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Innovating News Journalism through Positive Psychology

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Consuming and producing news reports have a substantial negative emotional impact on both users and journalism professionals. This is a concern for both the journalism profession and for society. Does positive reporting and positivity have a place within already existing foundational values and ethics in journalism? Key findings from positive psychology may be particularly relevant to media workplaces. To test this notion in the realm of news reporting, 710 participants completed an online experiment. Participants read a negatively valenced classic style news story and one of five experimentally manipulated variants, which drew on positive psychology principles to slightly alter the language and emotional valence. Participants completed measures of affect and offered impressions of the media. Across participants, affect significantly declined after reading the classic story. Results support the detrimental impact of classic-style news reports, and suggest that it may take multiple positive news stories to counter the emotional impact of a single negative story. Some positive versions proved more effectual for inducing positive emotion, whilst still being viewed as fair and balanced reporting. Despite strong core ethics in journalism of minimizing harm, news reporting is often more focused on repairing damage, thus promoting a disease model of human functioning and negatively affecting human flourishing. However, news media has strong potential for innovation by drawing on the principles of positive psychology. This potential is described and concrete suggestions given.

Keywords
News journalism, Positive Psychology, Innovating, reporting, negative news, positive news, journalist

Disciplines
Film and Media Studies | Other Psychology | Social Psychology

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Innovating News Journalism Through Positive Psychology

Cathrine Gyldensted

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Margaret L. Kern, PhD

August 1, 2011

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Abstract

Consuming and producing news reports have a substantial negative emotional impact on both users and journalism professionals. This is a concern for both the journalism profession and for society. Does positive reporting and positivity have a place within already existing foundational values and ethics in journalism? Key findings from positive psychology may be particularly relevant to media workplaces. To test this notion in the realm of news reporting, 710 participants completed an online experiment. Participants read a negatively valenced classic style news story and one of five experimentally manipulated variants, which drew on positive psychology principles to slightly alter the language and emotional valence. Participants completed measures of affect and offered impressions of the media. Across participants, affect significantly declined after reading the classic story. Results support the detrimental impact of classic-style news reports, and suggest that it may take multiple positive news stories to counter the emotional impact of a single negative story. Some positive versions proved more effectual for inducing positive emotion, whilst still being viewed as fair and balanced reporting. Despite strong core ethics in journalism of minimizing harm, news reporting is often more focused on repairing damage, thus promoting a disease model of human functioning and negatively affecting human flourishing. However, news media has strong potential for innovation by drawing on the principles of positive psychology. This potential is described and concrete suggestions given.

Innovating News Journalism through Positive Psychology

As a journalist the most proud you can feel is when you feel you have honored the foundational values of journalism, our ethics code, because you have been taught that honoring the code fosters reporting that makes an important difference for society, helps people and holds power accountable. The code goes like this:

Seek truth and report it.

Minimize harm.

Act independently.

Be accountable (Society of Professional Journalists, 2011).

I often felt like I had achieved that. Numerous nights I slept on the sofa in the editorial room of the investigative unit at my workplace, which was a national broadcaster of television and radio. It was necessary to work long hours because the detective work was hard. Sources would not align, documents would be missing, and data had to be collected and understood. Often, pursuing a great story meant early mornings and drives to distant parts of the country, with only the cameraman, myself, and a lot of gear. We would be high on coffee, soda drinks and an occasional sandwich from roadside gas stations. Later, back at the station, we spent hour after hour viewing our b-rolls and interviews, scripting and writing. For a while, text messages would tick in on my cell phone from friends and potential dates: “do you want to meet up - later?” I more often than not declined, and my circle of friends grew silent after having been turned away a solid number of times. Nevertheless, it all seemed to be worth it, when our news story hit the television screen and the nightly news. Wrongs were righted and people in power were held accountable. Nevertheless, I began to doubt whether my work made a positive difference for society, people, and communities. It seemed to me that I was mostly inducing negative affect and consequently actively corroded society. When we hold others accountable, we should hold ourselves accountable too. When we pride

ourselves in being antiauthoritarian towards authority, we should exercise that antiauthority on ourselves and thus question our own rules, habits and self-perception on a regular basis weeding out habitual thinking and foster new ideas. First step then is critically revisiting our own foundational principles, journalisms ethics code, its historical roots and empirically investigate how we in the news media hold up to honouring the code.

The positive journalism community

I am not alone in being critical on the destructive direction our profession has taken. Already in 1991, several journalists and editors got thought provoking news from American citizens. In a Kettering Foundation report, Americans voiced a strong distrust in the press and journalists. By continually locking horns with public officials and defining public service through these adversarial relationship participants stated that the press was little by little detaching itself from the average Americans deeper concerns (Kettering Foundation, 1991). This proved to be an important discovery for journalists because it put the press in the same category as power holders - a clear disconnect to how the press want to see itself. This sparked change of thought in some parts of the journalism community thus different labels within journalism has risen from this debate: Civic journalism, citizen journalism, community journalism, communitarian journalism and lastly constructive news. Constructive news has found footing in Denmark due to key executives' vision. All five types seek to be consistent with the traditional notion of the journalist as a free society's watchdog. Their purpose is to focus the watchdog's effort in a time of information overload. This focus, not the underlying function, is the new element. It is needed because of the transition from a society where information was scarce to one where it is in surplus. The new scarce good is public attention. Focusing the light of public attention on any one problem long enough to spark discourse leading to a solution is the object of these new strains of journalism (Rosen, 1996; Rosen,

1999). Recently, websites devoted to the reporting of constructive news has surfaced. Blair Hichman, an American journalist colleague who works at one of those, the online media dowser.org offered his own reflections after having read a classic investigative news story that exposed terrible abuse and negligence in New York state institutions for the developmentally disabled. Hichman wrote:

> *But when thinking about what could be done to solve this problem – to help the disabled residents – short of firing some people and adding more controls, I had little sense of possibilities. As good a piece of reporting as this story is, it highlighted to me an area where journalism frequently falls short. It does a great job defining the problem; but it says little about how that problem could be handled. Some journalists will respond by saying, "That's not our job. We expose corruption, malfeasance, and incompetence. It is up to society to figure out how to fix things … It is not enough to get people outraged; they need to know how to channel that outrage into something constructive. (Hichman, 2011, para. 4-5, 10)*

So, there are voices in the profession who share the vision for reporting to offer more positive meaning. My vision is for it to not only happen on websites solely devoted to positive news, but for it to be a stable component in classic news reporting. Therefore, not a niche but a part of the journalism curriculum.

My reflections on negative bias were not only directed towards the content that I produced. I also noticed how my personality changed into being cynical, negative, and distrusting of everything and everyone. These are character traits that my peers and I agreed make a good investigative reporter. However, they do not serve the vitality of journalism because of their narrowing and constraining nature. Consequentially, this negative personality change rippled into the rest of my life. It affected my outlook, positive emotions, relationships, and my sense of meaning in life. However, this is not only about my personal

situation, but about the state of my profession. After having realized how my colleagues and I had changed for the negative I also began wondering how this negative environment influenced the quality of our reporting, ability to get new ideas, to foster creativity, productivity, and how it might overall erode the workplace environment. These disillusioned years that I have gone through have been the most challenging years of my life losing faith in what you have dedicated your life to leaves a substantial hole in one's self-identity and a loss of direction. At the same time, these years have also been the most rewarding years of my life. The frustration meant that I began searching for answers on how to improve and innovate journalism and this search led me to the science of positive psychology because of its evidence based and rigorous methodology. Positive positive psychology is *the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive* (International Positive Psychology Association, 2011).

The scientific part was especially important to me. Coming from investigative reporting, I felt it was crucial to get documentation and solid facts and not just fluffy self-help. The science of positive psychology offers empirical evidence and concrete methods on techniques, interventions, and concepts such as how to grow creativity and build well-functioning workplaces. Furthermore, news media has been reeling from economic setbacks for years. For example, I compiled information from the DC-based Pew Research Center´s Project for Excellence in Journalism: Of 259 newspapers surveyed, 59% had reduced full-time newsroom staff in the preceding three years, while 56% of editors at larger papers anticipated more cuts in the coming year. This data underscore how news media and media workplaces are not thriving; there is an urgent need for innovation. Consequently, user patterns have changed dramatically the recent decade. Blogs, social media platforms and user-generated content seems to provide the young generations with an alternative to classic media organizations and their products. In a profession where this is the dynamic, layoffs and regressing circulation numbers have been reality for years, change is urgently needed (Pew Research Center´s Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008).

I believe that both the field and the consumers we serve will benefit by applying the empirically validated principles of positive psychology to our work. I challenge the media to pay attention to those in positive psychology whom have figured out inner structures and framework for cultivating creativity, innovation, and thriving individuals. We should then apply this learning to our own profession in order to grow and strengthen it. I find this to be an urgent task considering the economic recession that most media organizations find themselves in.

Language in News Media

A clear indicator that news reporting has a negative bias in valence is to look at the *explanatory style* used in the reporting. Explanatory style, a positive or negative psychological attribute that indicates how people explain to themselves why they experience a particular event, was established by one of the driving figures in positive psychology, Dr. Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania. A person's explanatory style gives a clear sense of that person's outlook on the world and whether that person is a pessimist or an optimist (Abramson et al, 1989; Buchanan & Seligman, 1978; Peterson, Maier & Seligman, 1995; Peterson & Park, 1998; Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). People with a negative explanatory style typically attribute negative outcomes to internal, stable, and global causes and are more likely to suffer depression when negative events happen to them, as a negative explanatory style can become a downward mental spiral. In contrast, people with a positive explanatory style typically attribute negative outcomes to external, temporary, specific causes. This optimistic style is often associated with personal resilience, subjective well-being, and meaningfulness, as a positive explanatory style builds an upward mental spiral. Extending to classical news reporting, the explanatory style used in most narratives chosen by journalist professionals is negative. This finding is strongly supported by

numerous research studies going back to 1947 (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947; Robinson & Sheehan, 1984; Patterson, 1993) and suggests that media, fictional and actual, influence the explanatory style used by people who would read, watch, and listen. One early example is a 1977 study reporting CBS and NBC newscasts modelled helplessness 71% of the time, and suggested that evening news was teaching learned helplessness to viewers (Levine, 1977). Unfortunately, the scene has changed little since the 1970s, and arguably has become worse. In appendix 1 I review and discuss the negative bias in news reporting. Essentially, news has created its own negative spiral that continues to spread through each successful generation of journalist. How did such a negative spiral transpire?

Investigating Journalism History

Dr. Darrin McMahon, professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, said: "if you want to know what literature is today you have got to ask what it was" (D. McMahon, MAPP classroom lecture, 01/14, 2011). Inspired by McMahons insight, I thought that if I wanted to know what news reporting is today, I had to ask what it was and from which ethics and values it has grown from. To that end, let us briefly journey through journalism history.

Establishing principles of fair reporting

Early news publishers did not identify themselves as self-appointed watchdogs for a liberal society, and their publications were not forums for the expression of many views. Imposing religious and political agendas to an audience was the overriding principle for publishers and the writers that produced the content (Ward, 2004; Schudson, 2003). This was an openly partisan and biased approach with no principles of journalism ethics present. The existing pamphlets published what they saw as "The Truth" and sent those who disagreed to the devil (Ward, 2004). Fast forward, a few centuries to the mid-1800s, and journalists began

to consider themselves as their own profession. As newsrooms expanded and the need for educated practitioners rose, journalists desired professionalism to raise their social status and to express their pride in the expanding skills of reporters and editors (Ward, 2004). The goal of founding a solid profession of journalism naturally sparked debate and discussions of which principles should guide and define the profession and the journalists. During the early 1900s, driven by major historical events, less partisan and more *interpretive journalism* developed. The world was growing increasingly complex and the need to offer an informed interpretation of world events, wars, and economic disasters like the worldwide Great Depression were very present (MacDougall, 1957).

When journalists become interpretative and stray from neutral, objective reporting, there is a clear risk that they will become partisan, biased, and unfair. The journalism profession through the Depression badly needed to define mutual rules of engagement and a value system that could guide and underpin the profession as a whole. The American Society of Newspaper Editors adopted the first version of ethical rules on April 28, 1923 (Superior Press Clipping Service, 2003). Since then, it has been adapted and endorsed by many other groups of journalists in both the United States and abroad (Ward, 2004). The ethical code of journalism has since been reworked many times and differs from country to country, but most share common elements including the principles of *truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness,* and *public accountability* as these apply to the acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public (Ward, 2004).

Vietnam, Watergate, and the distortion of news journalism

There were two defining pivotal historical events shaping modern journalism and fostering its current negativity bias - the leak of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal during the 1970s, and the Vietnam War. These events are usually highlighted as

establishing a golden age of contemporary journalism. However, I believe that this so-called "golden age" has had a profound negative influence on our ability to innovate journalism as a profession, because it created a negative spiral and negative thinking patterns that continues today. Dynamics that hinder creativity and innovation.

Beginning with Watergate, "great reporting" was to always be "critical reporting" – i.e., negative. Since Watergate, news reporting basically stalled into consequently describing a *disease model of the world.* What led to Watergate-style reporting and the newsroom culture that followed? Historical events before Watergate, which involved years of dallying from the press corps, paved the way for a growing negativity bias.

American reporting has always been more patriotic in its form and expression compared to the reporting style I was taught in my home country, Denmark. This patriotism possibly stems from generation after generation of Americans being sent to war, combined with the highly respected value of serving the US. Thus, large groups of the American public have been either involved with or a close relative of someone in the military, with potential to be in harm's way. Through the two World Wars and the Cold War, there was interest in not seeing reporting that potentially exposed details that could benefit the enemy. These wars called for patriotism from the press, and grew as a consequence thereof. Thus, media and government had a shared sense of common purpose that stretched through several decades.

However, this did not last. With growing pressure from the Vietnam War, the pendulum of press dynamics was about to swing in the opposite direction. The press corps became increasingly aware that it had tolerated how officials in the field and at the State Department, the White House, and the Pentagon -- their primary sources for news about the war - routinely lied to them. Reporters' own ability to ask poignant and well-researched questions had long been too meek. The military briefings were originally designed to give reporters clear, concise summaries of widely scattered action from the war zones. But during the early

1970s, reporters dubbed the military's daily briefing for the press the "Five´O´Clock Follies" (Schudson, 2003). The Associated Press Saigon bureau chief, Richard Pyle, is quoted for stating that the briefings were "the longest-playing tragicomedy in Southeast Asia's theatre of the absurd (Time Magazine, 1973). Gradually the Five O'clock Follies evolved into a strange show that satisfied no one. As the war, evolved, most enterprising reporters boycotted the Follies (Schudson, 2003; Ward, 2004).

Therefore, the accumulated resentment in the press towards government was solid - after the Vietnam War, journalism would never be the same. News organizations that had once cooperated routinely with the government began to view the term *national security* as a sure way that government consciously manipulated coverage and hid the truth from the public. In two pivotal moments, the government and the press faced off. First came the 1971 leak of the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. The Pentagon Papers was a classified report authored by the United States Department of Defense on U.S. political and military involvement in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967 (Wikipedia, 2011; National Archives, 2011). The Pentagon Papers described how four US Administrations deliberately had expanded its aggression in the region with bombings and raids hitting Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, none of which had been reported by media in the U.S. Thus, four consecutive US Administrations had misled the public regarding their real intentions and foreign policy. This of course fostered a widespread public distrust toward those in power.

Only one year later in 1972, another scandal of epic proportions hit and further manifested the sense of distrust and the press corps determination to expose corruption and abuse of power. The Watergate scandal uncovered how a break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, DC was orchestrated by the Nixon Administration. This eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, the only resignation of any U.S. President. Watergate also resulted in the

indictment, trial, conviction, and incarceration of several key Nixon administration officials. The reporters heading The Washington Post's coverage and key figures in exposing the scope of the corruption were Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward (Schudson, 2003; Vaughn, 2008). Bernstein and Woodward became idols, and are still viewed as role models for journalists.

These episodes during the 1970s utterly changed the field of journalism and cemented investigative reporting as the queen bee of journalism disciplines. Buzz Merritt, editor of *The Wichita Eagle,* describes his personal experience of this culture change in detail:

> *An event that should have been a plateau from which the profession moved on to even greater heights turned out to be a peak... the journalistic norm became "we catch crooks". Scalps on the belt, particularly government scalps, were the sign of rank and the measure of testosterone at gatherings of the tribe. Investigative reporting continued to prove its value in exposing abuse and corruption. But it also shaped what journalists came to value above all else - "the relentless uncovering of wrongdoing, no matter its ultimate importance to the public or the great scheme of things". The triumph of Watergate gave new shape to the profession's image of itself - the journalist as folk hero, the astute political analyst or media star.* (Merritt, 1995, pp. 62)

Watergate's immediate effect on journalism also became factually clear with the creation of the U.S. lead Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) centre in 1975. In a 2002 television interview, Carl Bernstein acknowledged the bias that Watergate had created and gave his own take on the impact on investigate journalism and news reporting as such. Bernstein said that the hype for investigative and critical journalism after Watergate had both a positive and negative affect on the content of modern news reporting. However, he said that the preoccupation on "*catching the crook"* hinders substantial reporting.

> *What happens is you lose context so that if you are covering city hall and what you are really looking for most of the time is to catch the mayor saying something that is a little*

> *untrue and turning it into a big story. When, in fact, the sewer system of the whole city is falling apart, people cannot get their water, and they are getting poisoned, you are missing the news.* (PBS, 2002, June 17)

The trend of the press as a pendulum swinging back and forth between being overly negative or too meek has continued to present day. Since Watergate, we have seen how Iraq wars, 9/11, the war on terrorism, Afghanistan, and most recently military document leaks from the website Wikileaks have activated a patriotic and very governmentally friendly coverage from a majority of the press - not only in the US, but also in most allied countries. Consequently, every time the press realizes that it has been too lenient in its reporting, we see a visible counter reaction where the news coverage gets overly negative, seemingly in an unspoken effort to level out prior unbalances. The pattern seems to keep repeating itself (Hoyt & Palattella, 2007; Media Education Foundation, 2003; Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011)

The Battle of Journalism Ethics

It is fair to state that news reporting's negativity bias often looks more like a counter reaction to outer manipulations and its own neglect of being critical in ones reporting, than the consequence of an informed and balanced choice made in the newsroom. Have the historical trends reviewed above affected the ethical code that forms the basis of journalism and media? As noted, the first ethical code was established in 1923. Journalists traditionally view their ethics code as their compass and it acts as an active guide to most classical reporters. It steers us to know what to do given our and news media's role in society. Our ethics code acts as the analysis, evaluation, and promotion of what constitutes correct conduct and virtuous character in the light of the best available principles.

In the early times, the publishing of news was too primitive and undeveloped to have an explicit journalism ethic. The press was in the hands of entrepreneurs, officials, universities, and warring factions who did not see themselves as part of an institution or system called the "press" with professional obligations. However, during the late 1800s and early 1900s newspapers turned into big business and were run by US press barons like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer (Vaughn, 2008). Competition between newspapers became intense and ushered in the era of *yellow journalism.* Yellow journalism, or the yellow press, is a type of journalism that presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to sell more newspapers. Techniques may include exaggerations of news events, scandal mongering, or sensationalism (Campbell, 2003; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). During this time, Hearst blatantly used his papers to promote his own causes and to attack his enemies (Ward, 2004). Because the readers were drawn to the eye-catching headlines, it was no coincidence that as yellow journalism grew, it tried to speak to the interests of the people on the street and it was successful in entertaining the reader.

Knowing what we know today about human psychology and how we react to emotions, it seems clear that yellow journalism tapped very effectively into aspects of the human psyche. Negative news can be interpreted as a type of survival-relevant information. Negative news is compelling, and negative video has been shown to increase attention to, physiological arousal elicited by, and storage of news stories (Lang, Newhagen, & Reeves, 1996). Bad news attracts readers and viewers because it activates evolved defensive motivational systems that generate attention to the message (Newhagen & Reeves, 1992). Dr. David Altheide from the School of Justice and Social Inquiry at Arizona State University has written extensively on this subject and its effect on modern society. Numerous opinion polls indicate that American citizens remain fearful despite clear evidence that most citizens are healthier, safer, and happier than ever before (Altheide, 2002). He argues that the creative use of fear by news

media and social control organizations has produced a discourse of fear where awareness and expectation that danger and risk lurks everywhere. Case studies illustrate how certain organizations and social institutions benefit from the exploitation of such fear construction. One social impact is a manipulated public empathy: We now have more "victims" than at any time in our prior history (Altheide, 2002, conclusion)

Moreover, empirical evidence from positive psychology suggests how negative emotions hit us harder than positive emotions. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has researched this issue for more than 20 years. Fredrickson suggests that negative emotions linger with us, and it is necessary to actively reverse their effect by inducing positive emotions. However, a single positive emotion is insufficient for reversing the negative effect; rather, we need to experience positive emotions three times more than negative ones - the so called *3-to-1 ratio* (Fredrickson, 2009, pp.32-33). Achieving that ratio leads people to a tipping point beyond which they naturally become more resilient to adversity, high performing and exhibits greater openness to new ideas (Fredrickson, 2009; Losada, 1999).

Even though yellow journalism did sell newspapers, it also sparked an ethical debate within the journalism profession. As mentioned earlier, in 1923 major journalism associations in the United States adopted formal codes that called for *objectivity in reporting*, *independence from government and business influence*, and *a strict distinction between news and opinion.* The result was an elaborate set of newsroom rules to ensure that journalists reported "just the facts". Thus, the first ethical code for a young journalism profession was established (Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978).

However, this ethical code did not exist long before it was challenged. The notion of *objectivity* was particularly divisive. Critics endlessly pointed out that journalists do not

simply report facts; they also select their facts, their sources, and their angle on a story. Even if objectivity were possible, critics said that it was undesirable because it encourages reporting routines that carry their own biases, such as quoting only official sources, and that pursuing objectivity promotes sterile reporting that fails to get behind the facts. Supporters argued that democracies need objective reporters who care about responsible communication. A strong dose of objectivity seemed an antidote to excessive yellow journalism to restrain journalists who would sacrifice accuracy and fairness to advocate causes or garner a sensational response. To devalue objectivity would be to leave the public sphere even more vulnerable to manipulation (Ward, 2004). The critics of objectivity won, so most major codes of ethics no longer use the word *objectivity.* In the mid-1990s, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) removed the term from its code and added instead *accountability* (Overholser, 2006).

In recent years, news media have also had to ponder whether it had a responsibility towards society to minimize harm, and whether that value should be included in journalism ethics as well. Despite early roots -- the first man who wanted to this responsibility included was President George Washington -- this trend has taken many years to manifest. The first President of the United States was very unhappy with journalists and editors who wrote unfavourable of him in their publications (Ford, 2006) but freedom of the press was in the very first paragraph of the United States Constitution, so President Washington had to endure press criticism. Many years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson had greater success in his endeavour to spark a debate on the responsibility of the press to minimize harm. Johnson could not hide his aggravation toward journalists and what they chose to cover. A key incident is highlighted by Michael Schudson from Columbia Journalism School in his book *The Sociology of News* (2003):

President Lyndon B. Johnson once complained about the tendency for news to be bad news to Henry Luce, publisher and editor of Time magazine. Johnson waved the current copy of Time at Luce and exclaimed, “this week 200.000 blacks registered in the South, thanks to the Voting Rights Act. Three hundred thousand elderly people are going to be covered by Medicare. We have a hundred thousand young kids working in neighbourhoods. Is any of that in there? No. What’s in here?”. Luce replied, “Mr. President, good news isn’t news. Bad news is news” (Schudson, 2003, pp.49-50).

Despite of this position, Henry Luce had worked to define the responsibilities of the press and its accountability. In the years leading up to this exchange with President Johnson Luce had grown into a major media tycoon who headed magazines such as *Life, Fortune, Sports Illustrated,* and *Time*. The world had been engulfed in World War II, which triggered a strong debate on whether the media had any social responsibility when it came to covering global conflicts, wars, and their broad ranging implications for society as a whole. The previously mentioned SPJ journalism code of ethics had been widely adopted in 1923 and underpinned western journalism, but how does one manage to “be accountable” and “minimize harm” when millions of soldiers were in harms way, and exposing military strategies could mean more deaths? It is said that Luce finally acknowledged this. In a boardroom meeting, he seemingly passed a note to Robert Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago. The note said, Hutchins later recalled,

“How do I find out about the freedom of the press and what my obligations are?” “I don’t know,” Hutchins answered. “Well, why don’t we set up a commission on freedom of the press and find out what it is?” Luce responded. “If you’ll put up the money,” Hutchins said, “I’ll organize the committee” (Bates, 1995).

The Hutchins Commission official name was “the Commission on Freedom of the Press”, and it deliberated for four years. In 1947, the commission published its conclusion, which

said that the press plays an important role in the development and stability of modern society and, as such, it is imperative that a commitment of social responsibility be imposed on mass media (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). According to this *social responsibility theory*, the press has a moral obligation to consider the overall needs of society when making journalistic decisions in order to produce the greatest good. How did the press receive that message? Journalism scholar Stephen Bates writes:

> *The press proved unreceptive -in fact, indignant--producing yelps of umbrage that nearly drowned out the Commission's recommendations. Over the half-century since, the report has appreciably influenced academic thinking about journalism, but not journalism itself. A flawed success as an analysis, A Free and Responsible Press has proved, as a call to action, a magnificent failure.* (Bates, 1995)

However, there were solid reasons why the surrounding world called for the press to show social responsibility. Powerful publishers, such as the previously mentioned Henry Luce, had grown unpopular with the public, and the public had a high degree of suspicions about the motivations and objectives of the press. The press had mushroomed into an unwieldy and powerful entity, and criticism of the Fourth Estate was widespread. Critics contended that the media had monopolistic tendencies that corporate owners were not concerned with the rights or interests of those unlike themselves, and that commercialization produced a debased culture as well as dangerously selfish politics (Ward, 2004). So, again the journalisms ethics code was revised and the current western ethics code has been left with four values:
Seek truth and report it. Minimize harm. Act independently. Be accountable (Society of Professional Journalists, 2011).

Parallels within Positive Psychology

It is clear that the current state of affairs within journalism is prefaced on a conflicted history. The responsibility to minimize harm is a core value, but are journalists doing all that they can to do this? I suggest that journalism can benefit from findings within positive psychology. Interestingly, the field of positive psychology was also born from its history, stemming from a preference across the field to focus on the negative.

Martin Seligman, one of the founding fathers of positive psychology, empirically investigated how negativity bias in his own profession manifested itself (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman had for decades specialized in researching depression, which had led to pivotal experiments and the theory of "learned helplessness". Seligman and colleagues discovered that the conditioning of dogs led to a state of learned helplessness in canine behaviours. The dogs did not try to escape from weak electrical shocks, even though they easily could. Seligman developed the theory further, finding learned helplessness to be a psychological condition in which a human being or an animal has learned to act or behave helplessly in a particular situation, usually after experiencing some inability to avoid an adverse situation, even when it actually has the power to change its unpleasant or even harmful circumstance. This research into the negative side of mental states triggered a curiosity of what was above zero when it came to positive mental states. Seligman then revisited psychology's historical foundations. He realized how Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Socrates had underscored the importance of investigating human values, human strengths - and what they called *eudamonia.* Eudamonia is the Greek word for *happiness*, however "human flourishing" is a more accurate translation. In classical Greek, eudaimonia was used as a term for the highest human good, and so it became the aim of practical psychology to consider what it really is and how it can be achieved (Melchert, 2002). However, through the 20th century, happiness became associated more with *hedonism*, or the pursuit of pleasure. Through an eye opening personal experience, Seligman realized that the

field of psychology and the research stemming from it was solely pathology oriented and concentrated on repairing damage using a disease model of human functioning. There was no research in psychology that focused on measuring and understanding how to build the best qualities in life.

Just as journalism and its approach are greatly influenced by key historic events, Seligman concluded that this negativity bias was embedded in history. After World War II, there was a strong emphasis to treat mental illness. Thousands of clinical psychologists found that they could make a living treating mental illness, and academics found out that they could easier get grants if their research was described as being about pathology. It is easy to see how negativity bias gains momentum in the field of psychology from these policies (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003). In 1998, Seligman launched a vision of founding a field of positive psychology before his peers in his speech as the President of the American Psychology association, calling for a renewed effort to honour the Greeks long forgotten value of understanding and growing human flourishing (Seligman, 1998). Other scholars agreed and joined in creating the field thus positive psychology was founded. Most recently, Seligman has introduced a more nuanced model for what happiness contains. This construct describes well being or flourishing and goes by the acronym of **PERMA**: **P**ositive emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishment (Seligman, 2011). The field quickly exploded, becoming one of the fastest growing sub-disciplines within psychology, and within some domains is changing the face of psychological research. The journalism field is ripe for a similar development.

Applying Positive Psychology to Journalism

I suggest that news reporting in its current form is doing a poor job honouring journalisms ethical code. On *minimizing harm*, it seems to me that our overriding negative focus is

harmful to both journalists and the public whom we serve. To investigate this thesis I have conducted a study on the emotional impact of news reporting. Please refer to page 23. On *seeking truth and reporting it,* it seems to me that the "truth" we are reporting is solely a pathological version of the world, which hardly qualifies as being the truth .If we are seeking truth, we should definitely also include examples of human resilience, post traumatic growth, positive emotions, accomplishments and solutions. On *acting independently,* it seems to me that the majority of news journalists are stuck in work patterns fostered from a journalism curriculum in urgent need of content innovation. On, *being accountable* I think the profession should walk its own talk and hold itself accountable for possible unbalanced reporting and lack of innovation - and act to change it. As noted above, positive psychology offers an empirical foundation for revolutionizing the newsroom. One place to start when working on innovating news media and news reporting with the help of positive psychology is to look at news reports explanatory style. A careful consideration of most news reports suggests that the words and emotions portrayed are overwhelmingly negative. Positive psychology scholars Christopher Peterson and Tracy A. Steen (2009) argue that the negative narrative and framing chosen by journalists have a major impact on the end users emotional state. When violence erupts, pictures of victims are displayed repetitively, and various commentators analyze the cause/effects (in some instances lasting for weeks), there is a communal rumination and catastrophic imprinting in the consumer, which strengthens and cements into place a pessimistic explanatory style.

Balancing positive and pessimistic explanatory styles in news report is one place to begin. I believe that theory and solid evidence from positive psychology research have much more to offer to the field journalism and its professionals and I see the potential on two levels:

1. On content. Where are the uncultivated opportunities for innovating news content, coverage, framing of stories, choosing story angles? This is not a discussion about

social media platforms or technological innovations but a discussion about content - stories, analyses, interviews, and journalistic investigations.

2. In the journalistic workplace. How can we foster creativity, engagement, and professionals who thrive?

In this paper, I focus mainly on how to innovate news reporting itself, but I will also touch briefly on how positive psychology research and methodology can be applied to foster a thriving media workplace.

An Empirical Investigation

The field of positive psychology has developed principles and interventions that can benefit journalism, with the overarching goal of shifting negative, pessimistic reports on a more positive trajectory, with the goal of positively affecting the well-being of both reporters and consumers. To connect positive psychology and journalism and provide data, I conducted an empirical investigation of the valence portrayed within news stories and the emotional impact on readers. Two specific hypotheses were tested:

1. News stories with negative valence have negative emotional affect (NA) on readers.
2. News stories with positive valence have positive emotional affect (PA) on readers.

In addition, I aimed to collect feedback from the participants themselves to get data, factual information, and personal insights on whether news stories with negative valence are seen as fair and balanced reporting and whether news stories with positive valence are seen as fair and balanced reporting.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited and assessed online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website, a crowd sourcing Internet website where users are able to sign on as

participants in this study. The validity of MTurk as a subject recruitment tool has been supported, with samples being more representative than many typical psychological studies (Berinsky et al. 2010). All participants were adults over 18 years of age, English speakers, and regular consumers of news. No limits were included regarding income, geographic location or race. However, as I am particularly interested in US media, I included a sub-sample that was limited to US residents.

Participants were excluded if there were double entries or if insufficient data were available for analysis. In addition, to filter potential individuals who simply completed the questions without actually engaging in the study (i.e., reading narratives and thoughtfully responding to questions), participants who spent less than 10 minutes on the survey were excluded (most participants took 15 to 30 minutes to complete the survey). The final sample consisted of 710 participants (408 males, 298 females, 4 unknown). Of these, 186 lived in the US, 486 lived in India, and 58 lived in other or unknown countries.

Procedures

All measures were given online, and a repeated measures experimental design was used. Participants first approved a written consent form. Next, participants completed several mood measures (see below). Participants then read a classical-style news story and completed mood measures. As a break between conditions, participants completed demographic and personality measures.[1] Participants were then randomly assigned to one of five conditions (which consisted of variants of the classical news article; see below), read the second story, and then completed the mood measures again. Participants then indicated which story they preferred and why, and were given an opportunity for further reflection or comment. The study ended with a debriefing statement that disclosed the full purposes of the study, explained the various conditions, and offered contact information. No names or personal

identities were collected. The MTurk participants were compensated a total amount of 0.20$ for their participation, and all procedures and measures were approved by the University of Pennsylvania IRB.

Measures

For purposes of this study, a questionnaire was developed. For the analyses presented here, I focused on emotion responses and qualitative responses.

Positive and negative affect.

The main outcome was changes in positive and negative affect from pre-test (T1), post story 1 (T2), and post story 2 (T3). The battery of well-being measures included previously validated measures that operationalize studying emotion and uses self-report responses to verbal questions in order to assess participants' current feeling or basic predisposition. To assess emotion, participants completed a modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. The 14-item questionnaire measures positive and negative dimensions of mood (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants typically indicate on a 4 point scale the extent to which they feel various emotions (enthusiastic, helpless, proactive, bored, angry, inspired, distressed, excited, helpless, content, happy, disillusioned, interested, upset). For purposes of this study, participants were presented with a slider bar to indicate the extent to which they felt each emotion (ranging from not at all to completely), which was then scaled based on bar location on a continuous scale (0 to 100 percent). Positive items were summed to create a total positive affect score, and negative items were summed to create a total negative affect score. Participants completed the PANAS measures at each time point.

News articles

The main manipulation involved reading two versions of a news article. I wrote six different conditions specifically for the purpose of this study. The main story was based on authentic interviews previously completed on a real story broadcasted on a national Danish radiochannel. The factual information in the articles was collected from relevant databases and governmental institutions. The six stories are printed in Appendix 2, and Appendix 3 gives an extensive description on the construction of the six article versions and the underpinning positive psychology theory and research. The first story reflected the classic typical style of a news report, written like I would automatically write as a professional reporter. This article proved to contain a high negative word ratio. One was a victim narrative, with an even higher negative ratio than the classic news report. The other four narratives were based on key concepts in positive psychology: (1) a 3-to-1 positivity ratio (Barbara Fredrickson), (2) peak/end rule (Daniel Kahneman), (3) meaningful narrative (Betty Sue Flowers), and (4) a hero narrative (high positive word ratio). All participants received the classic story, and then randomly received one of the other five styles. Participants were randomly assigned to each of the five other conditions. In the final sample, participants were fairly equally distributed across the five conditions (peak story: n = 139; hero story: n = 128; 3-to-1 story: n = 134; meaning story: n = 121; victim story: n = 139).

Data Analysis

The main analysis used a repeated measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare changes in positive and negative affect across the three assessments, along with graphical consideration by condition. In addition, after collecting a first round of data, I noticed that a large portion of individuals came from India. I was particularly interested in the US participants. Thus, when analysing the data, I considered the full sample, and then did a specific sub-analysis of US participants. For this sub analysis, I focus on the graphical results,

as there was insufficient power to detect group differences once broken down by both country and condition. In addition, participants were asked to respond to several free-response questions regarding their response to the readings and to the media in general. Responses are qualitatively considered, to supplement the empirical results.

Results

Changes in Affect over Time

Using a repeated measure ANOVA, I tested for differences over time and by condition. For positive affect, there was a significant difference over time, $F(2, 1186) = 131.74$, $p < .0001$. There was no significant difference by condition, $F(8, 1186) = .62$, $p = .76$. Mean values by condition are depicted in **Figure 1**. Across conditions, participants significantly dropped in positive affect after reading the classical news story, with non-significant changes in affect after reading the second news story, regardless of condition.

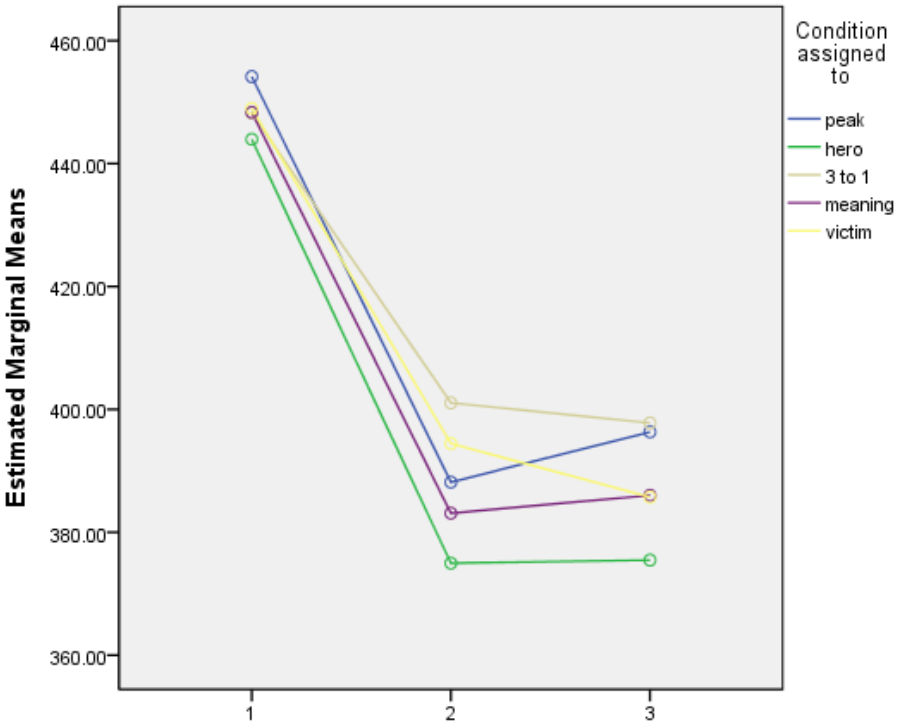

Figure 1. Mean values of positive affect by condition. T1 = baseline (pre-manipulation), T2 = post classical story, T3 = post manipulation. $N = 710$.

For negative affect, there was again a significant difference over time, $F(2,1190) = 136.90$, $p < .0001$. There was no significant difference by condition, $F(8, 1190) = 1.44$, $p = .18$. However, as depicted in **Figure 2**, although the means were not significantly different, an examination of the trends reveals several interesting patterns. Reading the *peak end* narrative reduced negative affect the most in readers, followed by the *3-to-1 ratio* and the *hero* narratives. Surprisingly, the *meaning* narrative, which was considered a positive version, *increased* negative affect in the reader. As expected, negative affect continued to increase in the negatively-valences *victim* narrative.

Figure 2:

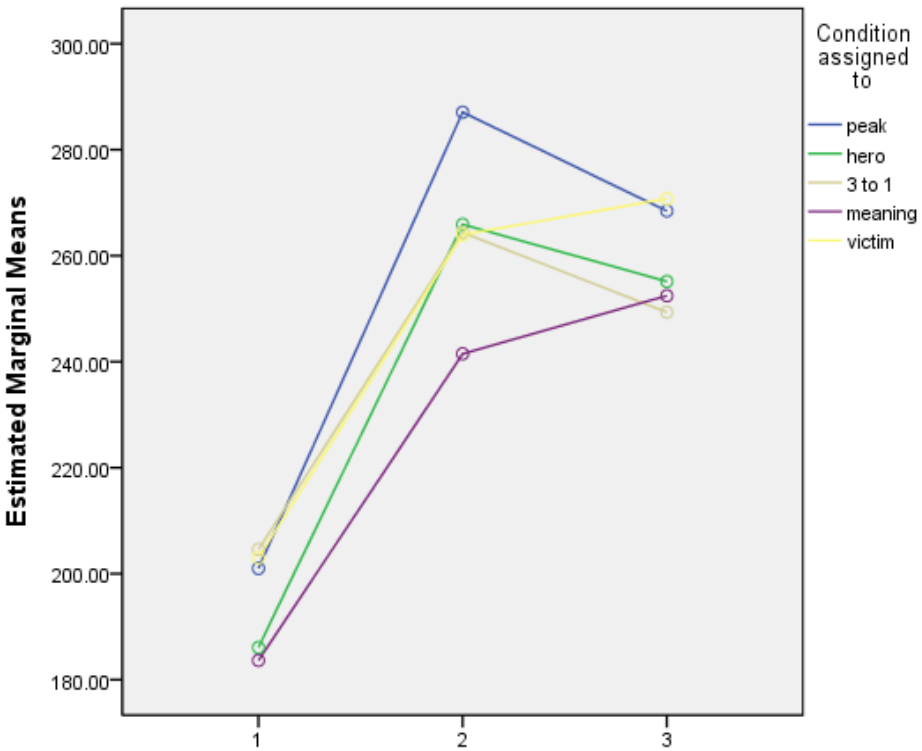

Figure 2. Mean values of negative affect by condition. T1 = baseline (pre-manipulation), T2 = post classical story, T3 = post manipulation. $N = 710$.

As noted, a large proportion of the sample ($n = 486$) lived in India. To examine effects specifically for U.S. participants, a sub-analysis was limited to the 186 participants from the U.S. Participants remained fairly equally distributed across conditions (peak story: $n = 41$; hero story: $n = 38$; 3-to-1 story: $n = 36$; meaning story: $n = 31$; victim story: $n = 33$), but

there was insufficient power to detect between-group differences. For both positive and negative affect, there were significant differences over time (positive affect: $F(2, 340) = 53.29$, $p < .0001$; negative affect: $F(2, 340) = 63.32$, $p < .0001$). There were no significant differences by condition (positive affect $F(8,340) = 1.09$, $p = .37$; negative affect: $F(8,340) = .51$, $p = .85$). Mean values by group are depicted in **Figure 3**. Although the patterns were fairly similar to the overall sample, the patterns more specifically followed expectation. For positive affect, the four positive conditions (peak, hero, 3-to-1, and meaning) showed some increase (though still significantly lower than baseline levels), whereas the negative victim story showed further decline. Likewise, for negative affect, the four positive conditions showed some recovery to baseline, whereas the victim condition showed further lowered mood.

Figure 3:

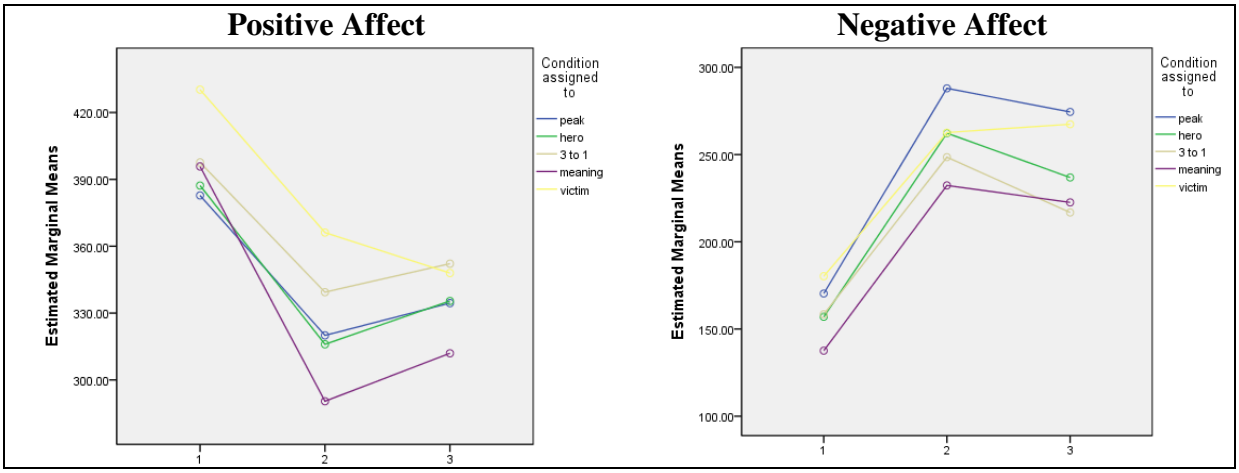

Figure 3. Mean values of positive and negative affect by condition for the US sample (n = 186). T1 = baseline (pre-manipulation), T2 = post classical story, T3 = post manipulation. N = 710.

In sum, the ANOVA results supported Hypothesis 1 (that negatively-valenced news stories have negative emotional affect on readers) and showed a trend in support of Hypothesis 2 (positively-valenced news stories have positive emotional affect on readers) for the *peak-end*, *3-1 ratio*, and *hero* narratives, with these trends clearest in the U.S. population (compared to the Indian sample, results not shown).

Qualitative Reactions

To further consider emotional reactions to positively or negatively valenced reports, participants completed several free-response questions. Their responses were thoughtful and insightful. The majority of participants reported that they found the two articles with negative valence to be fair and accurate reporting. After reading the classic article, there was minimal mention of mood changes. For example, one participant wrote, "Very informative article about a subject most of us don't want to know about. Lots of facts and figures to back up the claims." Another wrote: "The article is sharing facts about the state of food banks right now during this recession here in the United States. The article provides no encouragement that this issue will improve any time soon."

Contrary to the classic article, the victim narrative sparked more comments on how reading it had changed the mood for the negative in the reader: "Does not give out a ray of hope. It is the end and there is no hope." Still, the majority believed that it was a good and fair article. Concluding from the feedback from participants, the readers seemingly view news reporting with negative valence as fair and balanced reporting.

For the positive valenced stories, results were less clear. When asked if the story was fair and balanced reporting, people seemed to either like it or feel inspired to act, or they felt manipulated and deemed the reporter to be manipulative. As described earlier, the *peak-end* article was the most impactful in fostering positive emotion and lessening negative emotion in readers. A majority of the people who read this article show clear emotional response. Typical comments included:

"Heart warming."

"I like that it suggest how to solve the problem."

"While neither article took a proactive approach to the issue, I think the second article would be more likely to inspire positive action than the first."

"It gave basically the same information, but in a more interesting way."

However, in the interest of fairness there were also responses that highlighted people's desire to get more of "just the facts" reporting:

"I think less focus should be placed on the entertainment value (i.e., drumming up human interest, fear, or a "warm fuzzy feeling"). The distribution of factually accurate information is an important part of our society, and new reports should more accurately reflect that this is their primary purpose."

And:

"I feel that they (news reports) are written for a generally uninformed, poorly educated, and emotional audience. They (news reports) rely on plucking on heartstrings, or stirring up negative emotions, or playing along with overused tropes. These work, but I wish news reports could aspire to report fact, make reasonable conclusions, and advocate for the audience."

In the full sample, the *meaning* story, like the *victim* story, somewhat increased negative affect. In order to understand this surprising finding, it is helpful to consider the comments. Even though we had labelled it as an article with positive valence, might be found in the fact that it triggered bad conscience, empathy and anger. These statements illustrate those points:

"Pulls your heartstrings and promotes bad conscience."

"I think it's constructed in a way that places blame on the Government for a growing hunger problem and gives the impression that people are doing all possible to deal with a consequential problem."

"It contained more platitudes than the earlier one, and took less of a victimized tone. I don't think that takes away from the real tragedy of the situation though. You may "soldier on" and put on a brave face but you can still be undone by circumstance."

Altogether, the participants provided substantial and constructive feedback in order to work with and refine the construction of news articles. Overall, I conclude that a majority of news consumers seem to be used to negative valence in news reporting, because they did not highlight the negative manipulations in their feedback. This phenomena is called *desensitizing* and support the thesis that heavy exposure to news sources result in a desensitized response (Ewbank et al., 2009; Scharrer, 2008; Szabo & Hopkinson, 2007; Torr, 2001). Still participants' mood was noticeably impacted, as a majority report a significant drop in positive emotion and massive added negative emotion, suggesting that news negatively affects mood without conscious awareness. More importantly, after this negative shift occurred, even though emotion recovered some with the positive story, it was still far below baseline levels.

Finally, although news reports are typically negatively valenced to attract the interest of the consumer, the value in balancing negative and positive valence in news reporting is indeed sought after by consumers, as eloquently described by one participant:

> *"The fact that News is news means that it is normally only the extraordinary that gets reported on. This is the dirty secret of newspaper reporting and I believe of all reporting... / Good happens every day. People are kind every day. Yet the reporters print the dirt, the bad and the ugly... Most people are uneducated and believe that the newspapers and other media serve them the full truth about life instead of only offering them the unsavoury tidbits of life. I would like this to change. I would like the reporters to educate the people more about what news is and to help the people be better consumers of it... / I would really like fair, decent and honest reporting... I do not though have much faith that we will get that until the media does not have to depend on the good will of advertisers and large corporations or even of the government... I would love it if the reporters and those who*

are above them were free to dig deep, present accurate articles which represent all sides of the issue."

Discussion

Testing six different emotional valence news narratives anchored in the same factual information provides us with data on how news are received by the public. We can conclude that classic news reporting has a significant emotional impact on readers where negative emotion grows and positive emotion falters. In short, news reports turn people into a bad mood. This survey also provides us with insights on how these different narratives are judged by readers and whether they see the different versions as fair and balanced reporting. Using scientific based methodology to construct the narratives offers a hands-on- and skilled approach to innovate the way we write and report news. This study provides initial empirical footing for the hypotheses on the effects of negative and positive valence in news reports. Across conditions, the negatively valenced classical story negatively impacted mood. In understanding what would be the appropriate positive version, we only saw trends. Most positive affect was detected from the *peak-end* narrative followed by the *3-to-1 positive ratio* version. Despite this encouraging initial evidence, many questions arise: How much does it affect the results that the whole sample got the same negative article as their first read? How much do people's character traits influence the emotional affect they experience from news reports? What is the difference in emotional affect from written news, radio and TV? Research suggests that images and sound enhance the emotional experience (Lang et al., 1995; Miller, 2007). These issues are ripe for further study.

Flourishing in the Media

However, while we wait for more research to performed it is clear that he potential for growing the media workplaces into more positive work environments is huge, and can be

launched already. In journalism, there are many unexplored issues, which could be innovated by positive psychology research. Most urgently, are journalists flourishing? I would argue that many are not, because of high stress levels, high negative valence in the content we produce, lack of constructive feedback due to repetitive deadlines and non-skills in giving constructive feedback from editors. Though more study is certainly needed, the results of this study offer preliminary evidence that the principles of positive psychology are desired by consumers, and can be incorporated into news reports, simply by changing the wording and valence of reports. In this final section, I offer tools and suggestions for incorporating positive psychology into our reports and newsrooms, with potential for building a thriving field as a whole.

New constructive tools for journalists and newsrooms

The interview is journalism's fundamental tool. In addition to already well-known interview formats these should be added to the professional journalists' toolbox in order to achieve more balance between negative and positive valence in our reporting. Through this study, I have identified these new tools for journalistic content.

The hero interview: To be used when the aim is to add a tale of resilience and perseverance. The interview technique itself should be formed around renowned interviewer and lecturer John Sawatskys principles where lean, neutral and simple questions are key (The Poynter Institute, 2011). However, the reporter should actively look to highlight and elaborate on events and points in the sources story that has hero narrative characteristics.

- *The hero narrative:* Same principles as above, but where the storytelling principles follow the dramaturgy from literature defined as "the Hero's Journey".
- *The meaningful interview:* The meaningful interview investigates and highlights posttraumatic growth - or posttraumatic growth-like situations from a source.

Interview expert John Sawatskys has a principle on going back to "before change" in people's narrative (The Poynter Institute, 2011). This is still done here. However, the journalist should identify possible events that could have fostered posttraumatic growth (PTG) - or posttraumatic growth-like experiences. The questions we journalists ask induce emotion. Thus, the questions asked here should not be victimizing, like, "Why are you angry at the mayor?" but explore meaningfulness, like "What could you do to change the situation", "Have you learned anything meaningful from this conflict with the mayors office?" etc.

- *The meaningful story*: Same principles as above, but where key quotes highlight learning stemming from PTG or PTG-like situations.
- *The peak-end story*: According to the peak-end rule, we judge our past experiences almost entirely on how they were at their *peak* (pleasant or unpleasant) and how they ended. Other information is not lost, but it is not used. This includes net pleasantness or unpleasantness and how long the experience lasted. The dramaturgy of the news story should be constructed with a positive peak halfway through the story and a positive end-statement from main character.
- *High Quality Connections (HQCs):* The technique of fostering High Quality Connections (HQCs), which is a construct from positive psychology research, can be effectively used on several levels in the journalism profession. HQC is a form of communication where respectful engagement minimizes defensiveness and maximizes clarity.

A positive start

A Danish editor-in-chief at one of Denmark's influential newspapers implicitly inspired me in my pursuits. To my knowledge, he has never studied positive psychology, but he

intuitively implemented a morning song at his editorial meetings, on his newspaper "Information". This particular newspaper has a core of classical, critical reporters combined with a strong sense of professional pride. This editor-in-chief felt that it would be beneficial to begin the editorial meeting light-heartedly - "to shake things up". So now, the reporters are taking turns on selecting a favourite morning song, endorsing it, and then everybody goes on singing it during the day.[1] The majority in that newsroom reports how he or she feels benefits from the morning song, which is a positive intervention. A positive intervention is defined as action taken to enhance wellbeing and a construct in positive psychology. The journalists talk about how singing together sets a positive tone. They state that they interact more, the mood is loose and light *and* they get better ideas, and they notice high quality teamwork. Beginning any editorial meeting with some sort of positive intervention might prove effective and beneficial in order to building a thriving workplace.

Research done by Barbara Fredrickson offers important findings that may be valuable in working towards building a thriving newsroom. According to her broaden and build theory, positivity opens us and we are able to see the larger picture, to be more creative and innovative, whereas negativity narrows our focus and attention. Fredricksons research suggest that negative emotion has proven valuable for humans in *fight- or-flight situations*, but it is the positive emotions that has driven civilization forward, because of their ability to grow creativity and innovation (Fredrickson, 2009; Johnson, Waugh, & Fredrickson, 2010). The focus and attention of negativity is certainly valuable while engaging in specific tasks required as an investigative reporter or when an anchor do a live interview, where attention to detail, facts, and negative criticism is paramount. It is important to underscore that negative affect is acceptable; however, the negative affect should not become a chronic rumination. I

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[1] http://journalisten.dk/der-er-jo-ingen-pa-information-der-kan-synge

am calling for a more intelligent and precise application of negatives. Right now, negativity is the default for the profession with detrimental consequences.

Building relationships in the newsroom

High quality connections are especially important in the newsroom. When carefully managed, good relationships occur, and a supportive work environment is formed. When mis-managed, negativity can soar. One way to ensure that communication is supportive is to make requests, not demands. This can be tricky, because in the workplace, the goal of communication is often for one person to prompt another to complete a certain task. However, when people make demands, they send the signal that blame or punishment will follow if the demand is not fulfilled. Furthermore, requesters should employ positive language - not judgmental language: Say what you want (e.g., "I'd like you to check with me once a week"), not what you do not want (e.g., "I don't need you to check with me so often"). Make requests specific, avoiding the hazards of misinterpretation (e.g., "I need updates from you on a weekly basis regarding our progress on fundraising goals" is more effective than "Keep me posted"; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Exercising the skill of creating HQC´s could be used between the journalist and the source, pre-interview, and when conducting research. The positive emotion created most likely will give a better interview and more luck on getting information, as one's awareness is heightened and creative and collaborative thoughts and actions are strengthened (Fredrickson, 2009).

Moreover, a targeted effort on fostering HQCs in the journalistic workplaces and newsroom would grow creative, flourishing and high performing employees. Here is how: Conveying presence towards the person that you interact with in a meeting. For example, turn your body toward the other person. Pay authentic & active attention. Oh, and turn of that cell phone - reporters are REALLY poor at that.

Lastly, some American news outlets sometimes engage (unconsciously I believe) in what could be identified as one side of a HQC. The anchor addresses the viewer directly in a manner and tone in the style of a HQC. I believe there is reason to believe how this style fosters more loyalty and connectedness with the viewers. This could be extended to other, more immediate relationships, helping to foster connectedness within the newsroom. A key point to consider for any media executive.

Giving skilful feedback

Giving feedback that promotes positive performance and action toward work goals is a positive for any workplace, not least newsrooms where giving feedback is a constant during he work day. Research from Penn's Positive Psychology Centre suggests that there is fine line when giving feedback if one wants it to be effective (Young-Hoon et al., 2010). Being overly positive or overly negative when giving feedback promotes distortion and lowers motivation. The key is to provide accurate, authentic performance feedback. So I strongly advice training editors in mastering this type of feedback. The potential for positive results is substantial (Young-Hoon et al., 2010).

And remember that body!

Back in the good old days of journalism, it seemed to be a virtue that the more you drank, smoked, and deprived yourself of sleep, the better reporter you were, because these behaviors strengthened your identity of being a "lone wolf", the last man standing up for truth, etc. However, not using and taking care of your body is incredibly unintelligent if you want to perform well. A solid body of positive psychology research suggests that physical activity has direct effects on our psychological function (e.g., well functioning cardiovascular system, high muscle mass, dopamine release in brain), not to mention the detrimental effects

of tobacco use, alcohol abuse, and lack of sleep. In other words - the body and the behaviours that we engage in affect the mind. Better flexibility that supports healthy lifestyles may be especially important. If you feel playful, do something playful with your body. If you need to feel energetic, move your body energetically. Research supports that meditation and breathing exercises have immediate effects by stimulating the parasympathetic system and the vagus nerve, which causes us to relax (Garland et al., 2010). In contrast, rapid breathing stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and activates the fight-or-flight response. Being able to effectively relieve stress by deep breathing is incredibly powerful and user-friendly in a news-producing context. All the ingredients are free and literally right under our noses (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004; Porges et al, 1994; Schusterman, 2006).

Conclusion

What does the science of positive psychology offer to journalists and our profession? I believe a great deal. Positive psychology is not a “Happiology”, but a diligent, scientifically based study on building thriving individuals, within families, communities, organizations, businesses, and societies. Findings from the field of positive psychology offer hands-on techniques that can foster news reporting and newsrooms still in strict accordance with our core ethics and journalism purpose. I urge journalistic workplaces and schools to implement these findings and interventions in everyday routines like the editorial meeting and in training journalists, highlighting how this could raise the rate of innovation, creativity and personal levels of flourishing among media professionals. In conclusion, I believe it is a disturbing approach to solely focus media innovation on technology and not the content itself. I recently discussed this with John Sawatsky, who is world renowned for teaching interview skills. He used a metaphor that I think applies here. Sawatsky said that it is not only about installing more pipelines, but it is what we put in those pipelines that will define the future of news

reporting and journalism. Standing idly by while growing numbers deselect us and at the same time, distancing us from serving the public without taking focused action is an unintelligent approach. This capstone project solidifies that we do not need to grope in the dark for answers on how to innovate journalism and news reporting. Through systematic research and measurements, we can develop new and constructive ways to frame and write news stories and building thriving newsrooms. Martin Seligmans recent construct for wellbeing, PERMA also offers inspiration for how to construct news stories. The elements of engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment could well offer framework for news reporting. If we are covering an election, how easy would it be to do stories on engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment?

We, the news media risk becoming obsolete because we did not manage to innovate our own profession from within. This is a puzzling situation when so many other professions have understood the necessity and value of continuously doing this. Psychology managed to do it by founding positive psychology thus challenging a habitual focus on pathology that manifested itself because of historical events. The creating of positive psychology happened without psychology loosing its validity. On the contrary, it has complemented, strengthened and balanced the field. Journalism is ripe for the same development, because there is nothing in journalisms ethics code to prevent us to uncover and report on positives. The trick is to create an engaging and factually correct narrative. I believe that applying positive psychology methods both in news reporting and in the media workplace has strong potential for attracting a new audience whilst benefitting the people working in the news business. I also believe that the desensitization we see in our audience because of the overwhelmingly negative valence in news could be mended if our reporting became more emotionally balanced. The investigative and critical story still needs to be told and with an audience that is no longer desensitized, we might see more action and impact from the critical negative reporting.

A sound journalistic profession would be able to skilfully and consciously apply negativity and positivity thus strengthening the quality of our work and workplace in line with our ethics code. Journalism at its finest is a key player in a democracy. Thus, the importance of taking action to keep our profession dynamic viable and strong is evident. Let the work begin.

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Appendix 1

Discussion on the Construction of News

Initially, I find it is important to establish an understanding that news is a constructed product framed and narrated by the people producing it. I emphasise this, because there is seemingly still people in the public, who believe that news reporting is "neutral". When I conducted my survey for this Capstone, I got an email from a participant who had seen my description of the experiment. She wrote me because she felt disturbed by how I had constructed different versions of the same news story. She wrote:

> *I was rather disturbed by the study because it seems to be encouraging slanted and unobjective newspaper reporting. I can understand the desire to help people feel better but it should not be done by having the reporter lose objectivity... ...Using psychological approaches does not belong in newspaper reporting. It is commentary masking itself as news. It is not news. It is distortion or public relations not news.*

I wrote her back arguing that news reporting is not neutral. I offered to send her examples from current cover stories to document my statement. Please refer to Appendix 4 for a full transcript of this email correspondence. As I have argued in this capstone, the majority of the journalism profession no longer abide by objectivity as an ethical code, but in the 1990s replaced objectivity with the construct of accountability. However, this woman's email illustrates a widespread belief that news is neutral, that it has neutral emotional valence and that news does not affect peoples emotional states. In the following, I will document how this is a faulty assumption. Moreover, to my surprise, I did not find many journalism researchers being engaged in this. It turned out that it is another group of professionals that pays attention to the tactic construction of news and its dynamics. These people are sociology researchers, which makes sense, as sociology's aim is to develop and refine a body of knowledge about human social activity. These researchers have focused on the process

through which journalism constructs reality. Professor and PhD in sociology Michael Schudson from Columbia Journalism School argues that news is what newspapermen and women make it:

> *News is not a mirror of reality. It is a representation of the world, and all representations are selective. This means that some human beings must do the selecting; certain people make decisions about what present as news and how to present it. They use subjective judgements, personal values and prejudices aka. "Framing"* (Schudson, 2003, pp.33).

However, it seems that both the public and many journalists still will not acknowledge that news reporting is their construction of reality. This paragraph from Schudsons work illustrate this:

> *Journalists take offence when scholars say that journalists manufacture the news Such talk propels journalists into a fierce defence of their work, on the familiar ground that they just report the world as they see it, the facts and nothing but the facts.. .. However, faking is not the point. As sociologist, Gaye Tuchman writes: News, then, like bread or sausage is something that people make. Social scientists emphasize the manufacturing process* (Schudson, 2003, pp.4).

Moreover, Gaye Tuchman, Professor of Sociology argues that a news report is a *story*, no more, no less. Tuchman underscores that she is not out to demean the news or accuse it of being fictitious. However, her mission is rather to remind us that news like all public documents is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity (Tuchman, 1976). So clearly, news is a constructed version of reality and often a version of reality with an overwhelming negativity bias (Breed, 1955, pp. 326-55; White, 1950, pp.383-90). News mostly describes a disease model of the world, as I will document in the following chapter.

Facts and Data on Negativity Bias in News Reporting

In American journalism the item investigated is often the President. How diligently was the campaign covered? Did the media travel and report from outside the Beltway? Did the candidates get balanced coverage, etc? Therefore, researchers have also studied the emotional valence in campaign coverage. Television news covering the 1980 presidential campaign coverage was negative 70% of the time. In 1992, television coverage of the three leading presidential contenders proved more negative than positive in every case. News tends to emphasize conflict, dissension, and battle; out of a journalistic convention that there are two sides to any story, news heightens the appearance of conflict even in instances of relative calm (Patterson, 1993; Robinson & Sheehan, 1984).

Scholars have for decades described the dominance for negative valence in news. In 1922, Walter Lippmann, a renowned American intellectual, writer and reporter noted that the basic problem of democracy was the accuracy of news. Lippmann argued that distorted information was inherent in the human mind. People make up their minds before they define the facts, while the ideal would be to gather and analyze the facts before reaching conclusions (Lippmann, 1922) However, a solid body of research does not seem to be produced before we arrive to the 1970s and was primarily provided by Glasgow Media Group. Glasgow Media Group was a team of media researchers based in Glasgow, Scotland and they pioneered the analysis of television news in a series of studies starting in 1976 with *Bad News.* This major publication pioneered the study of television journalism, expressing critical concern with the 'common sense' acceptance of the neutrality of television news (Glasgow Media Group 1976; Glasgow Media Group, 1980; Glasgow Media Group, 1982). Critics have objected to the Glasgow Media Group's studies for its castigation of television news for bias when the more important point may be that broadcast news programmes "achieve their ideological effectively precisely through their observation of the statutory requirements of balance and

impartiality (Bennett 1982, pp. 306). Still Glasgow Media Group continues to research the negative impact that news coverage can have on popular understanding and examines possible strategies for achieving a more positive response from media in this area.

In the USA Rocky Mountain Media Watch occupied the role that Glasgow Media Group had in the UK. Rocky Mountain Media Watch is a grass roots organization and was founded in 1994 by activists with media and research skills. They describe their goal to be challenging the unbalanced and unhealthy diet of information presented by the media corporations, with a focus on local TV news (Rocky Mountain Media Watch, 2001). Rocky Mountain Media Watch published several reports where they measured high negative valence in news reporting (Rocky Mountain Media Watch, 1995; 1997; 1998). To help citizens develop a better understanding of the content of local TV news. The organization developed a *Mayhem Index.* This index is the percentage of news (excluding weather and sports) devoted to stories about violent topics: crime, disasters, war and terrorism - on average mayhem on local TV stations is 46 percent of the news (Rocky Mountain Media Watch, 1997).

Appendix 2

The Six News Story Versions

Classic

Going Hungry in the United States: Food Pantries Fight to Survive.

Extreme weather cutting resources, surging demand, soaring prices, and shrinking surpluses the commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of a perfect eerie storm of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously, federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by 75% in just four years, resulting in rising numbers of Americans that go hungry each and every day.

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City, a food bank in Chicago, Ill., filled grocery bags for the city's neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter.

Then, month by month, item by item, the food bank's shelves began to empty. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes.The story is similar around the country, where the cupboards of food pantries and other food assistance programs have grown bare as the lifeline of surplus commodities provided by the federal government has slowed to a trickle.

Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows the consequences firsthand. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68. "Right now I'm getting by—but just barely," she says with a sad cracked tone in her voice after she visited Food for The City, in Chicago, Ill.

Jacks, who live alone, depend on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends solely on them, even though the organization has had to

cut back on everything. “More and more I’m managing to make one meal stretch into two,” she says sadly. She also counts on food items she picks up at the food bank, but Food for the City, too, has had to scrimp. In December, the Christmas month, “they didn’t have any meat,” Jacks says. “They had to cut out sodas, and instead of two cans of vegetables there’s only one this time. Believe me, all those little cuts add up.”

The numbers are startling. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million.

“I am told that food banks all over the USA have been hit hard by the decline in surplus commodities, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centers because they can no longer make ends meet,” says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City. Moreover, this is not just a big city problem. Hardest hit are programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA. These areas have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA – and are finding funding and resources quickly depleted.

Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. But at the same time, resources are disappearing. Moreover, a disturbing new pattern is revealing itself. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite. “Once you see that despair, it makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to stay open more because there’s such a need,” said Sam Jones from Food for the City. Jones said they always consider running

out of money to meet the current need. “It’s been nail biting time for me and the staff at times with the finances the way they are,” said Jones.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry. Right now though, we do not seem to have the answers.

Peak End

Going Hungry in the United States: Food Pantries Fight to Survive.

Extreme weather cutting resources, surging demand, soaring prices, and shrinking surpluses the commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of a perfect eerie storm of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously, federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by 75% in just four years, resulting in rising numbers of Americans that go hungry each and every day.

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City, a food bank in Chicago, Ill., filled grocery bags for the city’s neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter. Then, month by month, item by item, the food bank’s shelves began to empty. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes.The story is similar around the country, where the cupboards of food pantries and other food assistance programs have grown bare as the lifeline of surplus commodities provided by the federal government has slowed to a trickle.

Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows the consequences firsthand. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68.

"Right now I'm getting by—but just barely," she says with a sad cracked tone in her voice after she visited Food for the City in Chicago, Ill.

Jacks, who lives alone, depends on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends solely on them, even though the organization has had to cut back on everything. "I feel like when I am handed a box of food I receive a box of hope," said Jacks, "That box represents a box of hope and that's how I see it. It gives me strength and love from my community and I do not have to worry about where my next meal is coming from.

She also counts on food items she picks up at the food bank, but Food for the City, too, has had to scrimp. In December, the Christmas month "they didn't have any meat," Jacks says. "They had to cut out sodas, and instead of two cans of vegetables there's only one this time. Believe me, all those little cuts add up."

The numbers are startling. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million.

"I am told that food banks all over the USA have been hit hard by the decline in surplus commodities, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centers because they can no longer make ends meet," says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City.

Moreover, this is not just a big city problem. Hardest hit are programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA. These areas have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA - and are finding funding and resources quickly depleted.

Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. But at the same time, resources are disappearing. Moreover, a disturbing new pattern is revealing itself. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry.

But even if the challenges seems hard to overcome, Director Sam Jones highlight the positive energy coming from his corps of volunteers: "I am always amazed to see the passions of our volunteers that come to Food for the City. It's very effective to bring about awareness and to fight hunger both locally and nationally," Jones said and added: "I hope that our food distribution, activities and events create awareness that inspire other people to be advocates in their own community. When we join in together, we make a huge positive difference in many people's lives"

Hero

Going Hungry in the United States: Food Pantries fight to Survive

Extreme weather, cutting resources, surging demand, soaring prices and shrinking surpluses... the commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of a perfect storm of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by 75% in just four years, resulting in rising numbers of Americans that go hungry each and every day. However, there are people out there ready to help

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City a food bank in Chicago, Ill., filled grocery bags for the city's neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter.

Then, month by month, the food bank's shelves began to empty. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes. The story is similar around the country, where the cupboards of food pantries and other food assistance programs have grown bare as the lifeline of surplus commodities provided by the federal government has slowed to a trickle. The resources are shrinking, and yet hope remains.

Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows the consequences firsthand. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68. "Right now I'm getting by—but just barely," she says with a defiant tone in her voice after she visited Food for the City in Chicago, Ill. Jacks, who lives alone by choice, depends on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends on them, even though the organization has had to cut back on everything. "More and more I'm managing to make one meal stretch into two, but I will of course get by. I consider myself a survivor. I have not yet heard of anyone who starves to death in the USA" she says, "and I certainly won't be the first". Her words echo throughout the attitudes and actions of resilient people throughout the country. She also counts on food items she picks up at the food bank, but Food for the City, too, has had to scrimp. In December, the Christmas month "they didn't have any meat," Jacks says. "They had to cut out sodas, and instead of two cans of vegetables there's only one this time. Believe me, all those little cuts add up."

The numbers are startling. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of

Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million. "I am told that food banks all over the USA have been hit hard by the decline in surplus commodities, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centers because they can no longer make ends meet," says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City.

Yet people, like Jacks, have not given up hope. Programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA are hit hardest, because these areas have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA. Despite of this stories of survival are appearing all over the country.

Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite. And in this time of need, people are uniting in ways we have never seen before.

"Once you see that despair, it makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to stay open more because there's such a need," said Sam Jones from Food for the City and adds: "It is a privilege to be able to serve these people - to do some good for fellow Americans that need our help." Jones said they always consider running out of money to meet the current need. "It's been nail biting time for me and the staff at times with the finances the way they are, but my staff believe in the value of our mission and every year that grows," said Jones.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry. Right now though, we do not seem to have the answers. While we look for

them, ordinary Americans do not cease to help.

<u>3 - 1 ratio</u>

Hunger in the United States: Hope within Desperate Situations.

The commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously, federal government aid for food banks has fallen by 75% in just four years, resulting in Americans that go hungry. Yet, hope resounds.

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City a food bank in Chicago, Ill., filled grocery bags for the city's neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter. Clients enjoyed the diverse food given to them here. They reported better health, energy levels rising and feeling mentally stronger. Then, month by month, the food bank's shelves began to empty. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes. The story is similar around the country. The resources are challenged, and yet hope remains.

Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68. "Right now I'm getting by—but just barely," she says with a defiant tone in her voice after she visited Food for the City in Chicago, Ill.

Jacks, who lives alone by choice, depends on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends on them, even though the organization has had to cut back on everything. "More and more I'm managing to make one meal stretch into two, but I will of course get by. I consider myself a survivor. I have not yet heard of anyone who

starves to death in the USA" she says, "and I certainly won't be the first". Her words echo throughout the attitudes and actions of resilient people throughout the country.

The numbers are solid. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million.

"I am told that food banks all over the USA encounters this, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centres because they can no longer make ends meet," says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City. However, Jones points to a surprising benefit amidst this new reality: "People show real life resilience. They help each other more, I have more volunteers than I will ever need, the community in this area has risen to support, I get letters and donations from unknown benefactors, the outpour is really warm and constant", says Jones.

People, like Jacks, have not given up hope. Programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA are all affected, because these areas have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA. Despite of this stories of survival are appearing all over the country.

Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite. Moreover, in this time of need, people are uniting in ways we have never seen before.

"It makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to stay open more because there's such a need," said Sam Jones from Food for the City and adds: "It is a privilege to be able to serve these people - to do some good for fellow Americans that need our help." "It's been nail biting time for me and the staff at times with the finances the way they are, but my staff believe in the value of our mission and every year their focus and commitment grows," said Jones.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry. Right now though, we do not seem to have the answers. While we look for them, ordinary Americans do not cease to help.

Meaning:

Going Hungry in the United States: Food Pantries Fight to Survive.

Extreme weather, cutting resources, surging demand, soaring prices and shrinking surpluses. The commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of a perfect storm of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by 75% in just four years, resulting in rising numbers of Americans that go hungry each and every day

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City a food bank in Chicago, Ill. filled grocery bags for the city's neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter.

Then, month by month, the food bank's shelves began to empty. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes. The story is similar around the country, where the cupboards of food pantries and other food

assistance programs have grown bare as the lifeline of surplus commodities provided by the federal government has slowed to a trickle.

Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows the consequences firsthand. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68. “Right now I’m getting by—but just barely,” she says with a defiant tone in her voice after she visited Food for the City in Chicago, Ill. Jacks, who live alone, depend on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends solely on them, even though the organization has had to cut back on everything. “More and more I’m managing to make one meal stretch into two, but I will of course get by. I consider myself a survivor. I have not yet heard of anyone who starves to death in the USA” she says, “and I certainly won’t be the first one”.

She also counts on food items she picks up at the food bank, but Food for the City, too, has had to scrimp. In December, the Christmas month “they didn’t have any meat,” Jacks says. “They had to cut out sodas, and instead of two cans of vegetables there’s only one this time. Believe me, all those little cuts add up. You start to appreciate the smallest things, which actually has made me more grateful and appreciative of the people taking an effort to help”.

The numbers are startling. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million. “I am told that food banks all over the USA have been hit hard by the decline in surplus commodities, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centers because they can no longer make ends meet,” says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City and adds “It is a privilege to be able to serve these people - to do some good for fellow Americans that need our help.”

Moreover, this is not just a big city problem. Hardest hit are programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA. Areas that have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA.

Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. Moreover, a disturbing new pattern is revealing itself. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite. "Once you see that despair, it makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to stay open more because there's such a need," said Sam Jones from Food for the City.

Jones said they always consider running out of money to meet the current need. "It's been nail biting time for me and the staff at times with the finances the way they are, but we always somehow manage to pull through said Jones.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry. Right now though, we do not seem to have the answers, but we have begun the search.

Victim

Going Hungry in the United States. Food Pantries Fight to Survive.

Extreme weather, cutting resources, surging demand, soaring prices and shrinking surpluses the commodities crisis, experts say, is the result of a perfect eerie storm of changing economic and social forces. Simultaneously, federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by

75% in just four years, resulting in rising numbers of Americans that go hungry each and every day.

Four years ago, volunteers at Food for The City a food bank in Chicago, Ill. filled grocery bags for the city's neediest residents with such healthy and appetizing foods as rice, peanut butter, chicken, apricots, bread, nuts, spinach, milk, carrots and butter.Then, month by month, the food bank's shelves began to empty and Americans became victim to the cutbacks. Last week, people who stood in line for food received just three canned items: sodas, green beans and stewed tomatoes.

The story is similar around the country, where the cupboards of food pantries and other food assistance programs have grown bare as the lifeline of surplus commodities provided by the federal government has slowed to a trickle. Bonnie Jacks, 78, knows the consequences firsthand. After raising a family of seven, Jacks took a job as a store clerk before retiring at 68. After having had a hard work life, she needs help but will not receive it.

"Right now I'm getting by—but just barely," she says with a sad cracked tone in her voice after she visited Food for the City in Chicago, Ill. Jacks, who live alone, depend on food stamps and prepared meals delivered by Meals on Wheels five days a week. She depends solely on them, even though the organization has had to cut back on everything. "More and more I'm managing to make one meal stretch into two," she says sadly.

She also counts on food items she picks up at the food bank, but Food for the City, too, has had to scrimp. In December, the Christmas month "they didn't have any meat," Jacks says. "commodities, just at a time when more and more people have been showing up at emergency food assistance centres because they can no longer make ends meet," says Sam Jones, director of Food for the City. He adds: "You don't know the true meaning of sad until a five year old looks

up at you with a plastic bag and says, “Can I have some”, and you have nothing really nice to give him. It hurts, but this is my life.” They had to cut out sodas, and instead of two cans of vegetables there’s only one this time. Believe me, all those little cuts add up, and I often have to go to bed starving.”

The numbers are startling. In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million.

“I am told that food banks all over the USA have been hit hard by the decline in surplus.”

Moreover, this is not just a big city problem. Hardest hit are programs that serve older Americans and people living in impoverished communities and rural areas all over the USA. The areas that have long depended disproportionately on commodities from the USDA - and are finding funding and resources quickly depleted. Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year. But at the same time, resources are disappearing. Moreover, a disturbing new pattern is revealing itself. Instead of their usual drop in customers after the holidays, many pantries in upscale suburbs this year are seeing the opposite. “Once you see that despair, it makes you want to do more, and it makes you want to stay open more because there’s such a need, and so many hardworking people stripped of resources” said Sam Jones from Food for the City. Jones said they always consider running out of money to meet the current need. “It’s been nail biting time for me and the staff at times with the finances the way they are. We are often kept in the dark when it comes to politicians deciding on our funding,” said Jones.

As food banks, meal programs and other food assistance organizations look to the future, experts say, they will have to look for new and innovative ways to keep millions of Americans from going hungry. Right now though, we do not seem to have the answers to help the millions of hard hit Americans who are right now lining up at the nations food pantries.

Appendix 3

How the Six News Articles were Constructed and How Science, Theory and Empirical Method Underpin Them

Common denominators for all six news articles were:

The Data:

- Federal government aid for food banks has been cut back by 75% in just four years.
- In 2003, the federal government passed along $242 million in donated surplus commodities to food banks and other programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program. Latest numbers show it has now dropped to just $59 million.
- Demand at food banks across the country increased by 30 percent in 2008 from the previous year, according to a survey by Feeding America, which distributes more than two billion pounds of food every year
- Bonnie Jacks, 78, client food pantry, former store clerk, retired at age 68.
- Sam Jones, director of Food for the City.

NB: Name of food pantry and city - Washington DC - wa altered in the news article used in the survey. This is because I wanted to reduce any possible bias in readers. Washington DC is often portrayed negatively because it is the seat of political power. The interviews were conducted at Food for the City in October 2009.

The other five articles were based on key concepts in positive psychology,

Manipulations:

1. **Classical narrative**. **(Negative valence)** This story was written with no manipulated concern to choice of words. I wrote it as I would have written any other news article based on my 11 years experience as a news reporter & correspondent. This article had by default a high negative word ratio.

2. **Peak-end narrative**. **(Positive valence).** According to the *peak-end rule,* we judge our past experiences almost entirely on how they were at their *peak* (pleasant or unpleasant) and how they ended. Other information is not lost, but it is not used. This includes net pleasantness or unpleasantness and how long the experience lasted. This news article was constructed with a positive peak halfway through the story and a positive end-statement from main character. The peak-end heuristic was first suggested by Nobel Laureate in Economics, Daniel Kahneman and subsequently tested (Kahneman et al.,1993; Kahneman, 1999; Kemp et al., 2008).

3. **Hero narrative**. **(Positive valence).** Inspired by Betty Sue Flowers, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin who lectured at the MAPP program. I wrote this news article as a hero narrative or *"The Hero´s Journey* - the formal term used by literature scholars. The Hero's Journey is a pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development (The Writers Journey, 2011). For visual graphic on the structure of The Hero´s journey please visit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Heroesjourney.svg

4. **<u>3 - 1 positive ratio</u>. (Positive valence).** Three positive emotions to one negative emotion, (thus the construct *3-positive ratio)* is the scientifically proven tipping point to go from floundering to flourishing. Solid findings from Positive Psychology scholar , Dr. Barbara Fredrickson suggests that experiencing positive emotions in a 3-to-1 ratio with negative ones leads people to a tipping point beyond which they naturally become more resilient to adversity and effortlessly achieve what they once could only imagine (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Losada, 1999). The 3 - 1 ratio builds on earlier research on team dynamics. The positivity/negativity ratio (P/N) has been found to be a critical parameter to ascertain what kinds of dynamics are possible for a team. P/N is measured by counting the instances of positive feedback (e.g. "that is a good idea";) vs. negative feedback (e.g. "this is not what I expected; I am disappointed"). This news article is constructed with three positive statements for each negative statement.

5. **<u>Meaningful narrative.</u> (Positive valence).** Again, inspired by Betty Sue Flowers, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin who lectured at the MAPP program, I worked to write a news article structured what literature scholars identify as the meaningful narrative. The quotes I have chosen to include in this article reflect this. They experience negatives, struggle, and acts humanely and persevere with a hopeful outlook that establishes a sense of meaning in themselves and the reader. Sources explanatory style is optimistic.

6. **Victim narrative**. **(Negative valence).** This article contains even more negative ratio than the classic article. This is the last article also inspired by Betty Sue Flowers, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin. The psychological profile of victimisation includes a pervasive sense of helplessness, passivity, loss of control, pessimism and negative thinking. The quotes in this article have a pessimistic explanatory style (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus & Seligman, 1986).

Appendix 4

Regarding Amazon Mechanical Turk HIT

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Mary M. R. **14. jun. 2011 07.22**
Til: Cathrine Gyldensted <cgy@sas.upenn.edu>

Greetings from Amazon Mechanical Turk,

An Amazon Mechanical Turk user is contacting you from the Amazon Mechanical Turk website. Please review the message below and respond to the message as you see fit.

Sincerely,
Amazon Mechanical Turk
http://requester.mturk.com
1200 12TH AVE South, SUITE 1200
SEATTLE, WA 98144-2734 USA
Message from Mary M. R.

Your study is interesting to me because I am someone who has worked as a newspaper reporter and who presently is a licensed marriage and family therapist.
I must admit that the newspaper reporter in me was rather disturbed by the study because it seems to be encouraging slanted and unobjective newspaper reporting.
I can understand the desire to help people feel better but it should not be done by having the reporter lose objectivity. The reporter should not label the source or step in and change his or her words or meaning just because the reporter believes that is would be nicer.
There should be more of a focus on telling good news. Yes. But still in an objective style. It is the topic of the news articles that needs to change to have more balance rather than the wording of the articles. Using psychological approaches does not belong in newspaper reporting. It is commentary masking itself as news. It is not news. It is distortion or public relations not news.

Cathrine gyldensted <cathrine.gyldensted@gmail.com> **14. jun. 2011 19.47**
Til: "Mary M. R.

Dear Mary M. R.

thank you for your wonderful feedback, which I sincerely appreciate because of the clear knowledge and insights it represents.

It does not come through in the HIT, but I myself is a very accomplished journalist with 11 yrs experience - and I am currently working as USA correspondent for TV and Radio. Before that, I have worked as an investigative reporter - with much success.

I think you are right, that ideal reporting should not be manipulated - but be neutral, unbiased and unskewed. However, this is not the reality in most part of modern newsreporting.

I can easily send you many examples on daily newsreports and print articles, where it is clear that the choice of words and quotes selected by the journalist, is biased, negative/positive - all in all not emotionally neutral.

My argument is, that we the news media are not acknowledging that this is actually happening. With this current study, we will get some data from participants, that can help us discuss the emotional impact that news reporting do have on people, and from that hopefully discuss how modern reporting is skewed. My hope is that this data, will help us begin an important debate within the field.

I am doing this study with a well renowned university like Penn, to make sure best research practices are honored.

Please feel free to contact me again, if you have further questions.
And thank you again for taking the time to send your valuable feedback.

Sincerely,
Cathrine Gyldensted

Sent from my iPad