AUDIT TRAILS: A NEW TOOL IN GATEKEEPING RESEARCH

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beginning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond Lewin's Theory</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. and Ms. Gates</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeepers and Decision-making</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeeping in Other Fields</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Previous Studies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHOD</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definitions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Instruments</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing the Data</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FINDINGS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I Did</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Articles</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and Meetings</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporters and the Articles</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors and the Articles</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Table</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Ideas Originated</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Gatekeeping</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine Articles</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations and Time Constraints</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................57

Conclusions ........................................................................................................................................57
Implications ........................................................................................................................................59
Weaknesses ........................................................................................................................................60
Future Research ..................................................................................................................................60

APPENDIX CONSENT FORM .............................................................................................................62

LIST OF REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................64

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ..................................................................................................................69
There is a lot of information available to people in this day and age, and many rely on the media to provide the important pieces of it to them. Because of this, mass communication researchers often study the gatekeepers who decide which pieces of information will pass through to the receivers. Gatekeeping studies can be done through case studies, surveys and content analysis. Researchers often look at the newspaper process to determine these gatekeepers, and then focus their studies on editors.

The purpose of this study was to test a new tool for conducting studies of the gatekeeping theory. The method tested involved the database audit trail used at newspapers to see if use would be feasible and if it would provide information about the potential gatekeepers at the newspaper studied. The researcher chose articles from the newspaper and then traced them through the audit trail to see who on the newspaper staff had accessed the articles. The researcher interviewed the people who appeared in the database about the article in question.
The research also provided some insight into the gatekeeping process at small newspapers. The researcher conducted interviews with reporters and editors about gatekeeping at the newspaper. The information gathered showed that newspaper staff had similarities in thinking within the ranks but not between them. This information coupled with the audit trail tool could expand future gatekeeping research by changing the subjects studied and allowing for more objective means of collecting data.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

New developments in the field of journalism are changing the role of gatekeepers, part of the gatekeeping concept that is less than 70 years old. Lewin (1951) said that items encounter gate regions when passing through various channels. Gatekeepers, who have the power to decide whether an item will pass through the gate, guard these gate regions. Many factors influence the gatekeeper. Similar items may have passed through the gate already. The gatekeeper may not like the particular item. The people at the end of the channel may not need or want the item. These are examples of some of the societal, cultural or individual influences that may affect the gatekeeper's decisions.

Later researchers revealed more potential influences and tied them to mass communication. How do competing gatekeepers affect the flow of information? If gatekeeper A does not pass along information that audiences want and need, will they use gatekeeper B instead? Newspapers compete with magazines, television and radio. They also compete with each other. Newspapers rely on the gatekeeping process to meet the needs and wants of their readers.

Newspapers

People call, email and fax the newsroom daily. Do those story ideas make it to a reporter? If they do, the reporters have the option to use the idea or disregard it. Do they find it interesting and will their readers? Do they have enough time and money to cover the event? They may or may not discuss the idea with their editors or other reporters first. The editors ask themselves these same questions. They also may consider the attitudes of
the newspaper's publisher and the ability of the reporters. The editors often toss ideas around at budget meetings. This is where they meet to discuss what is going in the newspaper and where it will appear. The budget describes how the news hole, or space available after advertisements and other set items are laid out, will be filled. The budget evolves throughout the day as news stories emerge, change or get cut.

Newspapers generally are organized the same way, but the structure may differ among newspapers of varying sizes. Today, most newspapers are owned by a large newspaper chain like the New York Times or Cox Communications. Most newspapers put out one edition per day, though they might have different editions for different locations in their geographic area. Larger newspapers have bureau offices in different geographic locations than the main bureau to allow for quick and on-the-spot coverage of news events.

Newspaper articles are the result of reporters and editors. Both come up with news ideas, with how much so depending on the newspaper. Some reporters are assigned beats, which is an area or topic of coverage. Others are general assignment reporters. Reporters answer to their editors. The number of editors a newspaper has depends on its size. Some have an executive editor who oversees the news section. The managing editor falls directly under the executive editor. The managing editor handles the day-to-day work of the news section. The section editors, sports, features, photo, also may report to the managing editor. The reporters work with the city or metro editor. They work together to develop stories ideas and angles.

After the editors have approved a story for print, it moves to the copy desk, where copy editors check for grammar and spelling errors. The other copy desk staff lay the
story out on the page using pagination software like Quark Express. They add headlines and photos to the stories.

In standard procedures, the reporters meet with the editors of their section, who then take the information about the stories, approved and potential, to their editors and the editors of other sections. When a more definite budget has been set, the editors meet with copy editors to discuss layout. Story ideas travel up the channel from the reporter to the editor to the section editor to the managing editor to the copy editor. The newspaper publisher may be involved in some instances. Some newspapers have numerous editors in each position, while some have one or even none in each position. Some newspapers are reporter driven, which means reporters often come up with story ideas they generate on beats, or regular coverage areas. Other newspapers are editor driven, which means the editors often assign reporters to story ideas. More stories are killed or thrown out at large newspapers. These kills happen during the news selection process, during the writing process, during the budget meetings and at the various bureaus. Though this seems lengthy, technology has sped up the process.

**Newspaper Technology**

Newspapers evolved from using typewriters to using computers. Now, they use other technology as well. Newspapers staff generate stories, but many newspapers rely on wire services as well. The wire staff makes decisions when putting stories on the wire. The stories are sent electronically to the subscribing newspapers. Someone at the newspaper then decides what to use and what to reject. They serve as a gate and are gatekeeping when they make a decision. Today, these decisions happen faster and more frequently because of technology. The Internet and updated computers allow wire services to transmit more stories and longer stories faster than ever before. At the same
time, newspapers face tough competition from television and radio, which requires more advertising on their part. The additional advertisements mean there is a smaller news hole, or space for news items. So, gatekeepers receive more articles at a quicker pace, most of which they must reject.

While this changing technology can both help and hinder gatekeepers, it can do the same for researchers. Most newspapers now use a database to save and share copy, even though that requires more training for newspaper staff. The database stores the stories used each day and tracks the changes made to each article and by whom. These programs allow reporters to transmit copy instantly to editors, who can either pass it back to reporters for more work or pass it along to the copy desk for layout. Stories can be tracked as they are completed, found in the News Done file when completed. More importantly, these databases have an audit trail that tracks which computers open which news stories. Most newspapers have archivists who help reporters conduct research, locate old stories for readers and maintains the database archives so the database contains only the necessary files, which can be found easily. The audit trail aspect of the database allows researchers to employ new methods, as was done in this study.

This study used the audit trail as a means of analyzing potential gatekeepers and influences. Gatekeepers can vary from the traditional gates in that interns and clerks can affect the news selection process by throwing away a press release rather than passing it along. An editor who is considered a gatekeeper in the business section of the newspaper may comment on a story from the local section that results in the story being killed, or not run. Many researchers may overlook this small, but potentially meaningful gates. These gatekeepers can influence stories in non-traditional ways as well. Traditionally a
gatekeeper says a story runs or does not run. However, a gatekeeper also can say a story needs to be refocused to make it more relevant or interesting.

**Intentions**

Theoretically, this study will benefit future researchers with a new way of studying a central concept. Practically, the results of this study can be applied in newsrooms when examining internal functions. Though this study focused only on newspapers, other fields may benefit from the research as well in gaining a better understanding of the complexity of the term. The narrow focus limited the results of the study, but does allow a starting point for research in other fields.

Though there is no gatekeeping theory, instead several key players have providing a conceptual base by rooting their ideas about gatekeeping in other theories. Lewin tied it to systemic theory, Westley and MacLean to information theory, Dimmick to uncertainty theory and Shoemaker to levels analysis. They helped explain how news moves through gates, what influences the gates and how the gatekeepers make decisions. Individual, organizational, societal and a host of other influences play a part in the gatekeeping process.

Mass communication researchers have used case studies, surveys, content analysis and a host of other methods to determine how and why news becomes news. They observe gatekeepers in the newsroom, interview them about why they choose and reject articles, analyze articles to find similarities in news values, and provide them with mock headlines, positive and negative, from which to choose. They've looked to see if gender, a publisher's attitude or wire services influence news selection. Many times that answer is sometimes. Gatekeepers are human, and they are subjective. They have organization protocols and similar news values, but they also have personal likes and
dislikes. They have bosses with opinions. They have conversations with others. Studies continue to try and identify all of these influences.

This study tested the method of using an audit trail in gatekeeping research. Stories were chosen from the newspaper and then located in the database audit trail. The reporters, editors and copy desk staff identified from the audit trail were interviewed about their role in the article's trek from idea to print. Several reporters and editors also were interviewed about their perception of gatekeeping at the newspaper.

The study originally would have compared two newspapers of varying sizes, but legal issue prevented the inclusion of one newspaper. People were protesting one of the newspaper's articles on the day research was to begin. The newspaper's legal department advised them not to sign consent forms for the research in case one of the article's studied became the involved in legal matter. Any research done on the article could have been subpoenaed. Consent forms were a necessary part of this study and therefore, the research at that newspaper could not proceed. A reporter and editor from a newspaper of a similar size to the one that was excluded answered some broad gatekeeping questions about their newspaper. Their responses were used to pose potential further research that could be done between newspapers of varying sizes to determine their differences.

The audit trail output listed the slug, or descriptive name as designated by the reporter, in the upper left corner. The time, date and folder name were listed along the top. The right side of the box had all of the names of the people who had opened the article in order of when they did so. The following lines contained the reporter's name, the tentative title of the article, the font and the first line of the article. Changes could be identified by looking at previous versions of the story that were in the database. However,
the folder of archived stories, stories that appeared in the newspaper, did not contain these versions.

The audit trail did not identify everyone who had some influence on an article. However, the audit trails combined with the interviews provided thorough coverage. This newspaper was reporter-driven. The majority of the stories came from regular beats. Because of its smaller size, editors do not turn down most story ideas. The main determinant of stories making it through the gates was relevance, both to the readers and to the community as a whole. Further interviewing found that similarities existed among the ranks, but not between them. The editors thought the reporters like the freedom they have to come up with ideas. However, the reporters desired more input on behalf of the editors.

While the second set of interviews did not rely on the audit trail, the first set relied on it entirely. It provided the subjects and some of the questions. Why did you view the story more than once? Why did the copy desk see the article before the city editor? This method can provide future researchers with an easier way to determine subjects for studies. It can reveal unforeseen gatekeepers. It can help researchers understand the newspaper process. It opens the door to new possibilities.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will consist mainly of relevant theoretical research and studies in the field of gatekeeping. No universally accepted definition of a mass communication gatekeeper exists. Bass (1969) said there could be two types of gatekeepers, news gatherers and news processors. Shoemaker (1991) suggests that all communication workers are gatekeepers to some degree, but she does not follow that suggestion up in her research. How is a communication worker defined? Have they all been studied? How does a researcher identify the gatekeepers?

The literature review will cover the conceptual basis of gatekeeping. This includes the systemic theory by Lewin, information theory by Westley and McLean, uncertainty theory by Dimmick and level analysis by Shoemaker. Westley and McLean and Dimmick related different communication theories to gatekeeping. Shoemaker expanded Lewin's original concept. The literature review also will cover the Mr. Gates, Mr. Gates Revisited and Ms. Gates studies. These were case studies of editors and the gatekeeping process. Findings from other mass communication gatekeeping studies will be discussed, as well as the methods used, and gatekeeping in other fields.

The Beginning

Kurt Lewin demonstrated the effect of a gatekeeper on the flow of food through various channels in *Field Theory in Social Science* (1951). Lewin gives the "gate region" complete control over whether or not the item, news piece or food will travel completely through the channel. It is where the important decisions are made and is influenced by
"impartial rules or gatekeepers" (Lewin, 1951, p. 186). He said a gatekeeper exists when "an individual or group is 'in power' to make the decision between 'in' or 'out'" (Lewin, 1951, p. 186). In his study, whether or not the food moved on depended solely on the gatekeeper. He examined the psychological forces that motivated the actions of the various gates, noting that they may be different for each one. Some are societal, some cultural and some individual. These forces contribute to the continued movement of the food through the channels. The factors that passed it through the first gate become more important each subsequent time.

Lewin asked an important question in this writing: Who controls the gate within the channel? Who is the gatekeeper? He said determining the answer to this question should be the first step. He asks this question in terms of meals and the family members behind food-related decisions. However, he mentions that who controls the channel is important to know in all circumstances. He felt this process could apply to situations beyond food selection.

"This situation holds not only for food channels but for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group, for movement of goods, and the social locomotion of individuals in many organizations" (Lewin, 1951, p. 187).

Lewin further defines the psychological factors of the gatekeeper. He said, "Understanding the functioning of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gatekeepers, and changing the social process means influencing or replacing the gatekeeper" (Lewin, 1951, p. 186). He places them under two types: cognitive structure and motivation.
Cognitive structure applies to how the gatekeeper thinks about food. Lewin broke this up into four sections: Food Outside and Within Consideration, Foods for Husbands and Children, Meal Patterns and the Meaning of the Eating Situation (Lewin, 1951, p. 178). The first section asks - How is food defined? Are different types of food meant for different people? The gatekeeper's surrounding culture helps to answer these questions. If the culture does not acknowledge an item as food, neither will the gatekeeper. Of course, there is a broad culture like a country and a smaller culture like a village. Both of these and the immediate culture of the family might influence the gatekeeper. The second section acknowledges preferences among family members and the influence they have. The third section considers the food eaten at various meals. Most people consider eggs a breakfast food, sandwiches a lunch food, and meat a dinner food. These set ideas of food influence the choices of the gatekeeper. The fourth section examines who is eating the meal. Is it family, friends or strangers? Each groups has an impact on the food choices, how they are prepared, and how they are eaten (Lewin, 1951, p.180).

Motivation, as Lewin defined it, is made up of three factors: values behind food selection, food needs and obstacles to overcome (Lewin, 1951, p.180). Lewin said the values people use when selecting food are expense, health, taste and status. The rank of these values is relative to each individual or group. The gatekeeper considers not only what they like but also what is essential. Food needs change with time, as do food likes. Obstacles such as time or money need to be factored in, as well as potential conflicts. Lewin considered events or ideas that may contribute to a change in the channels. One in particular, whether an item can be replaced by another, relates directly to gatekeepers at newspapers. Many former obstacles have been hurdled with the help of electronic media.
Lewin's systemic theory looks at the overall picture of gatekeeping. How does it work? Who is involved? What influences gatekeeping? Since Lewin, most gatekeeping studies have looked at one gatekeeper or similar gatekeepers. Other studies look at gatekeeping influences. However, most have failed to examine the entire process. Westley and McLean, Dimmick and Shoemaker have expanded Lewin's theory and tied it to mass communication. Their work contributes to the need of gatekeeping studies that examine the entire process from the original idea to the receiver.

**Beyond Lewin's Theory**

Westley and MacLean (1957) extended Lewin's work to the world of mass communication. Westley and MacLean developed a model with three points, A, B and C. This model was based on Newcomb's symmetry model. Westley and MacLean modified Newcomb's model by adding C, providing for feedback and allowing for numerous Xs. A was the source, B was the receiver and C was the mass media, or gatekeeper. The events or stories, X, either went from the source through media to the receiver or went directly to media, bypassing the source. This model demonstrated that the sources do not always share everything and that media do not always pass on information from sources. This also showed that the communication process could be started by an event as well as by an individual. They said C would sort through the various events or stories, Xs, and pass the appropriate ones along to B. Will X be relevant to B? Will B understand X? It was C's job to answer these questions.

Westley and MacLean also tied Lewin's work to information theory. C, or the mass media, must make information understandable for B. The media must interpret B's needs and meet them. C, mass media, serves as an agent for B, selecting the pieces of
information appropriate to B's needs and wants, putting the information, X, into understandable symbols or context, and then transmitting the information to B, the receiver. C must do this through "shared meanings" (Westley and MacLean, 1957, p. 34). Severin and Tankard (1988) explain that C fulfills needs for B, which can be a person, a group or an entire social system. They added that both A and C could receive feedback that provided them with information about the effect of their messages on B.

Westley and MacLean allowed for C and B to be more than one person. They also said that X did not have to be a purposive message, and therefore, can be void of influence on C's part. A difference between Westley and MacLean's model and Lewin is the position of C as a mediator. C neither functions as the source or on behalf of the source. This is what complicates gatekeeping in mass communication. By treating C as an agent of B, they imply that A can no longer communicate directly to be without passing through C.

Dimmick (1974) tied Lewin's theory to the uncertainty theory of mass communication. He said gatekeepers' decisions are based on an uncertainty theory and relates the theory to the levels of decision that gatekeepers utilize. He looked at the gatekeeping process from an organizational and institutional level, as well as routines of communication work. This theory had several propositions. The first said that gatekeepers are unsure how to determine what is news, because society will make this determination later. The second explains what can reduce this uncertainty, a few of which revolve around the dynamics of the group or news organization. The third proposition said there many things that contribute to a gatekeeper's final decision criteria. In his fourth proposition, Dimmick develops a composition model by which gatekeepers can
reduce their uncertainty. At this point, Dimmick mentions that the composition models of several people influence the final output (Dimmick, 1974, p. 24). The actions that can contribute to a composition model are, as stated in proposition 2 (Dimmick, 1974, p. 10):

1. Accepting the definition of news of an "opinion leader" in a group within which he works,

2. Arriving at a group consensus,

3. Monitoring the output of a reference institution,

4. Accepting the policy of the organization for which he works,

5. Accepting the definitions of news promulgated by his sources, and a source's definition of news, and

6. Using his own group-related attitudes and values.

All of these actions combine to form an idea of what is news for the gatekeeper. In the end, they may be responsible for the decision to accept or reject the article. These actions reinforce the idea that many gates may contribute to news stories while they pass through the channel. But this thought only skims one layer of the subject. How much, if any, influence do unconventional gatekeepers have?

Shoemaker is the current leading gatekeeping expert. She said that the gatekeeping process relies on individuals with personal ideas and beliefs functioning within organizations that have a set of norms, which are tied to larger societal ideologies. All of this happens while outside positive and negative forces work to push or constrain messages from passing through various channels (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 71).

Shoemaker broadened the number of analysis levels. Lewin mentioned three levels. Shoemaker provided five levels. These were individual, routines of communication work, organizational, social and institutional, and societal. The individual
analysis concerns personal likes or dislikes of a gatekeeper. An analysis of routines of communication work involves preestablished rules or policies, which Lewin mentioned. The organizational level is different from the previous level, because the rules may vary between organizations. Employees become socialized to the organization's norms to retain their jobs, or they hide their dissident views. Over time, the gatekeepers may gain the power to make final gatekeeping decisions.

The fourth level of analysis, social and institutional, looks at the effects of sources, audiences, markets, advertisers, interest groups, public relations and other media on the gatekeeping process. The final analysis level, societal, is the basis for the other influences. The culture, societal interests, societal structure and ideology all are variables of this level (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 68). These variables often contribute to the media treating ideas that deviate from the status quo as illegitimate.

Shoemaker stresses that gatekeeping is more than selection. It also involves production of messages. Though she applies much of gatekeeping to mass communication, she says it applies to any person making a decision about the transmission of information. She said information begins the gatekeeping process with the "entrance of items into the channel" (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 19). This can happen three ways: routine, informal or enterprise. The first two pertain to information from the outside. Enterprise pertains to information gathered by the communication worker. Things like normality and constraints may hinder a message from reaching the first gate. Other things like lack of other competition may help a message through the first gate. Shoemaker lists several qualities, or news values, that make messages attractive. These are proximity, human interest, conflict, the unusual, timeliness and prominence, and they
usually are the predictable way that gatekeepers decide what's news (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 21).

Shoemaker also expanded on several of Lewin's ideas. One of these ideas was polarity. Lewin and Shoemaker both discuss polarity in terms of gatekeeping. Polarity considers both positive and negative forces. With food, attractiveness is a positive force, while expense is a negative force. Once the expense is put toward an attractive purchase, the expense becomes a positive force, which will help the purchase pass through future gates. This is an example of polarity reversal.

Shoemaker provides the following example. A remote location of a news story is a negative force. If a reporter does cover the story, that force turns positive. The expenses incurred and time required give the story value. This value will encourage its passage through future gates. But Shoemaker said that forces might retain polarity. For instance a positive force such as newsworthiness will remain positive throughout the article's passage.

The second issue of forces that Lewin did not address is that some forces may be stronger than others. These stronger forces should allow easier passage through channels than weaker forces. If a story stands out because of some details, a gatekeeper might think it more important than other less exciting stories.

The third issue is that passage is not only affected by forces in front of the gate. Shoemaker's example involves story similarity. If three articles about topic A have passed through the gate, as well as one article about topic B, the three should have a combined strength. But the strength of numbers may inhibit a fourth article about topic A, which still has not passed through the gate.
Finally, Shoemaker related polarity to more than selection. She relayed ideas formed in other studies, which said that stories with positive forces should get better "play" than stories with negative forces.

Shoemaker expanded polarity once again in 2001. This study examined forces on both the individual and routine levels, though she notes that forces can be identified on all levels of analysis. She found that routine determinations of newsworthiness had a positive role in predicting the amount of coverage an event receives. She also found that the routine had more of a role than an individual's characteristics. Shoemaker said that newspaper routines may act as "shortcuts" in the decision-making process of individuals (Shoemaker, 2001, p. 235).

These conceptual studies that expanded gatekeeping guide researchers using data-based or direct observation studies. The researchers in the Mr. and Mrs. Gates studies examined individuals to test some of the ideas put forth by the conceptual researchers.

Mr. and Ms. Gates

White's 1950 study found that a wire editor, "Mr. Gates," had used mainly subjective reasoning when deciding whether or not to include a story in the newspaper. One motivation that Mr. Gates used in this study was one listed by Lewin. For Mr. Gates, likes and dislikes took great priority. Likewise, stories that were true or essential to readers' learning and knowledge were chosen more readily than others. This study analyzed gatekeeping on an individual level.

White chose Mr. Gates for the case study because Gates chose the national and international news that would appear on the front page. The fact that his selection was final added to his importance as a gatekeeper. Gates rejects about nine-tenths of the wire
stories he receives daily from three wire services. During the one-week study, he saved all of the wire copy that he rejected. At the end of the day, he wrote his reason for rejection on the copy.

Many of Mr. Gates' reasons for rejection were highly-subjective value judgments. A common reason was that he did not have space. He used human interest news most frequently, with politics coming in second. However, he did not appear to choose stories based on category, though he said he did when interviewed. Mr. Gates also was subjective when choosing between similar stories from multiple services. He tended to go with the conservative piece.

In "Mr. Gates Revisited," Snider defined gatekeepers as "those decision makers who control the flow of news" (Snider, 1967, p. 419). Snider attempted to replicate White's study to see if Mr. Gates' attitudes had changed during the years. Because of newspaper changes, Gates only could provide results of four editions. Other differences exist. During this study, news holes were smaller, he only used one wire service, and broadcast competition was a factor. Mr. Gates went through the same routine in this study. After work he went through the rejected pieces and wrote his reasons for rejection on them.

Interestingly, Mr. Gates' motivations had changed somewhat. He still was concerned with likes and dislikes, but tried to be less opinionated and more neutral. In this study, Mr. Gates used international war stories most often, with crime stories coming in second. However, he chose a better balance of stories. During the study, he used one-third of the wire copy he received. Gates no longer used propaganda or B.S. as reasons
for rejection, though he still said no space. In the earlier study, Mr. Gates had admitted to having prejudices. In the later study, he said he has worked hard to overcome them.

Bleske's 1991 study focused his study more on gender and technology. He studied a wire editor working in an electronic newsroom whose background differed in many ways from that of Mr. Gates. He used the same method that both White and Snider did, but also requested that Ms. Gates list reason why she used copy for the five days the study covered. Ms. Gates did not have the same issue with wire stories that White's Mr. Gates did. Her newspaper had a policy to choose the latest, most complete story. She also had less control over her newspaper because of its size.

In this study, as in the others, politics ranked high, as did human interest. Also similar to the other studies, Ms. Gates cited lack of space as a main reason for rejection. Though this study did not find that gender affected the gatekeeper's decisions, it did find that editors strive to find a balance of story topics and difficulty for readers. All of the researchers said that wire services do seem to encourage gatekeepers to use a mix of news categories.

**Gatekeepers and Decision-making**

The gatekeeper at a newspaper may define news differently than someone else. Though some stories are available always, they never may be considered for publication. In addition, the decision to include a news story depends partly on which section it fits into most easily and the effect of the people working in and reading that section. Previous definitions of what news is also can contribute to the decision of what makes it into the paper, whether directly or indirectly.
Berkowitz (1990, 1991) studied gatekeeping at television news stations. His 1990 study examined how stories were selected from a pool of other available stories. He focused on three types of stories: planned, event-related stories; non-event stories concerning local issues and trends; and breaking stories that news workers actively considered putting on the air. He also considered the standard news values of conflict, timeliness, proximity, significance and familiarity. Through coding he found that non-event or unplanned events aired most often. Timeliness and significance also factored into the airing of stories.

Through qualitative interviews, Berkowitz found that decision-making was done as a group. The group considered the ease of reporting, which deals with expense, time and expertise. The group also said national trends factored into their decisions. Berkowitz concluded that stories aired for many reasons, and that each was decided on individual merits. Berowitz's 1991 study had similar findings in that resource constraints often had as much of an impact on the decision-making process as news judgment did. The same study in a newsroom may have turned out differently. According to Abbott and Brassfield (1989) gatekeepers working in television have more autonomy than gatekeepers at newspapers.

Whitney and Becker (1982) hypothesized that wire editors for news services influenced or set the agenda for news editors at newspapers by the proportions at which they sent stories over the wire (Whitney and Becker, 1982, p. 61). Basically, the categories of stories in each day's wire influenced their decisions. They hypothesized that wire service editors and news editors shared similar news values, but their findings did not demonstrate this. Instead, their findings supported their other hypothesis that news
editors chose their news mix in proportion to the ratio of items that appear on the wire. Editors, the only gatekeepers studied, followed the reference institution and the source's definition of news. This goes back to Shoemaker's levels, because there are a large number of local editors being influenced by a small number of national editors.

Gieber had earlier found similar results in his study. He noted that the wording of the news budget, the wire service the editor chose and what the individual favored all factored into the decision-making process. The editors studied all seemed to value providing readers with the top news stories of the day as their primary priority (Gieber, 1960).

Decisions can be affected by news values, constraints and society, among other variables. Are they also affected by gender? Whitlow (1977) studied the difference between male and female gatekeepers' decision about whether to include a news story about a woman. She found that standard news values become less important to male gatekeepers when the subject of the article is female. This also applied to stories dealing with women in general. Some female gatekeepers had the same reaction. Stories related to conflict often were chosen. The conflict stories that were rejected featured women in low conflict situations. The city editor, news editor, sports editor and the women's or family section editor were analyzed for this study (Whitlow, 1977, p. 575).

Personal opinion ranked high on the motivation scale in Donohew's (1965) study. Donohew found that the attitude of a newspaper's publisher was correlated with the story's passage through the channel and inclusion into the newspaper. The publishers' attitudes affected the atmosphere of the newspaper. Donohew studied the publisher's attitude on Medicare and the effect it had on Medicare-related news items. He said
gatekeeping functions as a form of knowledge control. In addition, the study did not find a link between the gatekeepers' decisions and community opinion.

Though the previous studies did not find a strong system of shared values among gatekeepers, Epstein (1973) did. Epstein found that newsmen did share similar news values, but that these values sometimes differ from those embraced by the organizations. An organization's values, which tend to be supported by publishers and high-level editors, often take precedence. This relates to Breed (1955), who introduced the concept of newsroom group influence in gatekeepers' decision-making. In his 1985 study, Stempel found that gatekeepers have similar news values depending on the medium within which they work.

In their 1974 study, Davison and Yu found the reporter chooses the subject, but the editor decides if, when and how the story will be used. Both the reporter and editor contemplate the organization's standards during the decision-making process. This is similar to what Shoemaker found in her 2001 study. However, in the Davison and Yu study, reporters were influenced by political preferences, especially more so when compared to editors (Davison and Yu, 1974).

In his 1975 study, Janowitz said that journalists perceive themselves as the ones who make the decisions about what their readers, or people in general, need to know. In this study, he formed a different gatekeeping model. His model leans more toward objectivity than subjectivity and deals more with reporters than editors. Janowitz's model paints journalists as advocates, which requires that they be motivated by different factors when deciding whether to write an article. He said that the advocate personality differs from the personality of a gatekeeper.
Unlike Janowitz's study, most studies have relied on editors as the participants. Studies by White (1950), Snider (1967), Bleske (1991), Gieber (1956) and Smith, Tumlin and Henning (1988) all have studied editors. This happens though Chibnall (1977) found that most decisions have been made by the time the editors see a story. The field of journalism has gained immense knowledge as to how gatekeepers work, and many in the field probably think they know who the gatekeepers are, but the studies have been limited.

Gatekeeping in Other Fields

Gatekeeping has become a popular topic in fields other than mass communication. As seen in journalism, research in other fields shows who the gatekeepers are and why or how they make their decisions. Though the first studies of gatekeeping looked mainly at individual choices, over time the theory of gatekeeping developed to include influences or society and organizations. Though researchers also have developed the concept of who a gatekeeper is further by including people of varying titles, it is no broader than editors with different titles - copyeditor, metro editor, deputy metro editor.

Admittance decisions happen every few minutes at hospitals around the world. A gatekeeper in this situation is defined as the person in charge of "decision--making with regard to ICU (intensive care unit) admission and discharge" (Strosberg and Teres, 1997, p. 4). It also could apply to a physician who makes referrals to specialists. The gatekeeper works in one of two modes: triage mode and non-triage mode. Stosberg and Teres define triage as "the process of prioritizing access to beds during high census" (Strosberg and Teres, 1997, p. 4). This usually is done by the triage officer, but may also be done by the attending physician, a hospital administrator or the ICU nurse manager. Different things
influence each person. The decision-making of triage officers involves the individual, organizational, societal and institutional levels of analysis discussed earlier in this paper. Physicians have input, as does the law.

In triage mode, the triage officer functions like a gatekeeper at a newspaper choosing between two stories, only the triage officer is choosing between two patients. Factors like cost, access and quality of care play into triage decisions, as well as varying physicians' opinions. The simplest way for a triage officer to make a decision is to answer the question: can the patient benefit from treatment?

Though newspaper gatekeepers can decide to run one story later, triage officers have no such luxury. Therefore, during triage mode, they must engage in rationing. There are two organizational models for decision-making. One model is rational and relies on clear-cut criteria. The other model, political, is subjective and is based on individual opinions.

With the physician, the family, the patient and the hospital administration to please, the triage officer most likely follows the rational model and follows policy to avoid conflict.

Human service professions also rely on gatekeeping practices. In this field, gatekeeping was defined in 1976 as "situations where interviewers actually hold conflicting roles: acting as a guide as well as acting as a monitor of progress for an individual's career" (Fiksdal, 1990, p. 4). This definition applies to universities, corporations and government institutions. Interviewers are the sole gatekeepers and they must rely on conversational cues, which always are open to misinterpretation. Their
decisions are based on rapport, nonverbal cues and organized discourse and are subjective.

Those in the field of psychology use gatekeeping practices to include diagnoses in the handbook *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Caplan defines gatekeeping as "unscientific decisions about which diagnoses will be allowed through and which will be kept out of the handbook" (Caplan, 1995, p.185). Caplan said that most people think decisions about who is normal and who is not are made scientifically, but they actually rely on gatekeeping.

The categories presented in the book are constructs, though many people treat them as existing disorders. To produce the book, interviews are given to psychiatrists. Caplan calls the interview questions "very subjective" (Caplan, 1994, p.196). They involve asking various mental health professionals whether they found a category useful for diagnosis and if they had a category to add. The reliability test is whether or not two psychiatrists give the same patient the same diagnosis. One section consisted of seven categories out of the 300 submitted. Within those categories, instead of mental health professionals studying patients with the disorder to decide on criterion, health professionals from all fields decide the criteria is to be diagnosed and the related cutoff levels.

How does this gatekeeping process work? Caplan found that the authors of the handbook use 25 gatekeeping methods (Caplan, 1995, p. 218). Some of these methods involved:

1. Ignoring information about diagnoses not planned for inclusion,
2. Ignoring inquiries,
3. Decreasing standards for favored diagnoses, and

Caplan said the authors' motivations were subjective and based on individual and group levels. Several had to do with power and prestige within the institution of mental health.

Though all different fields, they all deal with gatekeeping on a regular basis. All mentioned the subjectivity of the gatekeeper. The above authors used observation and reliability tests. Future mass communication studies may be able to have gatekeepers think aloud while tape recording their thoughts during the decision-making process. Later, they could be interviewed or surveyed to see if they provide the same reasons for acceptance or rejection of an article.

**Methods of Previous Studies**

The main methods used in previous gatekeeping studies are case study, survey and content analysis. The 1950 study of Mr. Gates and the follow up study of Ms. Gates were examples of case studies, or studies that "examine many characteristics of a single subject" (Severin and Tankard, 1988, p. 24).

In his 1950 study, White mentioned the transmission of news stories through various gatekeepers. He listed several gates such as "reporter, rewrite man, bureau chief, and 'state' file editor," that many researchers will examine again in later research (White, 1950, p. 384). His study looked at the final gate, the wire editor, who had the power to negate the actions of all the previous gates. As mentioned earlier, while this study did not take an in-depth look into the motivation behind gatekeepers' decisions, it still is an important aspect of gatekeeping.
White had a telegraph editor save all of the wire stories he did not use for one week and to indicate his reason for rejecting the story. This method was replicated in a 1967 study by Snider with only minor changes. In this study, Mr. Gates only used one wire service. He frequently chose international war news, crime, national economy and human interest. His reasons for rejection were no space, lack of local interest, not new, pseudo-event. These studies looked at the input and output in column inches and the percentage used.

Both studies asked the following questions of Mr. Gates (White, 1950, Snider, 1967):

1. Does the category of news affect your choice of news stories?

2. Do you feel that you have any prejudices, which may affect your choice of news stories?

3. What is your concept of the audience for whom you select stories, and what sort of person do you conceive the average person to be?

4. Do you have any specific tests of subject matter or way of writing that help you determine the selection of any particular news story?

5. How would you define "news"?

One of the most common methods of studying gatekeeping is the survey. Severin and Tankard said, "A sample survey is used to answer questions about how a large number of subjects feel, behave, or are" (1988, p. 17). Surveys require the researcher to rely on answers supplied by those being surveyed. Those being surveyed have to self-report, which may give them an inclination to alter responses or just misrepresent them. Surveys have less face validity.

Shoemaker also used the survey method in 2001. She surveyed reporters and editors about the coverage of Congressional bills. She found that newspaper routines had
more impact on a bill's prominence than individual characteristics. She mentioned that the surveys were returned at a rate of 50 percent from reporters and 25 percent for editors. The small return rate somewhat limited the results.

Gross and Merritt also used mail surveys when studying the editors of lifestyle pages. They found that social news was a primary focus for small and community newspapers, while metropolitan newspapers gave equal space to social news, careers, the women's movement and other issues (Gross and Merritt, 1981).

Weaver and Wilhoit used a survey in their 1996 study, which found that journalists continue to see their primary role as interpreter of information, rather than gatherers or disseminators or it. In this study, they identified conceptions about how journalists feel about their jobs. They said that these conceptions might be related to the items they deem newsworthy enough to pass through the gates.

Bowers also asked for the opinions of participants in a 1967 study of publishers' activities. The study required managing editors to rate their publisher's activity in the gatekeeping process. Publishers were not found to be as involved in social issues but did weigh in when it affected newspaper revenue. They also were concerned more with local news.

Buckalew (1969) showed tapes of news stories to television news editors and surveyed them about factors that played a role in their decision-making process. He found that the editors favored visual elements. Bohle used a similar survey method by constructing positive and negative leads, and then having journalists rate them according to what they would select to run in the newspaper. The negative leads received higher ratings (Bohle, 1986).
This is similar to the method used in Berkowitz's studies (1990, 1991). He used an unstructured interview format coupled with 4 weeks of observation to determine the reasons behind news selection. In these types of studies, the longer one spends in the field, observing and familiarizing, the higher the external validity.

A third method of study is content analysis. Severin and Tankard define this as "a systematic method of analyzing message content" (1988, p. 19). Smith, Tumlin and Henning used content analysis in their 1988 study. They had coders analyze local news stories from a newspaper before and after its change in format. Their reliability among the coders was 80 percent agreement. They found that there were drastic differences in the newspaper when it switched from national to local-driven format.

Todd used this method in his 1983 study. He analyzed newspapers that subscribed to the New York Times wire service to see if the front pages of the newspapers had any correlation with the budget sent out by the wire service. He did find a small correlation (Todd, 1983).

Several researchers used a combination of the above methods. In her 1977 study, Whitlow interviewed 36 gatekeepers and observed them as they sorted 48 news leads into different categories of newsworthiness. She also asked them to write headlines for some of the articles, and she gathered basic demographic information about each gatekeeper. Similarly, Whitney and Becker (1982) had 46 editors participate in a news selection task. They also asked them personal questions. They found that regional and national editors at wire services influence local editors.

Donohew (1967) studied publishers' attitudes and perceptions of community opinion on Medicaid by using a questionnaire. They were asked to indicate their attitudes
of certain statements with a seven-point scale. The options included: publisher opposed, perceives community opposed; publisher opposed, perceives community for; publisher for, perceives community opposed; and publisher for, perceives community for. This study also coded newspaper stories about Medicaid. Newspapers with publishers who supported Medicaid ran more stories. The perception of the community had little correlation to if a story ran.

The present study involved use of an audit trail and personal interviews. Both of these are elaborated on in chapter three.

**Research Questions**

The primary questions were addressed during this study to test the method of using the database audit trail:

R1. Is it feasible to use an audit trail to locate potential gatekeepers?

R1. Do people of other positions beside editors fill the role of gatekeeper, though not addressed in previous research?

R3. Is the concept of gatekeeping recognized in the newsroom and does this contribute to why potential alternative gatekeepers have been overlooked in previous studies?
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

The purpose of this study was to test a new tool to use in gatekeeping research. This study explored the use of a database audit trail to help guide research of the gatekeeping process. To answer the research questions proposed in chapter two, a qualitative interview and observation method was employed.

Research Design

This study truly began in December of 2000 when I interned at a South Florida newspaper. During my free time there, I would browse through the newspaper's audit trail to read various news articles. I noticed that my name appeared in the audit trail even though I had not made any changes to the articles I was reading. I realized this was a great record that could be used in a gatekeeping study.

In February 2001 I ran a pilot test at a different newspaper. The newspaper has slightly more than 250 employees, of which about 200 are fulltime. The number of interns varies, but is highest in the summer with about nine. The newspaper competes with three other daily newspapers, two of which are larger and located in different towns. The newspaper is part of a national chain and circulates to about 87,000 adults during the week and 129,300 adults on Sunday. I picked an article out of the local section that had been written by one of the newspaper's staff. I went to the paper and checked the Digital Technology International (database) audit trail to find out who had viewed the article. Routine people appeared such as copy editors and section editors. I checked with
those present to find out if they had looked at the article for routine reasons and to find out what impact they had on the gatekeeping process.

The reporter had come up with the story idea on his own. He covered that particular beat, and the story was one he did each year with a slightly new angle. When questioned further, he said he had come up with the angle on his own as well because he was familiar enough with the beat to know what had been covered already. The reason the story proceeded through the gates without intervention from alternative gates was because it was a routine story for that time period.

I collected data from the same newspaper during a one-week period. This time frame was long enough to test the feasibility of the audit trail and uncover potential problems. This length of time also was long enough to allow the staff to become familiar with me before the second set of interviews. Using the same methods employed during the pilot test, I picked a story, checked with everyone who appeared in the audit trail and then completed interviews with them. I chose three stories a day. When taking into account the time needed for interviews and the availability of the subjects, this was the maximum number of articles I could manage in one day.

The newspaper allowed me the use of their information technology person in case I had questions during my time there. He showed me how to login to the system and how to use the news done folder to find stories. The procedure was as follows:

1) Choose Apple, then DT Applications and then Speedwriter.

2) Choose Database, then Directory and then News Done.

3) Select Search.

4) Enter as much information as possible to find story (reporter's name, date, slug, etc.)
5) Select Story and choose 10-Line History.

**Operational Definitions**

I chose the stories by looking in sections A and B of that day's newspaper and narrowing the selection to only those stories that had been written by one of the newspaper's staff. Staff included all freelancers, interns, reporters and anyone else who was employed by the newspaper. This restriction alone greatly reduced the choice of articles, because many were from wire services. This decision was made for two reasons. First, only staff would appear on the audit trail, which is what I was relying on to determine my subjects. Second, I had to be able to interview the subject, which means that authors of wire stories were not applicable.

A Digital Technologies International (DTI) application, the audit trail, is a subset of the database. The newspaper I researched filed stories that ran in the current day's newspaper in the directory "news done." It showed all stories entered by the newspaper's staff, all wire stories and how each had been changed since its original entry.

I determined who had viewed the story by using the audit trail. When I looked up an article in the DTI program, it showed me who had viewed it. In case someone influenced the story but did not appear in the audit trail, I asked each interviewee who had informed them of the story and who they had informed of the story. This way I could ensure more complete coverage.

I decided that to have influence on a story someone would have to have affected the course of the story. This could mean that they had said they agreed that the story should run on the selected day, a different day, or not at all. This also could mean that they told the story idea to a reporter or someone else who either directly or indirectly
influenced the story. People who simply reviewed an article for routine reasons still were interviewed, because they may have had potential influence and have been unaware of it.

A gatekeeper was defined as someone who had any influence on the story starting from the original source. This definition was used because idea origination was a topic addressed in the research instruments. Influence can mean the person had a hand in whether an article was cut, killed, expanded or printed. Influence can occur through a question, command, critique or something else. Anything that could have an effect on the outcome of a story is influence.

**Research Instruments**

The research instruments consisted of three topics and eleven questions. The first topic, role, was relevant because it allowed me to examine each person's potential as a gatekeeper. The second topic, relevance, helped determine the subjects' actions and thoughts during the gatekeeping process. The third topic, notification, allowed me to find any potential gatekeepers not listed in the audit trail.

Role: What role did you play in the article? Who told you about the article? Is this an (type of) article you would review regularly? Why did you view this article?

The first question allowed me to identify interviewees as the reporter, editor, copy desk or other. Other applied to someone who passed along information or made a suggestion but was not involved directly in the story. The second question helped determine the process of story development and identify other potential gatekeepers. The third question added to the understanding of the gatekeeping process. The fourth question served to reveal other potential gatekeepers.
Relevance: Did you consider this article to be relevant to the newspapers' readers? Why or why not? Did you agree it should be printed on the day it appeared? How did this article compare to others you had read that day (day of review)?

The first and second questions helped uncover determinants in the decision-making process. The third question allowed me to detect any potential influence on the gatekeeping process. The fourth question was related to the news selection process. News selection is a subset of gatekeeping. During news selection, decisions are made as to whether a story will be written, discarded or printed. All of these decisions affect what appears in the newspaper, and that is a form of gatekeeping.

Notification: What did you know about this article before it reached you? Did any prior information influence your decision about whether the article should run in the newspaper? Did you discuss this article with anyone?

The first question was related to the news selection process. The second question was used to uncover any influences in the gatekeeping process. The third questions served to uncover any other potential gatekeepers.

These questions were asked during interviews that lasted between eight and 15 minutes. Interviews were conducted during the subjects' working hours at the newspaper office. Subjects were asked to sign a consent form before the initial interview. They were reminded of the consent form before each subsequent interview and given a chance to review it. They had the option to refrain from answering any questions and to withdraw from the study at any time.

Often, probes or follow-up questions were asked during these interviews to help obtain all of the necessary information from the interviewee. "Did another reporter offer
and thoughts on the angle? Did another reporter provide you with any information that
you included in the article?"

These same procedures applied to the second set of interviews conducted. These
were done to assess what the subjects thought of the gatekeeping process at the
newspaper. The questions were: Define gatekeeping. Who are the gatekeepers at this
newspaper? Explain how the gatekeeping process works at this newspaper. How do you
think this process could be changed?

These questions were used to better understand how people at newspapers
perceive the gatekeeping process and their roles in it.

Analyzing the Data

As I collected the stories and conducted the interviews, I kept track of all people
who influenced a story and/or served as a gate. I noted those who deviated from the
standard definitions of gatekeepers as presented in the literature review. While I did look
for information concerning gatekeepers at the newspaper, the main purpose was to
analyze the methods and research instruments used. Was use of the audit trail feasible?
Were there limitations to the technology? Were interviewees confused by a question? Did
the question solicit the type of information intended? Was relevant and useful
information garnered from the question? Did the question need adjustment?
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

The interviews conducted during this study were with editors, copy editors, clerks and reporters. Their experience level ranged from less than two years to more than fifteen. Some had a degree in journalism, and some did not. Some had worked at other small newspapers, some at big newspapers, and some had worked at only the newspaper studied. Overall, nine reporters were interviewed, six people from the copy desk and four editors. Two of the nine reporters were general assignment reporters and did not have regular beats.

What I Did

I selected the stories from the two news sections, national and local. I chose 12 stories. Each story chosen started on the front page of the respective section. With one exception, at least one of the articles chosen on a given day did not have any photographs. None of the articles appeared entirely on one page.

After picking out the articles each morning, I used one of the newspaper's computers to access the audit trail. The audit trail is part of a database system that contains all of the wire articles, written articles, partially written articles, photographs and archived stories. Users can find a particular article by performing a search for keywords, title or author. Users also can scroll through the "news done" folder looking for articles by the slug name, or name given to a story by the reporter. Sometimes the articles had been archived before I arrived at the newspaper. In this situation, I would pull up the
online layout of the newspaper, which was done the previous night, and click directly on the article to find out the slug and article location.

When I found an article and opened it, I could access three or ten lines of information all on one screen. I could see the title, slug, reporter, first few sentences and the names of everyone else who viewed the article in the order in which they did. This is what I printed out for each article. By selecting to view the history of an article, I could see what changes were made by looking at each saved version. If the article had been archived, I could not access this feature.

The Articles

The first article chosen was the centerpiece of the front page of the main news section. The article was about the local day labor system, and its pros and cons. Four photographs accompanied the article.

The second article chosen was about a drug’s growing usage in the local area. It appeared on the front page of the main news section and had no photographs.

The third article chosen appeared on the bottom right corner on the front page of the local news section. One photograph accompanied it. The reporter writes articles for a series that runs each Tuesday. The series takes a look at people behind the headlines.

The fourth article chosen concerned a local group that was trying to secure a wildlife corridor in a local area. It appeared on the lower right corner on the front page of the local news section. The article had one photograph and one graphic, a map.

The fifth article chosen covered legislative redistricting and how it would affect local politicians. The article appeared on the right side on the front page of the main news section. Two photographs of local politicians accompanied the article.
The sixth article chosen explained a new stormwater project that may reduce environmental problems at a local park. The article appeared on the lower left side on the front page of the main news section. The article had one photograph and one graphic.

The seventh article chosen was about the opening of a 95-year-old church building that had been made into a museum. The article appeared as the centerpiece on the front page of the local news section. Three photographs accompanied the article.

The eighth article chosen concerned a local vaccine shortage. The article appeared on the left side of the front page of the main news section.

The ninth article chosen concerned the re-assignment of four animals on protected species lists. The article appeared as the centerpiece on the front page of the main news section. Four photographs of the subject animals appeared.

The tenth article chosen was about bill calling for a seven-county transportation board that would affect the area airport. The article appeared on the left side on the front page of the local news section. One photograph accompanied the article.

The eleventh article chosen was about an educational program in a nearby city. The article appeared as a centerpiece on the front page of the local section. Three photographs accompanied the article.

The twelfth article chosen was a weekly column by a senior reporter. It appeared on the right side of the local section front page. The article topic was banned vanity auto tags.

Photographs accompanied eight of the articles. Two of these nine had graphics as well. Four of these nine had multiple photographs.
Interviews and Meetings

I spent my time at the newspaper reviewing the audit trail and conducting interviews. I interviewed 10 people the first day, seven the second day and nine on the third and fourth days. The fifth day, I attended two budget meetings and conducted five individual interviews. Four reporters, two editors and a metro clerk were interviewed separately, in no relation to an article, in an effort to uncover their opinions about gatekeeping at the newspaper.

Several of the people I interviewed each day were involved with more than one of the chosen articles. Because of time constraints, I had to interview these individuals about the different articles at the same time. This did not cause any problems, and their answers still varied. In most cases, they had viewed the stories I was interviewing them about on the previous day. The longest time between viewing and interviewing was from Friday to Tuesday. The shortest time between the two was midnight to the next morning.

The interview length varied mainly because of the interviewees' personalities. Another reason was the complexity involved in the particular article. However, except for the individual gatekeeping interviews conducted on the fifth day, the interviews lasted between eight and fifteen minutes. The gatekeeping interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes apiece. This was the largest amount of time any of them could spare. On more than one occasion, a person would find me the next day to expand on something said earlier. There was some back and forth interviewing like this with the articles as well. When someone mentioned receiving feedback from someone I had interviewed previously, I went back to that person for more information.

On the fifth day I attended two budget meetings. At the morning meeting, the editors reviewed that day's newspaper. They made decisions about what to put on the
front of the next day's newspaper. There was a discussion about covering a festival that weekend. One editor voiced a complaint about the newspaper always covering festivals. This comment was similar to comments made by reporters. The other editors said it needed to run, because the readers like it.

The editors questioned things that did appear. Why did we cover this with the angle? How could we have made this more relevant? Does this picture affect the credibility or play of this article? It was a question session that did not garner any answers. The final discussions revolved around follow-up articles and misleading language.

The afternoon budget meeting mostly pertained to layout. The copy editors and editors discussed placement, jumps, design and graphics. There was a recap of the earlier meeting and some wire and photograph decisions. The main discussion was about the budget breakdowns of other newspapers that would come out the following morning. A gatekeeping conversation about an article about an ex-Black Panther's speech closed the meeting. Was it news? Was it relevant? Would they be giving him credibility? The article ran, mainly because there was a hole.

The daily interviews took approximately between seven and eight total hours to conduct. During these interviews, participants answered questions about the articles they had reviewed. They discussed idea origins, relevance and any conversations they had about the article with others. The gatekeeping interviews required another two hours total. During these interviews, participants discussed their ideas about gatekeeping in general and how the process worked at this newspaper. Almost two hours was spent using the audit trail during the week. Slightly less than two hours was spent in budget
meetings. The budget meetings dealt with questions about the relevance and credibility of stories and sources, as well as how the paper presented these issues.

Reporters and the Articles

Seven of the reporters had written only one article that was selected for analysis. One reporter had written three, and another had written two. The reporter said the idea for the first article arose months ago, while working on an article about the homeless. The reporter of the first article said, "I don't know if it is relevant, because people may not care. But I think it's interesting, and that people don't realize that homeless people work every day." The reporter regularly covers the local government beat.

The reporter of the second article said several regular contacts had mentioned a growing trend during the last few months. The reporter said the article was relevant "because 70 percent of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's time is spent on that particular drug." The reporter never considered not covering the topic because it "involved public health and safety, and this beat always covers new trends." The reporter regularly covers the police beat.

The reporter of the third article had spoken with subject of this article before and was trying to give readers a look inside the university and the subject's history at the university. The reporter regularly covers the university beat.

The idea for the fourth article came from another staff reporter, who had heard about the topic at a city commission meeting. The reporter said the story would be relevant "anytime, because it concerns a big project that would use a lot of land." The reporter also said it was relevant because the newspaper's readers care about wildlife and conservation issues. The reporter regularly covers the environmental beat.
Another reporter was on the telephone with a legislator when the news broke and then passed along the information for the fifth article. A different reporter provided new material later in the day. The reporter said the article was the most directly relevant to readers because it affects representation. The reporter had been working on another article for about three hours, which this article replaced, because it was more timely and relevant to the readers.

The reporter of the sixth article had been aware of the stormwater project for years, but said it had been underreported at the newspaper. The reporter added that the tip for the article came from someone who worked for the city, which he said rarely happens. The reporter regularly covers environmental issues.

The reporter of the seventh article had seen the information about the museum in a newsletter and thought the story was relevant because the museum was in a small town where history is important to the people. The story appeared on a Thursday, though the reporter thought it should have appeared Saturday when the museum opened. The reporter is a general assignment reporter.

The reporter said the eighth article was relevant because of the number of children in the local area. The reporter was surprised the article did not appear in the local news section. The reporter, who regularly covers medicine and health issues, thought the article should have appeared the previous day because it was timely.

The reporter said the ninth article was relevant because all of the involved animals can be found in the local area. The reporter had seen the issue covered in other newspapers. The reporter had suggested a one-day turnaround for the article, but later wished for more time. "The numbers were hard to gather, and the article probably would
have been better on the weekend, but they editors needed it to fill a hole." The reporter regularly covers environmental issues.

One of the editors assigned the tenth article to the reporter. The editor had heard about the issue from another reporter, who had heard about from someone on the governing board of the airport. Everyone agreed that anything airport-related was a hot local topic.

The reporter of the eleventh article works from home in the nearby city. Two copy editors reviewed the story. The photographs determined the placement.

The original idea for the twelfth was vanity tags in general, but the reporter modified the idea after the Department of Motor Vehicles mentioned there was a list of banned phrases. The reporter said it was meant to be more entertaining than relevant.

Government, health and environment were common responses from reporters when asked why they covered a particular article. Four articles related to government. Two of these four were local political issue. The other two dealt with time spent on issues by government agencies. Three articles were related to the environment and animals. These issues may not be as relevant at other newspapers, but readers in this community care about those topics. Two articles were health related. The reporters covering these articles felt that made them obviously relevant to readers. Two of the articles were attempts by the reporters to coax readers to see the relevance of historical issues.

Editors and the Articles

Of the editors, one had reviewed nine of the articles, one had read five, and the other two had read one apiece. Those from the copy desk had reviewed between three and five of the articles apiece.
A copy editor said the first article was "somewhat feature-y" and was interesting because it provided another point of view. Two editors were interviewed. One, who knew only the basics of the article before reading it, said the article was relevant because "it covered a subject that affects everybody and casts light on a problem worthy for discussion." The editor said it was a conscious decision to run the story during the week because it makes sense to run work-related articles on workdays.

The other editor, who knew the basics and approach of the first article before reviewing it, said the article was "extremely relevant" because the issue "has been around and visible for a long time. The editor added, "It's interesting because the system is exploitive but can give someone a chance. Plus, it's a new area not previously covered."

Two editors reviewed the second article before it appeared in the newspaper. One editor, who knew the majority of the content before reviewing the article, said the article was relevant because the newspaper is in a college town where drug use is prevalent, and because the article showed a "new trend of growing use of this drug in low-economic areas." The other editor, who had no prior information about the article, said it made sense to run the article because "it's a college town, and parents care about this type of thing."

Two copy editors reviewed the third article. One copy editor said that reader relevance was not an issue with the article because it was relevant in terms of the series. "It was interesting, lighter and more compelling than other news stories that ran that day."

Two editors and one copy editor reviewed the fourth article. All said the article was relevant because of the interests of the readers locally and throughout the state. One editor, who knew 90 percent of the article before reviewing it, changed the lead sentence
because it sounded, "as though the reporter was uninterested." The copy editor said there was discussion about placement. "The city desk said not to overplay the story, because it wasn't hard enough."

The reporter of the fifth article had been working on another article for about three hours when the editors cut it and assigned this article. They said it was more timely and relevant to the readers.

One copy editor and one editor reviewed the sixth article. The copy editor changed the lead after discussion with other editors from the news desk. The editor, who knew the background of the article beforehand, said the story was relevant, but that the accompanying sidebar was not. The editor said the sidebar was a rehash of old news, so it was cut to make room for the previously mentioned article about legislative redistricting.

Two copy editors and one editor reviewed the seventh article. One of the copy editors agreed with the day the appeared, reasoning "it would have appeared too late if it ran on Saturday, because people would have made plans already." The other copy editor thought Friday would have been the best day for the story to appear. The editor, who knew nothing about the story before reviewing it, made the final decision to run the article on Thursday, so readers would have advance notice.

One copy editor and two editors reviewed the eighth article. All agreed the article was relevant because of the large numbers of children in the readership area. They also agreed on the placement, though they admitted it "was a coin toss" between two articles. The two editors felt it had to be held over for one day because of a more pertinent article the previous day.
One editor and one copy editor reviewed the ninth article. Both agreed with the reporter about the relevancy, and neither made any suggestions for change.

One of the editors assigned the tenth article to the reporter. The editor had heard about the issue from another reporter, who had heard about it from someone on the governing board of the airport. Everyone agreed that anything airport-related was a hot local topic.

Only a copy editor reviewed the eleventh article. The photographs determined the placement because of their large size.

Two editors reviewed the twelfth article. One did cut some words during the edit, because they were "borderline words that may offend some readers." The editor said the reporter often has a lot of freedom, but some ideas do get turned down because of relevancy or possible offensiveness.

The editors and those from the copy desk agreed with reporters that issues concerning health and children were obviously relevant to readers. They also agreed that stories about the environment and local politics were of high interest to the readers. The editors said some topics needed to be brought to the forefront for discussion. They said issues that have been visible for a while never received coverage before. They said historical issues tended to be community-relevant rather than reader-relevant. When filling space, the editors were less concerned with relevance. The cutting of the sidebar to make room for a different article was an example of polarity. The article the reporter ended up covering came in near the deadline, but the editors deemed it more important than the sidebar. This runs parallel to what Shoemaker said about newsworthiness and
forces. "Proximity to the deadline may be a negative force unless there is a countervailing positive force of high newsworthiness" (Shoemaker, 2001, p. 236).
<table>
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The Table

The table shows the articles reviewed, numbered one through 12, and the people who reviewed the articles. The 18 participants are identified by the title editor, reporter or copy. The numbers in each story's row indicate the order in which the participants reviewed the story. If there is a number in parentheses next to it, it indicates that participant reviewed the story multiple times. The numbers in the last row indicate the average position the participant was in the reviewing process. For instance, Editor A usually was the third person to review an article. The numbers in the last column indicate the total number of participants who reviewed a story. The number at the bottom of the column shows the average number of participants who reviewed an article.

The audit trail showed who reviewed a particular article and the order in which they did so. Reporters always held the first position in the review process. The general procedure is reporter, editor and then copy. In some situations at this newspaper, the editor will discuss changes with the reporter. One reason the reporter may not appear again in the audit trail is because the editor and reporter made the changes together at the editor's computer. Other times, the editors make changes after the reporter has left for the day. Also, if someone from the copy desk has the article open, someone else can make changes to the article during that time without changing the order of the review process in the audit trail. The person at the copy desk can remain third in the review process even though someone changed the story after they opened it, because the database updates the story and it does not have to be reopened for changes to appear.

A given person reviewed several articles more than once. Most of those articles were reviewed by an editor more than once, because of the length and amount of
information involved in the stories. The reporters often reviewed them again to add some last-minute facts or make changes suggested by editors.

Of the stories reviewed, editors averaged third in the review process. However, one editor who reviewed one article after four others skewed this number. This average makes sense, because the editors reviewed the article after a reporter or another editor. The participants from the copy desk usually reviewed the articles after two other people, the reporter and the editor. In the few times someone from the copy desk took second position, it was because the reviewing editor arrived late or was in a meeting, and the layout process had started already. Two of the numbers have asterisks next to them. This means the participant was listed in the audit trail, but did nothing more than check if the article already had been reviewed and laid out.

Three people reviewed two stories. One was a standard weekly story that did not require much input from the editors. An out-of-town reporter wrote the other. The issue was not controversial or complex. Five people reviewed five articles. Several people reviewed one, a weekly column, because it is not completely news-based and may be controversial. One was written by a new reporter, which the editors often review more, and had a large picture, which required more supervision from the copy desk. The remaining two of the five were lengthy stories about ongoing trends. The editors and copy desk reviewed these at length to ensure they were presented properly.

The majority of these stories followed the standard review process of reporter, editor and then copy desk. The order among the editors and copy desk often depends on who arrives at the newspaper first. Articles with large or numerous photographs spent more time circulating around the copy desk.
How Ideas Originated

The majority of the reporters at the newspaper are beat reporters. Many of the articles studied originated on beats during random conversations between the reporter and a regular contact. Often, they hear information that will not be used immediately in an article. Reporters said this happens because they are busy with a different article and forget about it, or they are waiting to see if the information turns into something more.

"I had a conversation about this months ago, but never got around to it."

"Different cops had mentioned it as a trend over a couple of months. I have regular contact with them, so it came up in conversations."

"I talked to the legislators a couple of weeks ago. They had foretold this would happen."

The reporters without beats often rely on readers' tips or outside sources. If they think the idea has merit, they often do some preliminary research before discussing the idea with their editors. Three of the articles studied had ideas that came additional outside sources. One came from a newsletter, one from a press release and another from an outside caller who did not have regular contact with the reporter. When the call is from an uncommon or unknown source, the reporters often proceed with reservation.

"People from … and the city called and pitched it as an idea, which they never do."

Other times, the ideas came from other reporters or editors. This often happens when the wrong person was contacted originally. In one case, a reporter heard something at a city commission meeting that pertained to another reporter's beat. In another, the editor got a call from an outside source. The idea sometimes is revamped in the budget meetings when other reporters offer new angles or information. In one case, a reporter
was on the phone with a local politician when an event occurred that was later covered by a different reporter.

Two of the articles came from inside sources. Three others came from wires or other publications. Six came from conversations with regular contacts on beats.

Relevance

Reporters' reasons for writing an article often differed from editors' reasons for running the same article. Many times, reporters seemed to look at the bigger picture when determine relevancy, while editors looked directly at the newspaper's community.

"It's a public safety matter. The FDLE spends 70 percent of its time dealing with ecstasy."

An editor said, "It's a college town," about the same article.

A copyeditor said, "Parents want to know about it."

One reporter said that readers may not care about an article he wrote, but that does not always affect his choices. People may not care, because they are not informed or are unaware of the problem. He said that sometimes a newspaper's job is to let readers know what they need to pay attention to in their area.

"I don't know if it's relevant. People may not care, but it's interesting because people don't realize homeless people work every single day."

An editor said about the same article, "It's an issue that's been around and visible for a long time. It's interesting because it's [the program discussed] exploitive, can give people a chance."

Environmental and political stories were deemed relevant regardless of whether the readers would understand why. There was a general consensus that the newspaper's
readers cared about conservation and the environment. Several interviewees also mentioned that the readers care about the area's history.

"Even if people don't understand it, it'll mean a lot in ten years."

"We only have an environmental beat at this paper because of the readers."

One of the main determinations of relevancy was gut feelings. The majority of the ideas were rejected before they reached an editor. The metro clerk always passed ideas on from outside sources, and the reporter made the decision. The metro clerk wanted to give reporters the opportunity to decide, because they may be able to extract a good idea from a poor one. The reporters have different methods for deciding if an idea should become an article.

One reporter said, "I have a standard. Will a person driving by [this town] see this article and think it's important?"

Another said, "Many ideas get turned down because they are not relevant, not important, don't have enough notice, the source gives a bad presentation, or they call the wrong person."

Roles and Gatekeeping

The reporters interviewed about gatekeeping at the newspaper said they would like the editors to provide more ideas. One said, "The editors need to read all of the articles and be more informed, because it seems as though they do not know what many of the articles are about."

This reporter said the reporters are the main gates for outside sources and for the other reporters. He also said he receives no resistance to any of his ideas, and that the burden is on the reporter to get feedback.
"Either my stories are great, or no one cares. The editors are too hands-off. Everything is one-way around here."

The senior reporter refrained from speaking negatively about the editors of how the newspaper was run. He writes a weekly column. He said the editors do turn down some of his column ideas. He said the reason often is that his idea or language used is too racy for the newspaper's readers. He receives about two or three ideas a week from readers. He only uses other people's ideas about 25 percent of the time. The columns are not relevant all of the time, but often have a local tie or make a point about a local governing body.

An editor who read almost all of the articles studied said the biggest gate is when the beat reporters talk with the editors about their ideas, and the editors ask questions. The next gate, according to him, happens between editors during the editing process. He said the editors trust the beat reporters and like to give them room. He said he feels they do the "gatekeeping process" fairly well, but that their conversations could be better and longer.

"It's reporter-driven here. I think that makes it better with the later input."

Shoemaker and Reese said that individuals have to hold substantial power within an organization to exert influence on content (2001). This differs from what the reporters and editors at this newspaper say. The editors thought the reporters enjoyed their freedom when deciding on content. However, the reporters wanted more input, ideas and time from the editors.
Routine Articles

There was a dispute about how a recent holiday was covered in the newspaper. Most of the reporters said they felt the newspaper wrote the same story every year and made no attempt to find a newsworthy or interesting angle. They said no one complains, because there is no time.

"Every Sunday we run a festival story."

Some of the editors shared this feeling. During one of the budget meetings, several agreed with one objection about covering an annual festival that weekend. The final decision was to run the article, because the readers like festival coverage. There was no discussion between the reporters and the editors about this.

Motivations and Time Constraints

None of the people interviewed looked at an article they would not review regularly. Some had impact on articles during conversations, but did not use the audit trail to make any changes. That impact was important when discussing relevance with the interviewees. On one occasion, an article that a reporter had invested three hours on was cut. In this situation, both the reporter and the editor agreed a developing story was more relevant to readers. Therefore, the polarity changed. An article that previously had a positive reason for being printed, the time spent, became neutral when it was thrown out. Twice, a reporter and editor disagreed about what day the article should have run. The editor had the final say in both instances.

One of the reporters said the article's quality would have been better if he had had more time, but his editor said they needed to fill a hole. He said he thought it would have been a better article for the weekend newspaper. The reporter also said that he often has to turn out complicated articles, which require more time, too quickly. Another article,
about a speech by an ex-Black Panther, ran even though the editors had questions about its relevancy. It ran to fill a hole.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Originally, this study was going to compare the gatekeeping process, using the audit trail method, between a large and a small newspaper. The main goal was to determine potential gatekeepers that past gatekeeping studies have overlooked. The study was going to span ten weeks. Unfortunately, legal issues kept that from happening. People were protesting outside one of the newspapers the day the research was supposed to start. The newspaper's legal team decided that if the newspaper was sued because of one of the articles researched, any notes taken during the study could be subpoenaed. Therefore, consent was denied, and the study halted, because the university will not allow students to conduct research without consent. To still continue with the chosen theory, there was a shift to a methods study. Though common at newspapers, audit trails were not used in gatekeeping research. That seemed curious, because they hold so much information about potential gatekeepers.

Conclusions

The second set of interviews on gatekeeping broadly rather than specific stories allowed the subjects to be more open with their thoughts about the newspaper and how it worked. They were able to expand on issues that arose during budget meetings. For instance, some of the reporters and editors felt the same about festival coverage, though they were unaware of it. This was an example of how communication between the ranks regarding what articles should run was lacking at the newspaper.
The extra interview questions about gatekeeping asked at the end of the week also allowed the newspaper staff to contemplate what was going on during the study and provide their own insights. The interviewees' answers showed the discrepancies between reporters and editors and how they view the gatekeeping process at their newspaper. The findings indicated that at this paper reporters, more often than editors, fill the role of gatekeeper at newspapers. This runs contrary to previous gatekeeping studies. However, these results may not apply at all newspapers.

Larger newspapers tend to be editor-driven, not reporter-driven. Editors reject story ideas more often and may kill an article right before deadline because it didn't measure up to their personal standards. Reporters do come up with story ideas, but often those are beat reporters. Otherwise, ideas originate with editors, at weekly brainstorming sessions run by editors or between editor and reporters. Another difference is that the editors are expected to be responsible for and familiar with every article being worked on by a member of their staff. Halloran, Elliot and Murdock (1970) said that the editorial staff functions as gatekeepers but differently at each newspaper.

At the budget meetings, the editors seem to find major problems after the articles have run. These problems, if found earlier, may have prevented the article or postponed it from running. Does this mean that they need stronger gates at the newspaper? Maybe they just need more gates. Would changes in the gatekeeping process help them to find these problems before the articles run? Judging by the answers given during the gatekeeping interviews, the reporters and editors seem to think so.

The results of this study were surprising because many studies only look at editors and their influence on the gatekeeping process. All newspapers are different to some
degree, but the newspaper used in this study is unique, which explains its differences from larger newspapers. The newspaper used in this study found more influence at the reporter level where most of the main decisions were made. The decisions made at the editor level tended to be more fine-tuning rather than major decisions to cut or kill an article. Also, many larger newspapers have too many news items to choose from and therefore, have a tougher news selection process. This newspaper, however, rarely discarded news stories. The extra interviews provided a glimpse into the minds of the people who are a part of the gatekeeping process on a daily basis. Most felt that the process could be changed to better the stories that appear in the newspaper. Many also felt that the process weighed too heavily on reporters. This was revealed during the audit trail interviews as well. Observation was necessary to establish validity in this case, because it was a small newspaper.

**Implications**

The implications of the findings for the field of journalism are enormous. Newsrooms may consider reevaluating their current processes to not place too much emphasis on just reporters or just editors but on both equally. Journalism schools may spend more time on the concept of gatekeeping and begin introducing it to undergraduates, who may end up as gatekeepers in their chosen careers. Researchers have a new tool to use when conducting studies at newspapers. They also have new insight into the term gatekeeper and to whom it might apply. Previous studies may have been accurate studying editors at larger newspapers. However, the researchers often did not explain the basis for that decision, and therefore, failed to rule out other potential gatekeepers. Future studies using the audit trail may involve a follow-up, which would
see if the staff made any changes to the newspaper's gatekeeping process. The length of
the studied should be extended, as should the number of articles used and data should be
collected from newspapers of various sizes. Future studies also may compare the
gatekeeping processes between newspapers and other media. They might be surprisingly
similar.

**Weaknesses**

The one drawback of using the audit trail was that the newspaper's archivist
archived the articles at different times each morning. If that happened before the chosen
articles were pulled, the archives had to be searched. That was difficult because many of
the identifying slugs or file names used by the reporters were not obvious. Another
problem was that when the archivist was in the process of archiving, the articles could not
be located on the database. Other than those minor problems, the audit trail worked
especially well for identifying people who had viewed the articles. Many people appeared
on the list for routine reasons. In future studies, the researcher may decide to overlook
those people, but in this case they were interviewed as well. They may not be essential
when studying a larger newspaper. The audit trail also shows the history of the article,
which includes what order people viewed the articles. This may provide extra insight into
how changes are made to the article.

**Future Research**

The audit trail is a relatively easy tool that can be used to study the gatekeeping
process. The output provided me with a list of people involved with the story and the
order in which they viewed it. For the most part, stories were relatively easy to find in the
database. However, focusing on the news done folder made it hard to find killed stories
or stories that had been archived. If the newspaper archivist had been informed of the parameters of the study and set time established for the daily archiving, the searching would have been easier. With greater assistance from the newspaper staff, stories could have had more accurate slug or descriptive names and changes to the stories could have been tracked while the story was going through the editing process. Both of these things could have been addressed if I had been more familiar with what potential problems would be encountered.

On some newspapers' systems, the archivist may delete some parts of the history that the researcher may not know about. The main issue with using the audit trail is time. Time affects quality. Too much time between viewing and interviews may affect the responses given by the newspaper staff. The archivist needs to archive the stories in the morning so an empty news done folder is available and this can interfere with using the audit trail.

Keeping these issues in mind, future researchers can use an audit trial to study previous overlooked gatekeepers or identify key gatekeepers at a certain newspaper. The audit trail can be used to expand current research or news decision-making by examining changes made to stories. The audit trail can help examine the predominate types of stories that appear in a newspaper. The ways audit trails can help researchers are endless. They can help researchers with their timeliness as well as with the information they hold that cannot be found elsewhere.
APPENDIX
CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The Real Gatekeepers: a Methodology to Help Redefine the Concept of Gatekeepers (previous title)

Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Consent: By signing this form, you consent to answer questions relating to your involvement and knowledge of the newspaper article in question to determine whether you were involved in the gatekeeping process, how you were involved and to what extent you were involved.

Confidentiality: The principal investigator will maintain confidentiality to the full extent of the law. Any notes will refer to you by your position rather than by your name.

Benefits: No immediate benefits are expected. This means that you will not be paid or receive any other remuneration for the participation, aside from the possible satisfaction at helping to improve the current definition of gatekeeper used in gatekeeping research.

Risks: Taking part in the interviews will have no risks to you of physical, psychological, or economic harm greater than those ordinarily encountered in everyday life.

Cessation: You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer and that you may cease participation and leave at any time.

Time involved: The time involved in your participation will last over a one- to two-week period in January of 2001. Interviews will last less than 20 minutes. The number of interviews depends upon your involvement in the chosen articles.

Concerns: Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the Institutional Review Board, 98A Psychology Building, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250, telephone 392-0433. Questions about the study may be directed to:

Principal Investigator: Julie Hunt Lyons
Phone: 378-1961
Email: Julie-Lyons@juno.com

Faculty Advisor: Leonard Tipton
Phone: 392-6669
Email: tipton@ufl.edu

Agreement: I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julie Hunt Lyons grew up in Florida. She received her Bachelor of Science in Communication with a minor in international affairs from Florida State University. She received her Master of Arts in Mass Communication with an emphasis in journalism from the University of Florida.