

**DEMOCRACY, CITIZENS' MEDIA, AND RESISTANCE:
A STUDY OF THE *NEW RIVER FREE PRESS***

A thesis by

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Abstract

A central concern of media scholars such as Ben Bagdikian and Robert McChesney is the undemocratic potential of the U.S. mainstream media system, dominated by a small number of highly consolidated, multinational, corporate media firms. In this context, other scholars, including Chris Atton, John Downing, Stephen Duncombe, Nina Eliasoph, and Clemencia Rodriguez, have argued for the importance of citizen's media, defined as citizen-run, non-profit, independent media projects that may have greater democratic potential. Since the majority of research into citizens' media has focused on media from urban cities, this thesis offers discussion and analysis of a progressive citizen's paper, the *New River Free Press*, located in a rural, Appalachian community that is home to a large technical, military, state university. After first reviewing major scholarly criticism of mainstream media in a democratic society and characteristics and debates about citizen's media, this thesis uses interviews of key staff members and textual analysis of archived past issues of the *New River Free Press* to situate the paper in the citizen's media literature. Ultimately, this thesis locates citizens' media as a necessity for democratic societies, suggesting methods of resistance against undemocratic practice and the further consolidation and monopolization of the global media system.

Dedication:

Stephen Christopher Mihal

March 5, 1981- June 7, 2003

feather, because of your wings, I fly

-light of all our lives-
in these days between
you are still as always,
shining
too beautiful for this world

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CHAPTER ONE: CRITICAL VIEWS OF MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

From the 1980s, the U.S. mass media system has increasingly come under the control of a small number of powerful, global media conglomerates. The power, organization and economic incentives of the large media corporations, including Time Warner, AT&T Corporation, General Electric, News Corporation, Viacom, Bertelsmann, and Disney, severely compromise their ability to support and participate in democratic communication. A democratic society requires open and free citizen access to media as a forum of political and cultural debate and expression, facilitating and ensuring the practice of self-government.

Opposed to the practices of the corporate media firms, smaller and more grass-roots-oriented “citizens’ media” (also labeled as “alternative media” or “radical media”) enter the social struggle as a democratic force, actively engaging citizenship and transforming traditional social relationships. The participation of citizens and citizens’ groups throughout the world, in the creation of non-profit, independent media outlets, actively resists the power of the corporate media giants. Citizens’ media offer an opportunity to analyze the dimensions and practices of democratic media in order to strengthen resistance to the consolidation of the corporate media, to empower citizens, and to promote democratic practice.

To address the issues of corporate media, democracy, and citizens’ media as resistance, this thesis, which applies perspectives on citizens’ media to one example, the *New River Free Press*, located in Southwestern Virginia, is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1, “Critical Views of Media and Democracy,” explores two theories of democracy and two approaches to mainstream media criticism (the political economy and professional journalistic routines approaches) in order to analyze the potentially undemocratic practices of media. Chapter 2, “Democracy, Creativity, and Resistance: The Practices of Citizens’ Media”, focuses on the democratic potential of media by exploring different theories used to describe non-profit, independent citizens’ media outlets. Chapter 3, “Studying the *New River Free Press* as Citizens’ Media: Geographic Context, Overview, and Methodology,” provides a brief description of the Appalachian region, specifically focusing on the area in Virginia, reviews the development of different citizens’ papers in the New River Valley region of Virginia since 1968, and discusses the methodology used to research the *New River Free Press*. Chapter 4, “Educate, Agitate, Activate: The *New River Free Press* as a Citizens’ Media,” provides a detailed analysis of the practices and organization of the *New River Free Press* loosely based on the dimensions of citizens’ media developed in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 concludes by analyzing the ways in which the *New River Free Press* radicalizes democracy through engaging citizenship and transforming social relationships, discussing the democratic potential of citizens’ media, and suggesting methods of resisting undemocratic media practice.

This first chapter examines definitions of democracy, describes the goal of a democratic media, and explores how mass media may operate undemocratically. The centrality of democracy to media theory not only requires that democracy is understood conceptually in relation to media systems, but also functionally. In any media system past or present, there exists conflict between democratic media theory and media practice; this makes the exploration of both democratic media theory and active media systems in democratic societies necessary. Investigating and understanding exactly how the current

media system may operate in undemocratic ways is one of the first steps in working towards a more democratic media. One goal of mass media criticism is to explain how the conflicts between mass media and democracy occur and what the possible implications are as a result. Criticism undemocratic media practice also highlights the urgency of radical media theory in researching and developing democratic solutions. To explore these issues, this chapter is broken down into the following sections: classical and radical democracy, the role of democratic media, and critical approaches to mass media.

Classical and Radical Democracy

The first section of this chapter explores classical democracy and radical democracy as developed by media scholars to explain the ideal practice of democratic media. The definitions developed to explain democracy in the context of citizens' media reflect different ideological positions, which impact the ways in which citizens' media are understood. Radical democracy recognizes cultural expression as necessary democratic practice, extending the classical definition, which focuses on electoral politics and explicitly political expression. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate both classical and radical democracy theories to determine the implications of each definition.

Classical Democracy

The first definition, classical democracy, is used by Robert McChesney (1999) in order to address what he feels are problems with current conceptions of democracy. He claims that through its frequent use, definitions and thus understandings of democracy have become tied increasingly to notions of individual freedom. As such, McChesney claims, the current application of the term is too narrow. McChesney (1999, p. 5) argues instead for a definition of democracy in what he calls its "classical sense," which is "the rule of the many." According to his description, the classical definition goes beyond electoral and representational democracy to include daily expressions citizenship, stressing the importance of free and open media access.

Similar to McChesney, Alger (1998) points out that common conceptions of democracy only focus on civil liberties and electoral processes. Alger claims that democracy extends to everyday forms of communication that enable citizens to participate in open debate and free expression. Citing political theorist Robert Dahl, Alger states that the two primary criteria for a democratic society are *effective participation* and *enlightened understanding*. Effective participation refers to the ability for all citizens to have equal opportunities to contribute to debates, discussion, and agenda setting; enlightened understanding refers to the potential for citizens' to obtain adequate information on which to base their decisions (Alger, 1998).

Like McChesney's classical democracy, Alger's definition extends democracy beyond the electoral process to include everyday practices, focusing on the need for open and free media systems. Since true democracies depend on active citizenship and work toward full citizen participation, open access for political and cultural expression through media is necessary in promoting social equality. Scholars contend that if a democracy is committed to social equality and self-government, then the media will be an essential forum for political and cultural debate (McChesney, 1999). McChesney (1999, p. 288) claims, "If the governing process is predicated upon having an informed citizenry ... [then] media perform a crucial function." The media can provide citizens with the knowledge necessary to make informed electoral and political decisions. Without an open

forum to learn about and debate political issues, the ability of citizens to make informed decisions is weakened.

Compared to the 'common' conception of democracy, McChesney's (1999, p. 5) definition extends beyond the system of election and representation to include "reducing social inequality and establishing a media system that serves the entire population and promotes democratic rule". Despite the benefits of his definition, McChesney does not believe that everyone should participate in media production, reserving expression for those with higher education. Therefore, although his definition recognizes that more people should have an informed voice in the traditional political realm, his definition still privileges and results in an elitist conception of democratic practice. Essentially, McChesney extends the definition of democracy to include everyday politics, like media, but seems to have a limited view of what 'the political' is, failing to recognize the full spectrum of democratic activity and expression, such as creative cultural forms. However, other definitions of democracy, like radical democracy, move beyond the problems with classical democracy by recognizing the need for all citizens and people to contribute to cultural, social, and political production.

Radical Democracy

Radical democracy, a second definition of democracy used by media scholars, goes beyond the politically-oriented definitions like classical democracy to include all forms of cultural, social, and political citizen participation as democratic action. The term 'radical' refers to the application of democracy to all realms of human life and expression, which contests and renegotiates traditional and classical definitions of democracy. Rodriguez (2001) develops radical democracy from the theories of feminist scholars Mouffe and McClure, who extend the understanding of political participation from traditional forms like voting and protesting, to all forms of social and cultural production.

Radical democracy refers to any social, cultural, or political action that seeks to define the way the world is understood and experienced. Included within radical democracy are the everyday sites where meaning is social contested and cultural codes are negotiated (Rodriguez, 2001). Thus democracy is understood as operating on a multiplicity of levels, from legislative decisions to everyday practice, and in many forms, from signing petitions to style of dress. Rodriguez (2001, p. 19) claims,

Breaking away from a modern understanding of citizenship as expressed by voting and protesting, the theory of radical democracy advances a concept of political subject as one who expresses his/her citizenship in multiple forms, including for example, the collective transformation of symbolic codes, historically legitimized identities, and traditionally established social relations.

Radical democracy provides media scholarship a way to acknowledge the diverse ways media may function as democratic or undemocratic forces in society. Definitions of democracy that are based primarily on electoral or procedural practice alone cannot fully describe how media operate because they ignore the agency of cultural expression, which is active democratic practice through open and direct participation in media production. Radical democracy encompasses and extends the classical democracy definition, by including all forms of politicized human expression by all people. All subsequent references to democracy will refer to radical democracy unless otherwise indicated

because it recognizes that open and full access of media for all citizens is a necessary component of democratic society.

Democratic Media

The second section of this chapter describes the ideal role of media within a democratic society to explain the ways democratic media may support radical democracy. Rodriguez (2001) notes, media do not just inform the citizenry, but they can also provide a forum for citizens to express their opinions and experiences, expanding the power of the citizen to contribute to decision-making and debate. Media, as an open forum in democratic societies, should also support the exchange and expression of citizens' experiences and perspectives. Regardless of medium (print, video, film, radio, television, Internet), content (news, entertainment), and scope (local, national), democratic media systems should be designed to allow and encourage full participation of citizens in media production. Any obstacle that prevents or denies citizen access to media as a tool of self-rule and political participation should be envisioned as a threat to the fundamentals of democracy that aspire to an equal, self-governed society.

While the role of a democratic media may seem idealized, there are many cultural forces, both democratic and undemocratic, which are practiced. Both Rodriguez (2001) and McChesney (1999) stand alongside other scholars who argue that the mass media limit the ability of citizens to engage in critical discussion and therefore hinder democracy. Currently, the U.S. mass media system is composed of a few large corporations that dominate the U.S. television, film, radio, newspaper, magazine, and book markets. This system allows a few large corporations, some of which are global, responsibility for producing, distributing, and exhibiting the majority of mass media. Under this system, critical media scholars claim that mass media practice does not conform to the interests of the citizens, falling unacceptably short of performing its democratic function. Additionally, as explored below, the problems are compounded by the standards of professional journalism accepted by mainstream mass media outlets, which determine who can and cannot contribute to media production, resulting in restricted access to media outlets.

Critical Approaches to Mass Media

The third and last section of this chapter examines the two main approaches to mass media criticism, political economy analysis and professional norms critique. Both political economy and professional norms approaches offer insight into the ways conflict may arise between mass news and the practice of democracy. Although both approaches hold that the current organization of the mass media restricts participatory democracy, they critique mass media from different perspectives.

Political Economy

The first critical approach, political economy, analyzes the ways that the financial organization of mass media may curb democratic practice. In this approach, the threat to democracy arises from the tendency of mass media to primarily react to financial pressures instead of serving and engaging the public to the extent that a democracy requires. Research in the political economy of mass media can be loosely grouped under the following areas: consolidation and market dominance, cross-ownership, and advertising and profit orientation. To understand how democratic participation may be restricted, an examination of the research within each area of political economy analysis is necessary.

Consolidation and Market Dominance

Political economists interested in consolidation and market dominance examine how the horizontal and vertical consolidation of media markets may limit participation in media production, and thus democracy. Murdock (1996, p. 91) observed,

By the beginning of this [twentieth] century the age of chain ownership and the press barons had arrived, prompting the liberal democratic commentators to acknowledge a growing contradiction between the idealized role of the press as a key resource for citizenship and its economic base in private ownership.

The problems of the early twentieth century were repeated at the beginning of the twenty-first. A 2003 report by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) confirms Bagdikian's 1983 prediction that "by the 1990s a half-dozen large corporations will own all the most powerful media outlets in the United States" (2000, p. 3-4). The undemocratic potential of consolidated corporate ownership of media is two-fold: first, it limits the number of voices that participate in media production, and second, it entrusts reporting on political issues to large corporations with business interests.

Corporate ownership of media

The first problem with consolidation and market orientation focuses on how the ownership of the majority of mass media outlets by seven or eight large corporations places limits on who can participate in media production. To begin with, the initial financial investment required to start a national media organization restricts who can participate in media production (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Even if the initial capital were available to start a national media organization, the organization would then have to compete with the few media empires that own the major media outlets. The few large media corporations are vertically integrated, owning the means of media production, distribution, and exhibition, and horizontally integrated, controlling the majority of market share at any given level (Bagdikian, 2000).

According to a 2004 report by Columbia Journalism Review (CRJ), Time Warner, "the largest media company in the world is the standard bearer of synergy and vertical integration in the modern digital age." Time Warner owns such outlets and brands as HBO, CNN, Time Warner Cable, Warner Bros. (& Studios), Time magazine, Elektra recording label, Columbia House, Road Runner Internet service, TBS, New Line Cinema, AOL, and Netscape Communications (CRJ, 2004, *Who Owns What: Time Warner*). In addition to owning an extensive variety of media outlets and products, Time Warner, as a vertically integrated company, is able to produce programming, air the programming (on their television stations), and charge the public for exhibition (through their cable service).

Clear Channel, an example of horizontal integration, is the largest radio conglomerate in the world; as of 2004, it owns radio stations in 44 of 50 states, including eight stations in Washington, D.C., with around 70 radio stations in California, and 40 in New York (CRJ, 2004, *Who Owns What: Clear Channel*). Accused of using their power to censor music and political content, Clear Channel is nothing short of a radio monopoly. The domination of media markets, both vertically and horizontally, by large media corporations decreases citizen access, and places the democratic responsibility of open debate and expression in the hands of a few private corporations.

While Bagdikian (2000, p. 239) notes that media do not always act in agreement, the corporate organization of media institutions places "corporate decision making [as]

the most powerful single force in socializing and politicizing the American public". Chomsky (1989) goes as far as to proclaim that mass media's political economy constitutes private-censorship, which unlike state-censorship, is not explicit. He feels that in democratic societies where the media are in the hands of a few, large, private corporations, the types and forms of censorship are harder to trace (Chomsky, 1989). Through these market practices more people are excluded from decision-making and knowledge producing positions, creating an elite discourse predicated on institutionally-reinforced economic dominance.

Political power of media conglomerates

The second problem with consolidation and market dominance is the political power of the large mass media companies wielding political influence over policy in areas such as tax legislation, labor practices, anti-trust law, trade, and interest rates (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Tied to its business interest is the possibility or perception that mass media executives may exchange favorable coverage or endorsement with legislators and politicians for political favors. As a result, the political lobbying power of media corporations, both financially and through political coverage, can work to benefit the media companies, which is usually at the expense of democracy.

For example, Bagdikian (2000) revealed how in 1969 the then president and chief officer of the Hearst Corporation in New York persuaded President Nixon, through threatening personal correspondence, to reverse his decision on the Newspaper Preservation Act. In effect, the Act allowed certain newspapers to skirt antimonopoly law and save the papers from competition. The Hearst Corporation teamed up with other media chains that stood to benefit from the passage of the Act (Bagdikian, 2000). Among the chains that joined were Cox and Scripps-Howard, who along with Hearst controlled media empires with around sixty-five newspapers and other media properties (Bagdikian, 2000).

After Nixon signed the Act every Hearst, every Cox, and every Scripps-Howard paper endorsed Nixon for president (Bagdikian, 2000). Bagdikian's (2000, p. 100) description of newspaper support for Nixon after his reversal powerfully highlights the political payoff Nixon received for his decision, he explains,

Without the chains whose local papers benefited from the White House reversal on the Newspaper Preservation Act, Richard Nixon would have had, with the exception of Barry Goldwater in 1964, the lowest newspaper support of any Republican candidate since World War II. Instead, he had the highest newspaper support of any candidate in U.S. history...In the case of the Newspaper Preservation Act, three media operators, with the stroke of a pen, ordered their professionals to endorse for president a man who had previously attacked their constitutional freedoms but who had recently granted them a corporate favor.

A more recent example can be found in the research of Gilens and Hertzman (1996) who analyzed the news coverage of the controversial Telecommunications Act of 1996, which deregulated media ownership rules allowing increased market consolidation. Gilens and Hertzman (1996) studied how news outlets covered the Act based on whether the media company could benefit, might benefit, or would not benefit from the Act. They found that not only did the outlets that stood to benefit report on the proposed deregulation in a positive light more frequently than other papers, but they also featured fewer stories dealing with the Act (Gilens & Hertzman, 1996).

Interlocking boards of directorates

The consolidation of media empires also includes interlocking boards of directors between media corporations and other industries. This means that the people that serve on the board of directors for the media corporations, who represent shareholders and legally run the companies, also serve on the board of directors for other media corporations and other Fortune 1000 firms (McChesney, 1999). According to McChesney (1999), eight of the largest U.S. based media corporations participate in joint ventures with the other seven media corporations, with News Corp. participating in at least one joint venture with every large media corporation. As Bagdikian (1999, p. 29) summarizes,

Wealthy managers and billionaires run these firms with clear stakes in the outcome of the most fundamental political issues, and their interests are often distinct from those of the vast majority of humanity. By any known theory of democracy, such a concentration of economic, cultural, and political power into so few hands- and mostly unaccountable hands at that- is absurd and unacceptable.

As a result of the concentrated wealth and interlocking interests and ventures of the corporate media firms, the ability for the corporations to act in the public interest and provide everyday citizens a means of expression is compromised by the business interests of the media firms.

Media corporations and political contributions

Another conflict of interest resulting from consolidation and market orientation concerns the ability of large media corporations to donate large sums of money to political candidates, including those running for presidency. Although Bagdikian (2000) frames the \$152 million that Reagan spent for his presidential campaign in 1980 as exorbitant, the money raised and spent in political campaigns is quickly rising above this level. For example, the Public Citizen (2004) reports that George W. Bush reached \$171 million with 7 months before the 2004 election. In the same presidential race, two of the three biggest career contributors to Democratic nominee John Kerry are Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo (#1), a law firm that lobbies for the telecommunications industry, and Time Warner (#3) (The Center for Public Integrity, 2004). The direct transfer of money from media corporations to political candidates creates a clear conflict of interest, threatening open-debate and self-rule.

Cross-ownership

Closely tied to the research of consolidation and market dominance is the second area of political economy research, cross-ownership. Cross-ownership refers to the multiple media and non-media holdings of the mass media corporations. This research contends that media cross-ownership not only discourages democratic competition as discussed earlier, but also influences news and media content. As media consolidation increases, corporations diversify their media holding by purchasing production, distribution, and exhibition outlets in a variety of media including, film, radio, television, newspapers, and magazines.

Media holdings

Disney, for example, owns the ABC network and has diverse holdings in magazine and book publishing, broadcast and cable, movie production and distribution, multimedia and Internet, music, and theater (CJR, 2003, Who Owns What: The Walt Disney

Company). Another example is Viacom, one of the largest global media empires, which owns broadcast stations including local CBS and UPN stations, cable stations including MTV, Nickelodeon, and Showtime, radio outlets including Infinity Broadcasting, film production including Paramount Pictures, book publishing including Simon & Schuster, and other holding like the Blockbuster video store chain and Paramount Parks (CRJ, 2003, *Who Owns What: Viacom*). News holdings, then, became a minority in a larger entertainment oriented environment.

Critics argue that cross-ownership of media outlets leads to self-promotion and self-interest, opposed to serving public interest. For example, McAllister's (2002) research revealed that corporate media synergy, the plugging of a media companies holdings in news programming and other fora was present in reporting on the last episode of the TV program *Seinfeld*. By covering the last episode of *Seinfeld*, NBC marginalized important news items that were the leading stories on other networks such as nuclear tensions between Pakistan and India, Middle East peace talks, and riots in Indonesia. He states that, "this example shows the current context of news organizations influences the agenda of news: what is covered and what is not covered" (McAllister, 2002, p. 399).

Non-media holdings

These corporations not only have concentrated ownership of diverse media outlets, but they also have substantial holdings in other industries. The non-media holdings of some of the media corporations are diverse; for example General Electric (GE), the company who owns the NBC network, has non-media industry holdings including GE aircraft engines, GE medical systems, GE power systems, GE plastics, GE transportation systems, GE industrial systems, and GE commercial finance (CJR, 2003, *Who Owns What: General Electric*). Not only do the corporations like GE own media outlets, but also they have direct ties to military and industrial manufacturers, seriously jeopardizing the likelihood their media outlets will serve the public interest by covering such holdings in an assertive way.

Global media

McChesney (1999) explains that during the 1990's the transition from primarily a national media to a full-force global media diversified the business interests of media corporations and weakened the promotion of self-government. The three largest transnational media corporations, what McChesney (1999, p. 91) calls the "holy trinity of the global media system," are Time Warner, Disney, and News Corp. The immense size and large domestic profits of the transnational media corporations enable them to enter markets all around the world.

The corporations enter new global markets with enormous financial backing and seemingly endless resources for content coming from their diverse media holdings. The disparity of wealth between media companies makes it difficult for local and national media organization to compete with the global media. For example, McChesney (1999, p. 87) reports, "the largest media firm in the world in terms of annual revenues, Time Warner (1998 revenues: \$28 billion), is some *fifty times* [emphasis added] larger in terms of annual sales than the worlds' fiftieth-largest media firm." More recently, a report by the Free Press and Free Press Action Fund (2004) revealed that Time-Warner's annual revenues totaled \$40.9 million in 2002 (Free Press and Free Press Action Fund, 2004).

The dominating presence of U.S. media corporations in foreign markets brings along many negative consequences for democratic media because of the decline in

coverage of local issues and the “packaging” of news programming that can easily move across borders. According to McChesney (1999, p. 103), “The global media system is best understood, then, as one that advances corporate and commercial interests and values, and denigrates or ignores that which cannot be incorporated into its mission”. As large transnational media conglomerates, like Time Warner, move into new markets, presence of local culture, customs, and issues is replaced by “American” (more accurately, corporate-capitalistic) values of consumerism and capitalism. In attempts to produce programming that can be exported to many different regions and countries without much change, the transnational media corporations rely on “packaged” programming, which encourages “universal” content, such as action-adventure, human interest, and celebrity news (McChesney, 1999). Not only does this type of programming reduce the presence of local coverage, but it also avoids addressing controversial national and global issues that are politically and culturally charged.

Furthermore, scholars criticize corporate programming for promoting the ideals of consumerism and commercialism, which carry an implicit political bias (McChesney, 1999). For McChesney (1999), the transnational corporations encourage a depoliticized citizenry marked by complicity and cynicism, which is the preeminent model of U.S. neo-liberal democracy. He claims (1999, p. 100),

The global media system is *radical*, in the sense that it will respect no tradition or custom, on balance, if it stands in the way of significantly increased profits. But it ultimately is politically *conservative*, because the media giants are significant beneficiaries of the current global social structure, and any upheaval in property or social relations, particularly to the extent it reduced the power of business and lessened inequality, would possibly- no, probably- jeopardize their positions. Therefore, media giants are more likely to support the dominating powers in so far as their economic vitality and dominance are protected.

Under this system the media may become a significant antidemocratic force when their political-economic interests and desires conflict with the demands and expressions of an informed and active citizenry. The depoliticization of citizenry through commercialism, which McChesney (1999) describes as the implicit political bias of corporate media programming, is not solely contingent on the cross-ownership of media outlets. Scholars have also investigated how the role of advertising may limit democratic expression.

Advertising

Advertising, which the third area researched by political economy scholars, deals with how advertising affects news content through the financial dependency of mass media on continual and constant advertising for revenue. Based on the constraint of advertising dependency, some scholars believe the advertiser is in a gatekeeper position regarding media content and audience. Therefore, critical media research investigates at least two areas: advertiser influence and media audience.

Advertiser influence

The first concern of advertising influence pertains to media coverage of issues that politically or economically affect the advertising company. In 1983 Bagdikian (2000, p.153) revealed that, “newspapers make 75 percent of their revenues from ads and devote about 65 percent of their daily space to them.” Broadcasting, of course, is dependent on advertising for virtually all of its revenue. Because such a large portion of

revenue comes from advertisers, news outlets may be susceptible to advertiser influence over content. Advertiser influence has the potential to impact media practices and content in a variety of ways, which is not surprising considering, as Baker (1994) estimates, approximately 65% of newspaper space and 22% of TV time is dedicated to advertising.

Baker (1994) describes four ways in which advertiser influence has affected and has the potential to affect media content, including: favorable treatment given to advertisers in news stories and editorials; the promotion of a “buying mood” aimed at increasing favorable reception of advertising; avoidance of partisan and controversial issues that may offend potential consumers and lessen the advertisers reach; and catering to upper and middle class audiences with buying power. Proctor & Gamble, the largest television advertiser, has used financial leverage to censor media content related and unrelated to its products (Baker, 1994). In the 1990’s, by threatening to withdraw all advertising from any station that broadcast an ad, Proctor & Gamble successfully censored an ad by a political advocacy group that called for a boycott of Proctor & Gamble’s product, Folgers Coffee, because sales of the coffee were supporting the vicious and murderous civil war in El Salvador (Baker, 1994). During the 1960’s, the demands of Proctor & Gamble stretched far beyond its own products, with detailed advertising policies that dictated how specific content would be handled (Baker, 1994). For example, some of Proctor & Gamble’s requirements were: the “horrors” of war to be minimized; men in uniform, businessmen, and “positive social forces” to be valorized, not vilified; businesses and businessmen never depicted as corrupt, ruthless, or deceptive; and issues of gun control, abortion, or cults completely avoided (Baker, 1994).

Another example comes from a 2003 Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) report, which reveals how the close relationship between *The New York Times* and Starbucks may have influenced news coverage. *The New York Times* and Starbucks had a 2002 promotional agreement in which Starbucks ensured that the *Times* is the only newspaper sold in its chains, and the *Times* promoted Starbucks in national ad campaigns (FAIR, 2003). *The New York Times* reported this agreement at the bottom of a 1,300-word article with two photos that hailed Starbucks as a growing part of Manhattan culture (FAIR, 2003). Within the following three months, the *Times* ran two more stories praising Starbucks, one ran on the front page and focused on the opening of Starbucks chains in Europe, and the other focused on Starbucks in Japan (FAIR, 2003). Neither of the later two articles mentioned the promotional agreement (FAIR, 2003).

Media audience

The second concern of advertising influence concerns the media audience, specifically audience marketability, and its ultimate effects on content, including market-friendly programming. In describing audience marketability, Herman and Chomsky (2002, p. 16) note, “In short, the mass media are interested in attracting audiences with buying power, not audiences per se; it is affluent audiences that spark advertiser interest today”. Media programming that attracts audiences with expendable capital also attracts advertisers, which encourages media outlets to cater to wealthy audiences with the “right demographics”.

Targeting the ‘right audience’, which is usually defined as an affluent and/or young (willing to spend) audience, is completely incompatible with democratic principles because it reinforces minority participation in social expression, while marginalizing

citizens without significant purchasing power and content targeted to audiences with undesirable demographics is removed. In practice, even for the “right” audiences, this results in market-friendly programming, which is less serious, lightly entertaining, and non-controversial (Herman and Chomsky, 2002). McChesney (1999, p. 113) agrees that while the media are non-conspiratorial and only follow market influences, the political economy of the media conglomerates acts as an undemocratic media force. In a democratic society where the media are supposed to serve as an unmitigated forum for social and political debate, the influence of profit and advertising influences on media content presents a serious obstacle for a democratic media.

Taken collectively the three areas of political economy mass media criticism--consolidation, cross ownership, and advertising-- reveal many possible contradictions between the current media system and a functioning democracy. Bagdikian (2000, p. 192) states,

The inappropriate fit between the country’s major media and the country’s political system has starved voters of relevant information, leaving them at the mercy of paid political propaganda that is close to meaningless and often worse. It has eroded the central requirement of democracy that those who are governed give not only their consent but also their informed consent.

Based on the centrality of democratic media within democratic society, any threat to the ability of citizens to express their opinions and experiences through the media should be understood as a direct threat to the practice of democracy.

Journalistic professional norms

The journalistic professional norms approach, which is a second major critical approach to mass media, researches how the current organization of mass news organizations may likewise conflict with democratic practice. Like the political economy approach, these scholars contend that mass media restrict democratic practice by excluding voices and perspectives: determining who are media producers and consumers, and deterring participatory citizenship. But, unlike political economy scholars, they claim that the professional practices of media organizations are more determinate in limiting democratic participation than financial considerations (Eliasoph, 1989).

Specifically, scholars who focus on journalistic professional norms highlight mass media newsroom practices that are internalized and adopted by those working within the field. These standards are followed from the level of journalistic practice, like news sourcing, to the level of editorial approval. Journalists must adhere to these norms to gain access to and credibility within the field. Scholars feel that these professional norms create a media elite that operate within rigid hierarchies and prevent citizen participation. Professional norms research investigates news conventions, production constraints, and hierarchical newsroom structure.

News Conventions

The first area of research that aims to describe how newsroom practice may limit democratic participation is news conventions. News convention research includes investigation of news values, defensive routines, and audience appeal and story structure (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Scholars claim that these practices exclude the citizens from production, lead to biased coverage of news and issues, and make news vulnerable to charges of bias.

News values

News values, the first characteristic of news conventions, refer to the criteria used by journalists to create and evaluate stories. Most journalism textbooks list the following news values near the beginning that should influence what stories receive coverage: prominence/importance, human interest, conflict/controversy, the unusual, timeliness, and proximity (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). But scholars argue that the textbook values only begin to explain the influences on story creation, and one important influence is the “eternal quest for impact and novelty...[which] causes reporters to ignore long-term social problems” (Gans cited in Eliasoph, 1988). Reliance on these news values, especially impact and novelty, steers news coverage away from serious, long-term social conditions towards tabloid-style, entertainment journalism.

In addition, professional-norms scholars feel that the class position of the journalist and the job pressures from news organizations and advertisers play a larger role in story creation than traditional textbook news values (Eliasoph, 1988). Chomsky (1989) claims that journalists entering professional practice have little choice but to adopt and internalize the ideologies of consumerism and elitism if they wish to keep their jobs. Due to the educational capital and middle-to-upper class background of most professional journalists, their perceptions and perspectives of reality may not be representative of the majority of citizens, negatively impacting the ability of media to act as a democratic force (Chomsky, 1988).

Defensive routines

Defensive routines, the second characteristic of news conventions, refer to the professional practices of journalistic objectivity. Such professional practices include exclusion of personal voice, reliance on official sources, and absence of mobilizing information (how to become involved in a problem or issue) (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). But for critical scholars, ‘journalistic objectivity’ is a “defensive” routine because it is used to avoid and deny the complexities of story construction. For example, the daily demand for news and the cost of news programming makes it difficult for media outlets to cover every story, and therefore they are selective about what events and issues they cover. However, despite such restrictions, Herman and Chomsky (2002) claim that use of official sources by journalists in the construction of news values predominately enables journalists to appear objective and protect them from charges of partisanship and bias.

Frequently, conservative think tanks, right-wing lobbying organizations, and large corporations charge the media with having a decidedly liberal bias (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). These accusations are attempts to prevent critical and controversial coverage of business, industry, and government by media outlets through the impending threat of legal action and financial ruin (because of advertiser withdrawal). On the other side of the political spectrum, media critiques such as Herman & Chomsky (2002), McChesney (1999), and Bagdikian (1999) believe that the media is conservatively biased. To counter these accusations and appear impartial, the accepted professional journalistic standards, including the avoidance of first person, reliance on official sources, and exclusion of mobilizing information, serve as “defensive” routines, providing journalists and media outlets a way to seem uninvolved and objective about the issues and events they cover.

Audience appeal and story structure

Audience appeal refers to the need for media producers to keep audiences interested in the programming through the use of visuals, narrative, and plot line. Story structure creates drama and attempts to create neat stories with a beginning, middle, and end, although the alterations distort an accurate depiction of events (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Additionally, the framing and contextualizing of the story within certain events also alters the story content. For example, Schudson (1986) describes how a journalistic attempt to create historical irony by reporting on an ex-hippie radical's transformation during the 1980's-- into an affluent, success driven, conservative, living the American dream conflicts-- with social research on sixties radicals. But Schudson claims this is not surprising; the reason the story on the ex-radical made the news is not because of its accuracy, but precisely because its entertaining irony. Tying into the earlier influence of advertising and ratings, structuring news stories around these routines aims to increase audience interest, and thus increase the outlets ratings or circulation. The higher the rating/circulation of a program, along with 'desirable' audience demographics, the more attractive the program becomes to advertisers, although it infringes on the role of the media as a pro-democratic force.

Production constraints

Besides news conventions, the second category of professional norms is production constraints, which studies how reliance on news services, deadlines, and the pack mentality of journalists may shape mass media news coverage (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Many scholars, such as Schudson (1986) and Herman and Chomsky (2002), claim the professional journalistic standards accepted by corporate media outlets affect media content, representing undemocratic forces. Although news sourcing and the pack mentality of journalists are practices that help news outlets meet deadlines, the practices also carry negative consequences for democratic communication.

News services

First, news services and wires are key sources for newspaper content because they allow the paper to produce a great deal of news on a daily basis. Although the paper is able to cover stories it could not otherwise afford to cover, over-reliance on news wires limits diversity. Producing daily news puts journalists under time constraints that also limit what they can cover. As a result of the time constraints, journalists use routine sources and contacts. Routine sources and contacts are also used because news outlets must compete with other outlets and media for ratings and audience share, and routine sources provide easy, inexpensive, and continual information. But continual use of routine sources provides readers the most convenient perspective, which is not necessarily the most accurate.

The reliance on news services and routine sourcing in constructing news stories is also a more prevalent practice among the large newspaper and media chains, because it makes the production of news much cheaper and easier than paying and employing local journalists in every town (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). As a result, there is a decrease in the diversity of stories and issues carried across different media outlets, as well as a marked decrease in the amount of local issues and cultures covered. News articles that are written for national audiences and programming that is developed for national and international audiences detracts from the amount of local coverage and local cultural expression present, and fails to express the lived realities and needs of citizens.

Pack mentality

Pack mentality describes the inclination of different news organizations to support a consistency in reporting (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) claim that many times when reporters cover the same event, they also share their ideas and opinions. Furthermore, if an issue has already been covered in another paper, a reporter has better chance of getting editorial approval on a story (Gans, cited in Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). The pack mentality of journalists discourages diversity among news outlets, because story decisions are not necessarily made based on the needs of the citizens.

Hierarchical newsroom structure

The third category of professional norms is hierarchical newsroom structure, which refers to the organizational characteristics of mass news media. Newsrooms with hierarchical structure display organizational characteristics like editorial approval, clearly defined job roles, and bureaucratic decision-making (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). For example, vertical organization places news editors in a gatekeeper position concerning news content. Also, clearly defined job roles keep journalists within their 'beat', which discourages diversity in reporting. According to media scholars, these aspects of mass news organization limit participation in news production and the diversity of coverage. Chomsky (1989, p. 10) claims,

What is at issue here is not the honesty of the opinions expressed or the integrity of those who seek the facts but rather the choice of topics and highlighting of issues, the range of opinion permitted expression, the unquestioned premises that guide reporting and commentary, and the general framework imposed from the presentation of a certain view of the world.

In this category, not only are the citizens excluded from the production process, but the journalists are limited as well. Scholars feel that vertical, top-down newsroom structure only provides another form of media control (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed classical and radical definitions of democracy, the role of media in a democratic society, and two critical approaches to the current media system, political economy and professional norms. In conclusion, radical democracy is a useful concept for describing the diversity and the multiple ways media may promote democratic practice. But in practice, critical media scholarship reveals that the current media system is rife with institutional characteristics that may function in undemocratic ways. And although descriptions of democratic media are idealistic in comparison to media practice, the aspirations of a democratic media theoretically unify the basic critique of critical media research and the basic principle of citizens' media.

However, the dominating media institutions are not monolithic or static, but involved in a continual struggle. While the tight integration and organization of mass media does place them in a dominating position, there is always resistance present. To better clarify the power dynamics of media struggle, the next chapter will explore the social struggle for meaning, specifically focusing on how resistance, in the form of what will be labeled 'citizen's media,' creates and promotes democracy.

CHAPTER TWO: DEMOCRACY, CREATIVITY AND RESISTANCE: THE PRACTICES OF CITIZENS MEDIA

Pointed critiques of the mass media are indispensable in understanding and resisting the possible threat of a hierarchical, corporately owned mass media, especially in regions with a highly consolidated private media system like the United States. But Atton (2002) comments that while much research focuses on the ways mass media marginalize particular groups, not much research focuses on how citizens may use media as a tool of democracy and empowerment. It is important to explore how citizens develop and use media because as McChesney (1999, p. 305) claims, “the starting point for media reform is to build up a viable nonprofit, noncommercial media sector.” Therefore, after recognizing the problems that may potentially arise in mainstream media practice, it is necessary to investigate the ways and conditions in which citizens’ media are utilized as sites of democratic struggle and citizen empowerment. This section explores democratic media as one outlet that citizens and citizens’ groups may use to express their experiences and stories on their own terms, and not the terms of the large corporations or professional journalists.

Part of Rodriguez’s (2001) interpretation of democracy hinges on the idea that democracy is in constant struggle. She advocates, “instead of thinking of democracy as an ultimate goal, a final state-of-things to reach, we should look at how democratic and non-democratic practices are being renegotiated constantly, and how citizens’ media can strengthen the former, thus contributing to the- although sometimes ephemeral- swelling of the democratic” (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 22). For Rodriguez and other media scholars, democratic media forces are media projects that are organized by and for citizens as a means of empowerment, expression, and equality.

Definitions and Terms

While Rodriguez uses the term “citizens’ media” to describe democratic media practices, there is significant confusion and debate about what to call democratic media practices. A variety of terms have been used to describe these media practices such as ‘alternative’, ‘oppositional’, ‘radical’, ‘dissent’, ‘revolutionary’, ‘counter-culture’, and ‘underground’. Many times these terms are used indiscriminately in describing media projects without much reflection or theoretical explanation. However, when media scholars are reflexive of the choices they make, tensions emerge between terminology, theory, and practice. The tensions are points of theoretical distinction that highlight the difficulty scholars have in defining human activities as diverse, creative, and politically charged as democratic media production. In order to investigate these tensions, this first subsection explores three terms-- radical media, alternative media, and citizens’ media-- along with the corresponding theoretical and practical implications.

Radical Media

Radical media, the first term described in this section, was initially used favorably by Downing (1984) to highlight the anarchist nature of democratic media projects because he felt both socialist and capitalist models of organization were undemocratic and resulted in various forms of power domination. He felt that the anti-domination perspective of feminism and anarchism could explain and work towards the type of full, open participation required by a democratic media better than Marxism. Downing (1984,

p. 17) argues that an anarchist-feminism approach explains four ‘ultra-democratic’ possibilities of radical media that Marxism does not address, which are:

- 1) The emphasis on multiple realities of oppression beyond the economic;
- 2) The critique of marxism’s blindness on the intelligentsia and the party;
- 3) The priority accorded to movements over institutions; and
- 4) The attempt to construct pre-figurative politics and a liberating ‘process’.

After the radical transitions that took place in communist countries after 1989, Downing’s (1984) critique of the State and the Party (principle 2) was removed from his theoretical discussion (Atton, 2002). The lack of institutional control characteristic of radical media is not absent from Downing’s theory as a result of these changes, but it applies to private media systems, not state-controlled systems. Downing (1984, p.2) privileges the institutional freedom of radical media by using the concept of ‘self-managed media’, which are democratic powers “owned neither by a corporation, nor by the state, a church, political party, or labor party.”

In his most recent work Downing (2001) uses the term ‘radical alternative media’, which Atton (2002, p. 21) claims, “signals an interest in considering media as radical to the extent that they explicitly shape political consciousness through collective endeavor.” But as Atton (2002) notes, both of Downing’s (1984; 2001) definitions privilege social movements over other types of mediated cultural resistance (principle 3). The privileging of movements would exclude certain individual and cultural media expressions from radical alternative media because they are not part of larger, ‘stronger’ movements. As Atton (2002) claims, Duncombe’s (1999) study of fanzines, or personal web pages, would not be considered radical alternative media by Downing’s description.

When Rodriguez (2001) explains how she interprets the ‘movements’ in Downing’s (1984) definition, she comes to a much different conclusion than Atton (2002). Instead of seeing the reference to movements as social movements, she understands ‘movements’ as the constant reorganization and creation of meaning that evades classification, which is necessary in creating citizen participation and social change. Rodriguez (2001, p. 14) claims, “principle three evokes the idea of resistance as movement, a phenomenon in flux, that escapes our attempts to trap it into a specific social subject (a class, an ethnic minority, a gender, and so forth).” Since Downing’s case studies focus on social movements, he probably did intend for ‘movements’ to refer to social movements, but this does not decrease the importance of Rodriguez’s interpretation. Movements understood as the diverse, creative, and ever changing forms of resistance and social struggle that defy definition, which is similar to Atton’s description, has the ability to account for media forms not explicitly part of a larger social movements.

Alternative Media

Alternative media, the second term described in this section, is used by Atton (2002) to extend the Downing’s (1984) radical media definition beyond what Atton perceives as the limitation posed by the priority of social movements and the inability to account for certain cultural forms of media. The main distinction Atton makes between his description of alternative media and Downing’s description of radical media is that alternative media includes media projects that are not necessarily tied to social movements, like personal websites or personal publications. In contrast to Downing’s assertion that the term ‘alternative media’ is essentially meaningless because at some

point everything can be interpreted as 'alternative' to something else, Atton argues that alternative media is a useful term. Atton (2002, p. 9) explains, "whilst 'radical' encourages a definition that is primarily concerned with (often revolutionary) social change... 'alternative' is more of a general application." For Atton, 'alternative' goes beyond 'radical' to include a wider range of media activities, like community oriented projects and alternative lifestyle magazines.

While Atton (2002) does not completely discard the term 'radical media' and uses it along with 'alternative media', he feels that alternative media can describe media use by social movements as well as by groups not explicitly associated with a social movement. Alternative media, Atton (2002, p. 25) claims, "must be available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar statements." Atton and Downing (1984) both fundamentally describe citizens' media as a low-cost production, which takes place out of institutional control, and is open to people without professional training. But in addition, Atton (2002, p. 25) notes that "they typically go beyond simply providing a platform for radical or alternative points of view: they emphasize the organization of media to enable wider social participation in their creation, production or dissemination than is possible in the mass media." Atton points out that it is not just the alternative processes that enable citizens' media to support democratic participation, but also the relations within and between the processes.

Atton (2003, p. 268) claims that alternative media are radical in the sense that they are "opposed to hierarchical, elite-centered notions of journalism as a business- this is an ideology that holds that it is only through more egalitarian, inclusive media organization is it possible to even think about a socially responsible journalism." Under Atton's definition, both the radical and alternative character of citizens' media essentially both refer to the resistant quality of democratic media.

To develop this theory and a useful research methodology, Atton divides alternative media into products and processes and creates a model, which will be discussed in depth later in this chapter. Products include content, form, and reprographic technologies, and processes are the distributive uses, the transformation of social roles including audience, producer, and journalist, and the transformed communication processes including horizontal organizations and networking. While these are independent elements, Atton (2002, p. 25) claims:

Social relations stand to be transformed through radical communications processes at the same time as the media (the vehicles) themselves stand to be transformed (visually, aurally, distributively). In this model, roles and responsibilities are no longer discrete; there is much overlap and transformation of notions such as professionalism, competence, and expertise.

As evidenced in the above statement, the overlaps and dynamics of alternative media in practice do not fit well into formal definitions or models. Additionally, Atton has difficulty calling the parts of his model 'elements' or 'positions' because there are not static, consistent, or always independent. The combinations, arrangements, and presence of the 'positions' is dependent on how groups can and do use media in democratic practice.

Despite the problems with definition, Atton's (2002) interpretation of alternative media overcomes the polarization of social movements and institutions as the only two

producers of media, which was present in Downing's (1984) theory of radical media. Atton also offers a workable model for research that describes potential media qualities in an organized way. Additionally, the continual interaction between process and product places more focus on the audience and how their participation is an integral force shaping the media. But, alternative media stills define media processes and products primarily as alternative to mainstream media.

Citizens' Media

Citizens' media, the third and last term in this section, was developed by Rodriguez (2001) to reject the false dichotomy between mainstream and alternative media inherent in the use of the term 'alternative media'. Much like Downing (1984), Rodriguez feels defining media as 'alternative' locks us into binary thinking whereby democratic media are always understood as alternative to the mainstream. Additionally, defining citizens' media as alternative describes them primarily in terms of resistance against mainstream practice, which does not adequately describe how and why citizens' develop media practices as cultural expression.

Rodriguez claims that the term citizens' media more accurately describes the ways in which citizens engage in media practice as a tool of empowerment, community cohesion, and expression of social and cultural identities. Discussing the benefits of the concept of citizens' media Rodriguez (2001, p. 15) states:

Referring to 'citizens' media' implies first that a collectivity is enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible.

The benefit of Rodriguez's 'citizens' media' is that it defines the media in terms of why it is developed (which is to support active citizenship and expression) and not in terms of the dominating institutions it may resist against. Just as Atton (2002) describes his alternative media model as being radicalized in different ways (the different elements can offer different alternative models of organization), citizens' media may resist mainstream practices in unique ways and combinations.

Citizens' media place the focus on the citizens' groups that support alternative media practices, because first and foremost these media practices are created through citizens' creative expression and democratic participation. Even media projects that directly resist the corporate mass media are not primarily 'alternative', but arise from a shared and expressed need among concerned citizens. Citizens' media, a media driven by a philosophy in democracy, community, and equality, is created and driven by citizen participation (Rodriguez, 2001). The ways in which the media project may or may not develop is contingent on the expression of citizenship, and while 'alternative' elements are practiced and may be even theoretically discussed, the media project is an expression of citizenship. In order to understand and recognize the diverse ways that citizens' media can create and contest social and cultural meanings in media practice, media practice must be defined positively and not as a reaction to mainstream practice.

The theories of Atton, Downing, and Rodriguez are similar in that they use feminist and anarchy theories of resistance and anti-domination to explore how a radically democratic media can best be achieved. For Rodriguez (2001, p. 63), the commonality between all of the forms of citizens' media, whether described as 'alternative', 'radical', or 'oppositional', and regardless of geographic, economic, and

cultural differences, is that “they express the will and agency of human community confronting historical marginalizing and isolating forces, whatever they may be.” The radical and alternative dimensions of citizens’ media are specific to the goals and limitations of each media project; the commonality of citizens’ media is the democratic expression of citizens interacting with historical and institutional forces. While citizens’ media include the ways in which media may become radical or alternative to mainstream practice, these considerations are somewhat secondary to understanding the specifics of a citizens’ media outlet as creative, empowering, and adaptive.

In summary, this section discussed three different terms-- radical media, alternative media, and citizens’ media-- which are used to describe democratic media practice aimed at supporting full and open participation. Citizens’ media was determined to be the most useful and accurate term in describing democratic media practice because it focuses on active citizenship and accounts for the diversity of social and cultural practice. While the issue of whether or not it is possible or even desirable to explore the essential and basic characteristics of citizens’ media is debatable, the next section deals more closely with this issue by exploring documented case studies of citizens’ media.

Characteristics of Citizens’ Media

There is a problem in applying models to alternative media practice, and it lies in the diversity of media outlets and the inability for strict descriptions to encompass all possible organizations, creations, and uses of democratic media. It would seem that to be consistent with Rodriguez’s understanding of citizens’ media, any model would limit this potential understanding. Additionally, it would seem contradictory to place the focus on the citizens’ creative use of media outlets and then attempt to investigate and explain them by imposing external guidelines.

Nevertheless, to begin to explain the potential of citizens’ media, a model can serve the dual purpose of loosely organizing previous research and guiding future research. It does not have to be a strict set of descriptive and prescriptive guidelines; if used with a critical reflexivity, it could provide coherence and clarity. Since models change as citizens’ developed new practices and research continues, it might be helpful to understand a fluid model more as a method or process for conceptualizing the possible forms that citizens’ media might possibly take instead of what they will or should look like. Both Rodriguez (2001) and Atton (2002) believe that a flexible theoretical approach could serve to organize and develop citizens’ media research more accurately than static models. Rodriguez (2001, p. 64) claims, “we need to develop theories and methods that break away from the usual routine of freezing and dissecting communicative reality-theories and methods which enable us to follow and study-in-accompaniment these media-practices-in-motion.”

Thus, models used to describe citizens’ media must always maintain a level of critical reflexivity that recognizes its inherent limitations. As Atton (2002, p. 29) warns, “we also need to be alert to historical or geographical contingency; the absence of radicality in any dimension may not limit a medium’s revolutionary potential; the dimension may not be ‘available’ for radicalization at that time or place, or in that culture.” The direct application of any type of model that attempts to make general claims about citizens’ media is in great danger of ignoring the historical, geographical, and contextual specificities fundamental to citizens’ media practice. With these

limitations in mind, this section examines Atton’s model of citizens’ media and some possible dimensions of citizens’ media.

Atton’s Model

This subsection examines one of the most recent models of citizens’ media developed by Atton (2001, p. 27), which he titles, “a typology of alternative and radical media.” He develops this model to reflect the continual, shifting transformation of social roles and relationships that citizens’ media create and promote in attempt to overcome the limitations of a static model (Atton, 2002). He also develops the model so that citizens’ media may be discussed positively (i.e. not simply as an ‘alternative’ to mainstream media) about its potential to encourage democratic participation. Below is an outline of Atton’s (2001, p. 27) model:

Table 1: Atton’s Model
Media Product:
1. Content- politically/culturally/socially radical; news values 2. Form- layout, graphics, visual rhetoric; binding 3. Reprographic technologies- printing, reproduction technology
Media Process:
4. Distribution- distribution sites, networks, copyright 5. Transformed social relations- reader/writer, collective organization, deprofessionalization 6. Transformed communication processes- horizontal networks

According to Atton (2002), previous models either focused on media products or processes, which provided an incomplete description of media practices. He claims, “The dimensions...do not merely serve to explain production and distribution strategies (such as innovations in form and reprographic techniques, and new sites for distribution), they also account for the realignment of social and professional relations that alternative publishing offers (such as methods of collective organization, writing and editing, the deprofessionalization of editing and writing) (Atton, 2002, p. 151).

Atton feels that inclusion of both media products (content, form, and reprographic technologies) and media processes (distribution, transformation of social roles and transformation of communication processes) adds dimensions that were excluded from previous models.

Although Atton’s model is divided into products and process, as well as into numbered points, he claims that the separation does not imply independence. According to Atton (2002, p.27), “the social processes will activate and inform the development of the products to the extent that each position [dimension] in a communications circuit...will be amenable to radicalization in terms of products and processes, resources and relations.” Therefore, the dimensions are intertwined and have the potential at any time to determine, to be determined by, or to be co-dependent on any of the other dimensions.

For this reason, Atton suggests that the model should be understood as hybrid and multi-dimensional because citizens’ media create social and political meaning in unique ways, from the negotiation of meanings to the creation of new meanings and methods.

He states, “an alternative publication might then be interrogated as to its radicality in terms of its multi-dimensional character, a perspective that privileges the overlap and intersection of dimensions” (Atton, 2002, p. 28). Therefore, Atton’s model provides a useful way for understanding the possible ways that citizens’ media might become radicalized, while recognizing the different degrees of radicality and the hybridity of practice.

Critiques and Modifications of Atton’s Model

The next section reviews research into citizens’ media to explore how the different dimensions of Atton’s (2002) model might be or become radicalized. But before the itemized review, a few qualifications about the model should be reviewed. While each dimension will be explored individually, the dimensions are not radicalized independently in practice. For example, a citizens’ paper that encourages readers to photocopy the paper and pass it out to friends simultaneously demonstrates both radical distribution (anti-copyright and networks) and radically transformed social relations (reader/printer/distributor). Atton (2002) recognizes that citizens’ media do not develop in categorically ‘pure’ ways, nor can they be researched in purely categorical ways-- the dimensions will always interact. Discussing the purpose of his model, Atton (2002, p. 29) explains, “it suggests an area of cultural production that – whilst it lacks the explanatory power of a totalizing concept -- enables us to consider its various manifestations and activations as part of an autonomous field...that is constituted by its own rules.”

A second important issue of citizens’ media is funding or finance, which is not present in his model. Although Atton’s model does not include economics as a dimension that citizens’ media may radicalize, analyses of his model have included this dimension as central. For example, in Atton’s (1999) study on five nationally distributed citizens’ media titles, he uses finance as the overriding lens to analyze the ways in which it influences the other dimensions of circulation, reprographic, and distributive use. The investigation of economics and finance again emerges in Atton’s (2002) study of *The Big Issue* and *Squall*; two key citizens’ media print titles in the UK during the 1990’s.

In addition to Atton (1999; 2002), other citizens’ media scholars like Duncombe (1997) and Rodriguez (2001) explore citizen’s media in term of their financial organization and practice. In Duncombe’s (1997) study on punk fanzines, he found that the non-profit orientation of ‘zines was a basic philosophical decision by the zine creators. He claims, “As a rule, and with the exception of free zines and records sent in for reviews, zines are not expected to bring material reward. In fact the very idea of profiting from a zine is anathema to the underground, bringing with it charges of ‘selling out’” (Duncombe, 1997, p. 13).

In Rodriguez’s study of local television stations in the Catalonia region of Spain she finds the financing of the citizens’ stations important for different reasons. She states (2001, p. 102), “Advertising is considered a financial source that will shield the autonomy of local televisions from political and official institutions. On the other hand, most interviewees explicitly acknowledged the risk of becoming economically dependent while trying to maintain their political autonomy”. As explored in the political economy approach in Chapter One, the market consolidation, company size, cross-ownership, and market advertising (including advertising) of mass media may threaten democratic practice. Understanding the financial organizations of citizens’ media is equally

important in working towards a media system that is more democratic. Rodriguez's (2001) example points out how citizens' media continually transform and negotiate practice, which means that the dimensions, including finance, must not be prescriptive (for example, 'all citizens' media outlets must reject all advertising, state, and institutional dependence') because they would lose their ability to interpret the diversity of citizens' media.

Citizens' Media Dimensions

This subsection discusses the different dimensions that citizens' media may radicalize, including content, form, reprographic technology, distribution, transformed social relations, and finance, as reflected in the modified model in Table 2. Inclusion of citizens' media finance as a dimension of media processes with the other dimensions of Atton's (2002) model suggests only that finance is another dimensions that can be explored as it is radicalized with other dimensions by citizens' media.

The second change is that 'transformation of communication processes' is combined with 'transformation of social relations' since communication processes, like open distribution and horizontal networking between citizens' media outlets, can also be understood as the transformation of social relations. While cataloging and categorizing all the many creative ways in which citizens' media emerge would be impossible, this section attempts to organize previous research and provide a loose framework for conceptualizing citizens' media by discussing the following dimensions of citizens media: content, form, reprographic technology, distribution, transforming social relations, and finance. To clarify, the revised model (from Atton's 2002 model) describing the dimensions of citizens' media is presented below:

Table 2: Revised Model of Citizens' Media
Media Product:
1. Content- politically/culturally/socially radical; news values 2. Form- layout, graphics, visual rhetoric; binding 3. Reprographic technologies- printing, reproduction technology
Media Process:
4. Distribution- distribution sites, networks, copyright 5. Transformed social relations- transformed communication processes, reader/writer, collective organization, deprofessionalization, horizontal networks 6. Finance- advertising, fundraising

Content

The first dimension of citizens' media to be explored is content, which refers to the qualities of the actual media products. According to Atton (2002), content refers to the form of radicalization, whether politically radical or socially/culturally radical (or any combination) and to news values of citizens' media, like story selection, journalistic values (objectivity, advocacy) sourcing, and narrative voice. The section will explore how types of radicalization and news values may be relevant and practiced by citizens' media.

Types of radicalization

According to Atton (2002,) the content of citizens' media may be radicalized in different ways, politically and/or socially/culturally. Downing's (1984) study of *The National Guardian* (founded in 1947, and later renamed *The Guardian* in 1967), a citizens' paper in the United States, exemplifies a paper that was openly politically radical. *The National Guardian* was started in New York after WWII in response to anti-labor laws like the Taft-Hartley Act and the rise of the Cold War, specifically Truman's request for aid to resist the popular communist rebellion in Greece (Downing, 1984). The paper took a stand on political issues that were radically different than those adopted by the mainstream mass media. It unofficially supported Henry Wallace's Progressive Party in 1948, supported the Rosenbergs (and were the only U.S. paper to do so), harshly criticized Joe McCarthy when other papers were complicit, condemned U.S. involvement in Vietnam long before the anti-war movement grew strong, and exposed racism and power abuse in the U.S. South for the national and international community, which on one occasion resulted in a standing moment of silence by the French parliament for an African-American victimized by U.S. legal 'justice' (Downing, 1984).

Even those publications that are not avowedly political in their content can still be socially/culturally and/or politically radical. For example, Duncombe (1997) discusses a fanzine *Little Free Press*, written by a self-professed society drop out Ernest Mann, which includes stories about Mann's adventures of trapping squirrels in a warehouse and his trips to Mexico for cheap false teeth. This type of citizens' media would be predominately described as socially/culturally radical because the content deals with the social and cultural life of Mann, which radically contests roles such as producer/consumer and expert/citizen. As Duncombe claims (1997, p. 24), "as is to be expected in a meritocracy, the voices heard in the United States are those of the best and the brightest: experts, business leaders politicians, and celebrities. Perzines [personal zines] are the voice of a democracy; testimony to the unrepresented everyday, the unheard-from everyperson." Thus, Duncombe's example shows how predominately socially/culturally radical citizens' media projects may encourage democratic practice.

News values

News values, the other component of content includes a variety of 'conventions' and issues involved in news production such as sourcing, journalistic values (objectivity, advocacy), editorializing, time constraints, and story construction. As cultural theorists like Clarke et al. (1976), Rodriguez (2001), and Eliasoph (1988) suggest, not all practices may be wholly rejected in resistance: some may be adopted, and some may be negotiated or transformed. Therefore, the shape the citizens' media may take in relation to any news value may be unique to that particular organization. Sourcing, journalistic values, and mobilizing information offer examples of what some citizens' media news values might be and how they may interact with other dimensions.

Sourcing

To begin with, both mainstream and citizens' news may rely on official sources in their story construction; they just use a different set of 'official' sources. Eliasoph (1988) reports that *KPFA-FM* in Berkeley, California, one of the oldest daily citizens' news outlets in the country, regularly relies on union organizers, demonstration leaders, socialist politicians, activist organizations, or environmental groups, which are considered 'official sources' for *KPFA*. Citizens' media outlets can also go beyond just

quoting or paraphrasing these sources by including articles written by the official (Atton, 2002).

In addition to official sources like union organizers or demonstrations organizers, many citizens' media will include 'expert' or 'native' sources, like the coal miners on strike or the protesters, who are not usually considered 'officials'. Atton (2003, p. 112) claims that native reporting, "can usefully define the activities of alternative journalists working within communities of interest to present news that is relevant to those communities' interests, in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support." Atton's definition encompasses the range of voices that may participate in citizen media and highlights the active involvement and empowerment supported by citizens' media.

The inclusion of a wide range of voices and native reporting in media content empowers community and, in many cases, advocates direct involvement or action. For example, Howley (2003) explores how *Street Feat*, a citizens' media outlet advocating and providing help for homeless residents of Halifax, relies on native reporting or reports that are created from the expert knowledge of everyday citizens' and first-hand experience. Other citizens' media projects that are not explicitly political in content may also feature native reporting. For example, Atton (2002) researched an on-line community website that focuses on historical and cultural ties, and aims to preserve tradition, encourage community participation and unity, and support demotic local history (Atton, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the dimensions of citizens' media interact and overlap, and one example is the interaction of sourcing and the transformed social roles promoted by citizens' media outlets. As Harcup (2003, p. 371) found, "alternative and mainstream media not only use different casts of sources, they tend to have a different relationship between producers and sources, with alternative media sometimes blurring the lines between the two." For example, many zines convey the narratives, notes, and expressions of one person who serves simultaneously as the producer/printer/writer, blurring the lines between traditional roles to the point where they are indistinguishable (Atton, 2002; Duncombe, 1997). *The Green Anarchist*, a newspaper started in 1984 and published by an anarcho-environmental groups based out of Oxford, asked readers to design an entire page of the paper, which would receive no editorial changes, and thus directly transform the role of reader, writer, editor, and source (Atton, 2002).

Atton (2002, p. 53) claims, "the alternative media can provide empowering narratives of resistance for those counter-publics that are written by those very counter publics." Therefore the choices of sources, whether it is an alternative set of official sources, the readers themselves, or one producer/printer/writer, open up access to voices in the community that would not otherwise be expressed in media. As Rodriguez (2001, p. 151) concludes her study of four citizens' media outlets,

People experiment with words, images, sounds, and special effects- as they delve into the universe of signs and codes- selecting, rejecting, reaccommodating, and reappropriating the symbolic in order to create their own grid, they may be relabeling the world, reorganizing reality, and reconstituting a new order where pre-established social and cultural codifications of power cease to make sense.

These examples highlight how the attempt to encourage democratic practice, citizenship, and open expression leads to the transformation of social roles that interacts with and shapes the content of citizens' media.

Journalistic values

The next news value that will be explored is journalistic values, or how journalists/writers understand and manage their role within the media project. Typically, citizens' media outlets lack an explicit statement or claim to objectivity like the "fair and balanced" statement that precedes Fox news network's nightly broadcast. Citizens' media are committed to, according to Atton (2003, p. 267), "a journalism that is wedded to notions of social responsibility, replacing an ideology of 'objectivity' with overt and oppositional practices." Advocating for social equality, human rights, and environmental issues in many cases, citizens' media discard claims to objective reporting, openly recognizing their political perspective or position.

Eliasoph (1988) claims that mainstream journalists may feel that they are 'objective' simply because they are politically uninvolved. She points out that the difference is that many times citizens' media writers are involved closely with the movements and events that they cover; in other words, they are activists. In Atton's (2002) study of *SchNEWS*, an activist newsletter found in the 1990s and based in Brighton, he reports that the organization members believe that it is not enough to report on an issue or advocate a position for progressive social change; activist participation is crucial and necessary for all members.

The detachment of citizens' media writers from the professional social structure of mainstream journalism, as well as and their own social role within citizens' movements (which in many cases encourages explicit advocacy for a position), mitigates the need for 'objectivity' as a news value. Citizens' media may reject the "two sides" orientation that journalistic objectivity embraces, and instead embrace a multi-perceptual orientation. Platon and Deuze (2003, p. 346) found that for the writers of *IndyMedia*, a web-based anti-globalization, anti-capitalistic, de-centered collective, which formed initially to cover the 1999 Seattle protests against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, "truth is not seen as an absolute but an infinite sampling of perspectives of a given situation." Therefore, many citizens' media outlets privilege multiple interpretations of reality as necessary in empowering citizen expression to dissolve structures of domination.

As Downing (1984, p. 19) claims, "if we are thinking of organizing democratic media, we cannot imagine them as liberating forces unless they are open to lateral communication between social beings, with their *multiple* experience and concerns." Therefore, objectivity is not a goal or ideology of citizens' media, and the belief in democratic participation many times leads to native reporting and open contributions with little to no editorial censorship. As scholars such as Atton (2002), Downing (1984), Eliasoph (1988), and Rodriguez (2001) demonstrate, the journalistic value of advocacy and empowerment that materializes in the transformation of social roles is firmly rooted in a belief in what Downing (1984) described as the multiple realities of oppression and expression. Interpretations of issues and events are perspectives and opinions that the reader can accept, reject, or negotiate, and are not intended to be objective presentations of reality.

Mobilizing information

In accordance with citizens' media support of democratic participation, citizens' media outlets, especially politically radical news collectives, are more likely to provide readers with mobilizing information that facilitates involvement. Atton (2002, p. 85) defines mobilizing information as,

Information, appended to or embedded in a news report, that provides the reader with the wherewithal to pursue the story further; typically, to become actively involved in the issue being reported. This usually takes the form of details of a meeting or demonstration, giving time, place, and date and contact details for more information.

And mobilization can take many forms. The *Green Anarchist*, researched by Atton, offers perhaps an extreme, violent, and militant example of encouraging citizen participation. The newspaper has published stories on how to build a bomb, a shotgun, and caltrops; and it has promoted violent methods of direct action (Atton, 2002). Other examples from citizens' media include providing a time and place for a demonstration, information on getting involved with a particular issue, and how to become part of the citizens' media outlet (Atton, 2002).

The propensity for citizens' media to provide mobilizing information is linked with many other dimensions and practices, including the inclusion of native reporting, the desire to enact progressive social change in the present, and the empowerment of citizen expression and democratic practice. Since encouraging citizen involvement is one of the fundamental roles and goals of citizens' media, many media projects seek to increase involvement and expression by providing readers information about how to get involved if they are interested.

In summary, this subsection has discussed the content dimension of citizens' media, including its radicalization (political and/or cultural/social) and its news values (sourcing, journalistic value, and mobilizing information). Many of the different practices within content are interdependent, as well as dependent on other dimensions, such as form, reprographic content, and organization. The next subsection will discuss the form of the citizens' media projects, which continues the discussion of citizens' media product dimensions.

Form

While it is difficult to separate any of the dimensions, it is especially hard to discuss content and form, since the content and form are inextricably linked. Therefore, although this subsection focuses on form, much of the discussion is also relevant to content such as images, pictures, typography, etc. To discuss the dimension of form, this section explores medium, visual rhetoric (including graphics/images), and presentation.

Medium

While usually accepted as given by media scholars, there are many different media that citizens' media may utilize, and a few examples will illustrate some of the research in the field and the diversity of creativity expressed by citizens' media. For example, Downing (1984) analyzed the emergence of *Third World Newsreel*, KPFA radio in Berkeley, and the *Republica* newspaper in Portugal. Streitmatter (2001) researched the dissent newspaper press in the United States including labor, women rights, civil rights, and gay and lesbian rights. Rodriguez (2001) studied and participated in a project in Colombia where women used video technology to produce a film about the need for

funding for childcare programs. Duncombe (1997) provided an extensive analysis of 'zines from the 1970's through the 1990's. And Atton (2001) has studied the potential of the Internet to further democratic participation. In addition to researching where and how citizens use different media, scholars have also investigated the visual characteristics of the media, some of which are medium-specific.

Visual rhetoric

Visual rhetoric refers to the graphics, images, typography, organization, contrast, and general design principles that citizens employ in media production. There are many different ways that citizens use particular media to meet their needs and respect their cultural codes. For example, in a non-visual example, Rodriguez (2001) reports that *PY Media*, an aboriginal radio station in Australia, schedules its programming so that it does not conflict with school hours or ceremonial activities. Additionally, programming is suspended for a funeral or important community event (Rodriguez, 2001).

Moving beyond radio, each medium can be used in a variety of creative and diverse ways. Rodriguez (2001) found that Australian aboriginal television broadcast tended to include many long shots of landscapes and large groups of people. She claims that these visual decisions express aboriginal cultural codes that view the environment sacred and rely on communal decision-making in story creation (Rodriguez, 2001).

The format of *Letter Parade*, a zine that is composed of contributions, is determined by the size and amount of contributions that are received, and every different typeface, layout, and author stands out. Duncombe (1997, p. 128) claims:

Zines, whether as a result of conscious design- using jagged cut-and-paste layout, ranting sledgehammer editorials, bizarre subject matter- or merely as the sloppy and scruffy side effect of being amateur and handmade, don't allow the reader to be sucked in. Zines are dissonant; their juxtapositions in design and strong feelings in content are unsettling. Instead of offering a conflict-free escape from a tumultuous world, they hold up a mirror to it. As opposed to the happy fantasy world of mass culture, the purpose of many zines is to piss reader off, have them work to make sense of the bizarre world of the reader.

Duncombe's (1997) description of zines is similar to Atton's (2002) description of the *Green Anarchist*. Atton (2002) explains that there is a mix of hand and type written text, columns are occasionally misaligned and in the wrong order, and images are reproduced poorly. In addition, Atton (2002) describes how the *Green Anarchist* frequently runs 'themed' issues in which reader are requested to submit articles under 500 words, and contributions are pasted directed onto the zine from the writers' original copy. In the case of the *Green Anarchists'* themed-issues, the readers are able to become both writer and designer, which alter the design of the zine and transforms social roles.

Presentation refers to the production qualities of the paper, like the binding and the paper type. Some publications like *Do or Die!*, a collective paper created by a British group of Earth First!, are bound (comparatively) professionally (Atton, 2002). Zines are usually A4, U.S. legal size, sometimes fastened or stapled on the side, or folded in half; some use color and card stocks; some are barely legible; some are published on newsprint; and some designed on personal computers (Duncombe, 1997). While not as important as content or form, presentation does contribute to the overall product of citizens' media. Many of the presentation decisions are made based on the reprographic technology and expenses used to produce the citizens' media product.

In summary, this subsection has explored some issues like medium, visual rhetoric, and presentation that are relevant to possible forms citizens' media may develop. Some may explicitly embrace an anti-professional look or feel as part of ideological positioning. In addition to content and form, there is one more dimension that relates to the citizens' media product, reprographic technologies, which is the subject of the next subsection.

Reprographic Technology

This subsection focuses on the reprographic technology dimension of citizens' media, which is the last dimension that Atton (2002) classifies as primarily a dimension of media product. Although this dimension primarily relates to print media, it could apply to other media like the Internet and video/film. For example, a website could offer a video for download that could be later transferred onto DVD or VHS technologies, and then the video might be openly copied and passed on through horizontal citizens' networks. But despite these possibilities, the majority of research has focused on the reprographic technologies of print-based media.

For example, Duncombe (1997) describes how zines are typically the size of photocopy paper, which has allowed publishers (which may or may not be one person) to make free copies at work and get friends that work at copy stores to make free copies. Atton (2002) explains how the punk explosion of 1976 saw for the first time, the emergence of music magazines that were photocopied, with plagiarized lyrics and a mix of typed and handwritten patches, on self-served copy machines, a new technology that allowed a quick, easy, and cheap way to make copies. Additionally, readers are able to make and distribute copies themselves, which is encouraged by many open distribution/anti-copyright publications (Atton, 2002; Duncombe, 1997). Thus, once again the social roles are transformed, and the reader is able to freely copy and distribute the citizen media, making them both printer and distributor.

Distribution

Distribution, the fourth dimension of citizens' media, refers to the dissemination networks as well as the different 'distributive uses' of citizens' media, such as open distribution. Distribution is the first dimension that is a media *process* (content, form, and reprographic technology are primarily concerned with the product), which Atton (2002) feels is increasingly important considering the non-explicit political content of some citizens' media (zines in particular). To investigate the dimension of distribution, this section discusses open-copyright policy and distribution practices.

Open Copyright

Many citizens' media promote open-copyright or anti-copyright policies, which Atton (2002) claims grew out of a strong movement in the citizens' press of the 1990's against intellectual property rights. Open copyright allows the free distribution and reprinting of materials as long as it is for non-commercial, non-profit purpose (Atton, 2002). The goal of open copyright policy was to encourage the dissemination of dissent through as many channels as possible through free distribution.

First, open-copyright policies enable media outlets to include content that they could not otherwise include if open-copyright policies were not in effect. For example, Atton (2002) describes how the *Green Anarchist* has been able to reprint articles by anarchist writers Bob Black and Hakim Bey because of open-copyright policies.

Inclusion of such authors not only fills media space, but it also brings a degree of 'professionalism', credibility, and prestige to the media outlet (Atton, 2002).

Second, as a reaction against intellectual property rights, an open-copyright policy allows the reproduction of a work, in whole or in part, for non-commercial purposes. Atton (2002) describes how a citizens' paper used standard photocopy size paper so that anyone could become a potential printer and distributor. But just because a media outlet utilizes open-copyright policies to reprint the work of others does not necessarily imply that the media outlets support the open-copyright of their work. However, Atton points out that most media that utilize the open-copyright of other work do allow the open-distribution of their work irrespective of whether or not they include a statement about open-copyright.

In addition to open-copyright, open-distribution is another term that can be used to describe the policy that allows the reproduction of an entire media product or publication. Atton (2002) claims that many anarchist papers in the UK initially supported open-distribution and still claim to do so, but the size of the publications (at times around 350 pages) makes it difficult and costly for people to make copies. But smaller publications still support the open-distribution of their work as long as no profit is made (Atton, 2002). In his study of zines, Duncombe (1997, p. 12) claims, "distribution is primarily person-to-person via the mail, though zines are also sold in some book and music stores and traded, sold, or given away at punk rock gigs, SF [science fiction] conventions, and the like."

Distribution practices

In addition to anti-copyright and open distribution policies, citizens' media may develop and negotiate distribution practices in creative ways because they do not (and cannot) rely on the same distribution outlets and networks as the mainstream media. One creative method of distribution is street selling, where a publication may be sold or distributed freely on the streets/subways/public areas, and citizens' papers in both the UK and Nova Scotia have effectively utilized street-selling techniques (Atton, 2002; Howley, 2003). The creative and diversity in street selling is evident in Atton's (2002) comparison of two UK citizens' papers use of the technique. He finds that one publication allows anyone to distribute their paper on the streets, but the other paper, which receives more funding, pays and trains its street-sellers and requires them to sign a conduct contract as well as wear a badge (Atton, 2002).

Aside from street selling, one of the more common places for distribution of citizens' media is in alternative and locally owned bookstores, which have remained a major place for citizens' media distribution since the 1960s (Atton, 2002). Other places that citizens' media may distribute their papers are in local coffee shops, vegetarian restaurants, independent record stores, and head shops (Atton, 2002). Atton (2002) claims since the 1990s a new form of distribution called 'infoshops', which are places that exhibit citizens' media (both retail and free), provide cheap and do-it-yourself design and publishing, and provide space for meetings/exhibits/concerts/community events.

In summary, this section has discussed the open copyright policies and distribution practices of citizens' media, and although the examples used primarily relate to print-based media, they highlight the diverse ways citizens' media may negotiate methods and practices of distribution. As stated earlier, the dimensions are not independent. In order to describe the multi-dimensional quality of distribution, two

examples are explored. One multi-dimensional quality of distribution is the practice of open-copyright and anti-copyright, which have the potential to transform the social relations of reader and printer/publisher. Another quality is how development of creative distribution practices may emerge in support of economic strategies, which are usually anti-capitalistic and anti-commercial (Atton, 2002). The next section continues discussion by exploring the ways in which the dimensions, including distribution, transform traditional social relations to increase democratic participation and expression.

Transforming Social Relations

The continual transformation of social relations is the fifth dimension of citizen's media, which is central to the role of citizens' media in activating citizenship because it deals directly with democratic participation. There are two main ways that citizens' media transform social relations: engaging citizens and collective organization. First, most citizens' media breakdown the mainstream definitions involved in the communication process of who is a producer, writer, reader, printer, designer, or editor by empowering citizens (traditionally defined as readers) through participation and expression. Second, citizens' media frequently utilize collective models of organization where collective decision-making is critical and job roles are shared, rotated, or undefined. Both practices, engaging citizens and collective organization, constitute what is considered 'de-professionalized' practice because the medium is open to people without professional media training, allowing non-professionals direct access. This section discusses the ways that citizens' media transform social roles, engaging citizens in media practice and collective methods of organization, and how the transformation of these roles de-professionalizes media practice.

Engaging citizens

Social roles are transformed through citizens' media practice by breaking down traditional definitions of who is a media consumer and media producer, and empowering citizens to take on new roles and relations. Citizens' media enable those that are not usually part of media production to contribute their opinions and creative expression, thus citizens' media seeks to engage citizens in construction and production of media. According to Rodriguez (2001, p. 158):

As defined by the theory of radical democracy, the concept of citizenship implies that social subjects claim a space for their public voices, that these social subjects tenaciously intervene and shape their identities, altering circulating social discourses and cultural codes, and that...these negotiations and renegotiations empower the communities involved. Seen from a radical democracy perspective, citizens' media materialize as important sites where citizenship is forged. By participating in these media experiences, reshaping their identities, reformulating established social definitions, and legitimizing local cultures and lifestyles on the personal as well as the local level, communities are actively engaging citizenship. Therefore, the participation of citizens in media projects transforms traditional social relations, which support the diversity and community interest necessary for democratic citizenship. For example, Rodriguez (2001) examines how *TV Clot*, a citizen run television station in Catalonia, Spain, creates new relationships between traditionally separate relationships (Rodriguez, 2001). *TV Clot* airs programs that are created by children and senior citizens', empowering these citizens' the opportunity to produce, direct, write, and create programs about issues that are relevant to their age group

(Rodriguez, 2001). By engaging children and senior citizens' in new roles, these practices transcend traditional definitions of consumer/producers, working towards greater social equality.

In Atton's (2001) study of anarchist papers, he claims that transforming the social roles of producer/writer and reader creates a diversity of contributions that support the kind of debate and discussion fundamental in democratic society. According to Atton (2001, p. 87),

Such papers and magazines hope to build agendas and develop opinion. This will come from as wide a range of participants as possible; communication is encouraged across movements and communities, including those potentially in conflict; the media space available is open to a wide array of voices and opinions. The inclusion of new voices in media through the transformation of traditional social roles is necessary in creating social equality. Atton (1999, p. 73) states, "Horizontal communication between writers and readers (some people will be both, of course) and between different manifestations of alternative media will be crucial in furthering the primary aim of social change." The communication between different manifestations of alternative media that Atton mentions refer to the horizontal networks developed between citizens' media.

Horizontal networking refers to the diverse range of potential activities that may take place between citizens' media outlets, including the sharing of articles, mobilizing citizens around a particular issue, and providing information about other media projects. In his study of zines Duncombe (1997) describes how some zines support each other through free advertising, which transforms traditional relationships between media outlets. In addition to transforming social relationships by engaging citizens in media practice, citizens' media also transform the traditional relations within the media organization itself.

Media organization

The second set of social relations that citizens' media transform are the relationships within the media organization. Many media scholars, including Atton (2002), Downing (1984; 2001), and Rodriguez (2001) have found that citizens' media outlets privilege collective forms of decision-making and practice job rotation/sharing. Describing the 'loose' organization in citizens' media, Atton (2002, p. 82) states:

These forms of organization are characterized by loose internal structures and by autonomy of the groups thus organized. Loose structures are most commonly realized in social movements by the absence (or at least reduction) of hierarchy and by an anti-authoritative ethos. Job rotation is common, as is the sharing of jobs and skills. Membership is fluid: often there are few if any criteria for membership, save active involvement in the group. Consensus and collective decision-making are preferred over voting.

For example, the *Squall* a British citizens' paper that serves the homeless and squatter communities, is edited by a collective whose membership rotates according to availability (which is a significant issue for the paper since a large portion of the members are homeless and activists) (Atton, 2002). An example of an extreme rejection of hierarchical organization structures, which Atton (2002) describes with a bit of scrutiny, is citizens' papers like the *SchNEWS* that claim to reject all organization and publish in a state of chaos and mayhem, sporadically distributing issues with jumbled content. This

practice seeks to ensure that all participants are given equal input into each issue, avoiding dominance or editorial control of one participant.

De-professionalization

Connected to the transformation of social roles within the audience (producer/writer/distributor/printer and reader) and within the citizens' media outlet, is the de-professionalization of media practice. De-professionalization is the entry of people, often volunteers, without professional journalistic training, into media practice (Atton, 2002). Atton (2002, p. 111) defines de-professionalization as "a strategy [that] not only introduces new forms of knowledge from a much wider writing base (so to speak), it also introduces many more social actors, and offers them the same empowerment it offers an intellectual: an equal platform for ideas." De-professionalization can be practiced through any combination of the other dimensions, including content, form, reprographic technologies, and distribution, and is directly related to the participation of non-media professionals in media production.

Through the inclusion of voices that are usually marginalized from the mainstream media, citizens' media de-professionalize and diversify its products and processes, giving citizens' direct access to media. For example, Duncombe (1997) offers a description of how possible zine products, like the cut-and-paste layout featuring contributions in the format they were received, and zine processes, like the use of photocopiers in reproduction supporting open-distribution, constitute de-professional practices. Another example is the inclusion of first-person activist articles (native reporting) and calls to direct action, which are both de-professionalize activities that seek to increase participation and expression (Atton, 2002).

Finance

Although finance is the last dimension investigated, the financial practices of citizens' media are perhaps more hotly contested in terms of efficacy and more explored in terms of research than any other dimension. Broadly speaking, finance refers to the economic practices used by citizens' media in order to survive, which can include a variety of activities including different advertising policies, fundraisers, donation drives, and subscriptions. As stated earlier, the dominant majority of citizens' media does not make any profit and cannot afford to pay those that participate in production. For example, *The Squall*, a paper that advocates squatting and frequently has homeless members, is always on the verge of financial ruin (Atton, 2002). For citizens' media to survive, they must develop and utilize different financial practices that allow them to support democratic participation. While the next section will discuss the controversy surrounding the most effective financial practices for citizens' media to employ, this section will discuss different financial practices that citizens' media have developed and relied on in order to continue to support democratic participation, including advertising policies, fundraisers, donation drives, and subscriptions.

Advertising is probably one of the most controversial of the financial practices among citizens' media outlets (Atton, 2002; Rodriguez, 2001). Media scholars have noted a range of advertising policies among citizens' media from complete rejection of all advertising to conditional acceptance. On some occasions citizens' media place no restrictions of advertising, but as Atton (2002) claims, most citizens' media outlets are skeptical or advertisers and resistant to open advertising policies. In the case of Latino radio broadcasting in the U.S., Rodriguez (2001) found that an advertising policy with no

restrictions resulted in the exertion of advertiser influence over content and a loss of local community focus in programming. However before 1960, Rodriguez (2001) explains that this was not the case, and Latino broadcast was not recognized as a potential market to exploit. As a result, this allowed it to develop on the margins attracting only local advertisers who were invested in the local community and interested in supporting the radio stations.

As discussed earlier, political economy scholars of mass media demonstrate that heavy reliance on advertising for a source of income may result in censored content and limited expression. Atton (2001) describes how the *Squall* is highly skeptical of any donation or financial contribution that does not come from readers or explicit supporters of social justice and citizens' media. In many cases the acceptance of advertising runs directly counter to the aims of the media collective. For example, Duncombe (1997) explains that the vast majority of zines do not accept advertising in any form because of their anti-commercialism and anti-consumerism stance.

Additionally, the skepticism of most citizens' media toward advertising brings up the issue of whether or not advertisers are even interested in citizens' media. Many citizens' media do not serve market 'friendly' audiences, do not have circulations as large as the mass media, and do not support content that is advertiser 'friendly'; as a result citizens' media may not be particularly attractive to advertisers (Atton, 2002). When advertising does appear in citizens' media it is usually a small part of the production, regulated, and/or local (Atton, 2002). For these reasons, citizens' media tend to rely on different sources for funding, which include subscriptions, donations, and fundraising.

The Controversy of the "Alternative Ghetto"

Although dimensions like reprographic technologies and distribution positively describe the potential of citizens' media, the Comedia group (1984) argued that while the practices do encourage democratic participation, the practices prevent citizens' media from reaching enough people, and result in marginality, obscurity, and failure. The critique posed by Comedia is necessary to address, since as Atton (2002, p. 33) claims, "the most forthright critique [of citizens' media finance and organization] has been the Comedia's pessimistic assessment which, though over fifteen years old, has not been significantly added to (nor argued against) in the ensuing debate." To investigate the 'alternative ghetto' debate, this section discusses Comedia's argument, including the three main reasons why Comedia feels the media inevitable fail and suffer (economics, organization, and audience) and critical responses to Comedia's argument from media scholars Atton (2002), Eliasoph (1988) and Rodriguez (2001).

Comedia's Argument

For Comedia (1984), the economic and organizational practices of citizens' media cripple its ability to provide the necessary financial and organizational structure to compete with mainstream media. As argued, the economic practices, journalistic values, and organization of citizens' media result in low circulation and inevitable failure. The inability to reach a large audience and/or survive relegate citizens' media into what Comedia call 'an alternative ghetto.' This section explores the three reasons that Comedia provide for citizens' media occupation of the 'alternative ghetto': economics, organization, and audience.

Economics

Comedia (1984) claim there is almost a complete neglect with economic concerns and financial planning in citizens' media, which leads the media outlets to failure. These concerns, according to Comedia (1984, p. 96), are "relegated to the bottom of the agenda of political discussion within the sector, as merely 'technical' problems, to be dealt with if there's time, after the editorial meeting and otherwise left 'til the next meeting'." Comedia feel that citizens' media are too occupied maintaining collective organization and job rotation to pay attention to the economic needs of the media outlet. Therefore when financial crises arise that were neither foreseen nor planned for, citizens' media struggle for survival, and usually lose because of their retroactive approach to economic needs (Comedia, 1984).

Organization

Comedia also fault citizens' media for their reliance on collective methods of organization. According to Comedia, collective organization compounds the problems with economic practice because it removes the hierarchical division of labor and clearly defined job roles necessary to reach national circulation. Also, the group feels that collective organization impedes the decision-making processes, making it difficult to make money and discuss market strategy, and thus limiting the ability of citizens' media to reach large audiences.

Audience

The final reason why Comedia (1984) feel that citizens' media occupy an alternative ghetto is the small size of the audience compared to mainstream media circulation. While Comedia recognizes that these media have addressed important issues such as feminism, sexuality, and ethnicity, what they have all failed to recognize is the cultural capital of their audience. For Comedia, the potential for the educational level and socio-economic status of the citizens' media audience to attract advertisers has never been considered because of a preoccupation with political philosophy and a rejection of capitalism. In order to survive, Comedia (1984, p. 100) claims,

In terms of achieving viability through the sale of advertising...the relatively privileged economic position of their reader is attractive to advertisers- who are not only concerned with number, but also with the purchasing power, of the readers they can reach through a given publication.

Comedia advocate the exploitation of the citizens' media audience to obtain funding, and thus increase circulation.

Comedia (1984) also suggests that the market research conducted by advertising agencies could provide citizens' papers with methods of feedback to determine how to make the media content more enjoyable and appealing. Without the assistance of market research, Comedia feels citizens' media would have no way to 'know' their audience or obtain reader feedback. Comedia concludes that in order for alternative papers to break out of their ghetto, they need to learn how to use the capitalist market to further their political agenda despite the fact such behavior would run counter to the principles of the media project.

Essentially, Comedia's (1984) argument is that the fundamental practices and philosophies of citizens' media are a recipe for failure, paralyzing the ability of citizens' media to increase funding and circulation. The Comedia group believes these practices must be replaced by what resembles mainstream media practice: advertising dependence,

hierarchical organization, clearly defined job duties, market research, and ‘light’, entertaining content. For Comedia, citizens’ media are determined effective if they are able to attain a circulation comparable to mainstream media, which requires citizens’ media practice adopt the economic strategies and organizational structures of mainstream media.

Responses to Comedia

While most media scholars do agree with Comedia’s (1984) historical description of citizens’ media as low finance productions serving smaller audiences than mainstream media composed of unpaid members with no professional media or business training, and reliant on collective methods of decisions making and job rotation, media scholars like Atton (1999; 2002) and Harcup (2003) adamantly disagree with Comedia’s claim that these practices lead citizens’ media to failure. Atton (1999; 2002), Eliasoph (1988), and Rodriguez (2001) offer a perspective counter to Comedia (1984) that locate collective organization, pre-figurative politics, and the diversity of citizens’ media as essential components necessary for democratic participation. Pre-figurative politics refer to “the attempt to practice socialist principles in the present, not merely to imagine them for the future” (Downing 1984, p. 23). Therefore, the serious threat accompanying Comedia’s proposed ‘solution’ is that the means used to increase circulation and financing will limit the ability of the media outlet to practice democracy.

In reference to Comedia’s (1984) claims that pre-figurative politics and collective organization lead to failure, Atton (1999, p. 70) claims, “such an argument, however, is based on a narrow view of the alternative media as merely as an economic rival to its mainstream counterpart’ a view that is merely in competition with the mainstream in terms of products and ‘market penetration’, but no more.” Atton (2002) and Rodriguez (2001) argue that the only reason why Comedia declares citizens’ media a failure is because Comedia understand citizens’ media only as an ‘alternative’ to mainstream media, sharing the same circulation and life-span goals of mainstream media.

As discussed earlier in the section on definitions of citizens’ media, defining citizens’ media as ‘alternative media’ frames citizens’ media in terms of what they are not, instead of what they are, which creates a continual comparison in research between citizens’ media and the mainstream media. The alternative framework creates difficulty in recognizing the diversity of practice (because practice can only be described negatively) and goals of citizens’ media by falsely assuming that citizens’ media share the same market and circulation aspirations of mainstream media. As Atton (2002), Duncombe (1997), and Rodriguez (2001) claim, most citizens’ media do not intend to reach all audiences because it would impede on the ability to transform social relations (which entails direct citizens participation in media production) and provide community access.

It is questionable whether the ‘neglect’ for economic concerns that Comedia (1984) felt was characteristic of citizens’ media is more accurately understood as the financial struggles many low-budget productions endure. Rather than economic neglect, Atton (2002) describes citizens’ media as highly concerned with financial issues, from survival to integrity. He claims that financial difficulties arise not because of neglect, but from the conflicting desire to protect open access and expression for citizens and procurement of financial security for survival.

Atton (1999, p. 71) argues, “rather than pre-figurative methods of economics and organization being barriers to the development of the alternative press; we might examine them as essential components of a media that seek to integrate themselves with the movements they are supporting, reporting, and indeed, developing.” For example, Atton describes how citizens’ media may develop and renegotiate the reprographic technologies and distribution methods in order to offset financial costs. Therefore, citizens’ media develop creative ways to survive financially that benefit the community and the aims of the media outlet, which usually does not include the acceptance of advertising.

In reference to Comedia’s (1984) claim that citizens’ media need to start exploiting their audience for advertising revenue and to obtain market research, Rodriguez (2001) argues that accepting advertising would not only violate the philosophies of citizens’ media, but it would alter the relations between and within processes that enable them to support direct expression and local diversity. Since the aim is to transform social relations, many times the line between reader and writer is blurred because the content is explicitly developed and created by the audience. Such a relationship would lessen the need for the formal ‘feedback mechanisms’ that market research might be able to provide.

Furthermore, Atton (2002) claims that some citizens’ media do have more clearly defined job duties based on the preference and talents of different members, and job rotation is not a rejection of ‘professionalism’, but a technique developed to increase and encourage participation and diversity. Once again the problem with negatively defining citizens’ media emerges when journalistic values of citizens’ media are understood only in opposition to mainstream journalistic values, which ignores the possibility that citizens’ might develop to better serve the community and mobilize support for social justice and change. For example, Atton (2002) described the practice of ‘native reporting’ which privileges those involved in direct action and struggles for social justice as credible voices of citizen expression over professional journalists that are ‘objectively’ distanced and otherwise uninvolved in the issue or movement. Eliasoph’s (1988) analysis of the media routines of KPFA radio station in Berkeley, California, argues,

There would be nothing in the news form itself to prevent the propagation of oppositional interpretations of the world if news organizations could exist which were not so beholden to corporate and commercial interests, *and* which employed noncareerist reporters with different ideologies themselves, *and* which had different relations both to their audiences and the social movements on which they reported.

Atton (2002) and Eliasoph (1988) claim the way citizens’ media develop and serve their communities is directly contingent on the specificities of the community and are necessary in continuing the support of open participation.

Finally, Atton (2002) finds Comedia’s decision to judge the success of citizens’ media on the basis of their ability to compete with mainstream media in terms of circulation arbitrary and irrelevant because he cites that many successful citizens’ media have circulations around 2,000 or less. As Rodriguez (2001, p. 154) claims, “citizens’ media do not have to compete for global markets; they do not have to reach all audiences; they do not have to ‘talk to everyone,’ and therefore, local dialects, local issues, and local codifications of social reality find their way into citizens’ media.” Also the larger the circulation, the more difficult it becomes to transform the traditional relations between

writers, distributors, publishers, and readers because of the audience size. Basically, most citizens' media do not intend to reach audiences as large as the mainstream media, and instead work towards encouraging direct participation in media production at a local level.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed and analyzed research on citizens' media, proposed a model for explaining citizens' media, and discussed some critiques of citizens' media. The model is intended to serve as a fluid guide to organize and explore fundamental qualities and dimensions of citizens' media in order to better understand democratic practice and resistance. The dimensions investigate the ways in which citizens' media negotiate and transform practice in order to maximize citizen participation, and thus democracy. As explored by Comedia, while the goal of citizens' media is to engage citizenship and practice democracy, some of the practices and dimensions may negatively impact their ability to reach their goal. The next chapter extends the discussion and wrestles with the controversies of citizens' media by using the model and dimensions of citizens' media to investigate a specific citizens' media outlet, the *New River Free Press*.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDYING THE *NEW RIVER FREE PRESS* AS CITIZENS MEDIA: GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT, OVERVIEW, AND METHODOLOGY

The diverse practices of citizens' media requires research that examines specific citizens' media projects to determine the unique ways they practice radical democracy (Atton, 2002). Rodriguez (2001, p. 163) claims, "As scholars, we need to contribute our research and our data collecting to documenting and analyzing the lives and deaths of citizens' media." Analysis of citizens' media provides both a history of citizens' media projects and an opportunity to understand how citizens use media within particular communities, to reach specific goals, through creative and democratic means.

Research into citizens' media has investigated a variety of geographical regions and time periods. As discussed earlier, Rodriguez (2001) studied citizens' media in Colombia, Argentina, Catalonia, and the U.S.; Atton (2002) studied anarchist papers in the U.K.; Streitmatter (2001) studied the papers published by different U.S. social movements; Downing (2001) studied a variety of international citizens' media. However, the majority of research has focused on media produced in urban cities located in the U.S. and U.K. with local and/or national distribution. Major cities support more citizens' media projects because of the population; however smaller, less urban communities also support citizens' media. If Atton, Downing, and Rodriguez are correct in their claim that citizens' media are hybrid and diverse, it is necessary to explore many different types of citizens' media from different geographic locations to fully understand their scope.

This chapter begins the analysis of one specific citizens' media paper, the *New River Free Press (NRFP)* located in southwest, rural Virginia. The *New River Free Press* offers an opportunity to explore the practice of a citizens' media newspaper that is published for and by an Appalachian community in the United States. No previous research exists into citizens' media projects in Blacksburg, Virginia, and therefore this analysis will be unique in this respect. This chapter describes a few of the specific characteristics of the New River Valley area, the *New River Free Press*, and the research methodology of this project.

The New River Valley

This section explores the New River Valley, which is in southwestern Virginia, where the *New River Free Press* produces and distributes its paper. While this section does explore some aspects of the region, it is by no means intended as a comprehensive historical account or description. Since the focus is citizens' media, historical struggles and issues relevant to the *NRFP* are discussed. This section is broken into two subsections, the first focuses on the town of Blacksburg, Virginia, where the paper's office is located, and the second focuses on the Appalachian region that the paper serves.

Blacksburg

The New River Valley (NRV) contains a mix of small, rural towns close to hiking and other outdoor recreation, surrounded by Appalachian culture, but dominated by a technology-oriented university. In the NRV, there are two universities, Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, and Radford University in Radford, and one community college, New River Valley Community College in Dublin. Blacksburg, home to the *New River Free Press*

office, is located in the southwestern region of Virginia between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Mountains. Blacksburg is a high-tech town, declared “America’s Most Wired Town”, which supports the internationally known Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV, www.bev.net). The downtown area offers a variety of locally owned shops and restaurants, including three coffee shops.

Just down the street from the *Free Press* office is Virginia Tech (also known as Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), a large, land grant, public university. In addition to the proximity of the paper’s office to the Virginia Tech (VT), some of the volunteers at the *New River Free Press* live in Blacksburg and/or work at VT. As of 2004, Virginia Tech enrolls 25,000 students, which makes it the largest university in Virginia (Virginia Tech, 2004, *About Virginia Tech*). Due to the size of the university and the amount of money it brings in, the university is a major force in the town and the region. Interaction between VT and the *NRFP* is inevitable and the paper’s staff develop routines for dealing with its proximity to the university, which are discussed later; therefore, this subsection describes three aspects of Virginia Tech: research, military history, and politics.

Research

In regards to research, Virginia Tech is a Research I university ranked within the top 50 research institutions in the United States, spending about \$230 million annually on research with a heavy focus on technology and science (Virginia Tech, 2004, *University Factbook*). Virginia Tech also focuses heavily on and is known for its engineering and business schools. Many of the technological and scientific projects have received national attention and been the first of their kind. For example, on March 5, 2000, the first cloned pigs were born in a research facility leased by the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center to PPL Therapeutics, the same company to clone the first sheep, Dolly (Anwar, 2000). And in 2003, VT research teams developed the world’s third fastest supercomputer (Top 500.org, 2004).

Military History

In addition to being a top research university, Virginia Tech has a long military record. Although joining the “Corps of Cadets”, a student military unit, is no longer deemed mandatory, up until 1964 VT was an all-military school (Virginia Tech, 2004, *University Factbook*). Currently VT is one of the only three schools in the country that supports both a military and civilian student body (Virginia Tech, 2004, *University Factbook*). According to 2002 student profile statistics, the VT Corps of Cadets totals 724 member, which is around 3% of the overall on-campus enrollment (Virginia Tech, 2004, *University Factbook*).

Politics

Politically, Virginia Tech has a conservative reputation; historically slow to admit both minorities and women into the university. Women were not admitted into Virginia Tech until 1921. All of the presidents of Virginia Tech have been white males. In 1995, Peggy Meszaros was the first woman appointed senior vice president and provost. And although the last president, Charles Steger, promised to improve and promote cultural diversity on campus, the student population is still predominately white. In 1953, Virginia Tech admitted its first African American student, Irving L. Peddrew III, although legally, he was only admitted to classes, and could not participate in any other university activities (including eating in the dining hall) (Wallenstein, 1997). From 1997

to 2003, the undergraduate student population claiming minority status represented no more than seventeen percent. In 2003, the largest racial minority on campus was comprised of Asians (6.9%), followed by African Americans (5.9%), Hispanics (2%), and Native Americans (0.3%) (University Reports, 2004). Whites, however, consisted 77.4% of the student population that year (University Reports, 2004).

The governor in a traditionally conservative state appoints the members of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, who make policy decisions for the university. Accordingly, VT has a traditionally conservative reputation. For example, in 1968, four students, Bob Greenwalt, Jane Baldwin, Ben Lawton, and Cecil Pettus, decided to poll the student body to determine whether or not students approved of the dress regulations, which required that women could not wear slacks unless designated by the Dean of Women Office (Ackler, 1968). The students were placed on disciplinary probation until graduation for violation of the university's Solicitation Clause, which was overturned by a faculty review board (Ackler, 1968).

Another example of VT's conservative political actions happened in March 2003, when the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors (BOV) preempted a Supreme Court ruling in the University of Michigan case about affirmative action, and repealed the university's affirmative action policy. During the same closed meeting the BOV removed sexual orientation from their non-discrimination policy and voted for a new policy that would require the VT president to approve any campus speaker (Associated Press, 2003). Exposure of this meeting drew a large student-teacher-citizen protest outside of VT's administration building, which culminated in storming the president's office, and caused intense criticism from the public (Associated Press, 2003). On April 6, 2003, in response to intense public and official pressure, the BOV reversed its decision on anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies (Miller, 2003). While this offers only one example of controversial university policy, many of the university's historical actions have sparked outrage.

As stated earlier, Virginia Tech is a major force in the town of Blacksburg, but the *NRFP* does not locate the university or the students as the primary audience (although these community member are not excluded). Furthermore, although the paper was started by students at Virginia Tech the paper is not associated either officially or un-officially to the university. The *NRFP* aims to serve the New River Valley, which is a part of the larger Appalachian community. Therefore, the next subsection focuses on some aspects of Appalachia.

Appalachia

Although exact definitions of Appalachia vary, various counties within the New River Valley have been considered part of Appalachia. Because the geographical boundaries created to define Appalachia frequently change, most towns and counties in and around the Appalachian chain can be considered part of Appalachia. Additionally, the term Appalachia has a variety of cultural meanings and connotations, with frequent conflicts between cultural experience and cultural definition (Couto, 2002a). Because of the ambiguity surrounding Appalachia and the New River Valley's existence within this region of North America, this subsection explores different ways that scholars and citizens people described and conceptualized Appalachia. This subsection is divided into the following sections to explore the Appalachian region: geography and demographics, economics, and culture.

Geography & Demographics

Appalachia is a term to designate (with various sets of boundaries) areas running in and near the Appalachian mountain chain, including land in parts of West Virginia (entire state), Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Couto, 2002a). This area is further divided into Northern, Central, and Southern Appalachia, with Virginia counties falling into both Central and Southern Appalachian categories (Couto, 2002a). According to the Peoples Appalachian Research Collective (PARC, 1972), the Appalachian Mountains, which consist of various small mountains chains, the oldest of which run from Maine to Georgia (the newer chain running from New York to Georgia), is a defining characteristic of the region, because the mountains make accessibility and building difficult, and increase potential flood dangers.

Economic, social, and cultural differences exist between areas in Appalachia, which make generalizations about growth, population, economy, and culture difficult and problematic. Although the Appalachian region is extremely diverse and generalizations are inadequate, research reports consistently reveal lower growth rates, lower employment rates, lower per capita income, and lower population growth rates compared to national averages (Couto, 2002a). For example, in Virginia from 1980 to 1990 reports show that economic growth in the Appalachian region declined 5.8%, compared to a national increase of 9.8% (Couto, 2002a). According to the Virginia Employment Commission (1999a; 1999b), there was a slight increase in the population of Montgomery and Floyd counties since 1980, although the increase was nowhere close to the national average.

Poverty

Poverty is experienced and defined by those Appalachian citizens it affects; however, some external groups, members of which who do not live within Appalachia, also defined Appalachian poverty. For those not citizens of Appalachia, including generations of scholars, citizens, developers, policy makers, and companies, poverty became the defining characteristic of Appalachian culture (Couto, 2002a). The problem is that most of the external groups that were defining the poverty of the region blamed the culture of the Appalachian people for causing the conditions to exist (Lewis, 2002). The lack of understanding that formed perceptions of Appalachia as breeding a culture of poverty resulted in misguided policy that failed to understand the needs of Appalachian citizens (Lewis, 2002). While Lohmann (2002) claims that poverty is still a destructive force in the Appalachian region, with rates twice the national average, it does not result from a culture of poverty.

While there are many conflicting explanations for the causes, changes, and characteristics of Appalachia poverty, most scholars agree that the coal industry heavily contributed to the poverty of the region (PARC, 1972). Since the turn of the twentieth century, the wealth generated by Appalachia's rich coal deposits has been controlled by large, absent, private corporations based on 'mineral rights' contracts, which are currently used as justification for harmful strip-mining practices (PARC, 1972). After the arrival of the large coal companies, internal revenue of the Appalachian region began to steadily decline as much-needed money for schools, hospitals, parks, worker safety, and health care was filtered out of town by the non-local coal companies (PARC, 1972). Additionally, varying 'development' projects created by external groups to 'improve'

Appalachia, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission created in 1965, failed to understand the conditions of poverty as citizens experienced them, and therefore failed in efforts to improve the region (Bradshaw, 2002).

As a result of the economic and political programs and policies experienced by the region, Appalachian citizens lost control of their economic products and became increasingly subjected to conditions of poverty (PARC, 1972). In comparison to the larger state of Virginia, the counties that the *NRFP* serves consistently have a lower per capita income. According to Couto (2002b), although overall poverty rates are decreasing in most parts of Appalachia, the poverty rates are consistently higher than national poverty rates. Finally, though, given the diversity of the region, it is important to remember that while poverty is a prevalent social concern for the Appalachian region as a whole, it cannot describe all Appalachian communities and/or Appalachian culture.

Culture

Appalachia is a region that supports a variety of cultural practices including music, poetry, storytelling, and art. Unfortunately, popular conceptions of Appalachia focus mainly on poverty and what is perceived as cultural backwardness (i.e. ‘the hillbilly’), resulting in a negative, inaccurate, homogenous characterization (Couto, 2002a). As a result of marginalization, misunderstanding, and media stereotypes, popular conceptions characterize Appalachian citizens as passive, individualistic, racist, and sexist, stricken by poverty, illiteracy, and cultural ‘backwardness’, which conflict with the ways that Appalachians experience and express culture (Fisher, 2002).

After the arrival of Europeans in North America, Irish immigrants wishing to avoid British colonial rule on the Atlantic Coast settled in the Appalachian Mountains, bringing Celtic culture to the Appalachian region (PARC, 1972). Although geographically defined by the Appalachian Mountains, the region did not develop differently from other pre-industrial regions in rural America in terms of communication, and was never completely isolated from the rest of the nation (Lewis, 2002). Trade routes existed before European settlers arrived, which allowed trade between Native American tribes (Lewis, 2002). Additionally, throughout history Appalachia has sustained a high subscription rate to various media, like newspapers, magazines, and newsletters, which signals interest in national and international trends (Lewis, 2002).

While Appalachian culture is Celtic in origin, the cultural expressions of Appalachia, including bluegrass and poetry, draw on a variety of different cultural traditions. Lewis (2002, p. 133) claims, “Industrializing Appalachia was a matrix of cultural interaction among very diverse races and cultures”. A 1909 report on the racial and ethnic origins of West Virginia coal miners reveals a wide range of cultural diversity, including Africans, Italians, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Germans, Slavs, and Syrians (Lewis, 2002). Although the report on West Virginia coal miners represents only one example, people from diverse cultural backgrounds lived in the many different regions of Appalachia (Lewis, 2003).

Because of the diverse cultural background and practices between regions within Appalachia, it is difficult to discuss a general ‘Appalachian culture’ (PARC, 1972). Furthermore, the cultural diversity active in Appalachia repudiates the myth that Appalachia fostered a homogenous ‘culture of poverty’, which was based on its isolation and backwardness, leading to economic poverty (Lewis, 2002). As William Ryan (1971) describes, when problems are misunderstood, inaccurately defined, and victims are

blamed as the source of the problem, the problem persists and is intensified, leading to future victimization. Describing Appalachia solely in terms of its poverty has led many to “blame the victim”, and define Appalachia as a “culture of poverty.” Therefore, it is important to recognize cultural expression in Appalachia as diverse and multi-dimensional (Lewis, 2002).

In different points in its history, citizens of the Appalachian region have struggled for political, environmental, and social rights through cultural and political expression to end repressive and oppressive practices (Fisher, 2002). Since the 1960s, hundreds of single-issue citizens’ groups have organized in Appalachia to work towards improving local conditions (Fisher, 2002). For example, the citizens of Floyd County in Virginia have fought for safer environmental practices and more community-based decision-making. Additionally, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), one of the largest and most successful labor unions, is active in Appalachia, and has fought hard in the mines of Appalachia against the coal companies for the rights of coal miners and their families (Fox, 2002). The UMWA was also one of the first labor unions to admit Asian members, and at the founding of the UMWA in 1890, the union condemned racial discrimination as one of its earliest actions (Fox, 2002).

In summary, this subsection discussed the conflicting descriptions of the geography, poverty, and culture of Appalachia. While specific examples of cultural expression and practice perhaps best describe Appalachian culture, the diversity of regional practices and cultural forms create a multi-dimensional culture that escapes specific definition. Additionally, most of the negative conceptions of Appalachia that conceive of the region as culturally backward, repressive, and passive are inaccurate and oppressive.

According to the Peoples Appalachian Research Collective (PARC, 1972), research that documents historical and cultural practices of Appalachian citizens is necessary in countering negative conceptions and representations of Appalachia. Examination of the *New River Free Press* provides an opportunity to examine the social, cultural, and political expressions of a particular region of Appalachia located in the New River Valley of southwestern Virginia. In order to begin analysis of the *NRFP* as a citizens’ media outlet in an Appalachian region, the next section provides a brief history of citizen run media in Blacksburg, Virginia.

The New River Free Press

This section provides a brief history of citizens’ media in Blacksburg, Virginia including *Alice*, *The Steamtunnel*, and *New River Free Press*. The *New River Free Press* has predecessors, which are important to the story, but due to gaps in the historical record are not part of the primary analysis. However, based on available records, brief descriptions of the *NRFP*’s predecessors, *Alice* and *The Steamtunnel*, are included.

While the *New River Free Press* was selected for analysis over the other papers, it is important to recognize the papers that historically preceded the *New River Free Press*. Additionally, background information into the *NRFP* is necessary to familiarize the reader with the basic aspects of the paper including dates of publication, original staff members and size, type of publication, frequency of publication, and estimated circulation. Therefore, this section describes three citizens’ papers in Blacksburg,

Virginia published from 1968 to the present in chronological order: *alice*, *The Steamtunnel*, and *New River Free Press*.

Alice

An undated 8.5" by 16" newsletter quality paper, reading "FREE! *Blacksburg Underground Newsletter*, No. 1", preceded the publication of *alice*. Submitted to Virginia Tech Special Collections Library by Bryan Ackler, one of *alice*'s founders and long-time staff member, the newsletter includes two columns, typewriter produced rant about cops, capitalist pigs, oppression, war, and The Establishment from Jerry Rubin's book, *Do It!* The excerpt from the book is the only content aside from a description of what is meant by "free". According to the unidentified author(s),

WHY FREE?

---No hassles over: 'obscenity, censorship, legality, money, advertising, readership, or printing. We don't have to please anybody.

WHEN FREE?

---When we feel liked it.

(Kkitchycoo, Nichols!)

WHERE FREE?

---Everywhere!

WHO FREE?

--- You free, we free, they free, he free, she free, it free.

WHAT FREE?

---Everything and anything.

Aside from the first issue of the *Blacksburg Underground Newsletter*, no information was obtained or available concerning additional issues or staff members.

The first issue of *alice* came out in May of 1968, the same month students took to the streets in Paris, and although it cost ten cents, it carried with it the name, *Blacksburg Free Press*. The paper was founded by four students, listed in the first issue on May 18, 1968 according to their job duties: Everett Hogg, editor; John Pendleton, business manager; Jans Appel, art editor; Bryan Ackler, copy editor; Jans Appel, Tom Saunders, Ed Day, and Everett Hogg, editorial board. The inside the front cover, containing the first statement of purpose, reads,

'alice' is published occasionally at Blacksburg, Virginia as a form of free discussion for the community of the people concerned about Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Only those articles identified as editorials necessarily reflect the policy of this paper. 'alice' is open to the feelings of the people of the university community, for only if all viewpoints are expressed, can this paper become an agent of free discussion.

The first issue (May 16, 1968) is four pages long, containing two advertisements; one for a local store, Carver's, and another store, Books, Strings, and Things, who claimed, "we don't advertise our record prices".

The founding member and first editor of *alice* was Everett Hogg, temporarily replaced in the summer of 1969 by Tom Saunders, who organized a group of liberal-religious students to start a paper (Ackler, 1969). The first issue lists the volunteers and their duties, Bryan Ackler (1969, p. 5), a founding member of *alice*, explains,

The question always arises as why doesn't the *alice* staff work for the *Virginia Tech* [the VT student newspaper], or why didn't we all join the *Tech* staff to start

with instead of forming *alice*. The answer is many parted and deeply rooted in personal outlooks on what a paper should be. First, the *Va. Tech* is supposed to represent the student body and be its newspaper; there was a need for a focal point in the liberal community secondly. Competition is healthy even in publishing... The administrative system that the *Tech* is committed to does not allow the staff the amount of voice in the paper that we feel it should have, while investing almost total power in the editorship. Finally the point arises as to how can an official portion of the University turn around and ethically attack the University of which it is part and from which it is accepting approval and funds. Thus, *alice* was created out of a felt and much-needed outlet for free expression and debate that was not or could not be filled by other local newspapers.

Although not explicitly stated, the title, *alice*, reflects the psychedelic, hippie-culture of the 1960s and entails references to LSD, for example, a classified in the first issue reads, "Jo, I love you gypsy eyes flashing...PERSONAL: Alice is Mary Jane's sister." Once again, an April 4, 1969 issue pleads, "Alice's sister is in trouble...Remember 20 to 40 yrs. for possession of a fraction of an ounce of Mary Jane; i.e. cleanliness next to Godliness or go straight to hell." But the paper remains elusive about the title's choice, including an excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland* as an introduction to a description about "what is 'alice'?" It reads,

'alice' From *Alice in Wonderland*, alice a girl I once knew, alice a cat, alice a dwarfed Russian olive, alice the mother of a friend, and the alice that runs a restaurant, and various and sundry other alices that one finds, cones 'alice', a free newspaper.

The size and visual rhetoric of *alice* varied dramatically over its lifespan. For example, the first two issues are printed on tabloid-size, newsprint paper, with clearly separated articles and darkly colored pictures. From June 24, 1968 until November 25, 1968, the paper published sixteen papers, ranging from one page to sixteen (November 25, 1968 issue), but averaging two to three pages, on 8.5" by 16" newsletter-quality paper. Additionally, the contrast between the ink and the paper is lighter, and the typed articles run closer together. The change probably occurred because after June 24, 1968, many students left town for the summer, and reflective of this, the newspaper staff temporarily changed.

During the time period from June to November 1968, the top of every *alice* issue included the phrase, "this is a limiting printing please read and pass on". Creative pictures were used to frame the phrase, for example of the cover of the July 15, 1968, the phrase is written sideways leading to a gravestone reading "RIP" with an infinity symbol, reflecting the urgency of the paper's financial difficulties. The same issue reveals the advertising price, usually only available upon request from the "ad department", ".35cents per line or \$1 for three lines, or maybe less if we like you". Additionally the *alice* staff requested help, urging readers and supporters, "We need help. Two weeks ago we sent out fifty appeals for funds that are needed so that we can print this fall. We received one rely." However, the January 7, 1968, issue of *alice* brought the return of tabloid-size newsprint and high ink/paper contrast.

The next issue, dated January 1969, was the last edition to carry the names of the volunteers according to their job duties. The following edition, February 1969, listed Tom Saunders as editor, followed by the rest of the fourteen staff members, adding, "and

all of our friends...” Subsequent issues do not include the names of staff member, but inform readers about staff meeting times and location. Additionally, after February of 1969, the issues of the paper become longer, ranging from 8 to 18 pages. The longest issue, from October 14, 1969 is 20 pages, complete with a full-color, psychedelic drawing of a hand releasing the dove of peace, reading “Work for Peace.”

Alice covered anti-war and draft articles, women’s rights, environmental issues, human rights, and drug policy. *Alice* practiced an open submission policy, which welcomed contributions from the community, according to Ackler (1969, p. 8),

We promised to print anything as long as it was well written and was short enough length to make it printable in a newspaper. The staff made only a small attempt in being objective. The fact that an individual with a particular set of views is writing it, his selections of words, the layout of the article, its title and title style all combined with the paper’s image make it impossible to publish an objective paper. Every staff member has his own prejudices and we make no attempt to cover them up by saying that we are objective. When the reader picks up *alice* he knows beforehand what he is about to read is biased to some degree. We are at least honest about it...

Along with articles, the magazine featured artwork that captured the psychedelic style of the 1960’s counterculture movements. It contained a variety of typed and handwritten articles, including hand-drawn pictures and practices of detournement. Possibly reflective of the open submission policy of the paper, many of the articles are written in the first-person and report on the personal feelings and experiences of writers.

Multicolor pictures and drawings that related to the main focus of the issue often graced the cover. A special drug issue cover dated March 17, 1972, included with a drawing of a girl with a flower in her hair, a pill in her hand, and bubbles all around her. The paper was experimental and creative in appearance, tone/style, and subject matter. The cover of the November 25, 1968, issue features “Wanted Jesus” in an old Western-themed typeface. The cover lists some of the things Jesus is being charged with, including: “urges love not war- love everybody including communists”, “anti-capitalist-urges followers to sell everything and give to the poor”, and “is given to hallucinatory: turns people on” (The Drug Issue, 1968, November 25). This sarcastic, witty, and comical style is characteristic of the paper’s critical perspective.

The fascinating *alice* published its last issue, Volume 8 Number 1 in 1972. Unlike earlier issues, the last issue makes neither pleas for funding nor a statement that it is final the issue. Additionally, the last issue once again carries names of the fourteen staff members, including original founding member, Bryan Ackler. But under the staff names, *alice* makes a last criticism of the university using an adaptation, uncredited, from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*,

One Ring to rule them all,
One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all
and in the darkness bind them.
In the Land of VaTech where the
shadows lie.

The Steamtunnel

The Steamtunnel published its first issue in November of 1980 as a new alternative news monthly. The title, *The Steamtunnel*, is most likely a reference to the approximately six miles of tunnels under the Virginia Tech campus, thus associating the paper with the “underground.” The *Steamtunnel* carried on in the progressive tradition of *Alice* by covering community, environmental, anti-war, and human rights issues. The size of the actual paper was smaller than *alice*, measuring 8.5” by 14”, and only one sheet, front-and-back, folded in half. All of the issues are typed, and appear to be typed on a typewriter in Courier New typeface. None of the issues of *The Steamtunnel* contain any advertising.

The style of the articles in *The Steamtunnel* varies, and includes quotes, letters, hand-drawn cartoons, and first-person narratives. A 1982 lead article entitled, “Don’t Register!” is an anti-draft argument, which due to lack of authorial byline and use of first-person narrative voice, appears to express the views of the paper staff. Another example is the inclusion of a first-hand account of a June 12, 1982, peace rally in New York City written by Carol Echternach, who later also served as a volunteer at the *New River Free Press*. The beginning of the article reads, “Being arrested is not normally something to feel good about, but under the circumstance, I do. I was one of the 1600 arrested in New York City for blockading the entrances to the UN mission of the five major nuclear powers on June 14” (Echternach, 1982 Summer).

By the summer of 1982 *The Steamtunnel*, going under due to financial difficulties, published their last issue. Archives of *The Steamtunnel* are not available through any library collection, so unlike *alice*, specific historical information, such as staff members and statement of purpose cannot be determined. Perhaps foreshadowing a transition, in the masterhead of the last issue, the title carried the line, “New River Free Press” under *Steamtunnel* and between “Vol. II no. 6”.

New River Free Press

In 1983 when John Enagonio, Ron Kaminkow, and Mariann Caine decided the New River valley could benefit from an alternative paper, they created a new paper, the *New River Free Press*. The *NRFP* rolled off the press for the first time in February of 1983 with Volume 1, Issue Number 1, professing a circulation of 5,000. The volunteer staff listed in the first issue includes: Pam Allen, David Darcy, Carol Echternach, Jeff Schroeder, John Engonio, Kim Holloman, Ron Kaminkow, Bob Wilson, Joni Keating, Mark Ratledge, Bill Shelton, and welcoming, “articles, poetry, stores, artwork, letters, advertisers, donations, and all the help we can get.” The first issue is eight pages long, including a long statement of purpose, which concludes,

In sum, the *NRFP* will support the creation of societies where age groups, races, sexes, classes, people with an deformity or deficiency, and with any and all views of the world and our place in it shall interact without prejudice or other barriers; where humanity lives in harmony with all species and with the earth in our consumption patterns, cultivation, waste disposal, and use of technology’ where cooperation guides our international negotiations’ and where the creative potential of all people are given freedom and encouragement.

The statement of purpose has been repeatedly amended, but the paper still stands by its belief in community, peace, international solidarity, and education. *NRFP* volunteer Kip Kipling claims, “We are a collective committed to the cause of progressive

politics, justice, and peace” (personal communication, December 4, 2003). Still published as of July 2004, the *NRFP* represents the longest running citizens’ newspaper in Blacksburg.

Funding was obtained through advertising and loans. In the first issue there were six ads, and all of the loans were paid back as far as current records show (Anderson, personal communication, November 21, 2003). The advertisements are for local business, like Round & Around, a local record store, Fringe Benefit, a local boutique, Annie Kay’s local whole food store, a local restaurant, and social organizations, like Community Jobs, a newsletter that helps people find jobs as well as Abortion in Good Faith, a pro-choice Catholic organization. Throughout its history, local and activist-oriented advertising has continued to be a characteristic and source of income for the paper.

The *NRFP* is published bi-monthly, and although it began with a circulation around 5,000, the paper as of 2004 had obtained a circulation to around 7,000 citizens. The paper is available, free of cost, to citizens of the New River Valley at local exhibition outlets like grocery stores, coffee shops, and restaurants. While the purpose of the paper is to serve the local community, the paper pledges to serve all peoples and societies united in collective action.

Taken collectively, *Alice*, *The Steamtunnel*, and the *NRFP* represent a forum where politically progressive citizens are able to share political concerns and cultural expressions. While the newspapers are not necessarily responsible for the formation of an alternative or radical community within the New River Valley, their presence does serve to provide social cohesiveness and a sense of shared community. In the New River Valley, these citizens’ newspapers offer the only media outlet through which politically radical citizens can express/share their concerns and experiences. While further analysis and discussion of the *NRFP* is the focus of the next chapter, the next section of this chapter describes the methodologies used to collect research on the *NRFP*.

Methodology

This section explores the three methodologies used to research the *New River Free Press*: the interview method, archival research, and textual analysis. These three methods were selected because they were applicable to available resources and have been used in previous research by citizens’ media scholars Atton (2001), Duncombe (1997), and Rodriguez (2001). In addition to discussing how interviews, archival research, and textual analysis were conducted to research the *New River Free Press*, this section discusses the possible advantages and disadvantages of each method.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with two long-time volunteers of the *New River Free Press* staff, Susan Anderson and Kim Kipling, who have served various duties and roles within the *NRFP*. The interviews were conducted at the paper’s office in Blacksburg so that the staff members could supplement their responses with the paper’s archival material, lasting around two hours. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, which builds a rapport between participants and includes the exchange of nonverbal communication (Frey et al., 2000). The interviews were recorded on audiotape and by hand, and any confusion was cleared up through follow-up e-mail correspondence. Names and dates were checked for correct spelling through email correspondence and

archival research. The chosen format for the interviews was semi-structured and the questions were open-ended.

The semi-structured interview format involves a basic set of interview questions that is intended to generate discussion, allowing the interviewee or interviewer to discuss particular issues in depth. Open-ended questions were used because of the ability to provide greater in-depth information than close-ended questions (Frey et. al., 2000). Additionally open-ended questions are “more useful when researchers are exploring a little-understood issue, want unanticipated answers, and are studying respondents who may resent pre-selected answers” (Frey et. al., 2000, p. 100). Since there is little to no previous research about the *New River Free Press*, the semi-structured format and open-ended were an appropriate method for research.

The interview method occasionally suffers from the methodological flaws of self-reporting, such as self-monitoring and social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is described as, “the tendency for people to answer in socially desirably ways...[which] potentially compromises the validity of many self-reports” (Frey et al., 2000, p. 96). However, the interview method offered one of the only methods to collect information about the paper’s history and organizing and financial practices. Additionally, because all of the people interviewed are members of the *New River Free Press*, they bring with them a perspective that may be different from the readers. But as discussed earlier, one of the dimensions of citizens’ media is to transform social roles and break down the distinctions between producer, distributor, and (active) consumer. Therefore, the impact that such biases as social desirability bias associated with self-reporting may have on research is minimal. Atton (2002) and Rodriguez (2001) utilized the interview method to obtain information about the organizing and financial practices of citizens’ media.

Archival research

The second research method, archival research, was used to supplement information generated through the interviews and to analyze aspects such as layout, design, and journalistic practices. Archival research was conducted in the Special Collections Departments at Virginia Tech’s Newman Library in Blacksburg, Virginia. Complete collections of all volumes and numbers of the *New River Free Press* are available through the Special Collections archive service at the library. Therefore, analysis was based on primary documents, which is preferable when resources are available (Frey et al., 2000).

The archival research process began with a preliminary screening of all of the papers in the archive collection to gain familiarity with the paper. At this time preliminary notes containing initial reactions and observations were recorded with notations indexed by date, volume, and number (also special edition if applicable). The preliminary notes contain prominent issues or topics featured, general style, tone, and layout, list of all founding members, dates of publication, advertising presence and description, types of content, any statements of purpose or description of paper’s stated purpose, and presence of feedback mechanisms including the possibility of accepting submissions. After the interviews were conducted, archival research was used to double-check issues and locate articles that were mentioned.

Textual analysis

The third and final research method, textual analysis, was used with archival research to investigate specific aspects of paper layout and content. A textual analysis of

citizens' media includes examining the following aspects: feature and story layout/selection (position of story, type of issues covered), style of story (philosophy statement, narrative, social or political critique, self-critique, satire, humor), social voice (inclusive/exclusive, first person/third person), and direct action tactics (demonstrations, letter writing, setting up local groups, self-education) (Atton, 2002). In addition to these uses of textual analysis, the analysis of the *New River Free Press* also included special sections, editorials, typography, and image selection. The textual analysis of important articles, as determined through the interviews, and reoccurring coverage by the *NRFP* was conducted recording narrative voice, sources cited, and position advocated. Copies of all articles analyzed were photocopied at the library.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed background information about the New River Valley, provided a brief history of citizens' media in Blacksburg, and explained the methodology used to research the *New River Free Press*. The next chapter will develop many of the issues raised in this chapter concerning cultural expression in Appalachia and how citizens' media strive to support and encourage democratic participation. While this chapter provided more general background information, the next chapter offers specific examples that best demonstrate the democratic activities of a citizens' media outlet in Appalachian Virginia.

CHAPTER FOUR: *EDUCATE, AGITATE, ACTIVATE*: THE *NEW RIVER FREE PRESS* AS A CITIZENS' NEWSPAPER

“Educate, agitate, activate”, the current motto of *the New River Free Press*, expresses the ideologies and goals of many citizens' newspapers. While many citizens' media outlets share the goals of education, empowerment, and activism, the specific practices used to support democratic participation and their context differ between media outlets. Therefore, it is necessary to explore as many different citizens' media outlets as possible in order to better understand democratic practice. Insight into how citizens' media may negotiate, transform, and develop methods to support the practice of radical democracy increases understandings of citizens' media and strengthens forms of resistance. This chapter focuses on the ways in which a specific citizens' newspaper, the *NRFP*, transforms and negotiates media practice to support radical forms of democracy that embraces full participation and open expression.

As Chapter Two elaborated, Atton (2002) and Rodriguez (2001) consider analysis and documentation of citizens' media as necessary in understanding, recording, and furthering democratic struggle and progressive social change. Closer examination of the *NRFP* offers an opportunity to explore the issues raised by citizens' media scholars about democracy, citizens' media dimensions, and measures of success or failure, as discussed in Chapter Two, and a chance to analyze and document an Appalachian citizens' newspaper that has never been researched before. First, this chapter explores the dimensions of the *NRFP* in detail. Second, this chapter analyses how these criteria may support the practice of radical democracy and the needs of the New River Valley community.

This chapter explores how the *NRFP* radicalizes practice by using the adapted model, loosely based on Atton's model of citizens' media dimensions, and developed in Chapter Two (see Table 2). As stated in Chapter Two, these dimensions seek to explore citizens' media in terms of how they negotiate practice to maximize democratic expression. They are not intended as a complete historical description of all the practices of citizens' media. The dimensions serve to evaluate issues that all citizens' media must address and to structure research analysis in an organized and comprehensible way. This chapter explores six dimensions of citizens' media practice, which are loosely divided into media products and media processes. The dimensions that explore media products are content, form, and reprographic technology; the dimensions that explore media processes are distribution practices, transforming social relations, and finance.

Content

The first dimension of citizens' media explored is content, including types of radicalization and news values. This section first discusses both types of radicalization, political and cultural, focusing on the ways in which the *New River Free Press* can be understood as actively practicing both types of radical politics. Next, this section discusses the content of citizens' media by exploring how the *New River Free Press* transforms the journalistic values of sourcing, journalistic objectivity, and mobilizing information in order to increase democratic participation.

Types of Radicalization

Atton (2002) suggests that citizens' media can radicalize content politically, culturally, or both politically and culturally. Politically radical describes content that is *primarily* political, directly addressing questions of government and policy; culturally radical describes content that is *primarily* cultural, expressing multiple ways in which citizens' experience reality, which are not explicitly political. But the content of most citizens' media can be understood as both culturally and politically radical, although in some cases one form of radicalization may be dominant. Atton (2002) claims that the difficulty in determining which type of radicalization is dominant results from the absence of a quantitative measurement of radicalization. The *New River Free Press* presents a common case where it is difficult to determine whether the paper is predominately politically or culturally radical; both types will be explored.

Politically radical

The *NRFP* is openly politically radical, constantly advocating for and participating in citizens' struggles and progressive politics. Frequently the *NRFP* advocates that its readers take a stand on environmental, equality (racial, religion, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation), anti-war, and human rights issues. For example, in the March 1983 issue, a cover story, written by an unnamed staff member, titled "Citizens Lobby for a Nuclear Freeze" describes the activities and goals of Freeze Lobby and advocates reader involvement. The article provides contacts for New River Valley citizens concerned about the issue, and the article provides relevant local information about nuclear freeze policy by describing, "Rick Boucher, newly elected to the House of Representatives from Virginia's District #9, has become a co-sponsor of H.J. Res. 2, making District 9 the first Congressional district in Virginia whose congressman supports the freeze."

Additionally, the paper devotes considerable time and space to the coverage of local environmental issues, labor strikes, controversies, and elections, which are many times neglected by other media outlets. According to long-time volunteer Kip Kipling (2003), the paper openly acknowledges and encourages radical politics and citizen involvement in political issues. From the late 1990s into 2003, the paper covered a citizens' movement to protect Brown Farm, a community nature reserve, from recreational development. An excerpt from the *NRFP* coverage critical of the plan to build soccer fields on the nature reserve reads:

There appeared to be a great deal of sympathy between the New River Valley Soccer Association and the Recreation Advisory Board. Both advocate a park oriented toward active recreation which would require extensive construction to provide for parking and large soccer field on the farm, significantly altering its current topography and character. The environmentally oriented Friends of Brown Farm argued that this would mean the end of the only wildlife habitat close to the heart of Blacksburg (Roth, 2002 September).

Additionally, the paper supported a movement to prevent a controversial sewer line from being built through the local Toms Creek River Basin in Blacksburg. A 2003 cover article titled, "The Toms Creek Basin Struggle Continues", which opens, "as readers of the *New River Free Press* know, the fate of the Toms Creek basin, and ultimately the future of the greater Blacksburg community, hang in balance..." is accompanied by a

image like a stop sign, which reads, “STOP the TCB SEWER” (Kipling, 2003 October-November, p. 1).

The *NRFP* stated in the October 1983 issue that they have “tried to avoid becoming a single-issue publication”. For the majority of *NRFP* history this has been the case each issue containing articles on a range of issues, both local and national. But special topics have arisen, such as nuclear disarmament, that the volunteers at the paper felt were compelling enough to the community, the environment, and the world, that a special single-issue addition was created. In 1983, the *NRFP* ran the first single-issue edition of the paper, focusing on nuclear disarmament (Special Disarmament Issue, 1983, October, p. 1). Reflecting their radical stance, the lead article of the disarmament issue passionately describes the importance of preventing the production and deployment of nuclear missiles (specifically the Pershing II and Cruise Missiles), claiming, “Deployment of the American missiles, under development since the late 1960s, would push our planet to the brink of nuclear destruction” (Special Disarmament Issue, 1983, October, p. 1). In October of 1984, the *NRFP* ran another special edition, which included a synopsis of Ronald Reagan’s political record, focusing on his policy concerning labor, minorities, civil rights, women, Central America, social welfare, poverty, and nuclear arms (Special Elections Issue, 1984, October).

Many of the recurring stories in the *NRFP* center on human rights, anti-war, equal rights, women’s rights, gay rights, environmental issues, political activism, labor, and drug policy. Stories on drug policy, homelessness, and nuclear disarmament were most prevalent during the 1980s while Reagan was president. An article on Grenada in the November 1983 issue by Mary Day, written in first person, reads:

Most interesting to me is that at the present time the press is not allowed access to Grenada. Hence, all the news from there comes through our government...and as concerned citizens we must demand the media’s free access to the events happening in Grenada. To form our own opinions, question the information provided, and act as we deem appropriate is our right and duty as enlightened and interested world citizens.

During the late 1990s stories on the School of the Americas (SOA) became a common feature because of the involvement of local citizens in shutting down the military training camp. According to Susan Anderson (2003), supporters of the *NRFP* contributed to raising bail money for a long-time *NRFP* staff member who was arrested at one of the SOA protests. The *NRFP*’s December/January 2003 issue featured a cover story written by local Blacksburg activists, Jane Lehr, Patrick Lincoln, and Jonson Miller, who “crossed the line” at Fort Benning in civil disobedience to protest the murderous military record of its graduates in Latin America and were arrested. At the end of the article, each activist contributes a separate expression of their experience and feelings, with the titles reading, “Why Did I Cross the Line?” (Lincoln), “I Crossed the Line” (Lehr), “What Does the Line Mean?” (Miller). Overall, local, environmental, human rights, civil rights, women’s rights, and anti-war issues have been common features throughout the history of the paper.

The paper attempts to cover issues relevant to the community not covered on the AP wire or by other papers, and consults foreign news to identify issues and events that have been marginalized in the mainstream press (Kipling, 2003). Examples of local coverage throughout the history of the paper include, Take Back the Night marches at

local universities, Montgomery County bond issues, clear-cutting trees, speakers, the activities of local citizens groups, and local boycotts. One of the cover stories in the August 1987 issue focuses on the opening of a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Blacksburg. The article describes the history of Planned Parenthood as an organization, lists services offered at the new building, and contact information to seek more information. The October/November 1994 issue featured a cover story titled, "Mt. Rogers Threatened by Highway Development", by Sherman Bamford, which advocated protesting a proposed highway plan. The article also provides a bit of local New River Valley history, information not normally found – if at all – in local mainstream news outlets. According to the article,

Local residents are wary of the promises of outsiders, and with good reason. After all, lifelong residents have seen a number of development schemes blow through the area: In the early 1970s, the Appalachian Power Company threatened to dam the New River in two locations and flood 40,000 acres of bottomland. Later in the 1970s, the Forest Service considered building a wasteful 63-mile scenic highway and ski complex. In the mid-1980s, the Mt. Rogers area was considered as a prime site for a dump designed to contain 80 percent of all high-level waste generated by nuclear power facilities in the country. A few years ago, the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area permitted VDOT to construct a Route 600, a two-lane road with cut-and-fill roadwork all the way to Skulls Gap, just north of Konnarock. Local citizens put a stop to every single development scheme except the last one.

Coverage of local issues and controversies, like the proposed highway plan through Mt. Rogers, is significant because it enables local citizens to express their feelings and concerns. While other papers like the *Roanoke Times* may cover some of the same local issues and the *New River Free Press*, the *NRFP* is unique because it supports direct citizen expression, provides relevant town meeting information, and provides repeated and detailed coverage, which the other papers do not offer. Additionally, because of its progressive political ideology, the *NRFP* allows radical community members to voice their opinions on issues, which is another aspect unique to the *NRFP*.

The *NRFP* deals with Virginia Tech when the issue has the potential to impact the larger Blacksburg community, focusing on such issues as labor, equality and the environment (Anderson, 2003). For example, in reaction to university labor practices, the July/August 1988 carried a story on Virginia Tech on the cover, which described the actions of 125 Virginia Tech employees angered at state plans to cut wages, work hours, and benefits. The *NRFP* claims, "before the meeting adjourned, the employees united behind the demands of benefits for all and no cuts in hours, and agreed on the need to build an organization and establish an organizing committee" (Rittenhouse, 1988 July/August, p.8). Another example of the *NRFP* discussing VT comes from a November-December article titled, "Virginia Tech Goes Retail; Burgers-R-Us?" The article by Peter Scharf, questions the need for and implications of the university's decision to build seven new retail operations on campus, including such businesses as Burger King and I Can't Believe It's Yogurt, quoting local merchants worried it would negatively impact business and direct university focus toward retail projects and away from improving education. Virginia Tech's environmental record has received special attention by *NRFP*. For example, the dangerous emissions of the coal-burning plant on

Virginia Tech's campus has been the subject of many articles in the *NRFP* throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. An article by Don Langrehr (a local progressive community leader elected in 2004 to Blacksburg Town Council) in the July-September 2001 issue, titled "Commentary: Smoke and Mirrors at Virginia Tech", is featured on the first page, criticizing the secretive and elusive responses by Virginia Tech to the environmentally hazardous emissions from a coal-burning energy plant on campus. Langrehr describes the activities surrounding the controversial permit Virginia Tech supported, which would increase environmental hazards of its coal plant:

If approved, this permit will allow the university to more than double the amount of coal it currently burns in one of its boilers (#11) from 17,800 tons per year to 42,000 tons per year. At the hearing a number of community members spoke strongly against the increase in coal usage and offered personal reports of smokestack soot entering their offices and home. Residents, including some Virginia Tech faculty, challenged the school to attend to serious emission problems that already exist. They asked Virginia Tech administrators to consider expanded conservation measure and alternative forms of energy.

The paper's visual presentation also reinforces the political radicalism of *NRFP*. For example, the photographs that are included in the paper frequently depict citizens' involved in democratic activities, whether attending a protest, festival, or local event. The cover of the June 1986 issue features a photograph of a series of "street theater" actions produced on VT campus and in Blacksburg as part of Pledge of Resistance against U.S. military intervention in Central America. Another example is the cover picture from the April- May 1998 issue of the paper, which features Blacksburg Peace activists protest what began a 10-year long trade embargo on Iraq, with activist holding signs reading, "1.2 million IRAQIS DEAD. 4,500 CHILDREN. END US-UN SANCTIONS."

Because of the politically radical content of the *NRFP*, the paper serves as a voice for the progressive community in the New River Valley. Aside from the *NRFP*, the progressive citizens of the New River Valley do not have any access to any other medium to express their political and cultural opinions. The *NRFP* provides politically progressive citizens with a forum to express opinions on local, national, and global issues that are usually marginalized from mainstream media and larger newspapers. The political radicalization of content is one of the main ways in which the *NRFP* participates in radical democracy and resistance to mainstream media coverage.

Culturally radical

In addition to being politically radical, particular aspects of the *NRFP* are also culturally radical. The content of the paper frequently expresses local culture that is either underrepresented or absent from the mainstream media and/or other local news outlets. For example, the November 1983 issue of the *NRFP* features a poem by Ettelson, a citizen from Waiteville, West Virginia, that expresses many local citizens' perspective on war:

The oppressors are the ones with guns.
It doesn't matter what uniforms they're wearing
or what their cause is.
Soldiers in patent leather belts...young toughs
standing up straight...legs spread
over a foreign land

unaware of anger.
They stand with guns on street corners
watching a strange people pass.
Civilians too scared to speak...
guarded but for their eyes
when they see the uniforms...
their eyes speak a fury
no bullet can silence.
(Ettelson, 1983 November, p.1)

Appalachian culture is usually marginalized and/or negatively stereotyped by mainstream media and culture, which contributes to misunderstandings and misguided policy (PARC, 1972). By engaging Appalachian citizens in the production of media content, the *New River Free Press* enables Appalachian citizens an opportunity to express their culture. Just as Duncombe (1997) considers personal zines the voice of democracy, by expressing the underrepresented experiences of everyday Appalachian life, the *NRFP* supports democracy by enabling citizens who are normally excluded from media production an opportunity to describe their everyday experiences. For example, each spring the *NRFP* published *Appalachian Voices*, a collection of poetry, art, photography, and prose about Appalachia written by members of the community. Published annually beginning in 1983, the special edition offers an opportunity for New River Valley citizens to contribute artistically and creatively to paper content. The paper averages around ten pages and is included as an insert within the regular bi-monthly edition of the paper. The eighth edition of *Appalachian Voices*, published in May/June 1991, features the reflection of local citizens on the experiences of war, “from the Civil War to the coalfield battles of the 1920s to the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf.” The 1991 edition includes “Mel”, a narrative memoir by Pounding Mill, Virginia, resident Charlotte H. Deskins about the notification of her brother Mel’s death in Vietnam, and a poem by Garry Barker, resident of Berea, Kentucky, which describes his experience of war as an Appalachian resident. Additionally, every issue of the paper welcomes contributions from members of the community, which provides citizens’ with a potential avenue for expression.

News Values

News values offer another site where the content of a citizens’ paper may be radicalized through the transformation of traditional news and journalistic values, which were discussed in Chapter One and Two. This section deals with the ways in which the *New River Free Press* uses and transforms the news values of sourcing, journalistic objectivity, and mobilizing information to support democratic practice.

Sourcing

Citizens’ media frequently rely on sources that are typically underrepresented in mainstream media, but still represent ‘official’ sources, like anti-war organizers, labor leaders, activist organizations, or environmental groups (Eliasoph, 1988). Like most citizens’ papers, the sources cited within *NRFP* articles are usually from local community members, activists, or activist organizations. In order to analyze an example of specific sourcing practices of the *NRFP*, this section examines the miner’s strike, to which the paper devoted considerable space and reported on over consecutive issues.

In 1988, the miners for Pittston Coal Co., headquartered in Connecticut and employing approximately 4,800 people in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky, voted

to go on strike because the company did not renew worker contracts, continued to layoff workers, and removed health benefits from retirees, disabled workers, and widows (Enagonio, 1988 March). *NRFP* coverage of the miners' strike at Pittston Coal Company began in March of 1988 when the question of whether the workers were going to strike or not was still up in the air. Labor activist and *NRFP* volunteer John Enagonio wrote "Will Pittston force a mineworkers' strike", the article that began the coverage of the strike titled. Over the two-year period from March 1988 to April/May 1990 a total of fourteen articles appeared in the paper about the strike.

The first article to discuss the strike appeared in the Editorial section of the *NRFP*. Accompanied by a hand-drawn image of striking miners, the *NRFP* explains their perspective on the miners, Pittston, and the strike, claiming:

Pittston coal company is the latest in a long line of absentee-owned mining corporations to believe the union can be broken. The United Mine Workers (UMW) accuses Pittston of trying to break not only the union but also the Appalachian communities where it operates. After over a year of waiting for negotiations to bare some results, the UMW struck Pittston in early April to counter the company's assault against its loyal and productive workforce ("UMW Strikes Pittston", 1989 April/May, p. 12).

Following the April/May 1989 editorial, coverage was heavy, with each consecutive issue featuring at least one article on the strike. From May to October of 1989, the Pittston miners' strike was the headline story on the front page of the paper, with titles including, "UMW Strike: Unity in the Coal Counties", "The People vs. Pittston – Lives on the Line", "UMWA and the Power of Non-Violence", and "Labor Rallies Around Pittston Strikers". In one year, from May 1989 to May 1990, every issue of the *NRFP* contained an article on the miners' strike, with nine of the total fourteen articles featured as headline/front page stories.

Many of the sources used in articles during the two-year span were leaders, organizers, presidents, and members of the United Mine Workers union. Some sources were used regularly or over multiple issues. For example Jerry Johnson, a United Mine Workers representative from Norton, Virginia, who worked for Pittston at the time, and UMW president Richard Trumka were cited in different articles, across multiple issues. Coverage of the strike ended in April of 1990 after the strike was over -- recognized as victory for labor -- with coverage of a dinner that was held to honor the role women played in the strike.

According to the *NRFP*, Pittston's refusal to recognize the workers' demand for a contract, leaving many without health benefits, resulted in a mineworkers' march outside the Pittston regional office in Lebanon on June 25, 1988 (Enagonio, 1988 July/August). *NRFP* coverage of the miners' walkout in June 1988 at the regional Pittston office in Lebanon, Virginia directly quoted striking miners in addition to citing two local labor leaders. The Pittston miner interviewed, Tom Yates, was quoted as saying, "What top management doesn't realize is that we, the union, run the mines because we make day-to-day decisions" (Enagonio, 1988 July/August). The walkout began to put increased pressure on Pittston, and as a result of the walkout less people were at work, which made working in the mining extremely dangerous, leading to the death of a supervisor (Enagonio, 1988 July/ August).

Throughout coverage of the Pittston miners' strike the *NRFP* relied on labor unions members, striking miners, and people sympathetic to the miners' cause as reliable news sources. The sources included official voices, like United Mine Workers Representatives, UMW spokespersons, the State AFL-CIO president, the Coal Miners' Political Action Committee director in Charleston, WV, and frequent quotes from then UMW president Richard Trumka. In May/June 1989, Trumka, cited in an article by Sara Rose and John Enagonio, was quoted as saying:

Today...we stand at a crossroads of our history. Paul Douglas and his cohorts...want to take us on a very long road, far back to a time when the coal miner and their families had less value to the company than a mule... But we are here today to give them a message: We, the young, the old, the crippled and infirm, the healthy, all of us...are the heirs of a legacy of sacrifice and struggle that built our great union, and WE WILL NOT GO BACK!

Although the journalists are usually volunteers at the paper, most of the volunteers are actively involved in the issues and events that they cover. The relationship between the journalist and the issues they cover points to another way that citizens' media may radicalize content: by rejecting the journalistic values of objectivity to encourage democratic participation (i.e. advocating direct action) and self-reflexivity.

Journalistic objectivity

According to Atton (2003), most citizens' news outlets lack an explicit statement of objectivity. They and instead abide by values of social responsibility and democratic participation, although objectivity and social responsibility are not mutually exclusive. The reasons that citizens' media may not value objectivity as a news value is because first, most citizens' media journalists are activists and encourage activism, which means they value involvement, and second, many citizens' media outlets do not privilege objective descriptions of reality, choosing instead to encourage multiple interpretations of reality. This subsection focuses on how the *NRFP* deals with the news value of objectivity, and how the volunteers understand their relationship with the struggles and movements they cover.

Kipling (2003), a long-time volunteer at the paper, says that the paper makes no claims of objectivity whatsoever, and supports what he calls 'advocacy journalism'. In addition to taking a clear position on issues, the paper advocates active involvement in struggles. Active involvement is supported through the participation of volunteers in activism and through providing mobilizing information for citizens. For example, since the late 1990s, coverage of the proposed and controversial Tom's Creek River Basin sewer line in Blacksburg included contact information for involvement and the dates and locations of town meetings, elections, and debates. The December/ January 2001 issue features an editorial titled, "The Ashcroft Inquisition" as the only cover story, concluding, "We urge you to read these articles [on the PATRIOT Act] carefully and to let your own voice be heard now—before even acts of dissenting speech are declared acts of treason to be outlawed under the pretext of 'giving comfort to the enemy'" (The Ashcroft Inquisition, 2001 November-December).

Because volunteers at the *NRFP* are activists involved in local community and larger social movements, the articles are written from the perspective of a critical and concerned citizen. Some examples of recent actions of *NRFP* volunteers include protesting the Iraq War and protecting forest service and wilderness areas in the

Appalachian region (Anderson and Kipling, 2003). For example, a March/April 2004 front-page article describes a local Blacksburg anti-war protest,

With signs denouncing the Bush administration's lies and deceptions and calling for a withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, several dozen protesters lined Main Street while Saturday morning motorists honked in support or shouted obscenities in anger as they drove by (NRV Joins in Global Protest Against War, 2004 March/April, p.1).

According to Kipling (2003), the *New River Free Press* believes that a strong dedication to activism and progressive, peaceful social change, requires a constant critical self-reflexivity and openness. Many times in *NRFP* articles, the volunteers will refer to the paper staff as "we" in order to describe the collective decisions and opinions of the paper. Use of the first-person singular, or "I", did appear in articles during the 1980s, but faded from use in the 1990s, and was largely replaced by the collective use of "we". For example, the Special Disarmament Issue, published in 1983, contains frequent use of the words "I" and "you". In addition, if an article is written by someone highly active within the issue or by someone with unique experiences, that information is usually provided within the article itself or after the article in an editor's note. However, despite the not uncommon use of "we," most articles are written in the third-person and follow standard practice with the inclusion of who, what, when, where, and how at the beginning of each article.

For the *NRFP*, journalistic objectivity is not considered the primary news value, and instead the staff recognizes active involvement and critical self-reflection as positive news values. Like many citizens' media outlets, the *NRFP* transforms the traditional news value of objectivity because it does not conform to their position as active citizens and it fails to recognize the multiplicity of lived realities. According to *NRFP* volunteers, an active and involved role within citizens' struggles is necessary to express citizens' perceptions and activate progressive change (Anderson and Kipling, 2003). Editorials do occasionally appear in the *NRFP*, but their presence is not meant so much to signal the appearance of opinion writing, but rather collective writing. When the paper's staff decides that they need to take a definitive shared stand on an issue, an editorial section is added. Nevertheless, the implications of an editorial section are that the *NRFP* does recognize that particular materials need to be separated and labeled as "editorials", a technique shared by mainstream news.

Mobilizing information

Closely tied to the transformation of journalistic objectivity by citizens' media is the inclusion of mobilizing information. While mobilizing information may take different forms, the inclusion of such information is intended to encourage readers to become active members in the movement or controversy. As such, mobilizing information advocates taking action and frequently provides information on how to become involved on a specific side of an issue. This subsection focuses on the types of mobilizing information the *NRFP* provides to encourage democratic participation.

Frequently, the *NRFP* provides contact information to enable community members to become involved in an issue. For example, the June/July 1990 issue of the *NRFP* features a cover story on the founding of a new, local environmental action group, the New River Valley Environmental Coalition, which provides the reader with the date, time, and location for the groups next meeting (Mackler, June-July 1990). The paper also

helps to coordinate rides to protests and polling locations, such as when the *NRFP* organized rides to a protest against the use and deployment of nuclear arms in Washington, DC on October 22, 1983, and raised awareness of a green armband campaign that protested nuclear weapons.

Dates of important community and town meetings are included at the end of articles to encourage citizen turnout and participation. Each month, the paper publishes Community Calendar, which lists local activities, including lectures, submission deadlines, luncheons, panel discussions, plays, art exhibits, community dinners, organization meetings, special protest actions, and a variety of other events. Citizens and local groups submit the events that are included in the Community Calendar, which is supplemented with carefully selected graphics (Kipling, 2003). The events entail a variety of local events that are not compiled elsewhere; examples from the March-April 2004 issue include a YMCA hike, Amnesty International meetings, a silent art auction/show to benefit Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign, and a Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Caucus. In addition, the paper offers readers an opportunity to become involved as a volunteer at the paper by asking for help and offering contact information.

In summary, this section has discussed the ways in which the *NRFP* transforms the dimension of content to increase democratic participation. In terms of radicalization, the *NRFP* can be understood as both politically and culturally radical because it actively engages citizens in democratic activity- allowing both predominately political and cultural expression. Additionally, efforts are made to increase democratic participation through the transformation of news values, including sourcing, journalistic objectivity, and mobilizing information. The next section continues discussion of the *NRFP* by analyzing the form of the paper.

Form

Since the dimensions of form and content are inextricably connected, many of the issues prevalent to form such as image, typography, layout, and style are also relevant to content. For example, a change in form from print media to video media may affect the content. To investigate the form of the *NRFP*, this subsection explores characteristics of the medium and *NRFP*'s visual rhetoric.

Medium

Medium refers to the particular form or forms of a media outlet, such a television, broadcast, video, film, web, or print. In terms of media, the *NRFP* is a print-based newspaper. Suggestions have been made by new volunteers to put the paper on the Internet (Anderson and Kipling, 2003). The *NRFP* has resisted such a move, first because Internet access is not free or equally available to all citizens, and second because they feel that it would alter the role of the paper within the community (Anderson and Kipling, 2003). For volunteers at the *NRFP*, one of the capabilities of print-based media is that they bring people into the community, because the paper is portable and is something they can carry with them and read in public places, like a local coffee shop (Kipling, 2003). The portability of the paper is enhanced by its relatively small tabloid size.

Visual Rhetoric

Because the *NRFP* is a paper-based medium, this subsection explores visual properties specific to paper-based media such as organization and design (style, layout, typography). Taken collectively, the various visual elements that compose the paper's

form represent the visual rhetoric of the document. The visual rhetoric of the paper is important because it has the ability to affect communication practices between the paper and its readers (Schriver, 1999).

Contrasted to the organization of other alternative publications like zines or the previously discussed *alice*, the organization of the *NRFP* follows a format similar to professional newspapers with content organized into typed articles, which are set apart and clearly identified, and organized according to article topic. From the front page of the paper, the articles progress from local to state and regional to national issues. Additionally, the volunteers attempt to relate all of the articles to an issue of local importance and prevalence (Kipling, 2003).

The front page of the paper usually features articles of local relevance unless the volunteers feel that an issue that is not specifically local is urgent enough to warrant placement on the cover, such as conditions in Nicaragua (mid-1980s) and the nuclear weapons issue discussed earlier. Similar to mainstream newspapers, in *NRFP* the headlines are in a larger font than the articles and attempt to “catch the eye.” Inside the front cover, on the second page the *NRFP* features their statement of purpose, contact information, and staff information. Although the placement, font, content, and arrangement of the information have changed over time, some variation on the same basic masthead information has been included on the second page of each issue. Another occasional feature is the inclusion of an editorial section, which is clearly labeled, and usually near the back of the paper (although, as stated in the previous section, the editorials usually are not attributed to a individual volunteer, but rather are representative the paper’s collective voice).

In terms of design, the paper is fully typed, including headlines, a designated editorial statement, and black-and-white photographs, which has been the case since its creation, despite minor adjustments in font and style. While articles with corresponding page numbers, clearly separated articles, and authorial bylines were constant features since the first issue of the paper, an index of articles and page numbers was not a standard feature until after November of 1988. From 1982 until 1985 it was not uncommon for hand-drawn designs to accompany the title, creating in essence ever-changing nameplates for the paper and breaking the professional style and adding a unique look to each new issue, which was closer to the psychedelic style of *alice*. Examples of the hand-drawn designs include a mountain range, mermaids, an origami swan, and a Christmas scene. Although after 1985 artwork was absent from the paper’s title/nameplate, hand-drawn artwork by local citizens and *NRFP* volunteers has continued to accompany articles. But in comparison to the cut-and-paste layout of many ‘zines and the intricately hand-illustrated, psychedelic style of *alice*, the *NRFP* appears more formal and follows more closely accepted professional practices.

The commitment of *NRFP* to local community and coverage is evident in the selection of images for the paper. The photographs included in the paper usually depict local activities, including protests, festivals, events, speakers, labor strikes, and community projects, and local scenery. The May 2004 issue of the *NRFP* features a picture of the five candidates for Blacksburg’s Town Council at a forum moderated by the League of Women Voters (Practice Democracy: Vote on May 4, 2004, April 20- May 20). Occasionally artwork is selected or created based on its relevance to issues and articles covered in the paper. For example, the June-July 1995 (Vol. 13, No. 6) issue of

the *NRFP*, which reflected on the 50th anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, featuring articles on nuclear test ban facts, nuclear disarmament, and commemorative events, included a variety of hand-drawn pictures protesting atomic storage, build-up, and deployments.

While some media outlets explicitly make form and design decisions to break with professional style and reflect their ideological position, the *NRFP* does not wholly reject the form of professional newspapers. The practices the *NRFP* participates in, such as the citing of official sources, including authorial bylines, editing and typing articles, organizing articles into clearly defined columns, designating a separate editorial section, and a minimally selective submission policy, may be considered professional journalistic practice according to the description in Chapter One. As the sole alternative news voice for the New River Valley region of southwestern Virginia, the *NRFP* has an enormous responsibility to practice democracy, and in doing so, serve as an outlet of free and open expression. Although it may enhance credibility, the privileging of professional journalistic standards for practices such as story construction, writing style, and paper layout, also limits, to an extent, who can contribute to media content, and the types of contributions accepted. This is especially important given the “outreach” function that the *NRFP* may serve for the Appalachian community.

This section discussed two issues concerning the form of citizen’s media products: medium and visual rhetoric. Form, along with content, represent the first two dimensions of citizens’ media associated with media products, the focus of the next section is the third and final dimension of media products, reprographic technology.

Reprographic Technology

Reprographic technology, which is the last dimension that relates primarily to media product, describes how printing or publishing technology affects citizens’ media products. This section discusses the reprographic technologies used by the *NRFP*, including the physical size of the paper, design programs used in production, and the method of printing.

The *NRFP* has relied on numerous publishers to print the paper, and changes in publishers were not just financial decisions, but also resulted from ideological factors. Some publishers refused to print the paper after disagreements arose over political ideology or fear of association with the political ideology of the paper (Anderson & Kipling, 2003). Currently, the *NRFP* prints 7,000 copies of the paper at a publisher located in Galax, Virginia, approximately a one-hour drive from the *NRFP* office in Blacksburg, VA. The volunteers at the *NRFP* feel that the current printer takes great care in production; the ink is dark and the print is extremely clear (Anderson, 2003). Once all 7,000 copies of the *NRFP* are printed, the volunteers must distribute the paper to the community, which is accomplished in a variety of ways. In order to explore these dimensions, the next section discusses the different distribution methods and distributive uses of the *NRFP*; here the focus shifts to dimensions of citizens’ media that involve media *process*.

Distribution

Distribution includes both the methods of distribution, such as subscriptions or street-selling, and distributive uses, such as open copyright. Both are discussed below with regard to the *NRFP*.

Open-copyright

Open-copyright refers to an authors' waiving of copyright law on the condition that materials will be reprinted for non-commercial purposes. Open-copyright practices may allow citizens' media to republish material from other sources and/or may allow other sources to republish their material (once again, as long as it is for non-commercial purposes). The *NRFP* practices and benefits from open-copyright in multiple ways, including the republishing material from other sources and the republishing of their material by other sources.

While the *NRFP* strives to include the expressions and voices of people in the Appalachian community, the paper has also included articles and material reprinted from other sources. As Atton (2002) claims, inclusion of articles written by prominent activists and activist/intellectuals may increase readership and credibility of citizens' media. For example, Alexander Cockburn, frequent contributor to *The Nation*, allows non-profit, paper-based media outlets like the *NRFP* to republish a series of articles he writes entitled, *Diamonds and Ashes*. Cockburn is not identified aside from the byline and credit at the bottom of the article reads, "*Ashes and Diamonds* appears courtesy of Alexander Cockburn." In addition to including *Diamonds and Ashes*, the *NRFP* has republished material from other writers and citizens' media outlets. For example, the February/March 2004 issue of the paper reprinted an articles titled, "The 10 Worst Corporations of 2003", reprinted by permission from Focus on the Corporation, a weekly, subscription-based column.

While the *NRFP* does allow other media outlets to republish their articles, the *NRFP* prefers if permission is requested before material is republished. Permission is preferred because frequently community members write articles and the *NRFP* likes to contact the author before an article is republished (Anderson, 2003). For example, an article by Floyd County resident and occasional contributor Tom Moates (1999, May-June) on May Day was republished with permission by a citizens' paper in California. Moates's article contrasts the fascinating, heroic, and violent struggle for workers' rights in the United States against the ahistorical and ironic celebration of Labor Day in the U.S. The article was republished on the Internet, but this time without permission of the *NRFP* or Moates, which Moates felt infringed on his artistic and intellectual rights. Although nothing resulted from the reprinting of the article, and the article was removed from the website, the *NRFP* asks for permission to be sought before material is republished. But, no compensation is required, and legal action would be rarely, if ever, contemplated, unlike most corporate media outlets.

Distribution practices

Moving away from how distributive uses such as open copyright impact content, this subsection explores distribution practices of the *New River Free Press*, focusing on distribution methods and networks. The distribution method hinges on the participation of volunteers. The process begins by mailing off subscriptions (around 400, as of July 2004) to locations in the New River Valley as well as to residents in Independence (VA), Athens (OH), Lewisburg (WV), Abingdon (VA), Greensboro (SC), and Bristol (TN). Subscriptions are also sent to supporters in distant locations such as Alaska, Hawaii, and Germany. Once subscriptions are completed, the papers are bundled and organized into different bags that will be distributed to different regions in Virginia.

Don Mackler, the volunteer in charge of organizing distribution, calls people on a distributor list who volunteer to distribute the paper to different regions. Although the paper is distributed in multiple states and across the state of Virginia, the bulk of the papers are distributed to a five-county area in the New River Valley, including Montgomery (such as the towns of Blacksburg and Radford), Giles, Floyd, Pulaski, and Roanoke counties before it is distributed elsewhere. After the distributors deliver issues of the *NRFP* to different regions, the paper is available free of charge at many locations including restaurants, coffee shops, campuses (including the student centers of VT and Radford), grocery stores, and bookstores.

This section has discussed the distribution practices of the *NRFP*, focusing on open-copyright and distribution practices. As is the case with other citizens' media outlets, the *NRFP* transforms the professional practice of copyright by engaging in open-copyright practices. Although the sites of distribution (coffee shops, grocery stores, bookstores) are not radically different from the distribution sites of mainstream papers, the *NRFP* is free of cost and usually only available at locally owned locations. Additionally, the distribution network is composed of volunteers, another shared characteristic of many citizens' media. The next section discusses how the dimensions, like distribution, are utilized by the *NRFP* to transform social relations in encouraging democratic participation.

Transforming Social Relations

The fifth dimension of citizens' media is transforming social relations, which is central to the role of citizens' media in supporting and promoting active citizenship. Transforming social roles describes the ways in which citizens' media outlets break the professionally separate social roles of producer, journalist, distributor, and reader. As stated earlier, the two main ways that citizens' media may transform social relations is by engaging citizens in the communications process and employing collective methods of organization. The transformation of social roles results in a deprofessionalization of media practice, which describes the involvement of people lacking formal or professional media training, opening participation to unique and often silenced voices. This section discusses the ways in which the *New River Free Press* transforms social relations by engaging citizens and media organization. A discussion follows of how the transformation of social relations by the *NRFP* serves to deprofessionalize media practice.

Engaging Citizens

The *New River Free Press* attempts to engage citizen participation in media production in each issue through requests for submissions and calls for volunteers. Submissions are received primarily from community members but may also come from students from Radford University and Virginia Tech. Although three VT students started the paper, Anderson (2003) claims that the core volunteers and contributors are getting older. Most of the contributions to the paper come from members of the Appalachian community or new residents of the area. The *Appalachian Voices* edition, which as discussed earlier highlights Appalachian art and expression, is an entirely submission-based publication compiled by the *NRFP* staff. This special edition enables Appalachian citizens' an opportunity to express themselves artistically in addition to the continual opportunity to submit articles and volunteer.

Since volunteers are always needed, the *NRFP* continually looks for ways to bring in new volunteers. While there is always a request for volunteers in the paper, *NRFP* volunteers also set up tables at local community and university events (like the annual Earth Day Fair), offering information about the *NRFP*, copies of issues, and an opportunity to volunteer or donate money. Newcomers are needed both in production/distribution and as contributors; the paper's recruitment of readers for such duties actively encourages all citizens to become involved in media, transforming the role of traditional producers and readers. Additionally, the *NRFP* encourages citizen participation in other activities including local groups, meetings, events, protests, and gatherings through the inclusion of mobilizing information. For example, the *Resource Guide to Community Organizations*, published each year by the *NRFP*, includes descriptions, activities, and contact information for local organizations (currently including around 50 organizations). The *Resource Guide* is a separate publication, distributed to subscribers and exhibition outlets in addition to the regular edition of the *Free Press*. The organizations, listed in alphabetical order with a logo or graphic that represents the organization, include such groups as Amnesty International, Appalachian Women's Alliance, Blue Ridge Environmental Network, Common Cause, Free Clinic of the New River Valley, International Club, Plowshare Peace and Justice Center, Rural Southern Voice for Peace, Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley, and the YMCA.

Media Organization

The second way that the *NRFP* transforms social relations is by employing collective methods of media organization, which are different from the hierarchical labor divisions in mainstream media discussed in Chapters One and Two. Supported by such practices as job rotation and collective decision-making, the collective organization of the *NRFP* seeks to actively resist hierarchical practices. Job duties are defined at each bi-monthly *NRFP* volunteer meetings by passing around a sheet of paper on which any volunteer may sign up for any of the duties, including editor, journalist, and so on. Rotating the job of editor ensures that one volunteer will not gain dominance over content or policy, thus avoiding one of the potential problems with hierarchical organization. Additionally, the *NRFP* requires that there are at least three editors to ensure no one volunteer dominates decision-making. The number of articles also reflects the amount of proofreading that each issue undergoes before publication. As the articles are revised, consensus among volunteers remains a key concern.

Submissions are included based on a vote by the volunteers, and creative submissions are included unless they receive a 'no' vote by all volunteers serving as editor for that issue. Poetry and artwork are usually not included or are saved for the *Appalachian Voices* edition, and Kipling (2003) claims that over the years such submissions have dwindled considerably. The bimonthly meetings also include brainstorming ideas for potential articles stories, events, and issues to cover, incorporating and considering all suggestions.

Just because the *NRFP* values and practices consensus-based, collective decision-making does not mean that all volunteers perform all duties. For example, when the paper first started out in the early 1980s, volunteers had their own 'beat', or issues and movements that they would repeatedly cover, whether it was labor, marijuana policy, women's rights, or environmental activism. As of 2004, the *NRFP* volunteer staff was

relatively small, consisting of about nine regular volunteers and twenty-five distributors, so the issues and movements that each volunteer must cover have become diversified over the years out of the necessity in running a short-staffed volunteer organization, but also out of commitment to a decentralized organizational ideology. However, one example of a job that is assigned to one volunteer is the role of treasurer. In 2004, Susan Anderson was the treasurer, which provided the paper needed consistency in bookkeeping, given her experience at bookkeeping and willingness to dedicate her time to fulfilling the role.

Although certain volunteers are more talented or more willing to fulfill particular roles, these practices do not infringe on the ability for the *NRFP* to support collective organization. All decisions concerning finance, coverage, submissions, or changes are made through consensus and collective decision-making. Additionally, the roles that volunteers and citizens play within the *NRFP* are not defined for them, but are created through their active participation. If a citizen wants to become engaged in media production or contribute to media content, the *NRFP* fully supports and encourages them to do so.

Deprofessionalization

While earlier this chapter focused on the ways in which the *NRFP* supported the expression of cultural and political views traditionally excluded from mainstream media, this subsection explores the ways in which the transformation of social roles supports relationships and opportunities traditionally excluded from professional media practice. The two ways the *NRFP* transforms social relations, engaging citizens and media organization, result in deprofessionalized media practice, or the inclusion of people normally excluded from media production. While one paid publisher prints the *NRFP*, the *NRFP* deprofessionalizes other practices including journalism, distribution, and organization.

Journalism is deprofessionalized for two reasons; first, none of the volunteers at the *NRFP* have received professional journalistic training (although professional training is not considered a disadvantage), and second, submissions are accepted from citizens regardless of their educational background. Distribution is deprofessionalized by the *NRFP* through its support of open copyright practices, enabling anyone to become a distributor, and utilizes horizontal networks with other citizens' media outlets. Organization is deprofessionalized through the rejection of hierarchical organization and decision-making and adoption of collective models that avoids power dominance and enables volunteers and citizens to contribute in a variety of ways.

Finance

Finance is the last, but not the least important dimension of *NRFP* discussed; because this dimension determines whether or not the paper is able to survive. Like many other citizens' media outlets, the *NRFP* has experienced financial difficulties and does not or cannot afford to pay its volunteers. The paper got its start through private loans from citizens, all of which were repaid, and six local advertisements (Anderson, 2003). Throughout its history it has participated in many activities to keep the paper economically viable, including eliciting subscriptions and donations and holding donation drives and fundraisers. This section explores the specific ways that the *NRFP* funds the paper and manages to stay in the black from month to month despite their average annual budget of around \$10,000. First this section discusses advertising as a method of

obtaining funding, and then it discusses other forms of obtaining funding, including submission, donation drives, and yard sales.

Like some citizens' media outlets, although the *NRFP* is skeptical about accepting advertising, they do accept some forms, including local advertising and activist organizations' ads. The first issue of the paper included six advertisements, which fluctuated throughout its history averaging between six to ten advertisements per issue. The majority of the advertisements are from local merchants that cater to a bohemian, alternative crowd and that have been long-term Blacksburg businesses with community ties, like the Cellar Restaurant, Gillie's vegetarian restaurant, and Annie Kay's Whole Foods store. In addition to accepting local advertising, the *NRFP* has run ads from national activist organizations and demonstrations, although since the 1990s advertising of this kind has decreased. Volunteers at the *NRFP* claim that, excluding one incident in which an advertiser withdrew support as a result of a controversy, advertiser support has remained constant and has not interfered with expression or content (Anderson and Kipling, 2003). However, the *NRFP* features local merchants, not large corporations like McDonald's or Wal-mart, and activist organizations, which indicate that the problem with advertising and media is not perhaps with advertising per se, but with the *types* of ads that are accepted.

Revenue is also generated through subscriptions and fundraising. Subscriptions to the *NRFP* currently number around 400, cost \$10 a year, and are distributed via mail to subscribers. Other forms of fundraising include donation drives, which are held annually and bring in around half of the paper's yearly budget (Anderson, 2003). A creative example of fundraising is practiced when finances reach a crisis level, and the *NRFP* holds emergency yard sales in order to survive. Also during community events, the *NRFP* sells a variety of buttons, *NRFP* bumper stickers, and shirts carrying their current motto, "Agitate, Educate, Activate".

The financing tactics employed by the *NRFP* have enabled them to survive for 22 years and counting (as of 2004), a considerably long-time for a citizens' media outlet, during which time they have supported a diversity of democratic expression. Although some months the paper is over budget because of a special expense, expenses are reduced or new funds are raised for the next issue (Anderson, 2003). Careful bookkeeping and a strong dedication to fundraising has enabled the *NRFP* to survive issue to issue, albeit as Anderson (2003) says, "hand-to-mouth".

This first section of Chapter Four explored the practices of the *NRFP* along the dimensions of content, form, reprographic technology, distributive practices, transformed social relations, and finance. According to citizens' media scholars, such as Atton (2002) and Rodriguez (2001), the practices of citizens' media seek to support and encourage democratic participation. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the ways in which the dimensions of the *NRFP* are negotiated and practiced to support the goal of democratic communication and expression. While this chapter described the practices of the *NRFP* in terms of its dimensions, the concluding chapter begins by describing how the practices of the paper constitute democratic activity.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the analysis of the *New River Free Press* by discussing how the democratic practices of the paper engage citizen expression and transform social relationships. Additionally, the analysis of the *NRFP* is used to address issues raised in Chapter Two about the success of citizens' media and whether or not its practices relegate it to an "alternative ghetto". Finally, this chapter discusses the implications of a corporately owned and consolidated media system for democratic society, and highlighting the need for active resistance and continued support for and participation in citizens' media projects.

The New River Free Press & Democratic Practice

According to Rodriguez (2001), citizens' media are collectivities that actively engage citizenship, transform institutionalized and hierarchical social relationships, and empower citizens through participation and action. Citizens' media can be considered active, democratic forces in social struggle, directly expressing and representing the interests, realities, and cultures of diverse communities and citizens (Rodriguez, 2001). As opposed to what has been perceived as the undemocratic practices of mainstream mass media, citizens' media offer citizens a means of direct expression by transforming media practice.

The previous chapter explored how the dimensions of the *New River Free Press* seek to encourage and support democratic participation. Although discussing the dimensions of citizens' media in isolation adds clarity, in practice the dimensions interact and are not separate. Therefore, this section both summarizes main results from the analysis of *NRFP* and also explores that ways in which the dimensions interact to support democratic practice, which provides a more accurate understanding of citizen's media than studying the dimensions in isolation.

Citizenship and Product: Engaging Expression

Engaging citizenship describes the ways in which citizens' media outlets practice democracy by encouraging citizens to become politically active and culturally expressive. Engaging citizenship also includes more traditional forms of democracy, like classical democracy, which includes electoral politics, activism, community organizing, and protesting. The ability of citizens' media to open space for free expression and discussion is an essential component of democracy. According to Rodriguez (2001, p. 158),

As defined by the theory of radical democracy, the concept of citizenship implies that social subjects claim a space for their public voices, that these social subjects tenaciously intervene and shape their identities, altering circulating social discourses and cultural codes, and that, as a result of the above, these negotiations and renegotiations empower the communities involved.

While citizenship is expressed daily in a multitude of diverse ways, citizens' media open space for citizens to share and debate social identities, meanings, struggles, and relationships. The section analyzes the ways in which the *NRFP* engages citizens' participation in its content through political and cultural expression and a commitment to activism.

Political and Cultural Expression

Citizenship is expressed both politically and culturally, and citizens' media have the potential to radicalize both forms of citizenship by engaging citizens in open expression. As discussed earlier, the content of the *NRFP* is both politically and culturally radical. The *NRFP* is politically radical because the content frequently covers issues and struggles marginalized by other news sources. Many of the issues covered by the *NRFP* are issues of local relevance and importance, like critical coverage of local Klux Klan marches or local elections. However, many national and global issues are frequently covered as well, expressing opinions and perspectives marginalized from other news sources. For example, the *NRFP*, which has always advocated for peace and protested against war as a method of foreign policy and imperialism, heavily criticized and took action against the U.S. led invasion of Grenada, U.S. involvement in Central and South America, Gulf War (I), and Iraq War (II). In such cases, the *NRFP*'s support of open expression, debate, and dissent, ensured that citizens' were able to express their feelings, interpretations, and actions on political issues.

In addition to engaging citizenship through political expression, the paper is culturally radical because it serves as a voice for the cultural expression of Appalachian citizens, which is either stereotyped in or absent from other news sources. Inclusion of photographs in the *NRFP* of events, landscapes, and citizens in the New River Valley are visual expressions of citizenship because the images capture and communicate local and democratic activities. The *Appalachian Voices* edition of the *NRFP* offers a special opportunity for cultural expression of citizenship, because it features artwork, poetry, fiction, and photography about Appalachia.

The political and cultural radicalization of the *NRFP* supports democratic citizenship by expressing the everyday concerns and lived realities of citizens, and not the opinions and ideologies of elite sources (business leaders, government officials, expert analysts, and celebrities). Both forms of radicalization support democratic citizenship because they provide a forum to discuss issues and controversies that are not covered or discussed elsewhere. The political and cultural radicalization of content occurs through media practice that seeks to engage citizenship and practice democracy.

The journalistic practices of the *NRFP*, such as sourcing and submissions, work together to support democratic citizenship by expressing the opinions and perspectives of voices usually excluded from the mainstream media. Although the sources are different from the sources used in mainstream media, the cast of sources is still largely composed of labor leaders, organizers, and intellectuals- in other words, a different set of *official* sources. However, aside from sourcing, the *NRFP* frequently includes articles written by activists that articulate their experiences as well as articles written by concerned and involved community members. Taken together, both the sourcing and submission practices act as positive democratic forces because they directly engage citizen expression and offer citizens a space to communicate.

The concept of radical democracy emphasizes that citizenship is expressed in a multiplicity of diverse ways, and expression of citizenship (including dissent) is necessary in democratic practice. As stated earlier in Chapter 4, the *NRFP* does not consider journalistic objectivity a central news value because it discounts multiple interpretations of reality and privileges one interpretation. Instead the *NRFP* privileges a

multi-perceptual interpretation of reality, which avoids the type of knowledge dominance inherent in objective conceptions of reality and values the diversity of open citizen expression. For the *NRFP*, reality is constructed by citizens through lived experience and expressed in complex ways, recognizing the experiences of citizens as valid and credible interpretations of the world, giving voice to the marginalized.

Commitment to Activism

Connected to the belief in multiple interpretations of reality, the *NRFP* also engages citizenship by encouraging and valuing active citizen participation in activism and social movements. The volunteers and supporters of the *NRFP* are dedicated to promoting progressive social change, resisting the undemocratic forces of domination and oppression, and actively transforming the social world in which we all live through the collaborative efforts of empowered citizens. The inclusion of mobilizing information, the community calendar, the opportunity to volunteer, and the open acceptance of articles all work towards the goal of engaging citizens in active participation.

The ability of citizens to participate in local and global struggles and issues increases the potential and ability of citizens to actively transform the social landscape, creating progressive social change. By facilitating citizens with the information and opportunity to become involved in issues and struggles the *NRFP* engages citizens in communication and social activities and practices radical democracy. The next subsection continues to discuss the ways the *NRFP* engages citizenship by exploring how the media processes empower citizens by transforming social relationships.

Citizenship and Process: Transformations

The reason that the *NRFP* is able to radicalize its content both politically and culturally is contingent on the transformation of media *processes*, such as transforming social relations and media organization. Transforming practice refers to the ways in which citizens' media transform social roles and media practice to include as many citizens as possible in all phases of media production. The transformation of media practice enables citizens to play an active role in media production and political/cultural expression. Ensuring that a media outlet supports the open and free debate of citizens, which is the primary aim of democratic media, requires that citizens be included in practice through continual negotiations and transformations. In order to analyze the ways the *NRFP* transforms social relationships to engage citizens in democratic practice, this subsection explores first, citizen participation, and second, media organization.

Citizen Participation

The main way in which the *NRFP* engages citizen participation in media production is by encouraging any and all citizens to become a volunteer at the newspaper. As a volunteer, citizens' can participate in a wide range of media activities, including editing, reporting, and distributing. Although the size of the staff has decreased over the years, the paper still offers an open invitation for citizen participation. The possibility for citizens to become active in different phases of media production transforms traditional social roles and de-professionalizes media practice.

The participation of citizens, from volunteering to submissions, transforms the traditionally separate roles of media producer and reader. The *NRFP*'s concern with editing, professional production quality, and traditional newspaper layout reflect their desire to produce a newspaper that projects credibility and presents material in a format

with which residents in the areas will be comfortable and familiar. As stated earlier, their readership represents a variety of citizens, including industrial workers, senior citizens, college professors, local business owners, and many other diverse people. While the editing and visual design of the paper remains of professional quality, the volunteers do not privilege professional journalistic training but rather support diverse expressions of citizenship. For the majority of citizens' in the New River Valley, there is little opportunity to contribute or participate in any form of media production because the closest newspapers are located in urban centers, such as Roanoke, Virginia.

Although many residents do not actively participate in the production of the *NRFP*, the activities of the community fill the pages of the paper, expressing and engaging citizenship that is typically marginalized from mainstream coverage. Because of the misrepresentation and marginalization of the Appalachian region and its citizens by the mainstream media; and the exploitation of the land, resources, and people by private corporations and federal and state governments, the citizens of the New River Valley require a method of expressing their unique experiences, realities, and politics in order to enact positive change in their communities. Fundamentally, the ability for citizens to contribute media content and participate in production increases the likelihood that the *NRFP* will express the needs and concerns of New River Valley citizens.

Media Organization

In addition to engaging citizens by transforming traditional social roles, the *NRFP* employs collective models of organization that support democratic practice. The collective organization, consensus-based decision-making, and job rotation practices of the *NRFP* ensure that the volunteers may have a voice in all activities. The number of volunteers at the paper has decreased over the years, but the paper continues to practice collective organization. With fewer volunteers each volunteer has increased roles and responsibilities, which allows them to experiment with different media production activities, but limits the number of citizens contributing to production in each issue. Increasing the number of citizens involved in media production would serve to increase citizen empowerment and democratic practice, and although all attempts are not successful, the *NRFP* actively tries to recruit volunteers through paper advertisements and information tables at local events.

Considering the number of volunteers at the *NRFP* is small, although comparable to other citizens' newspapers, the practice of consensus-based decision making and job rotation prevents one volunteer from dominating any part of media production. Any form of dominance is perceived as a threat to the open access that the *NRFP* seeks to offer citizens. It is for this reason that the *NRFP* is skeptical of accepting advertising money, although there has been little attempted interference from advertisers into the newspaper's ideologies or content. Most of the advertisers are local business owners and share the same interest in protecting, preserving, and improving their local and global communities through collective action as the other supporters and volunteers of the *NRFP*.

While the *NRFP* does not completely radicalize every dimension of the media process (for example, printing and form are not radicalized), the ways in which the paper transforms practice reflects the unique needs of the New River Valley citizens and the *NRFP* supporters. The goal of the *NRFP* is to engage citizens in media production and empower citizens through collective action to create progressive social change; therefore,

the ways in both media products and processes are radicalized in practice by the *NRFP* are unique.

This section analyzed how the unique practices of the *NRFP* are radically democratic, engaging expression and transforming traditional social roles. While it is impossible to determine the degree to which the *NRFP* actively transforms the social relationships and cultural and political environment of the New River Valley and the world, without it the *NRFP* many citizens would be deprived of an avenue of open expression, hindering the democratic process. As Rodriguez (2001) claims, the power of citizens' media lies not in its ability to reach large audiences or attract funding, but its ability to express the needs and culture of localities, whether geographically defined or not.

As this section has shown, the practices of the *NRFP* enable local citizens' to become actively involved in media production, cultural expression, local community, and national/international/global struggles and actions. Although it is difficult to measure the success of the paper other than its twenty-plus year longevity, the practices of the *NRFP* do engage democratic citizenship, transform social relationships, and contest traditional social codes. Additionally, because many of the local events and issues are not covered by other news sources, the *NRFP* provides a history of the New River Valley. The product and practices of the *NRFP* provide the citizens of the New River Valley with an avenue to express themselves and their interpretations of the world both politically and culturally. In doing so the paper encourages active involvement in media production and social activism, engaging citizenship through radical democracy.

Alternative Ghetto or Democratic Media?

Returning to the Comedia group's (1984) criticism of citizens' media practice discussed in Chapter Two, which holds that citizens media practice inevitably leads to the entrapment and failure of citizens' media within an "alternative ghetto", this section reflects on the practices of the *New River Free Press* to determine to what extent Comedia's argument may or may not be applicable. As explored in Chapter Two, Comedia holds that the economic and organizational practices of citizens' media result in such a small audience that the media outlet cannot financially survive and/or its circulation is so marginal that its existence is meaningless—condemning it to an alternative ghetto. As a solution, Comedia suggests that citizens' media outlets adopt the financial and organization practices of mainstream media corporations, including open advertising policies, market research, hierarchical organization, clearly defined job roles, and "lighter", entertaining content.

Comedia's alternative ghetto theory is highly disputed, and media theorists like Atton (2002), Eliasoph (1988), and Rodriguez (2001), who reject Comedia's claim, instead recognize alternative forms of financing and organization are essential for democratic media. This section explores the economics, organization, and circulation in light of Comedia's claim that the practices by citizens' media result in its occupation of an alternative ghetto.

Economics & Organization

As discussed in Chapter Two, Comedia (1984) claims that citizens' media are overly concerned with organization practices, such as job rotation and collective decision-making, which detracts time away from financial concerns, resulting in a neglect of financial needs, and eventually, economic ruin. Contrary to Comedia's claim, the

volunteers at the *NRFP* exhibit a high level of awareness and attention to financial matters. For example, Chapter Four discussed how the *NRFP* volunteers work hard to raise money through donations, subscriptions, and local advertisements, which are continually accepted, and through special fund drives, yearly fund appeals, and yard sales. Additionally, a large portion of the meetings are devoted to financial matters, as the staff carefully decides how funds should be allocated in order to stay with their budget, partly because, like all decisions, financial decisions are made collectively (Kipling, 2003). According to an interview with Susan Anderson (2003), each year careful plans are collectively developed to determine when and what needs to be purchased, improved, or cut from the budget, and although many unforeseen things may happen, like equipment breaking, the paper has just managed to financially survive from year to year.

It is also important to stress that the *NRFP* has a non-rotating treasurer, who has previous experience, and teaches math at Virginia Tech, providing the *NRFP* with a significant degree of financial stability compared to a paper like *alice*, run by a loosely-organized group of students. The *NRFP* doesn't resist all forms of professional practice, and in some cases adopts professional practices to meet their needs. The decisions to have a selective advertising policy and no point-of-exhibition charge reflect the ideologies of the *NRFP* that oppose any form of external or internal control, especially that of commercialism and consumerism. The example from the *NRFP* reinforces Atton's (2002) claim that financial difficulties in citizens' media arise not from negligence or neglect, but from the conflicting desire to promote open expression and democratic citizenship and, simultaneously, survive financially.

Comedia (1984) claims the horizontal organization of citizens' media, including collective decision-making and job rotation, also contributes to the failure of citizens' media. According to Comedia, practicing horizontal organization becomes a preoccupation since it is difficult to achieve and it takes time to gain consensus, eventually leading to failure. However, Comedia's main argument is that horizontal organization is an ineffective method of organization because it detracts attention away from financial interests. The financial difficulties of the *NRFP* do not result from lack of attention, and the volunteers at the paper dedicate considerable time and work on the paper's economics.

Discussing the horizontal organization of citizens' media outlets, Comedia (1984, p. 99) states,

The consequent lack of strategic overview does not only affect the financial and economic side of the organization- it also limits the ability to develop an analysis of the changes in the overall shape and size of the constituent parts of the market in which it is operating, and to adjust policy so as to take advantage of market opportunities as and when they occur.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Comedia's argument is based on the false assumption that citizens' media should share the same market ideology and aspirations as mainstream media. Based on interviews with long-time volunteers Anderson and Kipling (2003) and the *NRFP* statement of purpose, taking advantage of market opportunities is not a goal of the paper, and would contradict their political aims and ideology. Atton (2002) claims, instead of being hindrances to the success of citizens' media, radical forms of finance and

organization are necessary elements of democratic media. Without those radicalizations, citizens' media would cease democratic practice.

Circulation, Audience, and Success

Comedia (1984) claims that the failure of citizens' media to recognize and exploit the "buying power" of its audience deprives citizens' media of valuable feedback mechanisms (via marketing research) and results in low-circulation and small budgets. According to Comedia (1984, p. 100), "the economic position of these readers could be seen, in commercial terms, as an asset." However, exploiting the market potential of audiences would run counter to the anti-commercial ideologies of most citizens' media outlets.

Despite the incompatibility of capitalistic marketing practices with radically democratic media practice, Comedia (1984) claim that the financial difficulties of citizens' media, which result from radical economic and organizational practices, limit the audience size and reach. Also, Comedia claims, the relatively (compared to mainstream publications) small audience size negatively impacts the economic health of the media outlet, mainly because there are less people to contribute financially (or market to advertisers). Comedia also believe that the serious, political content of citizens' media is to blame for low circulation figures.

If the *NRFP* were to adopt the changes suggested by Comedia, such as market research, market capitalism, hierarchical job divisions, lightly entertaining content, and large circulations, it would be difficult to conceive how the paper would continue to work towards its goal of democratic expression and progressive social action. Additionally, under Comedia's recommendations to seek wider audience appeal, the *NRFP* would no longer contain the same amount of local information. Comedia's theory of the alternative ghetto not only conflicts with the practices of the *NRFP*, but it is based on the false assumption that citizens' media share the same market and circulation aspirations as the corporate, professional media conglomerates.

For example, since the goals of the *NRFP* are to promote democracy, and not to make a profit (which entails attracting advertisers and reaching a large audience), it would not further the aims of the paper to adopt mainstream professional practices. Although the radical practice of citizens' media is diverse, only in rare cases may citizens' media successfully incorporate particular aspects of mainstream practice, like market capitalism, without negatively impacting democracy. The independence of citizens' media from external and internal influences, and the direct access it provides for citizens, which are essential in practicing radical democracy, require, if democracy is to continue, citizens' media to engage in radical forms of economics and organization.

According to Rodriguez (2001), "when it comes to media production, the consequence of losing one's ability to articulate the local is unavoidable if coverage and audiences expand. The capacity to articulate constitutes a crucial component of the political potential of citizens' media." Since citizens' media do not attempt to reach "everybody", the focus is usually local culture and citizenship (Rodriguez, 2001). For example, the "localism" of the *NRFP* enables citizens to directly contribute to debates about local, national, and global issues.

As a result of these issues, which counter Comedia's (1984) claim, the success of a citizens' media cannot be determined by profit margin or circulation. An understanding of the unique ways that citizens' media radicalize practice, thus engaging citizenship, is

more practical in furthering the aims of radical democracy than judging citizens' media on capitalist measures of "success."

Although analysis of specific citizens' media outlets may illuminate unique ways in which citizens' organize media projects to support their democratic needs and desires, citizens' media also needs to be understood in terms of its role within the larger social struggle for power and democracy. To conclude the discussion of citizens' media and contextualize it within the larger social struggle of democracy, the next section explores the struggle of citizens' media as a democratic solution, and citizens' media as a necessary form of active resistance.

Citizens' Media, Media Conglomerates, and Democratic Resistance

The role of democratic media is to engage citizens in political debate and cultural expression, ensuring citizen access to the avenues necessary to practice self-rule. However, the mainstream media through the practices of political economy and professional journalism compromise their ability to serve as a voice for citizens and meet the needs of a democracy. As Bagdikian (1999, p. 252) states, "When broadcasters and sponsors fail to deal seriously, fairly, and regularly with the country's urgent issues, in a very real way they are using the nation's own property to rob its citizens of the knowledge necessary to cope with their most urgent needs and challenges." Therefore, the inability of the corporately owned media system to meet the needs of democratic citizens requires active, democratic resistance that engages citizenship and transforms social relationships.

As Bagdikian claims (1999, p. 252), "The public needs a constant reminder: The airwaves do not belong to the broadcasters. They do not belong to the advertisers. The owners, by law, are the people of the United States". Although the public may need a constant reminder, the public does react to the problems inherent in a privately owned, consolidated, corporate media system by fighting deregulation legislation and policy, increasing public access to television and broadcast outlets, and participating in the creation of citizens' media. According to Herman and McChesney (1999, p. 200),

The most vibrant and hopeful response to the trend toward globalization and commercialization has been the rise of community and public access radio and television stations and programs. These non-profit and noncommercial media have been forming across the globe in literally scores of countries on every continent ranging from the United States and Germany to El Salvador, Haiti, and the Philippines.

Additionally, Herman and McChesney (1999, p. 197) consider the build up of a non-profit, self-managed, civic media, "one of the central political tasks of our era". Therefore, the project of citizens' media is critical and necessary in activating social change, engaging diverse forms of citizenship, and resisting the undemocratic practices of the global, media chains.

As of 2004, the Bush Administration continues to pursue media deregulation policies that threatens to increase the reach and power of the corporate media giants. For example, Clear Channel, the largest owner of radio stations in the country (owning over 1,200 radio stations, 39 television stations, 135 live music venues, 40 U.S. venues, 30 European venues, and half a million billboards worldwide), organized and created a "Rally for America" campaign in 2003 that staged pro-war rallies sponsored and

promoted by Clear Channel stations across the country (Common Cause, 2004, “Friends in High Places”). Further deregulation of the laws and policies limiting the number of media outlets one company may own in a market will only allow corporations like Clear Channel to increase in power and reach. (Such power may be increased by the lobbying and campaign contributions of corporations such as Clear Channel, detailed in “Bush and Kerry fundraisers,” 2004).

Yet, many social forces contest the power of mainstream media; and one powerful force of resistance is the strengthening of citizens’ media. On June 24, 2004, the federal appeals court in Philadelphia ruled against the 2003 FCC “compromise” that increased the percent of a market one company could own to 35%. According to an article by Timothy Karr (2004, June 29):

The Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia told the FCC to reconsider cross-ownership rules that would have permitted more combinations of daily newspaper, radio and TV outlets in single markets. It also sent back for reconsideration rules that would let broadcasters own two or even three TV stations in a local market. Although the ruling forces no media corporation to divest itself immediately of broadcast holdings, it does signal a red light for big media companies intent upon buying up more local radio and television stations. In July 2004, the FCC released a statement by Michael Powell, the FCC president, which promised an inquiry into the ability of broadcast stations to provide access and serve local communities (referred to as “localism”) (Eggerton, 2004, July 1). Additionally, U.S. Senators John McCain and Patrick Leahy introduced a bill [S 2505] on June 25, 2004, that would increase the number of broadcast stations available for non-profit, local community use. The legislation, which has been denounced by the lobbyists for the corporate media giants, has the potential to provide citizens’ with media access, support cultural and mediated diversity, and increase the degree of “localism”. Despite the democratic progress that has been achieved through collective, citizen struggles, continued pressure and media activism must continue to further the project of media democratization. Herman and McChesney (1999, p. 205) warn, “if it [the media system] is to change, and in a positive way, it is important that people who are dissatisfied with the status quo should not be overcome and rendered truly powerless by a sense of hopelessness and cynicism.”

Therefore, continuing the struggle for democracy through citizens’ media practice and media activism/political pressure is necessary to reclaim, protect, and ensure citizen access to the means of expression and self-government. Rodriguez (2001, p. 163) suggests, “as communication scholars, we need to involve ourselves with citizens’ media projects; we need to contribute our research and data collection to documenting and analyzing the lives and deaths of citizens’ media.” In the attempt to document the practices of one citizens’ media outlet and highlight the dangers of privately owned, consolidated media firms in a democracy, this thesis argues that citizens’ media perform a crucial and necessary function in democratic societies by facilitating open citizen access to media outlets, which engage creative expression and radical politics. Continued efforts to strengthen citizens’ media projects, including participation and research, and resistance against legislation that does not respect the needs of democratic citizens are necessary to curb the undemocratic power of the corporately owned media conglomerates that dominate U.S. and global markets, embrace capitalism, consumerism, and

commercialism, marginalize citizens' voices, exclude citizens' from media practice, and threaten democracy.

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