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Risk Propensity in Journalists: An Analysis of Journalists' Personality Traits and How They Direct Behavior in the Field

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RISK PROPENSITY IN JOURNALISTS: AN ANALYSIS OF JOURNALISTS'
PERSONALITY TRAITS AND HOW THEY DIRECT BEHAVIOR IN THE FIELD

by

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University of South Carolina, 1997

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to many people who inspired, supported, and encouraged me throughout this process. To my husband Ted, who always listened and never said, "No." You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself and helped me realize that taking the next step, no matter how small, was one step closer to the finish line. This degree is as much for you as you love our precious University more than anyone I know.

To my children, Gracie and Teddy, my two greatest achievements, I hope I've shown you the value of an education and made you as proud as you have made me. There is a time for everything; if you work hard enough, the reward is even sweeter. Nothing means more than sharing this accomplishment with you at this point in my life.

To my parents, Andy and Paula Gemelaris. Thank you for celebrating every grade and accomplishment, whether I am eight or 48. You put two kids through college and set them up to earn master's degrees independently, ranking high in the parenting category.

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Augie once told me, "I push you because I know that I can; however, if you ever want me to stop, let me know." The thought crossed my mind often, however, I never threw in the towel; I could not disappoint him. Although my path no longer requires signed advisement forms or weekly progress checks, I will still look to my guardian advisor from time to time; for he sees the potential to which I am sometimes blind.

Dr. Brett Robertson and Dr. Laura Smith brought unique skill sets that improved my thesis experience and demonstrated teaching characteristics I hope to acquire. Dr. Robertson's commitment to his students is unprecedented. He never says "no," to a student's request for help and is willing to support them academically and personally. Dr. Smith uses her experience in the field to prepare students for what they will encounter in the newsroom, taking them from pupils to peers and carrying on the School of Journalism and Mass Communication's outstanding reputation in newsrooms across America.

Finally, thank you to the South Carolina State Library for making a 25-year-old dream of earning a master's degree a reality. The tuition assistance program proves that "equal access to information" is more than a mission; it is a mantra.

ABSTRACT

Much like first responders, journalists run toward dangerous scenes instead of away from them, often putting themselves at risk. Unlike first responders, there is no research on how a person's risk propensity ties to their career. For this project, reporters of various ages and tenures were surveyed on their sensation-seeking levels and propensity to engage in risky behaviors while working as journalists. Journalism risk propensity correlated positively with sensation seeking. Risk motivations increase with age and tenure, meaning that older and more experienced journalists are more likely to engage in risky behavior. Males are more risk-prone than females. The research, which was conducted among journalists in the Southeast, indicates that hurricane news coverage yields the most positive correlations with sensation seeking, age, and tenure.

PREFACE

Sitting alone in a hospital bed in the Fall of 1997, I thought, "Where did I go wrong?" Being a 23-year-old journalist in her first reporting job, I wanted to be the newsroom heroine, invincible with a no holds barred approach to covering stories.

After thanking the man who took me on a boat ride along the Little Pee Dee River, I hopped in the station-provided Jeep Cherokee and returned to produce my package for the six o'clock show. An alert from my beeper prompted me to look down toward my hip, wondering if it was breaking news. As I did, the Jeep ran off the road into a ditch, flipping on its side. I crawled through the shattered glass, cutting my arm, and ran for help.

I returned to work humbled and embarrassed. Although my newly acquired nickname, "crash test," seemed to stick, I did not want it to be my only legacy. I vowed that good would spawn from this accident.

Fast forward 25 years, and I am writing a master's thesis, knowing no other topic would suffice. Although there is extensive research on risk propensity, no one has explored risk propensity in journalists. Perhaps because the topic is reserved for me. I gladly take on the challenge hoping that this research leads to a better understanding of why journalists take risks and, in turn, prompts proactive action. If it keeps even one journalist from sitting alone in a hospital bed, the countless hours of researching, writing, and revising are worth it.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When individuals decide to become journalists, they tap into numerous motivations prompting such a choice. Social status, wanting to tell stories and interact with people, and sports media strongly influence extroverted students who pursue a broadcast career. Those following a print path list the desire to write as their primary motivation (Carpenter et al., 2018). Society needs both types of journalists, serving as watchdogs in the largest cities to the smallest towns, keeping the public informed and the powerful accountable.

Journalists bring us the stories, and while they've always assumed some risk while reporting, they face danger like never before. A divided nation and world frequently prompt an "us versus them" view of journalists. They are sometimes spat on, confronted, and assaulted. When the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked nationwide protests, journalists flocked to the streets, immersing themselves in the unrest. According to the Freedom of the Press Foundation, 605 journalists were assaulted in 2020, an increase of 593 from the previous year. Many experienced post-traumatic stress. A survey of journalists nationwide yielded 339 responses regarding interactions while covering protests. Of those responses, nearly half of all journalists surveyed said they experienced feelings of fear and also felt unsafe while covering protests, and 10% said they considered leaving the field (Miller et al., 2022).

People experience newsworthy and historical moments because of the brave journalists who, like first responders, run toward the action instead of away from it. While these actions are vital to bringing stories to the public and keeping them informed, they also put reporters and photojournalists at risk.

Risk enters the spectrum of daily reporting when breaking news happens or when a story is assigned. Journalism is not a desk job. Good reporters do more than call sources and monitor wire feeds. They live stories in real-time, utilizing the senses of sight, smell, hearing, and touch to deliver the experience to their audience. There are dangers everywhere, whether traveling to the story, interacting with sources, being on the scene, or returning to the newsroom. As every reporter knows, you cannot tell a story well from the sidelines; you have to live the story walking the walk and talking the talk of those involved.

Journalism involves physical and emotional risks. On the emotional side, people risk rejection, violating ethics, losing their job, severing relationships with family, friends, and colleagues, a tarnished reputation, and loss of status. The list of physical risks, while just as long, is more dire. Beyond bumps and bruises, or even broken bones, journalists sometimes encounter deadly circumstances. This project concentrates on such physical risks.

Market size dominates numerous journalism conversations. The size of a market can impact a reporter's exposure, salary, prestige, and influence, and, in most cases, the larger the market, the greater the level of these factors. Risk is different; it exists in every media market in the United States, and with risk, market size is not as great of a

determinant. While a reporter in New York, NY (Nielsen's Designated Market Area 1) faces a different type of risk than a reporter in Glendive, MT (DMA 210), the risk is not necessarily more dangerous as it is different. Therefore, examining a few markets, no matter the size, can help provide a glimpse at risk propensity in journalists. Not to say that journalists are alike across the board, but that market size is not a determinant of danger.

If employers understand what motivates personnel and how they respond to threatening situations, they can adapt on the front end and train accordingly. Onboarding in professions associated with higher risk should go beyond choosing a health plan and setting up direct deposit. It should include familiarizing staff on how far is too far to go in the line of duty and which resources are available should one face risky endeavors. Leadership is about people, understanding what makes them tick, supporting them in times of need, and keeping them safe. Such measures can help to develop a safer, more supported workforce that protects company assets by reducing the expenses associated with risky endeavors.

This project begins with a literature review examining research in other professions to help direct a study into risk propensity and journalists. Concentrating on motivators for risk, the objective is to determine which variables prompt substantial risk-taking behavior. By exploring how risk pertains to humans and mammals and how Risk Sensitivity Theory explains the motivations of risk-taking, one can better understand the triggers that prompt a person to engage in such behavior. The literature review also explores risk propensity and why some people choose risky lifestyles and professions while others are content with a more subdued existence. Finally, it examines Sensation

Seeking, the Sensation Seeking Scale, and the Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking to see how those classified as high sensation seekers respond to various risks.

Considering the significance of risk propensity and journalists, one might assume a vast array of studies, scales, and resources dedicated to the topic exists. That is not the case. While psychology and organizational psychology examine risk propensity, focusing on entrepreneurs, workplace mavericks, Navy divers, and other adrenaline-driven occupations, studies of journalists are lacking. There is a need for in-depth examinations of risk propensity and journalists. While such a void in the research leaves few studies to emulate or expand upon. As a result, an operational variable will be created by drawing from existing literature on the relationship between risky behavior, ethical challenges, and the personal experiences of journalists. As there is no operational measure for risk in journalism, using input from researchers at two major universities, a 25-question scale was created to examine a journalist's willingness to take risks while working in the field. This new variable, called "journalism risk," prompts participants to look introspectively at risks they have taken or would be willing to take if faced with such situations while on the job.

The hypotheses test relationships between journalism risk and sensation seeking and general risk propensity. There is also an interest in how tenure and age correlate with the journalism risk variable. Testing each hypothesis will help determine how risk affects working journalists and at what stage in their careers they are the most susceptible to the dangers of risk while on the job.

Chapter three, methodology, explains each of the scales used in this research, the operational definitions for journalism risk and tenure, and the demographics of the sample. The chapter defines the subjects used in the study and the method for choosing them while explaining how the survey was administered and the data was collected and analyzed. Following the results and the conclusion, there is a robust discussion of the need for future research. As mentioned, the body of knowledge needs to be improved regarding journalists and risk propensity. There are numerous opportunities to explore it further, protect future generations of journalists, and preserve the field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Journalists at Risk

Risk-taking is nothing new to journalism. Lorena Hickok of the Associated Press attained the title of "front page girl" because of her superhuman effort to convince male editors that she could perform as well, or better than, her male counterparts on all assignments. While covering the 1932 kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, Hickok crawled up a snow-covered mountain at 2:00 a.m. to peer into the famous aviator's window and investigated a rumor that the infant might have been returned. Hickok did not scoop the story, but she did catch a nasty sickness (Anderson, 2017).

On January 29, 2006, ABC News Anchor Bob Woodruff suffered a traumatic brain injury when a roadside bomb struck his vehicle near Taji, Iraq. Woodruff says he was dismissive of any risks he might be taking, at worst thinking he might be shot in the hand or break a foot, adding that his denial matched that of the soldiers he was covering: "Someone else might get badly hurt, but not them" (Folkenflink, 2016).

On May 28, 2018, while covering the impact of heavy rains on Highway 176 in Polk County, South Carolina, WYFF Anchor Mike McCormick and his photographer, Aaron Smeltzer, died when a tree fell on their vehicle. Ten minutes before the accident, the two men interviewed Tryon Fire Chief Geoffrey Tennant about safety and dangerous road conditions (WYFF, 2018).

These foreign and domestic examples are part of the vast array of dangerous situations journalists encounter while working in the field. Journalism is not a desk job; it involves being where news is happening, and no story comes without some level of risk. There is a liability when traveling to a story. Once there, a reporter risks encountering dangerous situations such as being caught in the crossfire of law enforcement and criminal interaction, suffering injury, or exposure to hazardous chemicals and viruses. Recent coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic proves the point. Even the weather brings its form of unsafe circumstances. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 2194 journalists and media workers were killed on the job between 1992 and 2023.

Newsmakers also create risk. For instance, journalists can be taken as hostages and, in worst-case scenarios, used as pawns in diplomacy. In February 2022, a terror group in Pakistan kidnapped Daniel Pearl, a Jewish reporter serving as Southeast Asia bureau chief of the Wall Street Journal. Weeks later, the kidnappers released a videotape of Pearl's beheading. He was the first American journalist to die in the Afghan war.

Journalists who face dangerous situations often refer to their coping mechanisms as a built-in denial system that clicks into place upon heading into danger. When reacting to Pearl's murder, Juliette Terzieff, a freelance correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle, said, "It's notional that, like AIDS or cancer, it can't happen to us." Terzieff describes this notion as "how we protect ourselves from running to the nearest airport as fast as we can pack our bags. Every time one of us is downed in the field, you always get hit with the reality that 'it could have been me' "(Ricchiardi, 2002). Former CBS Evening News Anchor Dan Rather emphasized reporters' consciousness of risk when reporting in war zones. "In war, journalists who take the risks know what the risks are, and they know

what they're getting into'' (Larry King Live, CNN, April 14, 2003). War correspondents recognize risk as extraordinary and the reality of the profession. From their perspective, reporters possess knowledge of risk and continue to put newsgathering above safety, which translates into bravery (Carlson, 2006).

Mexican journalists have been victims of diverse attacks, ranging from attempted murder, kidnappings with torture, beatings, and temporary detentions by the armed forces or organized crime, to imprisonment under false charges, to multiple kinds of threats and sustained harassment. As a result, many Mexican journalists have become risk-adverse. They protect themselves by self-censoring and avoiding publishing dangerous content (González-Macías & Reyna-García, 2019).

2.1.1 Multimedia Journalism- A New Frontier of Risk

Internet media prompt news media managers to develop ways to provide content that appeals to the largest number of consumers. Any newsgathering model that broadens the dynamic of a newscast by increasing the number of stories produced could be considered financially beneficial (Kung, 2016). This need for wide-ranging, dynamic content instigated the creation of the multimedia journalist or MMJ. Multi-media journalism involves presenting a news story through different media, such as (but not limited to) a website, a Usenet newsgroup, e-mail, short message service, multimedia messaging service, radio, television, teletext, print newspapers, and magazines (Deuze, 2004). The concept of MMJs grew significantly in popularity after success in using them during difficult hurricane seasons prompted a need for speed reporting (Marymont, 2007). Television managers have embraced MMJs in an attempt to keep their stations

profitable during a time of fractured audiences and declining advertising dollars (Brand, 2011). Often, MMJs work alone in the field, potentially increasing the risk.

Increased risk can also result from fatigue. In addition to shooting and editing video, one person must now drive the news vehicle, call sources, arrange interviews, post online, perform social media responsibilities, and plan the next story. This multitasking can be distracting, if not overwhelming, and raises safety issues. MMJs do not have another person looking after them while performing an interview or shooting in a crowd. Without another set of eyes, MMJs lose the 360 degree awareness another person provides and can miss dangers around them (Perez & Cremedas, 2014). In January 2022, while reporting on icy road conditions during a live shot, reporter Tory Yorgey of WSAZ in Charleston, West Virginia was struck by a car (Lenthang, 2022).

2.2 Trauma and Journalists

With so many examples of journalists encountering risk, one would expect a robust body of literature on risk and journalism. This is not the case. However, significant research exists on trauma and journalists. The DART Center, a project of Columbia University Graduate School, is a collaborative network studying media coverage of trauma, conflict, and tragedy to improve reporting and support journalists. In partnership with the Journalists Association of Korea, the Korean Women Journalists Association, and the Google News Initiative, the Center's Asia Pacific division, DART researchers found that out of 544 journalists surveyed, eight out of ten experienced work-related trauma, while nearly 30% said they experienced trauma at work regularly. Female journalists reported slightly higher trauma responses; however, it was clear that all

journalists surveyed were affected by work-related trauma. Nearly half of the journalists surveyed were living with ongoing post-traumatic stress symptoms months after the initial traumatic event, revealing the long-term impact of being exposed to trauma at work. Experiencing ongoing post-traumatic stress symptoms can also lead to mental health injury, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Lee, 2022).

A systematic literature review of trauma and journalists found inconsistencies in measuring work-related trauma exposure. Methods vary, with conflicting scales prompting questions of whether comparing data accurately is possible. Measurement of personal trauma and its impact on a journalist's psyche lacks consistency, as does how researchers define trauma. The more practical-centered concentration weakens the literature's foundation, and a less contextualized framework leads to an incongruent body of knowledge (MacDonald et al., 2017). However, the review found that journalists personally exposed to physical danger are less likely to perceive their employing organization as supportive (Beam & Spratt, 2009).

2.3 Risk Sensitivity Theory

Human beings are mammals, sharing characteristics and behaviors with members of the animal kingdom. These similarities enable scholars to establish parallels between the human and animal kingdoms and apply research in both fields to one another. To see if humans and monkeys have similar reactions when facing risky choices, Hayden and Platt (2017) designed a gambling study offering monetary rewards that mimicked previous experiments using juice to reward monkeys. Results showed similar decision patterns in humans and monkeys. Specifically, neither people nor monkeys were risk

averse, and both adopted a win-stay-lose-shift strategy when receiving high rewards after taking a significant risk.

Kacelnik and Bateson studied the response of foraging animals to variability in rate of gain or risk; examining fifty-nine studies in which animals were required to choose between foraging options versus the rate of reward. In each study, animals chose between two foraging options. The researchers found that when risk is generated by variability in the amount of reward, animals are most frequently risk-averse and sometimes indifferent to risk, although in some studies preference depends on energy budget. Those with positive energy budgets were often more risk-averse while those with negative budgets were more risk-prone. In other words, the more hungry they were, the more risks they were willing to take. When variability is in delay to reward, animals are universally risk prone (Kacelnik & Bateson, 1996).

Kacelnik and Bateson developed Risk Sensitivity Theory, laying the groundwork for examining risk averse vs. risk prone behaviors. According to the theory, organisms in a state of need are more likely to engage in risky behaviors to meet a need or achieve a goal. When foraging for food, birds' actions depend on energetic intake and its relation to energetic requirements; the hungrier the bird, the more likely it will enter dangerous territory to receive a food reward (Caraco et al., 1980).

2.3.1 Applications of Risk Sensitivity Theory

Mishra and Lalumière (2010) expanded on these findings, studying risk-sensitive decision-making from ecologically relevant experience in humans. Using multiple scales to measure the relationship between risk propensity and need, they found subjects made

decisions based on the reward variance of behavioral options in tasks involving both “decision from description” and “decision from experience.” Participants exhibited elevated risk preference when they were placed in a situation of high need, where a low-risk behavioral option was less likely to meet their need. People who experienced conditions of low need generally preferred low-risk options that were sure to meet their needs. The study also looked at personality and behavioral traits using Zuckerman’s (1979) Sensation Seeking scale and Eysenck’s et al.’s Impulsivity scale. Men scored higher than women on personality and behavioral measures of risk, but gender had little influence on risk-sensitive decision-making in this study (Mishra & Lalumière, 2010).

Experiences and cognitions regarding the outcomes of a choice have an impact. Humans making decisions in a negative frame under a condition of high need, demonstrated particularly high levels of risk acceptance compared to those making positively-framed decisions (Mishra et al., 2012). When exposed to cues of competitive disadvantage while taking a test of risky choices, participants engaged in higher risk-taking than those exposed to cues of competitive advantage. Random exposure to such cues resulted in greater risk-taking while removing such cues caused risk-taking to decrease (Mishra et al., 2014). When faced with multiple combinations of situations (advantage-advantage, advantage-disadvantage, disadvantage-advantage, disadvantage-disadvantage), participants encountering the most recent states of disadvantage or total disadvantage consistently took more risks than their advantageous counterparts. No other variable, gender, administration of choice task, or passage of time, had similar impacts on risk propensity prompting researchers to conclude that those randomly exposed to cues of competitive disadvantage took more risks than those assigned to experience no cues of

disadvantage and removing these cues of disadvantage caused risk-taking to decrease (Mishra et al., 2013).

2.3.2 Risk Sensitivity Theory in Real Life

Being without also impacts occurrences of technology-motivated deviant behavior (TMDB). People who see themselves as devoid of attention are more likely to post selfies in risky situations and post risky selfies, and show a reduced preference for low-risk, low-reward selfies. Users prefer to view information that may serve as a target for upward social comparison compared to information that may serve as a target for downward social comparison; only when engaging in upward social comparisons will these users increase their enactment of TMDBs (Turel, 2021). When comparing societal status, those with high-status designations are less likely to take risks for fear of losing rank, while those at the bottom of the societal structure are more risk-prone hoping to gain ground (Kotlyar et al., 2012).

In financial risk taking, exposure to inequalities prompts risky behavior as individuals selectively make upward social comparisons; such comparisons increase perceived needs, prompting a willingness to take greater risks to meet such needs (Payne et al., 2017). Sports teams evaluate risk propensity similarly, with NFL and NCAA football teams passing the ball more than running as the number of yards to obtain a first down increase, particularly in later downs. These teams also become more risk-prone the deeper they are in the game, with the most considerable positive correlation between points to parity observed in the fourth quarter, indicating teams are particularly risk-sensitive under extreme conditions of need (Gonzales et al., 2017).

2.4 Risk Propensity

Small choices, such as trying a new food or purchasing a different brand of toothpaste, involve risk, as do life-altering decisions, including picking a spouse, selecting a career path or deciding whether to commit a crime. Determining a pattern of risk-averse vs. risk-prone concerning such choices can help in understanding why people do what they do and how these choices relate to behavior. Such an understanding can help predict how individuals will respond to certain stimuli and provides guidance when advising them on encountering high-risk situations. It can even prompt an introspective look into whether to allow risk-prone individuals to engage in such activities if losses highly outweigh rewards.

2.4.1 Risk Propensity and Behavior

Whether crimes are committed out of desperation, passion, or greed, the motivations illustrate risk propensity and its foundation in human behavior. In a study of computer hackers (Bachmann, 2010), risk propensity positively correlated with the number of hacking attempts, and hackers were found to have higher risk propensity than the general public. Respondents with a more pronounced risk propensity engaged in more hacking attempts but reported overall less success, with the decrease in success attributed to less preparation, reconnaissance, and attack routines.

Although the decision to volunteer stems from a person's desire for involvement and service, risk propensity also plays a role. Volunteers face the possibility of encountering dangerous people and exposing themselves to disease, property loss, liability, and emotional stress. When asked to volunteer, Dong (2015) found that people

with a higher willingness to volunteer also scored higher in risk propensity in financial matters, major life changes, driving, health, relationships, and choice of occupation.

2.4.2 Risk Propensity and the Workforce

Risk propensity in the workforce gives employers, whether public or private, an introspective view of employees, providing an overview of the type of individuals their organizations attract and how personnel evolve. Among a sample of Swedish, French, and American soldiers, men demonstrated a higher degree of risk propensity, but that risk propensity decreased with age (Börjesson et al., 2014). Among the job categories of the public sector, non-profit, private employment, and self-employment, public employees working in government jobs have the lowest level of risk tolerance (Dong, 2014). The risk propensity of entrepreneurs is greater than that of managers. Stewart and Roth (2001) found entrepreneurs who seek financial gains and growth are more risk-prone than those whose focus is producing family income.

Workplace mavericks are individuals who defy the status quo and disrupt organizational norms as they search for unique and sometimes unconventional ways of achieving success. Mavericks justify their disruptive actions as being more beneficial than harmful and therefore believe that their non-conformity is valid. Organizational leaders often accept their extraordinary contribution toward meeting higher-order organizational outcomes and, therefore, in exchange, accept their non-compliance with largely bureaucratic norms, as well as any mistakes they may make in an attempt to benefit the organization (Jordan et al., 2022). In punishing conditions, individuals high in “maverickism” are more likely than their low maverick counterparts to continue to take risks. In rewarding conditions, individuals high and low in maverickism do not appear to

display differences in risk-taking propensity (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012). This aligns with Kacelnik and Bateson's (1996) findings with animals.

2.5 Risk Propensity Scale

Meertens and Lion (2008) created the Risk Propensity Scale to explore risk taking as it pertains to everyday behavior, such as selecting risky traveling destinations or choosing between medical treatments. To determine the scale's reliability, validity, and individuality, they tested its correlation to other scales examining risk to determine whether the RPS is unique enough in measure and does not duplicate the findings of other risk evaluation measures, including the Everyday Risk Inventory (Steketee & Frost, 1994), the short version of the Sensation Seeking Scale (Madsen et al., 1987), the four choices of Schneider and Lopes (1986), the Need for Cognition Scale (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo et al., 1984) and the Need for Structure Scale (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). Results showed that the scores on the RPS in the different samples yielded good internal reliability and test-retest reliability.

2.6 Personality and Risk Propensity

To explore how epigenetics relate to personality traits and risk propensity, researchers examined 49 year-old female monozygotic twins (Kaminsky, et al., 2008). The twins grew up together, in a close relationship, with their parents dressing them the same. At age 17, one twin, known as "the war twin" acted on her interest in languages and dislike for science, ultimately leaving home to travel the world. She chose journalism as a career, reporting from war zones, seeing the atrocities of war and encountering life-threatening situations. In her forties, the "war twin" married a photojournalist who worked in similar environments. The couple did not have children.

The other twin missed her sister greatly. Although she traveled as well, this twin limited her experience to visiting only one English-speaking country. She married young, to a lawyer, and soon had two children. This twin, known as “the law twin,” worked part-time as a manager in her husband’s law office. The sisters remained close despite their geographical separation.

The twins participated in a study to see how different variations in gene patterns could affect risk taking behavior. Using the Toronto Gambling task (Floden & Struss, 2004), researchers presented the twins with a series of five gambles where the probability of “winning” points systematically increased or, on half trials, decreased. Each twin could select the gamble they preferred in order to win as many points as possible. Gambles with a high probability of winning had a lower point value while gambles with a low probability of winning were linked to larger payoffs. The “war twin’s” responses on this task were high-risk while her sister, the “law twin” was more risk-averse, demonstrating that environment can affect genes and, ultimately, personality.

2.7 Sensation Seeking

According to Marvin Zuckerman (1979), Sensation Seeking is a trait defined by the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences as well as the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experiences. The high-sensation seeker is sensitive to his or her internal sensations and chooses external stimuli that maximize them. One of the characteristics of high-sensation seekers is their tendency to do things that lower-sensation seekers regard as too risky. Behavioral differences could be due to different appraisals of risk or to different reactions to similarly appraised risk.

Zuckerman tested the relationship between sensation seeking and risk appraisal, looking to determine whether high sensation seekers appraise risk as less than low sensation seekers in situations where they had no experience. Results showed that high sensation seekers appraise many kinds of situations as less risky than lows, and in response to situations of equal appraised risks, “highs” expect that they will experience less anxiety and more sensation-seeking state.

2.7.1 Sensation Seeking and the Workforce

Sensation seeking correlates positively with occasional and frequent risk-taking (Desrichard & Denarie, 2005), and is tied to genetic factors prompting people’s tendency to become entrepreneurs (Nicolaou et al., 2008). Sensation seekers are also attracted to highly-stimulating vocations and more adventurous occupations (Roberti, 2004).

Sensation-seeking scores are tied to certain professions, with firefighters, mountain rescue personnel, and mine rescue team members scoring higher in thrill and adventure seeking than those in sports professions such as race car drivers, mountain climbers, and parachutists; both groups scored high on the disinhibition scale (Zalenski, 1984). Navy divers’ sensation seeking scores reveal a preference for thrill and adventure seeking (Biersner & LaRocco, 1983), as do those of pre-flight students in the U.S. Navy (Waters et al., 1976). In both studies, participants displayed low levels of disinhibition and experience seeking, indicating minimal preference for mental or social activities that are novel or unconventional (Roberti, 2004).

High sensation seekers tend to gravitate toward transforming occupational environments. As employees with relatively higher scores on disinhibition and boredom

susceptibility, they change jobs more often due to dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, job improvement prompts those with somewhat higher scores on disinhibition but low on experience seeking to make an occupational change (Van Vianen et al., 2003).

2.8 The Sensation Seeking Scale

To measure ultimate arousal levels Zuckerman looked for ways to test subjects' responses to stimulating circumstances. Early versions of the Sensation Seeking Scale lacked the depth necessary for validity. Sensation Seeking Scale IV contained four categories of questions measuring Thrill and Adventure Seeking, Experience Seeking, Disinhibition, and Boredom Susceptibility. However, it proved unsatisfactory in evaluating the overall value of sensation seeking because of an imbalance among the four categories' measures. Scale V, which Zuckerman revised in 1994, is built on the four-category concept, incorporating ten questions that generate a more balanced view of sensation seeking .

2.9 Hypotheses

Considering that high sensation seekers gravitate toward high-risk professions and take elevated risks while acting in these roles, this project explores the relationship between journalism risk scores and Sensation Seeking.

H1: Journalism risk propensity is positively correlated with Sensation Seeking.

The items on the journalism scale are specific to the roles and functions of journalists and the scope of their professional environment. Although unique, these duties

and situations present similar risk propensity to the risk-prone vs. risk-averse choices a typical person faces; therefore, a positive association is anticipated.

H2: Journalism risk propensity is positively related to general risk propensity.

New journalists beginning their career possess a hunger, a desire to designate themselves as deserving of the opportunity to cover the news and secure the respect of colleagues and the audience. Actions are sometimes executed with little regard for their consequences. With time and experience, such consequences are more apparent, and the journalist becomes more risk-averse.

H3: Journalism risk propensity negatively correlates with tenure.

Consequently, this awareness of the repercussions of a risk-prone career perpetuates as the journalist witnesses more dangerous outcomes of risky behavior. With age, the individual also has more to lose; they are more likely to have a family, own their own home, hold a prominent position within their employment and the community, and may not be in the same physical condition as they were earlier in their career. As a result, the propensity to take risks may decline.

H4: Journalism risk propensity negatively correlates with age.

Journalists who spend a significant amount of time working in the field encounter more opportunities for risk-prone behavior. As they engage in such risky behavior, there is potential for such actions to become normalized and the individual may not question their action before partaking in a dangerous activity. Therefore, the more a journalist works outside the office (“in the field”) could lead to more risky behavior.

H5: Risk propensity is positively correlated with the percentage of time that a journalist works in the field.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This project utilizes three scales to test the five hypotheses; two of them, The Sensation Seeking and Risk Propensity scales, have been used in previous research. The other, the journalism risk scale, is created specifically for this study. The concept of tenure is operationalized to align with the amount of time spent working in broadcast journalism careers and excludes time served in other professional roles. Data collection and analysis will involve connecting with journalists to distribute surveys and encourage participation. The Institutional Review Board at the University of South Carolina approved the survey (IRB ID# Pro00126504).

3.1 Measures

3.1.1 The Risk Propensity Scale

The Risk Propensity scale measure's an individual's general risk-taking; Meertens and Lions (2008) constructed it as a short, practical, and easy-to-use method to measure the tendency to avoid or take personal risks. Its focus is everyday risk-taking behavior, such as selecting a risky traveling destination or choosing between medical treatments. On a Likert scale where one measures totally disagree and nine measures totally agree, participants rate their agreement with phrases such as “Safety first,” “I prefer to avoid risks” and “I usually view risks as a challenge.” The Risk Propensity scale’s main interest

is not to measure thrill-seeking or risks involving violating social norms (Meertens & Lion, 2008). For that, the research relies on the Sensation Seeking scale.

3.1.2 The Sensation Seeking Scale

Risk-taking as a response style is related to occupational membership, with the high risk-taking group scoring significantly higher than the low risk-taking group on all five dimensions of Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (Musolino & Hershenson, 1977). In the Sensation Seeking Scale- Form V, participants choose between two options such as I like “wild” uninhibited parties or I prefer quiet parties with good conversations.

When tested, the four riskiest occupations in order of their rated riskiness were test pilot, air-traffic controller, police officer, and fireman. The lowest risk were librarians, civil service-clerical, and accountants (Zuckerman, 2007). Although journalists were not part of this study, similar personality traits to those of the high-risk-taking group prompt an interest in where journalists would fall in relation to the high and low-risk groups.

3.1.3 The Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking

Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking Scale consists of 40 questions and asks participants about alcohol and drug use and sexual tendencies. To conserve time and avoid making participants uncomfortable, this study uses the Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking. This measure provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between Sensation Seeking and various types of risk behavior with a focus on novelty and intensity. In Zuckerman’s scale and conception, sensation seeking is marked by a need for *novelty* and *complexity* of stimulation. In contrast, the development of the

new scale was guided by a conception of sensation seeking as being characterized by the need for *novelty and intensity* of stimulation (Arnett, 1993). Study participants respond to 20 statements such as, “When taking a trip, I think it is best to make as few plans as possible and just take it as it comes” and “I like the feeling of standing next to the edge on a high place and looking down.” Cronbach’s alpha of the 20 item scale was .733.

3.1.4 Journalism Risk

Since an extensive literature review did not divulge a measure for determining journalism risk propensity directly, this project moved in a direction to operationally define risk in journalism. In creating the journalism risk variable, called J-Risk for this research, a list of risky journalistic behaviors was developed and circulated among researchers at major United States universities who are familiar with the practice of journalism. Based on their responses, a resulting list was narrowed to obtain valid information while adhering to the five-minute completion limit promised to secure participation. Each risk-related activity is framed from a journalist's perspective and aligns with situations journalists have encountered, learned about from colleagues, or could envision themselves facing. The final version of the scale asks respondents to rate their willingness to engage in 25 behaviors, including covering news from the physical location of a forest fire, interviewing and interacting with people convicted of a violent crime, and reporting from a dangerous war zone. Cronbach’s alpha of the 25 item scale was .921.

3.1.5 Tenure

Although tenure is generally conceptually defined as the act, right, manner, or term of holding something (such as a landed property, a position, or an office), this research requires an operational definition. It defines tenure based on where participants are in their journalism careers and how long they have worked for their current employer.

3.1.6 Demographics

The survey prompted participants to provide demographic information to allow the researcher to understand better their background and personal life and how those things impact risk propensity. It collected age data operationalized as “year born” to test H4. Gender is also included in the survey.

3.2 Subjects

This research was based in South Carolina. Each participant selected was vulnerable to risk. In the case of full-time anchors, although their current role involves primarily working from the station, most if not all anchors worked as reporters before moving into a full-time anchoring role. Other anchors, such as those who anchor morning and weekend shows, often work as reporters during part of their schedules. Photographers either accompany journalists in the field or travel to stories themselves to get video, soundbites, and information for the producers back in the newsroom.

In all, 62 (N=62) journalists were included in the study, 38 (61%) men and 24 (39%) women. These journalists are anchors, reporters, and photojournalists. The age range is 22 to 66 years, with a mean of 37. Thirty-four surveys (55%) were collected

during morning and afternoon story meetings at two broadcast television stations in the Florence/Myrtle Beach market and one station in the Charleston market. Twenty-eight surveys (45%) were collected among the journalists in Walterboro covering the Alec Murdaugh trial. All surveys were administered during January and February 2023.

3.3 Data Collection

The researcher contacted news directors at each major network affiliate television station in the Columbia, Charleston, Greenville, and Florence/Myrtle Beach television markets. Two Florence/Myrtle Beach (DMA 100) stations and one Charleston (DMA 88) station agreed to participate. Although one Columbia station showed interest in participating, the corporate office declined the request. The remaining stations did not respond.

The researcher looked for alternatives to improve the sample size. The double-murder trial of Alec Murdaugh began on January 26, 2023, at the Colleton County courthouse in Walterboro, South Carolina. The high-profile trial attracted local and national journalists alike. The researcher traveled to Walterboro to connect with more journalists and ask them to complete the survey, thus increasing the sample size. The response to this request was strong; forty-five percent of the sample came from journalists covering the Murdaugh trial.

3.4 Data Analysis

Printed surveys were created using 20 questions from the Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking and 25 questions from the Journalism Risk Propensity scale. Demographic questions about gender, age, and tenure followed. After data collection,

each paper survey was numbered for identification. The data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, or SPSS, software for analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of this study and is divided into two areas. The first details the results of the hypothesis tests. The second reports post hoc observations from the data.

4.1 Hypothesis Test:

H1: Journalism risk propensity is positively correlated with Sensation Seeking.

H1 is supported. Sensation seeking was positively related to journalism risk propensity ($r = .353$; $p = .002$).

H2: Journalism risk propensity is positively related to general risk propensity.

H2 was not tested because only one measure was used to evaluate general risk propensity in an effort to conserve time and limit the survey duration to less than five minutes.

H3: Journalism risk propensity negatively correlates with tenure.

The data does not support H3 ($r = .233$; $p = .034$). In fact, here, the results indicate a statistically significant and opposite relationship; journalism risk propensity positively correlates with tenure.

H4: Journalism risk propensity negatively correlates with age.

The data does not support H4 ($r = .214$, $p = .047$). A statistically significant opposite relationship was also observed when testing this hypothesis. Age positively correlates with journalism risk propensity.

H5 Risk propensity is positively correlated with the percentage of time that a journalist works in the field.

H5 was not tested as the instrument did not ask about how much time a journalist spends in the field. This is an error on the part of the researcher. Future studies should include the percentage of time in the field.

4.2 Post Hoc Analysis:

This section explores additional relationships revealed by the data that are not part of the hypothesis testing.

Males scored higher in journalism risk propensity ($M = 102.0526$) than females ($M = 84.1667$) ($t = 3.385$; $p = .001$). Males also scored higher in sensation seeking ($M = 79.3684$) than females ($M = 72.5000$) ($t = 2.296$; $p = .025$).

Individual items in the Journalism Risk Propensity scale were also studied in relation to years working as a journalist, age, and sensation seeking. Table 4.1 contains a separate analysis of each of the 25 items. Tenure ($r = .255$; $p = .046$), and age ($r = .284$; $p = .025$) correlate positively with driving a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions. However, there is a stronger relationship between riding in a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions and tenure ($r = .432$; $p < .01$) and age ($r = .415$; $p < .01$). Tenure and age have relationships with reporting from a place that experienced a natural disaster (Tenure, $r = .319$; $p = .012$) (Age, $r = .283$; $p = .026$), covering a natural disaster even though the government issued an emergency evacuation order (Tenure, $r = .430$; $p < .001$) (Age,

$r=.395$; $p=.001$), and covering news from the physical location of a forest fire (Tenure, $r=.334$; $p=.008$) (Age, $r=.319$; $p=.011$). Covering news from the physical location of a hurricane is the only measure that is related to all three variables: years working as a journalist ($r=.270$; $p=.034$), age ($r=.258$; $p=.043$), and sensation seeking ($r=.358$; $p=.004$).

Sensation seeking is the only variable that correlates with driving more than ten miles over the speed limit to a breaking news event ($r=.460$, $p;<.01$), pressure an unwilling and confrontational source to speak on the record ($r=.259$; $p=.042$), trail law enforcement in a high-speed chase ($r=.315$; $p=.016$), report news from a dangerous war zone ($r=.300$; $p=.018$), and fly in a helicopter to travel to a news story or cover a news story from the air ($r=.314$; $p=.013$).

Table 4.1 Correlations with Journalism Risk Propensity

Journalism Risk Propensity Measure	Years Working as a Journalist	Age	Sensation Seeking
Drive a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	.255*	.284*	NS
Ride in a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	.432**	.415**	NS
Ignore public safety warnings	NS	NS	.296*
Report from a place that experienced a natural disaster.	.319*	.319*	NS
Cover a natural disaster even though the government issued an emergency evacuation order.	.430**	.395**	NS
Cover news from the physical location of a forest fire.	.334**	.319*	NS
Cover news from the physical location of a hurricane.	.270*	.258*	.358**
Drive more than ten miles over the speed limit to a breaking news event.	NS	NS	.460**
Pressure an unwilling confrontational source to speak on the record	NS	NS	.259*
Trail law enforcement in a high-speed chase.	NS	NS	.305*
Report news from a dangerous war zone	NS	NS	.300*
Fly in a helicopter to travel to a news story or cover a news story from the air	NS	.250*	.314*
Refuse to provide the name of a protected, confidential source	NS	NS	NS
Engage with news sources in environments in which people have a contagious disease or virus	.263*	NS	NS
Interview and interact with people convicted of a violent crime	NS	NS	NS
Engage in arguments with social media users who threaten me	NS	NS	NS
Use a recording device without the source knowing they were being recorded	NS	NS	NS
Trespass without permission onto another property to obtain information	NS	NS	NS
Trail law enforcement in a high-speed chase	NS	NS	.305*
Report from a dangerous war zone	NS	NS	.300*
Report from a location in which protestors and police were in physical altercations	NS	NS	NS
Meet with news sources alone in a remote and desolate location	NS	NS	NS
Shadow military and law enforcement personnel as they work	NS	NS	NS

Enter an area that contains hazardous materials, with hazardous materials being substances or chemicals that pose a health hazard, a physical hazard, or harm to the environment	NS	NS	NS
Travel alone to high-crime areas to report on the news	NS	NS	NS

*p<.05, **p<.001

Table 4.2 Gender Differences in Journalism Risk Propensity

Journalism Risk Propensity Measure	Overall Mean	Male	Female
Report from a place that experienced a natural disaster	5.21	5.29	5.08
Shadow military and/or law enforcement personnel as they work	5.13	NS	NS
Fly in a helicopter to travel to a news story or cover a news story from the air	5.11	5.34	4.75
Cover news from the physical location of a hurricane.	5.02	NS	NS
Interview and interact with people convicted of a violent crime	5.00	NS	NS
Cover news from the physical location of a forest fire	4.63	4.97	4.08
Cover a natural disaster even though the government issued an emergency evacuation order	4.63	4.95	4.13
Refuse to provide the name of a protected, confidential source.	4.39	4.79	3.75
Report from a location in which protestors and police were in physical altercations	4.37	4.68	3.88
Ride in a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	4.31	4.68	3.71
Drive more than ten miles over the speed limit to a breaking news event.	4.23	NS	NS
Drive a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	4.02	4.66	3.00
Use a recording device without the source knowing they were being recorded	3.40	NS	NS
Meet with news sources alone in a remote and desolate location	3.31	3.95	2.29
Report in locations under threat of bombing	3.23	3.63	2.58
Engage with news sources and environments in which people have a contagious virus or disease	3.15	NS	NS
Travel alone to high-crime areas to report on the news	3.15	NS	NS
Report from a dangerous war zone	3.08	NS	NS
Cross a police barricade	3.03	3.34	2.54
Pressure an unwilling confrontational source to speak on the record	3.02	NS	NS
Ignore public safety warnings	2.98	3.32	2.46
Enter an area that contains hazardous materials, with hazardous materials being substances or chemicals that pose a health hazard, a physical hazard, or harm to the environment	2.94	NS	NS
Trail law enforcement in a high-speed chase	2.87	NS	NS
Trespass without permission onto another property to obtain information	2.55	NS	NS
Engage in arguments with social media users who threaten me	2.40	2.74	1.88

*NS Indicates there is no statistically significant difference between males and females.

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism Risk	45.00	139.00	95.1290	21.93544
Sensation Seeking	35.00	98.00	76.7097	11.86728
Age	22.00	66.00	36.8226	12.72731
Months Working for Current Employer	1.00	481.00	87.3871	108.04148

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses this study's results and the relationships between journalism risk propensity, sensation seeking, age, and tenure. It suggests opportunities for future studies as little to no research is available on risk propensity and journalists. This researcher took a traditional approach to survey participants in a modern age. This chapter examines the effectiveness of such an approach and recommends future studies to emulate the amount of research that exists for other high-risk occupations.

5.1 Findings and Implications

By testing journalists' levels of sensation seeking and journalism risk propensity and demonstrating that these variables are positively correlated, we learn that individuals with the highest levels of sensation seeking also demonstrate high levels of risk propensity when working as journalists. This finding provides tremendous insight into the mindset of the most risk-prone. These individuals are general risk-takers and seek sensation in everyday life and while on the job, revealing a personality type that may be attracted to journalism. In this case, this finding suggests that a journalist may be a person who likes the thrill and intensity of gathering information.

As stated in Chapter 2, reporting is not a desk job. No two days are the same; journalists never know what they will encounter with each assignment. This research reveals that such a characteristic is an attractive part of the role. People become

journalists because they seek excitement and high-intensity situations. For managers, such knowledge is a double-edged sword. While they can promote a reporter's fast-paced and ever-changing lifestyle when recruiting new reporters, such information reveals their staff's potential for encountering danger and sustaining an injury is strong. This study's findings reveal that while the average individual would steer clear of such dangers, they are enticing to journalists, who are more likely to move toward danger rather than away from it. With modern environments more threatening, the field is more dangerous, and reporters and photographers may not be afraid of taking a head-on approach.

An insightful news director can use this information to protect their team. They can communicate that although one's tenacity to get the story is admired and respected, safety is the top priority. Cultivating a newsroom culture that recognizes, honors, and celebrates those committed to a safe and lawful protocol would be prudent.

This project revealed that studying journalism risk propensity is new, uncharted, long overdue territory. Very little academic research has been done on the topic. Even researchers at the DART Center for journalists experiencing trauma were limited in what they knew and could provide about the subject. Yet, they agreed that it was a vital issue to explore. The research also intrigued panelists for a "trauma and journalists" online forum, although they could provide little information.

5.2 Creating the Scale

Other than the measure crafted for this study, no scale exists to explore journalism risk propensity, and while creating one seemed daunting upon approach, if not this project, which one? It needed to be done. Since journalists encounter many dangers, it

was not difficult to draft the scenarios for the journalism risk propensity scale. However, it was challenging to narrow the list to 25 questions and determine which options best measure a journalist's willingness to take risks. One could argue that more questions are necessary to measure journalism risk propensity accurately. This researcher would agree. Yet, time and access were the most significant challenge of this research. There was a temptation to add questions that could provide more insight, but making the survey longer could inhibit willingness to participate. However, because this study was exploratory in nature, it was beneficial for the researcher to understand the relationships between the items and the study's demographic variables. More work should be done to explain how the Journalist Risk Propensity scale may function using traditional factor analyses. For the purpose of this study, exploring individual items allows nuance in understanding these specific relationships—that future scholars can use to measure risk in this context.

5.3 Survey Method and Variables

There were pros and cons to the "pen and paper" surveys. Looking participants in the eye and speaking with them humanized this project. Although a number is assigned to each survey for identification, and the sample is anonymous, the interest and appreciation emulated by the participants serve as an invisible variable, as do the conversations that evolved as journalists returned their surveys. The most impactful response came from a reporter who had worked for CNN for more than 30 years and was eager to share his story. When asked, "What is the most difficult situation you ever encountered?", he described the scene when he and Christiane Amanpour were the first to arrive at the crash site of the Pan Am Flight 103 on December 21, 1988. "There were people still strapped in

their seats with wrapped Christmas presents scattered around them, presents they were never able to give. Those people never made it to their loved ones. You can't unsee that."

Such depth is unavailable via a five minute online survey with closed-ended questions. Checking a box doesn't tell the entire story. And, just like journalists have to be on-site to get the gist of a story, researchers must enter their world to understand motivations and personalities. While an online survey may have yielded more responses and boosted the sample size, thus increasing the statistical significance of this research, such an instrument would not have the humanistic relevance that this kind of project requires.

Interestingly, "cover news from the physical location of a hurricane" is the only individual item on the journalism risk propensity scale that positively correlated with all three dependent variables studied: years working as a journalist, age, and sensation seeking. Considering the survey was administered at three television stations in coastal South Carolina, and to mostly South Carolina-based journalists, these participants are or somewhat apathetic regarding hurricanes. It would be interesting to see whether similar relationships result from surveying journalists in places where hurricanes are not as familiar such as the Midwest.

5.5 Rejected Hypotheses

H3 and H4 were not supported; tenure and age positively correlate with journalism risk propensity. The initial thinking was tied to Risk Sensitivity Theory, predicting that new and younger journalists need to grow professionally and therefore are more likely to engage in risky behaviors to achieve success. However, the data in this

study reveals the opposite. Older journalists and those with longer tenure with their employer are more risk prone.

Perhaps the profession weeds out the risk-averse, leaving only those who crave risk in their professional lives. It is also possible that older journalists are less concerned than their younger counterparts. They may have encountered many scenarios listed on the journalism risk propensity scale during their careers and did not suffer harm; therefore, they do not fear such occurrences.

5.6 Gender Differences

Males scored higher in journalism risk propensity and sensation seeking than females. Decisions involving risk-taking may be due to cultural, biological, or physiological differences. A meta-analysis of risk-taking tendencies of male and female participants showed greater risk-taking among males, although the gender gap seems to be narrowing over time (Byrens et al., 1999). Studies of the Risk Propensity Scale found that men scored higher than women (Meertens & Lion, 2008). Women's greater perceived likelihood of negative outcomes and lesser expectation of enjoyment partially mediated their lower propensity toward risky choices in gambling, recreation, and health domains (Harris & Jenkins, 2023).

There are gender differences in law enforcement, another high-risk profession. Research on undergraduate students majoring in criminal justice found that men were significantly more likely to want to pursue a career in law enforcement and to want to pursue a career in policing compared to women (Diaz & Nuño, 2021).

Broadcast television in the United States defies the status quo. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project, 63% of television journalists in the United States are women. The gender distribution for this research was 24 respondents identifying as male and 38 identifying as female.

This finding regarding gender contrasts with Risk Sensitivity Theory. If the theory were accurate regarding journalists, females wanting to prove themselves as newsroom leaders would be more risk-prone. However, as the data shows, male journalists take more risks. Because of the psychological differences and personal gender roles between men and women, the difference in risk propensity will likely remain, although it may shrink over time. In any case, more research is needed on gender differences in the newsroom.

5.7 Directions for Future Research

There is vast potential for future research on risk propensity in journalists. Time and resources limited this study to journalists from South Carolina and those who came to cover a national court case in the state. It would be beneficial to survey journalists nationwide, although that would require online surveys. Alternatively, data collection at a national conference might work. This study focused only on broadcast journalists. Future studies should include print journalists to gain a more representative sample of the profession.

It could be beneficial to track the risk propensity of journalists throughout their careers, administering the survey as they begin their first job and then re-evaluating their risk propensity at different intervals. Tracking the risk propensity of the same persons

could provide better insight into whether risk propensity grows with age and tenure or if risk-averse individuals tend to leave the profession.

Time constraints prevented the testing to H2. With completion time limited to five minutes and a scale already included measuring sensation seeking, the researcher eliminated the risk propensity scale. Future studies could include the risk propensity scale in addition to or in replacement of the sensation seeking scale. With H5 untested, subsequent research should ask participants the amount of time they spend in the field each week.

5.8 Limitations

News director buy-in was a substantial barrier to obtaining responses. Regardless of multiple phone calls and emails to news directors in every television market in South Carolina, only three agreed to participate. WLTX in Columbia (a Tegna station) was the only station that, despite wanting to participate, did not receive corporate approval. Other stations did not attempt to get such support or showed no interest, despite participation from sister stations. If it were not for the Murdaugh trial and the willingness of journalists on-site to participate, this research would have either not gotten off the ground or would not have had enough responses from the profession. Ultimately, the sample drought spawned from the lack of local news director buy-in yielded a more robust sample. So while the amount of time dedicated to sample collection was not ideal, the timing of collecting such a sample could not have been better. Since the trial attracted local and national journalists, it provided a more diverse sample.

While national journalists who descended on Colleton County to cover the Murdaugh trail diversified the sample, it still was not enough. Because the project was limited to one researcher, the South Carolina border had to be the boundary for collecting responses. However, more individuals devoted to the project could have taken it outside South Carolina and made the sample larger and more representative, and, therefore, more representative.

The researcher used organic means to obtain the sample, telephone calls, emails, and boots on the ground. No financial resources were devoted to data collection beyond the cost of the researcher's fuel. The goal was to obtain 60 completed surveys. Gathering 62 was a substantial feat given the barriers to access. The sample size could have been larger with financial resources to purchase a list of journalists.

H5 was not tested because of human error. The researcher failed to double-check the hypotheses when creating the instrument. This is an important lesson learned, considering such information could have added value to this study. Moving forward, the researcher will better review all hypotheses before requesting the instrument's approval.

This was a quantitative study. With little to no research on this topic, future studies using qualitative methods could examine the "why" behind a journalist's risk propensity. The CNN reporter who covered the Pan Am Flight 103 crash exemplifies the necessity of understanding a journalist's motivations. This reporter commented that he is more risk-averse because of family obligations. This contrasts with H3 and H4. A qualitative study could examine why other participants with similar ages and tenure responded differently. The story meetings the researcher attended to administer surveys

showcased how a focus group could benefit this research. Testing the relationship among members of the news team could provide insight into whether there is potential or perceived peer pressure and journalists influence one another's risk propensity.

Participants reported on their personal journalism risk propensity and sensation seeking. This self-reported data weakens the research's validity, a common occurrence with survey research. Individuals may have difficulty describing themselves accurately or effectively rating themselves. They may interpret the questions incorrectly or differently from other participants (Ganellen, 2007).

5.9 Conclusion

This research found that journalists like first responders, navy divers, and parachutists are more risk-prone. Unlike first responders, navy divers, and parachutists, there has been little to no research on risk propensity and journalists until now. This study found a positive relationship between journalism and sensation seeking, revealing that journalists seek extraordinary experiences when doing their job. This risk propensity is not necessarily tied to need and deprivation, as Risk Sensitivity Theory predicts. Instead, the findings show that risk propensity aligns with journalists' inner motivations to seek sensation.

According to this research, journalism risk propensity is stronger among journalists who are older and have served as journalists longer, with positive correlations between age and journalism risk propensity and age and sensation seeking.

For journalism, this means there is a better understanding of the type of individual who becomes a journalist and maintains their tenure. They sometimes thrive on

encountering danger when pursuing a story; such an innate desire requires nurturing to cultivate the motivation for becoming a journalist and continuing a journalism career. However, it is vital to express the importance of knowing how far is too far. No story is worth a life, and the field must protect its greatest asset, those who have devoted their lives to delivering information to the public.

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APPENDIX A: INSTRUMENT



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

I am Ellen Dunn, a master's student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. You are being asked to help with my thesis research so we can help keep journalists safe. This study is to understand risk-taking by journalists. Your participation is voluntary, and the survey is anonymous. All information collected will be reported as a group, and no individual will be identified. Your answers will only be used for the research project. The survey should take no more than four minutes to complete. You may withdraw from this survey anytime, but because your participation can contribute significantly to journalism research, please answer this survey carefully. To improve data quality, PLEASE ANSWER ALL OF THE QUESTIONS. If you have questions regarding this study, contact me via email: ellen.dunn00@gmail.com or the USC Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 1-803-777-4456. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Let's begin with some general questions about you. Please circle the response that best applies to you.

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
A) I can see how it would be interesting to marry someone from a foreign country	1	2	3	4	5	6
B) When the water is very cold, I prefer not to swim even if it is a hot day.	1	2	3	4	5	6
C) If I have to wait in a long line, I'm usually patient about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
D) When I listen to music, I like it to be loud.	1	2	3	4	5	6
E) When taking a trip, I think it is best to make as few plans as possible and just take it as it comes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
F) I stay away from movies that are said to be frightening or highly suspenseful.	1	2	3	4	5	6
G) I think it's fun and exciting to perform or speak before a group.	1	2	3	4	5	6
H) If I were to go to an amusement park, I would prefer to ride the roller coaster or other fast rides.	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Completely Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Completely Agree
D) I would like to travel to places that are strange and far away.	1	2	3	4	5	6
J) I would never like to gamble with money, even if I could afford it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
K) I would have enjoyed being one of the first explorers of an unknown land.	1	2	3	4	5	6
L) I like a movie where there are a lot of explosions and car chases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
M) I don't like extremely hot and spicy foods.	1	2	3	4	5	N
N) In general, I work better when I'm under pressure.	1	2	3	4	5	6
O) I often like to have the radio or TV on while I'm doing something else, such as reading or cleaning up.	1	2	3	4	5	6
P) It would be interesting to see a car accident happen.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q) I think it's best to order something familiar when eating in a restaurant.	1	2	3	4	5	6
R) I like the feeling of standing next to the edge on a high place and looking down.	1	2	3	4	5	6
S) If it were possible to visit another planet or the moon for free, I would be among the first in line to sign up.	1	2	3	4	5	6
T) I can see how it must be exciting to be in a battle during a war.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Next, we want to know some things about how you work.

	Completely Unwilling	Unwilling	Slightly Unwilling	Slightly Willing	Willing	Completely Willing
A) Refuse to provide the name of a protected, confidential source with the potential for imprisonment	1	2	3	4	5	6
B) Cover news from the physical location of a hurricane	1	2	3	4	5	6
C) Drive more than ten miles over the speed limit to a breaking news event	1	2	3	4	5	6
D) Engage with news sources and environments in which people have a contagious virus or disease	1	2	3	4	5	6
E) Fly in a helicopter to travel to a news story or cover a news story from the air	1	2	3	4	5	6
F) Interview and interact with people convicted of a violent crime	1	2	3	4	5	6
G) Engage in arguments with social media users who threaten me	1	2	3	4	5	6
H) Cover a natural disaster even though the government issued an emergency evacuation order	1	2	3	4	5	6
I) Use a recording device without the source knowing they were being recorded	1	2	3	4	5	6
J) Cover news from the physical location of a forest fire	1	2	3	4	5	6
K) Trespass without permission onto another property to obtain information	1	2	3	4	5	6
L) Trail law enforcement in a high-speed chase	1	2	3	4	5	6
M) Report from a dangerous war zone	1	2	3	4	5	6
N) Ride in a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	1	2	3	4	5	6
O) Report from a location in which protestors and police were in physical altercations	1	2	3	4	5	6
P) Meet with news sources alone in a remote and desolate location	1	2	3	4	5	6
Q) Pressure an unwilling confrontational source to speak on the record	1	2	3	4	5	6

R) Ignore public safety warnings	1	2	3	4	5	6
S) Shadow military and/or law enforcement personnel as they work	1	2	3	4	5	6
T) Enter an area that contains hazardous materials, with hazardous materials being substances or chemicals that pose a health hazard, a physical hazard, or harm to the environment	1	2	3	4	5	6
U) Travel alone to high-crime areas to report on the news	1	2	3	4	5	6
V) Drive a vehicle in hazardous weather conditions	1	2	3	4	5	6
W) Reporter from a place that experienced a natural disaster	1	2	3	4	5	6
X) Cross a police barricade	1	2	3	4	5	6
Y) Report in locations under threat of bombing	1	2	3	4	5	6

Finally, we have a few general questions about you and your job.

How long have you worked as a journalist? _____ years

How long have you worked for your current employer? _____ years _____ months

What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female _____ Non Binary

What year were you born? _____

Thank you for supporting journalism research; your participation is greatly appreciated. When finished, please make sure that you have NOT included your name or other personal information, fold your survey in half and hand it to the administrator.