

**The Changing Face of Current Affairs Television  
Programmes in New Zealand 1984 – 2004**

Sarah Jane Baker  
PhD

2012

School of Communication Studies  
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

A thesis submitted to the Auckland University of  
Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of a PhD.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	xi
ABSTRACT .....	xii
CHAPTER ONE: NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF CURRENT AFFAIRS TELEVISION.....	1
British public service broadcasting.....	2
The history and conception of ‘current affairs’ television programmes.....	10
Current affairs programmes in Australia .....	13
Public affairs television in the United States .....	17
Current affairs programming in New Zealand .....	22
The 1990s and 2000s: Current affairs in crisis.....	31
CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTUALISING THE CHANGING GENRE OF CURRENT AFFAIRS TELEVISION.....	34
The political economy approach .....	34
The critical political economy research tradition.....	41
The political economy approach and commodification/ commercialisation of Media .....	42
Deregulation.....	47
Panorama/World in Action .....	54
Market driven journalism.....	60
Tabloidisation.....	62
The rise of infotainment .....	65
A changing genre.....	70
Research on the news and current affairs genres in New Zealand.....	73
Charter principles versus commercial news and current affairs .....	80
after 1999.....	80
Summary.....	84
CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE OF METHODOLOGY .....	87
Content analysis of news: Quantitative and qualitative approaches .....	87

The British template: Barnett & Seymour's study (1999). .....	90
New Zealand research .....	97
Comrie's analysis of TVNZ news .....	98
Comrie's qualitative methodology .....	101
A summary of Comrie's findings .....	104
The study by Cook .....	105
The design of this content analysis study .....	106
The combination of approaches and the New Zealand current.....	113
affairs study.....	113
Programme selection .....	114
Programme types.....	115
The sample and coding.....	116
Subject categories .....	116
Summary.....	121
CHAPTER FOUR: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS .....	122
Research Question One:.....	122
Current affairs television 1984: Pre-deregulation, item lengths .....	123
Current affairs television 1984-1994: Before and after deregulation, .....	125
a comparison of item lengths for <i>Close Up</i> and <i>20/20</i> . .....	125
Current affairs television 1984-1994: Before and after deregulation, .....	126
a comparison of item lengths for <i>Sunday</i> and <i>20/20</i> .....	126
Current affairs programmes 1994: Following deregulation.....	127
Current affairs television. From deregulation to the Charter. A .....	128
comparison of 1994 and 2004 current affairs programmes.....	128
Current affairs television: Pre-Deregulation, de-regulation and the.....	129
Charter: A comparison of 1984, 1994 and 2004 current affairs.....	129
programmes.....	129
Research question 2: .....	134
Current affairs television: Pre-Deregulation-deregulation, 1984- .....	134
1994. <i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 .....	134
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> / <i>Sunday</i> 1984 and <i>20/20</i> 1994.....	135
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> / <i>Sunday</i> 1984 and <i>Holmes</i> 1994 .....	137
Current affairs television: Deregulation-The Charter, 1994-2004.....	138

A comparison of <i>20/20</i> 1994 and <i>Sunday</i> 2004. ....	138
A comparison of <i>Holmes</i> 1994 and <i>Holmes</i> 2004. ....	140
Research question three: .....	143
<i>Close Up</i> 1984 and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 .....	144
<i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 compared to <i>20/20</i> in 1994 .....	144
<i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 compared to <i>Holmes</i> 1994 .....	145
Current affairs television: Did entertainment-oriented subjectmatter increase; de-regulation- charter period, 1994 and 2004 .....	146
<i>Holmes</i> 1994 compared to <i>Holmes</i> 2004 .....	147
<i>Holmes</i> 2004 compared to <i>Sunday</i> 2004. ....	147
Overall trends.....	148
Research question 4: .....	150
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> in 1984- pre-deregulation .....	152
A comparison of <i>Close Up/Sunday</i> in 1984 and <i>20/20</i> in 1994 .....	153
A comparison of <i>Close Up/Sunday</i> in 1984 and <i>Holmes</i> in 1994 .....	154
Source changes from deregulation to the Charter-1994-2004. ....	155
A comparison of <i>20/20</i> 1994 and <i>Sunday</i> 2004. ....	155
<i>Holmes</i> 1994 and <i>Holmes</i> 2004. ....	156
Source Types for <i>Holmes</i> 1994 and <i>Sunday</i> 2004.....	157
Research question five: .....	158
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> in 1984.....	159
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 and <i>20/20</i> in 1994.....	160
A comparison of <i>Close Up</i> and <i>Sunday</i> 1984 and <i>Holmes</i> in 1994.....	161
A comparison of <i>20/20</i> in 1994 and <i>Sunday</i> in 2004. ....	162
A comparison of <i>Holmes</i> in 1994 and <i>Holmes</i> in 2004. ....	163
General trends in 1984, 1994 and 2004. ....	164
Summary.....	164
CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS.....	168
Changing style of current affairs programmes .....	170
Analysis of political stories .....	172
<i>Close Up</i> - 21/6/84, Battle for the Beehive, 20.5 minutes length.....	172
<i>Holmes</i> , 30/3/94, 5.8 minutes.....	173
<i>Holmes</i> , 13/10/04, 9.5 minutes .....	174

<i>Holmes</i> , 15/7/04, 15.8 minutes .....	177
Analysis of economic/political Stories .....	178
<i>Sunday</i> -2/9/84, 46.55 minutes. ....	178
20/20, 14/2/94, <i>Unfinished Business</i> , 11.13 minutes .....	181
Analysis of public moral problems.....	184
<i>Close Up</i> , 20/9/84, ‘Dying for a Drink’, 16 minutes.....	184
<i>Close Up</i> , 4/10/84, <i>Unlawful Love</i> , 14 minutes.....	187
Public Moral Problem- Story three .....	190
<i>Holmes</i> , 15/7/94, 7.4 minutes.....	190
20/20, 17/1/94, <i>Keyboard Romance</i> , 11 minutes .....	193
<i>Sunday</i> , 5/9/04, 13 minutes.....	196
<i>Holmes</i> , 29/10/04, 5.7 minutes .....	198
Analysis of human interest/ entertainment/celebrity stories .....	201
<i>Close Up</i> , 20/9/84, ‘Dragon them in’, 12.8 minutes.....	201
<i>Close Up</i> , 16/8/84, Off the Air, 18 minutes .....	202
20/20, 4/4/94, Happier Days Mothers with a Mission,12.5 minutes .....	203
<i>Holmes</i> , 26/1/94, 7.8 minutes.....	205
<i>Sunday</i> , 11/7/04, Pom Pom Mom, 14 minutes .....	207
<i>Sunday</i> ,24/10/04, ‘Mad, Mad, World’, 13.3 minutes. ....	209
Summary.....	211
1984-1994 .....	212
2004.....	216
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	218
REFERENCES .....	234
APPENDIX 1:.....	246
APPENDIX 2.....	247
APPENDIX 3:.....	248

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 The Subject Classification System.....	117
Table 2 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1984 current affairslength displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1984 current affairs programmes.....	123
Table 3 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for Close Up 1984 and 20/20 1994le .....	125
Table 4 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for Sunday 1984 and 20/20 1994 .....	126
Table 5 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 20/20 in 1994 and Holmes 1994Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 20/20 in 1994 and <i>Holmes</i> 1994.....	127
Table 6 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1994 and 2004 current affairs programmes .....	128
Table 7 Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1984 and 2004 current affairs programmes .....	129
Table 8 Full subject category percentages for specific current affairs programmes over the three sampling periods.....	131
Table 9 Major subject category percentages for specific Current Affairs Programmes over the three sampling periods.....	133
Table 10 A comparison of the percentage totals (per sample) of the various entertainment categories between 1984 and 1994A comparison of the percentage totals (per sample) of the various entertainment categories between .....	143
Table 11 A comparison of the percentage totals per programme of various entertainment categories in 1994 and 2004A comparison of the percentage totals per programme of various entertainment cries i 1994 .....	146
Table 12 Source types occurrences for each current affairs programme sample .....	151
Table 13 Likert assesment of the extent to which sources provided evidence within given programme samples, 1984 and 1994assessment of the extent to which sources provided evidence within given programme .....	159
Table 14 Likert assessment of the extent to which sources provided evidence 1994 & 2004.....	162

Table 15 Cook's category classification system..... 247

## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Alan Cocker and Associate Professor Wayne Hope. Alan began the process and greatly helped the thesis take shape assisting me with setting the foundation for the study. Alan's wide knowledge of the field and perspective were extremely helpful in the writing of this thesis. I owe Wayne Hope a debt of thanks for his significant contributions to the thesis. His patience, insight and calm approach made the final part of the thesis possible.

I would also like to thank Edwin de Ronde for his important contribution of providing me with a version of his Campaign Mapping software which was adapted for this study. This greatly assisted me with the collection and collation of the data. I would also like to thank Jeanie Benson for her tireless support in this process. This is another significant milestone in a friendship of over twenty years. Finally I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father Dennis Baker and Grace who could not be there at the end.

## **ABSTRACT**

The changes to broadcasting content in New Zealand after deregulation have been widely explored in the case of television news. That research, undertaken by Joe Atkinson, Margaret Comrie and Daniel Cook demonstrated that deregulation had fundamentally changed the content, purpose and format of television news bulletins. Broadcasting in New Zealand went from what could be loosely termed public service broadcasting system to a commercialised system which had profound consequences for the state of broadcasting in this country. The effect of this was to change key areas like news into programmes that could help produce ratings driven profits and this reflected the advent of a highly commercialised television system pervaded by advertorials and sponsored programmes. The research carried out into the news after deregulation showed that it had become personalised, moreselised and depoliticised. This thesis examines another key area of New Zealand journalism. It investigates the changing nature of current affairs television programmes in New Zealand after the introduction of deregulation. Part of the sample includes programmes sampled from the Charter period. This period of time subsequent to the election of a Labour led government in 1999 was supposed to improve current affairs programmes by making them less focused on ratings and more focused on quality.

The research objective of this thesis is to examine what the consequences of deregulation and commercial pressures on current affairs television programmes are. This examination incorporates a quantitative content analysis of representative current affairs television programmes sampled from 1984, 1994 and 2004. The time span covers pre-deregulation, the deregulation period and the Charter period. This is complemented by a qualitative evaluation of the extent to which New Zealand current affairs television became structured as infotainment.

The quantitative results confirm that there has been a general reduction in item length; the proportion of serious and informational content declined as the

proportion of entertainment oriented subject matter increased. Source types altered over the research period with an increase in celebrity and sportspeople and a corresponding reduction in politicians and expert sources. Sources were also less likely to verify their viewpoints, as the research period unfolded.

The qualitative chapter confirms the findings of the quantitative chapter. It demonstrates how current affairs television programmes altered in style, format and information delivery. Structural changes such as faster paced cutting coincided with a rise in emotion on the part of the subjects interviewed and in the journalist's reactions when carrying out the interviews.

The research demonstrates that deregulation and commercial pressures produced current affairs television programmes in New Zealand that no longer functioned in the way they were originally designed to. Originally, current affairs programmes were designed to elaborate on news stories and highlight public issues by means of research and investigation. The research shows that the impact of deregulation has been far-reaching and problematic for current affairs television. Since deregulation there has been a complete extinction of certain topics and types of programmes. The prominence of current affairs programmes that are ratings friendly over all other key considerations for current affairs has effectively diminished the public sphere and short-changed democracy.

## **CHAPTER ONE: NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF CURRENT AFFAIRS TELEVISION**

The development of current affairs television must be placed in the context of the political economy of television production and broadcasting policy. In this regard I will focus here on the early forms of current affairs. Current affairs television has been shaped by two formative models of the genre.

In the British model current affairs programming evolved within a public service system that became more influenced by commercial imperatives in later decades. In the United States television broadcasting, almost from its inception, was commercially driven. As one writer has noted, Britain and the United States are “English-speaking, democratic, capitalist, modern and technologically advanced, yet have very different broadcasting systems” (Cook, 2000, p. 8).

New Zealand has been influenced by both models which helps explain a ‘hybrid’ broadcasting system which has combined public service and commercial elements (Cook, 2000). It is important to survey these two contrasting histories in Britain and the United States and to trace other influences, such as that from the country’s near neighbour Australia, before examining the New Zealand case.

There are three distinct phases of broadcasting development in New Zealand. From 1936 to 1961, broadcasting was largely controlled by the state. The second phase was from 1961 to 1989 when a public corporation was the model and public broadcasting was under the control of a board appointed by government, theoretically operating at arm’s length from government interference. Television’s funding was mixed, derived from a government-fixed licence fee and advertising. A radical shift took place from 1989-1999 with a move to market-led, commercially-driven broadcasting with Television New Zealand (TVNZ) operating as a State Owned Enterprise (SOE). In New Zealand broadcasting the push for ratings and the pressures to make a profit impacted heavily on programming at the public broadcaster TVNZ throughout the 1980s and 1990s. From 1989, following the deregulation of broadcasting, there were

major changes to the media environment with no limits on foreign ownership or cross-ownership of media companies, the lifting of restrictions on the commercial content of programming and an absence of local content quotas (Harcourt, 2000).

### ***British public service broadcasting***

Britain has long been regarded as the spiritual home of public service broadcasting. The spectrum for radio and later television were treated as assets of national importance for the health of a functioning democratic state. Broadcasting networks were seen to be vulnerable to exploitation by demagogic state elites and/or powerful commercial interests. These concerns originated from the manipulations of print media by warring states during the 1914-18 conflict where the states at war had used the 'propaganda capabilities' of the printed press to aid their war efforts (Cook, 2000; Comrie, 1996; Tracey, 1998). The first General Manager of the BBC, John Reith (later Lord Reith), was convinced that radio broadcasting should be distanced from the direct control of politicians and commercial interests. He argued that broadcasting should operate as a public service with the capacity to inform, educate and entertain. The requirement to inform found expression in a comprehensive domestic news service, international news coverage, current affairs programmes and documentaries. The perceived need to educate led to accusations of paternalism whereby the public could not be trusted to watch what they desired. Reith believed that public service broadcasting was based on four principles. First, broadcasting should be removed and protected from commercial pressures and profit. Second, the broadcasting of radio and television should be universally available to the whole country, Third, broadcasting should be established under "unified control" in the public interest. This led to the creation of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The fourth principle was that broadcasting should be regulated to ensure professional standards and quality programmes (Franklin, 2001, p. 20).

Behind these principles was an optimistic view of mass communication as a progressive element in society and a faith in British culture as a civilising force.

The British developed a relatively independent broadcasting system that could be favourably contrasted to the experience of fascism in Europe where print, radio and film were tools of propaganda.

The 1950s saw the BBC start to experience competition in the form of Independent Television (ITV). There was considerable debate in the British Parliament and also in media about the move to a new service of broadcasting. It was an academic at the London School of Economics, Ronald Coase who challenged the two arguments underpinning Public Service Broadcasting, spectrum scarcity and programming quality (Coase, 1950, as cited in Quinn, 2007). The Television Act became law in 1954 and the Independent Television Authority was established to regulate the new service. There was a fear that an independent television service would follow the American programming model and become excessively commercial. With the establishment of independent television the monopoly hold on broadcasting was broken. England was divided between three regions, London, the Midlands and the North of England, with each region run by a different company. Commercials were broadcast by the regional entities and the structure was shaped by the Television Act to ensure there was competition between the ITV channels as well as with the BBC. There was a requirement that the ITV companies provide local daily news and regular documentaries. The impact of the ITV channels was immediate and for a brief period of time real and sustained competition and choice were available to the audience. This impacted on BBC programming too where there was a new informality and more popular programming was produced.

By the 1960s broadcasting debates centred on the issues of quality, ownership and accountability. There were numerous reports and inquiries and a key report was that of the Pilkington Committee in 1960 which made a number of recommendations. Among these were the establishment of a second BBC channel and a network of local radio stations. The ITV network was also affected when it was suggested that the ITA schedule programmes for the ITV network. The role of advertising in the commercialised broadcasting environment was also raised and the committee suggested that a levy be applied. The committee believed that television audiences were vulnerable and

needed protection from broadcasters and that the programming made by ITV was of "poor aesthetic quality" (Collins, 2005, p. 10 as cited in Quinn, 2007, p. 83).

There were on-going criticisms of the duopoly and in 1977 the Annan Report had a profound impact on British Broadcasting. Critics were unhappy at what they perceived was a lack of accountability by the BBC even though it was the most important cultural organisation in the country. One of the most important findings of this committee was that no real privatisation of the BBC should be considered. The committee considered breaking up the BBC but stopped short of this as it considered the existing resources of the Corporation allowed for programming of high quality. It also considered the introduction of a fourth television channel and their prescription for this channel led to the innovative Channel 4 which had no production resources of its own but commissioned its programming from the independent production industry.

The precursor to deregulation of the British broadcasting system occurred in 1979 with the election of the Conservative government. Margaret Thatcher was leader of the Conservative party and her philosophy embodied deregulation, flexible labour markets and the sale of state owned companies and the withdrawal of subsidies. The Hunt Committee Report was commissioned to explore the possibilities of the telecommunications and broadcasting industries being opened up to market forces. It concluded that high capacity cable systems could provide better provision than those terrestrially delivered television and business services. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the ITV regulatory authority, and the BBC each expressed reservations about what they perceived would be an uneven playing field. For both these organisations, the unregulated cable stations would have an advantage in the competition for audiences over what was a highly regulated sector. This approach was to be a watershed moment for future broadcasting policy (Quinn, 2007).

Channel Four began broadcasting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1982 and is commercially self-funded though publicly owned. Originally it was part of the

IBA but then restructured as the Channel Four Corporation in 1990. The Broadcasting Act of 1980 was designed to ensure that the new channel would be different to the existing channels. The channel was to screen programmes designed to appeal to tastes not normally catered to by ITV and a number of programmes were to be of an educational nature. The channel was also encouraged to broadcast programmes that were innovative or experimental in form and content.

The entry of Channel Four challenged the television duopoly in Britain (Tulloch, 1990). It was established to provide services to audiences such as minorities and others with special needs and interests which were not provided for by commercial television. It was to mark a change in United Kingdom broadcasting to the degree that: "The UK television industry was cited as an exemplar of the transition from a Fordist mass production system of broadcasting to one concerned with 'flexible specialization'" (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996,p.126 as cited in Quinn, 2007, p. 69).

From the mid-1980s competitive threats increased for the established television system in Britain. The ITV network experienced competition from satellite broadcasters and the BBC battled politicians for increases in the licence fee. Throughout the 1980s real financial difficulties impinged on the BBC. In November 1979 the licence fee was raised for the fifth time over a ten year period. The BBC attempt to survive with a financial shortfall made cuts in the organization. The fee rise however was less than the amount the BBC wanted and the shortfall resulted in another committee of officials from the Home Office and BBC discussing the best way the organization could be financed (Tracey, 1998).

The Peacock Committee (1986) on financing the BBC became a landmark report. Peacock was directed to assess the impact of the introduction of advertising or sponsorship on the BBC's Home Services in the form of an alternative or supplement to the income already received through the licence fee. Many academics, broadcasters, trade unionists, MPs, and members of the public were united in their resistance to a report they believed was an attack on

the BBC (Franklin, 2001). The battle between the Conservative Governments of Margaret Thatcher and a corporation resistant to the 'Thatcherite approach' which privileged market forces as the driving force above that of public broadcasting was highly controversial.

Franklin says that no other report has proved so contentious; hyperbole abounded in many responses to Peacock. A conservative minister, for example dismissed the report as a 'dead duck'. Christopher Bland, then Head of London Weekend Television (LWT), argued that Peacock's idea of auctioning regional television franchises to the highest bidder was a 'pretty loopy procedure'.... (2001, p. 3). Overall the integrity of the report was seen as problematic and was challenged by many. There was a view that the mix of the committee meant that it would see an almost automatic introduction of advertising as a primary source of revenue for the BBC. As many critics believed this outcome was inevitable it was surprising when many of the government's policy ideals were rejected by the committee. However, many of the proposals were influential in shaping other aspects of broadcasting like financial and organisation structures, and also the regulation of the commercial sector of broadcasting. Some of the key recommendations were that the BBC and ITV be required to have a minimum of 40 per cent of their programmes supplied by independent producers, Channel 4 be given the option of selling its own advertising and that pay-per-view restrictions also be lifted as well as restrictions on cable and satellite services (Franklin, 2001). Where the major change occurred was in the recommendation where "the Committee argued for the supremacy of market forces and asserted the need for consumer sovereignty in shaping broadcasting services..." (Franklin, 2001, p.6). A transition strategy was implemented where broadcasting would move to a full market system. During this phase the BBC was to continue to be funded by a licence fee but it was to be inflation linked. In the second stage the licence fee was to be gradually changed to a subscription charge and stage three was to see a full transition to a 'functioning broadcasting market' made up of multiple channels, delivery systems and more diverse forms of charging and payment systems.

However, these recommendations on changing the financing of the BBC have

not been implemented. The two key documents, the Royal Charter and the Licence Agreement are still in operation in Britain and they govern the BBC's structure, operation and independence from the government of the day. The Royal Charter is constitutionally established and sets out the public purpose of the BBC. This also guarantees the independence of the BBC and outlines the duties of the Trust and the Executive Board. The current charter was granted to the BBC on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2006 and took full effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007 running until 2016. The current Charter replaces the 1981 charter and each Charter is periodically renewed by parliament and this review is both comprehensive and open to the public. The Charter works to ensure transparency for the BBC and allows Government and the public to evaluate and assess news and current affairs treatment of controversial topics. In the Charter's objects, for example, it outlines *how* the Licence and Agreement restrain the BBC from expressing editorial opinion on current affairs.

One of the key points of the BBC as an organisation are these structures which seek to ensure its independence from government interference in its activities. As the key promoter of public service broadcasting it is still funded through an annual licence fee paid by all households or organisations that receive live broadcasts. The fee is set by the British government and is agreed by parliament. The BBC was until 2007 governed by a Board of Governors, twelve people who regulated the BBC and represented the interests of the public. The Board of governors was replaced by the BBC Trust in 2007 and it sets the strategy for the corporation and assesses the performance of the BBC Executive Board. The Charter specifies the mission of the BBC and its public service obligations and states the Corporation's position to serve the public interest and promote its public purpose. Taken together these are key elements protecting the BBC's independence.

During the deregulatory drive of the Thatcher government in the 1980s the relationship between the BBC and the government was strained and in 1985 the Board of Governors bowed to government pressure and a programme was withdrawn which featured two Northern Ireland political activists. The conservative government of this time believed that the political news was biased

in favour of its political opponents. In 1985 the government complained about a *Panorama* programme which portrayed armed members of the IRA and then later the same year a documentary, *Real Lives*, was re-edited after the Prime Minister claimed that it offered terrorists the “oxygen of publicity” (Pilger, 2001, p.188). The issue of impartiality was addressed with an amendment to the organisation’s code of conduct. This was a legal and broadcasting precedent containing a statutory requirement for impartiality. The amendment, which was successfully incorporated into the 1990 Broadcasting Act, was controversial and created a great deal of resentment among broadcasters. The code was to ensure impartiality in all programming including news and current affairs as well as drama. Programme makers however believed the code was unworkable and the issue was better left to broadcasters’ professional judgement (Ibid). Journalist John Pilger was a vocal opponent of the bill and argued that the requirement for balance, which contained a proposal that programme makers would have to make additional programmes to ‘balance’ the sentiments expressed in a programme, would be unworkable. He believed the new attempt at ‘balance’ would make producers less likely to tackle controversial content and amounted to censorship. Pilger (2001, pp. 190-191) argued:

Investigative television journalism, enjoys a considerable reputation worldwide precisely because programmes expose and make public instances of corruption in government and business. Such programmes would subsequently be denounced as ‘one-sided’. The true purpose of the amendment was ‘control’.

Pilger suggests television has replaced the the press as the fourth estate in Britain and this shift alarmed those (Thatcher and other conservatives of the time) as not representing their ideological interests. He argued that much of the public:

...looks to television current affairs, documentaries and drama documentaries to probe the secrets of an increasingly unaccountable state. Every survey shows public approval of television current affairs and offers not the slightest justification for new restrictions....For more than a quarter of a century, Granada’s *World in Action* has exposed injustices, great and small and made the sort of enemies of whom serious journalists should be proud (Pilger, 2001, p.191).

Another problematic area is the funding of television programmes, especially those with a heavy research component. Pilger argues “factual programmes are

expensive, especially investigations that require time and patience” (2001, p. 191). Traditional public service broadcasting in Britain was paid for through a licence fee regardless of people’s enjoyment of the programmes or whether, indeed, they watched them at all. Those who are strongly critical of public service broadcasting such as Rupert Murdoch, the head of the media conglomerate News Corporation, attack the protection of public service funding:

For 50 years British television has operated on the assumption that the people could not be trusted to watch what they wanted to watch, so that it had to be controlled by likeminded people who knew what was good for us (Murdoch, 1989, p.39).

For Murdoch the ideology of public service broadcasting is outdated and “misrepresents an economically inefficient paternalistic and unaccountable broadcasting system, as the only organisational structure capable of delivering quality programmes and encouraging creative risk-taking in programme making” (Murdoch as cited in Franklin, 2005, p.131). Murdoch also concluded that the market-led American system has been more successful in creating “greater quality and diversity of programming than British television informed by the principles of public-service broadcasting” (Murdoch as cited in Franklin, 2005, p.132). An opposing assessment is encapsulated by the following remarks:

However, public service broadcasting did allow for a distance from the audience where programme makers could evaluate arguments and tensions in society without fear that programmes would be pulled from air for not rating. Public service broadcasting could reflect those tensions and debates without fear of losing revenue if it raised unpopular views and lost audience share (Cook, 2000).

Though the thinking behind public service broadcasting may appear paternalistic Pilger and other critics insist that public service broadcasting can facilitate the explanation of issues for the public good. The commercial model that Murdoch advocates may in essence suggest a freer more competitive and thus more diverse form of programme making, however, the pressures of attracting advertisers and ratings may overrule the coverage of controversial topics.

## ***The history and conception of 'current affairs' television programmes***

Current affairs television programmes were, from their inception seen as an important 'public service' element of the medium. They were initiated in Britain with *Panorama*, produced by Grace Wyndham Goldie and screened by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). *Panorama* is now the longest running current affairs programme in the world and focuses on investigative journalism. It was first broadcast in November 1953 and received poor reviews and was taken off the air to be revamped. *Panorama* returned a month later with a new presenter Max Robertson and from there began to make headway. In 1955 *Panorama* was re-launched with Richard Dimbleby as the main presenter and then later that year Robin Day. The presenters brought gravitas to the role and the programme went from strength to strength with its coverage of the Suez crisis in 1956 (BBC, n.d.).

Prior to this programme the background coverage of political and current events had not been a routine feature of weekly or nightly schedules. The genre built upon the shorter treatment of stories within news bulletins to give audiences a much needed understanding of important issues and to contribute to democratic life (Holland, 2006). The major distinction between current affairs programmes and bulletins of news was that the former allowed for journalists and 1interviewers to critique, pose questions, investigate and challenge (Holland, 2001). One early and central feature of current affairs television was the presentation of politicians to the public through studio appearances (Herman & McChesney, 1997).

The underlying ethos of the 'public sphere' has been central to the conception and evaluation of current affairs programming. Within public spheres political issues are discussed and debated and information that is important for citizen participation is disseminated. Media outlets and forums are central to this. Herman and McChesney suggest:

To some, the public sphere is exemplified by non-profit, non-commercial public service broadcasters like the British Broadcasting Corporation

(BBC), that tend to be relatively independent and therefore capable of some degree of 'objectivity'...The crucial factor in making this type of democratic public sphere viable is that there be no restriction on the range of political viewpoints and resources allocated in such a way that powerful economic and political actors cannot drown out the ideas of media representing the less powerful segments of society (1997, p. 3).

Media outlets and forms which see the audience as passive receivers are not forms of communication which might encourage civic involvement in the political process. However, the media's contribution to the public sphere is an "important determinant of the quality of democracy" (Herman & McChesney, 1997, pp.3-4). A weakened or poorly performing media ultimately has anti-democratic consequences. As Robert McChesney observes "People will be ignorant, isolated and depoliticized, demagoguery will thrive, and small elites will easily capture and maintain control over decision making on society's most important matters" (Ibid, p. 4).

The original definitions of current affairs referred to programme subject matter which was more in-depth than the news. Broadcast news usually consists of short items and is produced at high speed and for many journalists the news is a lead into current affairs where more time is spent on stories and reporting is in more depth and at greater length. Current affairs programmes are built on news stories, exploring the background and context to issues (Alysen, 2000). Current affairs also provide an arena for the discussion of stories that do not fit within the news bulletin framework. Current affairs could also focus on issues and stories that might unfold over weeks, months and years. The programmes which result provide the distinctive function of examining the context behind the events that made daily headlines (Holland, 2001)<sup>1</sup>.

The role of the journalist in early current affairs programmes is another important consideration. He or she ensured that the views of the public were presented to the politicians and insisted that the politicians present themselves to the electorate. In contrast with later personality-driven current affairs

---

<sup>1</sup> Holland says "The investigatory mode based on factual research has been the stock in trade of current affairs programmes from *Panorama* and *World in Action* to the *Cook Report*. These are prestigious programmes with substantial research budgets which, on occasion, have been able to sustain an investigation over a number of years" (1997, p. 163).

programmes the journalist's authority stemmed from their role as mediator rather than their celebrity status (Smith, 1974). During the early current affairs era viewers gained an expectation that every effort would be made to produce a fair account of the arguments or situation under examination (IBA, 1983-84). The impact of current affairs programmes was immediate and far reaching (Holland, 2001). They became important sources of information for millions of people, and were regarded as a vital interface between broadcasting and politics.

Alysen (2000) notes that since the original definitions current affairs has become a generic term for a range of material that could be termed current affairs, public affairs or, in some cases infotainment. She says, however, that the latter term references a philosophical shift from the traditional notion of understanding current affairs as a provider of context and background to the news. Newer generic understandings indicate that the genre's content has shifted over time. Content changes incorporate programme formats, styles of narration, juxtaposition of imagery and modes of address to the audience. Over the last twenty-five years these changes have occurred against a backdrop of an increasingly deregulated and commercialized broadcasting environment. To a greater or lesser extent this has been the experience in New Zealand, Australia, Britain and the United States.

Another important case study comparison to the New Zealand example is that of Australia, as it is New Zealand's closest neighbour. As current affairs were a flagship genre in British broadcasting; current affairs in Australia was regarded as a flagship television format "filling in the background to the news and serving as a key location for network identity, for the discharge of television's public information responsibilities, and for shaping debate" (Turner, 2005, p.1).

The Australian broadcasting system like New Zealand is a hybrid, and reflects the political economy of the industry. Initially it was based on the regulated British public broadcasting model though it still had a competitive base similar to the American system. That is, privately-owned commercial stations have existed alongside the public Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Criticisms aimed at the current affairs genre of the 1990s in Australia targeted similar issues that British and American critics have cited of their own countries programmes; the lack of time to make the programmes, the style of reporting being too filmic and interviews that were formulaically interrogative. As a genre it has changed to become a focus on entertainment and news values with combative, personality focused forms which are full of conflict (Hirst, White, Chaplin & Wilson, 1995).

### ***Current affairs programmes in Australia***

The ABC's weekly current affairs programme Four Corners began in 1961 and became the format by which other current affairs programmes were modelled. For example, like the British model, there was an acceptance that politicians were obliged to defend their positions when interviewed by television journalists. The first attempt at nightly current affairs started in 1965 with Telescope which was based on the 1950s programme Tonight. Telescope was originally intended as a twenty-five minute programme, four nights a week but it was altered to a fifteen-minute segment as part of the nightly news. It was later changed again in 1967 to become the first successful nightly current affairs show in Australia with This Day Tonight (TDT), which was a half-hour weeknight programme which ran until 1978. TDT was:

usually seen as the gold standard for Australian current affairs because of its commitment to investigative reporting, its evident relish in confronting politicians, and the fact that so many of those who worked on the program went on to become high-profile figures in Australian television...At its peak, *TDT* routinely topped the ratings for its timeslot (Turner & Cunningham, 2000, p. 93).

There were many variations of the model such as *A Current Affair* which began in 1971, *Willesee* and *Sixty Minutes*. In Australia, current affairs were one of the highest rating formats on television however Turner and Cunningham argue "few would deny that is well past its golden years" (Ibid, p.1). The 1980s and 1990s were the days of greatest success for the genre where the programmes and journalists who presented the programmes attracted a lot of attention. The major stars of this time who often graced the covers of magazines, were George Negus, Jana Wendt, Michael Willesee and Ray Martin.

The 1980s were an important period in the history of Australian broadcasting with the television industry going through a dramatic period of upheaval. Networks were sold for inflated prices and advertising was down. It was to the current affairs genre that management turned to resurrect their stations' ratings in the challenging market (Turner, 2005). Seeing the early evening timeslot of 6:00-7.30 pm as the place to build the audience for the night the networks tried many innovations to secure the audience. Many interventions were made to try and emulate the ratings success of the most successful programmes and market leaders such as *Sixty Minutes* and *A Current Affair* (Ibid). Current affairs programmes at their best have carried out a lot of investigations and uncovered state and official wrongdoing. *Four Corners* exposed police and government corruption in Queensland which initiated the Fitzgerald inquiry which resulted in two by-elections, the deposition of a premier, the jailing of three former ministers and a police commissioner who also lost his knighthood. Another *Four Corners* episode proved official involvement by the French in the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* and *60 Minutes* exposed a deep sleep scandal at a Sydney Hospital. *Foreign Correspondent* exposed another important hidden story with an expose of victims of famine in North Korea (Alysen, 2000).

By the end of the 1990s serious current affairs were in trouble on Australian commercial television to the point where like other western countries the condition was deemed to be terminal (Alysen, 2000). Further, Turner suggests that the sustainability of investment could not be maintained and that by the mid-1990s current affairs ratings had dropped. *Witness* produced in 1996 was the last quality primetime public affairs programme that struggled to rate because of being moved around the programme schedule and poor timeslots. He says that there are fewer examples of the long form current affairs programme on Australian television and that the decline of the genre has been a steady item of media commentary in recent years (Turner, 2005).

The debate over changes to the current affairs genre is topical in Australia where some argue that the changes to the formats are to do with entertaining the audience and represent a "philosophical shift from the traditional notion of

current affairs being to give context and background to issues in the news” (Alysen, 2000, p. 234). During the 1980s and 1990s the commercial free-to-air stations had tried serious night-time current affairs before feeling the pressure to remove them. In this time the Ten Network had produced *The Reporters* and *Page One* which were weekly programmes. Nine had *60 Minutes* which was a mixture of ground breaking stories and interviews with celebrities and human interest or ‘feel good’ pieces. There were attempts at more serious programmes such as *On Assignment* with Jana Wendt and Network Seven had a late night programme *The Times* and later launched *Witness* which was a high-profile, big budget programme. By 1999 all these programmes had gone with the exception of *60 Minutes* and even with this programme there was criticism that it had become more tabloid (Alysen, 2000).

Not all agree that the changes to Australian current affairs are simply based on trying to entertain the audience. There are those who believe that the motives and drivers to change are not audience based but more the result of commercial imperatives. Jana Wendt in 1995 was one of Australia’s highest paid journalists and she blamed cost pressures for a drop in the quality of news journalism generally:

When these commercial pressures get stronger and stronger it makes the journalist’s job harder and harder. It’s probably a function of the fact that people in senior editorial positions these days in news and current affairs are required to be as much businessmen as editors. I think money-making is the ruin of it. People are very conscious of the bottom line and that’s the overriding principle that governs news media now (Wendt, 1995, as cited in Alysen, 2000, p. 175).

In 1997 Wendt also criticised the minute by minute approach to tracking the reception of current affairs stories and argued the producers never wondered whether it was more the approach to a topic that the audience was rejecting rather than the issue itself. Failure to make this distinction, she argued, meant that the producers were less likely to screen stories that might challenge an audience; and key stories and issues were thus not tackled (Alysen, 2000, p. 175). Another key factor working against current affairs is the cost of investigative reporting. The investigations can take weeks or months to put together and are much more expensive and time consuming than more modern types of current affairs genres. It is much cheaper to make even a

'lavishly produced' infotainment or magazine item than the kind of outlay that high-quality current affairs programmes take. Those programmes regarded as 'infotainment' can often recoup much of their costs with contras, airline tickets, accommodation, and sponsorship which make the programme costs more commercially attractive to a network than a high cost investigative programme. Current affairs television became part of the commercial competition between the networks in Australia with both the Seven and Nine Networks competing on weekday nights at 6.30 pm to capture the audience from 7.00 pm onwards. Competition in current affairs and news had been strong since the 1980s with the programmes mirroring each other in timeslot, format and the types of stories. The competition was so intense there was an increase in chequebook journalism and entertainment-oriented stories that presented the spectacular, sensational, the conflictual and the visual. The presentation style, often described as hyperbolic, has like many other western countries resulted in criticism of tabloidisation.

In the 1980s there were attempts at hybrid comedy, news and current affairs programmes. The first attempt was called *Newsworld* and was presented by Clive Robertson who would decide what subjects to read throughout the programme. Highly idiosyncratic, Robertson made acerbic comments and would screw up stories when he did not want to read them. This style of programme was replicated with *Kennedy's News Hour* in 1988. Kennedy was a comedian and only made the slightest attempt to read the news in an objective style and contributed comedic commentary throughout. All of these programmes subverted the conventions of the genres of news and current affairs. The programme most often targeted as representative of the Americanisation or tabloidization of the genre is *A Current Affair*. This programme has rated well, however critics suggest this is because of the types of subject matter that entertains audiences, such as small business scams, weight loss treatments, foot-in-the door, or attack journalism. A consequence of this approach to current affairs has been a withdrawal from the primary objective, to provide background and analysis of news stories (Turner & Cunningham, 2000).

## ***Public affairs television in the United States***

The first regular American TV news programme *Camel News Caravan* began in 1947, and was broadcast by the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). *Camel News Caravan* was sponsored by Camel Cigarettes and the commercial aspect of the news was established (Tracey, 1995; Wheen, 1985). Within all major networks short news bulletins were designed to retain audiences in a commercial television environment. Current or public affairs programmes developed from this and gave more in-depth treatment of news items. The first current affairs programme for United States television was made in 1951 and called *See it Now* (Tracey, 1995).

In Britain, when commercial broadcasting began in competition to the BBC in the 1950s, an ethos of public service broadcasting endured outside of the BBC (Cook, 2000). Commercial television incorporated elements of public service ethos from the beginning (Scannel as cited in Comrie, 1996, p. 17). The Television Act of 1954 aimed to marry public service broadcasting with commercial imperatives. The Independent Television Authority owned and operated the transmitting stations on behalf of the commercial companies and regulated them according to public service principles. They were to become highly profitable which made the need for public service programming obligations placed upon them by the Independent Television Authority (ITA) acceptable. Under the legislation Independent Television ITV was also to inform, educate and entertain according to the same standards as the BBC (Comrie, 1996).

In the United States the networks saw news as a loss leader and supported the costs of news and current affairs programming from the profits of their 'entertainment' output. However, the degree of commercialism intensified in the 1980s and 1990s with the growth and proliferation of satellite and cable networks. This led to a philosophical change that news should pay. The move away from the current affairs programmes pioneered in the 1950s began in the 1970s. With the broadcasting of local news on local stations, there came a

realisation that news was cheap, reliable, popular and therefore good for revenues whereas public affairs programming was a relatively expensive genre (Tracey, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

In the present environment, advertising revenue, audience ratings, and “good” demographics are the measure of success as calculated each night (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998)<sup>3</sup>. In the mid to late 1970s new magazine formats such as *60 Minutes* and *20/20* proved especially effective and not as costly as other prime-time public affairs programmes. The 1980s saw dramatic changes take place in the United States broadcasting environment. Prior to this the system was characterised by networks that integrated television stations and audiences on a nationwide scale. Based on a radio era the model reached its highest point in the 1960s and 1970s when the three networks dominated television broadcasting. Since that time the power of the networks has diminished and audiences like other western countries, now watch hundreds of channels. There are six conglomerates that dominate the market, operating hundreds of channels broadcast to America and the world, in what is an increasingly commercial broadcast environment (Curtin & Shattuc, 2009).

The contemporary broadcasting environment in the United States came about through a series of policy decisions made in the 1920s and 1930s that gave “primary use of the airwaves to the corporate sector” (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998, p. xv). Fearful of foreign takeover it was deemed more important for America to have local commercial corporations controlling the sector. From the late 1940s until the late 1970s the three networks of ABC, NBC and CBS dominated American television and regulation prevented possible competitors competing with them.

During the 1960s social movements such as the civil rights, feminism, and the

---

<sup>2</sup> As the battle for ratings and revenue increased, production techniques from the other television departments were co-opted by news and current affairs divisions like ‘music, graphics and market research (Lumby p. 45)

<sup>3</sup> The focus here is on commercial mainstream networks and not on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Unlike Britain, which has a strong public broadcasting history, PBS started after commercial television in the USA (1967) and does not have the same central tradition in American television.

Vietnam anti-war movement were representative of tensions and changes in American society. The commercial television's depiction of America as an all-inclusive democratic culture was challenged by social upheavals. There was a recommendation for the establishment of a Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) modelled on public service goals. In 1967 a law created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It was to have an "educative function, reflect the diversity of American society and provide a forum for public debate and controversy" (Cook, 2000, p.46; Curtin & Shattuc, 2009). The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was also to provide for those audiences not served by commercial broadcasters. Thus in 1967 the Public Broadcasting Act set up the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) to oversee the public broadcasting service. The private corporation distributes public tax dollars as grant money to the 360 stations that make up PBS (Curtin & Shattuc, 2009). There was a lot of fear from the commercial networks around the creation of the PBS and the networks lobbied intensely against its creation. PBS's quality of programmes and output has thus been hampered by a lack of funding which has made it vulnerable to pressure by politicians and pressure groups (Comrie, 1996; Curtin & Shattuc, 2009).

By the late 1970s the government regulation that had prevailed began to change and with this came the idea that market activity could effectively regulate broadcasting networks (McChesney, 2004). By the early 1980s, under Ronald Reagan's Presidency, funding for public service television was reduced and this led to a reliance on commercial activities such as corporate sponsorship to support programming. Under these circumstances neo-liberal, free-market views obtained a forum. Notably Milton Friedman, the proponent of free market economics was able to propound his views in the series *Free to Choose*. Under a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chaired by Michael Fowler, many of the regulatory structures that had been established to ensure public service broadcasting were dismantled. Public service broadcasting was to be regarded as just another business (Cook, 2000).

Restrictions on commercial television were removed by Reagan as he reduced funding to the CPB and forced them to look for sponsorship. Public television

received increasing regulatory monitoring where there was a right of rebuttal to left wing views but the same right was not extended to any conservative expression of opinion (Debrett, as cited in Cook, 2000, p. 31). The FCC also came under pressure at this time and regulatory structures were affected by, for example the rule of social responsibility in commercial broadcasting being removed.

The television industry in America was transformed when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) freed up ownership restrictions. Initially the number of television stations grew (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998)<sup>4</sup> and individual stations began to change hands more frequently. Meanwhile cable viewership increased and the audience for the broadcast networks decreased. The fight for audiences sharpened with changes in legislation and the spread of new technologies.

Prior to the Reagan era the network news divisions had operated without much regard for budget restrictions and were not under the same demands as other departments to make a profit. News was the only truly serious and responsible aspect of a network organization whose primary mission was entertainment (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1998). In this regard former CBS news president Richard Salant told a conference in 1990 that he:

Took pride in being known at CBS as the executive in charge of losing money... The entertainment programmes like sitcoms made the money and docs and public affairs programmes were regarded as prestigious loss leaders (Salant as cited in Tracey, 1995, p.132).

In the 1980s there was a move to a local news focus and this received criticism "that local news was singularly untouched by substance or journalistic merit", resulting in an erosion of serious television journalism (Tracey, 1995, p. 131). In the 1980s as the networks became part of larger conglomerates, considerable pressure was brought to bear on news divisions to increase profits and reduce costs. For example, Walt Disney owns ABC, acquired in 1996, and owns many other media companies. News Corp owns Fox and other media companies too.

---

<sup>4</sup> Another important period of government legislation incorporated neo-liberal assumptions which altered the mediascape in the 1980s. During this period there was a decisive increase in the domination of media policy making by business. The net effect was to see well-funded policy activists begin working to see that "public interest regulation was reduced and ultimately discontinued" (McChesney, 2004, p.48).

By the mid-1980s, Wall Street investment banks and other financial institutions favoured the consolidation of television stations, radio and other media into corporate station groups. This move to media consolidation was also favoured by the FCC and other American government agencies (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006, p. xxii). The arrival and spread of cable and regional networks increased the battle for ratings at the expense of journalistic enquiry. The coverage by television of the 'real' world had by the 1970s changed from an ethos of journalism to one of entertainment (Tracey, 1995).

There was a sharp reduction in television documentaries and public affairs programme formats after 1982 under Reagan as commercial pressures hit broadcasters. Where previously topics like defence, foreign affairs, history, culture and crime were the favoured subjects, these changed to personal subjects such as health, drugs and lifestyle (Mascaro, 1994, p. 239). These changes reflected assumptions (such as a desire to be entertained), about what the audience wanted. The new form of public affairs television programme was exemplified by *A Current Affair* which started screening in 1986. This programme included traditional human interest stories and racier segments which included wet t-shirt competitions and strippers (Lumby, 1999). Additionally the personality of the anchor became just as important as the content of the information being communicated. The first celebrity journalists were Woodward and Bernstein, whose investigations brought down Nixon and so began the rise in journalists as celebrities, a trend that has been seen since then. The advent of new magazine programmes fronted by celebrity journalists was especially evident in the case of *60 Minutes* (Tracey, 1995).

A ratings success, *60 Minutes* has consistently been a top ten current affairs programme in the United States for the past 25 years and it has been number one in the ratings on 16 occasions and has never been lower than tenth (Tracey, 1995). Its success can be attributed to a number of factors. Each episode has three or four stories ranging from the serious to the amusing and flippant in its subject matter. Part of its appeal is that it cues the emotional investment from the audience. Don Hewitt the 'father' of *60 Minutes* described his ideas for the programme as follows: "If we packaged reality as well as

Hollywood packages fiction, I'll bet we could double the ratings" (Chicago Tribune, 1981, p. 15). Heightening the emotional and entertainment appeal was a strategic move designed to win audiences. The *60 Minutes* format was copied in programmes such as *20/20*, *48 hours*, *Prime Time Live*, *Street Stories* and *Day One* (Tracey, 1995). In the 1980s, *60 Minutes* cost less to produce than prime-time dramas and earned higher ratings.

These programmes were driven by story selection and through the popularity of presenters like Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs (Madsen, 1984). Magazine format programmes were criticised however for their one-sided and sensational handling of events and reporting (Black, 1987). An analysis by Shaw suggests the programmes "don't ask the critical question that will provide important insights or a sense of fair play" (Shaw as cited in Black, 1987, p.4). The programmes in Shaw's analysis omitted important information in the stories covered, showing a lack of serious journalistic skills.

Alongside the changes brought about by deregulation in the 1980s, rapid technological growth has meant competition from new technologies such as satellite, cable television and the internet which added extra pressure to this complex environment. The viewing possibilities for audiences expanded with the arrival of video equipment and wider choices of channels to watch. Critics suggest that in reaction to fierce commercial pressure current affairs have become watered down, often delivering a 'context free' snapshot of reality, steeped in tabloid values (Comrie & Fountaine, 2005b; Franklin, 1997; Herman & McChesney, 1997).

### ***Current affairs programming in New Zealand***

Current affairs television programmes on New Zealand television began with *Compass* in 1963 produced by Alan Morris (Day, 2000). *Compass* often imported films from overseas current affairs documentaries but also addressed both domestic and international issues from a New Zealand point of view (Ibid). *Column Comment* followed in 1964 and was a long running, widely watched commentary on New Zealand journalism.

Current affairs programmes dealt with political issues and this was a new experience for New Zealand television audiences, broadcasting executives and politicians alike. The Holyoake administration of the 1960s became the first New Zealand administration to experience critical questioning from television news and current affairs. Politicians were extremely wary of the new forms of current affairs programmes and made a number of demands which led many to believe that these programmes were still open to government intervention or at least self-censorship (Day, 2000). An example of the subservience exhibited by programme makers in this time was to do with New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War. It was a contentious topic that was not addressed by *Compass*. This was not due to a lack of awareness by the programme makers, (including producer, reporters and researchers) but rather there was reluctance on the part of the NZBC's controllers to air controversial content. They were attempting to appease conservative voters and international allies involved in the war. This was also an example of a public broadcaster neglecting to provide a full range of views on a major topic and failing to address the audience as citizens (Hayward, 2003). In 1968 this was to change with the replacement of *Compass* with a new programme entitled *Gallery* (Day, 2000). Old constraints were discarded and interviewers and producers were able to engage more forthrightly with politicians and other community leaders (Saunders, 2004). This was believed to be a coming of age for New Zealand current affairs programmes with Brian Edwards as the main interviewer and Des Monaghan as producer (Boyd-Bell, 1985). It was during these years that current affairs broke from its past restrictions. Monaghan encouraged Edwards to adopt the persona of "the assertive, even aggressive interviewer... (and) during these years the style of current affairs reporting broke decisively with the past" (Day, 2000, p. 141).

The history of the New Zealand broadcasting system is marked by regular adaptations of overseas models and formats. From the start the ideals of independent public broadcasting as conceived by the BBC were undermined by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service (NZBS). Nationwide television was established in New Zealand in 1960 and was a state-owned monopoly operated by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service funded by commercial advertising

and a licence fee (Spicer, Powell & Emanuel, 2001).

The 1962 Broadcasting Corporation Act transformed the New Zealand Broadcasting Service (NZBS) from a government department into a publicly-owned entity the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC). One of the stated aims was to allow for a greater distancing from political interference. This was limited in practice as the NZBC still had to comply with the government's general broadcasting policy and to comply with directives issued by the broadcasting minister (Hayward, 2003). The government decided on its advent in 1961 that television would be part-commercial. So New Zealand television has always been subject to some measure of commercial ratings pressure. Early in the 1980s Television New Zealand (TVNZ) was still operating under a semblance of public service principles. The Broadcasting Act of 1976 charged TVNZ with public service requirements for its information programming, especially in regards to news and current affairs. The Broadcasting Council was established, and all broadcasting services were placed under the control of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand (BCNZ) (Spicer, Powell & Emanuel, 2001). The importance of news was recognised with both regional and network forms. TVNZ deemed it a matter of policy that its first programming responsibility was to news and current affairs<sup>5</sup>.

As previously stated, one of the first current affairs programmes made was *Compass* which screened in October 1964. It was deemed an important step in presenting New Zealanders with a sense of direction generated from their own country as opposed to the majority of programmes that were brought in and screened from overseas. The intention of the programme was to present a weekly half hour of current affairs programmes consisting of three items and using overseas resources to balance local items. The importance of *Compass* was that it reported on stories from New Zealand and the world from a New Zealand perspective. The typical subject matter that *Compass* covered was

---

5

In Part three, passage 22 of the Act, it states that the broadcaster is to:

- a) To ensure that each Service operates as a public service to provide and produce programmes which inform, educate, and entertain.
- (b) To establish a system for the gathering of news for television and a system for the gathering of news for radio; and to make such news available for the Services.

stories on drug addiction, defence, sex education, immigration and liquor laws. *Compass* was unique in dealing with stories of political importance and many programmes had a difficult time making it to air. Gordon Bick, the producer eventually resigned in September 1966 when a programme on decimal currency was banned. The controversy involved the inclusion of a Melbourne accountant who was campaigning that the move to decimal currency brought with it alleged price rises. Rob Muldoon, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for finance refused to allow Decimal Currency Board members to appear on the programme and required that he should be the only person to present the government's case. The NZBC had a ban on politicians appearing on current affairs and this meant there was an impasse. The producer resigned and the programme did not air until three months later (Boyd-Bell, 1985).

Brian Edwards joined the programme in 1968. He started with subject matter such as Islanders in Auckland, Alcoholics and Jehovah's Witnesses. Both audiences and critics noticed Edward's combative style and a new era was born in current affairs programmes. *Compass* faced difficulties and controversies and in 1968 was under fire over whether it was appropriate to debate broadcasting politics on television while a new bill on television was being debated. In 1969 *Compass* took a lower key role while *Gallery* moved into the edgier topics and more controversial programmes. *Compass* did produce further programmes but continued to be plagued by controversies when the NZBC administration suggested that a programme on the Chatham Islands lacked balance and impartiality. When the script was rewritten presenter Keith Aberdein refused to voice it and he was dismissed. 1969 saw the arrival of a national television network, the continued success of *Gallery* and continued upheavals in production. *Compass* was replaced by a non-topical documentary series called

*3Survey* and *Gallery* became the flagship current affairs programme (Boyd-Bell, 1985).

By the 1970s television news and current affairs were well established and nightly-regional news magazine programmes followed after the Network News each weeknight. *Gallery* was screened twice a week with Des Monaghan as

producer and Brian Edwards the lead presenter. Monaghan believed that one of the purposes of the programme was to hold politicians to account. Though *Gallery* was identified with Monaghan and Edwards, when it first went to air in 1968 it was a fifteen minute studio-based programme broadcast on Friday nights which discussed topical political issues. When Edwards took over as presenter he was supported by David Beatson, Geoff Walker and Peter Debreceeny. Many controversial issues were dealt with by *Gallery* such as allegations of police mistreatment of anti-Vietnam and anti-war protestors and there appeared on the programme a string of international guests such as Han Suyin, Duke Ellington, Denis Brutus, Pierre Trudeau, Yehudi Menuhin, Leonard Cheshire and Geoffrey Rion. Brian Edwards in May 1970 won a substantial settlement for a libel case against *Truth* for claiming he was politically biased in his current affairs interviews. Edwards secured his position as a powerful current affairs interviewer when in September 1970 he managed to get both sides of a postal dispute to return to negotiation. Edward's interviewing style was important as he was probing, challenging and confrontational and this approach tested politicians and other public figures. One example of the interviewing style was the interview with South African heart transplant surgeon Dr Christian Barnard. Edward's grilled him about the ethics of the early transplants and also his playboy image. These questions had been raised overseas but the style of interview led to a round of complaints about a lack of politeness to visitors by the audience though the interview made for interesting viewing. It did eventually win a Feltex award though there was a public outcry about the style of interviewing Edward's displayed. The approach was common in overseas current affairs programmes but not in New Zealand and this raised the profile of current affairs programmes and Edwards in particular (Boyd-Bell, 1985).

31

*The Brian Edwards Show* began in December 1970 after Edwards became tired of being confined to the role of current affairs interviewer and the pilot included satire and music and there was a famous confrontation between Rob Muldoon, the Minister of Finance and critics which was recorded before a live audience. The controversy about whether to screen the pilot continued for weeks and eventually the videotape was destroyed. Edwards did not renew his contract on *Gallery* for another year. David Excel a top political journalist was recruited to take Edwards' place and a Canadian reporter Joe Cote also joined a programme which continued to attract periodic controversy. Des Monaghan left in 1972 after being transferred to the sports section. The entire broadcasting system was under scrutiny after the new Labour government was elected and current affairs were revamped. *Gallery* altered to provide a "topical follow-up and explanation of current events" (Boyd-Bell, 1985, p. 177). *Inquiry* was a new current affairs programme that was to be screened weekly and was less responsive to immediate issues. The staff that had been on *Gallery* was then divided between the two programmes and *Inquiry* was to produce documentary films on a three week turnaround where the time was spent on research, filming and editing and then broadcasting (Ibid).

By 1974 *Gallery* had finished its run and producers were considering the possibility of a five day a week show. They finally decided to continue with *Inquiry* on Wednesday nights and *World Scene* on Friday and a new programme *Nationwide* screened on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday nights. *Nationwide* was the first attempt at national nightly current affairs which became the model that current affairs was to follow.

The 1973 election saw the third Labour government elected and they planned to make two substantial changes to broadcasting. These plans were to introduce colour television and also add a second channel. Roger Douglas Minister of broadcasting planned to introduce a new system of broadcasting which was to introduce competition amongst broadcasters while not fully embracing private enterprise. The NZBC under this plan was to be broken into three corporations. The Corporation of Radio New Zealand which would in effect control all the radio held by NZBC; Television Service One was to

continue to control the original channel and Television Service Two was to control the second channel on its arrival. There was a committee set up on broadcasting under the chairmanship of Kenneth Adam the director of the BBC from 1961-1968 (Day, 2000).

The Adam Committee report of 1973 was an important document that changed the direction of television in New Zealand. The 1960s had been a formative stage for television in New Zealand and the emphasis up to this point was to extend transmission around the country. The first discussion of public service aims for television was articulated in the 1973 Adam report which was also designed to deal with the move from one to two channels. The report criticised the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) for its limited range of programmes. It linked the expansion in television production with the potential “fostering of cultural identity” (Dunleavy, 2008, p. 801). The report specifically mentioned news and current affairs as important genres that needed fostering. The report said:

We are first and foremost convinced that news, which in broadcasting terms means bulletins of anything from 2 to 20 minutes length and comprises the straightforward and factual reporting of a wide series of events whether by picture or in voice should be separated from and seen to be separated from the application and analysis which are commonly described as current affairs programmes...Secondly we are certain that urgent attention must be given to the development of new formats in current affairs programming, where unlike most other fields of output, there is already healthy development (Adam Report, 1973, p.9).

In 1975 the government changed and National assumed office. They decided to amalgamate the broadcasting services again and halt any duplication of television news and current affairs. Television One provided current affairs with *Dateline Monday* which was film based and on Thursdays screened the studio-based *Prime-Time*. Television Two had a similar pattern and a weekly programme *Encounter* became *Perspective* and *Friday Conference* was moved to Thursday. Twice a week *After Ten* was screened and this programme then became *Eyewitness* with a strong reporting team favourably compared to the earlier *Gallery*. What had been a five year period of upheaval then culminated in 1980 when Television New Zealand was formed, and the news and current

affairs staff of both channels were amalgamated and the headquarters of news services moved to Auckland. After this change news and current affairs were then focused on Network One and regional news-magazines were reintroduced in the four main centres. Network Two in contrast was limited to news bulletins in the evenings though *Eyewitness* continued on TV2. A significant new development around this time was the introduction of *Video Dispatch*, a news programme for children, and the arrival of *Foreign Correspondent* which provided an outlet for the best television current affairs reporting from international broadcasters. Ian Fraser also presented *Newsmakers* and his skills and authority in interviewing meant the programme moved from an early evening slot to prime-time Sunday night viewing (Boyd-Bell, 1985).

Another programme that grew in popularity was *Close-Up* which took over the role that *Compass* had played, beginning with a prime-time Sunday slot before shifting to a prime-time commercial time mid-week. The mix of programmes remained stable for two years and included the addition of *News Review* which was a weekly review of major news stories that were specially presented and captioned for deaf viewers. Another programme, *Midweek*, was introduced in 1980-1981 over the summer and this played in the traditional summer gap of current affairs programmes at this time of the year (Ibid).

In 1982 there was another reshuffle of programmes and the evening news was consolidated into one hour-long package on One which included the *Network News* and *Nationwide* which was followed by the regional magazine programmes. *Nationwide* was then dropped and the *Network News* extended to fill the time and this allowed for greater sports coverage. By mid-1985 there was stability in programming with Television One's main news from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm and this hour incorporated the four regional magazine programmes. There was a shorter version of the news screened on Television Two for ten minutes at 5.45 pm followed by five minutes of *Te Karere*. *Eyewitness News* was screened on that channel at 9.30 pm for thirty minutes. *Close-Up* was screened on One and the studio based *Sunday* took over from *Newsmakers* on Sunday nights. There was an addition made for the younger viewers with *Viewfinder*

screened for teenagers. *Foreign Correspondent* by this point had secured a peak-time position on Saturday nights (Boyd-Bell, 1985).

Broadcasting took a new direction turn in the late 1980s. As in commercially driven Britain and the United States, the New Zealand television market became more competitive. Cook suggests: “The changes to broadcasting in New Zealand were part of a wider change to economic and to a degree, political orthodoxy, throughout much of the western world” (Cook, 2000, p6).<sup>6</sup>

In 1984 the fourth Labour Government was elected with an agenda to reform the economy using the prescription of neo-liberal economics. Television New Zealand was changed from an organization that loosely embodied aspects of public service television, to an organization whose remit was to make a profit (Harcourt, 2000). It went from state-owned organisation to a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) where it was obliged to deliver an annual dividend to the shareholder, the government, and operate with the same business principles as its commercial rivals. The process of corporatization opened the market up to both local and overseas competition (Comrie & Fontaine, 2005). A radical shift in the corporate culture at TVNZ occurred between 1987 and 1990. New Zealand’s publicly-owned two-channel television system was transformed into a commercial three-channel market-driven system.

From 1987 to 1990, TVNZ confronted competition from TV3 and a number of narrowcasters (Atkinson, 1994b). This preceded a shift toward softer, tabloid news (Cook, 2000). One consequence was “a rising tide of criticism about ‘quality’, particularly in the top-rating *One News* and various current affairs programmes” (Comrie & Fontaine, 2005, p. 102). The *Holmes* show (1989-2004) became TVNZ’s flagship current affairs programme though it was considered by some critics to be an unabashedly infotainment programme. The programme replaced the regional programmes that had screened at 7 pm and was much criticised for being ‘Auckland-focused’ in its outlook. The brief for *Holmes* suggests that the programme was designed to provide a compelling mix of topics, ranging from an emphasis on a central issue of the day to lighter

---

<sup>6</sup> New Zealand in fact, took the deregulation model of broadcasting further than these other nations

'human interest' features. The entire programme was presenter-driven, with Paul Holmes engaging with and demonstrating full ownership of the content. Even the most apparently difficult subject matter was to be treated comprehensibly so as to attract large audiences. (Holmes, n.d).<sup>7</sup> This surely was a tip to the more entertainment-oriented approach, designed to sustain the viewers already watching from the news.

The *Holmes* programme represented a departure from traditional current affairs and is an important area for research. *Holmes* aimed to represent the perspective of ordinary people in battles with bureaucrats, politicians and other sundry authorities. Holmes said of his own programme:

We used humour. This was a sin and, despite the tradition of cartoons, the newspapers had a terrible problem with it. Holmes was 'infotainment'. It was, I felt, a term used by snobs of dull intelligence and little imagination (Holmes, 1999, p.31).

Holmes believed his programme was more democratic and less elitist than other programmes and backed the ordinary person. It was this pitch to the 'ordinary' that Holmes argued made his programme work. Critics however, were less impressed with the trends *Holmes* represented. Saunders argues:

Whereas audiences in other English speaking countries can hear really good current affairs interviews and debates, that option is not available here, unless you subscribe to Sky TV, or use the web (2004, p.32).

Saunders (2004) argues that current affairs became interviewer focused and that good current affairs were no longer available on TVNZ. This was a departure from the ideal of public broadcasting where these aspects would be freely available to all citizens.

### ***The 1990s and 2000s: Current affairs in crisis***

As neo-liberal ideology, deregulation, technological advances and commercialisation advanced during the 1990s and early 2000s many observers

---

7

This programme brief was written by TVNZ but does not contain a date or publication title. It was written when the *Holmes* programme was first aired.

concluded that current affairs television was in crisis. In Britain and the United States, Australia and New Zealand, these changes have heavily impacted on the genre to the extent that questions are raised as to whether these programmes are still 'current affairs'. The original concept of current affairs programmes was around exploring issues in depth. McChesney (2008, p.39) says of the commercialisation of the media:

In this context, journalism increasingly became subjected to an explicit commercial regimentation; the protection from commercial pressure provided by professionalism was undermined...The rise of commercial news media enabled by new technologies - in particular round-the-clock TV news channels and the Internet - have increased the need for ongoing attention-getting stories, with less emphasis on their significance of the story by traditional standards.

The newer style current affairs programmes were affected by this move to commercialisation and appear to take the name of the genre but not carry out the original function. Previously the importance of current affairs and news was in their focus of nurturing public debate about issues that matter. While arguments around the shift to more entertainment-oriented current affairs continue, not everyone believes that the perceived entertainment focus is all audience-driven, and many see the dramatic changes to the genre as a result of the shift to commercial imperatives where ratings and sponsorship and advertising revenue are the marks of success. The impact of deregulation and commercialisation has only increased into the 1990s and 2000s. As previously mentioned, one aim of the political economy approach is to understand media institutions through an analysis of the environment in which they operate and it is clear that the genre of current affairs will be affected by changes to the broadcasting environment that demand that advertisers are the real customers of a commercial media organisation and the pressure this builds to shield advertisers from complicated or expensive stories. It also maps the impact of a dramatic change of approach with broadcasting philosophy and previous New Zealand research into the news shows that deregulation has significantly impacted on the way news programmes are produced. As such the move from a largely public service approach to a highly commercial model is important to examine.

With the change in approach to broadcasting and a highly commercial imperative driving programme making in New Zealand, it is clear there has been a philosophical change from the traditional view of current affairs where context and background were essential underpinnings of the genre to one where ratings became the key measurement of a programme's success. One problem with a move to a more entertainment-oriented or personalised form of news and current affairs is that the social or institutional context is often removed. New Zealand current affairs have often inherited a history of policy and legislative changes which closely mirrors Britain and the United States. The pursuit of ratings and revenue has resulted in the hybridisation of current affairs television<sup>8</sup>. This study sets out to map these changes to current affairs programmes in New Zealand and to examine whether the respected formats of the past that offered context, depth and serious commentary represent the norms of a discarded television genre and the degree and extent of the impact of deregulation on this key element of information programming.

---

<sup>8</sup> By this it is meant a combination of entertainment and infotainment programmes rather than a strictly traditional current affairs focus.

## **CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTUALISING THE CHANGING GENRE OF CURRENT AFFAIRS TELEVISION**

In order to place New Zealand current affairs television programmes in context I have surveyed the relevant literature from Britain, the United States and New Zealand. Britain and the United States have pioneered many of the genres seen on western television. As I have outlined both have different histories of broadcasting development. Britain was the home of public service broadcasting principles while the United States has always followed a commercial model with, since the late 1960s, a modest public broadcasting component. As each system has experienced various levels of deregulation and competition they provide a useful benchmark to evaluate the changes that have taken place in New Zealand television broadcasting. This chapter will discuss research concerning the political economy approach, broadcasting deregulation, genre changes in current affairs and the associated tendencies of tabloidization and infotainment. Each section explores the definitions of the terms used.

### ***The political economy approach***

The structures of broadcasting in New Zealand dramatically altered after the mid 1980s. To examine these changes I draw upon political economy research concerning institutional structures, patterns of media ownership, broadcasting revenue streams, technical changes and other factors that shape media organisations and content (Casey, Casey, Calvert, French & Lewis, 2002, McChesney, 1998). In this regard Wasko (2004) says that “the general study of political economy draws on 18<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish enlightenment thinking and its critique in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p.309). Its primary focus was on the “production, distribution, exchange and consumption of wealth and the consequences for the welfare of individuals and society” (p.309). In this context early theorists studied the systemic nature of capitalism.

As capitalism evolved critical political economy evolved with Karl Marx and Frederich Engel’s class analysis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a radical critique of the “evolving capitalist system through a moral stance in opposition to the

unjust characteristics of that system” (Wasko, p.310). In the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century economic issues were studied differently and the focus moved from macro analysis to micro analysis with an emphasis on individual as opposed to societal concerns. The name of the discipline changed from political economy to economics.

The study of political economy is important as media create and distribute many of the symbolic resources of the world. Media are major institutions “in the economic and political fabric of our societies” (ibid). Such institutions are also the vehicle which connects the world of production to the world of consumption through advertising and promotional culture.

Today, political economy is manifest within several different paradigms. Wasko says “several conservative versions have emerged, including a corporatist approach and public choice theory (also known as the new or positive political economy)” (p.310). Institutional political economy is an approach that focuses on institutional and technological influences and examines the role of evolutionary process and the role of institutions in shaping economic behaviour. The radical, Marxian or critical political economy approach is concerned with the interface between mass communication and mass consumption (Wasko, ibid). The move to deregulation and the advent of neo-liberal policies over the last 25 years has meant that mass communication has become a vehicle for mass consumption rather than public knowledge. Changes to programmes and genres are examples of how the move to consumption has become inextricably linked to styles and forms of broadcasting.

In this thesis a critical political economy approach is taken (Golding & Murdock, 1990). In this context four historical processes are particularly important. These are the growth of media; the extension of corporate reach; commodification; and the changing role of state intervention. In this thesis it is particularly important to consider the extension of corporate reach into New Zealand news and current affairs after deregulation. Equally important is the changing role of government intervention as broadcasting became positioned within a neo-liberal policy regime.

Today, broadly speaking, there are four main, overlapping areas of interest for a political economy analysis of the media are, concentration of ownership, communications policy deregulation, the globalisation of media production and the proliferation of new media forms (Casey et al, 2002).

The first trend is the increasing concentration of ownership in the media industries where corporations like Disney or Time Warner have grown to establish media empires with interests in all areas of production and distribution (Casey et al, 2002). In New Zealand, examples of this phenomenon are seen in the operations of companies such as APN and Fairfax which share an almost complete duopoly in newspaper publishing. In television the removal of overseas ownership restrictions in 1991 allowed one large transnational media corporate (Canwest) came to control the only free-to-air network television provider in competition with TVNZ, namely TV3.

In 1989 communications policy deregulation saw market-led, privatized broadcasting emerge in New Zealand with TVNZ run as a State Owned Enterprise (SOE). As such it was obligated to deliver an annual dividend and all other profits to the government, the shareholder. This included its two channels One and TV2 and the then transmission arm, Broadcasting Communications Limited (BCL). Alongside the publicly-owned TVNZ was the arrival of private broadcasters and pay television that ran in direct competition. There was TV3 owned and operated by Canadian Global Systems, (Can West) and also, at this stage, Australian-owned Prime Television. TV4 was added to CanWest's stable in 1997 and as a consequence of this, state-owned television had to rigorously compete to attract and maintain its market share. Also competing for audiences was the pay television service which was initially broadcast as a terrestrial analogue network and then operated as a digital satellite service by Sky Television Ltd.

Meanwhile the level of funding provided by the Broadcasting Fee (PBF) to fund public radio and 'public service' television could not keep pace with

increases in the cost of living. This was evident throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In July 1999 the fee, which had been \$110 annually, was abolished by the National government, to be replaced by a fixed government grant of \$87 million annually. This meant that commercial imperatives to increase revenue became an even stronger imperative. Current affairs programming therefore had to compete in the newly commercialized environment. The type of programmes produced altered to attract and maintain audiences. Lealand says:

There are visible trends now apparent in New Zealand television schedules: a shift towards middle-brow or populist programming in prime-time, with a proliferation of 'reality' programmes and sponsored magazine programmes; documentaries and 'quality' dramas shifting to late hours; competitive scheduling in prime time, aimed at the largest possible audience share; a quick death for programmes which do not attract healthy ratings; a tendency to stick with the tried and true (2002, p. 216).

For a genre like current affairs that ideally looks and explores stories in depth this has likely effects and consequences:

Advertisers are the real customers of a commercial media organisation, not its readers, viewers or listeners...This brings pressure to shield advertisers from views they do not like, to avoid complicated or expensive stories, and to avoid content that does not attract the maximum audience at any given time (Rosenberg, 2007, pp. 49-50) .

To someone taking a political economy approach to studying the media, the output of media organizations, in this case current affairs television programmes, is seen as the result of a complex set of relationships between the political, economic and socio-cultural environments within which the organization exists (Hayward, 2003, p.3). Thus it is impossible to achieve a full understanding of the operation and output of media institutions without considering the pressures and constraints imposed by each of these factors. This would include the level of political influence and the dominant ideologies that have guided policy making. All of these have had a significant impact on New Zealand public television.

Prior New Zealand research into television news content has revealed how

deregulation has shaped news production (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1996; Cook, 2000). Further, New Zealand broadcasters have had to deal with the changing funding market as public funding has declined in relative terms and this has impacted on operational and programming choices. Many critics have argued that public broadcaster TVNZ's main focus in the late 1980s and 1990s was to make money (Harcourt, 2000; Atkinson, 1994b, Comrie, 1996; Cook, 2000). This marked a substantial shift from an approach which still had strong public service commitments to a very commercial model.

The third trend is the globalisation of media production and distribution. McChesney says that globalisation may well be the "dominant political, social and economic issue of our era" (1998, p.1). This refers to the process whereby capitalism is increasingly seen as a process that takes occurs on a transnational scale. McChesney also says that the process is driven by neo-liberal policies that promote profits and the free flow of goods with minimal regulation as prerequisites for an efficient and viable economy. Some New Zealand commentators believe that the deregulation experiment enacted after the 1984 election was a rushed failure. Brain Easton, for example, argues that New Zealand experienced one of the quickest changes from a public service to a business model and this especially in broadcasting. As Easton states of the change of approach:

That happened in the 1980s, when some officials thought that, by running government agencies as businesses, problems with which the Treasury had struggled would be resolved. There was no pre-testing of the theory. It was directly implemented in the 1988 State Sector Act and the 1989 Public Finance Act. Unfortunately, the brilliant insight has not worked...The picture of the public service is of a ship of state that keeps springing leaks. A fundamental idea behind the reforms is deeply flawed. You cannot run a public service as if it is a private business... The reforms were right to give public servants the freedom to manage. But they overreached themselves by trying to commercialise the public service. Imposing business practices is destructive to good public practice (1998, p. 54).

The fourth trend associated with a political economy approach is the impact of new digital technologies. They have led to the expansion of new media forms as well as the proliferation of satellite channels

and outlets. The United States is an example of such expansion. In the 1980s, as networks became part of larger conglomerates, considerable pressure was brought to bear on news divisions to improve profits and reduce costs. The arrival and spread of cable and regional networks increased the battle for ratings. In 1975 there were three major broadcast networks in the United States, by 1990 there were four commercial networks and more than a hundred regional and cable networks (Tracy, 1995). Critics suggest that though there are more channels this does not necessarily mean a greater variety of content, merely a differing marketing pitch to the viewers or consumers of certain high spending demographics (Casey et al, 2002; McChesney, 1998; Golding & Murdock, 2000). The political economy approach critiques this development by examining the range and depth of new media expression (Golding & Murdock, 2000).

For my research the political economy approach provides a framework for examining the context that produces changes in broadcasting and current affairs programmes. There are many who argue for the benefits of a cultural studies approach with its interdisciplinary ways of studying the meanings of texts or media; often using a combination of the discrete disciplines of literature, sociology, education, history, communications studies and anthropology. However, the exploration of texts or media and how meanings are constructed says little about how texts as products of the culture industries operate. There is also little said about how economic forms impact on the production and circulation of meaning. A cultural studies does not examine how people's ability to consume this material is "structured in the wider economic formation" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p.72). If one takes into consideration the dramatic changes to New Zealand's 'economic' formation that occurred during the 1980s radical changes to television genres can be understood.

The political economy approach also has utility when examining the shaping of broadcasting policy. Governments through policy regulation and funding have the capacity to shape or influence the structure of broadcasting systems. As governments withdraw from public broadcasting obligations, broadcasting is treated as a market commodity rather than a cultural resource.

This occurred in New Zealand broadcasting from the mid-1980s.

According to Robert McChesney the political economy approach cannot explain all aspects of communication activity but it can examine the “context for most research questions in communication” (1998, p. 4). This ‘context’ is central to analysing trends in current affairs programmes and was critical to previous research concerning prime time news carried out after deregulation in New Zealand. Atkinson in his research into the impact of deregulation on TVNZ’s *One News* (1989-1990) noted a trend in the news towards depoliticisation and the disengagement of the public from political life (Atkinson, 1994a,1994b,1994c). Atkinson (2001, p.306) says:

Because the market for serious news and current affairs is a small subset of the public attention market, ‘letting the market prevail’ is typically a recipe for more entertainment-oriented editorial content. Only when commercial pressures are artificially restrained (for example, by public service regulation or newsprint rationing), and when the public’s interest in public affairs is exceptionally high (for example, due to war or terrorist attack), is serious news coverage likely to attract mass audiences. But whenever the media is unregulated and there is direct competition for audiences, some news outlets gravitate away from serious current affairs coverage towards more popular human interest stories - stories about sports, crime, personal tragedy, divorce, sex and human celebrity.

This supports the argument of those adopting a political economy approach who suggest that the dominance of commercial media approaches to ‘information’ services in broadcasting tends to reinforce depoliticisation among the citizenry. This development alongside the retreat from state regulation and public funding of broadcast media affect the capacity of the media to perform its democratic function (McChesney, 1998, p.8).

Since the deregulation of the broadcasting industry, there has not been an extensive study of current affairs programmes in New Zealand. The news, however, has been researched by Atkinson, Cook and Comrie. They found that the adoption of neo-liberal policies and the general effects of deregulation impacted heavily on that genre (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1996; Cook, 2000). Atkinson (1994b), for example, found the news after deregulation had become depoliticised and morselised among other key findings. Comrie (1996) analysed

the changes that took place within news structures pre- and post-deregulation; and Cook (2000) replicated Atkinson's and Comrie's research with similar findings. In terms of overseas research on current affairs programmes, a University of Westminster study by Barnett & Seymour (1999) also showed changes to the genre in Britain after deregulation to the point where they expressed the view that the genre might be in 'terminal decline'.

### ***The critical political economy research tradition***

The political economy approach focuses on the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of wealth and the consequences for the welfare of individuals and society. In the early history of the political economy approach capitalism as a system of social production was studied (Wasko, p.309). Mosco's model is reflected in the research of Graeme Murdock and Peter Golding who have made a key distinction between political economy and mainstream economics. They suggest that the political economy approach "goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good" (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 20).

Mosco (1996) has defined the critical political economy strand of political economy as the study of "social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources" and identifies four central characteristics of critical political economy (p.25).

The first concerns the characteristic of social change and history. Essentially this has to do with the 'dynamics of capitalism'; its cyclical nature, and the growth of monopoly capitalism. The second characteristic is social totality. The political economy approach is holistic and explores the relationship among institutions, and across social relations. The third central characteristic is moral concern. The political economy approach is not simply a discussion of moral philosophy but a discussion of policy problems and the moral issues that ensue. For many scholars this is a key feature of the political economy

approach. The fourth central characteristic is praxis. This serves to transcend the separation between policy and research. Instead, the overriding concern is theoretically informed practice for the purposes of social change (Mosco, 1996). In this respect political economists see activism as an important component of their work.

Wasko, Murdock, Sousa (2011, p.2) argue that the history of critical political economy research is embedded within the enlightenment. In this regard political economy has strong conceptual critiques of capitalism. Rather than treating the economy as a specialist and bounded domain, it focuses on the relations between economic practices and socio-political organisations. Rather than concentrating solely or primarily on immediate events, political economy insists upon a full understanding of long term change.

A primary concern of critical political economists is with the allocation of material resources within capitalist societies. Through studies of ownership and control, political economists document and analyse relations of class power along with other structural inequalities. Importantly, critical political economists analyse contradictions and suggest strategies for intervention against the status quo. The approach draws upon analytical methods drawn from history, economics, sociology and political science. In 1973, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding formulated their idea of the political economy of communication. They said the “mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organisations which produce and distribute commodities” (pp.205-206).

### ***The political economy approach and commodification/ commercialisation of Media***

As neo-liberalism took hold in the 1980s and 1990s, media and communication resources increasingly became commodities. Associated products and services were sold by profit-seeking companies to buyers and consumers. An example of

this was the spread of 'pay tv', cable and satellite television during the 1980s and beyond. Another example concerns how the media communication landscape became filled with more commercial messages. Rosser Johnson (2000) examined this in his research on the spread of advertising and sponsorship on New Zealand television during the 1990s. The trend to promote consumerism and the commodities that were sold was evident in other countries. This occurred in an increase in advertising as a whole as well as an increase in product placement in Hollywood films. Media companies have also expanded new lines of business in their process of diversification where many of the industries are dominated by large entertainment conglomerates such as Time Warner (Wasko, 2004, pp.315- 316). This included marketing strategies that were associated with media content. Promoting toys of characters from Disney films for example of the process of diversification that took place as new lines of business grew in this time period.

According to Atkinson the commercialisation of New Zealand television content was extreme and the effect on news and current affairs discourses was severe. Many critics argue that the primary impact of commercialisation was to strengthen the grip of much larger multinational forces (Atkinson, 1994; Comrie, 1996; Comrie & Fountaine, 2005; Cook, 2000). The two main forces impacting on New Zealand broadcasting at the time were neo-liberalism and deregulation. Atkinson says "The result has been hyper-competition and the global proliferation between niche channels, with multi-channel owners reusing vast libraries of existing content to minimise the expense of producing genuinely novel or original material" (2010, p.414). The political economy approach is then especially useful for this study into current affairs programmes in New Zealand after deregulation.

Mosco (1996) regards commodification as the process of transforming the use value of goods and services into exchange values. The concept of commodification is an entry point for understanding specific communication institutions and practices. Mosco states "communication processes and technologies contribute to the general process of commodification in the economy as a whole"(2009,p.130). The international trend toward the

liberalisation and privatization of enterprises, during the 1980s transformed public and state-run media and telecommunications into private enterprises (ibid).

From a capitalist perspective communication is taken to be a central sphere as it contains images and symbols which help to shape consciousness (Mosco, 2009, p. 134). Many studies have shown that the mass media in capitalist society has facilitated the process of commodity exchange. In doing so the media produces messages that reflect the interests of capital. Tightly integrated transnational businesses such as Time Warner, News Corp and Sony create media products with a multiplier effect embodied within them (e.g as in the cross-promotion of a new Hollywood film). Commodification applies to audiences as well as content (p.127).

Smythe's article *Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism* (1977) re-examined the role of the audience as a commodity where audience power is produced, sold, purchased and consumed. The audience has a price and can be considered a commodity and has a commodity value. Commodification is the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange. A good example is the process of turning a story into a film or novel that can be sold in the market place.

Dallas Smythe (1977) advanced the claim that the audience is the primary commodity of the mass media. He suggested that the audiences' value is determined by negotiations between media organisations and advertisers working on behalf of major corporations. This has important ramifications in the New Zealand context; the commercialisation of broadcasting under the ratings system has positioned the audience as a pure commodity to satisfy two overlapping objectives. To cut production costs and to maximise audiences, especially from favoured demographics (Corner and Pels, 2003). The logical consequence of this for media content is fragmentation and hybridity as programme formats are continuously refined to increase the audiences commodity value. Thus, the current affairs genre has altered from its original traditional long form studio interview or documentary format to an infotainment format.

Other important considerations in the political economy approach are those of horizontal and vertical integration. As media corporations have grown larger and more profitable they have often horizontally acquired companies in the same line of business. Vertical integration concerns the addition of businesses in the same supply chain of different stages of production. This refers to the degree to which businesses own different processes of production. For example, Warner Brothers is a fully integrated global entertainment company. It is owned by Time Warner which owns companies at each stage of the supply chain enabling the institution to maximise profits and tap into global markets. Since Time Warner is able to squeeze out competition from independent filmmakers they can produce, distribute, market and exhibit their own products using subsidiary companies. Since the 1980s there has been an increasing tendency for markets to become concentrated due to a number of factors. Most of the media industries are dominated by oligopolies. One impact of this development is that pressure may be placed on news producers to produce news and current affairs that does not challenge the agenda of the advertisers of the companies.

A central concern of the political economy approach is the relationship between political economy and broadcasting policy. Governments through regulation and funding have the capacity to shape the institutional structures of broadcasting systems. As governments withdraw from public broadcasting obligations broadcasting is often treated as an economic vehicle rather than a cultural resource. One of the most noticeable changes of the 1990s has been the emergence of a global commercial media market built on new technologies and the global trend towards deregulation. There is now a global oligopolistic market that covers the spectrum of media and is now crystallizing with very high barriers to entry. McChesney suggest that the relevance of the political economy approach is that it cannot explain all aspects of communication activity but what it can do is examine the “context for most research questions in communication” (1998, p. 4).

The political economy approach has a strong and consistent analysis of the institutional or structural content. An important area of academic consideration after deregulation is the social effects of commercial television. Two factors

forced profound change on television, the free market extremeism of Reagan and technological change which fostered radical social change. The United States television has always been controlled by advertising revenues where the principal function of television is to deliver audiences to advertisers. After deregulation took place in New Zealand this became the driving force for television from the mid 1980s onwards.

In the United States, television is controlled by advertising revenues, its principal function is to deliver audiences to advertisers. After deregulation this has also become the case in New Zealand. A consequence of the change in approach to programmes made is that audiences come to expect fast-paced visually exciting programmes and they will begin to find issue-oriented public affairs and news programmes dull. To compete with entertainment, news and public affairs programmes out of necessity to capture and retain audiences become more visual and personally oriented. As such, after many years of this approach to popularise more serious aspects of journalism there is arguably a decline in the public's capacity to understand and discuss events and issues in a serious way.

Media Economics mostly accepts the status quo, whereas the political economy approach represents a critical orientation to the study of the media, challenging unjust and inequitable systems of power. The study of political economics of media requires a thorough understanding of media companies/industries as well as attention to issues related to labour.

McChesney (2008, p.12) says about the political economy approach:

Political economists of media assume the media system is an important factor in understanding how societies function, but they do not assume it is the only or most important variable. In many cases the work of political economists of media demonstrates how media affect other, more deep-seated tendencies in society, such as racism, sexism, militarism, and depoliticization. The significance of media varies depending upon what is being considered. In general, though, the importance of media and media systems has grown over the past two centuries.

Media political economists seek to answer the question whether or not the media is a democratic institution. The other big question that political economists seek

to answer is whether citizens can address the situation presented to them by the media. The political economy approach grows out of a liberal democratic political base which asks which structures and policies generate the media systems and practices most “conducive to viable self-government” (McChesney, 2008, p.13). This approach is particularly useful for this examination of the impact of significant changes to the current affairs genre in New Zealand after the introduction of deregulation in the 1980s.

### ***Deregulation***

Just as New Zealand experienced dramatic deregulation after 1984, similar pressures have occurred in Britain from the mid-1990s. Deregulation is seen to impact on many areas of journalism:

The forces of deregulation and corporatisation are gathering pace in a seemingly inexorable shift towards concentration and consolidation of ownership. The inherent risks are, I believe, severe: a tendency towards monopoly and therefore less pluralism and diversity of voices: less innovation and risk taking; and more homogenised forms of journalism which are less equipped to challenge vested interests (Barnett, 2004, p.4).

The commercial pressure for television channels and news formats to sustain audiences increased during the 1980s as deregulation saw the arrival of more channels and services. The 1986 Peacock Committee report reviewed the funding of the BBC and examined public broadcasting in Britain. The Committee is credited with reshaping broadcasting policy and the broadcasting environment into a more commercial and deregulated system. Though Peacock did not fully support the move to a replacement of the BBC’s licence fee by advertising he did offer an argument for broadcasting to move more closely to principles in-line with government deregulatory thinking. Overall the Committee argued for market forces and consumer sovereignty to replace the public broadcasting model of the BBC. Peacock said:

British Broadcasting should move to a sophisticated market based on consumer sovereignty. That is a system which recognises that viewers and listeners are the best ultimate judge of their own interests which they

can best satisfy if they have the option of purchasing what they require from as many alternative sources of supply as possible (Peacock, 1986, p. 6).

The years from 1984 to the 2000s in broadcasting were characterised by deregulating the industry and using deregulation as the organising principle and the rise of the sovereignty of the consumer as a justification for the approach. This can be viewed as the fifth distinct period in the development of television broadcasting in Britain.

The first period from 1936-1955 was characterised by a public service monopoly (there was no competition until ITV's arrival in 1955), a licence fee, regulation by a board of governors and a wide range of programmes designed to 'educate, inform and entertain' (Blumler, 1996). The second phase from 1955-1962 was marked by policy debates about the arrival and impact of new commercial television and programme standards. The arrival of ITV targeted some areas that were perceived to have been neglected by the BBC with programmes designed to appeal to 'mass tastes' and also the provision of regional programmes. The BBC responded with a reinvigorated schedule with enhanced sports and children's programming, television drama and what was to become flagship news and current affairs shows such as *Tonight* and *Panorama* (Franklin, 2001). These were to provide variation to the 'over-used' programming. The third period was marked by stable competition from 1963-1970 and represented a new confidence in current affairs programmes. Not only did they 'inform, educate and entertain' but also questioned society with their "social realism and social criticism" (Blumler, 1996). The fourth period has been called 'broadcasting under attack' from 1970-1983. This period was marked by criticism that broadcasting had begun to trivialise politics, and was careless with its effects on public morals. Broadcasting was attacked for showing too much sex and violence while the Glasgow Media group demonstrated that supposed impartial news coverage was in fact biased in its depictions of issues such as industrial disputes. There was pressure from both the left and right of the political spectrum to break the broadcaster's editorial stronghold as well as pressure from within broadcasting itself to break the duopoly of the BBC and ITV. The criticism was that each broadcaster sought to preserve their own interests and this stymied creative and artistic broadcasting. The fifth period

from 1984 to the 2000s was marked by deregulation and a market approach. Here the operation of a free market and consumer sovereignty took priority. In terms of policy the key concerns were finance, competition and deregulation. It was the Peacock Committee that began a radical shift for broadcasting. This period was also marked by substantial technological developments with the emergence of satellite, cable and digital delivery platforms. These changes impacted heavily on the media environment of Britain as the environment became more competitive and ratings driven. The pressure to capture audiences was so intense that many regarded resulting programmes in news and current affairs as far more entertainment oriented.

Franklin's book *Newszak and News Media* discusses this general trend. He identifies 'newszak' as occurring when 'news is designed and processed for a particular market and delivered in increasingly homogenous 'snippets' which make only modest demands on the audience' (Franklin, 1997, p.5). In *Newszak*, the process and its effects lead to what he calls 'McNugget journalism'. As Joe Atkinson and other critics point out such journalism results in an uninformed citizenry where ultimately 'democracy is impoverished and at risk' (Atkinson, 1994b).

The impact of deregulation and commercial pressures on drama and current affairs programmes in Britain has been studied in depth by Steven Barnett and Emily Seymour (1999). Their study evaluated the performance of institutions and genres in broader terms than simple market efficiency or productivity. Thus Barnett and Seymour state that the genres of drama and current affairs epitomise "commitment to information, diversity and creativity in programme making" (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p.9). Their research was commissioned by the Campaign for Quality Television in Britain<sup>9</sup> and involved the interviewing of industry professionals and the undertaking of a content analysis of programme schedules starting in the 1970s. The general

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Campaign for Quality Television* was set up in 1988 after programme makers became concerned about the then proposed deregulation of television. Over the next two years it played an important role in ameliorating some of the worst excesses of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. It aims to promote public service television, choice and quality for all viewers in the United Kingdom. In the campaign's own words recent developments in television have been driven by a narrowly financial agenda and the role it plays in informing and educating people from all sectors of society is being largely ignored (Campaign for Quality Television, 2006).

purpose was descriptive rather than prescriptive; changes were examined without making any suggestions about how programme content might be improved. Importantly, the practitioners who were interviewed had grave concerns about the state of drama and current affairs and questioned whether these television forms were sustainable. The producers of drama suggested that change in the general media environment mean there was pressure to make “predictable hits, renewable series, recognised stars and “drama reassurance” (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p.6). For current affairs programmes there was a tendency to make programmes that were ratings- friendly rather than those that covered more complex political or economic issues. The authors emphasised that the report was not about turning back the clock and that the intentions was to foster robust debate about the state of drama and current affairs programme making.

Barnett & Seymour argue that from the 1940s to the 1980s the British broadcasting environment was largely stable (Barnett & Seymour, 1999). Then by a combination of “technological innovation and political fiat” the industry became characterised by channel proliferation and intense competition for commercial revenue (1999, p.9). The deregulatory framework adopted in the 1980s and 1990s reshaped the structure and philosophy of commercial television, while the BBC also absorbed some of the rhetoric of market liberalism and consumer sovereignty. The confluence of industrial, competitive, political and technological upheaval in just ten years, Barnett & Seymour suggest, have had an effect on television’s creative process and therefore on its output.

The study found that there had been a significant decline in current affairs programming over the last 20 years of the time period surveyed. The years they sampled were 1977-78, 1987-88 and 1997-98. Foreign affairs coverage for example had become almost completely confined to the BBC. British commercial television had effectively vacated political and economic current affairs. Across all the television channels there had been a noticeable rise in the coverage of police and crime issues and to a lesser extent consumer issues. This finding corresponds with changes noted by New Zealand researchers into

television news, for example, Atkinson, Cook and Comrie (Atkinson, 1994b; Cook, 2000; Comrie, 1996). The Barnett and Seymour study also noted a sharp reduction in audiences for current affairs programmes. Programme makers and programme commissioners who were interviewed said that the genre was under extreme pressure in a contemporary multi-channel environment. Drama producers were also very aware of the changing broadcasting environment. The pressure to gain an audience share was so great that it created caution in the creative process for those who produced drama. The high cost of making drama works against the creative instincts of what and how to make dramatic programming (Barnett & Seymour, 1999).

Overall there had been a substantial change in programme content due to the drive for ratings. For current affairs this translated into a greater emphasis on the domestic, consumer and ratings-friendly subjects at the expense of covering foreign affairs such as Northern Ireland or more complex political and economic issues. For example, one interviewee stated:

(E)ditors whose instincts lie normally with stories we would have covered five or ten years ago are pressing the button automatically and are looking over their shoulder at the sort of ratings that each programme could be expected to deliver (...) subjects that would have been commissioned in the past are no longer being commissioned. And it's received wisdom, it's not disputed, everybody is concerned about ratings. Everybody (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p. 20).

The programmes were more emotional and visual at the expense of more analytical or investigative programmes. As one interviewee said of the consequence of this change:

When you've built a tradition over thirty years of having some hard-hitting, serious, investigative current affairs, analysis, political debate, finance programmes, consumer programmes, and everything else that goes with it that makes all our lives richer [and] aids democracy. [In America] factual television and current affairs (...) is all hinged on emotion. Facts get in the way, so you just hinge everything on the emotion and you limit the facts to as few as possible. That is the way we are beginning to go, and it doesn't have to be like that (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p.38).

From 1989 to 1999, the last ten years surveyed, the pressure on budgets became more intense and producers experienced progressive budget cuts

which led to an unprecedented squeeze on programme costs. The authors suggest that this has seriously impacted on the volume and quality of research associated with the making of current affairs programmes. Stories requiring investigative journalism were especially affected by the lack of resources. Consequently there was no room for speculative investigations and little prospect of ground breaking programmes which required the long-term commitment of time or money. This has serious implications the authors suggest for a genre that was so often built on extensive research (Barnett & Seymour, 1999).

With an ever growing emphasis on profit and profitability there was also less job security for those working on current affairs programmes. Short-term contracts and part-time work meant that training opportunities were fewer and less sustained. Often staff gained little or no training in the traditional techniques of journalism and under these conditions they were required to work above their ability and experience. Research was less thorough and mistakes were more likely. During the process of programme making increasing emphasis was being laid on measuring, interpreting and responding to audience requirements; the hallmarks of a ratings-driven media environment.

The findings revealed dramatic changes for current affairs television. There were five main trends. Firstly, foreign affairs coverage virtually disappeared, apart from the BBC. Secondly, there was almost no political or economic coverage outside the BBC, and nearly all foreign affairs coverage was on BBC2. The channel devoted over 40% of its current affairs coverage to political themes and issues. Thirdly, overall there was less peak-time current affairs on ITV than before. Fourthly, the coverage of crime and police issues was very marked especially across all the channels; it became the most frequently featured topic on commercial television. The fifth trend is the general move to make programmes on “softer” issues, be this crime, consumer topics, or moral and ethical subject matter (Barnett & Seymour, 1999). Some practitioners felt the genre as such faced severe problems and that these had been compounded by an increasingly competitive environment. For these people the genre had done little to reinvent itself and many of the programmes were said to have a ‘1970s air’ about

them. Interviewees revealed that programme makers had been told to package their programmes more tightly, with more 'gloss'. Many producers had been pressured to sensationalise and shock, and emphasise the emotional and the dramatic.

Many producers interviewed by Barnett & Seymour expressed concern that the process of attracting audiences had gone too far such that the "emphasis on presentation and story-telling has an inexorable logic which ultimately led to a negative and bankrupt version of current affairs" (Ibid, p.29). Barnett & Seymour suggest that those interviewed felt the need for ratings was an "obsessive pursuit of an audience" (Ibid, p.29). This led to an underestimation of what the public might be interested in, and undermined the confidence of journalists to follow their own instincts.

In terms of subject matter and content, there was a growing awareness from interviewees that certain subjects often considered 'uncomfortable' were not being covered. Accordingly, there was concern that the flagship BBC programme *Panorama* had become more populist and less international in focus. The authors acknowledge that getting the mix right has "long been the Holy Grail for current affairs, which is an intrinsically awkward genre in a competitive schedule" (Barnett and Seymour, 1999, p.31). For example current affairs were often scheduled in long blocks and so there was often difficulty in maintaining consistency throughout the series run. Unusual or unpredictable subject matter made it hard to forecast or build up the audience. There are some programmes where producers have managed to take journalistic risks and maintain elements of populism. For example, *World in Action* often balanced stories to fulfil both its journalistic and commercial remit. This shift in focus could be seen as more of an alignment with the audience and a move away from "paternalistic and elitist" television journalism (Ibid, p.17). Or it might be viewed as a shift away from the producers and a move towards the audience to the extent where some might even suggest that television is getting "real" and responding to commercial realities (Ibid, p.17). Though these arguments have an element of truth the authors suggest that this should not obscure the critical condition of current affairs journalism.

## ***Panorama/World in Action***

Concerns about current affairs programmes are also raised in the book *Public issue television: World in Action, 1963-98*. *World In Action* ran from 1963 to 1998 and the authors Godder, Corner & Richardson concluded that the current affairs genre in Britain had changed from its original form and was, arguably, in terminal decline. *World in Action* was part of a triumvirate of long-running British current affairs programmes alongside *Panorama*, and *This Week/TV Eye*. According to these authors these three current affairs programmes “contributed substantially to the political health and public knowledge of the British nation...” (Goddard, Corner & Richardson, 2007, p.5). *World in Action* in particular had a major impact on the events of the day and was said to be an example of campaigning journalism.

These programmes were “responsible for many of the finest, bravest and most significant moments in British television journalism...” (Ibid, p.105). Stories examining corruption featured and *World in Action* covered key stories such as the unfolding reality of ‘mad cow disease’ and the increasing number of cases of Creutzfeldt - Jakob disease (CJD), the human form of mad cow disease. The episode screened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1995 and featured a story about a 19 year old who had died of CJD who was the first teenage victim to succumb to a disease that largely afflicted the elderly (Leiss, & Powell, 2004). For a long time government vets and officials had reassured the British public that a species barrier insulated humans yet *World In Action* revealed the growing numbers of people dying from ‘mad cow disease’.

*World in Action* screened the *Seven Up* documentaries and over many years won many awards<sup>10</sup>. The *Seven Up* documentaries were conceived of as a way to explore the impact of social class in Britain. It was first screened in 1964 and followed 14 British children from different social classes with the assumption

---

<sup>10</sup> The *Seven Up* series is now called *Up* and follows up on the original fourteen children to see how their lives have developed.

that social class predetermined their future. The director, Michael Apted, returned to film the original subjects each seven years so as to follow their progress. *World in Action's* investigations into other stories and issues were audacious and included the uncovering of evidence that was to free the Birmingham Six, six individuals who were sentenced to life imprisonment for the bombing of a Birmingham 'pub'. Their convictions were later overturned and they were awarded compensation. In July 1984 it also presented the confessions of a former MI5 officer who revealed a planned coup against the government of Harold Wilson.

Like the other current affairs programmes referred to in this literature review pressures came to impact on the programme leading to its eventual demise. These were, firstly, increased commercial pressures at ITV, with a remit to maximise profits. Secondly, the 1990 Broadcasting Act removed certain programme obligations on ITV and the establishment of the ITV Network Centre as a means for companies to manage scheduling. The 1990 Broadcasting Act by virtue of its wording meant that current affairs did not have to be screened in primetime. The regulatory and legislative framework had seen current affairs as part of ITV 'public service' obligations but its place in the schedule was no longer assured. Where licence requirements had stipulated an hour of current affairs per week, scheduling became the responsibility of the body established by the companies, which was the ITV Network Centre. *World in Action* was contracted to provide current affairs for a specific period to the Network Centre. The assurance was made by Andrew Quinn, Granada's managing director, that *World in Action* could earn its keep and provide large audiences of at least four to five million. By 1992, Paul Jackson, Chief Executive of Carlton Television, said the main requirement of current affairs programmes was to get audiences of ten million. To stay in primetime scheduling the programme would have to deliver a constant audience of eight million. This was a salient reminder that for current affairs in Britain in the 1990s the emphasis was on marketing, ratings and audience share rather than public service obligations and serious journalism. Ratings in the 1990s did in fact briefly climb and in 1991 the series averaged 7.2 million viewers. But, one liability of current affairs series is that the programmes cannot always deliver consistent audience ratings as viewing

figures depend upon the subjects of each episode. Internal changes at Granada television also affected *World in Action*. From 1989 and into the 1990s, efforts were made to downsize the staff and many of the senior programme makers and management took voluntary redundancy. *World in Action* went from being regarded as a special programme to Granada's lowest rating prime-time programme (Goddard, Corner & Richardson, 2007).

The 1990s saw significant changes to genre and formats. Richard Lindley suggested that the model for current affairs was altering so dramatically that the *60 Minutes* format would eventually be the only current affairs format left (as cited in Goddard, Corner & Richardson, 2007, p. 115). He said despite the popularity of that programme:

Complex stories must be ruthlessly simplified. Its emphasis on reporters...means that you sometimes hear more from them and their adventures than you do of their interviewees. And because the emphasis is on people and human stories, it's difficult for the programme to tackle an issue unless there's an obvious hero or heroine, a villain or victim.

Many in the industry predicted the end of an era where *Panorama*, *Week/TV* and *World in Action* had competed on the basis of quality. *World in Action* was trapped by contradictory imperatives. They needed to cover more populist subjects to maximise ratings while covering subjects which were able to maintain their reputation and authority (Ibid, 2007, p. 116).

Concerns over the direction of British current affairs were also raised in a 1999 *Guardian* news story 'World in Action meets Yoof TV.'...("World in Action meets Yoof TV," 1999) which published leaked information about the future direction of ITV's *World in Action*.<sup>11</sup> The station's intention was to copy the commercially successful formats of American programming at the expense of traditional current affairs formats. This was to be a substantial change for a flagship current affairs programme and reinforced the view held by many academics and broadcasters that news and current affairs had moved away from 'hard' news to 'softer' lighter stories (Franklin, 2001). The *Guardian* article

---

<sup>11</sup> The article (which does not have a designated author), called 'World in Action meets Yoof TV.'... (1999, *Guardian*, 19 January, pp. 6-7) is a leaked report from *Granada* published by the *Guardian* that provided insight into the future direction of news and current affairs.

mentioned that the single-issue current affairs programme was likely to limit the size of the audience compared to a multi-item magazine format which had the advantage of attracting viewers wanting to watch a mix of lighter and harder items. Researchers from Granada, quoted in the *Guardian* article, concluded that the new multi-item style of programme appealed to the less serious current affairs viewer. This had important commercial considerations because it was designed to appeal to more viewers and by doing so increase ratings. It was suggested that the way to increase ratings further was to include use of a hidden angle on a news story, or an irreverent approach to controversy or a human-interest story

(Franklin, 2001, p.112). The recommendations also related to the presentation style of programmes and the leaked document suggested new current affairs programmes should be live and presenter-led from a studio. The recommendations on the future direction of current affairs programmes stated they would benefit from a commitment to a more popular agenda and this would build new audiences. For example, referring to more populist approaches the document suggested:

It's stunts like these that will get the programme talked about. Along with popular investigations and campaigns they'll give the series its character and mark us out from our rivals. Young viewers, in particular, regard current affairs programmes as solemn and boring. But we will change that perception. For, as long as our journalism is solid, we can be as cheeky and entertaining as we like (*Guardian*, 1999, as cited in Franklin, 2001, p. 113).

They suggested the American approach to current affairs be adapted to the British style of current affairs and the focus of programmes should move more to an emphasis on the populist, human emotion and drama and the development of storytelling skills (Ibid, p. 114). They concluded that the new style of current affairs should follow Don Hewett's advice (the founder of *60 Minutes* and "package facts" like Hollywood "packages fiction" (Ibid, p. 114). Concerns over the ratings imperative whereby audience tracking takes precedence over news content were echoed by Barnett & Graber (2001, p. 7) who noted:

...concern for audience gratification is now eclipsing the influence of core professional news values. The growing practice of running surveys and focus groups, then feeding the results back into newsroom practice and

the selection of news stories, has led to a consumerization of news content which gives high priority to notions of 'accessibility' and intrinsic viewer interest. This ratings-led, consumer-led approach to news has been blamed for a more trivialized content which concentrates on show business, crime, scandal royalty and softer 'lifestyle' stories at the expense of foreign news and issues concerning social and economic policy.

In a study by Hargreaves & Thomas on British news (2002) there were similar findings to those of the earlier Barnett & Seymour study. Hargreaves & Thomas's examination of current affairs was part of a broader research initiative concerning the changing patterns of news provision which included recommendations on access, quality and public engagement. The reduced priority of traditional current affairs programmes on British television was confirmed. The powerful current affairs programmes *This Week*, *Weekend World* and *World in Action* had long runs that concluded in the 1990s. *This Week* ran from 1956 to 1978 when it was replaced by *TV Eye* but returned in 1986 and ran until 1992. As an example of the political impact of the programme, the most famous episode screened was *Death on the Rock* a programme that it is still claimed to be the reason that Thames lost their London Weekday ITV broadcasting franchise in 1992. Three IRA (Irish Republican Army) members were shot by the SAS (Special Air Services) and the programme featured witnesses who reported there had been no prior warning to shoot. After it was broadcast the programme met with a lot of criticism from *The Sunday Times* and *The Sun* as well as the British Prime Minister who claimed it was a trial by television.

*Weekend World* ran from 1972 to 1988 and featured an in-depth interview with a political figure each week. *World in Action* ran from 1963 to 1988 (Holland, 2006). With the flagship *Panorama* relegated to Sunday evenings in 2000 and the other programmes such as *World in Action*, *This Week* and *Weekend World* no longer produced, Hargreaves & Thomas noted that professional television people often spoke in the gloomiest terms about the genre.

In their account the debate "about journalism, democracy and political communication in Britain, Europe and America is framed by a relatively simple

divide: between pessimists and optimists” (2002, p.16). Pessimists suggest the crisis in journalism was so great that the death of the news could ultimately bring democracy down. The optimists in contrast argued “we have never had it so good” (Ibid, p. 16). For optimists, the new style of popular approaches to news would be good for democracy as the presentation of entertaining stories would make news accessible to a greater number of people. The pessimistic view was driven by the view that the news media fuelled the public’s growing disenchantment with democracy and a mistrust of government. For the pessimists a journalistic crisis exists in Europe, Britain and more particularly in the United States. The concerns are similar to those expressed by other critics of journalism that modern broadcasting is rife with dumbing down, tabloidisation, Americanisation, a rise in infotainment and the decline in public broadcasting and in serious journalism. For the audience there is often confusion about whether programmes are news or current affairs or both due to increasing hybridisation of the formats.

The research undertaken by Hargreaves & Thomas (2002) included a quantitative evaluation of whether current affairs programmes still held the audience. The overall finding was that in a commercial multi-channel environment the mass appointment to watch current affairs programming no longer existed. In their research, respondents were asked whether they wanted to watch a greater depth and range in the current affairs programmes. However this was not shown to be the case. What was found was that current affairs were shown to be able to provoke a solid following and be used to provoke discussion and interest, especially with programmes that had topics that directly related to people. Current affairs could appeal very strongly to a highly defined audience. A young Asian viewer might tape a programme about politics in a mosque and use this to discuss the issues with friends and family (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002, p. 67). Programmes that held powerful politicians and people to account were the most popular form of current affairs among the focus groups and to some extent the respondents confirmed what current affairs professionals had been saying, that there were insufficient incentives for investigative journalism. The authors suggested that broadcasters might want to relax their need for strong ratings as even small

audiences such as one million viewers (in the context of the British population) could still be performing an important democratic function (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002). Graeme Turner (2005) identifies similar trends in his discussion of Australian television current affairs programming. By the mid-1990s current affairs ratings had dropped and the audiences for current affairs television programmes were on the wane. Not only were the audiences for current affairs declining but they were also ageing at the same time. In the late 1990s a number of comedic and satirical current affairs programmes were introduced to attract the younger audience. Overall Turner concluded that Australian current affairs programmes were “increasingly tired and aimless, working over the same old territory as each other with ever-diminishing returns” (Ibid, p.3).

Morisett has commented on the effects of the changes in the genre on the democratic process, arguing that “most political analysts contend that television has undermined rather than strengthened civic life”, producing programmes which offer slogans instead of substance”...and “virtually no attempt is made to educate voters or to address their concerns” (Morisett as cited in Tracey, 1995, p.140). A claimed result of this is that it has produced a deepening disenfranchisement of the voting class who have turned away from mainstream journalism and the core institutions of democracy (Tracey, 1995). Shaw (1987, p. 4) suggests that with *60 Minutes* as the leading news magazine show in the United States it “doesn’t ask the critical questions that will provide important insights or a sense of fair play” concluding that the “single most interesting facet of *60 Minutes* wasn’t what I saw but what I didn’t see” (Ibid, p 6). These critics see the impact of changes to the genre as a key for creating a dislocation in citizens’ political involvement.

### ***Market driven journalism***

I will now consider the broader changes to news journalism in light of the debate about changes to the television current affairs genre. In this context the phrase ‘Market driven journalism’ refers to the ‘application of market logic’ to the news.

With this idea the news is perceived and constructed as a commodity rather than a public good. Therefore news is a 'product' and circulation is within a market rather than a public sphere and business logic is applied to serve the market (McManus, 1994). General debates about market driven journalism concern issues such as corporate control of television networks, commercial broadcasting versus public broadcasting, citizens versus consumers, deregulation and the rise of infotainment and tabloidization and the positioning of citizens as consumers. Bernstein summarises the net result as follows (McManus, 1994, p. 1-2):

For more than 15 years we have been moving away from real journalism toward the creation of a sleazoid info-tainment culture in which the lines between Oprah [Winfrey] and Phil [Donohue] and Geraldo [Rivera] and Diane [Sawyer] and even Ted [Koppel], between *the New York Post* and *Newsday*, are too often indistinguishable. In this new culture of journalistic titillation, we teach our readers and our viewers that the trivial is significant, that the lurid and loopy are more important than real news (Bernstein as cited in McManus, 1994, p.1-2).

Barnett & Gaber (2001) suggest that basic economic realities impinge on journalists' ability to do their job. One primary problem was that of investment in resources as without such investment news journalists inevitably become reliant upon PR releases. Jeremy Paxman (Barnett & Gaber, 2001) observed that time and resources for research were the cornerstone of investigative journalism. He says:

Finding things out, as anyone who has done any investigative journalism knows, takes time, and time is money. Resources are now so stretched on some news desks that no one can spare the time to research a story properly. The consequence is that they are increasingly dependent on what they are told...It is our job to find out things that people do not want found out. But for journalists to function properly, they have to be given freedom and resources. And those will come only from organisations which believe that their first duty is disclosure, not entertainment (Paxman as cited in Barnett & Gaber, 2001).

The key factors driving market driven journalism have been changes in viewing and reading trends which have caused a restructuring of news and broadcasting. By the early 1970s local news stations discovered that local news was lucrative and with many local stations competing for market share there was a process of considerable innovation in the structure of news programmes

as they battled for market share. With the growing emphasis of media as businesses there has been a growing sensitivity to audience ratings which results in changes to the news produced. With this has been a move to an expansion of news beyond government and politics to what is regarded as 'interesting'. In the mid-1980s the three major American networks went through substantial ownership changes that downsized the number of reporters, photographers, producers, archivists and technicians (McManus, 1994). With fewer workers to produce the news, network stories became briefer and the news values of emotion and heightened visuals became more dominant.

A 2006 Dutch study examined the impact of increased commercialisation or market-driven journalism on current affairs programmes. Using the research of Barnett & Seymour (1999) as their template, the Dutch researchers undertook a content analysis of three Dutch current affairs programmes that merged in 1996 as part of a strategy to fight increasing competition. The current affairs programmes were screened on public broadcasting channels and in 1992 the three programmes were screened on different week days. The three programmes were *Brandput*, *Hier en Nu* and *Televizier*. These merged into one programme *Network* in 2001. The research question examined whether the new current affairs programme displayed more sensationalism than the programmes from which they originated. Sensationalism has in theory been linked to market-driven journalism. Items for the sample from the 2001 *Network* were compared with the three predecessor programmes.

Their overall finding was that there were some noticeable changes towards sensationalism. The researchers suggest that technological developments such as 'sensationalist production techniques' have increased with the advent of dramatic editing, though this does not account for the increase in personalisation and a focus on domestic issues. The trend towards greater sensationalism they partly attributed to the more commercialised broadcasting environment (Vetthen, Nuijten, & Beentjes, 2006).

### ***Tabloidisation***

A critical theme in discussions about changes in news and current affairs journalism and serious journalism has been that of tabloidization. In this regard Franklin states that frequently with contemporary news and current affairs there is an "...insensitive conjoining of the sentimental and the sensational, the prurient and the populist, which bears all the hallmarks of tabloid journalism" (Franklin, 1997, p. 3). In terms of context tabloidisation has been defined "as a shift by the media away from national and international issues of importance to a more entertainment or gossipy style of journalism that focuses on lifestyle, entertainment and crime" (Ray, 2004). The concern with tabloidization is that it signifies a retreat from investigative journalism and hard news subjects and a move toward softer or lighter stories. There is an associated focus on entertainment rather than information, human interest rather than public interest, and a rise in sensational and trivial stories at the expense of weighty issues. By the mid-1990s on Australian television Ray noted the activities of celebrities from Hollywood, sport or the Royal family had marginalised coverage of events (Ray, 2004).

A further feature and criticism of tabloidisation is that it produces the previously mentioned 'newszak', a product designed to be delivered in "snippets" which the audience consumes with minimal effort (Franklin, 1997, p.4-5). The concern is that this style of current affairs programme addresses the audience not as citizens but as consumers who are mainly concerned with gossip or scandal (Macdonald, 2003, p. 58). It is alleged that this type of programme content also avoids political contention and views events as "detached from social processes and purely random, driven by chance or luck" (Curran and Sparks, 1991, p.58). Meade (as cited in Turner, 2005, p. 3) says of Australian current affairs that across the nation the 6.30 pm commercial current affairs programs:

"[are] giving their viewers their daily dose of what has become staple fare: consumer and lifestyle stories sprinkled with a little traditional current affairs and spiced up with trashy fillers that wouldn't be out of place in a racy supermarket mag such as *The National Enquirer*. Some of the items, usually four in each half hour, are seen on a regular basis: back pain, shonky tradesmen, diets, plastic surgery, home renovations, budgeting and the ubiquitous neighbourhood dispute are regular themes" (Meade as cited in Turner, 2005, p. 3).

Macdonald (2003) discusses the main issues facing current affairs programmes and argues that there are two opposed points of view. The first is that the quality of current affairs so declined that the genre has become superficial and tabloid. The second view is that the blurring of boundaries between this genre and others has provided a more accessible and popular form of current affairs.

A central concern in the criticism of current affairs and television news is that celebrity personalities dominate coverage at the expense of serious issues.

MacDonald says that:

When David Beckham, the captain of England's football team, broke a bone in his left foot on 10 April 2002, concern about his injury dominated the news in Britain. The conflict in the Middle East, simultaneously reaching such depths of degradation as to prompt concerns about Israel's aggression, struggled to compete for attention....this mesmerizing preoccupation with celebrity personalities and human interest is one of the central complaints of those who allege that the media are 'dumbing down', or indulging in 'infotainment' or 'tabloidization' at the expense of serious news (2003, p.57).

One of the major changes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the change in the focus of news from politics, international affairs and other more serious topics to softer topics. The cause for concern for critics of tabloidization is that celebrity and the trivialisation of subject matter has moved into the areas that were once regarded as the serious topics. Celebrity within media is a phenomenon of modern day culture, where along with public figures who are expected to be famous, other people who would have been termed ordinary have become celebrities in their own right. This is most notably seen in reality television programmes. Often the question of political apathy is raised when questions of consumerism and celebrity are raised. To some commentators political apathy is counterbalanced by an interest in political infotainment and celebrity (Corner & Pels, 2003). The move to tabloidization in these areas is also connected to the rise in celebrification in media and also in news and current affairs.

The cause for such a focus on celebrities is the intense competition for viewers that encourages the avoidance of examining domestic or international current

affairs (Macdonald, 2003). Current affairs programmes Macdonald says, are 'increasingly shunted around the schedules and parade populist titles such as 'Frankenstein Foods' and 'Nicking the Neighbours'. Both programmes she said came from BBC1s flagship current affairs programme *Panorama* (Macdonald, 2003, p.57).

The debate about current affairs programmes features questions about the very nature of what the genre is. Many programmes like *60 Minutes* and *20/20* would not have been considered current affairs when compared to the original forms of the genre. They are the result of 'new' forms borrowing from other genres and heavily influenced by entertainment values.

### ***The rise of infotainment***

Tabloidization of the current affairs genre in many western countries has coincided with the emergence of a programme or style called 'infotainment'. The term refers to the mixing or blurring of traditional distinctions between information-based and entertainment-oriented genres of television programming. The term is often used in the context of discussion about the decline in hard news stories or serious journalistic inquiry. This decline corresponds with the increase in entertainment shows which mimic the news. As noted earlier, one of the central criticisms aimed at modern current affairs programmes is that the genre has lost its way and may be in terminal decline (Barnett & Seymour, 1999; Franklin, 1997, Hirst et al, 1995, White, Chaplin & Wilson, 1995; Turner, 2005). Evidence for this development is seen to reside in the spreading influence of entertainment values. Langer suggests, that television news, in particular is perceived to be:

...overwhelmingly oriented around a media logic of entertainment values which has led inexorably and fatally to a 'post journalism era' where in news terms a kind of entertainment programming is always given precedence over doing deeper, more complete and accurate reports (Langer, 1998, p.8).

In response to this criticism various industry practitioners and academics argue that news and current affairs has simply changed with the times to meet the demands of the broadcasting environment so that bulletins and programmes are held to be more popular, accessible and democratic than the more

traditional formats (Alysen, 2000; Lumby, 1999, Holland, 2001, Macdonald, 2003). The argument has been complicated with the emergence of programmes that blend the entertainment and current affairs genres. A prominent example of this kind of hybridity is Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*. Baym (2005) suggests *The Daily Show* offers a new experiment in news and creates new audiences. *The Daily Show*, though it is positioned as 'fake' news, has a significant impact on political journalism. Using techniques from genres such as news, comedy and television talk-shows, Baym (2005, p.259) says the programme revives a journalism of critical enquiry and advances democracy.

Feldman discusses the impact of the *Daily Show* and says:

*The Daily Show* is not a critical incident per se, but more of a phenomenon that has given journalists cause to reflect on current industry assumptions and practices. It is symbolic of a changing media environment and the implications of that media environment for the journalism profession. While not the first program to satirize the news – *The Daily Show* is reminiscent of the short-lived 1960s series *That Was The Week That Was*, for example – its ongoing success has been prompted by a confluence of technological, economic, social, and political circumstances (2007).

*The Daily Show* may be a way of developing new forms of journalism that appeal especially to younger viewers who may feel more alienated by more traditional forms of broadcast journalism. However, this programme also shows the kinds of questions that are being asked of the newer forms of journalism as to whether this is news or some other form of journalism altogether.

The seminal text that began the examination of the move to infotainment and entertainment oriented practices was Neil Postman's (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He argued that the short news bite and entertainment-oriented aspects of television news provided viewers with de-contextualised fragments which require little effort on their part to understand. This move to infotainment has distinctive effects upon news presentation. These are an emphasis on conflict, emotion, strong visual imagery and interpersonal interaction (Graber, 1994). There is a predominance of fast editing and other effects to create drama in the stories. There is also a rise in celebrity and sports and lifestyle stories as well as the promotion of the anchor or newsreader as a selling point of the programme.

The counter view is that the new televisual forms have maintained the existing audiences and attracted new ones. From this perspective the changing current affairs genre reflects commercial realities and changing audience taste. Holland says that entertainment or 'infotainment' news and current affairs programmes are popular and enjoyed by new audiences. The changing genre has built upon new trends in broadcasting such as reality television. There is an acceptance that newer programming, embodying elements of 'magazine and infotainment' formats, cannot meet the earlier definitions of current affairs (Holland, 2001). Taken together these changes have impacted heavily on the genre, and with the additional impact of reality television, have made inroads on what was considered traditional current affairs.

Authors such as Lumby (1999) argue that changes which are portrayed negatively are in fact positive developments. She suggests for example that as talk-shows and reality television elements have become more integrated within current affairs programmes women are better represented. Moreover, many of the critics who see a decline and loss in quality are actually quite accurate in their description of the shifts evident in form, content and the role of the media. However, she believes they fail to put those shifts into a broader social and political context. Lumby argues there is a growth in public and scholarly debate that announces the decline and ruination of the public sphere. Arguments about this topic often include discussions around how democracy is well served by an informed and critical citizenry. However, in contemporary life, she says the criticism is that citizens are "the zombie spawn of late capitalism robotically feasting on distraction and spectacle" (Lumby, 1999, p. 220). Lumby instead argues that this picture of contemporary life is distorted and ignores the many ways that mass media have increased the diversity of voices and issues that are now part of the public area.

Lumby further argues that many criticisms of the news media are grounded in elitist and anachronistic assumptions about what is best for the general public. The traditional high brow media formats are not she adds, 'value free' and they are founded in a top-down model of public debate in which experts and others

in the know decide which issues are important and proceed to explain and debate them on behalf of ordinary people. She does acknowledge that tabloid media forms from talkback to daytime talk shows, women's magazines and downmarket commercial current affairs programmes are characterised by opinions and stories with no claim to expert knowledge. This chaotic, populist end of the media sphere, she suggests, is a place where you can most often hear ordinary people speak out on their own behalf (Lumby, 2003, p. xiii). One of her central points is that a diversification not only of voices but also of ways of speaking about personal, social and political life has generated diversification. The contemporary media sphere has become a highly diverse and inclusive forum in which a host of matters once deemed apolitical, trivial or personal are now being aired.

Lumby maintains that though the popular media is attacked for sending the audience the "wrong political message" it is not acknowledged that:

Media consumers are like voters - they don't just sit there and suck in everything they're fed, they negotiate and interact with what they're given. They make choices about what they watch or read. They think about themselves and their values in relation to what is produced by the media (Lumby, 1999, p.7).

Lumby subscribes to the active audience argument and says that compared to modern bulletins: "60s news appears coma inducing" (1999, p .44). Noting the massive reduction in sound-bites surveyed from 1968 to 1992 by the Center for Media and Public Affairs she reflects that there have been massive shifts in the structure and content of both American news and current affairs. Impartiality, neutrality, and commentary and analysis are values of a previous era, made of abstract ideals divorced from the commercial realities that have framed news and current affairs over the past three decades.

The modern news media, she believes, offers new ways for women to gain profile and make their voices heard:

US television talk shows are a good example of how politics infuses formats which we often think of as trivial or meaningless. Talk shows are notorious for seeking out sensational topics and volatile guests, and even staging conflicts and paying guests appearance fees....but it's equally true that talk shows offer a forum for voices which aren't often heard in American democracy because they comprise and speak to a

predominantly, ethnic, female and blue-collar audience ( Lumby, 1999, p. 9).

Macdonald (2000), however, argues that it is commercial priorities that are driving these programmes rather than popular expressions of equity. So stories that focus on more tabloid subject matter and concern sensational topics or unusual tales will rate more highly and be more entertaining to the audience. A story that discusses the impact of adultery or 'disease of the week' material will be easier to digest than a story on the intricacies of political decisions. US celebrity newswoman Barbara Walters however, is another who believes the changes of recent decades are positive:

The world has changed...there's more interest in people's personalities and more interest in gossip and what makes people tick. People are not interested in foreign policy. They are interested in making their lives better and in human interest stories (Walters as cited in Alysen, 2000, p. 174).

Critics of current and public affairs television argue there has been a move away from an emphasis on rational discourse, driven by "analysis" to programmes which have "pleasure" or entertainment at their centre (Turner, 2005; Tracy, 1995). A key change that these programmes represented was the inversion of the news hierarchy whereby public-sphere stories focusing on economics and business were pushed aside in favour of private sphere stories. Stories that focused on personal tragedy, celebrity scandal, relationships and sexuality were privileged over the political or business angled stories (Lumby, 1999, p.47). The move toward an entertainment focus has blurred the boundaries between the real and unreal. Tracey argues that this is nothing new and that drama docos, for example, have long been part of public affairs output. The issue however is one of the integrity of the exercise and the manner in which it is undertaken. Done well drama documentaries can add value to public affairs television, while done poorly or gratuitously for entertainment value alone, the integrity of the journalism can be lost (Tracy, 1995).

In contrast to those who critique the development of reality television and changes to public affairs programmes, others believe audiences have changed, and audiences enjoy the new style programmes. Holland is another who believes that entertainment or 'infotainment' news and current affairs programmes are popular and enjoyed by new audiences, and the genre has

built upon these new trends in broadcasting such as reality television. But there are still questions about what current affairs programmes are and whether new formats embodying elements of 'magazine and infotainment' formats can fit the earlier definitions of current affairs (Holland, 2001). For example if the programmes do not cover the similar subject matter that current affairs programmes originally presented, such as political stories or investigations, and focus instead on celebrities and human interest stories it is questionable whether this is current affairs programming.

### ***A changing genre***

Many post-modern theorists suggest genres no longer make sense and are an outmoded concept from film studies (Casey et al, 2002). There are debates about hybridity, and the fusion of entertainment formats with news and current affairs. Also, when considering the practicalities of modern broadcasting there is a commercial reality whereby the costs of television production for investigative and traditional journalism current affairs formats are simply higher than even the most lavishly produced infotainment or magazine programme (Alysen, 2000). However, many critics see the changes as problematic for democracy.

Pierre Bourdieu (1996) examined the invisible mechanisms of censorship and manipulation that determine content. Like other critics he argues that the 'ratings game' underpins most of present day television journalism and that serious programmes like news and current affairs have an anxiety about being amusing and entertaining at all costs. Bourdieu noted that instead of serious commentators and investigative reporters, there is usually instead, a talk show host. Echoing other critics, Bourdieu saw "real information, analysis, in-depth interviews, expert discussions and serious documentaries lose out to pure entertainment" (1996, p.3).

Thomas Patterson's (2000) research has examined how America's democracy has been weakened by a reliance on soft news items. He argued that the shrinking news and public affairs audience were indicators of a weakening democratic culture. The news is based increasingly on what will interest an audience, and not on what audiences need to know (2000). The long-term

prominence of soft news appears to be leading to a diminishing public interest in news and public affairs. Patterson does concede that there is a place for elements of soft news, however he argues that to “build the news around something other than public affairs is to build it on sand.” Soft news can “spice up” the news but cannot “anchor it” (Patterson, 2000, p.9). If used with restraint it can expand an audience, though ultimately it will, he argues, “wear out an audience” (Patterson, 2000, p. 9).

Turner (2005) discusses similar themes in relation to current affairs in Australia. He concludes that with commercially-driven changes to this genre, the Australian public are being under served by current affairs programmes. In contrast to Lumby’s argument that modern current affairs programme and talkback shows offer a new form of public sphere democratisation, Turner explores the general problem of tabloidisation. He says:

... news and current affairs is one of the benefits that broadcasting licensees can and should offer to the community as a whole in return for their operation of a public resource. Such principles were put in place to enhance the operation of democracy by ensuring the provision of independent information to the citizenry. If those principles were worth defending once, and the need remains today, then the disappearance of the place where they might be enacted is of serious concern (2005, p.25).

The second aspect driving the modern current affairs genre, Turner suggests, is presumptions about democracy. Frequently the explanation given is that the new forms of talk shows or hybrid genres are more democratic than the elitist, paternalistic formats of previous generations (Lumby, 1999)<sup>12</sup>. The popular forms talk to the audience and represent them. The changes in programme format are such that Turner sees the “ideological conversion to seeing their role as primarily a commercial one has been a gradual and often uncomfortable process for many journalists” but this he believes has now matured into something approaching orthodoxy (Turner, 2005, p. 159). However broadcasters hide behind the argument they are being democratic or popular when frequently their motives are more often commercial rather than

---

<sup>12</sup> Lumby (1999) suggests the newer forms of talk-shows and hybrid genres offer a fuller experience of democracy by bringing private sphere experiences to the public domain that were frequently ignored and not deemed important in more paternalistic offerings.

democratically motivated (2005). Programmes that are popular often focus on the tabloid aspects as Turner says:

Whole areas of public affairs have been ignored while we have learnt how effective the latest low-carb diet has been for Janine and Damien from Balgowlah who are trying to shed ten kilos each in the two months left before they are due to marry in swimsuits on the water's edge on Bondi Beach (p. 152).

Hirst et al (1995) in their study shows that Australian current affairs is following the American model by becoming more sensationalist and trivialised. They noted the overwhelming need to entertain in the early evening slot in order to maintain the audience through the night. Where authors like Lumby suggest the newer forms of public affairs somehow liberate women, by focusing on private sphere matters, Hirst et al argue that their research showed women were increasingly presented according to constricting stereotypes. They suggest that Rodney Weaver is correct when he says:

Current affairs television is part of the apparatus for maintaining the status quo by dealing with events as a combination of information and entertainment within a largely unquestioned social framework (Rodney Weaver as cited in Hirst et al, 1994, p. 18).

Macdonald (2000) questions whether the newer form of current affairs are an ineluctable trend. However she suggests the changes may disguise other problems. Personalisation has the ability, if used correctly, to allow for the audience to view older issues and "establish uncomfortable connections between the personal and political, to confront us with the limits of our perceptions, and to scratch away at the gloss of official discourses" (Macdonald, 2000, p. 264). The key to this lies in how it these insights are structured into the programme and also on the quality of research underpinning the programme. However, personalisation, as a cheap substitute for solid investigative reporting, becomes an easy temptation for programme makers working in a commercialised broadcasting market. She says:

Relying upon readily available human interest to cover up a poverty of sources or inadequacies in evidence may still deliver ratings, but will atrophy the ability of the personal to provoke the range of questions that need to be opened for debate if we are to have a vibrant democracy (Macdonald, 2000, p. 265).

## ***Research on the news and current affairs genres in New Zealand***

I will now consider news and current affairs genres within New Zealand. More specifically I will examine the impact of deregulation on current affairs television in New Zealand and identify the key texts which underpin my own research. Atkinson (1994b), Comrie, (1996) and Cook's (2000) research on television news content suggests a general trend toward news tabloidization. Although they examined the news rather than current affairs, their findings provide an important entry point to my own study.

Atkinson notes that tabloid journalism has been seen on New Zealand television in the head-to-head current affairs magazines, *60 Minutes* and *20/20*. The former programme first aired on TV3 in 1989 and in 1992 TVNZ bought the rights to the programme. It was broadcast for nine years until it was replaced by *Sunday*. *60 Minutes* is now broadcast again by TV3, TVNZ's rival broadcaster. *20/20* was originally screened on TV3 between 1993 and 2003 and the programme was picked up by TVNZ in 2005. These are New Zealand versions of the American programme formats with some local material included. He argues that the proliferation of reality television and talk shows such as *Cops*, *Sally Jessy Raphael* and *Oprah Winfrey* have also influenced the style of current affairs programmes, and the main nightly news programme. Most notably he suggests the prime-time commercial television tabloid presence has been felt particularly in Television One and Television Three News and the companion current affairs programme to *One News*, *Holmes* (Atkinson, 2001).

The approach to news and current affairs programmes after deregulation in 1989 became ratings at any cost (Atkinson, 1994b). Atkinson's research on news found increased tabloidization, morselisation, and depoliticisation which all suggested a greater proportion of entertainment, crime, victim and human interest stories and marginalised coverage of political and economic issues. These findings were replicated in studies by Comrie (1996) and Cook (2000). Atkinson says:

With respect to current affairs broadcasting, the temptation of the new

order is for political judgements to be made on the basis of non-political criteria, as in medieval trials by ordeal where the ordeal itself- whether walking on hot coals or surviving a television interview - is wholly irrelevant to the rights and wrongs of the matter at issue. Not only has our public been contracted by television, but the room left over is increasingly being used to focus on personality at the expense of policy substance. Personality politics is nothing new, but it is certainly more widespread (Atkinson, 1994b, p.172).

In 2006 Atkinson updated much of his previous research into the effects of commercialisation with a critical analysis of a relative newcomer to current affairs programmes, *Campbell Live*, presented by John Campbell. This started broadcasting on March 21, 2005. *Campbell Live* is described as current affairs, however though there are 'serious' interviews the programme frequently has more flippant or light hearted items included. He suggests the programme and others like it are poor imitations of serious journalism, and that contemporary journalism in New Zealand exemplifies the process of 'McDonaldization'. The 'McDonaldization thesis' in this context refers to the idea that broadcasting possesses the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant; most noticeably in the areas of efficiency, calculability, and predictability. Efficiency refers to the optimal method for achieving a task and calculability is how quantifiable a product is, and in terms of current affairs and *Campbell Live* the measurement of ratings. Predictability refers to receiving the same product every time and this occurs too in the formats of the programmes (Atkinson, 2006).

Roger Horrocks (2004) has examined the recent history of the New Zealand television system. A key time period examined was from 1985 to 1999 when TVNZ became a state owned enterprise with a directive to operate with the same commercial imperative as its privately-owned competitor. New Zealand on Air (NZOA) acted as a supposed counter balance to the commercial emphasis within the television schedules (Horrocks, 2004, p.25). From 1995, argues Horrocks, broadcasting became even more influenced by the dominant commercialism. Rosser Johnson discusses how news was the first area in which the effects of deregulation and commercialism were felt. These effects, he notes, spread into other television genres. His research examines how, after February 1989, TVNZ altered its rules and established a unit to manage sponsorship. The increase in sponsorship and

advertising were part of a general strategy to attract audiences. Sponsorship for example can be linked to “the tone and substance of a programme” (Johnson, 2000, p.125). In this regard travel shows for example, were “at the forefront of the integration of sponsorship and editorial programming” (Ibid, p. 126).

The commercially driven focus of New Zealand television broadcasters meant success “was not only a matter of ratings but constant calculation as to the profit and loss on each slot, each hour of television, and whether a different audience demographic could attract more advertising revenue” (Horrocks, 2004, p. 58). Harcourt (2000) also confirmed the profit focused emphasis when he says:

TVNZ is, according to a TVNZ study, the world’s most successful publicly owned broadcaster - if you look at the bottom line. It may have almost abdicated any notion of public service broadcasting but it makes loads of money: \$NZ 21.6 million in the final months of 1999 (Harcourt, 2000, p.18).<sup>13</sup>

Following deregulation the changes of the 1980s were so dramatic that Kelsey says that by 1995, news and current affairs were in a bad way. The news and current affairs programmes took on a ‘moral of the story’ view that Kelsey suggests was given through non-verbal cues. The all important in-depth studio interviews and investigative journalism were replaced by “populist crusades, group encounters and either an evasive or a rigidly combative interview” (Kelsey, 1995, p.330). Analysis of complex issues became structurally impossible purely through the fact that sound bites had been reduced. Using Atkinson’s (1994b) research Kelsey says “By 1992 more than three quarters of all interviews had been reduced to ten second sound bites” (Ibid, p.330) and the sources of news changed as well with a privileging of political and business elites. They were treated as authoritative sources which in turn gave them leverage over the language, agenda and perspectives that were heard. When there were attempts at investigative journalism such as TVNZ’s *Eyewitness* investigation into the links between the Labour government and big business, this was met with criticism. Many of the best journalists left New Zealand and

---

<sup>13</sup> Harcourt (2000) discusses the seeming death of public broadcasting in New Zealand in the 1980s. Commenting that public broadcasting is an extinct species he says that with no limits on foreign ownership, no limits on cross ownership, no local content quotas public broadcasting officially died in 1989.

maintained the critiques of the changes to New Zealand from overseas (Kelsey, 1995).

Many critics of deregulation note that news has substantially altered in the last twenty-five years. Judy McGregor & Margaret Comrie (2002, p. 14) criticise the “aggressive commercialism” evident in the news and they argue that the combination of deregulation and the commercial consequences of a global media has “significantly altered the face of the news” (Ibid). Another vocal opponent to these changes in the news was Brian Edwards. In 1992 he analysed two weeks of *One Network News* and selected six items that he considered exemplified the journalistic shortcomings of the bulletin. Each item, he concluded, failed to deliver news in a “neutral or disinterested way” (Edwards, 2002). Edwards noted that these changes reflected the new norms of news delivery, each item was required to contain an “emotive or dramatic tease” (Ibid, p. 17). Edwards offers an explanation as to why this occurred:

What happened was the advent of deregulation and competition in the television marketplace. The “tabloidisation” of television news can be traced back to the run-up period to the arrival of TV3 (Edwards, 2002, p .18)

Thus the origins of the structural changes to news occurred with the arrival of deregulation and rising competition between the state broadcaster and the new channel, TV3. Facing the arrival of the private broadcaster TVNZ no longer viewed the presenting of a high quality national and international news as an essential service:

To the extent that...*One Network News* bulletins thus took on the character of Soap Opera. The news was no longer a dispassionate recital of the day’s events at home and abroad, but a dramatic and frequently melodramatic presentation of the good, the bad and the ugly. The language of the news was changed and decorated to enhance dramatic effect, Items with no common themes were artificially linked with commentary to create the impression of a storyline. ‘As sands through the hourglass, these were the days of our lives’ (Edwards, 2002, p.18).

So the news after deregulation altered dramatically becoming far more emotionally laden and dramatic. Impartial and dispassionate news became a thing of the past. Edwards regarded changes to the news as a shift in the nature of news and the use of the dual presenter format on TV One for example

represented a new formula. In fact, Edwards argues, the original duo, Richard Long and Judy Bailey performed a non-journalistic function. Edwards argues:

Richard and Judy gradually stopped being mere newsreaders and became the subtle interpreters, the quiet but audible Greek chorus to the nightly soap, that superbly choreographed roller-coaster of emotions, from warm fuzzy to cold prickly and back again - the news (Edwards, 2002, p. 19).

These changes were designed to win and keep audiences in the battle for market share. The net result, however, was to render the news as a “palatable form of propaganda” (Ibid, p. 20). This process was also apparent in current affairs where confidence in its objectivity fell and the genre’s ability to critically examine issues was reduced and neutrality severely compromised. Atkinson suggests that as news bulletins and news-bites became shorter so too did studio interview segments. Current affairs used to give forty or fifty minutes to a single issue and studio interviews with a maximum of two interviewees. However, the current affairs programmes of the late 1980s and 1990s were usually divided into two or three segments each on a different topic. Even in hour long programmes the longest time given to issues was now less than twelve minutes. Interviews also changed and Atkinson says:

Occasionally, just occasionally, something gets to be said in that period, but what occurs more often is a mindless shouting match in which nobody listens to anybody else. The whole ethos of the interview has changed. The old notion that it was designed to seek out information has almost disappeared. Now the producers of the show try to figure out beforehand what the interviewee ought to say if they were honest and how they might be persuaded to say it (1994b, p. 159).

Further to the observations of the change in the current affairs interview Atkinson suggests the pace of the interviews became so fast-paced and fragmented as to be incapable of helping any understanding of political events. Most notably because the style of the interview created a situation where audiences adopt a position because they already agree with it and discover the interviewee is like minded, or because they like the personality of the subject and then want to accept the conclusions arrived at. The problem with this approach is none of the approaches will assist with understanding political issues or making long-term political commitments (Atkinson, 1994b).

Margaret Comrie's (1996) study explores broadcasting services and news content in New Zealand after significant restructuring and deregulation. Her research shows "the growing tensions between two major models of broadcasting as marketplace ideology gains ascendancy over public service approaches (Comrie, 1996, p.ii). She shows how increased commercial pressures and the drive to increase ratings resulted in news which under-served citizens in a democratic society.

Cook's (2000) research into the impact of deregulation confirmed previous findings by Atkinson and Comrie, that the increasing commercialisation of the broadcasting environment radically altered the news. Examining news bulletins from 1984-1996 he found increasing depoliticisation, morselisation, personalisation, tabloidisation, centralisation, decontextualisation, trivialisation, familiarisation and atomisation as a result of a move from the hybrid-public service/commercial model to a more commercialised TVNZ. Many of the 1996 news items studied showed more human-interest and tabloid elements compared to 1984. Cook concluded that the political implications of the human interest story showed "ominously conservative tendencies in the overtly benign reportage, which suggests the bulletin was not so much *de*-politicised as *re*-politicised in a particular ideological direction" (Cook, 2000, p.257). In his research, political policy items had also become more depoliticised as they became more tabloid.

More recently Peter Thompson's (2005) research centered on changes with the introduction of a Charter for TVNZ. With the election of the Labour government in 1999 a Charter was proposed and introduced to address perceived problems in broadcasting and to try and return some public broadcasting principles to TVNZ. Officially introduced on March 1, 2003 it set out TVNZ's public broadcasting principles and was designed to enhance national culture and identity. The Charter aimed to produce more locally made current affairs and documentaries and children's programmes than was the case when the broadcaster was an SOE (The TVNZ Charter, n.d). The Charter however did not remove TVNZ's remit to maintain its profits and was funded with a relatively limited initial funding of \$12 million. Thompson argues that the *Holmes*

programme and subsequent name change after the departure of Holmes to *Close Up*, was not what was expected of 'serious' current affairs and had more in common with more tabloid versions of the genre. He says of the TVNZ flagship current affairs programme:

Holmes was an enormous success in terms of delivering audience share, but its personality-driven format, drawing on Paul Holmes' ability to insinuate himself as the ostensible voice of middle New Zealand, worked better with human interest issues than with serious analysis of political and economic affairs (Thompson, 2005, p. 2).

Comrie & Fountaine (2005a) suggest that despite the Labour-Alliance Government's introduction of the TVNZ Charter to address areas of perceived poor performance in the key areas of quality news and current affairs, content quality actually became worse (Comrie & Fountaine, 2005). Comrie and Fountaine (2005, p. 13) say for all the hype about the quality of *Sunday* it still resorted to a highly personalised presentation of issues:

Even when *Sunday* tackles serious issues with wider implications, as it did in a 14 March item about medical malpractice and patients' right to know, its treatment tends to be highly emotive and personalised. The item concerned the death of a baby during a water birth, the midwife's alleged responsibility and the potential consequences of her continuing to practise:

"It should've been the happiest time of their lives, the homebirth of their first born...instead it went horribly wrong...the midwife is guilty, she's still working. Are we entitled to know her name?"

The story exploited every nuance of the parents' grief, and drew on reconstruction, clips from commercially produced water birth videos, personal photographs and close-ups, variously set to the sounds of panting, a ticking clock, beating heart and violin music.

Though the mid-1990s were a time marked by concern over the quality of current affairs programmes there were, Comrie & Fountaine suggest, no new quality current affairs shows produced in the post-charter era which survived. They suggest TVNZ's commercial imperatives have "arguably increased since it became burdened with charter requirements" (2005, p.10). Cocker suggests that the adoption of the Charter with its dual remit was in fact an example of flawed public policy (Cocker, 2006).

## *Charter principles versus commercial news and current affairs*

### *after 1999*

To many writers and critics current affairs programmes entered a period of crisis in the 1990s as a worldwide shift in the dominant character of television journalism occurred. Previously the importance of non-fiction television lay in the perception that television was an important means of nurturing public debates about issues that mattered. From the 1990s the key principle for the success of current affairs programming was commercial success.

TVNZ's current affairs flagship programme *Holmes* is an important example of this new focus of the current affairs genre. *Holmes* sacrificed more serious journalistic norms to make a programme as appealing as possible for the greatest number of viewers.

Even since *Holmes*'s departure in 2004 to another channel there were few differences in the approach used by the replacement presenter Susan Wood on the re-named *Close Up*. Wood offered her personal asides and opinions on the outcome of 0900 polls. In a poll taken on whether the Civil Union Bill should go ahead, Wood presented a questionable poll as fact, as well as making reference to her role as a concerned mother (Banks, 2004). This move from objectivity to personal comment did not fit with TVNZ's promotional material that the programme was not about 'personality'.

While arguments around the causal drive to more entertainment-oriented current affairs continue, not everyone believes that the perceived entertainment focus is all audience-driven, and many see it as a result of a shift in programming focus. The problem for current affairs programmes is that newer lifestyle programmes and infotainment programmes have set the agenda for subject material rather than traditional subject matter. These programmes represent a philosophical change from the traditional view of current affairs where context and background were the underpinnings of the genre.

Recent studies have tried to address the effects on audiences, specifically in relation to being informed on public affairs. The original importance of non-fiction or in this case current affairs television, rested on “the enlightenment belief in the importance of rational discourse about human affairs” (Tracey, 1995 p.141).

Concern over the lack of information and value in current affairs programmes has been voiced in New Zealand. There has been a tendency for current affairs of recent years to resort to standardized, polarized and antagonistic formats where the public is no better informed than they were before watching, although the programmes may give the illusion of authentic debate. The New Zealand research findings cast doubt on the level of informed debate in an environment where important issues and context have been neglected.

Some critics question how seriously TVNZ took the intention to make current affairs more serious with a Charter. Soon after the Charter was established Witchel said of the changing environment:

At present New Zealand broadcasting is anticipating the start of new current affairs programmes running head to head. Close Up at 7 is now just Close Up, but the time-honoured tradition of treating viewers likemorons hasn't changed (2005, p.70).

Atkinson (2006) believes in the case of *Campbell Live* that the elements of 'informed debate' in current affairs programmes have diminished even further. In late 2005 Susan Wood announced her resignation from *Close Up* and has been replaced by TVNZ political reporter Mark Sainsbury. This change came in the midst of a ratings battle with the *Campbell Live* programme broadcast on the competing channel Television Three (TV3). The problem for TVNZ, Comrie & Fountaine suggested, is that “the new law still requires the broadcaster to balance charter objectives with commercial considerations” (Comrie & Fountaine, 2005, p.14). So TVNZ was under the pressure of dual remits to make profits and to also produce 'quality' programming which were not always conducive to high ratings. There was a

relatively long period of introduction to the new Charter current affairs programmes. From 2000 to 2003 TVNZ began three new primetime current affairs programmes. These were the interview show *Face the Nation* (that became known as *Face to Face*), current affairs show *Sunday*, and the youth-oriented *Flipside* on TV2. This run of changes and attempts at new flagship current affairs programmes in the Charter era showed the public broadcaster still has major difficulties in achieving this balance. With the exception of *Sunday* the other two programmes have all been axed largely through an inability to rate with the audience. Interestingly, *Flipside* was a youth oriented interactive programme that met with mixed fortunes. Positioned on TV2, a channel predominantly filled with American prime-time entertainment programmes, *Flipside* struggled to reach and maintain its audience. It was cancelled in April 2004. *Face to Face* met with much controversy also. The presenter Kim Hill well known as Radio New Zealand in-depth interviewer, was not deemed a success on television

*Sunday* was launched in anticipation of the Charter and *Assignment* was cancelled so that resources could be moved to the new Charter current affairs programme. *Sunday*, Comrie & Fountaine (2005) argue, failed to deliver because rather than displaying a distinctively New Zealand style:

The show with its *X files*-style title sequence and tabloid headlines is an uneasy blend of the *60 Minutes* format and the *Assignment* approach. Analysis shows programmes run to a regular pattern of one crime story, one current issue, tackled as a frequently voyeuristic personal story, and a final "feel good" feature. TVNZ bills it as New Zealand's best current affairs programme claiming it provides "the most in-depth information on the stories you need to know about" (<http://www.tvnz.co.nz>). However, it has been criticised as "an issues-free-zone stuck in a highly contrived format" (Drinnan, 2004b) and is rating poorly. Notably, the programme has failed to tackle the "big issue" of 2004, race relations tensions stemming from seashore legislation. CEO Ian Fraser apologised for this at the Broadcasting School Conference in late March (Comrie & Fountaine, p.10).

Though the mid-1990s revealed public concern over the quality of current affairs programmes, Comrie & Fountaine note, no new shows produced in the charter era were continued with. The current state of *Close Up* suggests the commercial approach taken by TVNZ has only become tougher. They state

TVNZ's commercial imperatives have "arguably increased since it became burdened with charter requirements" (Ibid).

Atkinson argues the pressure to produce ratings is problematic for news and current affairs programmes and "for all the talk of 'consumer sovereignty' commercial media are chiefly concerned with delivering audiences to advertisers (Atkinson, 2006, p.5). The problem with the ethos of consumer sovereignty is that it rests on the crude "utilitarian notion that people know what they want, rather than being cumulatively conditioned by what is available" (Ibid). Ratings and focus groups measure forced choices from a pre-established menu rather than allowing for democratic deliberation. The commercial performance which is so often the measure of success for these programmes is primarily concerned with the cost-efficient delivery of news commodities and lucrative demographic groups (Ibid).

The different modes of address evident in news and current affairs programmes since the changes of deregulation have been explored by Atkinson and he says they are symptomatic of a "hybrid consumption setting" (2006, p.10). He has mapped the changes by categorising the three main forms of delivery associated with news and current affairs under different broadcasting systems. Using a scale of P1 to P3, P.1 is the norm of more public sphere-type journalism, P.2 is primarily focused on cost-efficient delivery of news commodities to lucrative demographic groups and P.3 is focused on more persuasive theatrical displays of journalistic roles designed to initiate controversy, generate publicity and be seen as glamorous in the quest to maximize audiences (Atkinson, 2006). As such these are categories to explain the move in presenting styles and linking them with the effects that the new modes of presentation create. The change in presentation can be seen to represent also the change from public sphere journalism to the more theatrical and controversial approach and he suggests that most presenters have moved from P1 which features aspects normally associated with the public sphere notions to far more commercial performances.

The P1 approach suggested responsible journalists behave as trusted third-party mediators and accept some version of their responsibilities. There have been tendencies in Western Journalism for the lofty P1 goals to be displaced by more commercial P2 and entertainment-oriented P 3 criteria. This change Atkinson says has intensified over the decades. Of these one of the worst culprits is *Campbell Live's* John Campbell:

Campbell has certainly entered the political fray as a participant rather than a third-party mediator, and the question is how long he can use the alibi of public interest to defend actions that are not journalism. The trick so far seems to be that he has so far been able to convince his audience of his own sincerity (Atkinson, 2006, p.12).

The impact of deregulation on “news and current affairs was severe - but its primary impact was to strengthen the grip of much larger multinational forces” (Atkinson, 2010, p, 414). The fragmentation of television news whether this is across channels, programme formats or attracting market niches, links to changes across conventional broadcast news. This change has been to news or current affairs programmes that are more entertainment-oriented talk, breakfast and celebrity news shows (Ibid, p. 414). Recent research comparing *Campbell Live* and *Breakfast* showed programmes that “embodied theatrical techniques of audience ingratiation that prioritised simplification over complexity, derision and mockery over understanding and engagement, and spectacle and entertainment over informing citizens or educating the public” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 417). Changes in the style in presentation since deregulation are seen to have impacted heavily on the programmes’ ability to deliver information as these new theatrical modes of presentation have become the norm.

### ***Summary***

This literature review has discussed the academic writing about television current affairs and specifically examined the key themes of tabloidization, infotainment, current affairs genre change and the impact of deregulation.

Current affairs television in New Zealand has inherited a history of policy and legislative changes which closely mirror that of Britain and the United States. It

is clear that many of the criticisms aimed at current affairs television in Britain and the United States are similar to those made of New Zealand programmes. Criticisms are often focused on a decline in quality or a lack of serious journalism and the intrusion of tabloid or infotainment elements. The change of focus is seen to result from changes to the broadcasting environments when they have become more commercialised and more ratings driven. In the changing system programmes have altered so completely to leave them often devoid of the characteristics that were originally expected of the current affairs genre. They are often only current affairs television in name rather than actuality. In all cases the pursuit of ratings and revenue has radically altered the nature of 'current affairs' to the point where there is a question of whether the respected formats of the past that offered context, depth and serious commentary are now merely part of a discarded television genre. This study sets out to answer that very question by examining current affairs television programmes both pre- and post-deregulation.

This literature review has examined key texts for this study from the New Zealand research into changes to news after deregulation and how these studies have relevance to the focus in this study on current affairs. It has also included the writing on the key areas of change to the media environment and current affairs. The key New Zealand research into TV news is by Atkinson, Corrie and Cook and these studies have been adapted to inform the research template into current affairs. These key texts are important as they specifically examined the key questions of how deregulation affected news. The British study of Barnett & Seymour into current affairs in Britain is the other key template as it is about research undertaken into the current affairs genre and examines how changes to the broadcasting environment in Britain have impacted on current affairs programmes. Aspects of that study have been adopted to fit this New Zealand research. It is clear from the literature that discusses current affairs programmes that there has been considerable concern about how the genre has changed and often the key factor affecting the genre is increasing commercialisation.

This study examines the change to current affairs programmes in New Zealand

by using existing templates of research and adapting these to fit. The existing literature positions the current affairs genre against a back-drop of terms such as infotainment, tabloidisation and market-driven journalism. This research is important as it provides quantifiable data to add to the existing New Zealand research and to explore the tensions that have arisen when considering the changes to the current affairs genre and debate around the change in function and form. This research approach also offers a greater depth in the questions asked. It complements the international research and will contribute to understanding changes to this key genre. The research findings of this research set out to explore how the programmes have changed in New Zealand. Whether there is a direct correlation from change in format to function remains a matter of debate, however the level of change in format should offer some insight into the way the current affairs genre has altered in a radically commercialised broadcasting environment. This research however is not seeking to address audience engagement but rather to map changes in the programmes and to analyse the depth of change over the research period.

## CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE OF METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the approach and methodology of this study are outlined. I employ a critical political economy approach and the rationale for this will be explained when the main templates for this research are detailed. A British study into current affairs programmes is one main template and the previous New Zealand research into the news by Cook (2000), Atkinson (1994b), and Comrie (1996) constitutes the other part of the template. As has been noted earlier, one of the key trends associated with deregulation and the spread of commercialisation is the competition for audiences and this has meant that there has been gravitation away from serious or traditional current affairs programmes. The move to a market-led broadcasting environment has meant a growing depoliticisation of content and, arguably, disengagement of the public from political life. The methodology outlined then is a way to measure quantitative and qualitative changes that have occurred across the changing media environment and media content after the introduction of deregulation. In this context the changes that have occurred in subject matter categories are indicative of selections made by broadcasters to attract audiences.

### *Content analysis of news: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed in the research. Quantitative data are used to examine changing subject matter and a qualitative approach will pick up on the way that subject matter is handled and the way issues are framed or attributed. In particular, the qualitative approach looks at the changing texture of programmes. For example one trend that has been noted is personalisation in current affairs programmes where personalities become foregrounded at the expense of the issues themselves. An instance of this would be, 'people in business' rather than economics reporting.<sup>14</sup> Another aspect of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Hope (2000) in a discussion of the commercialisation of the mediated public sphere says the media tends to

research exercise is to analyse the impact that the deregulation of broadcasting in the late 1980s in New Zealand has had on television current affairs programming and to answer the question as to what changes, if any, have occurred in the deregulated broadcasting environment.

Before outlining the template studies I will discuss the overall approach of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative content analysis in communication studies can be defined as:

The systematic, and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, p.25).

Usually content analysis involves drawing representative samples of content, using the category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content, and measuring reliability (agreement or stability) over time. The data collected in

quantitative content analyses are analysed to describe what are typical patterns or characteristics or to identify important relationships among the content qualities examined. If the categories and rules are conceptually and theoretically sound and are reliably applied, the researcher increases the chance that the study results will be valid (for instance, that the observed patterns are meaningful). Explanations for problems or questions for such researchers are sought and derived through direct and objective observation and measurement rather than through one's reasoning, intuition, faith, ideology or conviction. In short the scientific method is employed (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005).

In this study content analysis is supplemented by qualitative analysis. Jensen (1991) suggests that content analysis has a long pedigree and used with qualitative analysis can be a powerful research tool. Jensen says

---

amplify the individual symptoms of problems rather than analysing issues of poverty, unemployment and welfare provision. He says " On programmes such as *Holmes* or *20/20*, redundant workers, homeless families, and elderly citizens waiting for surgery are depicted as tragic cases rather than as necessary casualties of globally configured restructuring" (p. 16).

“qualitative analysis focuses on the occurrence of its analytical objects in a particular context, as opposed to the recurrence of formally similar elements in different contexts...and this implies an “internal approach to understanding culture, interpreting and perhaps immersing oneself in its concrete expressions”. This is opposed to the “external approach that seeks to establish an external stance outside culture” (Jensen, 1991, p.4).

One of the differences between quantitative and qualitative data is that quantitative research hypotheses are generated before collection while qualitative researchers in contrast, use an inductive method and data are collected relevant to a topic and are grouped into appropriate and meaningful categories. Explanations emerge from the data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). As quantitative content analyses tend to be purely descriptive of characteristics displayed in the media sample they often fail to suggest the potential significance of their findings in terms of either the impact on the audience or the issues around the production of the programme (Gunter, 2000). The strength of research is improved with a combination of both qualitative analysis and quantitative content analysis. Ericson et al. (1991) say the qualitative content analyst “picks out what is relevant for analysis and pieces it together to create tendencies, sequences, patterns and orders” (1991). Qualitative analysis then can pinpoint the ways news or other programme operatives combine different items and stories to create new meanings and new themes.

Qualitative analysis can assist with examining the degree of change in programmes and is particularly useful in a longitudinal study. If subject matter has changed the categories established for a quantitative study will not reveal the textures of change which will become apparent with qualitative examination.

Qualitative approaches are useful for examining changes such as how the stories have altered (Comrie, 1996). In the context of this study, a crime story in 1985 may be treated differently to a crime story in 1990. If this is the case the qualitative study will pick up these changes. The importance of examining

textual change in programmes became evident in an examination of subject matter change between the current affairs programmes *Agenda* and *Close-up* (Baker, 2007). In this research 50 programmes from *Agenda* and *Close-Up* from 2005 and 2006 were examined. The different treatment of subject matter was very obvious as *Close Up* was very entertainment focused even with coverage of political stories which tended to focus on controversies and scandals. A qualitative examination would reveal these changes rather than a quantitative analysis of how many stories fitted the subject areas of possibly politics or crime.

### ***The British template: Barnett & Seymour's study (1999).***

As previously mentioned research into the impact of deregulation on current affairs and drama programmes in Britain was carried out in a University of Westminster study in 1999. This study, *A Shrinking Iceberg Travelling South:*

*Changing Trends in British Television. A case study of drama and current affairs* (Barnett & Seymour, 1999) looked at both drama and current affairs programming over a twenty year period. It was commissioned by the *Campaign for Quality Television* in Britain<sup>15</sup> and employed a combination of research methods using interviews and content analysis of schedules starting in the 1970s.

The study interviewed industry professionals asking them questions over seven categories. It is a largely descriptive rather than prescriptive piece of research and examines the changes without making any suggestions about how the problems that the study outlines might be remedied. Its findings show that there have been dramatic changes in the subject matter of current affairs programmes in Britain. Importantly, those practitioners interviewed had grave

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Campaign for Quality Television* was set up in 1988 after programme makers became concerned about the then proposed deregulation of television. Over the next two years it played an important role in ameliorating, in its view, some of the worst excesses of the 1990 Broadcasting Act. It aims to promote public service television, choice and quality for all viewers in the United Kingdom. In the campaign's own words recent developments in television have been driven by a narrowly financial agenda and the role it plays in informing and educating people from all sectors of society is being largely ignored (Campaign for Quality Television, 2006).

concerns over the state of the genre and questioned whether it was in terminal decline. The authors state that the report is not about turning back the clock and that their study should assist with robust debate about the state of television programme making. The approach taken was twofold. First, the authors carried out a qualitative investigation of the industry through interviews with those directly involved in creating drama or current affairs programming. These included commissioning editors, department heads, senior industry figures and also those who worked in airtime sales and sponsorship. Thirty-four industry people in total were interviewed and they were selected at random. Alongside the interviews they also conducted a longitudinal analysis of peak-time current affairs and drama. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the current affairs section of their research.

Barnett & Seymour (1999) argue that for over 50 years from the 1940s to the 1980s the British broadcasting environment was largely stable. Then by a combination of “technological innovation and political fiat” the industry became characterised by channel proliferation and intense competition for commercial revenue (p.9). The deregulatory framework adopted in the 1980s and 1990s reshaped the structure and philosophy of commercial television, while the

BBC also absorbed some of the rhetoric of market liberalism and consumer sovereignty. Like many Western broadcasters, convergence and globalisation deeply affected the British broadcasting environment. These changes mirror many of the changes experienced in the New Zealand broadcasting environment of the 1980s and 1990s. The confluence of industrial, competitive, political and technological upheaval in just ten years, Barnett & Seymour suggest, have had an effect on television’s creative process and therefore on its output.

The study examined the purpose of the broadcasting institutions in wider terms than simple market efficiency or productivity. This was a deliberate measure to counter the emphasis that had been placed on the business and industrial role of the industry. Barnett and Seymour state that the genres of drama and current

affairs epitomise “commitment to information, diversity and creativity in programme making” (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p.9). This period of study incorporated a time of enormous upheaval in British broadcasting. The study sought to put the changes into a longer historical context and it starts from the late 1970s during a period of three channel stability which lasted until 1987. The initial time year chosen was 1977 and the last year 1998.

The sampling periods were decided according to two main criteria. The researchers, in trying to avoid any seasonal bias, decided upon two periods during a given year (September to August) which followed the programming year rather than the calendar year. They selected two four week periods during October and March within each of the years 1977/8, 1987/8 and 1997/8. To ensure exact compatibility in each year, the sampling period started on the first Monday of the relevant month and continued for 28 days. Analysis focused on peak-time hours only within that 28 day period, those hours being defined as between 6.00 pm to 11.00pm. In each year Barnett & Seymour (1999) sampled 15% of the off-peak programming output of total current affairs programmes available and these were chosen through random selection that excluded daily current affairs and news analysis programmes. This was done because it would have been impossibly time consuming to analyse all the programmes.

In the Barnett & Seymour study, the qualitative interviews were with 34 industry people in total, 26 of whom were senior producers, editors or directors of drama and current affairs. The interviews were designed to identify the changes experienced personally by the interviewees during their professional lives and how these changes have influenced the practice of programme making. Most of the interviewees were selected at random, using a combination of industry lists and schedule listings for 1998. Five were suggested after consultation with the *Campaign for Quality Television* (1998), and their views corresponded with the random sample. All interviews were conducted on a non-attributable basis. The study raised many questions about television’s changing priorities and the implications for programme quality and diversity.

A key departure in the research for this thesis is that the qualitative analysis does not include interviews. However, it does adapt from the Barnett & Seymour study the content analysis of changing subject matter under a deregulated broadcasting environment and the focus on the current affairs genre. For my purposes, (instead of trying to determine what is a 'proper' or 'correct' current affairs programme) programmes are potentially included in the sample if they fall under the umbrella term current affairs, a label given to them by the broadcaster. In the Barnett & Seymour study the unit of analysis was all weekly current affairs scheduled in peak hours on the terrestrial channels. This included all programmes designed to examine and interpret contemporary issues in the news, whether domestic or foreign. Longstanding weekly current affairs programmes such as *Panorama*, *World in Action*, *This Week* as well as *The Money Programme*, *Dispatches* and *Correspondent* were included. Because they dealt with immediately unfolding news stories regional programming as well as one off debates were part of the analysis. After discussion about which programmes to include they decided not to include specialist series which were specifically designed to tackle issues of immediate interest in particular policy areas (Barnett & Seymour, 1999).

As previously explained Barnett & Seymour excluded all daily current affairs and news analysis programmes as well as factual one off documentary, political discussion and minority programmes that were not addressing issues of immediate news relevance. This was partly for practical reasons as they said it would have been too time-consuming to analyse all the relevant editions of *Newsnight* and make the distinction between the news segments and current affairs. This study will not follow the selection criteria chosen by Barnett & Seymour (1999). In this research the overall selection of programmes was made by first seeing which current affairs programmes were available in the years selected for this study. The years chosen for examination were 1984, 1994 and 2004 and it was necessary to assess via the current affairs programmes stored in the Chapman Archive which programmes were

available in full. Some programmes did not have full sets of programmes and had large gaps in the archived collection.

In practice Barnett & Seymour found grey areas between news, current affairs, documentaries and factual programmes. The crucial point in their view was that the definitions remained constant over the time being analysed. They were confident that the methodology adopted had uncovered some real and significant trends over the 20 year period which could not be explained by a migration of subject matter to other categories of programmes not covered by their analysis.

The British study found that there had been a significant decline over the 20 years from 1977/78 to 1997/98 in foreign affairs coverage in current affairs programmes. By the late 1990s such coverage was almost completely confined to the BBC. British commercial television had effectively moved away from covering foreign affairs in current affairs programmes and much of what has been regarded as political and economic current affairs. Across all the channels there has been a noticeable rise in coverage of police and crime themed stories and, to a lesser extent, consumer stories. The growth of stories of police and crime news corresponds with changes noted by Atkinson (1994b), Cook, (2000), and Comrie, (1996) in New Zealand studies of the news. The Barnett & Seymour study concluded that the current affairs “genre is in crisis and is possibly in terminal decline”, with a sharp reduction in audiences (1999, p.20). All the programme makers and commissioners interviewed for the report said that the genre was under extreme pressure with a multi-channel environment (Barnett & Seymour, 1999).

The twenty-two subject matter categories from the Barnett & Seymour study will be adapted to fit New Zealand conditions.<sup>16</sup> For example it will be necessary

---

<sup>16</sup>The British study used the following: 1. politics/economic, 2. industry/business/ city/ finance, 3. crime/police, 4. drugs/alcohol/prostitution/immigration/home affairs, 5. legal, 6. consumer affairs, 7. foreign affairs (excluding the EU), 8. Education, 9. Employment, 10. Northern Ireland, 11. Environment, ecology, energy/planning and development, 12. Weather, disasters, 13. Health, medicine, 14. Science/technology, 15. Information technology, 16. religion, 17. Sport, 18. Royalty, 19. Show business, entertainment, 20. Moral, ethical issues, 21. Human interest, 22. Other-(including canine control, black artists, racism in Scotland, light aircraft safety in the south east. Comrie included Maori subject matter when she adapted a template from international studies for her study to make the research approach fit New Zealand.

to include subject areas like Maori issues that are distinctive to this country.<sup>17</sup> Areas of interest to a British study such as Northern Ireland are of little relevance to a New Zealand study and will be excluded.

The British study chose sampling periods on two criteria. To avoid seasonal bias they took two periods during any sample. As previously mentioned they followed the programming year in Britain which is September to August and not the calendar year. That method will be used in this study though the time period will be reversed to reflect New Zealand conditions. For example in Comrie's research she excluded the months of December and January. This is the summer holiday season which is notable for the amount of repeat programming and the absence of local programmes.

The Westminster study's initial coding definitions were guided by what they saw as obvious distinctions in news agendas; politics, business, foreign, consumer affairs, or crime. It was also partly shaped by the domain of government departments, for example Employment, Education and Home Affairs. They wanted to minimise cross-categorisation as much as possible, although they did concede there would always be room for subjective interpretation. For example they noted drug abuse and prostitution might theoretically be incorporated within the broad category crime, yet there are clearly issues that could stand alone and have important social policy implications. For their study they were categorised as Home Affairs. After carrying out pilot studies they created two further categories, one that included moral or ethical issues where the issue was more a matter of lifestyle and individual responsibility than policy (for example the sterilisation of young women, animal rights, adoption); and 'Human Interest' where programmes focused on one or two individuals or families with little or no attempt to draw outwider social or political implications from the stories being told (for example, a murder in the family or teenage parents). The researchers argued that the coding frame appeared to be robust and most programme content could be fairly easily allocated to one subject area.

---

<sup>17</sup> Comrie included Maori subject matter when she adapted a template from international studies for her study to make the research approach fit New Zealand.

There were several points of coding contention. Where coding contention arose the overriding concern of the researchers was to code according to the general purpose of the programme. So the question asked of each item was what was the general purpose of the programme? Was it designed as an investigation or analysis of a proposed piece of government legislation (politics) or was it looking more generally at a particular social issue? Was it primarily a business or industry story with political overtones or was it essentially a political story about business?

They regarded the judgements as essentially subjective and believed them to be self-balancing over the period under analysis. My research will take the Barnett & Seymour categories and add further categories relevant to this study. This approach was also taken by Cook in his study of television news programmes in New Zealand. He was also prepared to add new categories to the earlier study by Comrie that his research was based on.

One particular difficulty the British researchers found was the political nature of the National Health Service. Issues like the working hours of junior doctors or a shortage of hospital beds were problematic to code as health categories are broad and there can be big differences between areas such as working conditions and other health issues such as medical breakthroughs or health system innovations. Programmes on deregulation in the airline industry and privatising electricity could be coded as either politics or business/finance but were included in the latter. For the British researchers, consumer-oriented programmes also caused problems in the coding process. A programme on organophosphates in the home could they said, theoretically be placed in the health or science code but was, they argued, more about individual awareness promoted by consumer programmes. They did feel on balance it was more a general environmental issue.

In an earlier exploration of two recent current affairs programmes in New Zealand, *Agenda* and *Close Up* (Baker, 2007), similar problems were found in 86 trying to code subjects when the subject categories were too

narrow or the subject matter treatment not straightforward. In a story on the Prime Minister's speeding motorcade, which traditionally fits the political category, the approach of the story was at the more 'tabloid' end of the political spectrum.<sup>18</sup> By using a broader range of subjects with finer differentiations it is anticipated these issues can be resolved to offer a more robust measurement of how current affairs programmes have altered. The political subject matter is broken down into two broad areas, domestic or international and then into the following areas; Politics, miscellaneous, policy, taxation, finance, inflation, SOE's, assets, public service, politics health, education, accommodation, international relations. In the qualitative analysis the changing way of treating topics will be examined fully, where the distinction between the political stories of the mid-1980s can be compared and contrasted with those from the 1990s and beyond.

### ***New Zealand research***

The two key New Zealand research templates are by Comrie and Cook who based their work on Atkinson's earlier research.<sup>19</sup> Atkinson said the impact of a more commercialised broadcasting environment meant that: "Since deregulation, control over democratic discourse has become, if anything, more hierarchical and more elitist than before" (1994, p. 150). Comrie's research set out to study the impact of deregulation and competitive pressures on *One News* between 1985 and 1990. Her perspective came from a growing number of scholars arguing for public service broadcasting and informative news programming as essential tools for a healthy democracy. Comrie says her quantitative findings are confirmed and strengthened by the qualitative analysis which examined areas not covered by content analysis, such as the study of

---

<sup>18</sup> In 2004 a political scandal surrounded Prime Minister Helen Clark as her motorcade was reported to have driven over the speed limit so she could make a connecting flight to see a rugby game. Five police and a chauffeur were later charged with speeding and controversy continued with those who thought it was Clark's fault and she should take responsibility for the incident. The episode was later named 'Motorgate' along with several incidents deemed to be scandal in her term as Prime Minister. Watergate. The other incidents also referencing Watergate were 'Paintergate' (2002) where a painting Clarke signed was later determined to have been painted by an artist and also 'Corngate' where activist and author Nicky Hagar suggested genetically contaminated corn was released into the environment. A controversial interview with John Campbell intensified the accusations and scandal at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Atkinson (1994b) carried out content analysis on *One Network News* and found that, over time, items had become more morselised and depoliticised among other key findings.

visual images, the interaction between audio and visual messages and themes and symbols in the news (Comrie, 1996).

### ***Comrie's analysis of TVNZ news***

Comrie's thesis set out to explore the impact of deregulation and competitive pressures on the news. The underlying research question in the Comrie study was: What was the influence of deregulation and competitive pressure on the nature of the news? The content analysis she carried out answered two research questions. First, did the TVNZ early evening news bulletins change significantly during the period 1985-1990. Second, if change occurred, what was the nature and extent of that change?

Comrie's interviews and literature review then generated assumptions about what happens to information programming and news when a broadcaster is subject to commercial pressures. She carried out a content analysis of early evening news bulletins between 1985 and 1990 which quantified changes in subject matter and in the sourcing and attribution of news. Her results confirmed a shift towards more commercial approaches with a reduction in time given to national news, reduced story length and short sound bites. There was a move away from serious news subjects (traditionally thought of as politics, economics, and diplomacy and foreign affairs) to more entertainment-oriented subjects (crime, accidents and disasters, human interest, and public moral problem stories).<sup>20</sup>

Her research focused on five related questions which set the direction of the project (Comrie, 1996, p, 86). First, did the early evening news change significantly in the period covered by the research? Second, if change occurred, what was the extent and nature of the change? Third, what were the changing newsroom practices and philosophies? Fourth, did deregulatory changes and major management decisions from 1985 to 1990 contribute to

---

<sup>20</sup> TVNZ news, Comrie says, continued to rely on official sources but also increased its use of victim and ordinary citizens as news sources. There was also a reduction in cited sources ( p. iii, 1996).

changes in the news bulletin? Fifth, how did the philosophies of broadcasting contribute to the changing form of the news?

In addition there was a qualitative analysis of the changes in bulletin pace and the growth in emotional, tabloid language in stories and headlines. Comrie suggests that her methodologies reinforced each other, providing a fuller and more accurate picture of the media context. This was done to underline the importance of “contextualising” content research. Tuchman (1991) says quantitative and qualitative methods of studying news are seldom employed in conjunction with one another but if this approach is used it does allow for a more meaningful analysis of the end product. Comrie also set out to examine whether there had been a shift in the function of news items from disseminating information to creating vicarious experiences. Her analysis found both verbal and visual techniques were used to heighten emotion and increase audience involvement.

Comrie carried out a content analysis; content analysis is one of the most widely used research techniques in the understanding and evaluation of broadcast messages. Comrie cites a number of writers who testify to its continuing utility (Kaid and Wadsworth, 1989; Stempel, 1989; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991). The classic definition of content analysis is that it is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1925 as cited in Stempel, 1989). One of the debates around the utility of content analysis is whether analysis should be limited to manifest content (those elements that are physically present and countable) or extended to latent content. Manifest content describes what an author or speaker has actually said while latent meaning describes what an author intended to say or write. Normally content analysis can only be applied on manifest content, that is the words, sentences or texts themselves rather than their meanings. The interpretation of latent content includes a symbolic reading of what lies underneath the physical data.

The problem with this is that it is open to the coder’s subjective interpretation and

it is suggested that the researcher is explicit about the approach taken. Berg suggests that one way to resolve this is to use both an exploration of manifest and latent content where possible. This can be achieved by reporting the frequency of an observed concept within the material under study (Berg, 2001). Much of this can be resolved by how the results are interpreted, for instance researchers have to be careful not to announce what looks like significant findings without a fuller overall analysis (Stempel, 1989). In this study the coding package has clear instructions for each question as to when to note when there is an effect or not and how to determine multiple answers when several options are available. Each question has a help prompt which asks the coder to determine if set criteria are met and if so to note the effect.

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) argue that content analysis, rather than simply being a form of data-gathering is misused in that “most users see content analysis as a set of full-blown research procedures” (p.197). Stempel (1989) argues that content analysis is a useful formal system for carrying out investigations into communications research. This is confirmed by Wimmer and Dominick who say it can be used for answering many mass media questions (1991). Stempel says

“...it means that the analyses are designed to secure data relevant to a research question or hypothesis” (p. 120, 1989). Following Stempel’s (1989) advice that good content analysis begins with good questions, Comrie developed a subset of questions to the major research questions. Another of the foundations of good content analysis is how well the questions are framed.

Comrie’s research questions for her content analysis considered the following areas. Have sound bites and item length become shorter, as found in overseas studies? She also considered whether there has been a decrease in serious, informational or political topics in the news and if there has been an increase in topics with an emphasis on entertainment and audience appeal? (See Appendix 1 for the subject categories). Another area she explored was whether there has been a tendency to reduce costs by increasingly centralised news coverage, reflected in geographic sourcing? Her final two research questions examined whether there has been any change in news

sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in the news and if there has been an increased tendency to obscure or veil sources in the news?

### **Comrie's qualitative methodology**

Comrie's qualitative research set out to discover if deregulatory changes and management changes in the study period contributed to changes in presentational style. Her assumption was that increasing commercial pressure on Television New Zealand (TVNZ) resulted in qualitative changes designed to increase the entertainment value of news and its ability to attract and keep audiences. Comrie's qualitative analysis was based on van Dijk's (1988) methods of discourse analysis. She also used Ericson et al (1991) who used concepts of narrative and frames (central organising ideas) to describe the news. Comrie argued that combining qualitative and quantitative methods strengthened her study as content analysis answered the questions of what message was being carried while to answer the question why the news carries the message and content it does it was necessary to study the context in which the news is produced.

This part of Comrie's study concentrated on concerns with mood and effects created by pace, language, banter (chit chat), headline analysis, alliteration, puns, rhetorical questions, and metaphor as well as analysis of individual stories. Comrie's qualitative approach was based on the theories of Teun van Dijk (1991) who suggested that the popular or tabloid press violates norms of discourse using language packed with metaphors, alliteration and emotional adjectives. Alliteration, van Dijk says, is one of the most prominent rhetorical devices used by the popular press and this and the use of puns can show a growing intrusion of tabloid standards on reporting. Other verbal cues to measure can be 'blended' metaphor, cliché and hyperbole in the headlines of the stories.

For each year of her study all headlines were studied for occurrences of alliteration, puns, rhetorical questions, rhyme, repetition, parallels, links and contrasts, metaphor, cliché, hyperbole and emotionally loaded words (Comrie, 1996, p. 287). Comrie's qualitative analysis used Van Dijk's distinction between

the rhetorical devices typical in the tabloid press and the factual sounding discourse of traditional news writing (1991).<sup>21</sup> For each year, all headlines were studied for the incidence of alliteration, puns, rhetorical questions, rhyme, repetition, parallels, links and contrasts, metaphor, cliché, hyperbole and emotionally loaded words. This approach can be applied to the study of current affairs programmes, though with the qualification that it may offer less information than the studies on news headlines because they are less a feature of the current affairs genre. In this research this comparison is carried out for those current affairs programmes that have headlines. Some of the current affairs programmes do not have headline such as *Holmes*.

Comrie (1996) suggests that the effect of more tabloid elements was to make news stories more exciting and this would help to hook the viewer in. Edwards also noted the intrusion of tabloid values on TVNZ's *One Network News* with increasing editorialising (Edwards, 2002). Edwards noted news that had a number of journalistic flaws that was designed to hook the audience and maintain their interest in the news 'story' rather than watching news for facts.

Comrie's (1996) research examined many of the areas on the network news that Edwards critiqued in 1992 in *Cootchie Coo News* (Edwards, 1992) and later in *Cootchie Coo News Revisited* (Edwards, 2002). In 1992 he analysed two weeks of *One Network News* and examined these for what he perceived as journalistic flaws. The common element was that the bulletins failed to present the news in a "neutral or disinterested way" (Edwards, 1992, p. 17). Overall the bulletins were coloured with the perceptions of the producer, journalists or newsreader that was "overlaid with sentiment in an attempt to hook the viewer into an emotional response" (Ibid). These changes occurred due to the advent of deregulation and competition. The closeness of a small country like New Zealand, Edwards argued, was far more likely to undermine the confidence in the objectivity of news and current affairs as audiences are very familiar with local 'personalities'. The chances of meeting 'top news personalities' in a country like America is very

---

<sup>21</sup> Teun van Dijk's examination of the news suggests the main purpose behind news discourse is that it be accepted as truth. Factual events are emphasised using three methods, direct description and eyewitness reports, using sources and quotes and numbers. The Popular or tabloid press provide exceptions to this rhetorical style which he says is

remote for most Americans. The familiarity with local news 'personalities' also tends to move into a familiarity with all aspects of news, so that jingoism occurs. The problems he observed in the news could be argued as of greater importance for current affairs as the journalist's role is not simply to report the news but examine the issues critically.

As previously stated the two subject categories of crime and public moral problems were also included in the Comrie study and she mapped the move from description to narration.<sup>22</sup> Crime stories were examined for a change in the emphasis on the violent or sensational aspects of crime coverage. She focused on the nature of violent coverage, the use of language and the concentration on the victim and on the individual emotions. The second type of story examined was public moral problems. The stories analysed included those about human relations, moral problems and alcohol, divorce, sex and race relations and civil court proceedings; subjects close to the heart of tabloid journalism. Comrie then analysed the overall shape of the bulletin in terms of its potential impact in the light of Edward's (1992) comment on the "superbly choreographed roller coaster ride of emotions" (Comrie, p. 289, 1996) that television news now presented, since deregulation.<sup>23</sup> Edwards's states:

In addition to editorial intrusion, the two channels were more or less guilty of sloppy, imprecise and sometimes misleading use of language in their teasers, intros to reports and in the reports themselves (Edwards, 2002, p. 26).

In relation to the increase in crime stories, Comrie (1996) notes there was a growing focus on the victims of crime and the encouragement of the viewer to become involved in the distress of the victims. She examined quantitative features of the bulletins, the news hole, story length, visual elements and then expanded her qualitative analysis into four bulletins where a date was selected at

---

especially true of the tabloid press (1991).

<sup>22</sup> What is described here is a move from the description of the "straight news genre" where items are listed according to a hierarchy of importance. The function of the descriptive mode is to provide information and knowledge and this is the primary variable affected in the changes that have changed in a deregulated broadcasting environment. The second mode is narration, which Comrie says is characteristic of new journalism. The structure for this chronological order is either simple or complex, and may include flashbacks. The main function of narration is to recreate participation and vicarious experience which make the news more emotional rather than factual (p.287).

<sup>23</sup> This was done by examining the overall format of the bulletins and measuring shot length and comparing this to the subject matter changes. 'Chit chat' is generally light hearted comments between presenters and is dependent upon there being two presenters.

random from the first year and this bulletin was compared with equivalent days in each study year.<sup>24</sup>

### ***A summary of Comrie's findings***

Comrie found a significant reduction in the amount of time news sources spoke. In terms of sound bite length for each of the years studied she found they halved across the study period from 18.5 sec in 1985 to 9 sec in 1990 and this confirmed Atkinson's earlier findings into the decrease in length of sound bites (1994b).

Her content analysis found an increase in tabloid subject matter and an overall decrease in political subjects which confirmed Atkinson's earlier findings. Comrie's findings were less marked than Atkinson's in terms of a large increase in 'entertainment values' though Comrie suggests that this could be due to differences in sampling techniques as the constructed week sample would lessen the chance that a story or incident running over a few days will dominate the news. The results as to whether there was a change in geographical sourcing showed that overseas coverage was the main area covered, and these stories took up one third of the bulletin. The next largest source of stories came from Auckland and the coverage of Auckland grew in relation to those from Wellington in 1989 and 1990. Stories that focused on areas outside these main centres were few in Comrie's study. The question of whether there had been a tendency to veil or obscure sources showed that while there was usually attribution or identification, cited sources was only identified by the organisation or country from where the original comment came. There was a shift in results however later in the study period where the tendency for vague attribution of sources increased. Comrie says "This stylistic veiling of cited sources, when combined with a tendency to reduce the number of sources cited in a story, gives rise to concern" (1996, p.282).

---

<sup>24</sup> The dates selected were August 9, 1985, August 7, 1987, August 11, 1989 and August 10, 1990.

## ***The study by Cook***

Cook's study built on the existing research into the impact of deregulation on the news in New Zealand. He examined the pre- and post-deregulation periods and plotted trends over thirteen years. Cook carried out a macro-analysis of the news bulletin and a micro-analysis of political content.

Cook's methodology in his study of news was first concerned with the *macro- analysis* of content. This was an examination of changes to content measured in the comparative levels of time allocated to various news subjects. The quantitative content analysis was the principal feature of his thesis and attempted to answer two simple questions. First, have there been changes in the allocation of time to certain news subjects during the sample period? Second, if so, are those changes consistent with those predicted in the light of previous research? (See Appendix 2 for subject classification system). The specific expectations drawn from previous research was that there would be more commercialisation, morselisation, depoliticisation, gaming orientation, personalisation, tabloidisation, decontextualisation, centralisation, trivialisation, familiarisation, atomisation and commodification in the presentational elements and story content ratios of the bulletins over the survey years (for a full description of each term see Appendix 3).<sup>25</sup> Using the two previous investigations into the news by Comrie and Cook assisted with generating the questions used to measure changes to the current affairs genre. Cook qualitatively examined changes to the presentation of one subject area, political news. He outlined:

It could be argued that increased human-interest coverage of non-political topics does not matter if political issue coverage itself is otherwise unaffected. But if these same tendencies are also creeping into this core area of coverage, then the essence of serious journalism is being undermined (2000, p 203).

Cook's qualitative examination was to test four of his hypotheses; morselisation, personalisation, tabloidization and decontextualisation. Cook's sample for this part of the study came from two items from the *Domestic Political Policy* category for each election year in the sample period. Thus, two randomly chosen examples were examined from 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993 and

---

<sup>25</sup> These hypotheses were generated by Atkinson's earlier research.

1996. This was considered to be sufficient to develop a qualitative layer of analysis to supplement the quantitative data.<sup>26</sup>

This qualitative analysis of these election year samples examined the language and discourse used in the presentation of policy information. Cook analysed the verbal and visual texts and these were broken down into argumentative or rhetorical elements made up of facts, questions, assertions and attributed assertions and evidence (2000, p. 205).

### ***The design of this content analysis study***

The central research questions to be asked in this study were: First, had current affairs on free to air television changed significantly during the period 1984-2004. Second, if change had occurred, what was the nature of that change? Were these changes consistent with those predicted in the light of previous research?

The subset of questions posed is as follows. In New Zealand Current affairs television did item lengths become shorter between 1984 and 2004? The next question considers whether there was a change in the type of subject matter and asks in Current affairs television in New Zealand was there a decrease in serious, informational or political topics over the time period studied? The next question considers a related matter of whether there was an increase in topics with an emphasis on entertainment oriented content? Along with questions on how subject matter altered, the next two questions consider whether there are any changes across the different types of sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in Current affairs? Finally the question is posed whether from 1984 to 2004 were sources within a story were less likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions?

The design of a study raises questions about sample size and technique. It also

---

<sup>26</sup> Cook was particularly interested to map changes in election years because he believed that if serious policy reportage doesn't occur here, we should be doubly concerned. Many of the items deal with policy promises and the means of implementing them. It is precisely this sort of item that demands a careful analysis of often-complex information. Previous research suggested, however, that the move from journalistic to commercial demands on *One Network News* would involve a drift from less informative to more entertaining styles of presentation

raises questions about measurement and reliability and general data analysis that need resolving. Usually content analysis involves drawing representative samples, using the category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content, and measuring reliability (agreement or stability) over time.

The data collected in quantitative content analyses are examined to describe typical patterns or characteristics or to identify important relationships among the content qualities examined. If the categories and rules are conceptually and theoretically sound and are reliably applied, the researcher increases the chance that the study results will be valid (for instance, that the observed patterns are meaningful). Explanations for problems or questions for such researchers are sought and derived through direct and objective observation and measurement rather than through one's reasoning, intuition, faith, ideology or conviction. In short the scientific method is employed (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005).

Comrie and Cook's research effectively mapped the consequences of a shift from democratic to market discourse. In this research the position taken is one where: "The content one examines is evidence of those antecedent choices, conditions, or processes" (Stempel, as cited in Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005, p. 10). As such the changes in current affairs subject matter will reflect the collective results of government decisions that television broadcasting be more commercial as well as broadcasters' reactions to a highly commercialised setting. In order to carry out a successful content analysis one needs to formulate the hypotheses or research questions to be answered, selecting the sample to be analysed, defining the categories to be applied, outlining the coding process and training the coders to implement it, implementing the coding process, determining the reliability and validity, and analysing the results of the coding process (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989).

An adequate sample size for television according to Comrie remains a matter of conjecture (1996, p.193). Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993,) found after reviewing sample size that when using a constructed week procedure, one week was as efficient as four. For Comrie, a sample size of three constructed weeks was

deemed sufficient. The starting year for this study is 1984 and the second year is 1994 and the final year of the sample is 2004. The selection of the year 1984 should give an adequate benchmark or starting point to measure change before the management changes began at TVNZ that were designed to meet the start of competition with a private television network. The year 2004, falls within the era of the Charter whereby the government of the day sought to introduce public broadcasting criteria for evaluating television news and current affairs. The sample size for this study is fifteen current affairs programmes per year for each year of the study.

Quantitatively stratified sampling will be used which breaks the total available content into smaller subsets and random sampling will be taken from within these. The distinction in this approach is that one programme sample examines nightly current affairs programmes, the *Holmes* programme for example, while the other analyses weekly current affairs programmes such as *Sunday, 20/20* or *Close Up*. Unlike the news research, weekends will not be excluded for weekly current affairs programmes as current affairs frequently screen on Sunday evenings. For weekly current affairs, each year surveyed contained samples from each form of current affairs programme (week nightly/weekly) as the intention is to include enough programmes to provide reliable and valid data. The crucial difference between the news studies and current affairs will be sample size.

For each current affairs programme in each year fifteen programmes a year have been randomly selected but adjusted to ensure that no more than two programmes appear in any given month. This sample size of fifteen bulletins will provide three constructed weeks across each of the years. For the weekly programmes, a stratified approach is taken where fifteen programmes are randomly selected across the year excluding the broadcasting 'silly season' months of December and January which are seen as departures from the norm of broadcasting in New Zealand.<sup>27</sup> For the

---

<sup>27</sup> Riffe, Lacy & Fico (p. 215, 2005) discuss methods for sampling weekly news magazines and monthly consumer magazines and argue that selecting one issue randomly from each month was the most efficient method. The constructed year approach can produce problems as often there are yearly roundup editions that differ greatly from the regular issues in several types of variables. Researchers must decide, they argue, whether or not their projects logically required the inclusion of the round up editions as their inclusion can drastically alter the population

weeknightly current affairs programme *Holmes*, fifteen programmes have been randomly selected so that no more than two programmes can appear in any given month and these also exclude the months of December and January.

In this study the story length and the types of sources for each story and the extent to which sources provide evidence are tabulated. The measurement of item length should give an indication of whether changes have occurred in current affairs programmes with attempts to increase the 'pace' of stories and story sequence.

Both Comrie and Cook examined the official or accredited sources and distinctions made between elected leaders and officials. In Comrie's research she looked to see whether television news was moving away from politicians and towards 'ordinary' people. Comrie developed a number of categories from what she calls the "unaffiliated citizen" category from Brown et al. (1987) and Berkowitz (1987). This was done to see if there was a new emphasis on certain kinds of sources favoured in "popular" journalism, especially victims and celebrities.<sup>28</sup> This approach should give insights into the changes of sources on current affairs programmes. In this study there is an analysis of sources broken into various categories and these are: Political party representative, Armed forces, Experts, Foreign politician, NGO representative, Business, Government Ministry of Foreign Citizen, celebrity/sportsperson, union, whistleblower, accused, local government representative, journalist in other category, private citizen/stakeholder/public, church, and police. These categories were selected as representative of broad categories of potential sources.

The use of content analysis raises questions about the reliability and validity of the research. Reliability is defined by Riffe, Lacy & Fico as agreement amongst

---

parameters for the year.

<sup>28</sup> Comrie said there were coding issues with this approach but she resolved these by how the person was treated in the story. The example she gives is if a well-known rugby coach was asked their viewpoint and they were commenting on the concerns of coaches they would be coded as officials or affiliated citizen. If they were talking on a forthcoming play

coders and is increased by the careful definition of categories and subcategories. Coders must then be trained to apply the definitions to the content. The process ends with the assessment of reliability through coder reliability tests. Random selection of content samples for reliability testing is understood to be the best test of reliability. There is some contestation of how large a sample of the material requires testing, Wimmer & Dominick (2003), suggests that between 10% and 15% of the material should be tested. Kaid & Wadsworth (1989) suggested That between 5% and 7% of the total is adequate. For this study 10% of material will be tested.

Research examining crime and public moral stories on television news and current affairs overseas has shown a move towards personalisation and the vicariousness of the experience for the viewers (Wyatt & Badger, 1993). The original purpose of current affairs programmes was to provide context and depth in story coverage. Current affairs were initially a genre designed to present politicians to the public and as such the changing approach of political stories is important in an evaluation of the state of current affairs programmes. This will be examined using Comrie's approach of mapping alliteration, drama and emotion combined with an overall examination of how the programme treats its topic and will also include incorporating and adapting Cook's approach in the exploration of changes in these types of stories. For example does the programme show facts, events and interviews or does it bypass politics altogether or just focus on political scandals? The use of Comrie's approach of examining an entire bulletin for changes of description to narration is one way that this will be examined. Her headline analysis of changes in language can be applied to all the programmes studied. This can be used to examine crime, public moral problems and also political stories and should demonstrate if emotional language has become a feature of these three issue areas. Comrie examined some quantitative features of the bulletin such as newshole, story length and the amount of time given to certain subject groupings. This included average shot length of the first four locally produced items in a news bulletin and then an individual analysis was carried out with a description of each of the opening elements of the programme as

well as the visual elements of studio presentation. She then carried out an analysis of the overall shape of the bulletin.

Cook also analysed programmes for item, sound-bite and camera shot length. Cook also felt it was necessary for a complete examination to include the language and discourse of political information. This section of his study was based on work done by the Annenberg Public Policy Centre for their Campaign Discourse Mapping Project.<sup>29</sup> They detected a decrease in complex argumentation and an increase in negative statements made by candidates in relation to their rivals. They also found the presentation of candidate statements by the news media increasingly devoid of evidence for claims, which reduced what were often complex arguments to simple, often-negative assertions without evidence.<sup>30</sup> Cook's approach can then be used to complement Comrie's quantitative attribution section which examined the kind of identification given to sources cited or speaking in each story.

Cook (2000) used discourse categories where changes were measured over time. The items were also examined for changes according to the following criteria: Facts Relevant to Issue/Event, Visual and Redundant Facts, Assertion: Evidence Provided, Assertion: No Evidence Provided, Attributed Assertion, Acknowledge Source, Acknowledged Sources – Experts, ordinary people.

These categories have been adapted to clarify whether current affairs have moved to less expert sources and if there is evidence provided to back up journalists' claims and arguments. In this study the main source categories are used and then the occurrence of political representatives and celebrities are mapped. This is done to show whether there has been a move from harder more serious sourcing to celebrity sources. An increase in celebrity and a reduction in politics should indicate a trend toward tabloidization.

---

<sup>29</sup> This approach examined verifiable facts in terms of political stories (p. 207).

<sup>30</sup> The Annenberg Public Policy as cited in Cook (2000). *Report of the Campaign Discourse Mapping Project*, pg. 9

Comrie and Cook's approaches provide a useful starting point to qualitatively examine current affairs programmes. It is also possible however that there will be other aspects to current affairs programmes that are different to the news. It will be important to be open to these differences and map these as they become apparent. After all it is in the analysis of changes to the programme quality and how subjects are treated that real change can be examined and mapped.

In this study qualitative analysis rather than interviews will be the method to explore changes in the style and texture of the programmes themselves. The qualitative section of this research considers how the style of current affairs programmes altered over the time period. For this study the areas of public moral problems, human interest/ celebrity and entertainment, and politics will be examined. Within the political segment there are two further stories with a combination of an economic and political approach. Taking two stories from each category in each of the sample years, a qualitative examination should show any changing texture in the programmes. This analysis should provide not only evidence of how the shift in story or subject matter changes serious subject areas, but also, how this shift has occurred.

The changes to current affairs programmes are evident by examining individual stories to see the changes to breadth and context, the shape of programmes, structure, presentation and tone. Primarily this aspect of the research assesses whether there is a move from description to narration to recreate experience affecting participation and vicarious experience as noted by Wyatt and Badger (1993). Narration works by conveying to the viewer that they are experiencing the news event 'vicariously' for themselves. Description works differently to narration and is more typical of 'straight news' where the points made follow a hierarchy of importance. In effect the use of 'narration' effectively attaches a schema of viewing stories through well-worn stories rather than a presentation of facts of events.

The qualitative part of the research is carried out on political, economic, celebrity/human interest/entertainment stories. Two stories from each year of the research have been chosen for examination to see if current affairs programmes became more sensationalised, entertainment focused, and decontextualized. The current affairs programmes selected are examined to see if the pace of the programme increased and whether there is a greater mediation by the journalist into the programmes.

## ***The combination of approaches and the New Zealand current***

### ***affairs study***

Each of the studies referred to in this chapter have used a form of content analysis and these approaches adapted for this research form the fundamental elements of this research. Cook's approach to subject categorisation offers a broad range of categories to base this research on, though extra categories have been included.

One of the central problems of this content analysis concerns the issue of defining a current affairs programme. Unlike the British study, judgements of whether a programme is deemed to be of the current affairs genre will be decided using the definition of the broadcasters. This may mean that a very 'tabloid' or infotainment programme is included in the sample, but this is what the broadcasters have been offering up as current affairs programmes and as such should be analysed.

The news is a genre that through its consistent form is amenable to examination as the unit of analysis is relatively uniform and appears regularly. Though news formats have altered over the years there are standard features such as opening headlines, lead stories and weather segments. With current affairs programmes this is not the case and in New Zealand there have been nightly current affairs programmes as well as weekly offerings. It will be necessary to produce two or three samples across the years surveyed that

represent the difference between nightly current affairs and weekly programmes.<sup>31</sup> Though this may appear to be a bigger project, it does build on previous research which provides the basis for the detailed study undertaken here. From this base the research will seek to explore in detail changes to current affairs programming.

The approaches used should enable a clear outline of the shifts in types of programming, change in the content of programmes and, by qualitative methodology, changes in style and approach. Using this mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology will therefore enable a full picture of the changes to current affairs programmes.

### ***Programme selection***

There were six different types of programmes selected during the research period for analysis. These were *Close Up* (1984), *Sunday* (1984), *Holmes* (1994), *20/20* (1994), *Holmes* (2004) and *Sunday* (2004). The sample consisted of 15 randomly selected programmes from the years 1984, 1994, and 2004. It was made up of both the weekly scheduled current affairs programmes *Close Up* (1984), *Sunday* (1984), *Sunday* (2004), *20/20* (1994) and included *Holmes* (1994) screened on weeknights. Another criterion was that the programmes were full and not part recorded and available throughout the broadcast year.

The selection of programmes was affected by availability and was limited by this in some ways. Programmes such as *Foreign Correspondent* and *60 Minutes* were not available in full for each year as they had only been intermittently recorded at the Chapman Archive. If these programme had been included in the sample these may well have altered aspects of the data but were not available for selection because they were partially recorded. *Foreign Correspondent* was

---

<sup>31</sup> This study will have to include the arrival of TV3 and include its current affairs programmes. They did not have a weeknightly current affairs programme like TVNZ but their programmes should be considered in the potential sample to give a full picture of the changing nature of current affairs programmes.

made up of the best sourced overseas foreign current affairs programmes from overseas data and so its inclusion may have changed the subject matter selected. A number of video tapes have now been made available, however, these were not officially in the archive nor were they digitized and could not be included in the sample because this study relied on using digital recordings.

### ***Programme types***

The programmes selected from the 1980s generally reflected a traditional approach to current affairs with *Sunday* employing the long interview format style. Interviews took up the entire duration of the programme or were made up of two long style interviews. *Close-Up* was closer in format to later current affairs with various segments reflecting different topics and subject matter, however, the approach was largely still 'traditional' with a usually neutral interview style. *20/20* and *Holmes* were reflective of the changes to current affairs programmes in the 1990s. *Holmes* was TVNZ's personality-led current affairs that screened directly after the news and was designed to capture and hold the audience through the evening. *20/20* was the TV3 programme designed to maximize audience ratings and usually combined one local New Zealand story with those from overseas. *20/20* was fronted by New Zealand journalists who introduced the items though the overseas segments were reported by American journalists. *Sunday* (2004) was reflective of later current affairs formats with local items interspersed with overseas stories. It did generally however focus on New Zealand stories and was also the year when the TVNZ Charter was in operation. This was TVNZ's attempt to return to more traditional 'quality' current affairs programming. The Charter was introduced by the Labour government on 1 March 2003 as a way to counter what had been perceived as the excesses of commercialization after deregulation and *Sunday* was touted in the TVNZ publicity material as a return to quality current affairs programmes. Many critics perceived a drop in standards in news and current affairs from the 1980s and *Sunday* was advertised as hard hitting and a return to quality current affairs (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1995; Cook, 2000). The Charter itself has been depicted as

a problematic piece of legislation as the dual remit to make quality programmes ran counter to the other requirement to continue to make profits and achieve ratings. The amount of money given to run the charter, of up to \$15m per year was in broadcasting terms relatively low and it has been seen as a flawed piece of legislation by many (Cocker, 2006; Debrett, 2005; Thompson, 2005). The sample for this research starts just prior to deregulation and ends when there has been an attempt, at least legislatively, to return news and current affairs programming to a higher standard.

### ***The sample and coding***

Each programme was randomly selected for the research year from those available in the Chapman Archive database. They were analysed through a software system and each distinct section of programme was put through uniform and consistent classifications. Programmes were coded by one researcher. All timings were taken from the start of the programme when the advertisements finished and the programme item began, or in the earlier programmes from the start of the programme after the journalist's introductions. The introductions by the journalists before the start of the programme were not included in the analysis. Advertisements were not timed and were excluded so item lengths reflect the full programme excluding advertisements and introductions. Advertising in the later programmes was much greater than the earlier commercial free programmes screened on a Sunday night and this will be discussed in the qualitative section. Each programme was identified and individual segments of programme were logged, and then analysed. Each programme was logged for programme identification.

### ***Subject categories***

The development of subject categories is seen as a crucial step in content analysis (Kaid and Wadsworth, 1989). Stempel (1989) suggests there are many advantages to using categories designed by other researchers and Winston (1990) argues that content analysis stands or falls by its categories. The reason for using other researchers' categories is that they

have been tested and examined. The chance that the validity and reliability of the sample will be brought into question is also lessened (Stempel 1989).

The subject categories for this study have been developed from the British and New Zealand research. Though the British examples are useful, both Comrie and Cook built specific categories relevant to New Zealand conditions. Comrie used Deutschmann's (1959) categorisation to develop the subject categories and modified these to accommodate New Zealand conditions and societal changes that had occurred since 1985.<sup>32</sup> The new categories were modified to reflect aspects of New Zealand life and included separate categories for Maori and also education. These categories are a starting point but will be adapted to include Cook's classifications and to allow for the particularities of current affairs programmes of the research period.

The coding system designed for this study is based on Cook's subject categories though additional categories have been added to make the classification system more fitting for the current affairs genre and for a longer period of study (these additional categories are marked in bold type face).

**Table 1**

<b>The classification system</b>		
	<b>Category</b>	<b>Abbr.</b>
1	Domestic News; Politics; Misc.	DNPN
2	Domestic News; Politics; Taxation, Finance, Inflation.	DNPP
3	Domestic News; Politics; Taxation, Finance, Inflation.	DNPT
4	Domestic News; Politics; SOE's, Assets, Public Service.	DNPO
5	Domestic News; Politics; Health.	DNPH
6	Domestic News; Politics; Education.	DNPE
7	Domestic News; Politics; Accommodation.	DNPA
8	Domestic News; Politics; International Relations.	DNPIR
9	Domestic News; Politics; Strategy, Polls, Elections, Personalities.	DNPS
10	Domestic News; Economics; Misc.	DNEM
11	Domestic News; Economics; Interest Rates, Prices.	DNEI
12	Domestic News; Economics; Consumer Information.	DNEC
13	Domestic News; Economics; International Trade and Investment	DNEIT
14	Domestic News; Economics; Sharemarket, Corporate Affairs	DNES
15	Domestic News; Economics; Health.	DNEH
16	Domestic News; Economics; Education.	DNEE

<sup>32</sup> Deutschmann (1959) outlined eleven categories that cover the full range of content in media. These were war and defence, popular amusements, general human interest, economic activity, education and classic arts, politics and government, crime, accident and disaster, public health and welfare, science and invention, and public moral problems.

17	Domestic News; Economics; Accommodation	DNEA
18	Domestic News; Social Conflict, Race Relations, Immigration	DNSC
19	Domestic News; Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions	DNL
20	Domestic News; Agriculture, Farming, Fisheries (Non-Maori)	DNAF
21	Domestic News; Justice, Police, Law Changes	DNJ
22	Domestic News; Crime Misc.	DNCM
23	Domestic News; Crime; Customs, Security, Jails	DNCC
24	Domestic News; Courts; Crime; Property.	DNCCP
25	Domestic News; Courts; Crime; Violent.	DNCCV
26	Domestic News; Crime; Property	DNCP
27	Domestic News; Crime; Violence	DNCV
28	Domestic News; Road Accidents, Road Toll, Vehicular Crime.	DNRA
29	Domestic News; Accommodation, Health, Education, Misc.	DNAM
30	Domestic News; National Defence, Military, NZ Forces Overseas	DND
31	Domestic News; Transport, Travel and Tourism.	DNTT
32	Domestic News; Environment	DNEV
33	Domestic News; Health and Technological Developments.	DNHT
34	Domestic News; Accidents and Disasters; Man Made	DNDM
35	Domestic News; Natural Disasters, Accidents and Weather Extremes.	DNDN
36	Domestic News; Human-interest, Historical Items.	DNHI
37	Domestic News; Celebrities and Obituaries	DNCO
38	Domestic News, Miscellaneous.	DNM

New domestic subject categories (not employed by Cook) are included, namely Maori, Royalty, Terrorism, Employment and public moral problems. Maori as a subject has been included so that these stories can be distinguished from race relations generally. As immigration policies altered in the 1990s the issue became more publicised and a distinction needs to be made between issues Concerning Maori and those considering International students or Asian migrants. Royalty was a topic included in the British study and is subject matter which has less relevance in New Zealand than Britain. However, it is still a subject matter that requires its own category rather than being subsumed into other categories.

Employment has been given its own category as this issue became more pressing in New Zealand as the socio-economic impacts of neo-liberalism set in throughout the late 1980s and 1990s and unemployment became a more publicised and reported issue. Public Moral problems is a category taken from Comrie's study and reflects issues such as human relations and moral problems, including alcohol, divorce, sex, and civil court proceedings.<sup>33</sup> Another new category is Terrorism, as this became an increasingly reported issue in the 1990s and beyond. It is included separately

<sup>33</sup> Comrie originally also included race relations in her public moral problems category but this has been removed for this study as it already has its own category. Race relations is an issue that became more complex and vexed in New Zealand in the 1990s and as such deserves its own category.

in both the domestic and international category classifications.<sup>34</sup>This research uses CMP Content Analysis and Online Survey Software. The application software was developed specifically to aid with the process of human-coded content analysis. Originally developed for the Marsden funded Campaign Mapping Project, its functionality has been extended to other projects including this one. The research software has been successfully deployed on many research projects in New Zealand. Its design is unique in its ability to examine multiple questions and contains help menus to remind the coder what aspects they were looking for when examining if an effect or trend was present.

The software developed by Edwin de Ronde minimizes data transcription errors and inadvertent data loss as once a response is selected and another question is selected, the data is automatically saved directly to the web's database (de Ronde, 2011). Data was then retrieved online and outputted as a .csv file ready

for importation into excel for more advanced analysis. The function assists with the monitoring of coders to ensure the coding process is performed in a valid and reliable way.

The coding process was carried out in a uniform way such that questions were answered systematically for each item. Each programme was analysed according to their discrete sections. *Close Up* for example typically contained three sections and *Sunday* would normally have one or two sections. The program was designed to allow for partial coding so they could be returned to in a later session though it was more frequent for the coding to take place in an entire session (to save me from having to review the entire piece before working on it again at a later time). Once satisfied that an item was completely coded it was then submitted to the item list page. Each programme was then uniformly coded in this systematic way. For most questions there were explanatory help notes that stipulated how to code the question. For example when analysing subject matter the following notes assisted in the coding process:

---

<sup>34</sup> Cook had it included as violent political activity

Choose the most central or extensively covered topic. Where several exist choose the topic most representative, or the least misleading, in terms of the story or item's general focus. In longer format items divided into sections but not individual items or stories (i.e. debates, not news bulletins), choose the topic that best describes the overall focus of that section of the programme. Code sharemarket reports and exchange rates as a single story if they are brief and contiguous. Code the weather section as one story even if a sizeable weather story appears within the weather section but is reported by the weather presenter. However, if a weather story appears elsewhere within the bulletin as a separate news story, code it as a separate story.

When carrying out quantitative content analysis questions often arise around whether an effect is present or not. In terms of any questions that raised doubt in the coding process, the general rule of thumb was to choose the neutral response option, or for yes/no questions, to choose no. To make a positive or negative response I had to be able to offer some justification as to why my answer was yes or no. The idea with this rule was that the effect or trend be present and should not be a 'maybe'. The general rule was if the answer was it 'might be' or 'could be something' then the effect probably was not present. Where the answer was a single answer for a series of instances that might be a mixture of positive or negative, I answered on the basis of the overall impression concerning the balance of positivity or negativity (including a tally of different items of positive and negative events).

As directed by the coding notes of the CMP I was careful not to be too over-analytical to the nuances of certain target behaviours or possible answers. The general heuristic was to ask whether the average viewer of average intelligence and political understanding was likely to agree with the response. So the response reflected the likely preferred reading of a given event considering the viewer only sees or reads an article once and does not have the 'luxury' of re-examining the same piece many times. Despite this I did not ignore the cases where on multiple careful readings of an item, new aspects that I had not seen initially became obvious. So if a few negative events in a series were initially seen as positive this did make me reconsider the overall balance of answers.

Questions that only required a single instance of given behaviours to count as a yes, were deemed to be a yes if the effect was present. If it was overlooked

because it was too subtle to notice after two or three reviews, no was the probable answer. For questions that required choices from lists, it was helpful to eliminate the answers that did not clearly apply. I chose the most specific option available from the list or the most informative. For example, if an actor is famous for being famous more than their occupation or careers, I chose celebrity, and not 'Other'. For questions requiring rankings of features, this was done according to prominence, or how noticeable each feature was on the bases of size, magnitude or frequency of coverage, placement, visuality or salience.

### ***Summary***

In conclusion the methodological approach is one which draws on a quantitative content analysis drawing samples from the years 1984, 1994 and 2004. This approach is combined with qualitative research which seeks to elicit the changing texture of the current affairs programmes. There are limitations to this study that must be noted. This study will not carry out interviews or historically examine Television New Zealand decision making about programmes. It also cannot determine what audiences might actually have enjoyed in current affairs programmes. However, this study permits a longitudinal examination of the changes that have affected New Zealand current affairs programmes.

## CHAPTER FOUR: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis as outlined in the methodology chapter. The overall objective of the quantitative data is to draw a picture of the changes that have occurred to current affairs programmes in New Zealand after deregulation. Drawing on representative samples the content analysis is analysed to describe typical patterns or characteristics in current affairs programming. In this chapter the quantitative data is reported from the sample for each programme selected in the years 1984, 1994 and 2004. The essential questions investigated from the quantitative data were as follows:

- In New Zealand Current affairs television did item lengths become shorter between 1984 and 2004?
- In Current affairs television in New Zealand was there a decrease in serious, informational or political topics over the time period studied?
- Was there an increase in topics with an emphasis on entertainment-oriented content?
- Was there any change in the type of sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in Current affairs?
- From 1984 to 2004 were sources within a story less likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions?

### ***Research Question One:***

**The results of the content analysis. In New Zealand current affairs television have item lengths become shorter between 1984 and 2004?**

Cook (2000) suggested one of the key features of the commercialised post-deregulated news in New Zealand was the size of the news segment (the amount of the bulletin devoted to news, rather than advertising, sport, weather and banter between the presenters). This segment decreased, and the size of elements including advertising and other extraneous segments increased. Morselisation was another key marker of deregulation and Cook said it

was seen in the increased pace of the bulletin, with shorter stories, sound-bites and shot length. Comrie (1996) examined the reduction in time given to national news and found reduced story length and short sound bites as elements of increased commercialisation. The examination of the length and pace of current affairs programmes is therefore considered an important indication of changes to a more commercialized kind of programme.

Before discussing the item length and pace of items in this study it is important to consider some aspects of how these variables are measured. Researchers of quantitative data often wish to summarize the information about one variable into a single figure. The terms mean, median and mode describe properties of statistical distribution and are three measures of central tendency (Neuman, 2003). The mode is the most common or frequently occurring number and can be used with nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio data. The median is the middle point at which half the cases are above and half are below. The median can also be used with ordinal, interval or ratio level data. The mean is known as the arithmetic average and is the most widely used measure of central tendency. The mean is strongly affected by outliers that are either very small or very large. It is important that all three measures of central tendency are used when appropriate in order to give a reliable measure over all programmes in each year. In the following tables changes in item length for selected Television current affairs programmes are recorded. The table below indicates item lengths for two television current affairs programmes in 1984.

### **Current affairs television 1984: Pre-deregulation, item lengths**

**Table 2**

**Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1984 current affairs**

	<b><i>Close Up 1984</i></b>	<b><i>Sunday 1984</i></b>
<b>Mean</b>	15.6	23.1
<b>Median</b>	16	19.1
<b>Mode (range)</b>	15 – 16.7	33.3 – 46.7
<b>Max</b>	20.7	46.6
<b>Min</b>	9.3	5

This sample from 1984 is comprised of *Close Up* and *Sunday* current affairs programmes broadcast before deregulation. As previously mentioned, these programmes represented a more ‘traditional’ approach to current affairs. *Sunday* for example frequently had a long interview format where the entire programme consisted of interviews, often with politicians. *Close Up* was the forerunner for the later current affairs model where programmes are made up of three constituent items each examining different subject matter. In 1984, *Close Up* still had a strong political focus and often had long political interviews. The data reveals that the mean item length for *Sunday* was 23.1 minutes which was longer than *Close Up*’s mean item length of 15.6 minutes. *Sunday* also had a higher median item length of 19.1 minutes compared to *Close Up*’s median of 16 minutes. *Sunday* had a number of long interviews that could fill the entire programme and this is reflected in the maximum item length of the 1984 sample which was 46.6 minutes in length. This item was an interview with the new Minister of Finance Roger Douglas and five economists concerning discussions on the ‘financial crisis’ New Zealand was said to be experiencing at the time. The time given to this item demonstrates that when the seriousness of the story demanded it this particular current affairs programme could focus on items in depth. The mode for *Close Up* was close to the median so item lengths were relatively consistent. The mode for *Sunday* shows interview lengths were frequently longer than *Close Up*’s and there was variability in the length of items. However, there is a reversal in one area of item length in this sample. A comparison of minimum item lengths demonstrates *Close Up* has a minimum item length of 9.3 minutes while *Sunday*’s minimum length was 5 minutes. Let us now consider changes in item length before and after deregulation.

**Current affairs television 1984-1994: Before and after deregulation,  
a comparison of item lengths for *Close Up* and *20/20*.**

**Table 3**

**Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for *Close Up* 1984 and *20/20* 1994**

	<b><i>Close Up</i> 1984</b>	<b><i>20/20</i> 1994</b>
<b>Mean</b>	15.6	12.2
<b>Median</b>	16.0	12.2
<b>Mode (range)</b>	15.0-16.7	11.7-13.3
<b>Max</b>	20.7	18.1
<b>Min</b>	9.3	6.3

This sample compares data from *Close Up*, 1984 and *20/20* from 1994. One of the largest changes to occur following the period of pre-deregulation and the introduction of deregulation was the increase in advertising before the start of the programmes as well as in the commercial breaks during the programmes. Many current affairs programmes of 1994 had teasers advertising the upcoming programme story interspersed between general advertising. A comparison of median item lengths for both programmes reveals how changes from pre-deregulated broadcasting to a more commercialised broadcasting environment affected item length. Both programmes in this sample had a generic format that consisted of three items so a decline in item length demonstrates some of the pressures of commercialism that affected the 1994 programmes. For example, the median item length for *Close Up* was 16.0 minutes while the median item length for *20/20* was considerably shorter at 12.2 minutes in length. The maximum item length for *Close Up* in 1984 was longer than that for *20/20* in 1994 with maximum item lengths of 20.7 minutes and 18.1 minutes respectively. A comparison of minimum item length shows *Close Up*'s minimum item length of 9.3 minutes in 1984 was substantially longer than *20/20*'s minimum item length of 6.3 minutes. The comparison in item lengths between these two programmes reveals a clear decline in item length from 1984 to 1994 within this sample

**Current affairs television 1984-1994: Before and after deregulation,  
a comparison of item lengths for *Sunday* and *20/20*.**

**Table 4**

**Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for *Sunday* 1984 and *20/20* 1994**

	<b><i>Sunday</i> 1984</b>	<b><i>20/20</i> 1994</b>
<b>Mean</b>	23.1	12.2
<b>Median</b>	19.1	12.2
<b>Mode (range)</b>	33.3- 46.7	11.7-13.3
<b>Max</b>	46.6	18.1
<b>Min</b>	5.0	6.3

This table compares data from *Sunday* 1984 and *20/20* in 1994. It allows a further comparison of item lengths between the current affairs programmes of 1984 and 1994. This reveals an even more marked decline in item length. In this sample *Sunday* in 1984 has a median item length of 19.1 minutes compared to 12.2 minutes for *20/20* in 1994. The mean item length also differs considerably with *Sunday*'s mean item length of 23.1 minutes almost double that of *20/20*'s mean item length of 12.2 minutes. Similarly, *20/20*'s mean item in 1994 is length almost half that of *Sunday*'s mean item length of 23.1 minutes in 1984. A comparison of the maximum item length between the two programmes shows *20/20*'s maximum item length of 18.1 minutes is significantly lower than *Sunday*'s maximum item length of 46.6 minutes. This suggests that in 1994, *20/20*'s formulaic three segment programmes often with one or two segments from the ABC in the United States) constrained item length while *Sunday* had room to explore important issues in depth and use the entire programme for a single topic if required. There is a small anomaly in minimum item length between the two programmes however. An examination of minimum item lengths demonstrates that *Sunday* has a shorter minimum item length of 5 minutes compared to *20/20*'s minimum item length of 6.3 minutes. Overall, the data reveals that the median item length of 19.1 minutes (and the mean item length of 23.1 minutes) from the 1984 *Sunday* sample has entirely disappeared by 1994. This marked change in item length is significant as it

suggests that the use of long item lengths permitting the exploration of complex issues has disappeared. Once again, the statistical consistency of these findings suggests a significant shift in programme formats between 1984 and 1994.

Having examined the differing item lengths in *Sunday* 1984 and *20/20* in 1994, it is useful to compare item lengths within the current affairs programmes *20/20* and *Holmes* in 1994 to see what differences existed within the sample.

### **Current affairs programmes 1994: Following deregulation.**

**Table 5**

<b>Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for <i>20/20</i> and <i>Holmes</i> 1994</b>		
	<b><i>20/20</i> 1994</b>	<b><i>Holmes</i> 1994</b>
<b>Mean</b>	12.2	6.1
<b>Median</b>	12.2	5.7
<b>Mode (range)</b>	11.7-13.3	6.7-8.3
<b>Max</b>	18.1	11.
<b>Min</b>	6.3	2.4

This sample from 1994 follows deregulation and consists of the programmes *20/20* and *Holmes*. As previously mentioned over the period from pre-deregulation to deregulation one of the most noticeable changes was the increase in advertising both before and during the programmes. Both programmes in this sample were affected by increased advertising that ultimately reduced item lengths over the broadcast hour. Thus, item lengths for both current affairs programmes in 1994 were substantially shorter than those of 1984. *20/20* had three segments with one or two items brought in from overseas so item lengths were constrained by its format as well as heavy advertising throughout the programme. The median item length for *20/20* was 12.2 minutes while *Holmes'* median item length was far at shorter at 5.7 minutes in item length. The maximum item length for *20/20* in this sample was 18.1 minutes while *Holmes* had a maximum item length of 11 minutes. The mean item length for *20/20* was 12.2 minutes while *Holmes* had a mean item length of 6.1 minutes, which was half that recorded for *20/20*. The minimum

item length for *20/20* was 6.3 minutes while *Holmes* had a minimum item length of 2.4 minutes. The modes for both programmes suggest a consistency in item length that demonstrates the formulaic nature of the current affairs programmes by 1994.

The data from this table demonstrates that *Holmes* had a very different format compared to earlier current affairs programmes and compared to *20/20* of the same period. As I have previously outlined, the distinctiveness of the *Holmes* programme format was that the total programme had frequent advertising breaks. This meant that the item lengths that were short because of the entire length of the programme were shortened by frequent advertising. *Holmes* was a very different type of current affairs programme from early current affairs programmes. I will now consider the post deregulation era of Current affairs Television.

### **Current affairs television. From deregulation to the Charter. A**

#### **comparison of 1994 and 2004 current affairs programmes.**

**Table 6**

**Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1994 and 2004 current affairs programmes**

	<b>20/20 1994</b>	<b>Holmes 1994</b>	<b>Holmes 2004</b>	<b>Sunday 2004</b>
<b>Mean</b>	12.2	6.1	6.8	13.5
<b>Median</b>	12.2	5.7	6.5	13.3
<b>Mode (range)</b>	11.7 – 13.3	6.7 – 8.3	5 – 6.7	13.3 – 15
<b>Max</b>	18.1	11	15.8	19.6
<b>Min</b>	6.3	2.4	0.40	6.4

This table compares the programmes from the period where deregulation was strongly established in 1994 to the Charter period of 2004. In this sample the means across the programmes are close to those of the medians which suggest item lengths remained relatively uniform within the programmes. *Holmes* in

1994 had a median item length of 5.7 minutes which was substantially lower than that for *20/20*. The *Holmes* programme of 2004 had a higher median item length than the earlier *Holmes* programme from 1994 though this increase in item length was not significant. Nevertheless, when speculating about the reasons for this slight increase, the advent of the Charter in 2003 may have been an influencing factor with its mandate for a return to 'quality news and current affairs'. The shortest item length from 2004 is from *Holmes* in 2004 at 0.40 of a minute, *Sunday* in 2004 had a minimum item length of 6.4 minutes. Percentage wise, this is a huge difference and points to the quick-fire approach to news content apparent within the *Holmes* format. Median item length increased slightly for *Holmes* from 1994 to 2004, however it still lagged behind the *20/20* median item length in 1994 and *Sunday* in 2004. Though item lengths for all programmes somewhat increased from 1994 to 2004 this change did not signal a return to the longer item lengths of 1984.

The next table presents the comparative data from the 1984, 1994 and 2004 current affairs sample. This allows for a comparison of item length data between programmes, over time so that general item length trends can be discussed.

## **Current affairs television: Pre-Deregulation, de-regulation and the**

### **Charter: A comparison of 1984, 1994 and 2004 current affairs**

**programmes.**

**Table 7**

**Item length displayed with mean, median and mode in minutes for 1984 and 2004 current affairs programmes.**

	<i>CloseUp</i> 1984	<i>Sunday</i> 1984	<i>20/20</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 2004	<i>Sunday</i> 2004
<b>Mean</b>	15.6	23.1	12.2	6.1	6.8	13.5
<b>Median</b>	16	19.1	12.2	5.7	6.5	13.3
<b>Mode (range)</b>	15 – 16.7	33.3 – 46.7	11.7-13.3	6.7 – 8.3	5 – 6.7	13.3 – 15
<b>Max</b>	20.7	46.6	18.1	11	15.8	19.6
<b>Min</b>	9.3	5	6.3	2.4	0.40	6.4

The data broadly shows that from 1984 in the period of pre-deregulation to 1994 after deregulation, item lengths for television current affairs dropped markedly. The general trend in the data shows that the medians and means of both the 1994 current affairs programmes were substantially shorter than the current affairs programmes in 1984. From 1994 to 2004 there was a slight increase in the median item length for the *Holmes* programme. *Sunday's* median item length in 2004, though longer than the median item length for *Holmes* and *20/20* in 1994 does not reach the item length of the 1984 current affairs programmes. These 'item length' figures suggest that a very different type of current affairs programme came into existence in the 1990s. At that time much shorter item lengths were inhibiting the in-depth interviews that had been a mainstay of current affairs programmes in 1984. *Sunday* in 2004 has item lengths that are closer to earlier current affairs examples however even at the maximum item length for this date the programmes never return to the item length times of the 1984 sample. From 1994 to 2004 item lengths stabilised and increased slightly from the 1994 current affairs programmes. The data overall, suggests that between 1984 and 1994 the changes in item length over the research period altered the structure of current affairs programmes limiting the time to examine subjects in depth or to provide context.

The next part of the research examines subject content in each programme, for 1984, the era of pre-deregulation, 1994, after deregulation and 2004 the period of the Charter. Drawing on the work of Comrie (1996), Cook (2000) and Barnett & Seymour (1999), subject categories were specified to tease out the various item types. The two tables which follow reveal the percentage of content within particular subject categories (and sub-categories) for each programme, at given points in time.

**Table 8**

**Full, subject category percentages for specific Current Affairs Programmes over the three sampling periods**

Categories	Pre regulation		De regulation		Charter period	
	<i>Close Up</i> 1984	<i>Sunday</i> 1984	<i>20/20</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 2004	<i>Sunday</i> 2004
<b>Domestic Events</b>						
<b>Politics: Misc</b>	0	5.56	0	2.17	2.22	0
Politics; policy	0	8.33	0	0	0	0
<b>Politics; taxation, finance, inflation</b>	2.63	11.11	2.70	0	0	0
Politics; SOEs, assets, public service	0	47.27	0	2.17	0	0
Politics; Health	2.63	0	0	0	2.22	0
Politics; education	0	0	0	6.52	0	2.33
Politics; accommodation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Politics; international relations	0	0	0	0	0	2.33
Strategy, polls, elections, personalities	13.16	0	0	4.35	4.44	2.33
Economics; misc	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; interest rates, prices	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; interest rates, prices	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; consumer information	0	0	0	0	0	2.33
Economics; international trade and investment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; sharemarket, corporate affairs	2.63	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; Health	2.63	0	2.70	0	0	0
Economics; education	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics; accommodation	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social conflicts, race relations, immigration	0	5.56	0	0	6.67	0
Labour and employment, ACC, wages, conditions	7.89	2.78	0	6.52	0	0
Agriculture, farming, fisheries (non Maori)	2.63	0	0	0	0	0
Justice, police, law changes	0	0	2.70	0	0	2.33
Crime; misc	0	0	2.70	0	6.67	4.65
Crime; customs, security, jails	0	0	0	0	0	0
Courts; crime; property	0	0	0	0	0	0
Courts; crime; violent	0	0	2.70	0	2.22	9.30
Crime; property	0	0	0	0	2.22	0
Crime; violence	0	0	0	0	6.67	2.33
Road accidents, road toll, vehicular crime	0	0	2.70	0	2.22	4.65

Accommodation, Health, Education, misc	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
National defense, military, NZ forces overseas	2.63	2.78	2.70	0	0	0
Transport, travel & tourism	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environment	0	0	0	2.17	2.22	2.33
Health and technological developments	2.63	0	0	2.17	4.44	4.65
Accidents and disasters; man made	0	2.78	0	2.17	0	0
Natural disasters, accidents and weather extremes	0	0	0	4.35	0	0
Human interest, historical items	5.26	0	2.70	15.22	13.33	18.60
Celebrities and obituaries	0	0	2.70	0	8.89	13.95
Entertainment	2.63	0	0	2.17	8.89	16.28
Home improvement/gardening	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consumer issues	5.26	0	0	2.17	0	0
Miscellaneous	5.26	0	0	2.17	0	2.33
Religion	2.63	0	0	0	4.44	0
Maori	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
Royalty	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
Employment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public moral problems	5.26	0	5.41	6.52	0	0
Terrorism	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weather	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sport	5.26	2.78	2.70	15.22	8.89	4.65
Advertising	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relates to news, teasers, in-programme promotions for other network shows and presenter chitchat	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	2.78	0	0	0	0
<b>International events</b>						
Politics; international	5.26	5.56	0	0	6.67	0
Politics; domestic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Economics, national and international	0	0	0	0	0	0
War, uprisings and violent political activity	2.63	0	10.81	0	2.22	0
Social conflicts, excluding terrorism	2.63	0	0	0	0	0
Crime	0	2.78	5.41	2.17	2.22	2.22
Health and technological developments	2.63	0	10.81	0	0	0
Travel, tourism and environment	2.63	0	2.70	0	0	0
Natural disasters & weather extremes	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
Celebrities	0	0	18.92	6.52	0	0
Entertainment	2.63	0	5.41	2.17	0	2.33
Consumer issues	0	0	0	0	0	0
Home improvement, gardening	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human interest, historical items	2.63	0	8.11	2.17	2.22	0
Miscellaneous international events	0	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	5.26	0	0	0	0	0
Royalty	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public moral problems	2.63	0	2.70	2.17	0	0
Terrorism	0	0	2.70	0	0	0

**Table 9**

**Major subject category percentages for specific Current Affairs programmes over the three sampling periods (sub-categories from the previous table are aggregated within major subject categories)**

Categories	Pre regulation		De regulation		Charter period	
	<i>Close</i>	<i>Sunday</i>	<i>20/20</i>	<i>Holmes</i>	<i>Holmes</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
	<i>Up</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2004</i>
	<b>1984</b>					
<b>Domestic Events</b>						
Politics	18.42	72.22	0	15.21	8.88	6.99
Economics	5.26	0	2.70	0	0	2.33
Social conflict, race relations, immigration	0	5.56	0	0	6.67	0
Labour and employment, ACC, wages, conditions	7.89	2.78	0	6.52	0	0
Agriculture, farming, fisheries (non Maori).	2.63	0	0	0	0	0
Crime	0	0	10.80	0	20	23.26
Accommodation, health, education, misc.	0	0	2.70	2.17	0	0
National defense, military, NZ Forces overseas	2.63	2.78	2.70	0	0	0
Environment	0	0	0	2.17	2.22	2.33
Health and technological developments	2.63	0	0	2.17	4.44	4.65
Accidents & disasters	0	2.78	0	6.52	0	0
Celebrities, human interest & entertainment	7.89	0	5.4	17.39	31.11	48.83
Consumer issues	5.26	0	0	2.17	0	0
Miscellaneous	5.26	0	0	2.17	0	2.33
Religion	2.63	0	0	2.17	4.44	0
Maori	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
Royalty	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public moral problems	5.26	0	5.41	6.52	0	0
Weather	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sport	5.26	2.78	2.7	15.22	8.89	4.65
Other	0	2.78	0	0	0	0
<b>International Events</b>						
Politics; international	5.26	5.56	0	0	6.67	0
War, uprisings and violent political activity	2.63	0	10.81	0	2.22	0
Social conflicts (excluding terrorism)	2.63	0	0	0	0	0
Crime	0	2.78	5.41	2.17	2.22	2.33
Health & technological developments	2.63	0	10.81	0	0	0
Travel, tourism & environment	2.63	0	2.7	0	0	0
Natural disasters and weather extremes	0	0	0	2.17	0	0
Celebrities, human interest &	5.26	0	32.44	10.86	2.22	2.33

entertainment						
Religion	5.26	0	0	0	0	0
Royalty	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public moral problems	2.63	0	2.7	2.17	0	0
Terrorism	0	0	2.7	0	0	0

## ***Research question 2:***

### **In New Zealand Current Affairs television was there a decrease in serious, informational topic coverage over the time period studied?**

This question explores whether there has been a decrease in stories and story content which have a serious informational or political focus. The following subject categories are defined as serious informational topics: Politics (domestic and international), Defence military subject matter, and the policy areas of Taxation, Finance and inflation. Also included as serious informational areas are the subjects of Economics, Agriculture, Labour/employment, War/Conflict, and social issues such as Health, technology, public moral problems, and the environment.

#### **Current affairs television: Pre-Deregulation-deregulation, 1984-**

##### **1994. *Close Up* and *Sunday* 1984**

Both 1984 current affairs programmes had high numbers of serious informational subject topics. In the 1984 current affairs programmes there were differences in the coverage of serious informational topics by *Close Up* and *Sunday*. Taken as a combined overall percentage of serious informational subject matter *Close Up* had 63 % cent coverage of serious informational subject matter and *Sunday* had 94 % per cent coverage of serious informational subject matter. The reason for the higher percentage of coverage of serious informational topics by *Sunday* is because of the high proportion of domestic political coverage by that programme which was 72% versus 18 % of such coverage by *Close Up*. The aggregate totals for *Close Up* and *Sunday* then reveal some clear differences between the programmes. *Close Up* in 1984 had

18.42% coverage on 'Domestic Events; Politics' while *Sunday* had 72.22 % coverage in this category. This shows that though *Close Up* had political coverage it was not the only focus of the programme. Both *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had similar levels of 'International Political' coverage with 5.26% and 5.56% coverage respectively. Both 1984 programmes had a similar focus on 'Politics International' with 5.26% coverage on *CloseUp* and 5.56% coverage on *Sunday*. *Close Up* in 1984 then focused on a wider variety of serious informational topics while *Sunday* tended to focus more on domestic politics. Both 1984 current affairs programmes had high levels of coverage of political subject matter with *Sunday* particularly focused on this area. *Close Up* in contrast to *Sunday* tended to cover a broader array of serious informational topics rather than focusing on one main political area. Of the two 1984 current affairs programmes it was *Close Up* that focused more on the polls and personalities of the politicians. There were similar levels of 'Defence coverage' in 1984 with 2.63% coverage on *Close Up* and 2.78% coverage on *Sunday*. *Close Up* had a higher percentage of coverage of 'Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions' with 7.89% coverage while *Sunday* had 2.78% of coverage devoted to that category. *Close Up* also covered the areas of 'Agriculture', 'War and Conflict', 'Health and Technology', 'Public Moral Problems', and the 'Environment'. This is significant as it demonstrates that *Sunday* was far more focused on political subject matter and did this often in the style of long form interviews. *Close Up* in contrast also focused on political subject matter but covered a wider range of subject matter. In this respect *Close Up* was similar in format to later current affairs programmes.

#### **A comparison of *Close Up* / *Sunday* 1984 and *20/20* 1994**

As previously noted both the 1984 current affairs programmes had high levels of serious informational coverage, though each programme focused on different subject areas. In contrast to the 1984 current affairs programmes *20/20* in 1994 had a decrease in the overall percentage of serious informational coverage. The overall coverage of serious informational subject matter for *20/20* was 41%. This is considerably lower than *Sunday* in 1984 with 94% coverage and *CloseUp* with 63% coverage of serious informational topics. The most obvious decline in serious informational coverage from 1984 is the sub

category of political coverage. There is no coverage of political subject matter in this sample from 20/20.

Defence however is a topic which had a similar level of coverage by 20/20 when compared to the 1984 programmes (20/20 had 2.70% coverage while *Close Up* had 2.63% and *Sunday* had 2.78%). 'Taxation, Finance, Inflation', had coverage of 2.7 % which was still around the same figure as *Close Up* in 1984 with 2.63% coverage. There was a similar amount of coverage of 'Domestic Events; Public moral problems' by 20/20 with 5.41% coverage which was a slight increase on *Close Up*'s 1984 coverage of the same topic with 5.26% coverage. 20/20 also had 2.7 % coverage of 'International; Public Moral problems' which was a similar figure to the *Close Up* coverage of 2.63% coverage in 1984. There were two areas where 20/20 had increased coverage and this was in the area of 'War/Conflict' which had 10.81% coverage compared to 2.63% coverage on *Close Up* in 1984 and no coverage on *Sunday* of the same year. 'International Events; health and technology' also had higher coverage on 20/20 with 10.81% compared to 2.63% coverage on *Close Up* in 1984.

From 1984 to 1994 there was a large decrease in political subject matter on current affairs programmes. The aggregate subject matter totals demonstrate that 'Domestic Events; politics' had 18.42% coverage on *Close Up* and 72.22% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984. By 1994 this had dropped to no 'Domestic Events; politics' coverage on 20/20. *Close Up* had 5.26% coverage and *Sunday* had 5.56% coverage of 'International Events; Politics' in 1984. By 1994, 20/20 had no coverage of 'International Events; Politics'. In 1984, 'Domestic Events; Economics' had 5.26% coverage on *Close Up*. In 1994 there was 2.70% coverage on 20/20 demonstrates a decrease in another serious informational topic.

'Domestic Events; Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions' had 7.89% coverage on *Close Up* and 2.78% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984. By 1994

this topic had no coverage on *20/20*. Clearly, political and economic matters<sup>1</sup> were accorded far less priority on *20/20* in 1994 than in the television current affairs programmes of 1984.

### **A comparison of *Close Up / Sunday* 1984 and *Holmes* 1994**

*Holmes* in 1994 demonstrates an even greater overall decrease in the coverage of serious informational matter. The overall percentage spent on serious informational topics on *Holmes* for 1994 was 35%. This is much lower than the figure for *20/20* which was 40.53% (it is also significantly lower than *Close Up* and *Sunday* of 1984 which both had figures of 63% and 94% coverage respectively). There is a marked decrease in the coverage of political subject matter; *Holmes* has 15% of its coverage devoted to domestic politics and none at all to international politics. There is no coverage of 'defence', 'Taxation, finance, inflation', 'Economics', or Agriculture' on *Holmes* in 1994. 'Domestic Events; Politics, Taxation, Finance, Inflation' had 2.63% coverage on *Close Up* and 11.11 % coverage on *Sunday* in 1984. This sub category was not covered at all on *Holmes* in 1994. 'Domestic events; Politics, SOE's, Assets, Public Service' had 2.63% coverage on *Close Up*, and 47.22% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984. *Holmes* however did not have any coverage of this topic area in the sample. The topic of 'Labour/Employment' had 6.5% coverage on *Holmes* which was lower than *Close Up* with 7.89% coverage and higher than *Sunday's* with 2.78% coverage. This is one area where *Holmes* has some representation of political coverage and this might reflect the interest of the time in changing workers conditions. 'Domestic Events; Health and Technological developments' had 2 % coverage which was similar coverage to *Close Up's* coverage with 2.63%. 'Domestic events; Public Moral Problems' had a higher percentage of coverage on *Holmes* with 6.5 % coverage which was higher than *Close Up's* with 5.% coverage in 1984. 'International events; Public moral problems' had 2.17% coverage on *Holmes* which was only slightly lower than *Close Up's* 2.63 % coverage in 1984. The overall areas of decrease in serious informational topics by the *Holmes* programme are in the areas of politics, Economics, taxation, and Agriculture.

It is clear that the 1984 current affairs programmes dealt with political and economic topics such as 'Policy, Taxation, Finance, and Inflation', and 'SOE's, Assets, Public Service', whereas *Holmes* in 1984 did not cover these areas. *Holmes* did focus on topics such as 'Labour, and employment, ACC, Wages' and conditions and this probably reflects concerns with how these areas were changing at the time. The *Holmes* programme covered political policy, strategy and personalities while other political and economic aspects did not feature on the programme at all.

Examining the aggregate totals shows decreases in serious informational topics on *Holmes*. The 1984 current affairs programmes *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had high coverage of 'Domestic political' subject matter with 18.42% coverage and 72.22% coverage respectively. *Holmes* had 15.21% coverage on 'Domestic political' topics which was lower coverage than both 1984 current affairs programmes. In sum the *Holmes* programme had a large number of serious informational subject areas that had declined in importance over the time period from 1984 to 1994.

### **Current affairs television: Deregulation-The Charter, 1994-2004.**

#### **A comparison of 20/20 1994 and Sunday 2004.**

There was a further overall decline in the coverage of serious informational subject matter from 1994 to 2004. In 1994 *20/20* had a total coverage of 40.53% of serious informational topics whereas *Sunday* 2004 had a percentage total of 16.3. The decline in serious informational topics covered on *20/20* and *Sunday* (2004) was noticeable in areas such as 'International Events; War, Uprisings, and Violent Political Activity' and 'International Events; Health and Technological Developments' and 'International Events; Travel, Tourism and Environment'. *Sunday* in 2004 did not cover the following areas that *20/20* covered in 1994: 'International Politics', 'defence', 'Taxation, Finance, Inflation', 'War/Conflict', 'Domestic events; Public moral problems', 'International Events; Environment'.

Some of the finer shading of change can be seen in a closer analysis of subject coverage. Both *20/20* in 1994 and *Sunday* in 2004 had no coverage of 'Domestic Events; Misc and Domestic Events; Policy'. *20/20* had 2.70% coverage of 'Politics; Taxation, Finance, Inflation' while *Sunday* in 2004 had no coverage of this topic. Neither programme had any coverage of 'Domestic Events, Politics; SOE's, Assets, Public Service'. 'International Events, Politics; International' was not covered on either *20/20* in 1994 or *Sunday* in 2004. The topic 'Domestic Events; National Defence, Military, NZ Forces Overseas' had 2.70% coverage in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. 'Domestic Events, Economics; Consumer Information' had 2.33% coverage on *Sunday* in 2004 while it was not covered by *20/20* in 1994. The topic 'Domestic Events, Economics; Health' had 2.70% coverage on *20/20* in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. 'Domestic Events, Agriculture, Farming, Fisheries (Non-Maori)' had no coverage on *20/20* in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. Both *20/20* and *Sunday* had no coverage of 'Domestic Events, Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions' in either 1994 or 2004. 'International Events; War, Uprisings, and Violent Political Activity' had 10.81% coverage on *20/20* in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. These changes demonstrate that there was a wide range of serious informational topics that were no longer covered in 1994 and 2004. By 2004 many of the serious informational areas covered by the 1984 current affairs programmes were extinguished on current affairs television coverage.

'Domestic Events, Politics; Health' was not covered by *20/20* or *Sunday* in either 1994 or 2004. The topic was covered by *20/20* in 'Domestic Events, Economics; Health' with 2.70% coverage. In 1994, 'International Events; Health and Technological Developments' had 10.81% coverage on *20/20* and this topic was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. 'Domestic Events; Public Moral Problems' had 5.41% coverage on *20/20* in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. 'International Events; Public Moral Problems' had 2.70 % coverage on *20/20* in 1994 and was not covered by *Sunday* in 2004. 'Domestic Events; Environment' was not covered on *20/20* in 1994 though there was 2.33% coverage on

*Sunday* in 2004. 'International Events; Travel, Tourism and Environment' had 2.63% coverage on *20/20* and no coverage on *Sunday* in 2004. Once again this decline of these subject areas demonstrates that these serious informational subject areas were no longer covered by 2004. These areas were other key subject areas that were extinguished in current affairs programmes by 2004. This is important as though they did not dominate the subject matter coverage in 1984 current affairs programmes their lack of coverage suggests that the breadth of coverage of serious informational topics reduced in 1994 and 2004.

### **A comparison of *Holmes* 1994 and *Holmes* 2004.**

The comparison of the *Holmes* programmes of 1994 and 2004 demonstrates the decline in serious informational subjects on current affairs television. The overall coverage of serious informational subject matter on *Holmes* in 1994 was 35% while on *Holmes* in 2004 this declined to 24%. The 'Domestic Events; Politics' coverage on *Holmes* in 1994 was 15 % and there was no international political coverage on *Holmes* in that year. By 2004 there was 9% coverage on domestic politics and 7% coverage on international political subjects. The areas that were not covered in 2004 on *Holmes* that were covered on *Holmes* in 1994 were 'Labour/employment', 'Public moral problems', and 'health and technological developments'. 'Domestic Political' coverage had 15.21% coverage in 1994 which decreased to 8.88% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004 and 'Domestic Events; Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions' declined from 1994 with 6.52% coverage to no coverage on *Holmes* in 2004.

'Domestic Events, Politics; Misc' increased slightly from 1994 to 2004 with 2.17% coverage on *Holmes* in 1994 and 2.22% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. This increase, however, is minimal. 'Domestic Events, Politics; Policy' had no coverage in either the 1994 or 2004 samples. 'Domestic Events; National defence, Military, NZ Forces, Overseas' was not covered on either *Holmes* programme in either 1994 or 2004. 'International Events; War, Uprisings, and Violent Political Activity' had no coverage on *Holmes* in 1994 but did have 2.22% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. 'Domestic Events, Politics; Taxation, Finance, Inflation' was not covered in either *Holmes* programme of either 1994 or 2004. Both *Holmes* programmes had no coverage of economic topics in

either 1994 or 2004. 'Domestic Events; Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions' had 6.52% coverage on *Holmes* in 1994 though this topic was not covered in 2004. The focus on this area in 1994 may well have reflected the changes taking place at the time in many areas of New Zealand's labour relations system.

'Domestic Events, Politics; Health' was not covered on *Holmes* in 1994 and had 2.22% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. 'Domestic Events, Politics; Education' had 6.52% coverage in 1994 though was not covered on *Holmes* in 2004. 'International Events, Health and Technological Developments' was not covered on either *Holmes* programme in this sample. 'Domestic Events; Public Moral Problems' had 6.52% coverage on *Holmes* in 1994, though was not covered on the *Holmes* programme in 2004. In 1994 *Holmes* had 2.17 % coverage of 'International Events; Public Moral Problems' though this topic area was not covered in 2004. 'Domestic Events; Environment' had 2.17 % coverage in 1994 and this rose slightly to 2.22% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. There was no international coverage on either *Holmes* programme in 1994 or 2004.

The *Holmes* programmes showed key areas of decrease from 1994 to 2004. 'Domestic Events; Public Moral Problems' declined from the *Holmes* programme in 1994 with 6.52% to no coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. 'International Moral problems' also declined from the *Holmes* programme in 1994 with 2.17% to no coverage of this topic on *Holmes* in 2004. The *Holmes* programme shows a steady decline in serious informational topics that were covered from 1994 to 2004. Where previously there had been a wide range of serious informational subject matter covered in the 1984 current affairs programmes many key areas covered on *Holmes* in 1994 were not covered by *Holmes* in 2004. This suggests that within the *Holmes* programme serious subject matter coverage declined from the 1994 programme to 2004.

An unexpected result in the current affairs research sample was the coverage of the topic 'the environment'. The environment did not feature in the 1984 current affairs subject matter and appeared in 1994 in the category 'Domestic

Events: Environment,' on *Holmes* with 2.17% of coverage. Considering how prevalent the topic of the 'the environment' has become this is an unusually low finding. Another unusual result in this sample was the topic 'Domestic Events Maori' which only featured in 1994 with 2.17% on *Holmes*. The rights of Maori have been an on-going issue in New Zealand for approximately three decades and it is unusual this subject did not feature more highly in the sample. In a reversal of the general trend of a decrease in political stories, 'International Events; Politics;' increased slightly from the 1984 figure of 5.26% and 5.56% in 1994 to 6.67% coverage on *Holmes* in 2004. The topic 'Domestic Events, Social Conflict, Race Relations, Immigration' was an area where the highest level of coverage occurred on *Holmes* in 2004 with 6.67% coverage. This was higher than the earlier 1984 coverage on *Sunday* with 5.56% coverage.

The findings overall suggest there was a decrease in serious, informational and political topics over the research period. Of the programmes examined the *Holmes* programme stands out as an example of how the genre altered with a decline in many serious subject areas, though *Sunday* 2004 shows the lowest amount of serious informational coverage of all the programmes in the sample with only 16% coverage of serious informational subject matter. The coverage of political stories dropped dramatically from 1984 to 1994 and also declined further in 2004. Areas that were dominant in 1984 current affairs programmes such as 'Economics', 'Sharemarket', 'Corporate Affairs', 'Labour and Employments, ACC, wages, Conditions' and Defence were all areas that declined over the research period. The categories and subcategories taken together constitute a net decrease in terms of on-air content for serious subject matter. For example, a comparison of the percentage totals for serious subject matter are as follows, 63% on *Close Up*, 94% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984, 40% on *20/20* and 35% on *Holmes* in 1994. By 2004 the figures decline again with 24% coverage of serious informational subject matter on *Holmes* and 16% coverage on *Sunday* (the lowest figure of the sample). The decline in serious subject matter was so dramatic that some areas in effect became extinct. With the decline in serious subject matter occurring, it is now necessary to examine what replaced this. The next section examines the question of whether there was an increase with topics with an emphasis on entertainment-oriented

content.

***Research question three:***

**Was there an increase in stories with an emphasis on entertainment-oriented content?**

Previous research into the news in New Zealand suggests a move to more entertainment oriented subject matter (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1996; Cook, 2000). An increase in entertainment-oriented subject matter in this sample would confirm that current affairs television in New Zealand moved to more tabloid content from 1984, 1994 to 2004. To examine whether this trend has occurred, 'crime', 'human interest, celebrity and entertainment' and 'sport' were chosen as sub categories for examination. The subject areas are divided into both 'domestic' and 'international' events and are examined across the time periods, of pre-regulation (1984), deregulation (1994) and the Charter (2004).

**Table 10**

**A comparison of the percentage totals (per sample) of the various entertainment categories between 1984 and 1994.**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Pre regulation</b>		<b>De regulation</b>	
	<b><i>Close Up</i></b>	<b><i>Sunday</i></b>	<b><i>20/20</i></b>	<b><i>Holmes</i></b>
	<b>1994</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1994</b>
Domestic Crime	0	0	10.8	0
Domestic Celebrities, human interest & entertainment	7.89	0	5.4	17.39
Sport (Domestic and International)	5.26	2.78	2.7	15.22
International Crime	0	2.78	5.41	2.17
(International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment	5.26	0	32.44	10.86
<b>Entertainment Oreiented Total</b>	<b>18.41</b>	<b>5.56</b>	<b>56.75</b>	<b>45.64</b>

## **Did entertainment-oriented subject matter Increase: 1984-1994?**

### ***Close Up* 1984 and *Sunday* 1984**

Table 9 shows the entertainment-oriented subject matter for the pre-deregulation current affairs programmes *Close Up* and *Sunday* and the deregulation current affairs programmes *20/20* and *Holmes* in 1994. In 1984 *Close Up* and *Sunday* had differing totals of overall entertainment oriented coverage, 18.41% and 5.56% respectively. In 1984 *Close Up* had a far greater coverage of entertainment oriented content than *Sunday*. One entertainment category where *Close Up* had a higher coverage was 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' with 7.89% (*Sunday* had no coverage of this category). *Close Up* also had higher percentage coverage of 'Sport' with 5.26% coverage compared to 2.78% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984. The other area where *Close Up* had greater entertainment oriented coverage was in the area of 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' with 5.26% coverage while *Sunday* had no 'celebrity' coverage. As previously noted *Sunday* had a much greater focus on political interviews and this partly explains why there was a lesser focus on entertainment stories.

### ***Close Up* and *Sunday* 1984 compared to *20/20* in 1994**

Table 9 shows the entertainment categories from *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984 as compared to *20/20* in 1994. From 1984 to 1994 there was a large increase in entertainment oriented subject matter on *20/20* with a total of 56.75% coverage. For this programme the most significant category of entertainment focus was in the area of 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' at 32.44%. This is a large increase in proportion of entertainment coverage compared to *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984 which had 18.41% and 5.56% coverage respectively.

Domestic crime did not appear as a significant sub category in the 1984 current affairs programmes. In 1994 however domestic crime comprised 10.80%

coverage on *20/20*. Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' first appeared on *Close Up* in 1984 with 7.89% coverage, though the category was not seen on *Sunday* in 1984. There was a substantial increase in the focus on 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' in both 1994 current affairs with 5.4% coverage on *20/20* and 17.39% on *Holmes*. 'Sport' appeared in 1984 with 5.46% coverage on *Close Up* and 2.78% coverage on *Sunday* and by 1994 this had decreased to 2.7% on *20/20*. The largest increase in entertainment-oriented subject matter, concerned 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment.' In 1984 this category only appeared on *Close Up* with 5.26% coverage but by 1994 it increased to 32.44% on *20/20*.

### ***Close Up and Sunday 1984 compared to Holmes 1994***

There was a large increase in entertainment oriented subject matter on *Holmes* in 1994 compared to the 1984 current affairs programmes. 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' increased substantially to 17.39% coverage on *Holmes*, compared to 7.89% on *Close Up* and 0% on *Sunday* in 1984. There was a large increase in 'Sport' coverage on *Holmes* in 1994 with an increase to 15.22% coverage which is also the highest of the sample and a large increase from the 1984 programmes. The largest 1984 to 1994 increase in entertainment-oriented subject matter, was in the category 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment'. In 1994 *Holmes* had 10.86% coverage on this topic which though lower than *20/20* was still a large increase from the 1984 sample.

It is worth noting that in the 1994 current affairs programmes some of the differences seen in 'entertainment' totals were a product of the format of each programme. For example, as *20/20* often had items from overseas it is only natural that it would have a high percentage of 'International Celebrities and Human Interest' stories. *Holmes* in contrast had a strong focus on 'Domestic Celebrities' and also 'Sport'. By the mid-1990s some sports such as rugby had professionalised and it is likely that many of the stories focused on key players as they became positioned as mainstream as 'celebrities' at this time.

The following table (table 11) shows percentage comparisons in entertainment oriented content within current affairs programmes from 1994 to 2004. The figures listed compare the deregulation to the Charter period.

**Table 11**

**A comparison of the percentage totals per programme of various entertainment categories in 1994 and 2004.**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>De-regulation</b>		<b>Charter period</b>	
	<b>20/20 1994</b>	<b>Holmes 1994</b>	<b>Holmes 2004</b>	<b>Sunday 2004</b>
Domestic Crime	10.80	0	20	23.26
Domestic Celebrities, human interest & entertainment	5.4	17.39	31.11	48.83
Sport (Domestic & International)	2.7	15.22	8.89	4.65
International Crime.	5.41	2.17	0	0
International Celebrities, human interest & entertainment	32.44	10.86	2.22	2.33
Entertainment oriented content total	56.75	45.64	62.22	79.07

**Current affairs television: Did entertainment-oriented subjectmatter increase; de-regulation- charter period, 1994 and 2004**

Table 11 compares entertainment categories of 1994 current affairs with 2004 current affairs programmes. The combination of entertainment-oriented subject matter totals reveals an even greater increase in these areas than in the period from 1984 to 1994. 'Entertainment' subject matter had an overall figure of 62.22% coverage in 2004 on *Holmes* which shows an increase from the 1994 *Holmes* show figure of 45.64% coverage. The fact that nearly half the 1994

*Holmes* programme focused on 'entertainment' material demonstrates how pervasive this new approach to current affairs became after 1984. *Holmes* in 2004 had even greater coverage of entertainment material than the 1994 *Holmes* or *20/20* programme. This focus on entertainment oriented material was over half the subject matter covered on *Holmes* in 2004. *Sunday* in 2004 had the highest proportion of 'entertainment material' with 79.07% coverage. It is clear that from 1994 to 2004 there was an increase in coverage of 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' and a steady increase in crime coverage.

### ***Holmes* 1994 compared to *Holmes* 2004**

Overall entertainment oriented subject matter increased on *Holmes* in 2004 with 62.22% coverage versus 45.64% coverage on *Holmes* in 1994. Within entertainment oriented content was a large increase in 'Domestic Crime' which went from no coverage on the *Holmes* programme in 1994 to 20% coverage in 2004. It is important to note that 'crime' is regarded as entertainment subject matter as the way crime was treated after 1984 generally altered it from a serious category to an entertainment category. This is because crime was often presented as 'entertainment' with a focus on victims and outrage rather than policy analysis or contextual examination. The category 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest & entertainment' increased to 31.11% coverage in 2004 from 17.39% on *Holmes* in 1994. There was a decrease in the 'Sport' category in 2004 with 8.89% coverage compared to 15.22% coverage on *Holmes* in 1994. The topic 'International Crime' also decreased from 1994 with 2.17 % coverage compared to no coverage of the topic in 2004. 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' decreased from 10.86% in 1994 to 2.22% coverage in 2004. The largest increase in entertainment oriented material in the *Holmes* programmes from 1994 to 2004 was in the area of 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment'. This suggests that by 2004 the dominance of entertainment subject matter grew substantially and became well established as 'normal' current affairs coverage by this time.

### ***Holmes* 2004 compared to *Sunday* 2004.**

In 2004 both current affairs programmes had very high totals of entertainment

oriented content. *Holmes* had a total of 62.22% coverage while *Sunday* had 79.07% entertainment oriented content which was the highest entertainment figure for the data. The 'Domestic Crime' category remained relatively stable between the two programmes with *Holmes* having a 20% coverage and *Sunday* a 23.26% coverage. *Sunday* had a larger focus on 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' with 48.83% coverage while *Holmes* had 31.11% coverage. One area where *Sunday* in 2004 had less focus than *Holmes* was the category 'Sport' with 4.65% coverage while *Holmes* had 8.89% coverage. Both programmes had similar levels of coverage of 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' with 2.22% coverage on *Holmes* and 2.33% coverage on *Sunday*. It is possible to argue that *Sunday* became more tabloid than *Holmes* in 2004 with the heavy emphasis on 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment'.

### **Overall trends**

The topic of 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' experienced the greatest increase of all entertainment categories from 1994 to 2004. The topic 'crime' was not generally covered in the earlier current affairs programmes of 1984. However by the 1990s and 2000s crime stories increased to figure significantly in all programme samples. By 1994 there had been a steady increase in the various crime sub-categories such that there was a strong rise in crime coverage overall. Crime coverage from 1994 was presented in a manner that made it entertaining and often vicarious. There was a focus on sensational crime stories and how victims were affected. This approach lent itself to reactions and interpretations by the journalists with frequent camera shots of their reactions to the unfolding stories. In the subject category 'Domestic Events Justice, Police, Law Changes;' this appeared on *20/20* in 1994 with 2.70% while 'Domestic Events, Crime Misc;' appeared also on *20/20* in 1994 with 2.70%. A new focus on crime emerged in 1994 with *20/20*'s 2.70% coverage in the category 'Domestic Events, Crime, Violent;' and 'Domestic Events; Road Accidents, Road Toll, Vehicular Crime' appearing 2.70% on *Holmes* in 1994. An aggregate of the subcategories shows a major

increase in crime coverage in 1994 to over 13% of the subject matter covered on the current affairs programmes of this decade.

The *Holmes* programme in 1994 indicates a growth in human interest and celebrity coverage from 17.39% coverage in 1984 to 31.11% in 2004. This figure reached 48.83% coverage on *Sunday* in 2004. In 1994 and 2004 'Celebrities' as a topic increased substantially with a growing focus on domestic and international celebrities in current affairs programmes. This suggests that current affairs generally shifted from a serious political focus to a more tabloid and softer style of subject matter. The category 'Domestic Events, Human interest, Historical items' which screened on *20/20* with 2.70% coverage in 1994 increased on *Holmes* in 1994 with 15.22% of coverage. By 2004, this topic made up 13.33% of coverage on *Holmes* and 18.60% coverage on *Sunday*. *20/20* in 1994 had an emphasis on international celebrities and entertainment with 8.92% coverage in this category. *Holmes* in 1994 had 6.52% coverage of international celebrities. By 1994, current affairs programmes had moved to an increased and consistent focus on both domestic and international celebrities.

The subject area of 'Domestic Events entertainment' grew considerably as a category on *Holmes* from 2.17 % in 1994 to 8.89 % in 2004. This category made up 16.28 % of *Sunday's* content in 2004. *Holmes* in 1994 registered the 'domestic entertainment' topic as 15.22 % of sample coverage and 13.33 % in 2004. *Sunday* in 2004 reached the figure of 18.60 % content in this category. The *Holmes* programme of 2004 also had increased crime coverage with violent crime coverage comprising 6.67% of the programme. *Sunday* in 2004 devoted 9.30 % of its programme to violent crimes and 4.65 % its programme to vehicular crime. Whether this reflects a real shift in interest by the audience or a greater awareness by directors and producers that crime stories equals ratings is open to conjecture. In 1994, *20/20* had a relatively low proportion of content on domestic entertainment with 5.4% coverage. It had a 32.44 % focus on international celebrity, human interest and entertainment. This could be explained by the fact that it was easier and cheaper to get in international stories

rather than focus on local news. This pattern differed somewhat in the case of *Holmes*. In 1994 it had a domestic entertainment proportion of 17.39% and a decreased focus on international human interest, celebrities and entertainment with 10.86%. These trends suggest that the focus on entertainment oriented content was well established across the current affairs programmes after 1994 and was a permanent fixture by 2004. The trend to entertainment oriented subject matter increased and solidified by 2004.

Over the research period there was an increase in topics that emphasised entertainment-oriented content on current affairs programmes after 1984. By 1994, there were large increases in the entertainment topics of 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment' and a rise in 'sport' coverage also. The percentage totals of entertainment topics increased substantially from 1984 to 1994 and continued to increase into 2004. The focus on entertainment subject matter can be seen to have increased dramatically between 1984 to 1994 and this increase had not abated by 2004 (when the overall entertainment oriented content is considered it increased on *Holmes* and *Sunday* in 2004). Current affairs programmes from 1994 to 2004 all had increased coverage of 'Domestic Crime', 'Domestic Celebrities, human interest and entertainment', and 'International Celebrities, human interest and entertainment'. These findings suggest a substantial change from the 1984 current affairs sample whereby from 1994 to 2004 key entertainment subject areas such as 'crime', 'celebrities, human interest and entertainment' dominated the content on New Zealand current affairs television programmes.

#### ***Research question 4:***

##### **Was there any change in the type of sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in current affairs?**

This section examines the change in types of sources over the research period. Sourcing is an important area of examination because it determines the content and purpose of news and current affairs stories. Comrie explains that "sources are at the very centre of news" (Gans, 1979, Hall et al, 1978, Schlesinger, 1990 as cited in Comrie, 1996). More specifically Comrie

(1996) suggests that the examination of sources often reveals a rise in personalisation whereby expert voices within current affairs programmes decline in numbers as the voices of ordinary people increase (in vox populi news segments).

For this study, sources included those people interviewed by the journalist, and or presenter. Sources also included those who were speaking on air, on camera or who were recorded speaking while images were played. The table below categorises source types for each current affairs programme and lists their relative percentages for each sample.

**Table 12**

**Source Types occurrences for each current affairs programme sample.**

Source Type	Pre-regulation		De-regulation		Charter period	
	<i>Close Up</i> 1984	<i>Sunday</i> 1984	<i>20/20</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 2004	<i>Sunday</i> 2004
Political party representative -	5	14	2	7	11	1
Armed forces -	2			2		
Experts	5	4	8	4	2	
Foreign politician	2	1	1	1		5
NGO	2	3				
Business	2		1			
Government ministry		2		2	1	
Foreign citizen.	2	2		1		
Celebrity/sportsperson	2	2	10	14	10	18
Union	1	1				
Whistle-blower	1		4	1	1	
Accused.		1	4	1	1	
Local government				3	2	4
Journalist in other category				1	1	2

Private citizen/stakeholder/public	12	6	10	13	1
Church	1				12
Police		1	8	1	
<b>Total of Source Type</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>

### **A comparison of *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984- pre-deregulation**

The number of political sources in the 1984 sample was much higher on *Sunday* with 14 sources compared to *Close Up* with 5 sources. This may have to do with it being an election year, in which there was a dramatic change of government. Apart from this discrepancy (and one other mentioned below) source patterns for the two programmes were broadly similar. In this context *Sunday's* format was more disposed to politicians and political subject matter. There were two sources from the Armed forces on *Close Up* in 1984 and none on *Sunday* in the same year. The number of 'experts' for each programme was quite similar with five on *Close Up* and four on *Sunday*. Foreign politicians were evenly sourced too with two on *Close Up* and one on *Sunday*. NGO sources were quite evenly represented between the two programmes with two on *Close Up* and three on *Sunday*. There were more sources in the business category on *Close Up* with two sources while there were none on *Sunday*. There were two Government Ministerial sources on *Sunday* and none on *Close Up*, while foreign citizens were evenly represented with two sources on each programme. There were two celebrity/sportspeople sources on each programme also. There was one Church source and this occurred on *Close Up* while there were no Church sources for *Sunday*. There was only one police source on *Sunday* while *Close Up* had no police sources in 1984. Each programme also had an even number of union sources with one per programme. *Close Up* had the only whistle-blower source of the 1984 current affairs sample, while *Sunday* had the only 'accused' source. There were no local government sources or journalists as sources on either programme.

There is a large difference between the numbers of 'private citizen, stakeholders, public' with *Close Up* having 12 such sources and *Sunday* having

half that number of sources with six. This difference in numbers may have been because *Close Up* though focused on politics, covered a broader range of subject matter.

### **A comparison of *Close Up/Sunday* in 1984 and *20/20* in 1994**

A comparison of the 1984 *Close Up/Sunday* current affairs programme sources types with those for *20/20* in 1994 reveal two major changes. Firstly, there is a marked decline in the use of political party representative sources. In 1984 *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had five and fourteen political sources, respectively. In 1994 only *20/20* had two political sources, half the number registered by *Close Up* in 1984. In contrast to the 1984 current affairs programmes, *20/20* in 1994 had eight 'expert sources' (this was greater than the number of sources on either *Close Up* or *Sunday*; *Sunday* had four experts while *Close Up* had five. This is a significant increase at close to double the number of experts that were interviewed on the 1984 current affairs programmes. This demonstrates that though *20/20* may have had tabloid aspects to the programme that other standards of 'quality' journalism were upheld. *20/20* in 1994 had the same number of foreign political sources as *Sunday* (one each), while *Close Up* 1984 had two foreign political sources. There were no sources from NGO's on *20/20* in 1994 while both 1984 current affairs programmes did have NGO sources, two on *Close Up*, and three on *Sunday*. In 1994, *20/20* had no business sources while *Close Up* was the only 1984 current affairs programme to have business sources. There were no government ministry sources on *20/20* while *Sunday* was the only 1984 current affairs programme to have a government ministry source. There were no foreign citizen sources on *20/20* while each of the 1984 programmes had two foreign citizen sources each.

The source category celebrity/sportsperson reveals one of the greatest contrasts between the 1984 and 1994 current affairs programmes. In 1994 *20/20* had ten celebrity/sportspeople compared to two for each of the 1984 programmes. This suggests that there has been a move to sources which reflect both the growing prominence of entertainment values in current affairs television programmes and the changing genre of television current affairs per se. There were no union sources in the 1994 programme; in 1984 *Close Up*

and *Sunday* employed a union source each. Whistle-blowers and accused each had higher source numbers than *Close Up* and *Sunday* with four whistle-blowers and accused on *20/20* each amounted to four sources, a markedly higher number than *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984. Together, the rise in the number of 'police sources' and 'Accused' reflects the growth in crime stories from 1984 to 1994. The rise in celebrity sources combined with the increased number of sources in the 'accused', 'police' and 'whistle-blower' categories suggests that *20/20* had taken on an infotainment format in 1994. The decline in the numbers of 'Foreign Political' and 'Foreign Citizen' sources suggests less international news coverage on the current affairs programmes of 1994.

### **A comparison of *Close Up/Sunday* in 1984 and *Holmes* in 1994**

*Holmes* in 1994 had seven 'political party' sources compared to *Close Up*'s five and *Sunday*'s 14 in 1984. This may well represent an attempt by the producer to position *Holmes* with the political news stories of the day. Also the higher figure may represent the short interview format that *Holmes* had which would account for the greater number of political sources. Four expert sources employed by *Holmes* matched closely the four used by *Sunday* and those used by *Close Up* in 1984. There was not a lot of variation in the foreign politician category either. *Holmes* employed one of these sources while *Sunday* had one and *Close Up* had two foreign political sources.

The source category celebrity/sportspeople reveals the greatest change between 1984 and 1994. *Holmes*, with 14 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources greatly exceeded the two celebrity/sportspeople sources each used by *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984. The unprecedented rise in these kinds of sources demonstrates that the *Holmes* programme was geared towards infotainment values. The *Holmes* programme did not have any union sources and had one whistle-blower source which was consistent with the 1984 current affairs programmes. In the source category 'accused', *Holmes* had one source and this correlates with *Sunday*'s one 'accused' source while *Close Up* in 1984 had none. In contrast to the 1984 current affairs programmes *Holmes* had three 'local government' sources where the earlier programmes had none. There was one 'journalist source' in the 1994 *Holmes* programme where in 1984 there had

been none. The 'private citizen/stakeholder/public' source category remained comparable in number with 10 sources on the *Holmes* programme while *Close Up* had 12 and *Sunday* had six 'private/citizen/stakeholder/public' sources. However, the way the sources were interviewed on the *Holmes* programme was different however to the earlier current affairs programmes. There were a greater number of 'vox pop' interviews on *Holmes* where subjects were asked a short single question. In this respect the types of 'private/citizen' interviews were different to those conducted on *Close Up* or *Sunday*. There was no source from either the church source category or police category on the *Holmes* programme in 1994.

### **Source changes from deregulation to the Charter-1994-2004.**

#### **A comparison of 20/20 1994 and Sunday 2004.**

The number of political sources on each programme was relatively similar to 20/20, which had two such sources and *Sunday* with one. Both 1994 currentaffairs programmes had no sources from the armed forces. There were eight 'expert' sources on 20/20 in 1994 compared to none for *Sunday* in 2004. There were five 'foreign politicians' on *Sunday* in 2004 while 20/20 in 1994 had only one 'foreign politician' as a source. Both programmes did not have sources from NGO's while 20/20 in 1994 had 1 'business source' and *Sunday* had none. There were two 'Government Ministerial' sources on 20/20 in 1994 and none on *Sunday* in 2004. Neither current affairs programme had 'foreign citizen' sources. Both programmes had high numbers of 'celebrity/sportspeople' as sources. 20/20 had 10 sources in this category and *Sunday* had 18. These were the highest occurrences of 'celebrity/sportspeople' for the entire research sample. This figure suggests that *Sunday* in 2004 continued the trend towards 'Entertainment oriented' material rather than reverting to 'quality current affairs' as prescribed by The Charter. Both programmes had no union sources, while 20/20 had four 'whistle-blower' sources and *Sunday* had none. 20/20 had four 'accused' sources while *Sunday* in 2004 had none. 20/20 in 1994 had no 'Local government' sources in the 1994 sample and *Sunday* had four in 2004. 20/20 had no 'journalist' sources while *Sunday* had two. 20/20 had no private 'citizen/stakeholder/public' sources while *Sunday* had one from this

category. *Sunday* in 2004 had 12 'Church' sources which was the highest number of the research sample; *20/20* in 1994 had none. One reason for the high number of 'church sources' was because two stories in one programme which focused on a religious group and how people found it hard to leave the religion. *20/20* in 1994 had eight 'police sources' while *Sunday* in 2004 had none of these sources. Both these programmes show a rise in 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources which suggests a move to greater entertainment values. The low percentage of 'private/citizen/stakeholder' source types for *Sunday* 2004 suggests an eschewal of 'vox populi' style of presentation in favour of 'slick tabloid celebrity' focused stories.

### ***Holmes* 1994 and *Holmes* 2004.**

This section compares the *Holmes* programme of 1994 to the *Holmes* programme of 2004. The percentage of 'political' sources rose slightly from seven in 1994 to 11 in 2004. This rise in political sources suggests that *Holmes* in 2004 may have been getting more involved in the daily news cycle. However, this does not suggest an advance in the depth of interviews since the research data demonstrates that item lengths did not increase. There were two 'armed' forces sources on the *Holmes* programme in 1994 and no 'armed forces' sources on the *Holmes* programmes in 2004. The number of 'expert sources' decreased fifty per cent from the 1994 *Holmes* programme with four 'expert sources' to two 'expert sources' on *Holmes* in 2004. This decline in 'expert sources' suggests that the earlier ideal of current affairs as informational programming was altering permanently. 'Foreign political' sources decreased from one in 1994 to no 'foreign political' sources on the *Holmes* programme in 2004. Neither *Holmes* programme in either 1994 or 2004 had any sources from NGO's or business. *Holmes* in 1994 had two sources from 'Government Ministries' and this decreased to one source on *Holmes* in 2004. There was one 'foreign citizen' source on *Holmes* in 1994 and none on *Holmes* in 2004. Both programmes had a high number of 'celebrity/sportspeople' with 14 on *Holmes* in 1994 and 10 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources on *Holmes* in 2004. Each *Holmes* programme has a high number of celebrity sportspeople sources especially when compared to the earlier 1984 current affairs programmes. Neither *Holmes* programmes do not have any union sources and each had one

'whistle-blower' source, and one 'accused' source. *Holmes* in 1994 had three 'local government' sources which decreased slightly to two 'local government' sources in 2004. Each programme had one 'journalist' source while 'private citizen/stakeholder/public' sources increased from 10 in the 1994 *Holmes* sample with 10 sources to 13 on the 2004 *Holmes* programme. This increase in 'private citizen/stakeholder/public' suggests that the 'vox populi' approach to interviews may have increased by 2004. Neither *Holmes* programme of the sample had any church sources. There was only one 'police' source in the *Holmes* programme of 2004.

One of the most noticeable features of the *Holmes* programme in 1994 was the large increase in celebrity sources from the 1984 current affairs programmes. There were 14 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources which was also higher than the number of 'celebrity sources on *20/20* in 1994. There were a solid number of political sources on *Holmes* in 1994 which shows a focus on political stories however the increase in 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources in that year indicates a strong trend to lighter entertainment and infotainment stories. The number of celebrity sources on *Holmes* in 2004 declined from the 1994 figure though still remained quite high when compared to the other current affairs programmes in the overall research sample. Political sources increased somewhat on *Holmes* in 2004 from the 1994 *Holmes* figure though they never reached the 'political sources' figures of the 1984 current affairs programmes.

### **Source Types for *Holmes* 1994 and *Sunday* 2004**

This section compares the range of sources for the *Holmes* and *Sunday* programmes of 2004. The number of 'political sources' on *Holmes* in 2004 was 11. This is the second highest number of political sources for the entire research sample. This suggests that by 2004 *Holmes* may have been interviewing more politicians to keep the programme in step with political stories that were covered in the daily news. In contrast *Sunday* had a very low number of 'political sources' with one source. *Holmes* had two expert sources in 2004 while *Sunday* had none, which is one of the lowest numbers of the sample. *Holmes* in 2004 had no 'Foreign Political' sources while *Sunday* had 5 'Foreign Political' sources. This suggests *Sunday* had more of a focus on international

stories than *Holmes* did. Both 2004 current affairs programmes had high numbers of 'Celebrity/Sportspeople' sources with 10 on *Holmes* and 18 on *Sunday*. Neither programme had any 'Union' or 'Whistleblower' sources in 2004. There was one 'accused' source on *Holmes* while *Sunday* had none of these types of sources. *Holmes* had the highest number of 'Private citizen/stakeholder/public' category of the sample with 13 and *Sunday* had only one which is a marked contrast between these two programmes. The likely

reason for this is that *Holmes* often sent reporters out to engage ordinary people in the form of 'vox pops' interviews which may explain the high number of 'public' sources. *Sunday* has a high number of 'Church' sources in 2004 with 13 while *Holmes* has none. Of the two 2004 current affairs programmes *Holmes* has one 'Police' source while *Sunday* has none. There were similarities in these programmes where both have an almost complete eschewal of experts and there is a strong reliance on celebrity and sports people as sources.

### ***Research question five:***

From 1984 to 2004 were sources within a story less likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions?

The next area of examination concerns evidence provided by the sources. Primarily this is a measurement of whether evidence is provided by the source for their statements and opinions. This is an important aspect to examine as changes in this area reveals whether the kinds of information sources give have altered over time and whether unsubstantiated comment has meanwhile increased. If there is less evidence provided this may be because sources are expressing opinionated and/or emotionally laden comment. In analysing the programme content a Likert scale was used to ascertain the effect to which sources for each programme sample provided evidence for their views. It was ascertained whether they provided evidence 'often' 'occasionally,' 'rarely' or 'not at all' (none). This was determined using the following criteria. The 'often' criteria

was used if there were three strong instances of giving evidence. The occasionally criteria was used if there was one occurrence of using evidence amongst the examples. The criteria of 'occasionally' or 'often' was never used when there was no use of evidence. In the latter case 'not at all' was the criteria used for my research. The following table gives percentage figures for each programme sample in 1984 and 1994. Some of the figures in the tables add up to 101% and this is due to slight inaccuracies in rounding up in the calculations made.

**Table 13**

**Likert assessment of the extent to which sources provided evidence within given programme samples, 1984 and 1994. The table shows percentage of sources within each programme sample.**

Likert Frequency	<i>Pre-deregulation</i>		<i>Deregulation</i>	
	<i>Close Up</i> 1984	<i>Sunday</i> 1984	<i>20/20</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 1994
Often	60	54	24	11
Occasionally	30	14	60	60
Rarely	8	27	14	28
None	3	5	3	2

**A comparison of *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984.**

Both *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had high frequencies of the 'often' occurrence. With 60% for *Close Up* and 54% for *Sunday*. The number of 'occasionally' occurrences was lower with *Close Up* registering 30% and *Sunday* half this amount with 14%. There is a contrast with the number of 'rarely' occurrences with *Close Up* with 8% and *Sunday* 27% of the 'rarely' occurrence. The number of occurrences of 'no evidence' provided by source was low with *Close Up* revealing a occurrence of 'none' and *Sunday* with a 5%

occurrence. The 'often' and 'occasionally' figures for *Close Up*, when combined, equals 90%. For *Sunday* these figures combined equal 68%. The difference in these figures may be because *Sunday* had longer interviews with subjects who may not have given evidence and instead gave opinion. This is most likely because of the format of the programme had much longer interviews than *Close Up* (which usually had three segments making up the whole programme). This discrepancy is reflected in the fact that 32% of sources in *Sunday* in 1984 provided evidence for their views, 'rarely' or 'not at all'. In contrast only 11 % of sources on *Close Up* in 1984 provided evidence 'rarely' or 'not at all'. The difference in these figures may be due to the fact that *Sunday* had many long political interviews, while *Sunday* had some interviews which took up the entire hour while *Sunday's* format consisted of three distinct stories rather than a long form studio. within the hour. This may be the reason for the difference in the amount of evidence subjects gave.

#### **A comparison of *Close Up* and *Sunday* 1984 and *20/20* in 1994.**

The percentage of 'often' occurrences declines from the 1984 *Sunday* sample figure of 60% to 24% for *20/20* in 1994. Correspondingly, the 'occasionally' occurrence on *20/20* 1994 registers 60% compared to 30% for *Close Up* in 1984. This indicates that on *20/20* in 1994 there was less obvious and sustained evidence provided by sources. However, there was an increase in the 'occasionally' occurrence which suggests that all serious journalistic practices were not lost but instead there was a trend to less evidence given by sources though not a complete eradication of it. The 'rarely' occurrence on *20/20* (1994) stands at 14% compared to *Close Up* (1984) with 18%.

For *20/20* in 1994 'often' occurrences were 24% and the 'occasional' occurrence was 60%. This demonstrates that though the 'often' figure declined from both *Sunday's* and *Close Up's* 1984 figures the increase in the occasionally figures meant that there was still some evidence being provided by the sources on *20/20* though this was less than the earlier 1984 current affairs

programmes. This may be because on *20/20* there were a high number of sources overall and many of these may have given opinionated or emotional responses rather than interviews where there was a lot of evidence. *20/20*'s high numbers of 'occasionally' giving evidence also reflects the wide variety of sources with some experts and many ordinary people.

### **A comparison of *Close Up* and *Sunday* 1984 and *Holmes* in 1994.**

*Holmes* had less occurrences of sources 'often' providing evidence than all other current affairs programme sample in this table. '*Holmes* had the highest figure for the 'occasionally' occurrence at 60% *Holmes* also has the highest 'rarely' measurement with 28% of occurrences. The 'none' occurrence fits within the range of the other programmes within the sample and so does not stand out as a significant result. It is clear that on the *Holmes* programme there were much fewer instances where sources provided evidence than the 1984 current affairs programmes.

The percentage of sources which often provide evidence on *Holmes* in 1994 is 11% which was less than a quarter of the percentage of sources 'often' providing evidence in 1984 on *Close Up* and *Sunday*. The 11% figure for *Holmes* in 1994 is less than half of that for *20/20* over the same year. This suggests that *Holmes* is in a distinctive category of its own. The reason for this dramatic decrease in sources 'often' providing evidence may be due to the high numbers of celebrity/sportspeople as well as private/citizens who may not have given consistent evidence. The format of the programme, which was half an hour in length, may well have constricted sources' abilities to give evidence also. However, the fact that 60% of sources on the *Holmes* show 'occasionally' cite evidence suggests that rational discussion has not entirely disappeared. This indicates a decline rather than a complete removal of evidence. This may well have occurred because there was a reasonably high number of political sources on the *Holmes* programmes in 2004. What these figures suggest is that the *Holmes* programme overall lacked consistent depth in evidential explanation and that there were two distinct styles of interviews. In one style of interview sources gave evidence occasionally, in another style where sources gave evidence inconsistently or rarely.

The next table shows the extent to which sources provided evidence in the programme samples from 1994 and 2004. In this table the comparison is between current affairs programmes in the deregulation and Charter periods.

**Table 14**

**Likert assessment of the extent to which sources provided evidence within given programme samples; 1994 and 2004. The table shows the percentage of sources with each programme sample**

Likert Frequency	<i>Deregulation</i>		<i>Charter</i>	
	<i>20/20</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 1994	<i>Holmes</i> 2004	<i>Sunday</i> 2004
Often	24	11	22	23
Occasionally	60	60	30	47
Rarely	14	28	34	30
None	3	2	14	-

### **A comparison of *20/20* in 1994 and *Sunday* in 2004.**

Both *20/20* and *Sunday* had similar numbers of the ‘often’ occurrence. In 1994, *20/20* had 24% of ‘often’ occurrences while *Sunday* 1984 had 23% of ‘often’ occurrences. The ‘occasionally’ occurrence on *20/20* was 60% while *Sunday* had 47%. The figure for ‘rarely’ was considerably lower on *20/20* with 14% of occurrences compared with *Sunday*’s 30%. *20/20* had 3% of the ‘none’ occurrence while *Sunday* had no occasions of the ‘none’ occurrence.

The figure that stands out in this sample is the percentage of sources who ‘rarely’ gave evidence on *Sunday* in 2004. At 30% this is higher than *20/20* in 1994 with 14% and *Holmes* in 1994 with 28%. The reason for this high figure may well be due to the high number of sportspeople and celebrities that *Sunday* interviewed. As such these types of interviews are often designed to elicit opinions and or emotional responses. This reflects the minimal requirement for sources to give evidence in an entertainment oriented type of current affairs programme.

### **A comparison of *Holmes* in 1994 and *Holmes* in 2004.**

*Holmes* in 1994 had the lowest number of the 'often' gives evidence occurrence with 11%. This increased to 22% of 'often' occurrences on *Holmes* in 2004. The 'occasionally' occurrences on *Holmes* in 1994 decreased to 30% for *Holmes* in 2004. This suggests that there were changes in the frequency of evidence provided on the *Holmes* programme between 1994 and 2004. The 'rarely' occurrence was quite even between the two programme samples with 28% on *Holmes* in 1994 and 34% on *Holmes* in 2004. The times when the 'none' occurrence happened increased from 2% on *Holmes* in 1994 to 14% on *Holmes* in 2004. This rise suggests that there was an increase of sources not providing any evidence.

There are two key findings in this sample. The first is that the measure where sources 'often' provide evidence doubled to 22 % in the *Holmes* programme in 2004 compared to *Holmes* in 1994 with 11%. The second key finding is that the percentage of sources in the 2004 *Holmes* programme who 'rarely' or 'never' provide evidence adds up to 48% (compared to 30% for the same combined figure for *Holmes* in 1994). This suggests that the slightly higher incidence of politicians appearing on *Holmes* in 2004 (compared to 1994) may well have influenced the higher percentage sources of 'often' giving evidence. However, concurrent increase in celebrity/sportspeople sources as well as a higher figure for private citizens over the two dates may well reflect that the *Holmes* programmes of 2004 contained two modes of interview style; one style where there was evidence consistently given and the other where there was little or no evidence provided.

*Sunday* in 1984 had a high number of sources 'rarely' giving evidence when compared to *Close Up* in 1984. The figure of 27% 'rarely' giving evidence occurrence was higher than some 1994 figures and stands out as an anomaly in the sample. The 'rarely' figure of 27 % on *Sunday* in 1984 is quite a high figure though this could be a consequence of a lot of long political interviews. However the cause for this cannot be completely determined.

### **General trends in 1984, 1994 and 2004.**

It is clear from these tables that the number of occurrences where sources 'often' gave evidence decreased over the research period. This suggests that from 1984 to 2004 sources within a story were less likely to provide evidence for their statements. The lowest figures of sources providing evidence was in the 1994 current affairs programmes when deregulation was most powerful. The proportion of sources who 'often' gave evidence had only improved slightly by 2004 while the proportion of sources 'rarely' providing evidence increased.

The data demonstrates that as a general trend the percentage of sources who 'often' gave evidence diminished over time. This trend is especially evident when one compares *Holmes* in 1994 with 1984 programme samples and *20/20* in 1994. By 2004 there was an 'overall' recovery in the percentage of sources 'often' giving evidence but this percentage never matched the evidence for the 1984 current affairs programmes. The number of times when sources 'rarely' gave evidence also increased from 1994 to 2004. This indicates a growth in sources within stories not giving any evidence whatsoever. The figures for 'not at all, or none' in terms of the percentage of sources giving evidence remained quite stable, however, the *Holmes* programme in 2004 had a very high occurrence of this figure.

The trends suggest that as programme format altered from 1984 to shorter items and a removal of longer interviews the kinds of evidence that sources gave altered greatly. There was a growth in 'vox populi' interviews which are very quick. They tend not to be the format where subjects provide evidence but are prompted to give a rapid response. These probably accounted for the majority of the rise in sources 'rarely' giving evidence. The shorter interview lengths after 1984 also constricted the amount and type of evidence an interviewee could give. It is clear that from 1984 to 2004 those sources were less likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions.

### ***Summary***

In this chapter the quantitative findings of the research have been presented.

The initial research questions set out to answer if New Zealand current affairs programmes developed shorter item lengths over time and if there had been a decrease in serious, informational or political topics. Further, the research questions also posed the question as to whether there had been an increase in topics with an emphasis on entertainment-oriented content, and whether there had been a change in the type of sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in current affairs. Finally the research questions asked if sources were less likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions.

It is clear that over the research period from 1984 to 2004 item lengths have largely decreased. The decrease in item length is most obvious in the period when deregulation was at its height with the *Holmes* and *20/20* programmes of 1994. These current affairs programmes stand out as the programmes with the shortest item lengths of the research sample. 1994 was a year where the effects of deregulation were most noticeable. The impact of this decline in item lengths was to contract the time given to topics and this restricted interview lengths and how in-depth interviewers could go with subjects. The decline in item length in the 1994 current affairs programmes was dramatic and the 'current affairs interview' changed greatly at this point. Where once there were long slow paced interviews with politicians these were replaced with much shorter items. This change was no doubt similar to the same approach that the news took after deregulation where a decrease in item length and increase in pace was designed to keep audiences watching and entertained. Unfortunately the net result of this was to produce current affairs programmes that could not, because of their construction, deal with complex topics without a superficial approach. With the decrease in item length the pace within the items increased as item lengths declined. This is an important measure as the construction of the programmes altered. As such current affairs interviews had changed by the 1994 sample and they never returned to their earlier formats of 1984. Though there was a small increase in item lengths by the 2004 programmes the item lengths never returned to the similar levels of the 1984 current affairs programmes. With the decline in item lengths the capacity for current affairs programmes to deliver in-depth and comprehensive information and interviews declined dramatically.

The subject matter current affairs programmes covers altered substantially in current from 1984 to 2004. Most noticeably there are two key trends that emerged in the data. First, that there has been a reduction in the number of political and serious informational stories covered over the research period and second, that there has been an increase in the coverage of tabloid topics such as celebrity, human interest and entertainment. The data suggests that the decrease in serious informational and political topics started after 1984 continued to incorporate those current affairs programmes in 2004. As previously stated political coverage has largely been vacated and been replaced by stories on celebrity, human interest and entertainment. The increase in celebrity, human interest and entertainment was substantial and shows a general trend in New Zealand current affairs programmes to a greater entertainment focus largely at the expense of more serious topics. The increase in infotainment and entertainment topics as well as the declining item lengths suggests that current affairs programmes became generally more tabloid in subject in 1994 and beyond.

The data suggests substantial changes have also occurred in sources, most notably there has been a greater emphasis on celebrity/sportspeople that demonstrates the trend to more entertainment oriented programmes. With the greater numbers of celebrities/sportspeople there has been a concurrent decrease in politicians and experts and this further demonstrates a move to entertainment-oriented material. Politicians were frequently the main type of source in the 1984 current affairs programmes but the 1994 and 2004 sample revealed a sustained focus on celebrities and sportspeople. The fact that the replacement of politicians to a focus on celebrities and sportspeople indicates another strong trend that indicates that the coverage of entertainment and softer topics on current affairs programme occurred after 1984.

The change in the types of sources interviewed on current affairs programmes also corresponds with a decline in evidence given by sources over time. Over the research period it is clear that subjects were less inclined to 'often' provide evidence and this trend declined to 'occasionally' over the research period. There was also an increase in subjects 'rarely' providing evidence also. This

suggests that the research questions which explored item length, subject matter and types of sources correlate to show a fundamental change in what current affairs programmes became after 1994. It is important to note however that though the data shows strong trends there are areas which show that the move to the more tabloid approach did not influence all areas and there are signs that some journalistic norms remained. However, when all the research questions and data are considered, the construction and shape of current affairs programmes after 1984 altered dramatically in terms of subject choice covered, item length and changes to the kind of evidence those sources provided. These changes show that current affairs became more compressed as less serious informational topics became discussed. It is clear that when all the research questions are considered as a whole they show dramatic and permanent changes to current affairs programmes over the research period.

## CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Chapter four focused on a content analysis answering key questions on how current affairs programmes changed over the research period. The questions concerned changes to item length, the amount of coverage on serious, informational or political topics, whether there has been an increase in topics with an entertainment-orientated content and changes to sources. The analysis in that chapter reinforced previous research findings on the news in New Zealand and current affairs in Britain (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1996; Cook, 2000; Barnett & Seymour, 1999). The findings indicated a move towards a more entertainment-oriented approach in current affairs television with a growth in celebrity, human interest and entertainment items most noticeably at the expense of in-depth public affairs stories which were largely removed as a mainstay of current affairs programmes. Having examined the quantitative changes it is important to examine how the style of the programmes altered. To fully assess the changes it is important to focus on not just what changed but what these changes meant in terms of the programmes' style, reach and appeal to the audience. This analysis explores how the changes in content precipitated greater mediation by journalists at the expense of informational discourse. Aalberg & Curran (2012) argue that information is vital for democracy as it:

Ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than act out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves as a "checking function" by ensuring that representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out, broadly, the wishes of those who elected them (p.3).

Although access to politically relevant information is now more widely spread than ever before, it is essentially very easy to avoid being in contact with it (Bennett and Lyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). The use of the internet and proliferation of cable and satellite channels means that people now have greater control to eliminate engagement with politics and to consume entertainment programmes. Many critics also argue that entertainment features have slipped into what is news and public affairs (Entman 1989; Postman 1985; Patterson, 2000). This chapter qualitatively examines whether increasingly commercialised news markets have produced current affairs stories that are sensationalised, entertainment focused, and

decontextualized. The aim of this chapter's analysis is to delineate and examine changes in the style of sampled current affairs programmes. I am principally concerned with the mood and effects associated with stylistic changes. I will look at individual stories in terms of structure, presentation and tone. Comrie (1996) suggests that by the late 1980s a conversational and personal style had entered the news and Paul Norris the Head of News at TVNZ said "viewers overwhelmingly do not want to be read to or lectured. They simply want to be talked to in a way people have a conversation.... (Norris as cited in Campbell, 1992, p.17)." In the current affairs of the mid 1990s onwards the observation was made that chit chat increased (Holmes often had comedic pieces to camera). And as Norris also said, (cited in Campbell, 1992, p.17) viewers are often looking for guidance as to how they should feel about a story "often in the tone or by an additional line you can round it off and make the viewer 'comfortable' with the impact of the story".

Individual stories are assessed to see if there is a move from description to narration such that viewers are encouraged to engage. Narration works by conveying to the viewer that they are experiencing the news event 'vicariously' for themselves. Description works differently to narration and is more typical of 'straight news' where the points made follow a hierarchy of importance. On the question of the use of narrative by journalists Wyatt and Badger state:

Narrative may also impose meaning on events because reporters may try to fit the "facts" of a situation into the schemata of certain familiar narrative forms. Ettema and Glasser (1988), for example, argue that narration implicitly asserts moral order through the opposition of good and evil characters whose distinctions are more clearly drawn in narrative than in "reality" (Wyatt & Badger, 1993 p. 5).

The following areas are also examined in this qualitative examination. The nature of the visual coverage, the emotive use of language and in terms of crime stories whether there has been a concentration on victims and individual emotions. The 'personality' of the presenter and their presentation style is also considered. Altheide & Snow (1991) suggest the pace of television and film is linked to entertainment values and item length. Pace concerns the speed of delivery and the pause between stories to assess. This important area of change can lead to a more entertainment oriented package. Altheide and Snow

say:

Most television programs appear to move at a fairly rapid pace, and this is primarily due to the editing of visual material and the tempo of background music. Although the actual tempo of speech and body gestures by television performers is rather slow or deliberate (to avoid ambiguity), the pace of nearly all types of programme has increased over the last two decades (p.31).

Further the stories have been analysed overall to test the following hypotheses using Cook's (2000) and Comrie's (1996) research. The hypotheses are that in the deregulated broadcasting environment the following tendencies would advance morselisation, personalisation, tabloidization and decontextualisation. The stories are also considered in terms of the changes outlined by Hallin (1992). Hallin (1992) suggested in modern journalism there was a far greater mediation of news stories and this is assessed in relation to current affairs programmes. Two stories from each year were chosen and then analysed.

### ***Changing style of current affairs programmes***

Before examining specific programmes it is useful to discuss style and presentational changes in broad terms. The early programmes in this sample from 1984 were representative of 'traditional' current affairs. *Sunday* represents a traditional interview style programme which frequently featured interviews with politicians. *Close Up* was a forerunner for the later programmes in that it was comprised of three segments. (They focused on politics but such stories often looked at personality rather than policy). The older current affairs programme did have room for 'lighter' style items which were seen as human interest items. Slower in pace than the later style of current affairs, the programmes allowed space within the format of the programme for subjects to fully answer questions. Another important aspect was that the presentation of the journalist was generally unobtrusive. These 1984 programmes were hosted by journalists who had a measured, neutral tone especially when compared to the later current affairs programmes. By 1994 this traditional style of presentation had changed. In *20/20* for example it was clear that the role of the journalist had altered with the advent of the celebrity journalist presenter. *20/20* was introduced by New Zealand presenter Louise Wallace but often had one or two items in the package from the ABC network in the United States. It was not uncommon for

Diane Sawyer to interview famous people, usually Hollywood celebrities as part of the current affairs content. For example, one segment of *20/20* featured Diane Sawyer interviewing Julia Roberts. In this type of item, Sawyer, a long established news and current affairs anchor, was as well-known as many of the people she interviewed and her reactions and persona were as much a part of the story as either the story or her subject.

Camera techniques altered during the research period and one notable aspect was frequent, rapid cutting between subject and interviewer. This ultimately brought the journalist into the story more than in the 1980s examples. The camera during interviews would cue emotional reaction and this became the norm for interviewing technique. The graphics, music and pace were all accelerated to make a faster paced and, in the view of the producers, a smoother programme. The other programme in the 1994 sample was *Holmes* and this was very different stylistically from earlier current affairs programmes. Paul Holmes was the main draw-card of the programme. Screened after prime-time news *Holmes* featured short items, a fast paced and attacking style of interview and a talk-back approach to current affairs<sup>35</sup>.

As a personality interviewer' (Edwards, 2002) his emotional responses be they disinterested, aggressive or comedic in style altered the nature of current affairs permanently. In 2004 *Sunday* was broadcast after the introduction of the 2003 Charter which aimed amongst other objectives to herald a return to more serious current affairs. The presentational style of the journalists was more 'serious' than *Holmes*, however, the older style of current affairs that presented items with breadth and context was largely absent. *Holmes* was still broadcast in 2004 and continued in the manner in which it had started. The programme represented a shift to populism and a rejection of expertise and specialist knowledge (Atkinson, 2001). As Holmes said:

I never met anyone who wasn't intelligent. No one. Everyone has a talent for something. The talent has to be found; the people have to be reached. That is why I've never given a damn when my television programme has been criticised

---

<sup>35</sup> The opening interview of the new *Holmes* carried out was with America's cup captain Dennis Connor. Connor was so provoked by Holmes style of interview he stormed off the set.

by the ruling elite and the intellectual crowd in New Zealand (*Weekend Herald*, 1998).

### ***Analysis of political stories***

#### ***Close Up- 21/6/84, Battle for the Beehive, 20.5 minutes length***

With the title an alliterative *Battle for the Beehive* this item focuses on the 'battle' for the recently called election from the perspective of both party leaders at the time, Robert Muldoon the Prime Minister and leader of the National Party and Labour Party leader David Lange. Introduced by Martyn Bates with additional reporting by Alison Parr it investigates the strategy and focus of each party. It is presented only a few days after Robert Muldoon has announced a snap election.

*Alison Parr* [MS, near shot of Muldoon getting ready for interview] Less than 24 hours after he called a snap election Robert Muldoon was off and running looking for his fourth straight win.

*Martyn Bates* [MS at Rugby grounds] Meanwhile David Lange was part of the biggest crowd in town. He's come to cheer the All Blacks. On election day he hopes they'll be cheering his team.

*Martyn Bates* [MS in studio] Good evening, who's to run the country for the next three years? We've got just three weeks to make up our minds. Tonight we bring you the results of a special Haylen poll on how the voters see the personalities of the two main party leaders.

The piece shows each man moving through their schedules meeting people and campaigning. They are seen at the National Party debutante ball, both are pictured watching rugby and in interviews with the media. There is little intervention by the *Close Up* reporter who largely observes this activity. In the direct interviews they are given time to explain their point of view and although done in an adversarial style it is focused on what each man brings to the job. It ends with a poll presented in the form of a graphic that suggests that Robert Muldoon will win the election.

Though there is contention and points of difference the style of programme prevents this from becoming simply a battle between the two leaders. The distinction from later political examples is that the dissent is minimal, throughout

this story. Later current affairs programmes featured interviews where politicians were positioned in much more confrontational ways. Though the item does not place the main issue or problem in a broader context it views each leader as a focus of voters' interests and concerns. Although the role of personality in the election campaign is emphasised there is limited journalist mediation and each leader is able to put their views across without interruption. The story does not concentrate exclusively on the qualities, traits or images of any of the actors although it is clear that the politicians' performance in the short time before the election impacts on the election result. The story does reflect upon the trend of presidential style politics in New Zealand elections at the same time as it discusses the attributes that each leader might bring to the country.

***Holmes, 30/3/94, 5.8 minutes***

This item appears in section two of the programme and features an interview with Holmes in Auckland and Jim Bolger the Prime Minister from the Beehive studios. It starts with a graph showing responses to a question "Would you like to see New Zealand as a Republic". The graph showed a new Heylen poll with responses to the question of whether New Zealanders wanted to see the country become a Republic. It revealed that the number in favour in 1992 was 21% and in 1994, 26%. No responses were 72% in 1992 and in 1994, 62%. Don't knows remained the same at 7% and Don't cares were 5% in 1994. The poll showed a 5% increase in support for republican government and this was the subject for the interview.

*Jim Bolger* [CU] Well let's get this back on the rails. I said in parliament that having made one big constitutional change as New Zealand moved to MMP it was my judgement we'd move on, we'd move to have our own court of appeal in New Zealand and ultimately we'd move to an elected head of state. That's my view... the public will if the issue gets that far have a referendum to decide. What your poll shows is interesting. Long before I said anything the trends were going in one direction already without me making one contribution to the discussion.

*Holmes* [CU] There is speculation of course about the contribution you're making to the discussion because two years ago February 1992 as Prime Minister you said you couldn't see any indication that New Zealanders wanted this country to be a republic and suddenly here you are out of the blue two years later advocating it.

Holmes asks Bolger if the poll result is insufficient to consider moving New Zealand to a republic and Bolger says it shows evolution and movement and New Zealand had moved to MMP so was ready, in time, to become a republic. Holmes then changes tack and says that for many this is a distraction and a political ploy.

*Holmes* [CU] ...and what New Zealanders want is jobs and jobs are coming too slowly and some people of a political bent would say your call is an attempt to distract us from the unemployed numbers, the Wanganui [inaudible] and the mental health Act and so on and it is essentially a political ploy, a distraction.

*Bolger* [CU] Oh that's nonsense we've got the best economic indicators ever. I'm not wanting to distract New Zealanders from that. We've had the largest number of new jobs ever, 40,000 in the last 12 months. Goodness me I could spend all my time talking about the good news.

Bolger concludes by saying he thinks there should be a constitutional conference. The interview is indicative of the new style of political interview whereby Holmes does not consider who asked or commissioned the poll and why it was important at this point. Rather, he simply sets out to confront the Prime Minister. The interview is solely with the Prime Minister and though he slows his speech down and takes his time, from 1984 the pace is still considerably quicker than earlier interviews and there are no other opinions sought or asked for. There is a lack of information and context and the interview is quite light in tone. Holmes suggests the call for New Zealand to be a republic is a distraction but essentially does not go anywhere with this line of argument.

### ***Holmes, 13/10/04, 9.5 minutes***

This item concerns what Holmes repeatedly calls a political 'stuff up'. It focuses on local body elections whereby five days after the election the result is not known. This item illustrates a substantial turnaround in how political issues are conveyed and discussed in current affairs. The story features Paul Holmes as main interviewer with three interviewees.

*Holmes* [Piece to camera] Good evening, it's a cute comparison to make I know but its one being made through the day, a valid comparison for all of that. Afghanistan's elections were better organised than ours, our local body

elections a shambles, the Minister said in his own words a shambles. Five days on local body results are still up in the air for 7 different councils and 18 health boards. The problems have all happened where there were STV elections and the counting being done by a crowd called data-mail.

*Holmes* [Piece to camera] You are the minister who is responsible Chris Carter.

*Chris Carter* [Piece to camera] Ah, Paul what I am responsible for is ensuring that the legislative framework is in place and to provide a leadership role. I've been very vociferous and staunch on this Paul because it is a shambles and it must never happen again.

*Holmes* [Interrupts] You're blaming everybody, except taking responsibility yourself and your local government minister, minister.

The story, as Holmes repeatedly says in this item, is how the local election voting procedures are a "shambles". Using a split screen Holmes questions Chris Carter and repeatedly interrupts which makes this a confusing interview. Holmes is particularly insistent and repeatedly says to each interview subject "it is your fault, it is your responsibility". As Carter attempts to explain, Holmes continues to interrupt and goes to Nick Smith who also starts to attack the government saying how bad this is. Holmes interrupts Nick Smith. The interview is full of rapid fire, staccato exchanges where the words, 'cockup' are repeated by the interviewees and often in the same sentence as phrases such as 'outrageous' and 'inexcusable'. It is difficult to follow and there is a lot of outrage, emotion and little substance. For example it is unclear what the consequence of the 'cockup' is. There is a short interview with John Allen the head of New Zealand Post that runs Data mail; the organisation that Holmes suggests is responsible for the problems.

*Holmes* [piece to camera] Briefly if you could Mr Allen why has it happened?

*John Allen* [piece to camera] Well we didn't know until very recently Paul but now we do. We identified a technical issue with the software where in getting the data from the scanned data to the New Zealand elections data-base where it could go through the STV calculator.

*Holmes* [interrupts] So the big flash system you're man David (inaudible surname) is praising up recently in the *Dominion* recently which has checks upon checks upon checks upon checks and would never lead to anything like the 2000 election completely failed.

*John Allen* [piece to camera] We're a people organisation and sometimes mistakes occur and mistakes have occurred here.

*Holmes* [interrupts] This isn't to do with people this is a computer glitch....

Each time Allen says there were technical issues with software, Holmes interrupts and continues to question aggressively. The piece is disjointed and does not concern policy matters or different voting systems and with the approach Holmes takes it is difficult to understand what happened or how much of a crisis this actually is. This item highlights conflict and the accusations of wrongful handling and poor judgement and execution are made throughout.

There is no context to the story and it is difficult to see what happened, what the precedents were and what the consequences might be. Though not concentrating on the traits or images of the actors there is a constant theme that 'someone is inadequate'.

***Holmes, 15/7/04, 15.8 minutes***

This item is about the sentencing of Israeli spies who illegally stole New Zealand passports and features an interview with Prime Minister Helen Clark while at Auckland Airport. The interview is a standard conventional interview as Helen Clark answers questions fully and lets Holmes know in no uncertain terms that the incident has seriously damaged and strained relations between Israel and New Zealand. Holmes however draws the points out to emphasise drama.

*Holmes* [MCU] ...well tonight as the false passport Israelis go down for six months the PM says she believes the men are Israeli intelligence and she wants an explanation and apology from the Israeli government for breaking our sovereignty. She's going to be with us live from Auckland Airport.

*Holmes* [MCU] ...Have you got any doubt they are Israeli intelligence?

*Helen Clark* [MCU, from Airport Studio] No doubt whatsoever Paul. We have very strong reason to believe that these men were acting on behalf of Israeli intelligence.

*Holmes* [MCU, speaking deliberately] They were part of an official Israeli operation. that is your belief.

*Helen Clark* [MCU] We have every reason to believe they were acting on behalf of Israel's Agencies.

The tone is slower than the other political story and there is more time to express views but relative to the earlier sample from 1984 this is still a 'rapid-fire' interview. Helen Clark explains that she expects an apology and that the New Zealand government is angry about the event. Once again, though, this is given a sensational air without analytical clarity. There is not a lot of context given; Holmes asks if the Israeli spies will be treated like the French in the bombing of the 'Rainbow Warrior' and she says no. But there is no information given to background this. Though Clark wants an apology there is no exploration of what could happen if this apology is not forthcoming.

There were many stylistic changes seen from the 1984 sample to 1994 and beyond. In the earlier current affairs programmes stories were very much issue based rather than personalised accounts of politics. The 1984 story 'Battle for the Beehive' for example though focused on differing leadership styles managed to present the story through an examination of the issues. By 1994 however the Holmes programme has changed the approach to political stories. In the first Holmes interview with Jim Bolger there was greater emphasis on how the Prime Minister felt about aspects of the story on New Zealand becoming a republic than a neutral appraisal of the issue itself. Camera techniques also changed the way that politicians were presented. The greater use of the close up shot provided a greater intimacy with the subject and heightened the emotions seen. The change in the pace of items cannot be underestimated as complex policy was largely eschewed for simpler statements and sound-bites. The long form interview was no longer used and so the type of information politicians provided changed markedly over the period from pre to post deregulation.

### ***Analysis of economic/political Stories***

These two stories that focused on economic and political aspects are important examples of how complex topics were diluted over the ten year period from 1984 to 1994. New Zealand's political direction altered course after the 1984 election and how economic and political aspects were treated over time is an important area to consider, especially in the context of evolving current affairs formats on television.

#### ***Sunday-2/9/84, 46.55 minutes.***

This programme, though not labelled a special, concerns a topic that takes up the entire programme and features an interview with the new Minister of Finance Roger Douglas and a group of five Wellington-based economists. Ian Fraser the interviewer frames the programme as very important at a time of grave economic crisis.

*Ian Fraser* [Mid shot] The government of New Zealand is asking the people of New Zealand for restraint and co-operation in the gravest economic crisis this country has ever faced. It would be unreasonable to ask for that commitment without putting all the facts in front of the people of New Zealand. With that

dramatic warning and an appeal to war-time spirit of sacrifice and restraint Prime Minister David Lange ceremoniously opened the books on Thursday. But just what are the books? They turn out to be 700 pages of economic analysis and advice....

David Lange and his Government promised before winning the election that if they won they would open the books. In this episode of *Close Up* five Wellington economists who were given a 'sneak peak' at the diagnosis provide opinion and analysis. A backgrounder presented by John Keir provides commentary with graphs that show that New Zealand has been suffering rising overseas debt and real falls in income accompanied by a growth in outgoings. Keir explains the country was suffering from a persistent deficit. Also present in the background piece is the context that New Zealand was considered 'Godzone'; that perception from the 1960s had, by 1984, altered as after the 1970s growth had reduced and unemployment had risen. The tone of this item is sombre and the studio set is largely black. In the backgrounder Treasury's position is presented as follows:

John Keir [voiceover] The Reserve Bank and Treasury are also critical of past moves to control the money supply and inflation. The books slam the former government's policies in the following manner. [Graph] It is fair to say that monetary, fiscal and exchange rate policies were all given as hostages to support the freeze. A reduction in domestic inflation has been achieved at the cost of other objectives.

A group interview follows where each of the economists, Suzanne Snively, Professor Bryan Philpott, Len Bayliss and Brian Easton give lengthy explanations. The pace of this item allows the economists or Fraser to ask questions of Roger Douglas.

*Ian Fraser* [MS] Len Bayliss said he felt that the Treasury report was within a framework of orthodox thinking. The kind of thing you'd get from an OECD country. How would you describe the values and philosophy which is apparent in the Treasury document?

*Professor Philpott* I wouldn't describe it as orthodox unless you regard extreme monetarism as orthodox. I think, (pause) and I agree with Suzanne Snively one of the great revelations of this report is the extent to which Treasury has been penetrated by monetarism. The prescriptions that tend to follow the diagnosis is monetarist.

The economists have different views of 'the books' and ways of tackling the crisis. This level of analysis is not seen in today's short form current affairs programmes which eschew complexity. The economists use terms like 'monetarism', or say that such a prescription is not the appropriate approach for the prevailing economic crisis. The arguments are complex and the economists do not hold back, talk down or try to lighten the topic. The debate however is not adversarial or full of interruptions and resembles a more considered approach to problems. The 'sensationalism,' if any, is due to the nature of the crisis and the ramifications of this for New Zealand.

There are differences of opinion among the economists and Roger Douglas. But this is a debate over substantive matters. The backgrounder uses research to explain the nature of the economic problems presented in graphs. The financial crisis is seen as historical and systemic. This programme does not simply focus on a main event or incident and instead incorporates discussion on how best to deal with a long standing problem that has become a crisis.

One of the hallmarks of the personalisation of news and current affairs is a greater focus on the personal but this story does not concentrate on the qualities, traits or images of any of the actors. This 1984 example reveals that the style of current affairs that was very different to that which came later. The most apparent factor here is the time given to the subject and participants. Another key aspect is the amount of research evident in this programme. The economists and journalists outlined how the 'crisis' might impact on wages and taxation.

This programme deals with complex and important current issues and clearly falls into the 'hard news' category. The issue at hand is not presented as a tragic event for one person or group, but instead as a serious matter that requires careful consideration. Ian Fraser plays a big part as a mediator in this interview but he does not put himself in the middle of this issue or problem. The role of the interviewer or presenter was to change over time with the Paul Holmes an example of how far an interviewer could insert themselves into the programme.

**20/20, 14/2/94, *Unfinished Business*, 11.13 minutes**

This item called *Unfinished Business* (also the same title as the book Roger Douglas had written) is introduced by Louise Wallace and introduces Roger Douglas twenty years on from the introduction into New Zealand of Rogernomics.

*Keith Davis* [voiceover] He's back to set New Zealanders free of tax, debt and political management.

*Roger Douglas* [Close-Up] You've got to ask yourself can the government spend that \$35,000 better than the individual family and the answer in my view has to be no.

*Keith Davis* [Voice over] Many still believe he left New Zealand a legacy of unemployment and social misery. Just don't suggest that to Roger Douglas.

In this item Keith Davis interviews Douglas who discusses his beliefs and ideas from his new book that he is promoting called *Unfinished Business*. This item is distinct from the 1984 piece discussed earlier as it mainly features an interview with Douglas himself. He promotes his views that New Zealand could, twenty years on from Rogernomics, become a tax haven. At the same time ACT (Association of Consumers and Tax Payers) could become a real political power.

*Douglas* [CU] The only reform is quality reform. In other words we don't compromise. One year doesn't make us a winner. We need to have forty years of being a winner in order to regain and recapture our relative standard of living of the 1950s.

As distinct from the 1984 political interviews Douglas is shot using a lot of close ups which has the effect of heightening the sense of his convictions. The interview is mainly with Douglas though there is a short interlude from Derek Quigley who suggests that New Zealanders could be ready for the next round of Rogernomics.

*Derek Quigley* [Close Up] 10,000 copies now that suggests there are a lot of people who are really interested in his new approach.

The interview gives Douglas the opportunity to promote 'new Rogernomics' as a more radical attempt at what was introduced in New Zealand in the 1980s. A voice over establishes the angle of the story and says "some see Douglas as the architect of poverty and unemployment in New Zealand" but there is no

interview with an expert or anyone to outline why this would be the case. In the course of the item there is a very short interview of 50 seconds duration with Raymond Miller, who says that if ACT does become a political party they could become a partner for National in time. Roger Douglas forcefully states that 10-20 members of parliament from the current political parties could join ACT. There is a shot of a soup kitchen saying that Rogernomics was in some people's opinions the cause of social misery but Douglas then counters this idea by saying that Muldoon's policies of the 1970s were the precursor for New Zealand's economic woes. When these latter statements are made by Douglas there is no interview or argument presented to counter balance his views.

There is a shot of Douglas at home where Keith Davis provides another voice over saying that he is constantly on the phone to governments around the world such as Russia and Brazil. The piece ends with him saying that New Zealand could become a 'real' tax haven and that the current tax system locks people into dependency and that the Labour party of 1935 did not intend this. Unlike the earlier current affairs programmes this programme distinguishes itself by its lack of context. An audience watching this programme without knowledge of what happened to New Zealand in the 1980s would have difficulty understanding what the main issues are and there is no time allowed to explain what the points of contention are.

The simplistic arguments are centred on the idea of conflict, though the structure of the interview does not permit an examination of the conflicting views. Roger Douglas expresses his disapproval of various aspects of the then current government though there is little presented to challenge or explain why this is the case. With rapid fire exchanges and short sound-bites this is an example of a story with a political focus where there is an absence of expert input. The story does not place the main issue or problem in a theoretical or political-economic context and glosses over considerations as to whether or not Rogernomics worked, and what economic structural issues face New Zealand. The viewer has no way of making an informed decision on the small amount of information given. It is also an example of how the journalist, editor or producer has decided on an angle of a story without providing context. By its length and

approach there isn't enough time or structure to give a full picture. For example, as an explanation of Douglas's policies Davis says.

*Keith Davis* [voiceover] Healthcare won't be paid for by tax, you'll buy your own insurance policy. If you can't afford it the government will pay the premium for you funded from GST.

*Roger Douglas* [Close-Up] Why is it that the people of Otara, for every one that's on the waiting list from Remuera there's twenty people on the waiting list from Otara. Because people in Remuera can afford to take out a health insurance policy. Why can't we put the people of Otara, Maurewa on the same position as the people of Remuera or Parnell?

Both these statements fail to explain how this would work or why healthcare funded from GST for those that could not afford it would be an advantageous prescription. Douglas says Muldoon is responsible for New Zealand's problems and his (Douglas's) original prognosis about Muldoon's failed policies was correct. This item is limited to the idea that Roger Douglas is back and has a 'mission'. Rather than focusing on the specific policies or issues it concentrates on the qualities, traits and image of Roger Douglas. The story makes fleeting reference to the previous policies and problems of Rogernomics but spends little to no time on these. As Douglas is promoting his book, there is little that is critical of the consequences of his policy agenda. It exemplifies how post deregulation current affairs programmes often reduce complex issues to catch cries and throwaway lines. It is indicative of a lack of context and even research. For example if the researcher for this programme had obtained a copy of the earlier 1984 *Sunday* featuring Douglas this could have been used as a starting point for explorations. This later style of decontextualised journalism ultimately does not hold politicians to account and the story focuses very much on the single event of Douglas promoting his book rather than examining the impact of neo-liberal policies.

The two economic stories highlight how political economic stories were affected by personalisation. The first story demonstrates how in 1984 that the 'economic' crisis the new government perceived was a serious issue. As such, *Sunday* presents the story as serious through a presentation of the issues. There are few if any emotional cues and a natural comfort with explaining and discussing complex issues. This is done through statistical presentations and then moves to a studio discussion with experts and the Minister of Finance. The slow paced

camera techniques and long answers from subjects contrasts with the 1994 Roger Douglas interview on *20/20*. Retrospectively, the 'Unfinished Business' interview features a very different approach to the same 'crisis' discussed in 1984. Douglas is initially presented as something of a 'personality' and before the start of the programme is featured in an advertisement for ATM cards. Rather than a neutral description of Douglas' neo-liberal agenda, the reporter instead discusses how in demand around the world Douglas is. The item demonstrates through its focus on Douglas that economic issues on current affairs television are of a personalised nature (rather than centred on an examination of facts and issues).

The use of close up shots suggesting that Roger Douglas holds strong views means that it is hard to determine how his new approach to economic policy would work in fact. The item is fast paced and slick, however the information that it gives is very unsubstantial and hard to determine. These aspects combined point to a very different type of current affairs approach to economic and political matters by 1994.

### ***Analysis of public moral problems***

Public moral issues are useful stories to examine as changes in how these stories are presented indicate how current affairs programmes have changed. For example, public moral problems are stories that lend themselves to more emotional treatment and so indicate key changes in current affairs programmes over the research period.

### ***Close Up, 20/9/84, 'Dying for a Drink', 16 minutes***

Public moral problems were a relatively small sample in the overall research project but as these stories cover issues that can be emotive and controversial they are a useful means to map changes in current affairs style. Public moral problems were defined on the basis of Comrie's analysis (1996) and included problems pertaining to alcohol, divorce, sex, race relations and family court proceedings. In the first story from *Close Up* in 1984 the topic covered is the impact of alcoholism and is titled *Dying for a Drink*. The play on words with the

headline is as light hearted as this story gets. The start of *Close Up* begins with the programmes' theme music and a preview of the stories that follow and there is an introduction from the presenter in a studio setting and the basis of the story is explained. This segment called *Dying for a Drink* focuses on the problems that alcoholism causes and interviews some of the victims of its effects.

Martyn Bates [voice over footage of alcoholic bottles on a conveyor belt] Two or three whiskies or other drinks for four days and then a complete break from alcohol for the next three. That according to doctors is safe drinking. But how many go over the mark. Tonight alcoholism and some of its victims.

Martyn Bates [MS] A beer with the boys is a national institution but how many beers could be a life or death situation. It's estimated that alcohol abuse costs New Zealand \$900 million a year. Behind those stark economic facts lie countless stories of human misery. People whose so called social drinking graduated to chronic alcoholism and death. Tonight some of the facts about an insidious disease.

The item starts with a neutral description that most people can drink without ill-effects and that this is not a problem. The first interview in this story is with a man called Bill who is filmed lying in a hospital bed discussing the impact of alcoholism on his life and health. The interview is rather dispassionate with the interviewee describing the problems he faces as his health deteriorated from liver damage to cirrhosis. He says that his alcoholism became worse as his marriage deteriorated yet the interview is unemotional both from the position of the interview subject Bill, and the journalist. In this the camera is firmly fixed on Bill and does not cut to the interviewer for his reaction. As such the audience listens to what Bill says, and does not get any emotional cue from the journalist. After this interview the story shifts to expert opinion and a discussion with Professor John Scot who shows the comparison between healthy and unhealthy livers. Cutting back to Bill he explains that he knows unless something alters he will not make it. The next interview subject is another expert Dr Gordon Nicholson from Auckland Hospital and he explains that the prognosis is not good for Bill. There is an interlude where the reporter explains the appropriate limits of alcohol consumption. Then he says that this is worse for women as they cannot drink as much as men. Interestingly in this item there are no interviews with women and all interview 'alcoholics' are male. The journalist goes to a working men's club to ask them their views on alcohol. This involves interviews with long sound bites, one man explains that he drinks six days a

week, another man is more taciturn and reluctant to admit his drinking habits. The interview then returns to another man in rehab who is called Peter. Peter, the interviewer says, “did much of his drinking in a workingmen’s club and is an old looking 62 year old”. This subject, housed in the Sunnyside hospital alcohol unit, had been in the hospital for five years.

The next stage of the programme provides examples of Peter’s impaired memory; the reporter is situated between the patient and Dr Norman Walker who is carrying out tests on the subject to show how much damage has been done. Asking the patient easy general knowledge questions revealed that he cannot answer the simple questions asked of him. Following this is another talk by a doctor explaining the kind of damage done to the brain after alcoholism. The next interview is with a man called Jeff who in his own terms has ruined his life and career with alcohol. Situated in rehab at Queen Mary Hospital in Hanmer Springs the journalist asks what life has been like for him after battling alcohol for such a long period of his life. Once again there are no shots of the journalist either asking or responding to his answers.

Returning to the Working Men’s club the men there are asked to fill out an alcohol advisory form. Peter is asked for his opinion on alcohol and offers a warning and there is also a warning from Bill and Jeff. The programme ends with Martyn Bates in the studio discussing advice from the Alcohol Liquor Council on whether a self-test indicates a tendency to alcoholism with graphics displayed that list the questions.

In this story Martyn Bates remains neutral and unobtrusive. When the interview subjects discuss the impact of alcoholism the link between the journalist and interviewee is not emphasised by lots of close-ups. Martyn Bates’ response and reactions to the information are not shown. The delivery of the questions remains neutral and the entire piece is rather unemotional. Though this is a piece about a public moral problem it does not have the vicariousness of later current affairs stories. All subjects are male, and though seen as alcoholics interestingly we aren’t asked about how this has affected their families. There are warnings about alcohol but this is objectively done. The men describe the impact of their illness yet there is not a lot of focus concerning the personal impact on victims or the use of close-ups. There are a number of

warnings and graphics at the end and an Alcoholics Anonymous survey with the working men where they find one third are normal, one third are tending towards alcoholism and one third are alcoholics.

Considering how controversial this topic is there was little disapproval displayed by the journalist and the material was objectively treated. Though there is the suggestion this is quite a wide problem it is presented as more of a danger to individual men. There is an attempt to put this change in perspective with statistics, doctors and academics. There are various individuals in different states of alcoholism who are interviewed either in hospital or rehab but the story does not concentrate on the qualities, traits or personalities of any of the actors.

This is an interesting aspect of this era of current affairs because although each man acknowledges he is an alcoholic there is little focus on their personal lives. The most revealing statement is that one man had lost his marriage. Beginning with a statement about the financial loss to the country of alcoholism this item is positioned as reflective of a widespread problem that goes beyond a single event or incident.

### ***Close Up, 4/10/84, Unlawful Love, 14 minutes***

This story focuses on the potential impact of the law change to decriminalise male homosexuality.

*Martyn Bates* [Voice over footage of a club] A gay club in Christchurch. A place where gay men and women socialise. New Zealand is one of the dwindling number of countries in which male homosexuality is still a crime. How do homosexuals see themselves and the law?

Martyn Bates presents and reports on this story. Beginning this item with a quote from the former Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Trudeau that says: "The state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation". He says, however, that in New Zealand the state still does have a place. It is against New Zealand law for two men to engage in sexual relations even in the privacy of their own home. The story is set up with the frame that some hold the view that it is a moral sin which should never be condoned versus the other view that sexual discrimination is as abhorrent as racial discrimination. He then outlines that the item involves talking to two homosexuals about their relationship and the law.

The programme then moves to a shot where a man is talking to two women about decriminalising the law. The voiceover is as follows:

*Martyn Bates* [Man talking to two women about decriminalising law] John Willis is a Homosexual. He was twenty five before he discovered he was gay, but there is nothing more certain in his mind that this is where his sexual orientation lies.

In this item the men are asked questions about their personal lives and each of the men are articulate in answering the probing questions posed by the journalist. Each man states they accept this facet of themselves and say if people don't want to accept it they don't have to. Honner and John live together and they have done for five years. There is a shot of Martyn Bates saying that in New Zealand homosexual acts are still an offence and that Honner and John could be jailed if convicted.

Honner, it is stated knew he was gay before he left Holland. He explains how the parents in Holland accept the men's relationship. Bates then asks him: "You've never had a sexual relationship with a woman". Honner says "no", and Bates asks: "How do you know you could not do that with a woman". Honner answers that he would not be relaxed with a woman and feels relaxed with men. This is one of several very personal and what might be seen as 'insulting' questions the interviewer asks during the item. Continuing Bates asks: "Have you ever wondered what it might be like to make love to a woman", Honner says "sometimes but I've never had the courage to do it as it's not fair on a woman just to try it out. I don't think she'd be totally satisfied just so I could try it out to see how it feels to me".

The item then shifts to showing Honner's partner John working as a designer and craftsman cutting wood and building. Bates voice over says: "at one time John was studying for the priesthood at a Catholic seminary. Later as a University sociology student researching the gay community he realised that he himself was homosexual." The interview with John becomes very personal where he describes the sex acts with men as not very different to those he had with women except that with men it felt more completely right. There is a shot where John and Honner are working in their garden and John explains that they are a couple and what that means to them and also that each of the men is

active in the gay movement.

Though this item is about these two men who discuss some personal and private matters these aspects are delivered in a very matter of fact way. Martyn Bates makes statements about the legal state of homosexual acts yet because of his neutrality this item is free of editorialising. Questions are posed from both sides of the argument and the men have time to fully explain how they feel about the issues. Neutrality is largely because the viewer does not see the journalist's visual reaction and his tone does not indicate a particular response.

Martyn Bates [Voice over footage of the men in a club] John and Honner are active in the gay rights movement. This Christchurch club for gay men and women is one of the places where they socialise. It's thought that between five and ten per cent of New Zealand men, some of whom are married, have gay preferences.

Traditionally the church has regarded homosexuality as sinful.

The story is put in a broad way though it does focus on two men who are in a relationship rather than turning to experts or academics. As John says, "this is a victimless crime". The story does not go into extensive discussion of policy and law but does allude to the fact that homosexual law change will most likely occur. Unlike later versions of current affairs this programme is an example of how even though the two men are asked personal questions the story does not overly concentrate on their personalities nor does the story contain any moral message.

The story is contextualised; it is outlined that other countries have changed their laws and that New Zealand, along with Queensland and Scotland, is lagging behind change. It does not ask MPs how they will vote or go into extensive policy detail. However, the story does refer to a trend that goes beyond this single event or incident by acknowledging that the legalising of male homosexuality has taken place in a number of other countries. Like the previous public moral problem story this item touches on controversial issues, however, it is not presented as a tragic event for one person or group. The story refers to the private or personal lives of one of the actors very explicitly but the story does not come across as voyeuristic because the two men are given ample opportunity to speak and articulate their views. The audience is not being cued into what to feel and are invited to judge the facts and information on their

merits.

These programmes on alcoholism and homosexuality had each dealt with potentially very emotional subject matter yet the 'personal' aspect did not completely overshadow the facts of these stories. The role of the presenter/interviewer meant that the stories stood by themselves and did not exhibit the emotional cueing that became so normal later. In 1984 the camera did not cut to the interviewer for their reaction to what the subjects had said. Instead there were long shots of the subject describing their point of view without interruption or reaction from the journalist.

### ***Public Moral Problem- Story three***

#### ***Holmes, 15/7/94, 7.4 minutes***

The item length of this piece screened on *Holmes* in 1994 is almost half that of the 1984 story just outlined though it deals with another controversial and complex issue. This *Holmes* programme, presented by replacement presenter Susan Wood, is an example of how radically the current affairs genre changed since 1984. Initially the story begins with the 'sad' and 'tragic' story of a fire in a caravan where a four year old child died. Wood introduces the piece by saying:

*Susan Wood* [piece to camera, with a very serious tone] The caravan kids and the help their Father rejected that might have prevented the death of his four year old son. Parenting, it's the toughest of jobs and the one we're least prepared for but some people get it so wrong.

The tone of this story is set from the introduction and moves from a kind of loosely restrained moral criticism to a patronising view of how poor people are helped by agencies. Susan Wood editorialises saying "we can only speculate as to why six children were left alone in a caravan".

*Susan Wood* [piece to camera] It was a tragedy waiting to happen and it did. Six children left alone in a cramped caravan. The parents Pat and Dulcie HoHita returned to a friend's home in Pukekohe after a night of socialising only to be told the caravan had been destroyed by fire and their four year old son was dead.

In the introduction there is a voiceover by Wood with a graphic of a calendar showing the dates on which the father applied to Housing New Zealand and the date on which the offer of a Housing New Zealand house was turned down. Wood says that there have been seven children murdered in the previous year,

though the connection between the children killed in the fire and murder rates is not made clear. The link is spurious and builds an emotional picture initiated by the journalist.

*Susan Wood* [piece to camera] Now there can be no excuses for leaving six young children in a caravan overnight so why did it happen? Why are so many children in New Zealand suffering at the hands of those who should care for them most? Last year seven children under ten years old were murdered every month for the past three months. We've seen parents leaving children home alone so they can play cards or have a night out.

There is no interview with the family that lost their children. Graphs are present in fast-flip card fashion showing calendars with dates ringed that show when the (with a voice over explaining that the family repeatedly turned down the offer of assistance). This was because, Wood explains, it was an area of Pukekohe that they did not want to live in, though there is no interview or statement by a source to confirm this. The presentation style suggests that the family are presumed guilty of misconduct and neglect and there is a very strong moral message running through this item from the presenter Susan Wood to the reporter doing the voice over with the graphics. The item moves to interviews with 'poor' families that have been helped by agencies.

Huia Timu [from Kahungunu Community Service] The body language and vibe of these parents of how destitute and desperate they are is to the point where they want to leave their kids. I've had kids just dumped in my office. You know the parents and I like that because if they keep them at home they beat them up. So I prefer them to dump them here and to place them somewhere then and bring the parent back again later and start the process of building that parent up and making that parent strong again.

Reporter [Voice over while Huia Timu opens a cupboard] In her filing cabinet each folder tells a story, a story of children of a family at risk.

This part of the story continues the narrative of parents and children needing help. The approach also highlights and heightens the drama and emotion of the story with the addition that 'each folder tells a story of a family at risk'.

Rosemarie Scott [Glenburn School] You don't have a problem child. The idea is that the family is dysfunctional not the child. I'm not suggesting that every single child here is dysfunctional. I'm suggesting we look at it from a family approach.

This statement is not supported by any explanation as to what this means and the audience is left to assume what is meant. By portraying the subjects as 'victims' the audience is invited to be spectators in this emotional item. The narrative approach is a simple one of victims and villains. The item creates a

vicarious involvement of the viewer as the piece moves from the condemnation of the parents who left the children in the caravan to that of 'battlers' fighting back from chaos.

Dramatic/loaded language cues the viewer for an emotional rather than a thoughtful response. For example Susan Wood says "six small children were left in a caravan overnight". It is not clear why Wood calls the children small as the title children already implies they are not adult. There is a sense of extra sentimentality and the sense that dramatic potential is being exploited by the programme. This is exploited further with the disapproval expressed about the family not taking the Housing New Zealand house. The inference is, if they did not move into the property offered them they are culpable. It is unclear why the family did not choose the house and the audience can only assume why this happened. The emotional rollercoaster of the item continues with various domestic shots including those of Huia Timu opening a cupboard and ends with Susan Wood's concluding comments.

Susan Wood [smiling at a previous shot of sleeping baby on floor, speaks with softer tone] And Tahanunu Social Services say using parents that were once at risk to help other families in the same situation is working really well. It's an idea other groups should try.

When assessing whether the story fully backgrounds the circumstances and issues included, the answer to this must be no. The story of the death of the child in the caravan is used as a segue into the item on agencies that help. The first family is judged without presenting facts and there is no exploration as to why poverty in general has become such an issue. It is emotional in tone and visualisation with shots of little kids eating dinner juxtaposing shots of a wholesome family. There is strong subtext in this and a lot of emotional cuing of the audience as well as telling people what to think.

Lacking from this account are facts about child and family poverty in New Zealand. There is no attempt to discuss why these instances happen or what the political or economic repercussions are. The attitude conveyed in this item is that those people who have got help are 'good' and those who don't get help from agencies are 'bad' and so the item is a highly moralistic piece. There is an assumption that those individuals who don't get the appropriate help are

responsible for the death of children.

There are interviews with those who have gone to the agencies and one agency spokesperson, however, there are no 'experts' interviewed and there is no discussion concerning other arguments that might need to be heard on this issue. There is a concentration on one family that is Maori or Pacific Islander. The story is framed as 'good' versus 'bad' parenting and the narrative argument presented is a simple one: If you get help then 'you're good' and if you do not 'you're bad'. Rather than starting with a broad overview of family poverty and its ramifications the story starts with a terrible tragedy and ends with a simple moral note.

The item points to a tragedy for the children and suggests that these tragedies unnecessarily occur all the time in New Zealand. The 'message' is: If the families get help they can be saved. Unlike the 1984 current affairs programmes there is no alternative or counter argument presented and the simple dichotomy is that of a villain that kills their own children through neglect versus a victim that gets 'help'. At 7.4 minutes in length the time constraint makes context impossible and an emotional and visually laden story thereby results. This piece also follows a trend that Edwards noticed when he lamented the loss of neutrality in TV One news in favour of an assumed "populist, commonsensical, obvious-the majority view" which is "a dangerous trend in a democracy" (Edwards, 1992, p.24).

### **20/20, 17/1/94, *Keyboard Romance*, 11 minutes**

This item is from the ABC in the United States and features at the end of the programme. The earlier two stories in the programme were, firstly a story on NASA and how it was increasingly likely that there was going to be a catastrophic accident on a par with the Challenger disaster (because of poor internal communication at NASA). The second story was an item on how a young woman is weighing up the options of getting a test for Huntington's disease. The third story, lighter than the first two, focuses on the new phenomenon of online dating via the internet. The item opens with a graphic behind the presenter of a heart in the style of the Apple logo and a keyboard.

*Keyboard Romance* starts with an interview with a couple who met via dating bulletin boards, the early precursor of other dating websites.

*Presenter* [MS] It's a roaring party involving millions of people around the world. It's going on right now. Crossing the geographical boundaries, age gaps and social barriers. And they're doing it at their computers. As Judd Rose explains it's a technological revolution that's changing the way we do everything. From making friends to falling in love.

Light hearted music playing in back ground [voice over, shot of couple walking] When Jim Mickelhenny met Ann Kepner it wasn't love at first sight. [Two shot] do you remember the first communication you had with him?

Anne Kepner [two shot] Yeah I told him to get lost [laughing].

Jim Mickelhenny [two shot, laughing] that's the truth.

Reporter [piece to camera] You told him to get lost, but clearly things turned around, how did that happen?

In this story most of the questions asked of the interview subjects, or the expert consulted, contains shots of the journalist where he reacts openly, smiling laughing interacting and reacting. The neutral tradition with the role of the current affairs reporter is absent.

*Reporter* [voiceover with shot of man at computer] Howard Rheingold writes about the impact of computers on society.

*Reporter* [MS of him speaking interviewing] If there's such term as computer illiterate, I'm it. I know virtually nothing about computers. The technology baffles me. Is this all about technology?

*Rheingold* [MCU] No, it's about people connecting with other people.

At the end of this item the New Zealand presenter ends the item with a light hearted: "you might say she's the Apple of his eye and may they have lots of little bytes," all in front of an apple sign. Thus there are also matters here of product or company promotion which also calls into question the 'neutrality' of the item.

The item is faster paced than the 1984 items and contains a number of short interviews. It features shots of the couple getting married and other young people who say that they have taken to the new phenomenon. There are dangers presented in that porn is said to be readily available on-line and children could become easy targets for paedophiles. However, overall the piece is very light and features one expert though it is not clear what his credentials

are. The other notable feature of this piece is the insertion of visuals showing the journalist reacting to the subjects and emotionally reacting throughout.

The tone in this item is a kind of humorous wonder at the new use of technology. This story takes a broad brush stroke approach and largely illustrates its points by the people in the interviews and is short on experts and overview. There is not a lot of commentary about whether it is people making new use of technology or technology driving this change and the focus is on the new use of the technology itself. The programme, though sceptical of the good achieved, suggests this online interaction will radically alter the way people live. The story concentrates on the personalities and personal use of the technology. There is, when compared to earlier current affairs examples, a greater interaction with the subjects by the journalist and this interaction plays a bigger role in the style and meaning conveyed.

Though these two stories from 1994 were coded as public moral problems there is a sharp contrast in the kind of public moral problem story of 1994 compared to the 1984 examples. One of the most notable changes in the later current affairs stories was the prominence of personalisation. Although in 1984 current affairs television coverage of public moral problems focused on 'personal issues' the way these were presented has changed. The 1984 programmes were more 'issues based' overall than personalised. A clear signal of this change is evidenced through the decline in expert commentators after 1984. In the 1984 current affairs programmes the experts would frequently provide the context to the issue which ultimately provided more information on the issues identified.

The 1994 programmes demonstrate a greater focus on the sources and subjects through a personal frame. This is seen through questions designed to elicit emotion and provide chances for the subject to tell the audience how they feel. In the *Holmes* 'public moral problem' story the tragedy of loss is both foregrounded and highlighted. The story is presented as a 'tragic', 'sad' story where the unthinkable death of a child has occurred through parental neglect. The second 1994 example also highlights emotions and how the interview

subjects feel about how they met. Another key area that contributes to the highlighting of emotion in the later stories is the constant and pronounced interpretation of the stories by the journalists. This is demonstrated through changes in tone, from anger to sadness in the case of Susan Wood or in the light-hearted banter of the journalist in the 'Keyboard Romance' story. In each case there is a heavy reliance on the journalists to demonstrate how they 'feel' about the story. Another important change evidenced from the 1994 programmes onwards is the move to narration rather than description. This is clear in the *Holmes* example presented by Susan Wood, where the subjects are positioned into schemas which make it clear who is 'good' and 'bad'. In the earlier current affairs examples because the subjects are not framed in this way it is much harder to identify them in a category of either 'right' or 'wrong'.

The fast paced editing of the stories reinforces the emotion and personalisation present in these later stories. The fast cuts show the journalists constantly reacting to each piece of new information. This is a marked contrast to the slower-paced examples from the 1984 sample where the journalists largely remained unobtrusive. It is important to note that though each programme from 1984 and 1994 focuses on the same type of subject matter the way that controversial or potentially emotional subject matter is presented permanently changed in the 1994 current affairs programmes.

### ***Sunday, 5/9/04, 13 minutes***

This story, presented by Janet McIntyre, is on the subject of abortion. The setup for this story is unusual as it is an interview with a British filmmaker who made a film on abortion and it screens after an advertisement for an upcoming documentary to be screened on TVNZ the following week called *My Foetus*.

*Janet Macintyre* [MS introduction] Welcome back, I'm Janet McIntyre. Very often it's a secret a woman only shares with her closest friends and family. Abortion. No one likes it but this medical procedure to terminate pregnancy is now commonplace in New Zealand. Chosen by more women and girls than you might think. This week TVNZ screens a controversial documentary which its producer claims lifts the veil of secrecy on abortion.

Starting with footage of a woman giving birth the story proceeds to give figures on abortions and general facts. McIntyre conducts interviews both here in New Zealand and also in Britain. Starting off with the facts that for every four

pregnancies one is aborted each year she positions this programme within the moral perspective that there has been a 6 percent jump in abortions. The British documentary is then featured in parts. Julia Black (the filmmaker) is shown in an interview explaining that she wanted to make a documentary that showed how simple and safe abortions are.

Patrick Cusworth of the pro-life organisation [MS] The pictures that we've seen on the programme here are wonderful pictures of the child animated as early as around 8 weeks jumping around, walking around.

Janet McIntyre [Voiceover] The anti-abortion movement in Britain has delighted in the imagery. This time served up by those on the other side of the debate.

In *My Foetus* Julia Black talks to Professor Stuart Campbell who says that after pioneering 3D technology that the current abortion limits are too late and that foetuses are in fact babies. There is also an interview with a pro-lifer, Patrick Cusworth. Patrick Cusworth of Pro-life organisation [MS] It completely explodes the myth that a child is clump of cells or blob of jelly. That clearly is not the case.

Janet McIntyre then interviews a Wellington Doctor Dr Carol Shand who says that there is nothing new in this film.

Dr Carol Shand [CU] The reality of this information has been available. It's not new. It's a prettier picture [CU of Janet McIntyre looking intense] that might be slightly clearer but we've seen this before and the progress in technology for 20, 30 years now. And we've adapted to it. As have women.

To Shand the documentary comes across as naive and she remembers seeing women entering hospitals in the 1970s suffering, after back-street abortions, and recounts her own experience with abortion. McIntyre's interview style pulls the story back to a personalised take on the issue when she asked Dr Shand about her own personal experiences.

*Janet McIntyre* [MCU] Did you manage the abortion yourself?

*Dr Carol Shand* [CU] Yes I managed it myself, um induced an abortion, then I had a miscarriage. Had to have some surgery to follow that up.

*Janet McIntyre* [voiceover archival footage of Wellington Hospital] When Wellington's first abortion clinic opened in 1980 Dr Shand was asked by the hospital superintendent to operate. Since then she estimates she's performed 10,000 abortions.

*Janet McIntyre* [CU] Does that seem like a lot to you?

By asking this question McIntyre raises the issue of whether there are 'too many' abortions rather than accepting that abortion numbers may or may not be high. Without context such as yearly abortion statistics, it is difficult to know if the number of abortions quoted represents a significant increase or not. The story jumps from the start of the programme with the documentary maker discussing why she decided to make her film to this segment which is a personal account of her own abortion by the doctor who has since performed other abortions. The programme has an ambivalent approach to the subject matter where though it is suggested that the battle between pro-choice and pro-life has dissipated and this may be the case in New Zealand this is not the case internationally (In the United States for example abortion continues to be widely debated). The programme suggests that abortion is not as controversial as it once was. In this way the item is not placed in a broad, theoretical or abstract context. There is some context but it is still a jumbled item not certain of whether it is about abortion in general or about the documentary that TVNZ will screen. Short on context and outcomes as it refers to the trends of abortions in general, it does not discuss the other factors affecting the statistic as there is only a sentence to explain why abortions have risen in New Zealand. The story exemplifies the approach where the journalist does not let the facts of the item stand and moulds them to an outcome for the audience to respond to.

### ***Holmes, 29/10/04, 5.7 minutes***

This item features a story about Brian Coley, a man in a wheelchair who has been 'swindled' out of \$44,000 by a woman he believed was moving from Africa to join him in New Zealand. Holmes starts the piece by saying that another New Zealand man has been 'ripped off' by internet dating.

*Holmes* [piece to camera] Now the internet and dating. Another man has been ripped off, last week we brought you the story of the bogus brides because there's not just the Russians, one in particular Russian, it's not just the Russians that's doing the scamming. Brian Coley in Gisborne has been talking on the net to a woman called Rose an exotic African woman in Ghana and she has cost Brian big-time like 'Big-time' this from Mark Hannon.

Reporter [Over blurred footage of a woman typing on keyboard] You have to ask why does someone send \$44,000 to a post box in Ghana.

*Brian Coley* [Voice over photo of young black woman]. She was single, 28, African American, very nice looking.

Reporter [Voiceover shot of Brian Coley at keyboard] Brian Coley of Gisborne sent the money thinking he was going to get a shot at love.

Filmed in close-up Brian explains the woman called Rose Darro was initially friendly, put the bait out and hooked her man and continued asking him for money. Brian makes four visits to the airport and there are four no-shows. Brian wanted to find out more and there is footage of him surfing Google only to find out that the woman was a porn star. The way this item is constructed it moves into areas of narration rather than a simple presentation of facts. There is a short interview with Martin Klutjes, a Police Crime Manager who suggests Brian was probably caught by an internet mass mail out, Brian then says that all he has is a great piece of heartache and he has come forward with his story because he doesn't want other men to be caught out. The story does not seek to look at the wider issues of internet scamming or seek to ascertain how widespread the problem is. It is an exceptionally limited piece. Taking a simplistic position the programme suggests that the people responsible for this are porn scammers and that the people who get so readily and continually hooked by these 'scams' are seen purely as victims. There is no context given as to how someone could be so naïve and instead the story concentrates on the scammers' immorality and Brian who is presented as a sad tragic man.

This item refers to a problem that goes beyond this single event or incident but does not explore it with statistics or other case examples. The entire story refers to the private or personal life of the subject and the audience is invited to be a spectator or voyeur. The piece ends with editorialising from Holmes who says:

*Holmes* [mid shot] So thank-you for speaking to us Brian though it must be terribly sad and heart breaking and humiliating as well and um..[taps pen on desk] its good you've spoken to us and provided yet another warning for the stuff that can happen on the internet. Police say Brian's probably lost his dough for good and that could be a fairly safe kind of bet wouldn't it. No more love on the net for Brian, he says he's sent the computer back because he can't afford to keep his computer anymore. Sending money to post office boxes anywhere in the world, Ghana, isn't the safest thing to do.

This item highlights the change in convention with this type of item. There is a

primary focus on the subject's personal problems highlighting the emotional shame of his situation. The presentation of public moral problems on current affairs programmes was a marked contrast to the 1984 examples. By 1994, the examples discussed show a far greater personalisation of approach at the expense of facts and research.

This internet scam story is an example of how the changes evidenced in 1994 were by 2004 established as the norm for current affairs television programmes. The trend to personalisation was by this time common place. Each of the 2004 programmes demonstrate personalisation differently however. *Sunday's* item on abortion showed personalisation in key areas when even the female doctor was interviewed concerning her views on the controversial abortion documentary. Janet Macintyre posed personal questions to her rather than focusing on her views as a medical professional. Also the programme referred to only a few facts about abortion and largely did not provide a lot of context on abortion either in New Zealand or in other countries. There was less description in the 'abortion' story than the other stories of this sample, it was clear that the programme was presented along well established parameters of 'telling a story' rather than presenting facts. The camera techniques evidenced in this story demonstrated the same swift transition from the journalist to the interview subject. The pace was still a lot faster than the earlier 1984 examples of current affairs programmes. The 2004 *Holmes* story on Brian, the man 'scammed' out of his money, also demonstrates the pervasiveness of personalisation. The entire story is framed around Brian's unhappiness and disappointment and there is no attempt made to explain how this issue might be countered or even how widespread it is. The item focuses on the 'feelings' of the story, from pity for Brian to suppressed anger expressed by *Holmes* on Brian's behalf. By this point, current affairs has altered to such an extent that there is no effort made to discuss facts or issues rationally. This approach to the subject matter had become the norm.

The approach taken in this story demonstrates a clear move to narrative over description where the result is a kind of 'good' versus 'bad' opposition for what are often complex issues. The camera techniques of fast-cutting remain as well

as they use of close up shots that focus on the subject when they discuss their feelings or emotional responses. Once again, the level of personalisation seen from 1994 to 2004 shows that the way that current affairs programmes dealt with 'public moral problems', with a heavy emphasis on the personalisation of stories had altered dramatically by this time.

### ***Analysis of human interest/ entertainment/celebrity stories***

This next section examines the changes that occurred in the area of human interest, entertainment and celebrity. This subject area was included as the quantitative data showed a large growth in this area over the research period. From the 1984 sample it is clear that 'human interest/entertainment/celebrity' stories have always had coverage on current affairs programmes. The level of coverage altered over the research period on New Zealand current affairs television programmes. As I have shown, the percentage of this content increased markedly from 1984 to 1994, especially. However, it is important to show how the style and treatment of such stories changed over time as well.

#### ***Close Up, 20/9/84, 'Dragon them in', 12.8 minutes***

Called *Dragon them in* this item is introduced by Martyn Bates and is the third in the line-up of stories with human interest on the new phenomenon of the time; the books and board games, *Dungeons and Dragons*. Reported by Carole de Coville she introduces the story by referring to those who play as the 'converted', "it's an amazing experience and to cynics its just child's play". She begins by comparing the new game to Monopoly.

Carole de Colville [voice over footage of figurines] Once upon a time so the legend goes an awesome battle raged between the forces of good and evil. Once upon a time 1974 to be exact, a frustrated American insurance worker found a profitable way to make that real. Throw away your war games, toss out your backgammon set, forget your Saturday morning rugby that is at least the feeling of fantasy gamers. New Zealand has found a new way to get a buzz.

There is an interview with Dr Barry Kirkwood, a psychologist who explains the thrill in the games. The audience is told that this is a new form of fantasy game and though some people will find it childish it is a way of relieving adult pressures. There is a shot of school kids playing the board games and then another segment where adults are playing the game. There are no cut aways to

the reporter who remains very much in the background. There is some context given to the story that the game has contributed to best-selling children's books and the industry is worth \$60 million in the USA. Although there is dispute within the item over the usefulness of the new craze it is not personalised. The story focuses on groups who partake in the games and mention is made of the amount of money made in the United States. The story though on less serious subject matter than other items of this era still follows a standard presentation of the facts and is not presented as if it is a 'hard' news item.

### ***Close Up, 16/8/84, Off the Air, 18 minutes***

This item is a detailed interview with Sharon Crosbie a prominent interviewer on radio and television. Introduced by Alison Parr the item features a long interview with Crosbie before she departs New Zealand to attend Harvard University on a fellowship.

*Alison Parr* [MS in studio] She's collected all the significant broadcasting awards in New Zealand. Now Sharon Crosby has entered the international league. She's been granted two fellowships to study at Harvard University in America. One the Nieman fellowship is awarded to only six people outside the United States each year. Sharon Crosbie departs to mix with the world's top journalists and this means that for thousands of radio listeners here the mornings just won't be the same.

The item has a number of interviews with colleagues of Sharon Crosbie including Brain Allpress, Alison Holst, Beverly Wakem, and the Director General of Radio New Zealand. There is also comment from Prime Minister Robert Muldoon. Those interviewed extol her abilities with many saying she is the best interviewer the country has ever produced. Most of the interview is a focus on Crosbie herself where she explains her philosophy on broadcasting and her rise in the media. There are light hearted moments presented when Crosbie was an interviewer for 3 ZB and appeared on other television programmes. This is an item on a broadcaster in New Zealand but it is contextualised and researched and the subject gets a lot of time to explain about her life. The audience hear about her early start in broadcasting and how her career developed. Crosbie also has sufficient time to explain her approach to broadcasting and to reflect upon key junctures where her career changed course. It is not wholly sycophantic, however, and there is some criticism of Crosbie, with many interviewed saying that she is a perfectionist. The interview suggests that

Crosbie never quite transitioned properly to television and thus is mainly a radio interviewer. Overall this is a full piece on a broadcaster they suggest was one of the best at the time and her winning of the Harvard Scholarship was deemed a high point of an already successful career.

**20/20, 4/4/94, Happier Days Mothers with a Mission, 12.5 minutes**

This story covers all three categories of human interest, entertainment and celebrity. Introduced by Louise Wallace this item is from the ABC in the United States and presented by Diane Sawyer. This story features Elizabeth Glaser wife of actor Paul Michael Glaser, a former 1970s *Starsky and Hutch* star, and fits the hybrid categorisation. It is a story of how Elizabeth Glaser contracted AIDS and at the time of screening she had just lost her daughter to AIDS. Her son also contracted the disease. Unlike other stories that focus on AIDS as an illness this has the celebrity link which, for the producers of the programme makes the tragedy of the story more poignant. The programme outlines how Elizabeth Glaser set up a foundation to assist children with AIDS.

*Louise Wallace* [piece to camera] Together they decided to fight to help children with AIDS. They had to start from the beginning. There was no network, no specialised child support. So these mothers motivated with their theme song 'Itsy bitsy' spider made it their mission to help children combat AIDS. Now out of Elizabeth Glaser's tragedy has come the paediatric AIDS foundation and friendship that's stronger than ever.

Diane Sawyer provides a sombre voiceover. "Thirteen years ago as part of a blood transfusion she contracted HIV passing it on to her daughter and son and for support turned to her friends". The story talks about how Glaser and her two friends set about creating a foundation called the Paediatric AIDS Foundation and used her connections to get prominent doctors and scientists to join forces and set-up a think tank.

*Elizabeth Glaser* [mid shot] After we were diagnosed I couldn't go anywhere without looking at anyone on the street corner, in a car and not be envious. It was such a powerful emotion for me but in time [cut to Diane Sawyer looking empathic] you have to look at what you have, not what you don't have. And you have to make the best of what your life is.

The story features the women holding events for children with AIDS and getting the doctors to sing 'itsy bitsy spider'. There is one shot of a very young child singing for the AIDS cure party and then crying because two of her friends died of AIDS in the morning. The piece has a strong current of emotion throughout

and there are a number of emotional interviews in this story. Diane Sawyer frequently responds to this which is in marked contrast to programmes of an earlier era where the journalist's reactions were hardly featured.

*Diane Sawyer [mid shot]* How do you tell those two friends what you go through day in and day out, your spirits.

Elizabeth Glaser [mid shot] I would say almost everything...almost everything it's like their part of my pulse, you know their always there and I don't think I could do it without them.

This item is positioned as very much a personal story where there is little context about the science and spread of the disease. AIDS is a global problem but this story focuses upon a particular tragedy as a Hollywood family has been ravaged. There is discussion about the foundation but the base of this item is how the three friends fundraise and support each other. The story primarily concentrates on the personal story of the participants and focuses on Elizabeth Glaser's emotional journey and how she has been devastated by the experience.

Diane Sawyer [voice over while images of children singing] A day of concerts

clowning, fun for children who have HIV. On stage Jake [Elizabeth Glaser's son] sits next to a friend with HIV, Heidi.

Heidi [sitting with microphone] Sometimes I think of Ariel and everyone's who's in heaven.

This story exemplifies the shift in current affairs programmes. Rather than contextualising the issue it focuses on emotions and feelings. It is tabloid, and sensational, told via narrative rather than a description of events or issues. Diane Sawyer who was by this time a well-known journalist adds kudos to the celebrity element. So the shift from a description of events, or contextualisation has changed to a personalised account of a significant personal tragedy.

### ***Holmes, 26/1/94, 7.8 minutes***

This story ran as the third piece for the *Holmes* programme on this night. It is a soft news subject though is presented as if it is very important. Holmes announces that Michael Jackson has settled out of court and in the voiceover speaks about the case against Michael Jackson and how it has ended.

*Holmes* [piece to camera] Michael Jackson has settled. This is the big news in the United States today. It's only slightly bigger than Bill Clinton's State of the Union speech-but anyway. Michael Jackson will be paying an undisclosed sum probably millions to the young man who made the sexual molestation allegations against him and the dispute between the parties is now settled with both sides speaking highly and nobly of each other. But it is the latest shock development after months of shock news about the superstar.

This statement is followed by footage of Michael Jackson at his concerts and with the LAPD spokesman explaining that Jackson is subject to an investigation. The footage comes from the *ABC* in the United States and also features short sound bites from Liz Taylor and footage of an interview with La Toya Jackson. Holmes recounts issues of odd behaviour with Jackson and says La Toya Jackson is "the strangest one in a strange family". The item is presented as if it is vital and important and is given a considerable gravitas. The first part of the item finishes with a statement from Jackson saying he is innocent and this statement is broadcast from Neverland Valley. Having established the basis of the story, Holmes first interviews Diane Diamond a Los Angeles correspondent who explains the latest details of the case. There are

occasional close ups of Holmes while he answers Diamond. It is a prime example of how stories on celebrities became very important and normalised in this period.

Holmes [looking intently] So the diehard fans have stayed with Michael Jackson this is clear.

Diane Diamond [MCU] Well it is clear by the phone calls I get and the letters that I get but I have to tell you that his record sales are down, Pepsi Cola has dropped him as a sponsor and if you're going to do a concert tour you have to have a sponsor they are that expensive. Um he is still with Sony. He is a very powerful individual but I think this has definitely hurt him and I don't know if he'll ever recover.

They speculate about the effect of the case on Jackson, how this has affected his health as well as his finances and how even with this case settled there is a police investigation. Diamond states that on the media she is seeing that Jackson has bought his way out.

*Holmes* [split screen] ...how is this going to affect his work with children?

*Diane Diamond* [MCU, smiling] Well it's interesting just two weeks ago after all of these scandalous charges against him allegations let's say, that there were never really charges. He had a 100 little black and Hispanic children up to his ranch, showed them around for the day fed them lunch, hot dogs and chicken and they rode the rides at Neverland. I don't think Michael Jackson is ever going to stop entertaining children because that is what he is all about. I think he's going to be a lot more careful though.

The interview speculates about future events and the item contains celebrity tabloid gossip and has little substance in it. The entire item is based on disapproval and the scandals of a downfall of the once famous and untouchable celebrity. These types of celebrity, entertainment story do not place the main issue or problem in any broad context and there is no consideration of the possibility that extortion could be the motivation behind the case. At the centre of this item is speculation rather than reasoned judgement. In this case did the young boy and his family try to extort Jackson or did he bring this upon himself. This story focuses on the scandal and is underpinned by a concentration on the personality of Jackson. There is speculation as to what a strange individual Jackson is. It is a story short on context and facts and full of speculation from a journalist who writes on celebrity. The item suggests this is a tragic event for Jackson who continues a life of highs and also a life of scandal and

unhappiness. The story is very much focused on the private life of Jackson and raises the question that the 'King of Pop' possibly likes children too much. This story is the quintessential tabloid, entertainment piece and is a prime example of the changing subject matter in current affairs.

***Sunday, 11/7/04, Pom Pom Mom, 14 minutes***

The introduction to this item starts off with a 'confrontational' set-up with the statement that the poster-girl for 'Sleep maker' beds the Pom Pom Gran has been ripped off'. This piece is presented by Jackie Marsh and follows the story of the 'dancing granny' who appeared on Australasian adverts for nearly three years.

Jackie Marsh [piece to camera] Welcome back. I'm Jackie Marsh. The dancing

Granny boogied for 'Sleepmaker' beds on Australian and New Zealand TV for nearly three years. Her Pom poms won awards for the company whose beds she sold and the ad agency who found her. Except they didn't find her. They owe her tens of thousands of dollars in royalties but they had no idea who she is or where she was. But *Sunday* had no trouble finding the dancing granny and it's a surprising story. But when we asked the ad agency to be interviewed they refused. They threatened us with legal action, and took the ad off the air.

Dancing in a stadium and dressed as a cheer leader this 'Pom pom gran' was an advert for Sleepmaker beds. The *Sunday* team follow a lead to find out who the dancing granny was and what happened to her. The reporter and researcher contact Sleepmaker's advertising agency and find that Phyllis Wanger was filmed cheerleading at a game but had not been paid for her image.

What follows is a story where Jackie March travels to Los Angeles and finds out more about Phyllis and her life. The story is presented as simultaneously humorous and serious. For example, there is one insert from New Zealand's consumer programme *Fair Go* where the presenter is discussing the winner of the Best Ad award and says "Middle aged and flabby can turn you on" and says that the dancing granny advert is the best advert of the year. The *Sunday* researcher is shown talking to the talent agency and the voice over says it was easy for them to work out who she was. The *Sunday* team ascertain that Phyllis was not paid for her work but was also something of a star in Los Angeles. They find footage of her auditioning as a cheerleader in black leotards

at the age of 59 and state that she appeared on the 'Johnny Carson' show as well. Phyllis, however never received a cent of money for her appearances. There are a series of interviews with her relatives and friends where they extol the virtues of Phyllis and how she loved to perform. In Los Angeles Marsh interviews surviving members of her family who are shown watching Phyllis dancing in the stadium, smiling in appreciation and generally reminiscing about

her. Here the family of the victim are seen reacting and are emotional about her. There is also a focus on the reactions and interactions of Marsh as she reacts to various reports about Phyllis. There are a number of shots of Jackie Marsh smiling appreciatively at the interviewees and close ups of their reminiscing about Phyllis.

Jackie Marsh [voice over of footage of Phyllis dancing] But we were too late for Phyllis Wanger. She died only last September completely unaware her sister Lorraine says she was world famous in New Zealand.

Lorraine [Phyllis's sister] Ah my God, that's my sister. She's like me. She would always perform....terrific [laughing].

Jackie Marsh [voice over of footage of Phyllis putting boots on] They all perform terrific. At 80 little sister Lorraine is still dragging her pins into cowboy boots in order to take the line dancing class at the local YMCA.

This item is unusual in that a relatively 'small' though somewhat amusing story is treated with a combination of both frivolity and utter seriousness. There are interviews with a local Los Angeles celebrity Chris Copping who says that the dancing gran should have been paid and that it is 'terrible' that she was not. There are a number of these examples where the reporter primes the interview subject for an emotional response and it is clear that story telling has taken over reporting fact. This is a story where the audience is told what to think and feel. The reporter expresses disapproval about the way Phyllis was treated, not getting paid for her work and not receiving royalties. The advertising agency is positioned as wrong and is also said to have sent legal letters to *Sunday* suggesting that if they continue with their approach legal action will be taken against the programme makers. At the end there is a concession that efforts are being made to pay the family the royalties.

There is no context at all to this item and *Sunday* makes a feeble attempt to explore other 'conspiracies' when they suggest that the music that was added to

the dancing granny was stolen from a musician. A telephone interview is included with a soundtrack added of sinister music that spuriously links these pieces of information together. The advertisers have clearly done wrong in this instance and refused to be interviewed. However, there is no real backgrounder on how often this kind of thing happens or the context of how many times images are used for commercial gain. Rather this story concentrates on the personality of the actor, in this case Phyllis Wanger. The dancing Gran story is an example of the move to more trivial and light hearted offerings.

Moralising as a way of shaping a story is an aspect that crept into the later current affairs offerings. In this case 'Sleepmaker' and their advertising agency are presented as complicit and bad. There is little broad context given though a lot of resources were expended to interview the Los Angeles family. There is no reference to any trend that goes beyond this single event or incident and the story is presented as bitter sweet offerings of the fate of the dancing granny.

***Sunday, 24/10/04, 'Mad, Mad, World', 13.3 minutes.***

This item, essentially a fashion piece, focuses on the two New Zealand designers Denise L'Estrange-Corbet and Francis Hooper of the *World* company as they prepare for their fashion show. This is another crossover hybrid piece. Presented by Mark Crysell the piece features a low key presenting style with attempts to be witty and light.

*Mark Crysell* [Introduction] Just when you thought it was safe to turn the telly on, we've got more from fashion week for you. But we've got something really really different. Tonight we take you behind the scenes of World's show.... World is the cutting edge avant-garde of New Zealand fashion. They've shown in Hong Kong, London and Sydney.

Using a running metaphor of war and the embedded journalist he says "World's shows are as tightly planned as a military campaign and for the first time a TV crew has been allowed to be embedded".

*Mark Crysell* [voice over footage of catwalk] The troops are assembled  
Frances Hooper [sitting at table watching male model] He's got a hot ass and big lips.

*Mark Crysell* [voice over footage of Frances Hooper handling material] He's the

creative one. [Frances Hooper talking while holding material] Do you want a stripe of plaid?

*Mark Crysell* [voice over footage of Denise L'Estrange Corbet walking into room] And Denise L'Estrange-Corbet does the business.

The focus is on the backstage planning of the show and is presented as if the *Sunday* television crew and reporter are lucky to be allowed access to these celebrity designers.

*Mark Crysell* [Close up and with serious tone] How much of a secret is the venue?

*Denise L'Estrange- Corbet* [Close up] It's huge, nobody knows until they get the invitation.

*Mark Crysell* [Close up] You're going to tell me?

*Denise L'Estrange-Corbet* [Close up Smiling] No, we haven't signed off yet.

They discuss the unveiling of the venue as a major surprise and refer to the models and hairdressers in terms of D Day approaching.

*Mark Crysell* [voice over] It's two weeks out and it's time to enlist the troops.

*Frances Hooper* [mid shot interviewed by Crysell] The girls all have to be over 5-10 and stick thin because of the silhouette. Clothes look great on thin women. And the boys they have to be over 6-2 and they've got to walk really well like ...laughing just like us. We joke about it in the workroom but the girls have to walk like hookers.

The story progresses to show that the fashion show is going to be staged at a Masonic lodge and that the *World* designers are unique in that they are one of the first to use drag queens. Both designers are seen preparing for a dinner party and later at the dinner party. This item is very much focused on the staging of the fashion event and there is not a lot here about fashion generally or the context of the fashion industry in New Zealand. It is instead a rather personalised account around the two designers. The story does not go beyond the main event or incident and concentrates on the personalities of the interviewees and is very much a profile of a New Zealand celebrity couple. This is an exceptionally light item presented once again with a certain reverence by the presenter because of the 'fame' of the couple.

The entertainment, human interest and celebrity stories show a change in

presentation and approach over the time periods sampled. The items in 1984 still follow the standard approach to current affairs of that period with a serious, researched and largely neutral portrayal of facts. The 1984 programmes demonstrate a standard descriptive approach to these stories. By 1994 this alters dramatically and the move to a more narrative approach is in evidence. The story 'Happier Days' for example is framed as a tragic tale yet there is still jubilation in the way the women stick together. A large proportion of the programme is focussed on the friendship and bond between the women. The *Holmes* story on Michael Jackson shows how seriously celebrity and entertainment stories were being taken and the Michael Jackson story in particular was treated with a seriousness that earlier current affairs of 1984 would have reserved for a major world event. The major change from 1984 to 1994 and beyond in relation to these entertainment and celebrity stories was that neutral presentation of facts had largely been replaced by 'stories' about the lives of celebrities. The same is true also of the 'Pom Pom Mom' story where the main 'character' is presented as a hero who has been 'ripped' off rather than an account of what had happened. 'Mad Mad World' also shows a fashion show through the eyes of the 'star' designers rather than as a story on the rise of fashion generally or how New Zealand fashion might have changed over time.

The general quickening of camera shots from 1984 highlights the growing personalisation in the way current affairs stories were presented. The net impact of the faster paced item was to highlight the journalists' and subjects' reactions and emotions. This gave an 'emotional overlay' to stories that overshadowed most other aspects of the programmes. This shift between 1984 and 1994 was very pronounced and became embedded.

### ***Summary***

The overall trend in New Zealand current affairs programmes has been a dramatic and permanent change in their nature and in the delivery of information they give. Structural changes such as faster paced cutting and a focus on journalist's reactions accompany a rise in emotion seen in both the subjects interviewed and in the journalist carrying out the interviews. These

changes mirror other alterations in current affairs programmes discussed in previous chapters. Changes in the kinds of subject matter covered on current affairs after 1984 combined with other aspects such as a rise in entertainment, crime and celebrity coverage. Taken together these combined to create a very different kind of current affairs programmes and, overall, an alteration of the genre. The combination of these changes meant that current affairs programmes have largely moved to a far more personalised approach to stories rather than the issues based approach of the 1984 current affairs programmes. The argument that soft news, human interest and entertainment now dominates news and current affairs is well known and the suggestion is that with the increase and focus on soft news, complex arguments are made as simple as possible in order to increase audience share and thus ratings. News and current affairs have been 'dumbed down' in order to make this palatable for the audience (Cushion and Lewis, 2009; Franklin, 1997). This could be seen to provide evidence for the concept of structural bias in news reporting (Hofstetter, 1976) where stories are reported to exploit the character of the medium and respond to the incentives of commercial programming. Soft news is then associated with concepts such as infotainment, entertainment and tabloidization where the more dramatic the events, the more likely they are to be screened. The argument can still be made that 'soft' news values is not simply what drives content, however, and it is how the story is told (Boczkowski and Peer, 2008). In this research both aspects are true as there is a growth in celebrity and human interest stories as well as reduction in complexity when the harder news topics are covered. With this reduction of complexity has been a move to present items as 'stories' rather than a neutral presentation of facts.

### **1984-1994**

In the 1984 examples where political and serious informational topics were covered this was frequently done with a single interview. As the samples from later years were examined there was less attempt made to gather expert opinion or consult other sources. The result is a far less complex presentation of information in the current affairs programmes of this time. Issues were addressed with complexity in the 1984 sample rather than presented with a moralistic 'bad' versus 'good'. In this respect the neutrality of journalistic

presentation permitted a far more in-depth examination of the material presented. When politics or serious informational topics were covered in 1994 these were done far more superficially than the earlier examples of current affairs programmes. There were few areas where policy itself was referred to or debated after the 1984 sample. With the actual decrease in political stories was a concomitant rise in entertainment-oriented content and 'ratings friendly' topics. As current affairs become shorter in length so too were there fewer official sources interviewed and a focus instead on victims or relatives of victims. Previous research suggested the news hole diminished and advertising progressively increased. The news bulletin was altered to keep the audience watching around commercial breaks and hook them further into the evening. It is clear that morselisation occurred, especially so in *Holmes* and that even in more 'serious' and longer programmes, for example *Sunday*, the length of the items diminished. With the decrease in item length came the increase of the pace during items. Though some might argue that a slicker faster paced type of programme seen in current affairs programmes in 1994 and beyond enhanced the experience for audiences, the structure created problems in terms of the paucity of information that the programmes provided.

With the decline in item length and acceleration in pace the style of interview altered. The style seen in the more serious topics often declined into what Atkinson says is pseudo-argumentative, adopting a double tactic of demanding rational argumentation, but at the same time preventing it" (Hess-Luttich, as cited in Atkinson, 2010, p. 417). Current affairs programmes in 1994 were then faster paced than the 1984 examples with shorter stories with less sources and quicker shots. The change in camera techniques may well have made the current affairs programmes less 'boring' however the result has been to make emotion and pace the key drivers at the expense of an examination of serious and often complex stories. The impact of this is journalism that is driven by the distinct drivers; to serve popular sentiment, cut costs and maximise audiences (Corner & Pels, 2003). These changes were very clear in the 1994 and 2004 samples.

Political, public affairs stories have largely been displaced and replaced by crime and human interest stories. As Atkinson (2010) notes, news concision is hostile to political discourse and most often converts matters of public policy into questions of character or personality. This has been seen in the change from the 1984 treatment of political stories to the 1994 and later 2004 examples. As Hallin (1992, p.19) said of the impact of the decreasing sound-bite; "First and simplest, it is disturbing that the public never has a chance to hear a candidate- or anyone else-speak for more than about 20 seconds". Though the pace of the older programmes was slow, the logic of an argument and position could be understood and seen in depth. The change in camera shots with a lot of close up and extreme close ups also changes the mode to stories with a sense of intimacy (Tuchman, 1978, p.117). The increase in pace and rapid camera shots altered the ability for programmes to structure and present arguments. The later style of current affairs programme was also seriously inhibited by the focus on pace and emotion.

The changes in technical aspects altered pace and delivery. With the changes which included rapid cutting and the prominent use of close ups of both journalist and interview subject this coincided with a move to stories on victims. In this sample there has been a move to personalisation where victim stories increased. How these were covered displays changes in the current affairs genre. From 1984 to 1994, the way public moral problem stories altered makes for an interesting example of how stories generally became far more personalised than the 1984 examples. One of the major changes after 1984 was the insertion of the journalist into the story where the camera cuts to their reactions and feelings. These are prominently displayed rather than the neutral presentation of facts. In the 1984 sample the interviewees were neutrally positioned, the method by which interview subjects are viewed had altered by 1994 such that emotional responses were featured and reacted to by the journalist. Though it can be argued that this is part of a general change in media, journalism and presentation, the change that so many take for granted has inevitably altered the discourse and way information is given. As well as a strong focus on victims there was also a strong emphasis on confrontational interviews, especially with politicians. Atkinson says hectoring and assertion

replaced political arguments and frontal attack replaced constructive engagement. *Holmes* especially has both colloquial and cheeky modes of address and there was the elevation of trivial fun over the serious or important. Where context and overview were standard features of the 1984 current affairs programmes, this had become a much more simplistic rendering by 1994. There is much less structural complexity and historical context evident from 1994, and a complete reduction or removal of the abstract or theoretical. Overall, from 1994 there were fewer stories to help citizens assess information. In the quantitative sample there was evidence of a rise in tabloidization and in my qualitative analysis this became especially obvious. The *Holmes* story of Brian Coley, the man duped by an internet scam is a prime example. By 2004 a story such as this appears to herald a new kind of journalism with the focus on the private sphere. It is however the degree to which these types of stories became mainstream that demonstrates how personalisation became the norm in 1994 and in 2004. There were a number of items that were unusual in their inclusion and displayed little information to the point where they could only be seen as time fillers or items to lighten the current affairs programmes.

The inclusion of these items, of more personalised topics, often displayed traits where the style of story moved from description to narration. Often it appeared that this was to help offset the more serious pieces. However, the serious pieces were so light and trivial that the level of information in current affairs programmes produced after 1984 appears to have been seriously and permanently altered. The confluence of decreased time for each item and a focus on personal aspects has narrowed the scope of argument that current affairs programmes offered. In this sample the consequences of concision were to see arguments diluted to 'us versus them', and a general narrowing of the range of options for examining complex issues. The move to present the most complex issues as simple black and white belies the original point of current affairs programmes. The ability to present and discuss complex issues was diminished and instead was replaced especially on *Holmes* by 'argu-tainment' (Atkinson, 2010). An example of this was the *Holmes* item on the local elections where subjects talked past each other, or blatantly interrupted as was the case with *Holmes* himself.

## 2004

Many of the key changes identified in the 1994 sample were well established by 2004. The move to rapid camera shots, a more personalised style of interviewing and a general intrusion of the journalist into the story had become the norm by 2004. When the origins of current affairs are considered one of the key differences between news and current affairs programmes was the current affairs genre's ability to contextualise stories. Within the samples in 1994 and 2004 a rise in decontextualisation is evident. There was a steady move away from sources and experts to vox populi 'Oprah style' interviewing or single short interviews. The politicians interviewed after 1984 became very good at dealing with Holmes and his style of interviewing but generally political interviews became sites of confrontation at the expense of in-depth discussions of policy. With this trend came a trivialisation of serious matters and the combination of hectoring interview styles and compression of time within items meant that serious items were trivialised.

Within current affairs there is a definite move from the presentation of facts and attempts to put two sides of a story, to an emphasis on celebrity, human interest and entertainment. For the celebrity, human interest and entertainment stories facts become less important and way stories were constructed altered. Current affairs of the past were about giving information and keeping the journalist out of the story and the original current affairs journalist was a neutral mediator. The programmes were not afraid to present complex and important information and also to tackle serious stories. The current affairs programmes from mid-1994 and beyond do not show this same emphasis. They are short on research and seek to guide the audience as to what to feel about the issue under discussion. Frequently the audience is brought in as spectator and taken on an emotional roller coaster' as if current affairs should not do more than to tell a story of 'ups and downs' and emotional revelation. The political stories covered on the later current affairs programmes were frequently narrow in focus and decontextualized.

Many of the changes discussed in this chapter came together to alter the level of context in current affairs programmes after 1994. There is evidence of

decontextualization though it could be argued with a greater emphasis on argutainment, fast pace and a more emotional style of interview. The trends became defining features of current affairs per se. The greatest loss evident in the sample from 1994 and 2004 appears to be in the capacity of such programmes to consider and present facts. In the 1984 sample there was a long interview with economists and the Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas considering the impact of new right policy on New Zealand society. This factor continues to be a major underlying issue in New Zealand politics. Yet in the 1994 sample and beyond its only consideration was a 'puff piece' for Roger Douglas's new book. This was a very different treatment to the way such issues were being discussed in 1984. Complex political and serious stories have been eschewed in favour of softer more entertainment oriented subject matter. There are real deficits in the new style and approach of current affairs and the problem is that the new style of current affairs which is short on information, often filled with personalisation has become the norm for current affairs television. For example in recent years political topics have been moved to programmes such as Q & A, which screens on Sunday morning; in a time slot reserved for special interest programmes (as if interest in serious topics now means this is only of interest to a minority audience). The net effect of this is that where current affairs programmes were a resource for rational enquiry this is not the main feature of current affairs programmes today.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This research began by considering the origins and evolution of current affairs television programmes and documented the changes that occurred to such television programmes in New Zealand. Quantitative and qualitative analysis together suggest current affairs programmes underwent dramatic change after 1984. This change was primarily a consequence of broadcasting deregulation and the resulting influence of commercial pressures on television content.

The first chapter considered current affairs television programmes in the context of the political economy of television broadcasting and policy. Current affairs television in New Zealand was shaped by a broadcasting system comprised of elements of public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting. The key turning point for broadcasting as well as many other public institutions in New Zealand was the imposition of neo-liberal policies after 1984. The research period of this study examines twenty years of television current affairs programmes from 1984 to 2004. The theoretical framework of the research is based on a critical political economy approach which suggests that the impact of broadcasting changes and policies has meant that programmes produced in that setting are more visually and personally oriented and designed to produce ratings and an audience.

This research has covered different periods of broadcasting history and these can be loosely termed pre-deregulation, the deregulation period and the period of the Charter. Previous research (Atkinson, 1994b; Comrie, 1996; & Cook, 2000) suggested that prime time television news had dramatically altered with the arrival of deregulation. One of the core concerns expressed by media scholars and commentators is that commercialisation of media content generally, restricts political information and news in particular and marginalizes public discussion at the expense of democracy.

Chapter one examined the political-economic background to current affairs television programmes. It outlined the broadcasting traditions of both Britain the

United States and Australia, and positioned current affairs television in this context. New Zealand television current affairs were initially a key part of public broadcasting and an important part of the evolving public sphere. Compared to more recent current affairs programmes the early New Zealand programmes such as *Gallery* provided context and provided opportunities to explore serious issues in depth. Current affairs television programmes have a long tradition of carrying out political interviews and holding politicians to account. Central to this process was the practice of investigative journalism. Holland (1997) suggests that the traditional investigative current affairs programmes such as *World in Action* and *Panorama* were programmes with large research budgets and available time for research and production. The budgets and time given to investigation were sufficient to carry out many long running and complex investigations into wrongdoing and corruption. For example *World in Action* investigated the wrongful imprisonment of the Birmingham Six in the 1980s and after the London bombings in July 2005 *Panorama* produced a programme exploring the ongoing risk of potential terrorist bombings in London with an in-depth investigation that took many months to produce.<sup>36</sup> The journalist reporting the story was deep undercover and at risk during the making of the programme. *World in Action* in 1995 also provided evidence that 'mad cow disease' had infected a large cluster of young people in Britain and that this was a national problem for Britain's veterinary and medical community as well as the general population.<sup>37</sup> These examples demonstrate that well researched current affairs have played a vital role in the lives of everyday people and held important institutions and people to account.

Chapter two considered the literature that examined the television current affairs genre. The key observation was that current affairs television had evolved to become a very different type of programme when compared to the

---

<sup>36</sup> There was a substantial level of detail and research shown in the programme where the journalist had been 'undercover' for a long period of time.

<sup>37</sup> BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), Mad cow disease was first identified in 1985 and scientists suggested that the disease could be incubating in the human population. In 1988, there was a ban placed on cattle feed made of dead animals. The use of cow brains in human food was later stopped. One scientist Wendy Grant was aware that there were still poor practices taking place in abattoirs and that humans risked exposure to the infected material. In November 1989 the government banned the use of cows' brain and spinal cord for human consumption. The 1995 *World in Action* programme served to highlight the growing possibility that 'mad cow disease' had moved into the human population.

original conception. Originally the genre presented politicians and other public figures with the assistance of research budgets that permitted the funding of ambitious and important stories. Subsequently, Barnett & Seymour (1999) found that many interviewees with a background in television current affairs remarked upon the pressure to make programmes for less money. They remarked upon the pressure to produce stories that would be popular rather than serious or important. As such, many of the production staff Barnett & Seymour interviewed stated that the alteration of current affairs programmes' original formats was to the detriment of the quality of the programmes. In contrast to this critical view of more recent current affairs, other writers such as Lumby (1999) and some interview subjects in the Barnett & Seymour study argue that moves to make current affairs programmes more popular were the only way forward for a genre that was out dated, out-moded and in need of a revamp. The literature suggests that a key initiative to increase ratings was to employ hidden cameras. For some current affairs programmes this entailed an irreverent approach to promote controversy or human interest. Ratings-led approaches to audience maximization (timed for certain audiences of certain size and disposable income) have been blamed for trivializing content and leading to a focus on softer stories. Complex stories were simplified and made more attractive to audiences. Serious issues are often not covered if they do not revolve around a simplistic narrative treatment of an issue with either a hero or heroine and victims and villains.

According to Barnett & Seymour the demand for ratings had a dramatic impact on current affairs programmes with "an intensification of the use of market research, focus groups and ratings analysis" (Barnett & Seymour, 1999, p.20). An anonymous interviewee of the Barnett & Seymour study suggested that the demand to shape subject matter to attract large-scale peak time audiences meant that controllers at both ITV and the BBC exerted pressure to make programmes which would rate very well. As another interviewee said "Current affairs is no longer a protected species and is under pressure across the industry in terms of money, scheduling, running times and series lengths, with frustrating repercussions for programme makers" (Ibid, p. 20). A new-style current affairs programme featured on ITV was scheduled close to peak viewing

and given a new higher audience target to reach. As such, many of the programme makers Barnett & Seymour interviewed were representative of a new cynical form of journalism aimed at attracting a certain kind of audience” with minimal investment in original investigations or digging out information” (Ibid, p.20). Changes to working conditions altered the context of how current affairs programmes were produced in Britain and Barnett & Seymour explored how producers and directors felt about these changes. As previously noted, with fewer workers to produce the news, network stories became briefer and emotionally infused visuals became more dominant. Many critics have noticed the growing time and prominence accorded to entertainment, disasters and accidents in news and current affairs at the expense of political and public issue stories. Some critics like Lumby (1999), however, consider such changes a positive influence and regard impartiality and analysis, such that commercial realities could be kept at a distance, as the practice of a previous era. This research has considered these observations on the British experience as a starting point for examining changes to current affairs programmes in New Zealand over a twenty year period.

Chapter three presented the methodology and software coding system for my qualitative and quantitative content analysis of television current affairs programmes in New Zealand. In chapter four the central research questions considered whether free-to-air current affairs television had changed significantly during the period 1984 to 2004. The nature of these changes was considered in regard to those predicted in the light of previous research. The findings indicate a significant decline in the coverage of serious political and informational subjects and a sustained and measurable move to more entertainment oriented current affairs programmes. Within the research samples there were dramatic examples of change, between 1984 and 1994, and afterwards. In particular, the *Holmes* programme of 1994 represents a paradigm shift for current affairs programmes in New Zealand. The style of presentational delivery by Holmes represented a distinct departure from that of earlier current affairs programs. Previously, journalists had remained neutral and removed from the emotion of the programme. Holmes, in contrast, dominated the programme by positioning himself in all aspects of particular

stories. Item lengths were dramatically shorter, with the median item length on *Holmes* in 1994 5.7 minutes compared to median item lengths of 19.1 minutes on *Sunday* and 16 minutes on *Close Up* in 1984. The pace of the items on *Holmes* was frenetically fast and the sources included much fewer political experts and a rise in the number of sports and celebrity sources. Numbers for the source category celebrity/sportspeople altered greatly between the current affairs programmes of 1984 and those of 1994. In the latter year *Holmes* had 14 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources which greatly exceeded the two celebrity/sportspeople sources each used by *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984. The unprecedented rise in 'Celebrity' sources generally demonstrates that the *Holmes* programme was geared towards infotainment values. This meant the programme used features to entertain and maintain the audience.

*Holmes* was a very different current affairs programme compared to the current affairs programmes before and to some extent after. Though *Holmes* stands out as an example of a paradigm shift it is important to note that all current affairs programmes sampled over the research period altered their formats and subject matter. The quantitative subject matter taken in aggregate totals shows an overall decrease in serious informational subject matter. The percentage totals for serious subject matter in each year's sample were 63% coverage on *Close Up*, 94% coverage on *Sunday* in 1984, 40% on *20/20* and 35% on *Holmes* in 1994. By 2004 the figures declined further with 24% coverage of serious informational subject matter on *Holmes* and 16% coverage on *Sunday*.

In chapter four other research questions were posed as follows: In New Zealand Current Affairs television did item lengths become shorter between 1984 and 2004? The quantitative results show that item lengths reduced considerably over the research time period. The largest decrease in item length was from 1984 to 1994. This was seen on the *Holmes* programme in 1994 with the median item length of 5.7 minutes (compared to the average median length of 19.1 minutes for *Sunday* and 16 minutes for *Close Up* minutes in 1984). There was a small increase in item length by 2004 on *Holmes* with a median item length of 6.5 minutes and some increase in item length on *Sunday* with a median of 13.3 minutes (compared to 12.2 minutes on *20/20* in 1994 and 5.7 minutes on *Holmes* in 1994) though the programmes never returned to the earlier item lengths. The results demonstrate that

the very structure of current affairs items changed over the research period. The consequence of this change was a shift in how items were put together and a change in programme formats as a whole. By 1994 the long form interview was virtually extinct as shorter faster paced interview segments proliferated. The increased pace evident in the post 1984 current affairs programmes accelerated over the research period. The decrease in item length meant that television current affairs programmes could not provide the depth of information that was available in 1984.

The next research question considered whether there was a change in the type of subject matter and in Current Affairs television in New Zealand. Was there a decrease in serious, informational or political topics over the time period studied? The data shows that over the research period the tone devoted to such subject matter altered significantly. The 1984 current affairs programmes had a large amount of subject matter covering political and serious informational subjects and this declined over the next ten years. The total serious informational subject matter covered on *20/20* in 1994 was 41% compared to *Sunday* and *Close Up*'s figures 94% and 63% coverage respectively, in 1984. *Holmes* in 1994 vividly exemplifies the decline in serious informational subject matter with 35% of such content devoted to such coverage. *Sunday* in 2004 had even less with 16.3% of such coverage (compared to *Holmes* in 2004 with 24%). This further decrease, confirms the hypothesis that there was a decrease in serious, informational or political topics over the research period.

The next research question considered the related matter of whether there was an increase in topics with an emphasis on entertainment oriented content? The subject matter section of the research considered whether there was a corresponding rise in celebrity, human interest, and entertainment subject matter. The increase in human-interest, crime and entertainment and celebrity stories largely came at the expense of political stories. From 1984 to 1994 there was a large increase in entertainment oriented stories. *20/20* for example had 56.75% of its content devoted to such coverage compared to *Close Up* and *Sunday* which had 18.41% and 5.56% of their content taken up by entertainment oriented subject matter in 1984. The 'Entertainment' subject matter figure on *Holmes* in 2004 was 62.22% which shows an increase from the 1994 *Holmes* show figure of 45.64%. Entertainment oriented material covered over half the subject matter covered on *Holmes* in 2004. *Sunday* in 2004 had the highest coverage of 'entertainment material' in any sample with 79.07 % coverage. The increase in entertainment oriented subject matter was driven by commercial considerations not because the audience suddenly developed an aversion to political stories but because broadcasters were competing to retain and increase audience

share. Entertainment stories were a means to make the programmes more palatable and entertaining for the audience in order to increase ratings in a commercial broadcasting environment.

The next question considered whether there were any changes across the different types of sources which might reflect a move towards entertainment values in Current Affairs? There were differences within the 1984 sample with the number of political sources in on *Sunday* higher than *Close Up*'s with 14 compared to five sources. The source category celebrity/sportsperson reveals one of the greatest contrasts between the 1984 and 1994 current affairs programmes. In the 1994 sample, *20/20* had 10 celebrity/sportspeople compared to two for each of the 1984 programmes. This suggests that there has been a move to sources which reflect the growing prominence of entertainment values in current affairs television programmes. At the same time there was a marked decline in the use of political party representative sources. In 1984 *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had five and 14 political sources respectively while *20/20* in 1994 only had two political sources and a decline in expert sources. For example, putting to one side *20/20* in 1994 with eight expert sources, such sources stayed at four for *Holmes* in 1994 and decreased to 2 on *Holmes* in 2004 and none on *Sunday* in 2004. The number of 'political sources' on *Holmes* in 2004 was 11. This is the second highest number of political sources for the entire research sample. This suggests that by 2004 *Holmes* may have been interviewing more politicians to keep the programme in step with political stories that were covered elsewhere in the daily news. In contrast *Sunday* had a very low number of 'political sources' with one source. This change in how sources behaved is evidence of depoliticisation.

The focus on celebrity/sportspeople was designed to make current affairs programmes more appealing for audiences. *Holmes*, in 1994 with 14 'celebrity/sportspeople' sources greatly exceeded the two celebrity/sportspeople sources each used by *Close Up* and *Sunday* in 1984. The unprecedented rise in 'Celebrity' sources generally demonstrates that the *Holmes* programme was

geared towards infotainment values. The high number of 'celebrity' sources gives further evidence of the post deregulation emphasis on infotainment oriented content in current affairs programmes.

Finally, the last research question in chapter four sought to determine, from 1984 to 2004, the extent to which sources within a story were likely to provide evidence for their statements and opinions. This was an important area to examine because changes to the kinds of evidence sources give raises questions about the quality of information current affairs television programmes offer. If there were changes, did this mean there was an increase in unsubstantiated comment rather than more informed arguments? The findings demonstrate that sources changed over the research period and the degree to which evidence was provided altered.

These changes signaled that current affairs programmes were taking a more entertainment oriented approach to their subject matter. In 1984 both *Close Up* and *Sunday* each had high frequencies of the 'often' occurrence for the verification of statements and viewpoints. *Close Up* had 60% verification from its sources and *Sunday* 54%. The number of 'occasionally' occurrences was lower on *Close Up* with 30% and lower still on *Sunday* with 14%. The 'often' and 'occasionally' figure for *Close Up* when combined equals 90% and for *Sunday* these figures combined equal 68%. The data shows that by 1994 changes were occurring in the extent to which sources provided evidence. The percentage of 'often' occurrences declines from the 1984 *Sunday* sample figure of 60% to 24% for *20/20* in 1994. Correspondingly, the 'occasionally' occurrence on *20/20* 1994 registers 60% compared to 30% for *Close Up* in 1984. This indicates that on *20/20* in 1994 there was less obvious and sustained evidence provided by sources. *Holmes* had less occurrences of sources 'often' providing evidence than all the other current affairs programmes sampled up to that time. This corresponds with many other findings within the research sample of item length and subject matter change. In 1994, *Holmes* was a programme with a lot less of the traditional journalistic features of the 1984 current affairs programmes. '*Holmes* had the highest figure of the 'occasionally' occurrence

with 60% of occurrences and also has the highest 'rarely' measurement with 28% of occurrences. The decline in sources providing evidence declined over the research sample and in 1994, *20/20* had 24% of 'often' occurrences (compared to *Sunday* of 1984 with 23% of 'often' occurrences). This demonstrates that sources were offering less evidence over time. This would suggest that when sources were interviewed that they were offering more informal and colloquial responses. This is also confirmed with the 'occasionally' occurrence on *20/20*. In 1994 that figure was 60% while *Sunday* in 2004 had 47%. The data shows that there was a decline in sources 'always' giving evidence and a growth in sources 'rarely' giving evidence. This indicates a tendency of less factual evidence and more opinion.

This suggests that sources were less expert and also that as subject matter altered to a more entertainment oriented focus that there was less need, due to the very nature of the subject matter, for sources to provide evidence. The findings demonstrate that the original function of the current affairs genre to provide a platform for the discussion of matters of public importance was diminishing.

When considering the research findings one must ask whether the findings can be explained by the theoretical framework. The critical political economy approach argues that media reflects the surrounding social structure and that there are interplays between market forces, historical trends, ownership changes and legislative policies that alter media.

The findings in this thesis demonstrate that under deregulation current affairs programmes altered in key measurable ways. Item lengths became shorter, subject matter changed and new subjects gave less evidence for their views. The expectations of a more commercialised media environment have been revealed. The theoretical and methodological approach in this thesis cannot completely determine every nuance and change in programme format. Changes in style and approach will always occur over time, however the findings suggest that change has been dramatic for current affairs programmes and that the current affairs genre itself has greatly altered. This suggests that the concerns earlier held by theorists and writers and even programme makers have come to pass. The

practitioners interviewed by Barnett & Seymour (1999) saw direct changes to working conditions in the form of lower budgets to carry out current affairs research. They also often felt pressure to produce programmes that would clash with their journalistic instincts and training.

For the quantitative research questions the findings show that there have been substantial changes to current affairs programmes concerning item length, subject matter changes in the types of sources and in the degree to which sources provided evidence. Interestingly in the Charter period the quality of current affairs was supposed to improve yet the data shows an even greater increase in entertainment oriented subject matter and a corresponding decline in serious informational content.

The qualitative chapter examined the textual quality of New Zealand current affairs programmes over the research period. This showed that the style of current affairs programmes changed and that there was a far greater intrusion by journalists into the stories. This was seen with the increasing focus on the journalist's reaction to the interviewee's response. In the 1994 *20/20 Happier Days Mothers with a Mission* AIDS story, the camera fixates on Diane Sawyer's response to Elizabeth Glaser's tragic tale throughout the interview. After asking Elizabeth Glaser how she feels about losing her children to AIDs the camera automatically returns to a close up of Sawyer's face for her reaction to the 'sad' story. By contrast in the 1984 alcoholism story *Dying for a Drink* the camera barely returns to Martyn Bate's face as he asks the interview subjects personal and probing questions. The net effect of the change is to see a greater journalistic intrusion into the broadcasting of stories. With these changes there was also a move to produce stories with a stronger narrative structure which in the end made for a more vicarious viewer experience. Examples of this were seen in the *Holmes* story that focused on the pain of Brian who tells of his internet dating scam. Rather than an objective overview on internet scams in general this story focused instead, on one man's pain. When dealing with public moral problems the 1984 current affairs programmes then demonstrated that it was possible to deal with these stories in a more objective manner and provide

greater information. The story on legalizing homosexuality though anachronistic from today's perspective still provided a more factual and in-depth coverage where 'feelings' and 'emotions' did not dominate.

It is important to note that another key change from the 1984 current affairs programmes has been the increased pace of the programmes. The increase was evidenced by the speed with which journalists introduced items, carried out interviews and also in how the subjects and sources spoke. The net effect has been to produce stories and programme segments that pass by quickly at the expense of long form interviews.

This research shows that there have been substantial quantitative and qualitative changes to current affairs television programmes in New Zealand. As hypothesized from previous research into television news in New Zealand and from the literature on current affairs programmes elsewhere, major changes have occurred; the question is how extensive were these changes? Where once public issue stories were at the centre of current affairs these have largely been removed in favour of stories with an entertainment oriented approach. When current affairs programmes focused on politics in the later programmes it was apparent that the way this was done had changed as political stories were often structured around personal conflict or a scandal rather than any analysis of policy. In effect policy analysis has been extinguished from the television current affairs genre in New Zealand, at least in prime time. By 1994, as seen in the story *Unfinished Business* the approach taken to political and economic stories had greatly altered. The focus on Roger Douglas's book and personality was at the expense of an in-depth discussion of what his policies meant and the effect they would have if they were carried out fully. The 1984 *Sunday* programme that examined the economic crisis facing New Zealand contained a very full and in-depth discussion with Roger Douglas and various economists. This interview, where the economists gave in-depth and full opinions is a stark reminder of how current affairs programmes used to approach important and serious matters. Rather than glib or superficial treatments of economic and political issues the 1984 example took the subject

matter very seriously. Though it may be argued that the proliferation of channels and satellites and the advent of the internet means that audiences can surf and gather far more information than before and are no longer restricted to mainstream broadcasting, the changes presented here nevertheless question the very nature of television current affairs as produced in New Zealand.

These changes have meant that television current affairs programmes have less time and inclination to explore serious and important issues. When the story or issue is particularly complex, the constriction of time means the complexity cannot be examined. This could be viewed in the *Holmes* story on July 15 1994 which examined how some people who do not get help with their budgeting and childcare often suffer with tragic consequences. Rather than providing statistics and context as to why poverty has grown in New Zealand, Susan Wood presented a story full of moral judgment and short on fact. This approach to an issue where there is either a victim or villain or a hero became very common in current affairs programmes after 1984. Possibly what is most problematic when considering the condition of the current affairs genre in the New Zealand context is the fact that the changes that occurred after the introduction of deregulation have become so established and embedded such that within the research data there are no signs of change. In fact, in the 2004 sample, during the Charter period there are plenty of signs that the change to an entertainment focus over serious informational subject matter was complete. Many of the stories examined in 2004 were consciously entertainment oriented from the *Pom Pom Gran* story broadcast on July 11 2004 to the item called *Mad Mad World* broadcast on October 24, 2004. These items were heavily focused on the celebrity response to news and current affairs. Both programmes demonstrate a heavy emphasis on entertainment.

The problem of the 'new approach' to current affairs is that simple and soft stories became news while complex topics were either eliminated or reduced to a simplistic treatment. Arguably no one wants return to how things were in the 1980s current affairs versions with slow paced programmes, long studio interviews with politicians and a dominant focus on complex issues. However, the alteration to current affairs programmes since 1994 means that there are important areas of civic life that this genre of journalism is not covering. As

Turner says of the importance of current affairs television:

... news and current affairs is one of the benefits that broadcasting licensees can and should offer to the community as a whole in return for their operation of a public resource. Such principles were put in place to enhance the operation of democracy by ensuring the provision of independent information to the citizenry. If those principles were worth defending once, and the need remains today, then the disappearance of the place where they might be enacted is of serious concern (2005, p.25).

With political and public issue stories falling away and a focus on human interest, celebrity and entertainment rising so substantially, this raises questions about the type of information that current affairs produces. As such, the public is not served and current affairs is then failing. Macdonald says "To give them, or us as readers/viewers, a sense of potential agency, connections between the 'personal subject' and the 'motor force (s) of history need to be activated" (2003, p. 63). From the early 2000s, current affairs programmes that emphasised politics, economics and social issues were largely ghettoized. They were moved to Saturday and Sunday morning slots normally reserved for minority special interest programmes.

As previously mentioned there have been some efforts made to redress the impact of commercialism with the introduction of the Charter in 2003. Programmes such as *Face to Face* began broadcasting at that time. Also there was a move to broadcast 'serious' current affairs programmes in the Saturday or Sunday morning timeslot. For Example the current affairs programme *Agenda* was screened at 10 am on Sundays. When *Agenda* was discontinued in 2009 *Q and A* which is broadcast on a Sunday morning and Sunday evening replaced it. The Charter current affairs programmes, most notably *Face to Face* was an attempt to place the long form political interview back in prime-time. The TVNZ publicity material on *Face to Face* stated: "The format boasts a 25 minute one-on-one interview, giving Hill the opportunity to look in-depth at the issue and the personality behind it." It allows us the time to really discuss an issue and in doing so we're able to get more context and more enlightenment" (TVNZ, n.d.). *Face to Face* was not renewed and was last aired in November 2005. It had not rated successfully and its demise is evidence that the desire to get high ratings now makes it virtually impossible for a

'traditional' long interview format programme to be broadcast in primetime.

*Q and A* features interviews with politicians; however, it is broadcast in a Sunday morning timeslot, a position that suggests that political subject matter is not important for current affairs programming in New Zealand. The idea of 'serious' current affairs as a place of primary importance in the broadcast schedule has gone. Instead the current affairs programmes that are in prime-time now exhibit the shift to a more personalized form of the genre. The *Holmes* programme was a prime example of this where interview lengths were short, Holmes himself was often combative and his personality was the key driving force behind the content.

As Brian Edwards noted about news, current affairs items are not presented as neutral and are frequently coloured and overlaid with sentiment in order to hook the viewer into an emotional response, this "objective journalism gave way to sympathy, prejudice and sheer drama" (p.17). Every story had an emotive or dramatic tease where tone was conveyed by inflection, emotional response where the presenter becomes far more of a story than the story. The problem with the level of personalization evident in these current affairs programmes was that "Personalisation works to "divert attention from serious issues by replacing analysis with emotion and substituting cheap thrills for knowledge-enabling engagement" (Macdonald, 2000, p.260).

Where there were once concerns that deregulation was impacting on minority and special interest groups only, the more central question now is, what is a current affairs programme exactly. Current affairs programmes still have the title current affairs but it is questionable whether they have any of the original functions. Essentially current affairs programmes have become decontextualized, tabloidised and personalised. There have been attempts to return to more traditional formats however the data clearly shows that the changes, which ultimately add up to a quality decline in what is offered, have become firmly embedded.

It is important to consider that the 'new style' of current affairs with all the various hall marks of the genre became established in 1994 and have not substantially altered since then. As such, there is no initiative or motivation to

question what these programmes do and there seems to be an acceptance that the format and style is appropriate.

Broadcasting in New Zealand altered greatly after 1984 when Television New Zealand restructured, and commercialisation drove many programming decisions. News was reformatted to win a large part of the prime-time audience alongside the introduction of advertorials which were often included in the programmes made by Television New Zealand. Sponsorship of programmes also occurred such as *Country Wide Bank Grandstand* and *Mobil Sport* to name a few. By the mid-1990s sponsorship of programming was very common in New Zealand (Johnson, 2000). The current affairs programmes *Sixty Minutes* and *20/20* were also sponsored. As such, it is important to note that the current affairs programmes made in New Zealand in this research sample have been created against a highly commercialised backdrop which has no doubt heavily influenced the level of commercialisation evidenced in the current affairs samples.

The consequences of these changes to television broadcasting and the current affairs genre are many. Real structural changes have meant that the programmes cannot deliver the same kinds of information they once did. With financial restrictions impacting on journalistic research capacity there are questions as to whether New Zealand television current affairs can actually carry out investigative journalism. With current affairs programmes in New Zealand there are no more programmes that provide the important functions of the past. For example, in Britain *Panorama* is still broadcast, so there is a range of current affairs programmes still available. However in New Zealand the range is very narrow and there is no example in prime time of a current affairs programme which mitigates against the trends identified in this thesis. This has serious consequences for the state of the public sphere in New Zealand.

## REFERENCES

- Aalberg T. & Curren J. (2012). *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*. Routledge, New York.
- Adam Report (1973) *The Broadcasting Future for New Zealand: Report of the Committee on Broadcasting*, July.
- Altheide, D. L. (2004). *Media logic and political communication*. *Political Communication*, (21), 293-296.
- Altheide D. & Snow P. (1991) *Media Worlds in the Post journalism Era*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Alysen, B. (2000) *The Electronic Reporter*. Broadcast Journalism in Australia. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Atkinson, J. (1994a, April). Hey Martha! The reconstruction of One Network News, *Metro*, 94-101.
- Atkinson, J. (1994b). The State the media and thin democracy. In A. Sharp (Ed.), *Leap into the dark: The changing role of the State in New Zealand since 1984* (pp.146-177). Auckland, Auckland University Press.
- Atkinson, J. (1994c). 'Structures of Television News'. In P. Ballard (Ed.) *Power and Responsibility*. Wellington: Broadcasting Standards Authority.
- Atkinson, J. 2001. 'Tabloid Democracy'. In R. Miller (Ed.) *New Zealand Government and Politics*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Atkinson, J. (2006). Performance Journalism and the Public Interest. Paper presented to the "In the public Interest Conference," University of Canterbury, Christchurch, August 26-26, 2006.
- Atkinson, J. (2010). 'Political Mediators' in Raymond Miller (Ed.), *New Zealand Government and Politics*, Victoria, Oxford University Press.
- Baker, S. (2007). *The death of a genre? Television current affairs programmes in New Zealand Public television*. Presentation to the ANZCA Conference, Melbourne, July.

- Banks, C. (2004, December 15). *Beat Up @ 7- The era of interactive sensationalism-Gaynz.com*. Retrieved December 17, 2004, from <http://www.gaynz.com>.
- Barnett, S. (2004). Media Ownership Policies: Pressure for change and implications, *Pacific Journalism Review*, Vol 10, No 2, September 2004: 8-31.
- Barnett, S. & Gaber, (2001). *Westminster Tales: The twenty-first century Crisis in Political Journalism*. London, Continuum.
- Barnett S. & Seymour, E. (1999). *A Shrinking Iceberg travelling South...Changing Trends in British television: A case Study of drama and Current Affairs*, London: University of Westminster.
- Baym, G. (2005). The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the reinvention of critical journalism, *Political Communication*, (22), 259-276.
- BBC Website (n.d.). Retrieved on 29 September 2003 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/default.stm>
- Bennett, L. & Lyengar, S. (2008). "A New Era of Minimal Effects. The Changing Foundations of Political Communication." *Journal of Communication* 58:707-731.
- Berelson, B. *Content Analysis in Communication*, New York, Hafner, (Reprinted) 1972.
- Berg, B. (2001). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston, Allyn & Bacon.
- Berkowitz, D. (1987). TV news sources and news channels: A study in agenda-building *Journalism Quarterly*, 64(2-3), 508-513.
- Black, J. (1987). *The Stung in Television the critical view fourth edition*, edited by Horace Newcomb, Oxford: Oxford University Press,
- Blumenthal H.J., & Goodenough, O.R., (1998), *The Business of Television*, Billboard books, New York.
- Blumer, J.G. (1996). 'British Television', in H.Newcomb (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Television*, New York: Frank Dearborn.
- Boczkowski, P. & Peer, L. (2008). *The Choice Gap: The Softening of News and the Divergent preferences of Journalists and Consumers*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May, 22.

- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *On Television*. New York: The New Press.
- Boyd-Bell, R. (1985). *New Zealand Television: The first 25 years*. Auckland: Reed Methuen Publishers Ltd.
- Brown, J.D., Bybee, C.R., Wearden, S.T., & Straughn, D.M. (1987). Invisible power: Newspaper news and sources and the limits of diversity. *Journalism Quarterly*, 64, 45-54.
- Burriss, L.L. (1988). Attribution in network radio news: A cross-network analysis. *Journalism Quarterly*, 65 (3), 690-694.
- Campaign for Quality Television (1998). *The Purposes of Broadcasting*, London: CQT, 26 pp.
- Casey, B., Casey N., Calvert, B., French, L., & Lewis J. (2002). *Television Studies The key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Close Up Archived stories. (24/01/07). Retrieved from [www.tvnz.co.nz/cda/tvnz/archive?search=&media=&section=close%20up&style=tv\\_one](http://www.tvnz.co.nz/cda/tvnz/archive?search=&media=&section=close%20up&style=tv_one)
- Cocker, A. (2006). *The Television New Zealand Charter: rethinking Deregulated Broadcasting*. Paper presented to the ANZCA conference, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, July 2006.
- Cook, Daniel, (2000), *Deregulation and Broadcast News Content: ONN 1984-96*, PhD thesis, University of Auckland.
- Comrie, M. (1996). *The Commercial Imperative in Broadcasting news: TVNZ from 1985 to 1990*. Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
- Comrie, M. (October 2002). *The Commercial Imperative: Key Changes in TVNZ's News During Deregulation* Retrieved 31 October, 2002 from <http://www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/index.cfm?P=367>
- Comrie, M., & Fountaine, S. (2005a). *Retrieving Public Service broadcasting: treading a fine line at TVNZ*. *Media, Culture & Society*, 27 (1): 101-118.
- Comrie, M., & Fountaine, S. (2005b, forthcoming). *Under Investigation: The Fate of current affairs under a public service charter*. Proceedings of a refereed conference paper presented at the Second International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities, Monash University Centre, Prato, Tuscany, July 2004.
- Corner & Pels, (2003). *Media and the restyling of politics: consumerism, celebrity and Cynicism*, London, Sage Publications.

- Culbertson, H. M. (1978). Veiled Attribution- an element of style? *Journalism Quarterly*, 55, *society: A critical reader*. London: Sage.
- Curren, J & Sparks, C. (1991). *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*. Taylor & Francis: London and NY.
- Curtin M. & Shattuc J., (2009). *The American Television Industry*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Cushion, S. & Lewis, J. (2009). "Towards a 'Foxification' of 24 Hour news channels in Britain? An Analysis of Market- Driven and Publicly Funded News Coverage." *Journalism* 10: 131-153
- Day, P. (2000). *Voice and Vision, A History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*, Auckland University Press.
- Dahlgren, P & Sparks, C. (1991). *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, London, Routledge.
- Debrett, M. (2005). 'Extreme Makeover: The recurring Motif of New Zealand Broadcasting Policy', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, no.117, November 2005, pp.76-85.
- Dunleavy, T.(2008). New Zealand television and the struggle for 'public service' in *Media, Culture & Society* SAGE Publications (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi & Singapore), Vol. 30(6): 795–811.
- de Ronde, E. (2011) *Notes on CMP Software*.
- Easton, B. (1998). 'With a Whimper', in the *New Zealand Listener*, 28 August. *Reader*, Palmerston North, Dunmore Press.
- Edwards, B. (1992). The Cootchie Coo News. In M Comrie & J McGregor (Eds.) *Whose news?* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Edwards, B. 2002. The Cootchie Coo News Revisited. In M Comrie & J McGregor (Eds) *What's News?* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Entman, R. (1989). *Democracy without Citizens*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ericson, R.V., Baranek, P.M., & Chann, J.B.L. (1991). *Representing Order*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Feldman, L. (2007). The News about comedy, young audiences, The Daily Show, and evolving notions of journalism, *Sage Publications*, Vol. 8(4): 406–427

- Fountaine, S, Comrie, M & Cheyne, C,. (2005). 'Empty Heartland: The Absent Regions on New Zealand Television', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture & Policy*, No. 117, pp. 100-109.
- Franklin, B. (1997). *Newszak & News Media*. London: Arnold.
- Franklin, B. (2001). Television Broadcasting Policy: Public Service Broadcasting in B Franklin (ed), *British Television Policy: A Reader*, London & New York, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, pp. 20-21.
- Franklin, B. (2005). *Television Policy: The Mactaggart Lectures*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 131- 138.
- Fuchs, C.(2012). 'Dallas Smythe Today- The Audience Commodity, the Digital Labour Debate, Marxist Political Economy and Critical Theory. Prolegomena to a Digital Labour Theory of Value' in *triple*, 10(2): 692-740, 2012.
- Godard, P, Corner, J., & Richardson K. (2007). *Public Issue television*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (1991). Culture, communication and political economy. In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (pp. 15-32). London: Edward Arnold.
- Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (2000) Culture, Communications & Political Economy in J Curran & M Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media & Society*, London, Edward Arnold, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: 70-92.
- Gunter, B, (2000). *Media Research Methods*, London, Sage Publications.
- Graber, D. (1994). *The infotainment quotient in routine television news*. *Discourse & Society*, (5), 483 508.
- Hallin, (1992). Sound Bite News: Television Coverage of Elections, 1968–1988, *Journal of Communication*, 42(2) 5–24, June 1992.
- Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine. R., & Newbold., C, (1998). *Mass Communication Research Methods*, Macmillan Press, Hong Kong.
- Harcourt, G. (2000, Winter). Public Broadcasting – The Tasmanian Tiger of New Zealand. *ABCzINE*, 18-20.
- Hargreaves, I., & Thomas, J., (2002). *New News Old News: An ITC and BSC Research Publication*.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Hayward, P. (2003). *A History of Public Service Broadcasting in New Zealand Television*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Herman, E.S., & McChesney, R.W. (1997). *The Global Media: the new missionaries of global capitalism*. London: Cassell.
- Hess-Luttich, E.W. B (2007) "(Pseudo) Argumentation in TV Debates", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, (8). 1360-1370.
- Hofstetter, C.R. (1976). *Bias in the News. Network Television Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Holland, P. (1997) *Television Handbook*, New York Routledge.
- Holland, P. (2001). Authority and Authenticity: Redefining Television Current Affairs. In M.Bromley (Ed.) *No News is Bad news Radio, Television and the Public* London Longman, pp.80-95.
- Holland, P. (2006). *The Angry Buzz*, London, I.B Taurus.
- Holmes, P. (1999). *Holmes*, Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett.
- Hope, W. (2000). *Restructuring and the dual society in New Zealand*. Paper presented at IAMCR Conference, Singapore, 17-20 July 2000.
- Horrocks, R. (2004). Turbulent television, *Television and New Media*. 5, (1) 55-68.
- Hirst, M., White., T Chaplin, D., & Wilson,. J. (1995). 'When too much entertainment is barely enough: current affairs television in the 1990s', *Australian Journalism Review*, 17 (1), pp. 79-98.
- Jensen, K.B. (1991). Introduction: The qualitative turn. In K.B Jensen & N.W Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (pp.1-11).
- Johnson, R.(2000). *But Wait There's More: The infiltration of the Infomercial into mainstream primetime Television*. PHD Thesis, AUT University.
- Kaid, L.L., & Wadsworth, A.J. (1989). Content analysis. In P.Emmert & L.L. Barker (Eds.) *Measurement of Communication Behaviours* (pp.197-217). New York: Longman.
- Kelsey, J. (1995). *The New Zealand Experiment: A World model for Structural Adjustment?* Wellington: Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books.
- Langer, J.(1998). *Tabloid Television, Popular Journalism and the 'other news'*, London and New York, Routledge.

- Leiss, W. & Powell, D.A. (2004). *Mad Cows and Mother's Milk: The Perils of Poor Risk Communication*, McGill–Queen's University Press, Montreal Langer.
- Lealand, Geoff. (2002), 'Regulation-What Regulation? *Cultural Diversity and Local Content*', in *New Zealand Television: A Reader*, (J.Farnsworth & I. Hutchison, Eds.). Palmerston North, Dunmore Press.
- Lumby, C. (1999). *Gotcha: Life in a Tabloid World*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Macdonald, M. (2000). Rethinking Personalization, in *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates over Media Standards*, Sparks, C & Tulloch, J, (Eds), Macdonald, M. (2003). *Exploring Media Discourse*. London, Arnold.
- Macdonald, M. (2003). *Exploring Media Discourse*. London, Arnold.
- Madsen, A. (1984). *60 Minutes the Power and Politics of America's popular TV news show*.New York: Dodd, Mead & Company.
- Mascaro, T.A. (1994). *Lowering the voice of reason: The decline of network documentaries in the Reagan years*, Wayne State University, Michigan, USA.
- McChesney, R. (1998). The Political Economy of Global Communication. In R. W McChesney, E.M. Wood, & J., Bellamy Foster (Eds.), *Capitalism and the information age: the political economy of the global communication revolution*. New York, NY Monthly Review Press.
- McChesney, R.(2004).The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the Twenty-first Century, New York, Monthly-Review Press.
- McChesney, R. (2008). *The Political Economy of Media, enduring issues, emerging dilemmas*, New York, Monthly-review Press.
- McGregor, J. & Comrie,(2002). M. Changing Patterns in *What's News?* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- McIntyre, L.J. (2005). *Need to Know. Social science research methods*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- McManus, J. (1994). *Market Driven Journalism: Let the citizen beware?*, Ca:Sage Publications.
- Medved, Michael 2000. 'Television News: Information of Infotainment?' *USA Today* 128(2660):58-59.
- Mosco, V. (1989). *The pay-per society: Computers and communication in the information age*. Toronto: Garamond.

- Mosco, V. (1996). *The Political economy of communication: Rethinking and renewal*, London: Sage.
- Murdoch, G., & Golding, P. (1973). For a political economy of mass communications. In R. Miliband & J. Saville (Eds.), *Socialist register 1973* (pp. 205-234). London: Merlin.
- Murdoch, R. (1989). 'Freedom in Broadcasting', MacTaggart Memorial Lecture, Edinburgh International Film Festival, 25 August.
- Neumann, W.L. (2003). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- NZ Herald Online. (21.12.05). *Sainsbury gets Close Up-moustache and all*. Retrieved 17.1.07 from [www.nzherald.co.nz/search/story.cfm?storyid=00015581-17E6-1589-A86783027A](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/search/story.cfm?storyid=00015581-17E6-1589-A86783027A).
- Norris, P. (2002). News Media Ownership in New Zealand. In J. McGregor & M. Comrie (Eds.), *What's News: Reclaiming journalism in New Zealand* (pp. 33-55). Dunmore Press, Palmerston North.
- Paige, S. 1998 'That's Infotainment.' *Insight on the News*. June 8. 14(21):8-11.
- Patterson, T.E. (2000). *Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy- And What News Outlets can Do About It* The Joan Shorenstein Center. Harvard University John F.Kennedy School of Government.
- Peacock, A. (1986). *Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC*. July. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Home Office.
- Pilger, J. (2001) Impartiality: The Broadcasting Act 1990 and Impartiality, in B. Franklin (Ed), *British television Policy A Reader*, London, Routledge, pp.188-192.
- Postman, N. 1985. *Amusing Ourselves To Death* New York: Methuen.
- Prior, M (2007) *Post-Broadcast Democracy. How Media Choice Increases Inequality Political Involvement and Polarises Elections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quinn (2007), Management, restructuring and industrial relations: organizational change within the United Kingdom broadcasting industry,

1979-2002, PHD Thesis, University of St Andrews.

- Riffe, Daniel, Stephen Lacy, and Charles Aust. 'The Effectiveness of Random Constructed Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis', in *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 1, Spring 1996.
- Rosenberg, B. 2007. *News Media Ownership in New Zealand*. Retrieved March 5, 2006 from <http://www.mediascape.ac.nz/content/UserFiles/file/mediaown.pdf>
- Riffe, D., Lacy S., & Fico, F., (2005). *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Saunders, B. (2004, March 13). The Lost Language of debate. *The Listener*, 32-33.
- Shaw, (March 28, 1987) Grading 60 Minutes, its still strong but needs help in one key area. *TV Guide: USA*.
- Smith, A. (1974). *British Broadcasting*. Plymouth: David & Charles. Newton Abbott.
- Smythe, D. W. (1977). Communications: Blind spot of Western Marxism. *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 1(3), 1-27.
- Smythe, D.W. (1981). *Dependency Road*. Norwood, NJ:Ablex.
- Spicer, B., Powell., & Emanuel.,D.(2001). *The Remaking of Television New Zealand: 1984-1992*.Auckland University Press.
- Stempel III, G.H. (1989). Content Analysis. In G.H Stempel III, and B.H Westley (Eds.), *Research Methods in Mass Communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp.124-135). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Stockwell, S. (2004). Reconsidering the Functions of the Fourth Estate, paper presented at Australian Political studies Association, University of Adelaide, 2004.
- Television New Zealand. (n.d)*. Holmes programme Brief.
- TVNZ Charter, n.d. Retrieved on 11 July 2011 from <http://tvnz.co.nz/content/823782>
- Thompson, P. A. (2004). Unto God or unto Caesar? Television after the TVNZ Charter. *Communication Journal of New Zealand: He Kohinga Korero*, 5 (2), 59-90.

- Thompson, P (2005). 'Desultory Dividends: The Politics of Funding the TVNZ charter', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, no.117, November, 2005.
- Tracey, M.(1995). Non-Fiction television in A. Smith (Ed.), *Television An International History* (pp.118-147). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tracey, M. (1998). *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, G. (2005) *Ending the Affair. The decline of television current affairs in Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Turner, G & Cunningham, S. (2000) *The Australian TV Book*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making News. A Study in the construction of reality*. New York & London: The Free press.
- Tuchman, G. (1991). Qualitative methods in the study of the news. In K.B Jensen & N.W Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass media communication research* (pp.79-92). London: Routledge.
- TVNZ (n.d). *Face to Face with Kim Hill*. Retrieved on February 1, 2012 from <http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/410965/414355.TVNZ>
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1988) *News as discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1991). *Racism and the press*. London: Routledge.
- Vetthen, P.H Nuijten, K & Beentjes, J.W.J. (2006). Research Note: *Sensationalism in Dutch Current Affairs Programmes 1992-2001*. *European Journal of Communication* 21(2), 227-237.
- Wasko, J. (2004). The Political Economy of Communications. In J. Downing, D. McQuail, P. Schlesinger, E. Wartells, (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Media Studies* (pp.309-330). London: Sage.
- Wheen, F. (1985). *Television*. London: Century Publishing.
- Willard, R., & Tracey, M. (1990). Worldwide challenges to public service broadcasting. *Journal of Communication*, 40 (2): 8-27.
- Wimmer, R.D., & Dominick, J.R. (1991). *Mass Media research: An Introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup>. ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Winston, B. (1990). On counting the wrong things. In M. Alvarado, & J.O. Thompson (Eds.), *The media reader* (pp.50-64). London: British Film

Institute.

Witchel, D. (2005, February 5-11). Quite Hard News, *The Listener* 70-71.

'*World in Action meets Yoof TV...*' (January 18, 1999) *Guardian*, pp.6-7.

Wulfmeyer, K.T. (1985). How and why anonymous attribution is used by *Time* and *Newsweek*. *Journalism Quarterly*, 62(1), 81-86.

Wyatt, R.O., & Badger, D.P. (1993). A new typology for journalism and mass communication writing. *Journalism Educator*, 48 (1), 3-11.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX 1:**

**Table 15**

### ***Comries Subject Categories***

<i>Politics and Government Acts</i>	Government acts and politics at local, regional, national and international level
<i>War and defence</i>	War, defence, rebellion, armed intervention, military use of space Includes World War 2 anniversaries and Nazi hunts.
<i>Diplomacy and foreign relations</i>	Both foreign and domestic items dealing with diplomacy and foreign relations. Includes United Nations. Covers such issues as ANZUS and the nuclear debate
<i>Economic activity</i>	General economic activity, share market, money, prices, labour wages, natural resources, transportation and travel.
<i>Agriculture and environment</i>	Includes fishing and forestry as primary export industries (subcategory of the environment)
<i>Public health and welfare</i>	Health, public welfare, social and safety measures, welfare of children and marriage and marriage relations.
<i>Education</i>	Includes resourcing and industrial matters.
<i>Science, technology and invention</i>	Science and technology other than that related to defence or health and medicine.
<i>Crime</i>	All crime stories, including criminal proceedings in court, police stories and police resourcing.
<i>Accidents and disasters</i>	Both human-made and natural disasters.
<i>Sport</i>	Organised sport (includes climbing).
<i>Culture</i>	Classic arts, history, ethnic (excluding Maori), entertainment and amusements, media (sub-categories popular and classic)
<i>Maori</i>	Maori issues include political issues, resources and culture (Maori moral problems and crime sub-categories)
<i>Human interest</i>	Human interest, obituaries, animals, cute children, juvenile interest Royals and weather, when not part of accident and disaster category.
<i>Public moral problems</i>	Human relations and moral problems, including alcohol, divorce, sex, race relations and civil court proceedings.

## APPENDIX 2:

Table 16

### Cook's Category Classification System.

#### The Classification System

: The Classification System.		
	Category.	Abbr.
1	Domestic News; Politics; Misc.	DNPM
2	Domestic News; Politics; Policy.	DNPP
3	Domestic News; Politics; Taxation, Finance, Inflation.	DNPT
4	Domestic News; Politics; SOE's, Assets, Public Service.	DNPO
5	Domestic News; Politics; Health.	DNPH
6	Domestic News; Politics; Education.	DNPE
7	Domestic News; Politics; Accommodation.	DNPA
8	Domestic News; Politics; International Relations.	DNPIR
9	Domestic News; Politics; Strategy, Polls, Elections, Personalities.	DNPS
10	Domestic News; Economics; Misc.	DNEM
11	Domestic News; Economics; Interest Rates, Prices.	DNEI
12	Domestic News; Economics; Consumer Information.	DNEC
13	Domestic News; Economics; International Trade and Investment	DNEIT
14	Domestic News; Economics; Sharemarket, Corporate Affairs	DNES
15	Domestic News; Economics; Health.	DNEH
16	Domestic News; Economics; Education.	DNEE
17	Domestic News; Economics; Accommodation.	DNEA
18	Domestic News; Social Conflict, Race Relations, Immigration.	DNSC
19	Domestic News; Labour and Employment, ACC, Wages, Conditions.	DNL
20	Domestic News; Agriculture, Farming, Fisheries (Non-Maori)	DNAF
21	Domestic News: Justice, Police, Law Changes	DNJ
22	Domestic News; Crime Misc.	DNCM
23	Domestic News; Crime; Customs, Security, Jails.	DNCC
24	Domestic News; Courts; Crime; Property.	DNCCP
25	Domestic News; Courts; Crime; Violent.	DNCCV
26	Domestic News; Crime; Property.	DNCP
27	Domestic News; Crime; Violence.	DNCV
28	Domestic News; Road Accidents, Road Toll, Vehicular Crime.	DNRA
29	Domestic News; Accommodation, Health, Education, Misc.	DNAM
30	Domestic News; National Defence, Military, NZ Forces Overseas	DND
31	Domestic News; Transport, Travel and Tourism.	DNTT
32	Domestic News; Environment.	DNEV
33	Domestic News; Health and Technological Developments.	DNHT
34	Domestic News; Accidents and Disasters; Man Made.	DNDM
35	Domestic News; Natural Disasters, Accidents and Weather Extremes.	DNDN
36	Domestic News; Human-interest, Historical Items.	DNHI
37	Domestic News; Celebrities and Obituaries	DNCO
38	Domestic News, Miscellaneous.	DNM

### ***APPENDIX 3:***

#### **Cook's Hypotheses**

1. *Commercialisation*: That the size of the news segment (the amount of the bulletin devoted to news, rather than advertising, sport, weather and banter between the presenters) would decrease, and the size of these other elements would increase.
  
2. *Morselisation*: That the pace of the bulletin would be speeded up, with shorter stories, sound-bites and shot length.
  
3. *Depoliticisation*: That the coverage of expressly political issues would decrease and be replaced by more psychological and less overtly political crime and human-interest items.
  
4. *Gaming Orientation*: That the coverage of political issues and events, particularly during election years, would be reduced to 'horse-race' style coverage with a greater reliance on polling data, and less discussion of policy issues.
  
5. *Personalisation*: That the amount of stories about victims, particularly crime, would increase and the use of expert voices would be replaced by the voices of ordinary people.
  
6. *Tabloidisation*: That an inversion of serious journalistic norms would occur,

with an increase in reportage of the dramatic, the spectacular and the sensational

at the expense of serious reportage of serious topics.

7. *Decontextualisation*: That there would be a reduction in the number of

cited sources and references to verifiable evidence in favour of more

universalised narratives.

8. *Centralisation*: That the number of stories situated in Auckland would

increase at the expense of regional coverage.

9. *Trivialisation*: That there would be increase in the use of theme music and

presenter chit-chat.

10. *Familiarisation*: That the adoption of a dual anchor format would include an

extension of the 'news family' to include weather and sports presenters and an

increase in chit-chat to foster para-social interaction.

11. *Atomisation*: That there would be a reduction in stories about collective

action like unionism at the expense of stories about individual actors portrayed as

villains and victims as in crime coverage.

12. *Commodification*: Finally, that there would be a reduction in stories that

serve the needs of the audience as citizens, and an increase in stories that serve

their needs as consumers.