

SOURCE SELECTION IN CRIME NEWS: HOW JOURNALISTS'
EVALUATIONS OF CREDIBILITY INFLUENCED COVERAGE OF THE
PATRICK DENNEHY MURDER CASE

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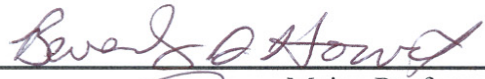
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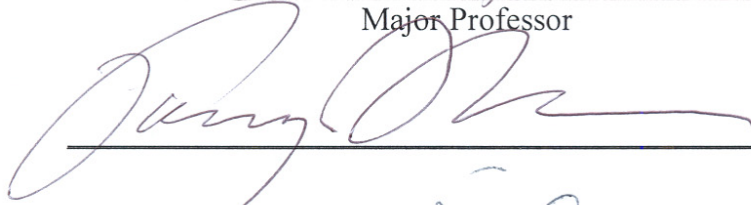
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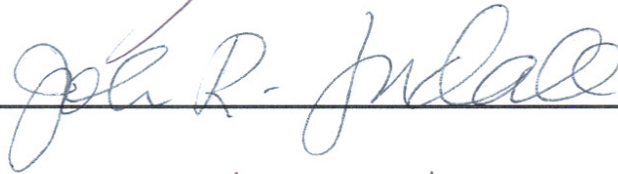
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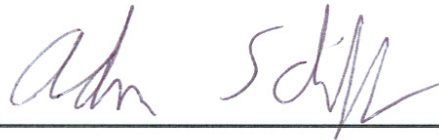
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The disappearance of Baylor University student-athlete Patrick Dennehy in June 2003 began as a missing-person story but developed into a bizarre murder investigation involving a victim, Dennehy, and an assailant, Carlton Dotson – roommates and teammates on the Baylor basketball team. In June 2005, Dotson pleaded guilty to murdering Dennehy and was sentenced to 35 years in prison (Moore, 2005a; Moore, 2005b). The murder case was only part of the story. The athlete's death led reporters to uncover a scandal within the university's basketball program involving serious infractions of NCAA rules by head coach Dave Bliss.

Focusing on the Dennehy murder case, this study will examine how print journalists select news sources in crime news. This study is important because previous research has failed to consider the role source credibility plays in determining who gets quoted and who is not heard from in coverage of crime. This study will focus on how journalists at four newspapers covered the Dennehy murder case, with an emphasis on what types of sources they quoted. This study will seek journalists' input on how they define source credibility – a concept that has been widely studied but rarely defined through journalists' own words. The study will also help determine how source credibility rates compared to other influences on source selection and whether source credibility is a factor in why journalists quote official sources as often as they do.

The Dennehy Case

The chain of events in the Patrick Dennehy murder case was set in motion June 12, 2003. The 21-year-old Dennehy was spotted on the Baylor campus and at his Waco apartment complex that day. That evening, Carlton Dotson, Dennehy's friend and teammate, drove Dennehy's 1996 Chevrolet Tahoe to Sulphur Springs in northeast Texas, where he paid a visit to his estranged wife, Melissa Kethley. Sometime in between those two events, Dennehy was killed (Acosta, 2003; Montgomery, 2003; Hanna, 2003b).

By the time Dennehy's family reported him missing a week later, Dotson had made his way home to Maryland. On June 25, in nearby Virginia Beach, Va., Dennehy's sport-utility vehicle was found abandoned in a mall parking lot. Dotson, who spent the next three weeks sleeping at various relatives' homes, "emerged from seclusion" July 17 to speak with an FBI agent and a detective with the Dorchester County sheriff's office (Montgomery, 2003).

Three days later, Dotson placed a 911 call from a convenience store pay phone in Chestertown, Md., telling the dispatcher he "was hearing voices and that he needed assistance." The next day, during an interview with FBI agents, Dotson reportedly confessed to the fatal shooting of Dennehy (Hanna & Caplan, 2003b).

Back in Waco, the search for Dennehy intensified. The breakthrough came around sunset July 25, when McLennan County law enforcement officials found the remains of a body in a grassy field five miles outside the Waco city limits. Two days later, after the body was positively identified, Baylor President Robert Sloan sent an e-mail to students, staff, faculty and alumni. "[T]oday," he wrote, "our worst fears were realized (Douglas 2003; Hanna & Caplan, 2003b)."

In the same e-mail, Sloan announced the formation of an internal committee to investigate allegations that coaches paid Dennehy's tuition and living expenses. On Aug. 7, Baylor head coach Dave Bliss and assistants Rodney Belcher and Doug Ash attended a memorial service for Dennehy in San Jose, Calif. The next day, Sloan held a news conference in Waco to announce the committee's preliminary findings. Major NCAA violations, Sloan said, were committed within the basketball program, including improper payments made on behalf of two players – one of whom was Dennehy – and the knowledge of and non-reporting of positive drug-test results of basketball players. At the news conference, Bliss, who approved the improper payments, announced his resignation (Hanna & Caplan, 2003b; Caplan, 2003a; Williams, 2003).

Bliss' departure did not bring closure to the scandal, however. Baylor assistant coach Abar Rouse, who began working at Baylor in June 2003, revealed to Baylor and NCAA investigators in mid-August that he had secretly recorded conversations with the former coach in which Bliss encouraged players to lie to Baylor's investigators and imply that Dennehy earned his tuition money as a drug dealer. "What we have to create here," Bliss is quoted as saying, "is drugs (Robbins, 2003c)."

Further damaging Bliss' reputation was the discovery of an NCAA memo from the 1980s that indicated the college athletics governing body had found evidence of illegal payments made to players during Bliss' time as head coach at Southern Methodist University. One of those former SMU players, Jon Koncak, acknowledged to *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reporter Danny Robbins that he had indeed received payments from boosters (Robbins, 2003a; Robbins, 2003b).

As for Carlton Dotson, a McLennan County grand jury on Aug. 27 returned a murder indictment against the former Baylor athlete, accusing him of fatally shooting former teammate Patrick Dennehy. In October 2003, Dotson was extradited from Maryland to McLennan County, Texas, where he entered a not guilty plea (Hanna, 2003c; Hanna, 2003d).

Dotson next appeared in the headlines a year later – October 2004 – when a McLennan County district judge declared him incompetent to stand trial and ordered him sent to the North Texas State Hospital for mental health treatment (Hanna, 2004).

Even without Dotson's making news for most of 2004, the Dennehy case remained in the headlines, as Baylor officials dealt with the fallout of the resulting basketball program scandal. In February, the internal investigation into the Baylor basketball program was completed. The committee found several previously undisclosed violations, including the improper purchase of airline tickets for players, and the committee responded by eliminating five scholarships from the basketball program for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 seasons (Robbins, 2004).

The Dennehy case further fueled internal strife within Baylor's governing body. On May 14, 2004, the board of regents decided by one vote not to remove President Robert Sloan. The vote was a signal of things to come. In January 2005, Sloan resigned, taking the largely ceremonial title of chancellor (Hanna & Robbins, 2004; Hanna & Robbins, 2005).

As for Dotson's trial, it never happened. Dotson, who spent four months in a mental health facility before being found competent to stand trial, pleaded guilty to fatally shooting Dennehy on June 8, 2005. The plea came shortly before his trial was set

to start and was not part of a deal with prosecutors (“Ex-Baylor Player,” 2005; Hanna, 2005a).

A week later, Waco District Judge Ralph Strother sentenced Dotson to 35 years in prison. At the hearing, which lasted 10 minutes, Brian Brabazon, Dennehy’s stepfather, said to Dotson, “You, Carlton Dotson, are a killer, a sinner of the worst degree, and may you never forget what you did (Hanna, 2005b).”

How did reporters cover the murder of Patrick Dennehy? To put this question in a theoretical context, the study will first turn to previous research on crime news and sourcing.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Studies have consistently shown that source dependency plays an important role in reporters' sourcing patterns. Many studies (for example, Hallin, Manoff & Weddle, 1993; Brown, Bybee, Wearden & Straughan, 1987; Hackett, 1985) have demonstrated reporters' heavy dependency on official sources, especially government officials. According to Sigal (1973, p. 115), source dependency results from journalists' reliance "mainly on routine channels to get their information," including press releases, press conferences and background briefings. Officials, readily accessible through these routine channels and armed with information perceived as valuable by journalists, have the upper hand, then, in being quoted (Gans, 1979, p. 117).

Routine news

In the context of crime news, routine news consists mainly of stories that "read like police blotter reports, peopled by remote, impersonal, motiveless figures" (Graber, 1980, 47). In other words, routine crime stories are ones that come primarily from journalists' everyday dealings with the police (Fishman, 1981, p. 108; Chibnall, 1981, p. 78; Sherizen, 1978, pp. 210-211). "If [crime stories] sound like copies from the police blotter," according to Graber (p. 47), "the explanation is that this is what they are. Reporters rarely stray from what their police contacts supply." Indeed, Simon and Hayes (2004, p. 91) and Schlesinger, Tumber and Murdock (1991, p. 413) found that police officials are among the most frequently cited sources in crime news.

Non-routine news

Instead of staged events, news conferences, press releases and official proceedings, non-routine news develops from tips, private briefings with officials or business leaders, or reporters' enterprise (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993, p. 5). Although murder is sometimes classified as among the everyday crime news (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, p. 17; Graber, 1980, p. 47), whether a murder is covered as routine or non-routine news might depend on the prominence of the alleged victim or suspect. According to Graber (p. 47), "When an ordinary man is accused of killing his wife and burning the house to hide the crime, this is only a routine matter, covered inconspicuously and insipidly." But who judges which murders and murderers are ordinary? Schlesinger et al. (1991, p. 411) suggest it is the media that must ultimately decide whether a crime story is worthy of more than routine coverage. Schlesinger et al. contend there are two types of crime news: sensational stories that receive "extended treatment, often on the front page and with accompanying pictures" and mundane stories that are short items "tucked away on the inside pages" (p. 411). Likewise, Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1991, p. 73) determined that an elite newspaper and a less prestigious, but popular, daily newspaper covered differently the murder of a college student in suburban Toronto. The popular newspaper gave front-page coverage to the murder, but the prestige newspaper "all but ignored the story, providing only 'briefs' with minimal primary facts" (p. 73).

Not only do journalists gather their information differently for non-routine news, but studies also have found journalists tend to choose different sources. Moloch and Lester (1974, pp. 109-110) suggest journalists rely less heavily on government sources

and include a greater variety of sources in non-routine news. Berkowitz and Beach (1993, p. 9) discovered that non-routine stories in the three largest Iowa dailies contained a significantly higher number of unaffiliated sources – sources not identified by their affiliation with a business, interest group or other organization – and non-executive sources than routine stories. If the Dennehy murder was covered as non-routine news – as the high amount of coverage the case received suggests – then there should be a relatively high percentage of non-official sources.

Proximity and prestige

Source selection may also vary depending on a newspaper's proximity to an event. Martin (1988, p. 989) found that the closer a newspaper is to an event, the wider range of sources a journalist tends to use, while a journalist at a newspaper farther from an event will tend to rely on fewer sources and more quotes by official sources (Martin 1988, p. 989). Berkowitz and Beach (1993, pp. 9-10) determined that source selection in routine and non-routine news varied significantly for stories occurring within a newspaper's primary coverage area, but for stories that happen farther away, source selection was basically the same, whether the news was routine or non-routine. The researchers concluded the differences between non-routine and routine news did not hold for non-proximate stories because journalists "develop a diverse pool of sources in their own communities, but can find only the most visible sources in other locations" (p. 10). How close a newspaper is to Waco, the city where Dennehy and Dotson lived and attended college and where Dennehy's body was found, could play a role in determining the type and range of sources quoted.

Another possible influence on source selection is a newspaper's level of prestige. Schlesinger et al. (1991, p. 413) found that the types of sources quoted in crime news in British newspapers differed depending on whether the publication was a quality newspaper, a mid-market daily or a tabloid. Police and court officials were quoted in a similar percentage of stories in all three types of newspapers, but quality and mid-market newspapers were more likely to quote experts in a story than were tabloids. Roughly 17 percent of quality and mid-market stories quoted experts, compared with 11 percent of tabloid stories. Victims, suspects and their families were quoted in roughly the same percentage of mid-market and tabloid stories (about 24 percent), but less often in quality-newspaper stories (13 percent). Additionally, the tabloids were more likely to quote members of the general public (7 percent of stories), compared with mid-market and quality-newspaper stories (about 4 percent of stories).

Source credibility

Seemingly few studies have sought to determine what role journalists believe the perceived credibility of a source plays in source selection. In one study, Powers and Fico (1994) surveyed reporters from the 21 highest circulation dailies to measure how often source credibility, articulateness, a source's gender, time pressure, fear of litigation, organizational pressures and other factors affected journalists' decision to select a type of news source. Source credibility, source accessibility and time pressure were found to be the most influential factors. Of the 121 respondents, 96 percent rated source credibility as "often or always influential" in journalists' selection of a source (p. 92). Moreover, the more highly a journalist rated the influence of credibility, the less likely that journalist

was to report using official sources. Powers and Fico concluded that “news content was ... most powerfully shaped by journalists’ own orientations toward key source qualities” (p. 94). Of course, this is based on self-reporting. The researchers did not analyze reporters’ actual content.

Although Powers and Fico’s study does not define credibility, other scholars tend to define credibility by what audiences consider when assessing the believability of a source (see, for example, Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1969; Singletary, 1976; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Berlo et al. (p. 574) surveyed college students and adult community members and found the participants judged source credibility mainly by three criteria: safety, qualification and dynamism. Safety represents a source’s trustworthiness and the audience’s level of comfort with a source; qualification represents a source’s perceived experience, skill, qualifications and knowledge; and dynamism represents a source’s perceived aggressiveness and boldness or, conversely, hesitancy or timidity (p. 574). In his study, Singletary (p. 318) asked college students to list what makes a news source credible. Although he determined that credibility is “a highly complex and somewhat undifferentiated system of factors,” he nonetheless found six main elements of a credible source through factor analysis: knowledgeable, attraction, trustworthiness, articulation, lack of hostility and stability (p. 318). Gaziano and McGrath (1986) found some overlapping elements comprising credibility and some additional ones. They identified 12 in all: fairness, bias, completeness of statements, accuracy, treatment of others’ privacy, extent to which the source watches out for the public’s interest, separation of fact from opinion, trustworthiness and profit motive (p. 454).

Do journalists define source credibility similarly? Dansker, Wilcox and Van Tubergen (1980, p. 42) conducted a mail survey of reporters and editors asking them to name five criteria they use in determining source credibility. Follow-up surveys asked the participants to rank the various criteria suggested by participants in the first mailing. The researchers determined that source credibility was judged based on a source's reliability, motivation, appearance and status-position (p. 42). Status-position is not explained but likely denotes a source's rank within an organization. Appearance refers to whether a source is believable based on his or her physical characteristics – whether the source is clean-shaven (if the source is a man) and professionally dressed, and whether the source speaks with confidence (p. 42). Appearance defined in this way could only apply to in-person interviews. It seems reasonable that in e-mail and phone interviews, a person's grammar, punctuation or accent might give the appearance – or, rather, impression – that a source might or might not be credible.

Relative credibility of sources

Other research has attempted to determine which sources journalists believe are the most credible. For example, Counts (1975, pp. 447-448) asked 50 college journalism students to construct news stories about a marijuana study after listening to speeches by individuals the researcher classified as a low-credibility source – a government public relations official – and a high-credibility source – the director of research at a hospital. When the high-credibility source downplayed the risks associated with marijuana use, students rated the high-credibility source as being more credible than the low-credibility source, and the opposite was true when the high-credibility source emphasized the risks

associated with marijuana use and the low-credibility source downplayed the risks. The source rated more credible was the source with whom reporters seemed to agree. What limits the study, though, is that these were student reporters, not professionals. Professionals might be more likely to consider the source, so to speak, and rate the speaker with greater expertise as more credible.

Some media scholars have assumed that public officials' access to information makes them credible. Hansen (1991, p. 475), for example, posits that officials "are favored by reporters because they provide regular, credible (to reporters) information." If, as Hansen assumes, journalists believe officials have – or should have – access to information of interest to the public, then, logically, when officials speak, the press will listen. "It is thus easy to see why they must cite the executive in his office, the chief of police, the hospital administrator, the cabinet minister, the professor, and the chief justice. These are people who are recognized socially to be in a position to know" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989, p. 14).

Having access to information, though, is not necessarily the same thing as having expertise on a topic. Expertise could be important to a source's credibility because it presumably reflects the depth of knowledge a source has on a topic. An expert should be expected to truly know what he or she is talking about, but is this the case? Although some studies indicate journalists seek out experts on a topic, the sources reporters presume to be experts may have impressive credentials but not know a great deal about a particular topic. For example, scientists who were often quoted in stories about marijuana use and its effects had typically not published any studies on marijuana but were usually prominent figures in a related area of research (Shepherd & Goode, 1977, p. 484;

Shepherd, 1981, p. 135). These experts – the most often-cited of whom are called “dial-a-quotes” – may be attractive sources because of their accessibility and willingness to go on record on a wide range of topics (Cohen, 2005, p. 56). Studies of crime news do not appear to address source expertise, but academic sources knowledgeable about criminal justice and law enforcement or court officials not affiliated with a specific case may function as experts in this study.

High-credibility sources

Largely ignored by media scholars is how high- and low-credibility sources are portrayed in the news. An exception is Yoon (2005), who asked reporters to rate the relative credibility of different sources in science news. The most credible sources, respectively, were researchers for not-for-profit research institutes, university sources and professional association sources. Government, interest group and business sources were rated as having low credibility. Yoon performed a content analysis to see how the sources rated as having the highest credibility were portrayed and discovered that the high-credibility sources were not quoted more often or positioned more prominently within the stories (pp. 290-291). However, the organizations with which high-credibility sources were affiliated seemed to receive more positive coverage than low-credibility sources (pp. 290-291). Limiting Yoon’s results somewhat is that the journalists who rated the credibility of the sources were not necessarily the ones whose stories Yoon analyzed. Survey questionnaires were sent to all health, medical and science reporters at U.S. daily newspapers (and selected magazines) with a circulation of more than 50,000. The content

analysis studied the coverage of the publications whose journalists were surveyed, but not all the stories coded were written by the reporters surveyed.

Low-credibility sources

As was the case with high-credibility sources, credibility appears to have minimal bearing on how often or how prominently a presumed low-credibility source is quoted. For example, Shoemaker (1984, p. 71) found that deviant political groups were portrayed more negatively, but not positioned less prominently, than more legitimate political groups. In an earlier study, Shoemaker (1983, p. 27) found that the negative portrayal of low-credibility sources extended to statements without attribution. In the Dennehy murder case, defense attorneys, the suspect and the suspect's family and friends seem the most likely sources to be viewed as low-credibility sources by journalists.

This study will examine the role of credibility in newspaper coverage of crime news – in this case, a non-routine murder. The Patrick Dennehy murder case was chosen because of the high amount of coverage it attracted. *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* investigative reporter Danny Robbins, who broke several stories in the Dennehy case, called the murder “a very compelling story. When you combine murder and a cover-up, you pretty much touch them all. It had a lot interesting elements (personal interview, May 3, 2007).” Researching source credibility from the perspective of journalists is important because it is they who must ultimately decide which sources to cite in a story, but in few sourcing studies have reporters been asked how they decide. If most crime news is indeed covered as routine news with a heavy reliance on law enforcement sources (Graber, 1980; Simon & Hayes, 2004; and Schlesinger et al., 1991), why do journalists say they quote

certain sources so often, and by what methods do they say they gather sources? The channels through which journalists gather information and who they decide to quote have potentially important ramifications for how thorough and accurate of a picture readers receive of a high-profile crime.

CHAPTER 3

Research Questions

Using the Dennehy case as an example, this study is designed to answer the following questions and test the following hypotheses about non-routine murder cases.

RQ1: What type of source will journalists quote most often? How often how will other types of sources be quoted? How does this vary by newspaper?

RQ2: Is the most-often quoted type of source also quoted the most prominently? How prominently quoted are other sources, and does prominence of types of sources vary by newspaper?

RQ3: Does source selection vary depending on a newspaper's level of prestige or proximity to the events?

RQ4: Does source selection vary over time from the beginning of the coverage period to the end?

H1: Law enforcement officials will be the most quoted type of source.

H2: The local paper, the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, will have a greater range of sources than *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

H3: The three Texas newspapers will have a greater range of sources than the elite *New York Times*.

RQ5: How do journalists define source credibility?

RQ6: How do journalists believe source credibility compares to other factors in source selection?

Method

This study examines coverage of the Dennehy case in *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, the *Waco Tribune-Herald* and *The New York Times*. The newspapers were classified by proximity and prestige. Proximity refers to whether a newspaper is local, regional or national, and prestige refers to whether it is elite. *The Waco Tribune-Herald*, which has a Monday-Friday circulation of roughly 39,000 and is read by an estimated 100,000 adults in McLennan County, is the lone daily newspaper in the central Texas city where the murder occurred (*Waco Tribune-Herald*, n.d.). The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, which reports a Monday-Friday circulation of roughly 220,000, covers the north central Texas region and is sold in news racks as far south as Waco and Austin (Dedman & Doig, 2005; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, n.d.). *The Dallas Morning News*, which has a Monday-Friday circulation of nearly 405,000, also covers the north central Texas area and has paid subscribers in communities near Waco (*Dallas Morning News*, 2006). *The New York Times*, which boasts a weekday circulation of greater than one million, is an elite newspaper distributed daily to major markets across the United States (“Times expands,” 1996; Seelye, 2006).

The content analysis comprises a sample of stories ($n = 200$) about the Patrick Dennehy case in the four newspapers from June 20, 2003, the day after Dennehy’s family reported him missing, to June 16, 2005, the day after Carlton Dotson was sentenced to 35 years in prison for the murder of Dennehy. Stories containing the search terms “Baylor” and “Dennehy” or “Dotson” in full text were examined. Editorials, stories labeled as commentaries, news summaries and sports game coverage were disregarded. Features, news stories, news briefs and analysis stories were included. In the case of repeated

stories, only the first version found in the search was used. *The New York Times* articles were found in Lexis-Nexis. The articles for the other three newspapers were found in the America's Newspapers database.

A sample of 50 stories was selected from each newspaper. The stories were pulled from a population ranging from 51 stories in *The New York Times* to 201 stories in *The Dallas Morning News*. Every fourth story was used in studying the *Morning News*. For the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (n=179) and the *Waco Tribune-Herald* (n=193), every fourth story was selected and then additional stories were chosen at random to reach a sample size of 50 stories. All but one story from *The New York Times*, which covered the Dennehy case in 51 stories, was used for this analysis. Stories were coded for eight types of sources: 1) law, 2) suspect, 3) victim, 4) Baylor, 5) NCAA, 6) expert, 7) media and 8) other/none. A pre-test of 10 stories in the *Washington Post* and the *Houston Chronicle* indicated the categories were clearly defined and that no categories central to the coverage were overlooked. Stories were coded for the number of paragraphs in which a type source was cited through a direct or indirect quote. (See the full coding protocol in Appendix A.) After the initial coding was completed, the author retested a 10 percent sample of stories. The level of agreement across all variables exceeded 88 percent. The level of agreement for six of the eight source categories was 80 percent or greater, including a 100 percent level of agreement for expert sources. The level of agreement for media sources was 75 percent. The level of agreement for other/none paragraphs was 70 percent.

Sourcing was also coded for prominence, which was defined as whether a type source appeared in the first half of a story. The stories were also categorized by whether

they happened during or after summer 2003. Summer 2003 was chosen as a dividing line because more than half the stories in the population – and within the sample – were written from late June to the end of August, the period during which Dennehy’s body was found, his killer arrested, and his college coach, Dave Bliss, forced resign. After summer 2003, Dennehy’s killer, Carlton Dotson, confessed to the shooting and was sentenced; the Baylor basketball program was investigated by the NCAA for rules violations; and the president of the university, Robert Sloan, resigned. (See Appendix B for a timeline of key events in the case.)

Testing significance

Statistical tests were performed to test for significant differences among the use of sources by type and newspaper. An analysis of variance was performed to test the differences among newspapers in the mean percentage of paragraphs citing the seven types of sources. A chi-square was performed to test for significant differences in the prominence of types of sources – a categorical variable, yes or no – among newspapers. T-tests were performed to test differences in source use between prestige and non-prestige newspapers (also Texas and non-Texas newspapers) and between two different time periods. The tests of statistical significance are based on an alpha level of .05.

Qualitative data

In addition to the content analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted with three journalists who covered the Dennehy murder case: investigative reporter Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, courts reporter Tommy Witherspoon of the *Waco*

Tribune-Herald and sports reporter Pete Thamel of *The New York Times*. Letters were mailed and e-mails sent to 13 other reporters who covered the Dennehy case for one of the newspapers included in the study, but the journalists, who had the option of keeping their names confidential, did not respond to the interview requests. The questions asked of the interview subjects began with, but were not limited to, questions from an interview questionnaire developed before the interviews. Reporters were asked if they quote certain types of sources most often on their beats, how they define credibility and how important credibility is compared with other possible influences on source selection. (See Appendix C for the complete list of interview questions.)

CHAPTER 4

Results

The four newspapers covered the Dennehy murder case differently in terms of the amount of coverage. *The Dallas Morning News* had the most stories – 201 – followed by 193 stories in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* and 179 in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. All but one story from *The New York Times*, which covered the Dennehy case in 51 stories, was used for this analysis. The Waco newspaper's stories averaged about 795 words, compared with averages of 787 and 738 words in the Fort Worth and the Dallas newspapers, respectively. The stories were much shorter in *The New York Times*, where the average length was a little more than 414 words.

The section of the newspaper where the stories ran also differed considerably among newspapers. Within the *Times*' sample, all 50 stories appeared in the sports section. As for the three Texas newspapers, most of the stories in the samples of those newspapers appeared in the A section or in the metro section. Only nine stories in *The Dallas Morning News* sample appeared in sports, compared with 10 stories in the *Tribune-Herald* and 15 in the *Star-Telegram* samples. *The Dallas Morning News* sample also had the most page 1-A stories – 13 – and the next closest was the *Star-Telegram* with nine.

RQ1: What type of source will journalists quote most often? How often how will other types of sources be quoted? How does this vary by newspaper?

Baylor sources, which were found in 38.2 percent of paragraphs with clear sources, were by far the most-often cited type source overall and in each of the four

newspapers – ranging from 46.5 percent of paragraphs in *The Dallas Morning News* to 33.3 percent of paragraphs in *The New York Times* (See Table 1). Among the Baylor sources reporters quoted frequently – especially in the early months of the case – were the basketball team’s players and coaches, including head coach Dave Bliss. Bliss, who typically addressed the media in news conferences, was quoted in 16 paragraphs in a July 11, 2003, story in *The Dallas Morning News*, in which he asserted that Waco police believed “that there’s no basketball player with our program that is considered a suspect, and I believe that. No one on our roster is a suspect (Whitmire, 2003).” However, in the same story, a Waco police spokesperson is quoted as refuting Bliss’ statement, countering that the department had classified several players as “people of interest (Whitmire, 2003).”

Overall in the four newspapers, Waco police and other law sources, including FBI agents, McLennan County sheriff’s officers and Texas and Maryland court officials, comprised the second most-often cited type source (20.5 percent of paragraphs), followed by victim (16.5 percent) and suspect sources (12.3 percent). Media (7.2 percent), expert (3.2 percent) and NCAA sources (2.1) were used the least often.

An analysis of variance indicated statistically significant differences among the newspapers’ use of media sources ($F= 4.04, p= 0.0083$). Differences among newspapers for the other types of sources were not statistically significant. Media sources ranged from 16.7 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in *The New York Times* to 2.6 percent of paragraphs in *The Dallas Morning News*. A Tukey’s post-hoc analysis showed the statistically significant differences existed between the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, which

used media sources in 3.1 percent of paragraphs, and *The New York Times* ($p= 0.01040$) and between the *Times* and *The Dallas Morning News* ($p= 0.01293$).

The New York Times relied on media sources in 17 stories, in this sample, including nine paragraphs in a July 22, 2003, story that cites both an Associated Press account of murder suspect Carlton Dotson's arrest in Maryland and an interview in *The Dallas Morning News* with Waco police Sgt. Ryan Holt about Dotson's arrest (Bernstein, 2003). By contrast, in this sample, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *The Dallas Morning News* seldom used other media accounts, quoting media sources in six stories each. For example the *Star-Telegram* cited a report from the *Waco Tribune-Herald* in two paragraphs in a July 1, 2003, story after the Waco newspaper obtained a search warrant affidavit stating that an informant told police in Delaware that Dotson had admitted to a family member that he killed Patrick Dennehy (Hanna & Caplan, 2003a).

RQ2: Is the most-often quoted type of source also quoted the most prominently? How prominently quoted are other sources, and does prominence of types of sources vary by newspaper?

The more often a type of source was quoted, the more likely it was to appear prominently in a story (See Table 2). Prominence was measured as whether a type source appeared in the first half of a story, and Baylor sources, the most-often cited, were also the type source for which prominence was found most often: 51.5 percent of stories. In fact, in each newspaper except *The New York Times*, Baylor sources were used prominently in more than half the stories. However, the differences among newspapers in the prominence of Baylor sources are not statistically significant.

Law, victim, suspect and media sources, the second- through fifth-most-often cited sources, follow in the same order in prominence. Law sources appeared prominently in 43.0 percent of stories, followed by victim (22.5 percent), suspect (18.5 percent) and media sources (16.5 percent). Among the rarely used sources, NCAA sources, cited least often, appeared prominently in 4.5 percent of stories, while expert sources, cited more often than NCAA sources, appeared prominently in just 3.5 percent of stories.

A chi square indicated the differences in the prominent use of media sources among the four newspapers were statistically significant ($p= 0.0126$). Media sources were used prominently in roughly a quarter of stories in *The New York Times* and the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. In contrast, media sources appeared prominently in no more than 10 percent of stories in *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. In the *Star-Telegram* and the *Morning News*, which used media sources in fewer stories than the *Times* and *Tribune-Herald*, stories containing a media source tended to use that source prominently. For example, a *Star-Telegram* story citing the Waco newspaper's report about an arrest warrant affidavit used the media report in the second paragraph (Hanna & Caplan, 2003a). The same was true of the *Times* and the *Tribune-Herald*, which also tended to use media sources near the beginning of stories. For example, an Associated Press report was cited in the first half of a *Tribune-Herald* story about law enforcement officials searching a Waco ranch for Dennehy's body (Witherspoon, 2003a).

Differences in the prominence of expert sources approached significance ($p= 0.0563$). Expert sources, which appeared prominently in 7 percent of stories in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, were not used prominently in any stories in *The Dallas Morning News* or *The New York Times*.

RQ3: Does source selection vary depending on a newspaper's level of prestige or proximity to the events?

A t-test indicated a significant difference in the use of media sources was found by prestige level ($t= 2.26$, $p= 0.0275$). In non-elite newspapers (the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *The Dallas Morning News*), media sources accounted for 5.2 percent of paragraphs with clear sources, compared with 16.7 percent of paragraphs at the elite level (*The New York Times*). NCAA sources were another type of source for which a statistically significant difference was found depending on a newspaper's level of prestige ($t= -2.35$, $p= 0.0203$). In non-elite newspapers, NCAA sources were found in 2.5 percent of paragraphs but were absent at the elite level (See Table 3). Given the small use of NCAA sources, whether the difference matters is questionable.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* accounted for most of the NCAA sources used by non-elite newspapers. NCAA sources were cited in about 6 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in the *Star-Telegram* sample, including 28 paragraphs in an Aug. 3, 2003, story about an investigation into rules violations by Baylor head coach Dave Bliss when he was the coach at Southern Methodist University in the 1980s. In the story, an NCAA memo is cited that indicates evidence of rules violations by the basketball program at SMU for which the NCAA declined to punish Bliss. Also cited in the story was NCAA enforcement representative Robert L. Stroup III, who wrote the memo. Stroup is quoted in the story as saying he was told not to pursue his

investigation further because SMU's athletics program had already been punished enough for its "transgressions in football (Robbins, 2003a)."

As with prestige, significant differences were found for the use of media sources by proximity ($F= 6.09$, $p= 0.0028$). At the local newspaper level (the *Waco Tribune-Herald*), media sources were used in 10 percent of paragraphs with clear sources, compared with 2.9 percent of paragraphs in regional newspapers (*The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*). The most usage of media sources came at the national level (*The New York Times*), where media sources accounted for 16.7 percent of paragraphs (See Table 4). A post-hoc analysis showed the significant difference was between national and regional newspapers ($p= 0.00640$) but not between national and local or local and regional.

RQ4: Does source selection vary over time from the beginning of the coverage period to the end?

A t-test indicated statistically significant differences in the use of suspect ($t= -2.52$, $p= 0.0133$), victim ($t= 3.37$, $p= 0.0009$), Baylor ($t= -2.69$, $p= 0.0080$) and media sources ($t= 3.23$, $p= 0.0015$) between time period one – summer 2003 – and time period two – fall 2003 to summer 2005 – for the four newspapers overall.

Suspect sources were found in 7.6 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in the 119 stories from Time 1 and 17 percent of paragraphs in the 81 stories from Time 2 (See Table 5). Although Carlton Dotson, the murder suspect, was arrested during Time 1, most of the legal proceedings, including his extradition hearing and his guilty plea, happened in Time 2. Included in Time 2 is a Nov. 22, 2003, story in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* that

quotes suspect sources in 12 paragraphs. One of those paragraphs cites Dotson's asking a judge to be represented by two Texas court-appointed attorneys rather than two Maryland attorneys his family had hired (Witherspoon, 2003c). Suspect sources were quoted in 15 paragraphs in a Dec. 17, 2003, story in the *Tribune-Herald* in which Dotson's attorneys are quoted questioning why they were not informed that two mental health workers from Waco had examined Dotson at the McLennan County Jail (Witherspoon, 2003d).

As opposed to suspect sources, the use of victim sources decreased from Time 1 to Time 2. Victim sources were quoted in 18.8 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1 and 7.5 percent of paragraphs in Time 2. The search for, discovery of and memorial service for murder victim Patrick Dennehy all occurred during Time 1. For example, Dennehy's family was quoted in 27 paragraphs in a June 29, 2003, *Waco Tribune-Herald* story about the search for the missing Baylor student. In the story, Brian Brabazon, Dennehy's stepfather, accuses Baylor coaches of not taking the family's concerns seriously. "Brabazon said in a phone interview Saturday that when he contacted Baylor's coaches about his stepson's whereabouts, they seemed aloof and brushed off any foul-play theories (Ibanga, 2003)." Valorie Brabazon, Dennehy's mother, and Patrick Dennehy Sr., the athlete's father, did receive coverage during Time 2 for filing separate lawsuits against Baylor over Dennehy's death, but the most coverage those civil cases garnered was a 520-word story in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* on Nov. 7, 2003, that cited victim sources in seven paragraphs (Caplan, 2003b).

As for Baylor sources, their use increased from Time 1 to Time 2. Baylor sources, which included coaches, athletes, administrators, board of regents trustees and faculty, were quoted in 33.1 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1 but 50 percent of

paragraphs with clear sources in Time 2. Although Baylor sources were the most-often cited in Time 1 – law sources were second at 24.9 percent of paragraphs – they became even more of the focus in Time 2. After summer 2003, the search for Patrick Dennehy was over, and the focus had shifted instead to the rules violations committed by the men’s basketball program at Baylor and the administrative turmoil the scandal precipitated. For example, a Sept. 6, 2003, story in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* about Baylor President Robert Sloan receiving a no-confidence vote from the Baylor Faculty Senate cited Baylor sources in 11 paragraphs (Gaar, 2003). Baylor sources were quoted in 12 paragraphs in a Feb. 27, 2004, story in *The New York Times* in which Sloan revealed the results of an internal investigation into the basketball program’s alleged infractions – including the revelation that Bliss solicited payments from two university regents to make payments to players – and announced self-imposed scholarship reductions. “The university is embarrassed,” Sloan is quoted as saying in the story. “There were red flags that should have been noticed (“Report says,” 2004).”

In the case of media sources, they were used significantly more often in Time 1 than in Time 2. Media sources were cited in 11.9 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1, but dropped to 3.2 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 2. Media sources, it appears, were primarily cited in Time 1 when newspapers were scrambling to find out the latest details of the search for Dennehy and for his killer. If another newspaper beats you to a scoop, the *Waco Tribune-Herald’s* Tommy Witherspoon said, you still have to get that information in your newspaper. “We don’t like to [cite other media reports], but we have and we will. I’m willing to do that. And if you get beat, you

get beat. Obviously, you can't steal it. You have to attribute it (personal interview, April 2, 2007).”

Media sources proved especially important in *The New York Times*' coverage in summer 2003. The *Times* cited a report in *The Dallas Morning News* in the lead of a July 31, 2003, story. In the story, the *Times* cited an interview in the *Morning News* with Carlton Dotson, Dennehy's killer, in which he claimed to have shot his former Baylor teammate in self-defense (“Dennehy roommate,” 2003). The *Times* used media sources in 20.5 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1, but in only 4.8 percent of paragraphs in Time 2, a difference that was statistically significant ($t= 2.48$, $p= 0.0170$).

In the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, statistically significant differences between time periods were found for suspect sources ($t= -2.08$, $p= 0.0475$) and victim sources ($t= 3.10$, $p= 0.0044$). Differences in the average number of types of sources between Time 1 and Time 2 ($t= 2.35$, $p= 0.0234$) were also statistically significant, but the percentages are virtually the same – about 3 types of sources on average. Suspect sources were cited in 24 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 2, but in only 7.3 percent of paragraphs in Time 1. On the other hand, victim sources comprised 19.9 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1, but a scant 1.9 percent of paragraphs in Time 2.

In the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, only the use of media sources was significantly different from Time 1 to Time 2 ($t= 2.08$, $p= 0.0468$). Media sources comprised 6.5 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1, but were not used in any stories from Time 2. In Time 1, media sources were used in six paragraphs in a July 4, 2003, story in the *Star-Telegram*. The Associated Press report cited in the story quotes a friend of

Dennehy and Dotson's who said a Baylor teammate had threatened the basketball players at gunpoint (Hanna, 2003a).

In *The Dallas Morning News*, two types of sources – victim and Baylor sources – were used significantly differently in Time 1 compared with Time 2. Victim sources were cited in 23.3 percent of paragraphs with clear sources in Time 1, but only 4.8 percent of paragraphs in Time 2 ($t= 2.68, p= 0.0109$). Baylor sources increased from 36.9 percent of paragraphs in Time 1 to 64.3 percent of paragraphs in Time 2 ($t= -2.28, p= 0.0272$).

H1: Law enforcement officials will be the most quoted type of source.

Contrary to expectations, Baylor sources, not law sources, were the most-often cited type source overall and in each newspaper's sample. Law sources were the second most-often cited type source overall and in each newspaper. H1 is not supported.

H2: The local newspaper, the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, will have a greater range of sources than *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

The Waco Tribune-Herald averaged 3.1 types of sources per story, compared with an average of 2.9 types of sources in *The Dallas Morning News* and 3.2 types of sources in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. The differences in the range of sources were not statistically significant. H2 is not supported.

H3: The three Texas newspapers will have a greater range of sources than the elite *New York Times*.

The New York Times averaged 2.9 types of sources per story, fewer than the *Waco Tribune-Herald* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* but the same as *The Dallas Morning News*. An analysis of various indicates the differences among newspapers in the range of sources were not statistically significant. H3 is not supported.

RQ5: How do journalists define source credibility?

The reporters offered similar definitions of source credibility. For Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Tommy Witherspoon of the *Waco Tribune-Herald* and Pete Thamel of *The New York Times*, credibility refers to the trustworthiness of a source.

Robbins, who has worked more than 20 years as an investigative reporter, said he gauges a source's trustworthiness based on his prior experience with that source. A credible source, then, is one who Robbins said he believes "has proven to be trustworthy (personal interview, May 3, 2007)." When covering the Dennehy situation, Robbins said, he called on several sources with whom he had dealt in the past and whom he trusted. Those sources helped Robbins break several stories. One of those sources was Baylor assistant basketball coach Abar Rouse, who was hired by Baylor head basketball coach Dave Bliss on June 1, 2003, less than three weeks before Dennehy was reported missing. Several years earlier, Robbins had used Rouse as a source when he was investigating the athletic program at Ranger College, a two-year junior college in West Texas. Robbins said that Rouse, who was then an assistant at Ranger, had given Robbins accurate and insightful information for that story. When Robbins was assigned to the Dennehy story, he sought out Rouse, who he had last heard was a coach at McLennan College in Waco. "I started talking to [Rouse] throughout the whole thing," Robbins said. "He really didn't

know much. We kind of talked, and he filled in some gaps (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

On the night Bliss resigned, Robbins said, Rouse and his attorney told Robbins about some tapes Rouse had secretly recorded of Bliss. In the tapes, Bliss is heard asking coaches and players to lie about rules infractions, including improper payments made to Dennehy. “It was just a fluke that I knew him from before (personal interview, May 3, 2007),” Robbins said. But it was Robbins who believed Rouse was a credible source to pursue. “As coaches go, he’s not really questionable,” Robbins said. “I can see him doing what he did because he’s the kind of guy who has a conscience and he’s a young guy. Compared to some of these other guys, he’s not a hardened do-whatever-I-need-to guy (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

During the Baylor scandal, Robbins also received important information from a trusted source he had first used on a story 20 years earlier. A retired NCAA investigator provided Robbins with a memo detailing rules violations committed by Bliss when he was the head basketball coach at Southern Methodist University in Dallas in the 1980s. Robbins had met the source when he covered a football scandal at SMU in the mid-1980s for the *Dallas Times Herald*. The memo led Robbins to NCAA officials who had investigated SMU’s basketball program (Robbins, 2003a; personal interview, May 3, 2007). Through the sources, Robbins learned of previously unreported allegations that at least one prominent athlete on Bliss’ SMU team had reported receiving illegal payments from Dallas-area boosters (Robbins & Caplan, 2004).

Witherspoon, a courts reporter at the *Waco Tribune-Herald* for 25 years, said he considers credible sources those with access to important information whom he knows to

be reliable from past interactions. “On the [Dennehy case], I had the lead investigator’s cell phone number, and I was calling him up pretty much every day,” Witherspoon said. “I knew the guy. I had known him and worked with him for many years on other big cases. ... He was helpful as much as he could be (personal interview, April 2, 2007).”

Witherspoon said he relied on his trusted law enforcement sources to find out information other newspapers were not getting. He said a story came out in *The Dallas Morning News* detailing that police had found a gun outside the apartment of Harvey Thomas, a teammate of Dennehy and Dotson. The gun was reportedly a 9 mm pistol, the same kind of gun Dotson and Dennehy had been seen using for target practice in a rural field outside of Waco (Hancock 2003a). However, Witherspoon said he heard from an unnamed law enforcement source – a source he still declines to name – that the gun outside Thomas’ residence was not a 9 mm pistol. Witherspoon said he believes his story in the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, in which two unnamed sources are cited saying the gun does not appear to have been involved in the shooting of Dennehy, helped steer media attention away from a red-herring, Thomas, whom police ultimately never connected with the crime (Culp, Witherspoon & Ibanga, 2003). “It was a different kind of pistol, which you know was pretty pertinent to the case. [Other reporters] got it wrong (Witherspoon, personal interview, April 2, 2007).”

Witherspoon said he believes having local sources he trusted gave him an advantage over out-of-town media in covering the Dennehy case and, in 1993, the standoff at Mount Carmel between the Branch Davidians and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents. “When that Branch Davidian stuff happened, there was so

much wrong that we knew that the national media was printing. It was the same way with this Dotson thing (personal interview, April 2, 2007).”

Thamel, who has been a sportswriter for 10 years, was a freelance reporter for *The New York Times* based out of Coppell, Texas, near Dallas, when the newspaper called on him to cover the Dennehy murder. Thamel, who said he had a few “random connections” at Baylor and in the Waco area, said he could not rely heavily on sources he knew previously. Trustworthiness, then, was something he had to evaluate as he cultivated a source in the Dennehy case. “Every source you use in any story you have to gauge their trust,” Thamel said. “But you basically just call everybody you know and everybody you think might be a good source and go from there (phone interview, May 25, 2007).”

RQ6: How do journalists believe source credibility compares to other factors in source selection?

The three journalists indicated that competition and deadline pressure might exert a greater influence on source selection than credibility. Pete Thamel of *The New York Times* said he considered potential sources’ credibility when choosing whom to quote in the Dennehy case. However, he suggested that time pressure and a source’s accessibility were his primary concerns. “At 6 o’clock you sit down and say, ‘What did I get today?’” Thamel said. “And at 11 o’clock you’re just hitting refresh [on your Internet browser] saying, ‘I hope nobody else got anything (phone interview, May 25, 2007).’ ”

Witherspoon also mentioned the “time crunch” as a pressure influencing source selection (personal interview, April 2, 2007).

Competition with *The Dallas Morning News* and other media outlets was what Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* emphasized as playing a key role in influencing source selection. “You have to realize on a story like that, you’re just grasping at anything,” Robbins said. “You know somebody who lives by Baylor, you might call him because that was a real media gangbang. CNN’s down there, Greta Van Susteren and all that crap. You’re just trying to do your job and do it right, but you’re also ... sort of scatter shooting. ... I would’ve called anybody I knew in Waco who had anything to do with basketball (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

Because of competition, Robbins said, some sources he did not consider credible were quoted in other reporters’ news stories about the Dennehy case. And sometimes reporters included information that was not verified or even attributed – rumors – in the name of getting a scoop, he said. In his pursuit of scoops, Robbins said, he did not use a source without considering his or her credibility. “You have to check him or her out, as well as the information. If they prove to be kind of flaky, that has to factor into it. If they prove to be on the level – what they’re telling you is checking out – then you go with it (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

As a Waco-based reporter, Witherspoon said he had to contend with the negative pressures outside media exerted on the law enforcement and court sources he routinely used on his beat. “When the national media comes to town, [it] ups the pressure on the local people. And it ups the pressure on the journalists because there’s more competition,” Witherspoon said. “One thing that’s really been disappointing when the national media comes to town is just really how messy they are, how sloppy they are and how they’ll do anything to get a story (personal interview, April 2, 2007).” For example,

Witherspoon criticized *The Dallas Morning News* for sending intern Shani George to a Maryland jail to interview Carlton Dotson. Grady Irvin Jr., one of Dotson's attorneys, accused George of misrepresenting herself as a church member to gain access to Dotson, a charge the newspaper denied (Hancock, 2003b). Witherspoon speculates that journalists who engage in ethically questionable practices may not value credibility – their sources' or their own – very highly. "Come on, we don't do that. That's what the competition does to these other people," Witherspoon said. "I don't know why (personal interview, April 2, 2007)."

Competition also exerted a positive pressure on reporters' source selection, Robbins said. Instead of rushing to get a story, he said, he worked harder to get credible sources other reporters did not have. Acting on a tip that Dotson had been seen driving around Sulphur Springs, Texas, in Dennehy's sport-utility vehicle a short time after Dennehy was last seen alive, Robbins traveled to the northeastern Texas city and met with Sulphur Springs Police Chief Jim Bayuk, the stepfather of Dotson's estranged wife, Melissa Kethley. Bayuk, whose stepdaughter had been visited by Dotson on that trip, privately acknowledged Dotson's visit but declined to be quoted as a named or unnamed source, Robbins said. Robbins said he was prepared to head back home without a story but received a tip during his trip that a friend of Kethley's had seen Dotson driving Dennehy's vehicle. Robbins found the friend, who in turn referred him to another acquaintance of Dotson's. Having found multiple sources to corroborate the Dotson sighting, Robbins said he was prepared to run with the story. He decided to call Bayuk again and ask him if he would reconsider and told Bayuk a story would run with or without Bayuk as a source. At that point, Robbins said, Bayuk changed his mind and

allowed Robbins to quote him (personal interview, May 3, 2007; Robbins & Hanna, 2003).

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Even in coverage of a non-routine murder, reporters relied heavily on official sources, especially Baylor University and law enforcement officials. However, this study of four newspapers' coverage of the Patrick Dennehy murder case does not simply confirm the findings of previous research on source dependency. This study advances previous research by offering explanations in the reporters' own words for what could limit their ability to break their routine sourcing patterns. Moreover, the data from the interviews and content analysis provide evidence that reporters are not merely passive receptacles for officials' quotes. Subtle differences among newspapers' coverage, along with anecdotal evidence from reporters, reveal the potential for reporters to go beyond newsgathering routines and the official sources on which they seem so often to depend.

Among the newspapers studied, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* seemed to place the most emphasis on pursuing non-routine sources. The *Star-Telegram* had roughly the same percentage of Baylor sources and law sources as the other newspapers, but had the highest percentage of NCAA sources, which in this case appeared to be primarily non-routine. *Star-Telegram* investigative reporter Danny Robbins uncovered NCAA documents revealing Baylor basketball coach Dave Bliss' history of rules infractions at prior coaching jobs. "I wish [the information] had come out earlier," Robbins said, "because then somebody might not be dead (personal interview, May 3, 2007)." A glaring weakness in some newspapers' coverage of the Dennehy case was their inability to balance the need to report routine, deadline-sensitive news with the opportunity to cover an ongoing story or issue in greater depth, Robbins said. "The investigative team,

we do things over the long term more often than not, so we don't have some of the deadline pressure. But we have to be able to adjust on the fly to do that kind of work when it happens. Papers should be able to do both, and reporters should be able to do both (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

Not surprisingly, the newspapers that engaged in the most enterprising coverage, *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, are also the ones that probed most deeply into the broader concerns the Dennehy case raises. What does the murder signify about Baylor University's leadership? What responsibilities should the coaches and university leaders have for the safety and mental health of their athletes? Is coach Dave Bliss' conduct an indication of a widespread problem of college coaches misbehaving or abusing their authority? Such general questions were scarcely considered in *The New York Times*, which mainly chronicled the daily occurrences in the case – Dotson's arraignment, his extradition hearing and Bliss' resignation news conference.

Media sources

The largest of the four newspapers and also the one farthest from Waco, Texas, *The New York Times*, cited other media reports significantly more frequently than the other newspapers. The *Times*' heavy use of media sources most likely resulted from the lack of reporters and other resources the newspaper devoted to the Dennehy case. Of the 50 stories examined, 27, or 54 percent, had Associated Press bylines. At the other end of the spectrum, in this sample, *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* only had three stories each with AP or other wire service bylines, with the rest written by staff reporters. Six wire-service stories were included in the *Waco Tribune-*

Herald sample. For *Times* sportswriter Pete Thamel, who said he was often the only reporter from the newspaper in Waco covering the story, citing media sources was a last resort to keep up with the developments being reported by newspapers and media outlets with more staffers covering the case. “[*The Dallas Morning News*] had 10 people there, and they all had sources, so I was going to get beaten on some things (phone interview, May 25, 2007).”

Why did the *Times* pay less attention to the Dennehy case than other newspapers? What most noticeably sets the New York newspaper’s coverage apart are also the qualities that make it an elite paper, the implicit news values of its editors and what they perceive are the values of its readers. The Dennehy case, a sports story that played out in the courts of law rather than on the basketball court, did not stack up to the international events and national political matters the *Times* emphasized in its coverage during that time period. For example, on August 9, 2003, the day after Baylor University head basketball coach Dave Bliss resigned, stories on the front page of the *Times* dealt with such issues as U.S. intelligence officials’ findings that two mysterious trailers discovered in Iraq were being used to produce hydrogen for weather balloons, not biological weapons, and such events as a meeting of Anglican church leaders over the controversy surrounding the appointment of a gay bishop. Readers would have found the story about Bliss by turning to the front cover of Section D, the sports section. On the contrary, that the murder of a basketball player in Texas would merit *any* coverage by the *Times* suggests how unusual the Dennehy case was.

Baylor sources

Previous studies of crime news, such as Schlesinger et al. (1991), identified police officers and judges as the most-often quoted sources. However, this study found that newspaper coverage of the Dennehy murder case was not dominated by law sources. Instead, Baylor University sources, including administrators, board of regents trustees, coaches, athletes and faculty, were quoted more frequently. That Baylor sources were cited in 38.2 percent of paragraphs with clear sources does not seem to reflect a departure in how journalists cover a crime – law officials were, after all, the second most-often quoted type source – as much as it seems to be a byproduct of the unusual circumstances of the Dennehy case. It involved a murder and a scandal with the university at the center of both.

Likely contributing to the newspapers' reliance on Baylor sources was the access reporters were granted to President Robert Sloan, board of regents Chairman Drayton McLane and other administrative and athletics officials. Almost daily, Waco police officials held a news conference or provided reporters with a news release, but their statements often did not provide much new information on the Dennehy case, according to courts reporter Tommy Witherspoon of the *Waco Tribune-Herald*. "Give us something new," Witherspoon said. "Don't hold a press conference every day and say, 'I can't answer that. I can't answer that. I can't answer that.'" It was just ridiculous at that point (personal interview, April 2, 2007)." In one article, Witherspoon wrote: "Most of [Waco Police spokesman Steve] Anderson's media e-mails, including the one on Wednesday, begin, 'Investigation continues, but no new information to report on (Witherspoon, 2003b).'"

Instead of law enforcement officials, reporters appear to have turned to Baylor's frequent press briefings for potential answers, and for responses to accusations by Dennehy's family and others that Baylor coaches were responsible for negligence or wrongdoing in Dennehy's disappearance. A June 29, 2003, story in the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, for example, noted that the prior day's press conference was Baylor's third on the whereabouts of Dennehy. Bliss' comments from the news conference are cited in four paragraphs, including a comment by the coach speculating that Dennehy might still be alive. In the same story, university spokesman Scott Stricklin is quoted refuting a complaint by Dennehy's mother that the coaches did not show proper concern for the well-being of her son before and after his disappearance (Ibanga, 2003).

Source credibility

How did credibility affect coverage of the Dennehy case? The study provides only a limited answer to this question. The three reporters were not asked to rate the relative credibility of the types of sources identified in the content analysis. It might have been beneficial to ask reporters to rate the credibility of certain individuals, such as Baylor head basketball coach Dave Bliss, and to assess whether their perceptions of his and other individuals' credibility changed over time. Whether reporters would be able to give candid or objective assessments of their own thought processes is another question.

Still, the interviews do offer valuable insights into how important – or not so important – source credibility is to some reporters who covered the case. The findings raise doubts as to whether credibility is particularly high on the list of considerations journalists made when deciding which types of sources to quote. Rather than making a

conscious assessment of sources' credibility, reporters covering the Dennehy case seem to have largely left it to readers to figure out which sources are telling the truth.

Sportswriter Pete Thamel of *The New York Times* said that he often wondered whether Baylor University coach Dave Bliss was lying or misleading reporters in his public statements. "I imagine a lot of that turned out to be nonsense," Thamel said of Bliss' comments. However, Thamel said he did not think Bliss' questionable credibility negatively affected how often Bliss was quoted (phone interview, May 25, 2007).

Along those lines, Tommy Witherspoon of the *Waco Tribune-Herald* said that in covering the Dennehy case and other crime stories, he has quoted defense attorneys and other types of sources that he suspected were not telling the truth. "If you go up to them and say, 'Can I have a quote?' and they say, 'Yeah, I know she looks guilty, but she's not,' you've got to quote them just to get the other side in and be fair to both sides," Witherspoon said. "You may not agree with what they say, but, yeah, I pretty much quote what they say. ... It's a defense lawyer. What do you expect him to say? Just because you know it's not true doesn't mean you don't use it as a quote (personal interview, April 2, 2007)." Witherspoon's example of quoting a source with questionable credibility raises the issue of whether objectivity and balance limit journalists' ability to choose not to quote a low-credibility source or to communicate to the readers that a source may not be trustworthy.

Sometimes reporters failed even to consider a source's credibility, according to Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Robbins said credibility was often an afterthought compared with the need to find sources with new information. "You have to realize on a story like that, you're just grasping at anything," Robbins said. "... I

would've called anybody I knew in Waco who had anything to do with basketball (personal interview, May 3, 2007).”

That is not to say reporters covering the Dennehy case completely ignored source credibility. For example, Witherspoon said he tries to verify information and collect multiple sources' versions of an event to see if their stories are consistent. However, the courts reporter conceded that verifying the truth of a statement or corroborating a source's story sometimes takes a back seat to other concerns. “If it's at all possible, you talk to as many sources who might know something,” Witherspoon said, “or if someone tells me something off the record, I say, ‘Well, do you mind if I try to go verify that someplace else and get it on the record as long as I don't say that came from you?’ You kind of cut deals like that all the time. Obviously, if you can ..., depending on the time crunch you're under, you do try to verify with as many different sources as you can (personal interview, April 2, 2007).”

How often do reporters actually have time to verify all the information they receive? Do they have time to think about credibility while trying to gather the latest story as their competitors do the same? What measurable effect deadline pressure and competition had on source selection is unclear, but the interviews suggest those elements limit reporters' ability to evaluate the credibility of sources.

Time periods

Noticeable differences in source selection occurred between two time periods, summer 2003 and after summer 2003. Suspect sources and Baylor sources were cited significantly more often after the summer, while media sources and victim sources were

cited significantly less often. The changing sourcing patterns can be best explained by shifts in the Dennehy case. During the summer months, reporters were trying to figure out if Dennehy was dead, who might have killed him and where his body might be found. After the summer, Carlton Dotson was in jail awaiting trial for the killing of Dennehy and Baylor was embroiled in a scandal involving NCAA infractions by its basketball program. Reporters' decisions of whom to quote, then, were not independent from the news cycle of the Dennehy case.

The question is, who decided what was *the* story at various points in the Dennehy case? In other words, did reporters simply write up the information that official sources provided, or did they go beyond the routine coverage and delve more deeply into the case? This study suggests reporters often followed the routines, but others provided more non-routine coverage of the Dennehy case. For example, investigative reporter Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* acquired NCAA documents implicating Baylor coach Dave Bliss in a scandal that happened 20 years earlier at Southern Methodist University. That revelation led Robbins to delve further into Bliss' background. He traveled to Albuquerque and met with several former players from the University of New Mexico, where Bliss coached prior to Baylor. The former athletes offered their opinions of Bliss and directed Robbins to meet with Gary Ness, the former New Mexico athletics director. “[Ness] came and visited with us at the hotel, drank coffee and said, ‘If you come back in a few days, I’ll get together all these records on Bliss,’” Robbins said. “He said, ‘This is all information I want to come out (personal interview, May 3, 2007).’”

Limitations

The results of this study are limited in several ways. First, the other/none category muddies the results of the content analysis and should have been split into two categories. The category comprised paragraphs in which no source was cited, as well as paragraphs with explicit sources that did not fit into any of the remaining source categories. Because the category was used for two very different kinds of paragraphs, it was not included in the statistical analysis. That removed a large number of paragraphs from the study. For example, in the five stories containing the most other/none paragraphs, a total of 241 paragraphs were identified as other/none. Of those paragraphs, 52 percent cited clear sources – “others” – and 48 percent cited no sources. All five stories had some paragraphs that quoted no sources and some that quoted “other” sources.

Even if the “other” sources had been included, a “relevant content characteristic” could have been overlooked (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 161). Baylor University students and Waco residents are among the sources grouped into the other/none category. One story with a high number of “other” paragraphs focused on a Waco insurance company owner who formed an organization called Friends of Baylor, which held rallies and published newspaper advertisements supporting embattled university President Robert Sloan (Copeland, 2003). The insurance company owner was an important source because he represented a regular member of the public. Although members of the general public did not have a direct role in the Dennehy case, their reaction to the case deserved to be heard. After all, as government entities, law enforcement departments and the court system are supposed to serve in the public’s interest, and Baylor had to work to restore the trust of the public after the murder and scandal came to light.

Another limitation of the sourcing categories was the dilemma of determining how to code statements from sources embedded in the media sources. For example, if *The Dallas Morning News* is cited in an article in *The New York Times* and that media report quotes Baylor President Robert Sloan, should the paragraph be coded as citing a media source, or should it be coded as citing a media source and a Baylor source? In this study, such a paragraph was coded as citing a media source but not a Baylor source. Because one of the primary objectives was to determine how often various type of sources were heard from, this coding choice might have resulted in undercounting how often some types of sources, including Baylor sources, were represented in the four newspapers' coverage.

Additionally, prominence could have been measured more effectively. It was defined in the study as whether a source was cited in the first half of a story. This can be misleading. A source could be quoted in the first half of a longer story without being featured particularly high up in the story. A better option would have been to code prominence based on whether a story appeared in the first paragraph or first few paragraphs of a story. This is an important distinction because readers might not scan more than the first few paragraphs of a story, particularly one that jumps to another page. If a law source and a suspect source were each quoted in a story, then, prominence could determine if one or both sources' quotes actually get read.

Future Research

Future research should study framing – which Entman (2004, p. 5) defines as “selecting or highlighting some facets of events or issues” – in the Dennehy case. To

what extent did newspapers frame the case as a murder as opposed to a college athletics scandal? How does source selection differ based on how the story is framed? Stories framed as sports seem more likely to cite coaches, athletes and NCAA sources than stories framed as crimes. Conversely, stories framed as crimes seem more likely to cite law enforcement officials, suspects and the families of victims than stories framed as sports. Differences in framing might account for significant changes in source selection between Time 1 (summer 2003) and Time 2 (after summer 2003). A university, a murder, a quiet community and a troubled sports program intertwined to create a compelling story, but just how newsworthy the event was to a particular newspaper might have depended upon which aspects of the case the publications editors and reporters chose to emphasize.

Future studies might also want to focus on the role of media sources in crime news and how staff size and the use of wire services affect the citing of other media reports. In particular, studies of highly publicized crimes should address reporters' attitudes toward citing other media reports within their stories and whether the practice is discouraged. Is it considered lazy or bad journalism to use media reports, or is it an accepted reality that, with 24-hour-a-day news coverage available on the Internet and cable television, sometimes a reporter must use other media reports to keep up with the Joneses? Furthermore, studies might want to examine whether the reporters at newspapers devoting fewer resources to an event or issue find it more difficult to provide in-depth, non-routine coverage.

More generally, future studies of source credibility could also survey journalists about the relative credibility of certain types of sources. Researchers could compare those

credibility rankings with a content analysis of those reporters' prior coverage of an event or issue. This could provide a clearer picture of how journalists use high- and low-credibility sources.

There is also value in asking other journalists to explain the rationale behind why they select the sources they do and why they rate certain sources as high- or low-credibility sources. What do reporters feel are their main considerations when selecting sources, and where does credibility rank? This study begins to answer these questions, but three reporters cannot speak for all journalists who covered the Dennehy case and other high-profile crime stories. Interviewing a larger number of journalists might offer substantially different results or confirm these findings. Either way, it is important to continue to study source credibility. If credibility is not important to reporters, then readers might be receiving a less-than-accurate picture of a newsworthy event or issue. This could particularly be a problem if reporters are simply regurgitating the words of a questionable source, such as Baylor head basketball coach Dave Bliss, who was recorded on an audio tape instructing players to mislead investigators. If reporters do not evaluate who is telling the truth, how can they expect readers to figure it out?

The Dennehy case is also worth examining further. The case was treated as something of sports-section crime story, especially by *The New York Times*. Not surprisingly, some of the journalists assigned to the case were sports reporters, such as Pete Thamel of *The New York Times* and Jeff Caplan of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. How did sportswriters handle the unexpected role of covering crime news? How did coverage by news reporters and sports reporters differ in terms of sourcing and other factors? Do significant differences exist between stories on the Dennehy case that

appeared in the sports sections of newspapers and those that ran either on the front page of the newspaper or in its news section?

In other words, how much does who covers the story affect how the story is covered? It is worth examining the roles played by investigative reporters such as Danny Robbins in covering the Dennehy case. If a newspaper does not have an investigative team or does not commit its investigative team to the case, how does that hamper the newspaper's ability to provide enterprising coverage? Robbins hinted that, had the Dennehy case occurred today instead of in 2003, his newspaper might not have provided the same quality of coverage. He said he has noticed that the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* has become less willing to allow reporters to travel long distances and that he has concerns that the newspaper is placing less of a premium on quality investigative reporting (personal interview, May 3, 2007). Is this part of an industry-wide trend? If so, it is a disconcerting issue worthy of media scholars' attention.

Conclusion

Scholars have shed light on reporters' tendency to fall into routine coverage in general (see, for example Gans, 1979) and in crime news, in particular (Graber, 1980). The results of this study of the Dennehy murder case, for the most part, reinforce those findings. Officials, especially from Baylor, were quoted far more often than other sources. Perhaps lost in the statistical analysis, though, are the important contributions of those reporters who do not simply wait around for the next news conference to begin. A few enterprising reporters have the potential to reveal important information in an ongoing event or issue that would not have been addressed in a police report or by a

spokesperson at a lectern. For example, had Danny Robbins of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* not acquired secret audio tape recordings of Bliss, the public, including the murdered athlete's family and friends, would most likely never have learned the details of an attempted cover up of NCAA rules violations orchestrated by Bliss.

Officials might have the upper hand in getting quoted, but it is still up to reporters to make sure that what sources say to reporters, and ultimately the public, is the truth. Furthermore, reporters cannot simply rely on officials fully to disclose the details of a crime or a scandal. Not only does the public have the right to know when an official such as Bliss abuses his authority, justice might depend on it. When journalists only report what is offered through routine channels, they risk allowing officials to keep their misconduct hidden from view.

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APPENDIX A

Content Analysis Protocol

Newspaper

DMN=*The Dallas Morning News*

FW= *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

NYT= *The New York Times*

WTH= *Waco Tribune-Herald*

Story Slug

First two or three words in the main headline

Date

Day, month and year in which the story was published

Section

In which the story appeared

Page

In which page of the section the story appeared

Length

Word count of the story (If the item appears in a briefs package, count only the words in that brief)

Byline

Name of the reporter who wrote the story. If no name appears, write none.

Byline type

1= staff writer

2= AP

3= other wire service

0= cannot be determined

Dateline

Write down the city and state in the dateline of the story. If there is no dateline, write none.

Types of sources

For each paragraph of the story, designate the number below that best fits the paragraph. Some paragraphs may have more than one explicit source. In such a case,

code the paragraph as both types of sources. When finished, count the number of paragraphs per type of source and record the number on the coding sheet.

1) Law: Law enforcement or court officials. This includes police, FBI or sheriff's office personnel, including the investigators working on the case, a police spokesperson or an official police report or affidavit and any statements in a police report attributed to other individuals; it also includes the judge presiding over the case, the district attorney, an assistant district attorney, a spokesperson for the judge or district attorney, and any documents released by the prosecution.

2) Baylor: The Baylor University president, a Baylor trustee, the Baylor athletic director or a spokesperson for the president, the trustees or the athletic director. Include statements by the independent committee to investigate wrongdoing at Baylor, the head basketball coach and assistant coaches, except for head coach Scott Drew, who was hired to replace Dave Bliss. Members of the Baylor faculty and athletes on the basketball team except for Dotson count, but not students uninvolved in the case. Also, Baylor supporters/boosters do not count.

3) Victim: A source cited as being a family member of Patrick Dennehy's or as being a friend of Dennehy's. A teammate or roommate would not count in this category. A quote by Dotson also does not count in this category. Attorneys for Dennehy's family in civil cases related to the murder/scandal do not count in this category.

4) Suspect: Suspect Carlton Dotson, a member of the suspect's family or a friend of Dotson's. This category also includes a court-appointed defense attorney for Dotson, an attorney hired by the Dotson or his family, a spokesperson for a defense attorney and

any documents released by the defense attorney. Count only quotes directly spoken to reporters by Dotson, not statements attributed to Dotson that appeared in a police report.

5) Media: Information from another newspaper or media outlet cited within a story. For example, “*The Dallas Morning News* reported that ...” Stories with Associated Press bylines do not count as media sources, but if a paragraph in an AP article cites another story, such as an article in *The New York Times*, that paragraph would count. Also, paragraphs within staff written articles that cite the Associated Press as a source count.

6) NCAA: Official representing the governing body of intercollegiate athletics. Also, a document or report from the NCAA. Sources cited for their past service as an NCAA official or investigator also counts.

7) Expert: A scholar on criminal justice from a university or a police, court or legal official – current or retired – not involved in the case. The expert could also be an expert on athletic scandals.

0) Other/None: Use this category if none others seem to apply. Also use this category for paragraphs with no attribution.

Prominence

For each type of source, place a Y or N in the appropriate space. Choose one of the following for each source, depending on where the paragraph or paragraphs containing the quote or quotes are located.

Y= Quoted in the first half of a story

N= Not quoted in the first half of a story or not quoted at all

If a story has an odd number of paragraphs, consider the middle paragraph to be in the first half of the story. For example, if a story has 13 paragraphs, the first seven paragraphs are the first half and the remaining six are the second half.

APPENDIX B

Timeline of key events in the Dennehy murder case

June 19, 2003: Patrick Dennehy's family reports him missing.

June 23, 2003: According to a search warrant affidavit, an informant told police in Delaware that Carlton Dotson told his cousin that he shot Dennehy.

June 25, 2003: Dennehy's vehicle is found abandoned without license plates in a Virginia Beach, Va., mall parking lot.

July 17, 2003: Law enforcement officers discover a gun outside the apartment complex in Waco where Baylor basketball recruit Harvey Thomas lived.

July 21, 2003: Dotson is arrested in Chestertown, Md., after reportedly confessing to FBI agents that he shot Dennehy.

July 25, 2003: Dennehy's body is found in a field southeast of Waco.

August 4, 2003: Jon Koncak, who played at SMU for coach Dave Bliss in the 1980s, confirms that he and other SMU players received improper payments from boosters.

August 4, 2003: An unnamed law enforcement official confirms that a gun found in an apartment complex is not connected to the shooting of Dennehy.

August 8, 2003: Bliss resigns.

August 15, 2003: Baylor assistant coach Abar Rouse provides tapes he secretly recorded of Bliss to NCAA officials and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

Sept. 8, 2003: Five members of Baylor's board of regents sign a letter calling for the removal of university President Robert Sloan.

Oct. 28, 2003: Dotson is extradited from Chestertown, Md., to McLennan County, Texas.

Oct. 28, 2004: A McLennan County district judge declares Dotson incompetent to stand trial and orders him sent to North Texas State Hospital in Vernon.

January 21, 2005: Sloan resigns to become chancellor, a largely ceremonial position.

June 8, 2005: Dotson pleads guilty to fatally shooting Dennehy.

June 15, 2005: A Waco district judge sentences Dotson to 35 years in prison.

APPENDIX C

Interview Questionnaire

This questionnaire served as a general outline for interview questions. The interviews were not limited to the questionnaire.

- 1) What is your primary beat?

- 2) How long have you worked in print journalism? How long at your current paper? Your current beat?

- 3) How do you generally go about gathering information for a story?

- 4) Do you find you quote certain types of sources most often on your beat and why? Who are those sources?

- 5) What factors do you generally consider when deciding which sources to use in a story?

- 6) What role did time constraints or source accessibility play in your choice of whom to use as a source? Does it prevent you from gathering as many sources as you would like?

- 7) What role does the journalistic principle of balance play in whom you choose to quote?

- 8) How would you define source credibility? In other words, when you think about what makes a source credible, what qualities come to mind? What words might you use in describing a credible source?

- 9) How important is source credibility in choosing whether to quote a source? Is it a very important factor? The most important factor? What other factors might also be important?

- 10) If you deemed a source credible in the past, would you be more likely to quote that source in the future? Why?

- 11) If you had doubts about the truthfulness of what a source was saying, would you be less likely to quote that source? Why?

- 12) If you determined that a source was not very credible compared with other sources, would you be less likely to quote that source? Why?

13) If you determined that a source was not very credible, is there anything you might do to indicate to the reader that the source's information might not be reliable?

14) Journalists have been said to "develop a diverse pool of sources in their own communities, but can find only the most visible sources in other locations." Do you feel this is accurate for reporters in general? For yourself?

15) How did you primarily gather information in the Dennehy case? How often did you rely on press releases, press conferences and background briefings to gather information?

16) What were the difficulties you encountered in gathering information and sources?

17) In the Dennehy case, the victim was an athlete at Baylor University. How important was it to get the perspective of the athletics officials, including the head coach and athletic director, and how important was it to get the perspective of the university officials, such as the university president?

18) Did the credibility of these sources influence in any way how often they were quoted?

19) How important was credibility vs. time constraints and other factors in your deciding whom to select as sources in your coverage of the Dennehy case?

21) How likely are you to quote from a police report or to quote a law enforcement official? How credible do you find law enforcement officials as a source?

22) How likely are you to quote a defense attorney? How credible do you find defense attorneys as a source?

Table 1

Sources by newspaper

Mean percentage of explicitly sourced paragraphs by type source

	DMN	Fort Worth	NYT	Waco	Overall	F=	p=
Baylor	46.5	37.5	33.3	34.9	38.2	1.74	0.1607
Law	18.5	20.6	25.5	19.3	20.5	1.39	0.2487
Victim	17.1	15.7	18.0	16.2	16.5	0.24	0.8702
Suspect	14.5	11.5	6.1	14.4	12.3	0.84	0.4728
Media	2.6	3.1	16.7	10.0	7.2	4.04	0.0083*
Expert	–	5.7	0.3	4.9	3.2	1.95	0.1239
NCAA	0.8	5.8	–	0.3	2.1	2.37	0.0720
Sources per story	2.9	3.2	2.9	3.1	3.0	0.90	0.4439

An analysis of variance showed significant differences ($p < .05$) between *The New York Times* and *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Times* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for the use of media sources ($p < .05$).

Table 2

Prominence of sources by newspaper

Percentage of stories in which a clearly discernable source was quoted in the first half of a story

	% of stories overall	DMN	Fort Worth	NYT	Waco	Overall	Chi-sq	p=
Baylor	62.0	56.0	60.0	38.0	52.0	51.5	5.5050	0.1383
Law	49.5	42.0	44.0	40.0	46.0	43.0	0.4080	0.9386
Victim	36.0	16.0	34.0	24.0	16.0	22.5	6.2796	0.0988
Suspect	36.0	18.0	24.0	10.0	22.0	18.5	3.8136	0.2823
Media	22.5	6.0	10.0	24.0	26.0	16.5	10.8510	0.0126*
Expert	3.5	–	6.0	–	8.0	3.5	7.5500	0.0563
NCAA	5.0	4.0	10.0	–	4.0	4.5	5.9337	0.1149

A Chi-square showed significant differences ($p < .05$) between newspapers for the use of media sources. The second column above refers to the percentage of stories in which a type source was cited regardless of prominence.

Table 3

Sources by level of prestige

Mean percentage of explicitly sourced paragraphs by type source

	Elite Newspapers	Non-elite Newspapers	t=	p=
Baylor	33.3	39.2	-1.97	0.0501
Law	25.5	19.5	1.75	0.0859
Victim	18.0	16.3	0.11	0.9099
Suspect	6.1	13.4	-0.81	0.4173
Media	16.7	5.2	2.26	0.0275*
Expert	0.3	3.8	-1.01	0.3165
NCAA	–	2.5	-2.35	0.0203*
Sources per story	2.9	3.1	-1.06	0.2912

A t-test showed significant differences ($p < .05$) between elite newspapers (*The New York Times*) and non-elite newspapers (*The Dallas Morning News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *Waco Tribune-Herald*) in the use of media and NCAA sources.

Table 4

Sources by proximity

Mean percentage of explicitly sourced paragraphs by type source

	Local	Regional	National	F=	p=
Baylor	34.9	41.5	33.3	2.42	0.0915
Law	19.3	19.7	25.5	2.05	0.1322
Victim	16.2	16.3	18.0	0.35	0.7083
Suspect	14.4	12.9	6.1	0.85	0.4277
Media	10.0	2.9	16.7	6.09	0.0028*
Expert	4.9	3.2	0.3	0.34	0.7128
NCAA	0.3	3.6	–	1.72	0.1823
Sources per story	3.1	3.1	2.9	0.56	0.5731

An analysis of variance showed significant differences ($p < .05$) between national newspapers (*The New York Times*) and regional newspapers (*The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*) in the use of media sources.

Table 5

Sources by newspaper over time

Mean percentage of explicitly sourced paragraphs by type source

Sources	NCAA	Expert	Media	Suspect	Victim	Law	Baylor	
3.4	1.7	2.0	11.9	7.6	18.8	24.9	33.1	Overall T1
2.5	1.0	2.6	3.2	17.0	7.5	18.6	50.1	Overall T2
5.2	0.7	-0.3	3.2	-2.5	3.4	1.4	-2.7	t=
.00*	.05*	.76	.00*	.01*	.00*	.16	.01*	p=
3.2	1.5	_	5.4	11.7	23.4	21.1	36.9	DM T1
2.6	_	_	1.0	14.3	4.8	15.6	64.3	DM T2
1.9	1.1	_	1.3	-0.4	2.7	0.7	-2.2	t=
.06	.27	_	.19	.71	.01*	.51	.03*	p=
3.6	4.7	3.5	6.5	6.9	15.6	20.5	42.2	FW T1
2.8	3.1	7.2	_	11.0	14.2	20.8	43.8	FW T2
2.0	0.4	-0.7	2.1	-0.7	0.2	-0.0	-0.1	t=
.05	.69	.51	.05*	.48	.81	.97	.90	p=
3.4	_	_	20.5	4.6	16.5	34.1	24.2	NYT T1
1.9	_	3.6	4.8	18.4	10.7	21.4	41.1	NYT T2
4.8	_	-1.0	2.5	-1.4	0.7	1.1	-1.2	t=
.00*	_	.34	.02*	.19	.52	.28	.25	p=
3.3	1.0	5.1	14.5	7.3	19.9	22.8	29.9	WT T1
2.7	1.0	_	7.2	24.0	1.9	17.5	48.9	WT T2
2.4	0.1	1.9	1.1	-2.1	3.1	0.7	-1.6	t=
.02*	.90	.07	.29	.05*	.00*	.51	.12	p=

A t-test showed significant differences ($p < .05$) between Time 1 (summer 2003) and Time 2 (fall 2003-summer 2005) in the use of Baylor sources (overall and *Dallas Morning News*), victim sources (overall, *DMN* and *WTH*), suspect sources (overall and *WTH*), media sources (overall, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *New York Times*) and the range of sources (overall, *NYT* and *WTH*).

VITA

James Mark Wright was born December 3, 1979, in Augusta, Georgia. He is the son of James Bruce and Gayle Ann Wright. A 1998 graduate of Arlington High School, Arlington, Texas, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in journalism and English from the University of North Texas in Denton in 2001.

He worked as a reporter and assistant editor at several Tarrant County community newspapers owned by the then-parent company of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Knight Ridder. In 2005, he began working at Texas Christian University as news editor of the editorial services department and *The TCU Magazine*. In 2007, he joined the University of North Texas as a news promotion specialist in the university's news service office.

In August 2004, he enrolled for graduate study at Texas Christian University. While working on his master's degree, he taught Media Writing I as an adjunct instructor in the Schieffer School of Journalism at TCU and held a research assistantship from August 2005 to November 2007. He is a member of Kappa Tau Alpha National Honor Society, Journalism and Mass Communication.

ABSTRACT

A content analysis of a sample (n= 200) of stories about the murder of Baylor University student athlete Patrick Dennehy in four newspapers – *The New York Times*, *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *Waco Tribune-Herald* – indicates that university officials, including head basketball coach Dave Bliss, were quoted in a greater percentage of paragraphs than other types of sources. After Baylor sources, law officials – including police and sheriff’s officers, as well as judges and court officials – were the next most-often quoted. Statistically significant differences were found between *The New York Times* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and between the *Times* and *The Dallas Morning News* in the use of media sources. The *Times* cited other media reports in its articles significantly more often than the Fort Worth and Dallas newspapers. As an elite newspaper, the *Times* appears to have viewed the Dennehy case as less important than the non-elite newspapers.

The study reinforces previous research on source dependency, but also indicates that some newspapers conducted valuable non-routine coverage. For example, investigative reporter Danny Robbins of the *Star-Telegram* uncovered audio tapes and documents demonstrating misconduct committed by Bliss that might not otherwise have surfaced publicly (or been addressed by the university). In-depth interviews with Robbins and other reporters offer intriguing evidence about the lack of value reporters seem to place on evaluating the credibility of the sources they quote. The reporters indicated that deadlines, competition and other pressures exert a greater influence on source selection than source credibility.