341). He says journalists can spread the terrorism or become the victims of the same terrorism. In reaction to this, on March 24, 2011 more than 50 major press organizations in Mexico signed an unprecedented agreement to set professional standards for coverage of the drug cartel violence. “Among the agreement's principal goals: the press must not be used by organized crime to generate terror among the public, and it must not become a propaganda tool for criminals. Addressing a major gap in Mexican newsrooms, it also sets protocols for what to do when a journalist is in danger” (O’Conner, M., 2011, p.1). While this agreement is intended to set an ethical standard

while keeping the journalist out of direct danger, some believe it will be used by the cartels to further control and censor the news. What is clear is that the Press in Mexico is under fire, and all attempts to apply ethical practices are dangerous for news organization and their journalists.

There is a wide variance in attitudes toward Mexican press practices among the journalists at the *El Paso Times*. Some believed that the decisions made by the Mexican press are different from their counterparts in the United States, but that the decisions are in no way less ethical. A reporter who lived and reported in Juarez said that in many ways the Mexican media is more reliable than media in the United States. He said that the reporters in Mexico aggressively search for answers “They will actually attack or call out a person or thing they don’t agree with. It is more emotional, and they are better at telling what they think things are like” (personal communication, November 2009). The reporter added however that sometimes the press in Juarez is not good about checking facts, names, and information. Still, he said, they will often “... get to crime scenes before the police, and they aren’t afraid to push officials for answers to their questions” (personal communication, November 2009).

A reporter who began her career at the *El Diario* in Juarez discussed the difference between the public’s behavior toward the media in the United States, and the media in Mexico. She said that in the United States the press seems to be intimidated by aggressive people. She thinks this causes ethical problems for journalists. She said that private citizens in the United States are sometimes disrespectful, and try to control the press by threatening lawsuits, or by saying they know someone with influence who will cause problems. She thinks that this keeps the press in the United States from operating with

total freedom. In Mexico, she said, "...reporters are respected. The exception is the drug cartel. They respect no one" (personal communication, October 2009).

Discussion

There are important stories to be told and truths to be sought in the border area of El Paso/Juarez, but nothing is clear-cut. In news meetings and in individual interviews the journalists at the *El Paso Times* discussed the need to present the humanity behind the carnage; to write stories about those in Mexico and in the United States who are victims of the violence; to provide narratives that help clarify and explain the situation; to include information about the fight for control of lucrative drug routes into the United States. Other ideas mentioned by reporters and editors were to write about direct consequences of the drug violence by investigating lost business opportunities, studying the consequences of unemployment, identifying the loss of many charitable organizations, reporting on the increasing number of orphaned children, and looking at the psychological effect of trauma on public officials and law enforcement personnel. With stories such as these the *El Paso Times*' staff attempts to portray a complete picture of event in Juarez. The journalists aspire to the high ethical standards, but they struggle with day-to-day reality of choosing the correct story, the correct source, the correct time, the correct word, and the correct tone. They work to make choices that will ensure dignity and safety for the people of Juarez.

El Paso Times reporters, who work and write about the people of Juarez, guard against leaking even inadvertent information about their sources. One told the researcher that if they are not careful they could cause more violence. She gave an example of a man whose name was used in a quote. The man had complained about the bodies being

dumped in his neighborhood. Several weeks later the man ended up dead himself. The reporter said, “People might give you their names in dangerous situations, but a journalist should know better than to publish them” (personal communication, October 2009).

A reporter at the *El Paso Times* said that his job as a reporter is rewarding and important. He shows the commitment of the entire staff to the arduous and sometimes painful responsibility of the journalist. He comes to work early every day to do a difficult job. Before reporting on the daily news he sits quietly at his desk and keeps a running list of those who have died. He said, “It isn’t easy. Sometimes it takes almost an hour to find all the names” (personal communication, October 2009). He patiently creates a record of the dead. He hand writes their names, the date, and the location where they were found. He says that he knows these are not the only names and that there are many people who just disappear. He also says that it is not unusual to hear of a mass grave found in someone’s backyard. Still, he records the deaths as accurately as possible. Maybe the Juarez press also keeps this list. Maybe, his list is the only remembrance of these people, and in that measure provides justice for the victims.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Evaluation

Providing accurate and ethical coverage of events at the international border of El Paso, in the United States, and Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, is the business of those who work at the *El Paso Times*. They are charged with considering community attitudes, using efficient newsroom practices, regarding the safety of themselves and those they report on, and maintaining high ethical standards when reporting on violence and trauma in this international border space. Specific research questions and complete ethnographic immersion with journalists of *El Paso Times* provided the study with information about media operations on this international border.

The staff of the *El Paso Times* was eager to talk about their work. They were passionate about the importance of media on the El Paso/Juarez border. Their attitudes display a specific view of media's response to the needs of international borderlands.

Research Question One: How does the staff of the *El Paso Times* define community at the El Paso/Juarez border?

During the study, the researcher found that the *El Paso Times*' staff defines community in terms of their own experiences and identity; family, friends, also affect their attitudes. Each person has a unique interpretation of how the Juarez community is part of their reality and how it is separate. Adrian Little (Little, 2002) asserts, that communities are formed on the basis of shared principles and values. Even though staff members at the *El Paso Times*' have unique views, most agree that economics, health,

education, industrial development, and cultural values affect those living on both sides of the border.

Individual interviews revealed that the staff of the *El Paso Times* views their community as both separate and inclusive. Theorist Michael Foucault aptly described this border reality. He states, “We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition; we are in the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less than that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (as cited in Pavlakovich-Kochi, Morehouse, & Wastl-Walter, 2006, p. 1). The media in El Paso work to represent this dichotomy. They include stories about issues and events that impact both El Paso and Juarez. They also include stories that are unique and seem to apply only to Juarez or only to El Paso. The stories reflect the community values of the journalists at the *El Paso Times*.

Research Question Two: How do journalists adapt newsroom practices to accurately report on events in Juarez, Mexico?

Access to information in Juarez is in continual flux. Coverage requires ever changing strategies. World-wide, media struggles with the difficulty of managing the large amount of information generated by global events. Necessity requires them to use common established routines and structures designed to sort through the data, and determine the news that will be published (Tuchman, 1973/1997). News organizations are required to decide which events will receive their attention and what, when, and how the information will be published. Journalists attempt to avoid bias as they make these decisions (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 37). Many of those interviewed at the *El Paso*

Times voiced the difficulty of making these decisions at an international border. They said that the conflicts encountered when reporting in a violent border area make their decisions and their work more difficult. According to the journalists, the responsibilities, the challenges, and the demands of gathering and publishing news in Juarez are different and more complex than in other news areas.

Regardless of the difficulties, the study reveals that the *El Paso Times*' news operation relies on common organizational models and task allocation strategies. The division of labor controls the complexity associated with coordinating and representing events in a manner accessible to the public. The staff uses specific, daily activities to impose order on the endless stream of information. They maintain a professional demeanor when gathering and organizing news from both El Paso and Juarez. Each section of the paper is assigned to specific editorial leaders and staff. Daily meetings organize the news flow. Established ethical practices help to further define the amount and the type of coverage of events in El Paso and in Juarez. Although they make use of standard newsroom practices, the resulting decisions and practices are specific to news in this unique border area.

The difficulties and dangers associated with crossing the international border to Juarez, requires much of the news gathering to occur in the *Times*' building. Reporters and editors follow leads by contacting sources on the phone and arranging meetings. They use Internet and wire services to further find, establish, and confirm information. Many of the sources and websites are provided by official government sources in Mexico and in the United States. Although this is an efficient practice for journalists, the staff

voiced their frustration, saying that these practices were at times successful and at other times insufficient to adequately provide a true picture of the events in the area.

Research by Pamela Shoemaker (1996), and Herbert Gans (1979) shows that sources often influence news content by revealing or holding back information that furthers their own goals. The editors at the Times' said that political sources at the border of El Paso and Juarez are often suspect. One editor said that he is especially wary of using politicians or anyone who might try to plant stories. "Political campaigns will often leak ideas just to see what the public reaction might be. They have their own political or personal motivations" (personal interview, November 2009).

Editors, reporters and other staff members said they would prefer to gather news directly in Juarez, but are only able to spend limited time there. They would prefer more direct access; however, this desire is tempered by the complexity and danger of working in Juarez.

Research Question Three: As they investigate and write stories about the death and violence in Juarez, how do the journalists at the *El Paso Times* take into account the possibility of violence to themselves, their families, or their co-workers?

Safety is an important concern for ethical news operations. Journalists realize that gathering and reporting information can sometimes place their sources, their colleagues, or themselves in danger. They carefully weigh the importance of the story with its potential for risk.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has compiled information regarding the potential for physical and psychological risk to those who report in dangerous areas.

The CPJ article “Covering Conflict Safely,” advises media organizations to “...treat the safety of their journalists as paramount. This means discouraging unwarranted risk-taking, making assignments to war zones or other hostile environments voluntary, and providing proper training and equipment for those assignments” (CPJ, July 2011).

Simpson and Cote (2006) suggest advance preparation when reporting on violence and trauma. They advise planning alternate methods of communication between journalists and editors, determining several routes to enter and exit news scenes, and establishing guidelines to assess the continued physical and psychological welfare of each journalist. Cote and Simpson also suggest that news organization implement advance safety training for journalists. This training should include safety guidelines and information about the potential for both physical and psychological trauma.

Interviews with the staff at the *El Paso Times* indicate that they understand the risks associated with working in Juarez. The editors follow the CPJ guidelines. The executive editor said that he “... will send reporters and photographers who volunteer to go to Juarez, but will not send anyone who is afraid” (personal interview, November 2009). The editors also maintain close contact with reporters and photographers working in Juarez. They make sure that the journalists travel with someone who is aware of the city and the traffic patterns. They understand that writing about the specific drug cartels could be dangerous, and they know the consequence of careless behavior. Even though journalists at the *El Paso Times* believe in fearless reporting, they do not want to risk the lives of their family, their fellow reporters, or themselves.

During casual discussions, executive meetings, and in-depth interviews, staff members discussed the risks they felt for themselves, their families and their co-workers.

Most reporters said that they feel fortunate not to be a direct target of the cartels. They believe this is not the case for their colleagues in Mexico, and feel solidarity with the journalists in Juarez who risk their lives daily as they attempt to provide news for the public.

Research Question Four: How do journalists at the *El Paso Times* perceive their ethical responsibility regarding coverage of Juarez, Mexico?

As in all newsrooms, ethical choices for *El Paso Times* journalists are not clear-cut. They attempt follow the accepted standards of the SPJ, but they additionally consider the responsibility of reporting at a violent international border. The researcher observed daily discussions about ethical news coverage. At news meetings, during informal discussions, and throughout the in-depth interviews, the staff consistently spoke about the affect of their choices. They reflected the concern of theorists who describe the potential media has to direct and shape the public's awareness of political and social problems (Boyle & Schmierbach, 2009; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Simpson and Cote (2006) describe the way media can determine what people remember about violent events. At the *El Paso Times* journalists consistently endeavor to provide a realistic view of events in Juarez. Many staff members discussed the ever-changing demands of those who subscribe to the newspaper. Their readers want information about the problems in Juarez, but at times it is unclear if the readers simply want statistics of the killings, or a more compassionate telling of the personal toll of violence. Some reporters said that a portion of the people who subscribe to their paper are tired of the violence in Juarez and want minimum coverage of the murder and trauma caused by the drug cartels. Michael Ignatieff (1997) warns of how media can promote a

callous response to unrelenting violence. The public can easily tire of negative and seemingly hopeless situations. Their response can become apathetic and in the worst cases they begin to blame the victims (Ignatieff, 1997, p. 29).

Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese have conducted extensive research that indicates the content of the news delivered to the public affects the public's subsequent attitudes and perceptions (1996). The journalists at the *El Paso Times* consider the needs of the public and the ramifications of their stories. They spend many hours discussing and deliberating the choices they make. They provide information to help inform the people. They regard the importance of protecting the vulnerable. They worry about further harming the victims of the violence. They discuss the need to provide a realistic picture that does not glorify the cartels or vilify their victims. They work to convey accuracy and context for each news event.

Clifford Christians (2009) said that media's ethical response is determined by the considerations and decisions of each individual journalist. The journalists at the *El Paso Times* understand the additional ethical responsibility required when reporting on violence and trauma on a bi-national border. During individual interviews it became apparent that each individual journalist was conscious of the weight of his or her decisions.

Limitations and suggestions for future study

Additional research regarding media choices in the border space of El Paso and Juarez is needed. While qualitative research provides a deep understanding of the individual concerns and decisions of journalists, it is a limited yet rich source of information. This research looks at one media outlet on the Mexican/American border,

and the researcher must be careful of making broad generalizations. Additional quantitative methods such as surveys and content analysis would also help measure newsroom decisions. Quantitative surveys would provide an alternative, anonymous format for each journalist. Another avenue of insight could be found by surveying *El Paso Times* subscribers. The surveys could be used to measure the public's perception of news accuracy.

Those who provide news in other areas along the border of the United States and Mexico are faced with similar circumstances. Repeating this study in these areas would add comparative information and broaden the understanding of journalistic decisions in complex and dangerous border spaces.

Strengths of the study

This research is grounded in the functioning of a free press on an international border. While the Mexican press is also considered to be free, those journalists who report the news in Juarez are limited by the demands and intimidations of a powerful and violent drug industry. The terrorist networks of the drug cartels attempt to limit free reporting which also limits the world's ability to understand the forces that affect their lives. In the border space of El Paso and Juarez, those who are in competition for money and for power either directly or indirectly affect life. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), which is an international media watchdog group based in New York City, says that "without a free press, few other human rights are attainable" (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011). A free press is responsible for revealing the actions and effects of those who abuse others in their quest for power. A functioning press can expose their ruthless tactics allowing for the administration of justice.

This study has its essence in the operation of a single newsroom and the specific voices of those who work there. It examines the decision-making processes of the journalists who cover the El Paso/Juarez border. Even though the scope of the research is limited, it indicates specific insights about media operations at many violent international borders. It examines the community values, organizational structures, psychological challenges, and ethical decisions making in a newsroom. These factors are an integral part of providing an accurate picture of the important events on international border.

The strength of this qualitative research is the in-depth descriptions it provides. The study maintains the importance of asking open-ended questions, listening to the individual concerns and judiciously analyzing the patterns that emerge. People who work for and with the public rarely have time to tell their own story, to reveal their own attitudes, but those feelings and attitudes often guide the choices they make.

Repeating this qualitative study in other international border areas might provide a global view of media operations and challenges. Border spaces throughout the world are unique. The people who live there are influenced by the cultural and political forces that media represents. It is important to understand the dynamics of their decisions.

Final comments

Accurately portraying life on a border and finding truth in an area mired with complexity and violence is the difficult job that journalists at the *El Paso Times* face every day. They don't have unlimited resources so they prioritize. They work to provide balance. They check their facts carefully and are cautious about what they do and what they say. The consequences of making a mistake when reporting about Juarez can be fatal – for the journalist or someone else. So, they work guardedly. They think vigilantly. Most

importantly, they don't stop reporting. As one reporter said, "The world would be a very scary place without freedom of the press. This job is important – perhaps the most important job in the country" (personal communication, October, 2009).

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY:

News and Community in a Tumultuous Border Region: How Journalists at the *El Paso Times* Report on their Juarez Neighbors

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Kris Kodrich, PhD, Associate Professor

Department of Journalism and Technical Communication

C-221 Clark

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, CO 80526

970-491-5986

kris.kodrich@colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Cathleen Carter, Graduate Student

Department of Journalism and Technical Communication

315 Taylor Street

Sterling, Colorado 80751

970-466-0450

carter.cathleen@gmail.com

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your unique position as a journalist/editor on an international border. This research will study how newsroom routines and practices accommodate news production within this diverse community.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? This research is a part of Cathleen Carter's Master's Thesis for the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? This study is designed to examine the complexity of providing news at an international border during a tumultuous period in history, and to gather information about how journalists at the *El Paso Times* define community as it applies to both sides of the border.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research will take place at the El Paso, 300 North Campbell Street, El Paso, Texas 79901, during October and November 2009.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

This study will use a multi-method approach. The specific methods will first include participant observation. During this time the researcher will take notes on the daily procedures of the journalists and editors at the *El Paso Times*. This part of the study requires no special participation. Second, the researcher may ask you to participate in a taped interview that will focus on the procedures, routines and decisions regarding news coverage at the border. Finally, a content analysis will study historical artifacts from a representative sample of the newspapers for the years 2006, 2007, and 2008.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are currently over 400 people employed at the *El Paso Times*, but this research will be limited only to the journalists and the editors.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks associated with the procedures in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to the participant in this study. However, a potential benefit of the research is increased understanding of media's function on an international border. This could

possibly help journalists at the *El Paso Times* as well as journalists on other international borders.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

Because of the public interest in and the nature of this study, please be informed that your name and position may be associated with the findings. In other words, the interviews and observations will be “on the record,” unless we make other arrangements. The *El Paso Times* will be identified as the location for the study. As a journalist you are very familiar with reporting and journalistic techniques, and what constitutes “on the record” and “off the record.” We believe you are knowledgeable about the techniques employed in this study. Thus, if you want something to not be recorded or used in any way, please let us know. Likewise, if you don’t want your name associated with particular aspects, let us know and we will keep those research records private, to the extent allowed by law. To our best abilities, we will keep private information out of the results as well as sensitive business information. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. We may publish the results of this study. If you have indicated anything is “off the record,” we will keep your name and other identifying

information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Cathleen Carter at 970-466-0450. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

You may also be asked for your consent to be

___ interviewed

___ audio taped

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR AGREEMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING

I agree to acknowledge that my involvement is at The *El Paso Times*.

_____yes _____no

I agree that my position at the *El Paso Times* may be listed.

_____yes _____no

I agree information I provide may be used in the study conditionally and understand information I request to not be made public will be stricken from all documents and recordings.

_____yes _____no

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on approval Date_____.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 7 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION LETTER

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INTRODUCTION LETTER

Department of Journalism and Technical Communication
Colorado State University
C-Clark Building, Level Two
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1785
Telephone 970-491-2077

Journalist and Editors
El Paso Times
300 North Campbell Street
El Paso, Texas 79901

Dear Journalist and Editors ‘

Thank you for your kindness when I arrived at the Times yesterday. I know I did not meet everyone and I look forward to meeting the rest of you soon. I would like to tell you more about my qualitative research project. As a part of my master’s program for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Colorado State University I am conducting a research project titled, “News and Community in a Tumultuous **Border** Region: How Journalists at the *El Paso Times* Report on their Juarez Neighbors.” This research is designed to examine the complex structure of a newsroom on an international border. I plan to be in your newsroom during October

and November 2009 and I hope to include observations and interviews as part of this study. I also will conduct a content analysis examining The *El Paso Times*' past publications for the years 2006, 2007, and 2008.

This study is designed to examine the complexity of providing news at an international border during a tumultuous period in history. The main purpose is to examine newsroom routines and practices that accommodate news production within the diverse community of El Paso and Juarez, and to gather information about how journalists at the *El Paso Times* define of community as it applies to both sides of the border. The results of this in-depth analysis of a newsroom on the border between the United States and Mexico can provide insight about how media decisions are made at an international border. It will also demonstrate the importance of journalists and editors as providers of information that promotes international communication and understanding.

Because of your unique position as a journalist/editor on an international border I would like to ask for your participation in this study. I want to assure you that I respect any of your wishes regarding my involvement in observing, interviewing or participating in other activities. I by no means want to get in the way or make your job harder. In fact, I would be willing to help out as needed. I think that those who provide news on an international border are providing a great service. I don't want to hamper the work. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time.

Within the next two weeks I will personally contact you to provide you with a consent form and answer any of your questions. I will phone those of you who are not in the newsroom to ask for an appointment. My contact with you will be as short or as long as you wish. I know your time is valuable. During this time I will provide you with a consent form and answer any questions you might have. The consent form will explain your rights as a volunteer. Again, I want to emphasize that your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at anytime.

If you have questions about the project, please contact me, or my advisor, Dr. Kris Kodrich. I have listed our contact information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, please contact Janell Barker, the Human Research Administrator for Colorado State University, at 970-491-1655.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this project.

Sincerely,

Cathleen Carter-Miller

Department of Journalism and Technical Communication

Colorado State University

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APPENDIX C

LETTER OF AGREEMENT FROM *EL PASO TIMES* EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF AGREEMENT FROM *EL PASO TIMES* EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Chris Lopez, Executive Editor

El Paso Times

300 North Campbell Street

El Paso, Texas 79901-1470

Evelyn Swiss, Senior IRB Coordinator

Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office

321 General services Building

Campus Delivery 2011

Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011

To Whom It May Concern:

As the Executive editor of the *El Paso Times* I am aware of Cathleen Carter's thesis project for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Colorado State University. I understand that as part of her project, "News and Community in a Tumultuous **Border** Region: How Journalists at the *El Paso Times* Report on their Juarez Neighbors," Cathleen will work in the *El Paso Times* newsroom for approximately 8 weeks during the months of October and November 2009. This project will include observation, interview, and content analysis. Our organization is confident that she will respect any of our wishes regarding her involvement in observing, interviewing or

participating in other activities. She has explained that participation in this research is voluntary and we may withdraw consent and stop participating at any time. I understand that potential risk or harm to participants is minimal and am satisfied that individuals participating in this research project are protected as human research subjects.

Sincerely,

Chris Lopez

Executive Editor

El Paso Times

APPENDIX D

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX D

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you and the staff at The *El Paso Times* decide which news events to cover?
2. How do you define Juarez as a part of the *El Paso Times* community?
3. What newsroom routines, practices, assignments and guidelines help you develop border stories?
4. What newsroom routines, practices, assignments and guidelines hinder you when developing border stories?
5. How much does reader feedback guide your decisions regarding coverage of events in Juarez and on the border?
6. How do you decide to develop stories that are unpopular to the readers?
7. Which private and public sources do you use regularly to gather information for a story?
8. How do you cultivate sources from Juarez?
9. How do you gauge the reliability and newsworthiness of source information?
10. How do ownership, advertising expectations, and governmental agendas exert constraints on everyday operations in the newsroom?
11. How do you assign stories for a typical week?
12. Are most reporters assigned to a “beat?”
13. What does the daily plan for the various beat reporters look like?
14. How are stories about Juarez or the Mexican state of Chihuahua assigned?
15. Where do most of the leads about Chihuahua come from?

16. Do you ever have a problem getting access from the Mexican government?
17. How easy is it to confirm the leads and get multiple sides of a story?
18. How is the amount of coverage determined?
19. What are the risks of gathering and publishing stories from Mexico?