HOW TELEVISION NEWS BROADCASTS IN KANSAS CITY CONTRIBUTE TO VIEWERS’ MEAN WORLD SYNDROME

by

Amanda Fischer-Penner

An Abstract of a thesis submitted partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication in the Department of Communication University of Central Missouri

October 2014
No matter where a person lives, he or she can turn on the local news to find reports of murder, automobile accidents, kidnapping, and other depressing or frightening stories, helping to create what has become known as mean world syndrome. Yet there are few in-depth, qualitative studies on exactly how television news broadcasts frame stories to further this syndrome in viewers. This study provides an in-depth analysis of three Kansas City 10:00 pm broadcasts and details how symbols, such as descriptive word choices, vocal and facial expressions, music, background images, and more, create a negative atmosphere for viewers.
HOW TELEVISION NEWS BROADCASTS IN KANSAS CITY CONTRIBUTE TO VIEWERS’ MEAN WORLD SYNDROME

by

Amanda Fischer-Penner

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication in the Department of Communication University of Central Missouri

October 2014
HOW TELEVISION NEWS BROADCASTS IN KANSAS CITY CONTRIBUTE TO VIEWERS’ MEAN WORLD SYNDROME

by

Amanda Fischer-Penner

APPROVED:

Thesis Chair: Dr. Joseph Moore
Thesis Committee Member: Dr. Wendy Geiger
Thesis Committee Member: Dr. Pam Glasnapp

ACCEPTED:

Chair, Department of Communication: Dr. Carol Atkinson

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ vi
CHAPER 1: INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................1

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .............................................................................5

   Behind the Scenes of a News Broadcast........................................................................5
   Sensationalized Violence in the News ...........................................................................7
   Pressure for High Ratings ..............................................................................................9
   Effects of Sensationalized Storytelling ........................................................................11
   Mean World Syndrome ................................................................................................12
   Violence in the News ...................................................................................................15
   Semiotics ......................................................................................................................19

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ...........................................................................................25

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS ......................................................................................................28

   KMBC: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 13, 2012 ....................................................28
   KCTV: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 3, 2012 .......................................................62
   KSHB: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 13, 2012 .....................................................91

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION ..............................................................................................120

   Anchors and Reporters ...............................................................................................120
   Framing Investigative Reports ...................................................................................122
   Breaking News ...........................................................................................................123
   Limitations ..................................................................................................................124

REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................131
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Anchor Lara Mortiz Emphasizing Temperatures Near Freezing Mark</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Anchor Lara Moritz Showing Emotion While Reporting a School Attack</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Extreme Close-Up of an 11-Year-Old Who Was Accidentally Shot and Killed</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Murder Suspect Shown on Screen for 21 Seconds</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Investigative Report of Karla Kobestky’s Disappearance Featured Numerous Dark, Blurred, and Mysterious Images</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

No matter where a person lives, he or she can turn on the local news to find reports of murder, automobile accidents, kidnapping, and other depressing or frightening stories (Chermak, 1995; Johnson, 1996). Kansas City news broadcasts are no different.

I believe that Kansas City’s local news is often filled with stories of murders, stabbings, and robberies, reinforcing the idea that if it bleeds, it leads. Yet it is not just the news that always seems to be negative; it is also the anchors and meteorologists. Those who report the weather never appear, at least to me, to be happy with the weather and temperatures. It’s always too hot or too cold, and severe storms or snow are always somehow just around the corner. If it is nice outside, they advise viewers to enjoy it, because it won’t last for long.

All this negativity surrounding the news can eventually make viewers weary, and heavy viewers may experience what has become known as mean world syndrome (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), the belief that society is violent and unsafe. Someone afflicted with mean world syndrome may take steps to feel protected, such as lock doors, cling on to her purse, avoid strangers, and even change her political vote, for example, to support a candidate who supports capital punishment (Nari & Sullivan, 2001).

This raises ethical questions regarding journalists and the companies they work for. The decision to broadcast a story is often based on what will get the most ratings (Chermak 1995; Johnson 1996; Winerip, 1998), and therefore, the most advertising revenue; stories are supposed to be based on its value to the public. I feel sensationally-based reports have turned broadcasts into entertainment rather than valuable programming. Many times upcoming stories are misrepresented by teasers that suggest a
major crisis is happening, but when the news story finally airs after much viewer anticipation, it turns out there is really nothing to worry about (KSHB, 2012; KMBC 2012). Fred Brown, a member of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) ethics committee, stated that media outlets tend to focus on startling stories, such as shocking crimes, because they know it will attract viewers (Buckman, 2006). He felt news directors needed to balance the two SPJ ethical codes of “seek truth and reporting it” and “minimize harm” (p. 35) into more newscasts. The Society of Professional Journalists’ preamble to its code of ethics states:

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility (Code of Ethics 2008).

The SPJ code of ethics also states journalists should not misrepresent headlines, news teases and promotional materials. By making violence and scandalous news the focus of programming, I believe news broadcasters also break the ethical code of recognizing their “special obligation to ensure that the public’s business is conducted in the open and government records are open to inspection” (Code of Ethics, 2008). I would say reporters also violate ethical codes by insisting on interviews with those recently affected by tragedy and filming outside of their homes.
Weitzer and Kubrin (2004) concluded that most people get their news through television broadcasts, rather than newspapers and radio broadcasts, so the content of television news affects a large portion of the population. While a large amount of quantitative research has analyzed violence in the news and content on television broadcasts (Baily, Fox, & Grabe, 2013; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Singnorielli, 1980; Johnson, 1996; Marin, 2012; Slattery, Doremus, & Marcus, 2001; Wilkinson & Fletcher, 1995; Yanich, 2013), there appears to be little to no in-depth, qualitative studies on exactly how news content is packaged for viewers to interpret.

Therefore, the purpose of my study was to analyze if and how the symbolic images, words, vocal tone, music, and graphics add to the negativity of news narratives, thereby escalating the impact it has on its viewers. My critical analysis looks at three Kansas City news stations’ nightly broadcasts and how verbal and visual symbols may be interpreted by their viewers. The motive behind this study is the assumption of an overpowering presence of negativity in the news and leading, descriptive words spoken by anchors guiding how viewers should interpret stories. Journalism is meant to be objective – to inform the viewer what is happening so he can decide on his own what to think.

For this study, I will answer three research questions. First, how are news stories being interpreted by producers, anchors, and reporters? This is answered by looking at what words are used to describe narratives, vocal tones in reporting, and graphics and music accompanying each story. Second, what narratives are given the most importance by placing them at the beginning of newscasts or under the title, “Breaking News”? 
Finally, in finding for the first two questions show that local news has a negative tone, how are the elements researched adding to viewers’ possible mean world syndrome?

The remainder of this paper first provides background information on the subject of broadcast news. This includes a look behind the scenes at how stories are compiled, sensationalism and violence in news, and pressure for high viewer ratings. Second is my review of literature, looking at previous studies regarding mean world syndrome, sensationalized violence in news, and semiotics. Third is the methodology I followed to perform a critical analysis. Fourth is the analysis of three Kansas City news broadcasts, followed by the conclusion. Lastly are the limitations of my study.
Production

Behind the Scenes of a News Broadcast

It takes a lot of people to get a news broadcast on the air. There are those who decide what is news; those who film the visual images; others who appear on air; and many more. There are also a lot of decisions to be made, such as what stories should be covered, who will report what, how much time each story be allotted, and what order they should be aired in. So to get a more personal and in-depth look behind the scenes of a local news broadcast, Ronald N. Jacobs (1996) spent twelve weeks observing a news station in Los Angeles and analyzed how it created narratives for its audiences. He noted since television news was an audio-visual medium, news stories that allow for an interesting visual are more likely to be covered than a story with no visual representation.

Interpreting symbols within a narrative comes into play when deciding how news footage is to be used. Jacobs (1996) said that how a news reporter interprets footage will affect the manner in which he or she retells the story (p. 379). For example, footage of a serious car wreck on a busy interstate highway could be interpreted in different ways; if nobody was hurt, it could have “miraculous” interpretation, yet it could also take a dark, serious tone as a near-death experience.

Footage used to accompany a news story can be obtained a couple of different ways. First, old footage or graphics of previously recorded images can be found in a video library. Old footage is sometimes used for new stories, especially when no updated images are available. Jacobs (1996) described how footage of the Rodney King crisis in a video library was often used for new developments on the story since new visual
images had not been recorded. Library footage also provides visual images for continuing stories, such as the Rodney King crisis, the O.J. Simpson trial, or the recent Joplin, Missouri tornado, which may appear in daily broadcasts or have new developments every week.

Yet despite the availability of a video library, Jacobs (1996) explained that new footage is highly valuable, since it can help establish a station’s authority by showing the station was actually at the scene of a story. The merit of being at a news scene is often illustrated in the broadcast; just think about how often one can hear a station proclaiming it was first or the only station at the scene. Since obtaining these new and valuable images is so important, a large amount of station resources are devoted to filming new footage. A station is likely to have helicopters and several news vans available so fresh images may be obtained. Plus, to ensure that breaking news is covered, at least one group of camera personnel and a vehicle is always available (p. 380).

The idea of breaking news, a staple in Kansas City news broadcasts and across the country, is another subject Jacobs (2006) addressed. He described workers at the Los Angeles station as knowing that breaking news was automatically newsworthy material and had set steps in place to cover the story type. It was simply understood that footage was not needed to report breaking news, so a reporter is initially shown on-air in the newsroom giving the story details to the audience in a rushed tone of voice (p. 381). The rushed voice comes as a result of the reporter, also known as the “talent,” deciding what type of story the narrative is and dramatizing it through nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions and vocal tone that match the mood of the narrative (p. 384). These
nonverbals send a message to viewers about whether the story is somber, uplifting, or disturbing, to name a few.

To help add to a narrative, breaking news is often presented in a “this just in” manner (Jacobs, 1996). He sites a time when an on-air reporter was handed a slip of paper with information regarding a story. The newscaster purposely waited to pick up the paper until he was sure the camera was on him, and at that time, he finally picked up the slip that had been sitting in front of him for 90 seconds. Jacobs noted that the information on the slip could have easily been inserted into the teleprompter the talent read from. Yet the act of picking the paper up from the desk added dramatics of the broadcast.

News stations do not only cover breaking news; producers and news directors must play their famous role as gatekeepers and decide what events to push aside and what to cover. Buckman (2006) explained those in the journalism field have to create a balance between what viewers want to see, what will bring in advertising revenue, and what viewers need to know. Buckman said that news directors have to consider which stories have the greatest value for viewers. Priority is given to narratives regarding the public’s safety.

Sensationalized Violence in the News

Scholars have created several definitions for what constitutes sensationalism. One that seems to be all-encompassing defines sensationalism as provoking “more sensory and emotional reaction than what society has deemed proper to desire or experience” (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). This means sensational news will elicit strong emotions within viewers, whether it be fear, excitement, or outrage. Grabe, Zhou
and Barnett, state that while this may seem like a modern phenomenon, it has been around since the 1500s in Europe. Initial reactions to sensationalized stories found within the penny press, yellow journalism, and now the popularity of tabloid news have all incited unhappiness from the public.

To test the allure of sensational news, Bailey, Fox, and Grabe (2013) examined television news channel changing. They analyzed 50 participants’ behavior while watching four simultaneous television news channels, noting time spent watching channels, heart rate, and sensation seeking. The studied found that the more sensational a news story was, the more time they spent watching that particular channel. Likewise, stories that aroused viewers’ interest, such as drive by shootings, tornados, and protests, that were also sensationalized through music, sound effects, slow motion, and flash frames, were an overall favorite format.

As Baily, Fox, and Grabe (2013) also noted, with today’s television technologies, sensationalism is not created with just written words, but also music, camera techniques, and high-quality graphics that aim to grab viewers’ attention and stir emotions behind narratives (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). Camera shots that zoom in close on subjects encourage viewers to become involved in the story and are often involved in sensational stories. Then there are the “bells and whistles” (p. 642) that are designed to hold viewers’ attention. Sound effects, vocal delivery, and music help add to the anxiety and excitement viewers feelings.

So a lot goes into creating a newscast. Producers must decide what angle to report a story from, words used to describe the story, as well as what visual effects to use, all of which add to the impact the story has on viewers.
Pressure for High Ratings

Johnson (1996) wondered if news directors were simply portraying a harmful world as it is in reality or if they were attempting to reach higher ratings. So he monitored 100 news broadcasts from four varying television stations’ news; a local news broadcasts, network news, cable television news, and a superstation’s news. He focused on five types of news stories that made up what he called violent, conflict, and suffering news. The categories were violent crimes, tragedy and suffering, conflict and discord (slander, divorces, fraud, etc), social and collective protests involving violence or the threat of, and war and military affairs. Using these categories, Johnson found that more than half of all news stories contained some sort of violence, conflict, and suffering (p. 207). What is more, he discovered that two-thirds of the time, news programs gave added emphasis to violent stories by placing them at the beginning of the program; 64 percent of the first five stories in the average broadcast contained violence, conflict, or suffering themes, positioning the stories as the most important for viewers to know about.

Complementing the previously mentioned study, Yanich (2013) performed a content analysis of news broadcasts from four Designated Market Areas (DMA), groupings trademarked by the Nielson Company. The broadcasts studied aired in 2002 and included Kansas City, whose DMA included Nashville, Grand Rapids, and Albuquerque. Yanich found that, specifically, Kansas City’s broadcasts were 60 percent local content, while the DMA’s percentage was 74 percent. As a group, 36 percent of broadcasts studied featured crime-related stories, 38 percent was public issues, 15 percent “other” (entertainment, fires, accidents, disasters, etc.), 12 percent human interest, and eight percent government and politics. Yanich noted that broadcasts often began with
crime-related stories. Thirty-nine percent of the time, crime stories were in the first time block. The next highest percentage for a story type was public interest at 22 percent.

Chermak (1995) noted that there is more pressure for high ratings in television than there is a push for high circulations in newspaper; therefore, television places more importance on marketability and shocking news. Indeed, some stations have tried to break away from the violent and sensational narratives, only to experience a drop in ratings. For example, In 2000, a Chicago station embarked on a nine-month experiment to broadcast longer, more in-depth stories (Campbell, 2000). Despite much praise for the change, many viewers ultimately changed the channel, and the station was forced to abandon its new format due to pressure for higher ratings.

WESH-TV, a station in Orlando, Florida, tried a similar change in 1998 when it hired Bill Bauman as its new general manager (Winerip, 1998). When he announced they would stop sensational crime stories, the staff was delighted, yet viewers eventually tuned out. A year after the change, Bauman said the station’s ratings were the lowest they had been since his arrival (p. 31). Instead of watching smarter news, viewers were tuning into the stations that focused on crime. This is because, according to some, viewers do not want serious news, but rather want to be entertained.

When ratings are low, Bauman and other general managers and news directors feel the pressure to raise them; if they fail, they are either fired or have to move to another station (Winerip, 1998). This pressure is due to the desires of making a profit, and when stations are publicly owned or part of a conglomerate, owners are not willing to make less money for stronger news content. Instead of focusing on viewers as citizens, they are being viewed as an audience, making the number one goal to gain their attention
rather than educating them (Slattery, Doremus, Marcus, 2001). Gerbner (1996) blames conglomerates for much of the violence on television. “Today . . . a handful of global conglomerates can own many outlets in all media, deny entry to new and alternative perspectives, and homogenize content” (p. 28).

News narratives are often made even more violent and threatening through sensationalizing the subject matter, which some feel is the result of business profit pressures; in order to make money, a station must get high viewer ratings, which can easily be achieved by including sensationalized stories. So rather than reporting on public affairs, news broadcasts focus on more entertaining news. The following section will present studies that show there is evidence that violent news can have a psychological affect on viewers, creating the sense that the world is a meaner and more immoral place than it is in reality.

**Effects of Sensationalized Storytelling**

Through the numerous studies of news broadcasts that have been performed and will be discussed in the Review of Literature, it is apparent that violent and sensational stories are prominent and can have negative psychological effects on viewers. Yet despite this criticism and the idea that these stories are taking up valuable time for other, more important stories, they remain a staple of broadcasts. Depending on whom one asks, there are different reasons for this. Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) said many feel sensational stories are important to include because it helps sustain society’s shared meanings of what is morally right and wrong. By broadcasting news about robberies, murder, and other violent acts, people are reminded that it is socially unacceptable, and
those who commit immoral crimes must face repercussions such as public court trials and jail.

To get a better understanding of past findings in regard to the effects television has on viewers, this review of literature will now address studies that discuss mean world syndrome, sensationalized violence in the news, and finally a look at semiotics.

**Mean World Syndrome**

It may be of no surprise that violent and sensational narratives in the news affect viewers psychologically. Decades ago, George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976) suggested the powerful influence television held over its viewers. He felt it was a more powerful medium than print or radio due to the idea that viewers did not have to be literate to gain information, and it has visual reinforcement on top of audio messages (p. 176). He believed that while television presents numerous viewing choices to a variety of different people and communities, it still connects them all through its symbolic environment. “Television is likely to remain for a long time the chief source of repetitive and ritualized symbol systems cultivating the common consciousness of the most far-flung and heterogeneous mass publics in history” (p. 174). While Gerbner and his colleagues focused on shows meant as entertainment, I believe the same idea can be applied to news broadcasts. As noted earlier, stations that change formats to “smarter” news lose viewers because they are unable to hold viewers’ attention, so the public appears to desire “infotainment.” Due to time constraints, broadcast news must pick and choose what stories receive coverage and just how much time each story deserves; stories placed at the beginning of a broadcast are portrayed as the most important, as are stories that receive more air time, signifying to viewers what they should care most about.
Gerbner and Gross (1976) felt passionately about the effects television had on its viewers, hence the creation of Cultivation Theory, which is the idea that television teaches and develops a person’s facts, standards, and values of society. He created three categories of television viewers: heavy, those who watch at least four hours a day; medium, those who watch between two and four hours; and light, those who watch less than two hours a day. Because there is such an abundance of violence on television, heavy viewers normally believe the world is actually more dangerous than it truly is.

Gerbner’s interest in violence on television led him and others to a 12 year study over how much violence was on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli, 1980). For one week every fall between 1967 and 1979, samples were taken from dramatic programming aired during prime-time and weekend daytime on network television. To rate programs, the Violence Index was used, made up of three observations: how much violence occurred in the sample, the frequency and rate of violent acts, and how many characters were depicted as being victims, victimizers, or both. The study found that over the 12 years, the percentage of characters associated with violence remained about the same, with two-thirds of male characters and one-half of female characters involved in some sort of violence. They also found that female characters were more likely than male characters to be portrayed as victims, and minority female characters were much more likely to experience a violent act instead of performing the act (p. 13).

Out of Cultivation Theory and Gerbner’s 12-year study comes mean world syndrome, described as when a person views society as a violent and fearful place (Gerbner, et. al 1980). The more time a person spends watching television, the more
likely he or she is to claim a perception of the world that mirrors the world portrayed on television. Viewers of lower education levels and income brackets are more likely to undergo this effect, as people with high income and education levels “have the most diversified patterns of cultural opportunities and activities” (p. 13). Yet the effects of watching television can be so strong, that even heavy viewers who are well educated and earn more money begin to view the world as a more dangerous place. This is known as mainstreaming, meaning that differences of social forces may be diminished or even absent among heavy viewers.

Other than education and income level, Gerbner (1996) believed some population groups were more influenced than others by the negative content they witnessed on television, something he termed “resonance” (p. 13). The more television content mirrors, or resonates, a viewer’s actual life, or even his or her perceived reality, the more harmful that content will be, as the viewer is getting a double dose of a particular message. For example, a woman who lives in a community with an abundance of sexual assault occurrences will have a double dose of the message that she is at risk of being a victim if she witnesses women being assaulted on television.

While some believe violence on television is likely to cause aggressive behavior in viewers, Gerbner (1996) felt the true impact of violence on television actually goes much deeper, affecting a person’s behaviors and views of reality. In a magazine interview with Scott Stossel (1997), Gerbner said that a television viewer observes such a large quantity of aggressive behavior that he can become desensitized and believe aggression is normal, which then leads to mean world syndrome (p. 91). Mean world syndrome contributes to feelings of fear and anxiety of society, which results in support
for stronger measures of protection. In fact, Gerbner believed mean world syndrome was partly why the majority of Americans now support capital punishment, when they did not thirty years prior to the interview (Stossel, 1997, p. 91).

**Violence in the News**

The effects of cultivation theory and mean world syndrome have inspired countless studies that have discovered just how big the impact of cultivation and mean world syndrome is (Wilkinson & Fletcher, 1995; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Lett, DiPietro & Johnson, 2004; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). One news aspect that helps add to mean world syndrome is the appearance of blood, which also adds impact to the story. Wilkinson and Fletcher (1995) performed a study to discover how the amount of blood shown affected viewers, noting that the more blood a story contains, the more sensationalized it becomes. Wilkinson and Fletcher noted that the effects of the news may depend on a personality type known as locus of control, which is how strongly one feels he is able to control events in his life. An individual with internal locus of control believes he has power over what happens to him, while someone with external locus of control feels he has no power, making him more vulnerable to violent news stories. After participants of their study watched selected news stories containing blood, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The results showed that the average participant had a high internal locus of control, indicating that most people feel they are in control of their lives. This, according to Wilkinson and Fletcher, makes them less susceptible to mean world syndrome. Yet participants who did have external locus of control and witnessed news stories with more blood were more likely to suffer from mean world syndrome (p. 175).
When they watch news stories, such as car accidents, viewers can experience “higher degrees of fearfulness, anxiety, and uncertainty” (p. 175).

One study found that news coverage tends to portray minorities as the “bad guys.” Dixon and Linz (2000) performed a content analysis of Los Angeles news broadcasts and found that blacks and Latinos were overly represented as perpetrators of crime. Black citizens were twice more likely than white citizens to be depicted as perpetrators (p. 558-559). The analysis also found that whites were more likely than blacks and Latinos to be depicted as victims of crime, particularly homicide. “43% of homicide victims portrayed on television news were white, 23% were black, 19% were Latino” (p. 560). According to cultivation theory, this can cause white viewers to believe that blacks and Latinos are dangerous and more likely to inflict harm onto them (p. 553).

Another side of violence in the news is embedded sensationalism (Slattery, Doremus, & Marcus, 2001). Embedded sensationalism occurs when a story includes a “visual portrayal or detailed verbal description of a topic or topics that, taken alone, would be coded as sensationalism and/or human interest” (p. 294). For example, I would say coverage of the 2011 Casey Anthony court case made the trial appear, at times, very dramatic, focusing on Anthony’s party lifestyle; however, the reason the trial was occurring was because of a child being murder. Slattery, Doremus, and Marcus (2001) set out to examine just how much sensationalism, including embedded sensationalism, was occurring in network news as compared to news in 1968. They found that coverage of sensational stories had increased only a small amount since 1968. “Stories containing sensationalism and human interest . . . increased from 3.4% of network news content in 1968 to 9.6% in 1996” (p. 298). Yet the authors pointed out that network news did not
cover the same amount of violence as local news because it is free for local news stations to obtain local stories, while networks would have to pay for the information and footage; network news only report on violent narratives “unless they are singularly spectacular” (p. 298). Therefore, viewers of strictly network news would have less exposure to sensationalized stories than viewers of local broadcast news.

Once a news viewer begins to feel he or she is in some sort of danger, he may begin to take precautions to protect himself, a definite sign of mean world syndrome. Making sure doors are locked, setting stricter curfews for children, and keeping a firm grip on one’s purse may be seen as just a few ways to prevent possible harm. Nari and Sullivan (2001) performed a study that found positive correlations between the amount of television a person watches and the amount of violence he perceives in society, his views of the world as a mean place, and his precautions taken to prevent violence from happening to him. Preventative measures taken by viewers can be as simple as locking doors or buying weapons, yet Nari and Sullivan state it can even influence how one votes and their political views. Someone who has mean world syndrome may begin supporting political figures who are harder on crime and criminals and support the death penalty.

An example of Cultivation Theory can be seen in Lett, DiPietro and Johnson’s (2004) study that looked at how the attacks on September 11 impacted college students. The images and reports of planes slamming into the World Trade Towers were powerful imagery that filled the news and caused many to fear foreigners, flying, and just everyday survival. Lett, DiPietro, and Johnson chose to study how this event affected college students, since the environment of higher education can often be much more diverse than students’ previous homes. While the study found no relationship between the amount of
coverage viewed and one’s perception of the amount of violence in America created by foreigners, there was evidence showing that the more coverage a person watched, the more negative his views were towards his individual Islamic peers. Yet students viewed Islamic worshipers as a whole non-threatening. Lett, DiPeietro, and Johnson explained this was most likely due to news coverage explaining that those responsible for September 11 were extremists.

The study of violence and sensationalism in television news is particularly important because many people depend on the medium for their local news to keep abreast on what is going on in their communities, giving local television broadcasters power over their viewers. Weitzer and Kubrin (2004) randomly surveyed more than 450 citizens of Washington, D.C., and found that 30 percent of citizens considered local television news their main source of information, 26 percent went to daily newspapers, and only seven percent listened to the radio news (Remaining percentages got their news through other outlets). What was especially interesting is the significant correlation between those who relied on local television news and the amount of fear they felt, while all other listeners and readers of other news sources did not feel a significant amount of fear. In fact, daily newspaper and radio news had a negative relationship with their audiences’ fear levels (p. 508). This suggests local news broadcasts do have a power over their viewers’ emotions and view of society. With this power, news broadcasts are overlooking significant stories in order to air more violent, sensational narratives that grab viewers’ attention (Buckman, 2006; Slattery, Doremus and Marcus, 2001; Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001).
Mean world syndrome may not be the only psychological side effect of violence in the news. Marin et al. (2012) performed a study to see if negative news is physiologically stressful, affects one’s tendency to be reactive to a subsequent stressor and affects remembrance for these news. The study had 60 participants read either 24 neutral news stories or 24 negative news stories. After reading ten minutes of their news segments, participants were then exposed to a “anticipation phase” to monitor their stress; for this study, they did a mock job interview and took salivary samples to measure cortisol. Marin et. al’s study found that for both men and women, negative news did not increase cortisol levels. On the other hand, they did find that women exposed to negative news had a higher physiological reaction to the subsequent stressor (in this case, the mock job interview). They also found that these women were able to recall the news better than their male counterparts and women who exposed to neutral news. These findings demonstrate the impact media can have on individuals’ physiological and psychological well-being, not just at the time of exposure but in their subsequent activities.

Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs, has been highly researched and analyzed over the years. Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) devoted his time to semiotics and believed a sign consisted of a concept and a sound image, known as the signifier and the signified. The sound image Saussure spoke of was not an actual spoken word, but rather a physical object that has created a psychological impression on a person and how it makes us think and feel (p. 66). What many people refer to as a symbol, Saussure called a “signifier,” and the concept it represents is the “signified.”
According to Saussure (1959), visual signifiers can have a variety of dimensions, or meanings on their own, while spoken and written signifiers are presented in chains that create their context (p. 70). The value of a symbol depends on its relation to other symbols in the chain, or context; a symbol that is the focus of a sentence or sequence has been given more value than others in the context.

People do not just use symbols to explain happenings and physical items in their world, but also use them to frame their reality. Sturken and Cartwright (2005) wrote that a symbol’s meaning is created through the society and historical period it comes from and the social context surrounding it. For example, the image of a burning car in America during the 1970s could symbolize civil unrest, but now in the 2000s, that same image would bring thoughts of international terrorism and hatred (p. 26). Sturken and Cartwright also explained that humans are “trained to read for cultural codes such as aspects of the image that signify gendered, racial, or class-specific meanings” (p. 26). Where and in what manner an image is seen helps give it meaning; a celebrity’s mug shot printed on millions of magazine covers will convey different thoughts than a person’s portrait hanging in a famous art museum.

Semiotics can be used to analyze media due to the idea that media, such as television, are made up of varying symbols organized to create specific impressions, convey ideas, or evoke meaning in an audience. Sturken and Cartwright (2005) explained that in the world of television news, the value of an image is dependent on how quickly it can be disseminated via broadcast and how many viewers it reaches (p. 35). By analyzing the semiotics of a news broadcast, the researcher is finding how the broadcast’s producer created signs and how viewers will interpret the signs.
One must remember that humans are very different from one another, so words, or symbols, have varying personal meanings to each individual. Saussure (1959) made certain to mention that the meaning of a sign is completely arbitrary; it can have a variety of meanings (p. 68). One’s interpretation of a symbol or group of symbols is based on his previous experiences with the word or words. When it comes to television news, viewers of the media do not always interpret symbols in the manner intended by the broadcast’s producer (Sturken and Cartwright, 2005). So while news producers may not intend to frighten viewers and make them fearful of society, viewers may decode a news narrative in just that way.

The idea that different people have different meanings of symbols is based on several reasons. The first is situational variance, meaning where one is physically will determine what a symbol means; for example, the word “shot” has a different meaning in a college bar than it would at a police firing range. The second variance is perspectival meaning, as people have varying perspectives on life and objects. The third reason is known as polysemy, or “the multiplicity of meanings a work can support” (Fiske, 1987, p. 18). Every human has past experiences or conditions, such as race, class, and gender, which determine how they interpret a word/symbol. These past experiences influence how a symbol will be interpreted. Polyvalence, the fourth reason for varying symbol meanings, is the idea that while two or more people may have a shared understanding of what a symbol means, they will disagree with its rightness, beauty, or justice (Condit, 1989). To illustrate, two people may agree with the meaning behind a piece of artwork, but disagree on its attractiveness.
Yet another reason for varying symbol meanings is multivocality. Multivocality is the idea that a statement or symbol can have multiple voices for viewers to hear, similar to polysemy (Fiske 1987). To help illustrate, take the phrase “All men are created equal.” One person may hear the phrase and think of the founding father Thomas Jefferson, while another may think the group of representatives who helped create the Constitution; yet another person may think of the word “men” is emphasized (Ducrot, 1996).

Finally, recoding is a reason people interpret symbols differently. Recoding refers to the idea that people will take a message, analyze it, and create different meanings based upon past experiences (Real, 1989). To me, this brings to mind the Jena 6 controversy in 2007, where six black high school students were arrested after a school fight where a white student was hurt. The black students were charge with attempted second-degree murder and it took an entirely white jury only two days to convict the first of the Jena 6 to stand trial. In terms of creating meaning from this situation, some people may have just felt it was the justice system doing its job, but others recoded the situation because they felt the town of Jena had always been highly racist. Instead of justice, they saw racism and injustice.

When a scholar studies symbols, he or she should consider how a symbol has been framed by its medium; framing is how an object or idea is presented, or in public relations terminology, positioned. Sturken and Cartwright (2005) said a symbol’s meaning comes from its place in history; the condition of a society creates a frame for images. In addition to framing, one studying a symbol needs to consider its denotative meaning, how it is visually presented, how it sounds or is said, and any facial expressions
or other nonverbal behavior associated with it. This is because symbols are created in the context they are presented in, and the more a symbol is presented in a particular sequence or context, the more a symbol is shown in that sequence, the more reinforced that meaning becomes to the viewer. So when the news programs show crime and violence every day as the top story, viewers come to know it as the most important story to report and that violence is a common occurrence. Symbols and their meanings are also reinforced when they are shown in various ways; so if a symbol is both verbally said, shown on screen visually, and written out in text to associate with the image, the stronger that particular interpretation of the symbol becomes to the viewer (p. 150).

Another event that has inspired semiotic studies is September 11, and Radhika Parameswaran (2006) is one scholar who conducted such an analysis. She performed a qualitative study into how editors, anchors, news managers, columnists, and others directly involved with journalism described their time during and immediately after the September 11 terrorist attacks. Her sample consisted of 32 articles published in trade publications such as American Journalism, Broadcast and Cable, and Quill between September 2001 and August 2002. She concluded that their descriptions were very masculine in nature, as though they had been soldiers and heroes. They rushed into the “battlefield” and “barreled” down busy roads; one article even described driving down the wrong side of the road in order to fulfill his duty as a news photographer (p. 47).

Scholars have also used semiotics to interpret images in the news, such as the 2004 tsunami that killed thousands in Asia. Daniel Kim (2007) analyzed how news sources in different countries interpreted the disaster through their visual images. It was found that American news portrayed the event through images that focused on individual
people and their emotions, while European and Asian newspapers showed subjects at a distance. This suggests that American newspapers “are more comfortable in interpreting the initial impressions of a major event through a personal icon rather than using the more contextual representations . . .” (p. 9). Kim stated American news illustrated the strong emotions and mourning that victims go through and contributed this to the idea that American photographers and editors are trained to find the novelty and peculiarity of an event or person in order to create the news narrative. This way, readers and viewers are left with an impression of what it feels like to experience such tragic and emotional events (p. 10).

As illustrated, there have been countless studies analyzing the quantitative side of what television viewers are seeing, as well as the effects of violence both in entertainment and news shows. These studies have been taking place since Gerbner and Gross (1972) first created cultivation theory and mean world syndrome. A few scholars have even done qualitative studies of news broadcasts by taking an in-depth look at how news stories are decided and how staff reacts to breaking news. These have illustrated that negative stories, and at times sensationalized violence, are prevalent on television.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

To get an in-depth understanding of the messages being broadcast through local news that could be attributed to mean world syndrome, a qualitative critical analysis was performed to examine three Kansas City ten o’clock weekday, evening news broadcasts from separate stations during February 2012. The top three stations in the Kansas City market in 2007, according to Nielson ratings provided by Beth Stockton (personal communication, January 30, 2008), were chosen. These stations were KCTV5, with a household rating of 11.0, KMBC, with a household rating of 10.9, and NBC Action News, which had a household rating of 6.0. The ten o’clock evening broadcast during the week was decided upon as it is the most viewed news of the day, and weekends tend to have lower ratings, according to Stockton. The small sample of only three total broadcasts is effective as this study is not meant to generalize findings to all television news broadcasts, but rather give an in-depth analysis of possibly detrimental techniques news stations are using to captivate viewers. Additionally, the small sample size ensured this study remained manageable as research findings are very detailed.

The sample is made up of one broadcast from each of the top three stations. Only one broadcast from each station has been chosen to help illustrate the quantity and quality of negative symbols used in just one 30-minute program. The sample was purposive, rather than randomly selected, in order to include a narrative that had been advertised at least one full day before its broadcast and portrayed as an investigative or shocking story affecting viewers directly.

Blocks in the broadcasts that were analyzed include top stories and breaking news reported at the beginning of the broadcast, national news, international news, and
weather. These blocks were used to answer the three research questions established earlier. Each broadcast was critically analyzed by interpreting a variety of elements in the broadcast and how each element’s symbols could be interpreted differently by viewers.

To answer the first RQ of how stories are being interpreted, I looked at how meanings behind visual/spoken symbols to determine if they are changed due to framing. This includes the words used to report the story, any music played, camera shots, tone of a reporter’s voice, and images shown on the screen. As mentioned earlier, Saussure (1959) felt the value of a symbol depends on its relation to other symbols in the chain, or context. A symbol that is the focus of a sentence or sequence has been given more value than others in the context. So words that are emphasized vocally or through visual reinforcement are given more value. This same idea was used to answer the second research question of how stories are emphasized by their placement within the broadcast. To answer the third research question of how the broadcasts could add to mean world syndrome, I looked at how situational variance, perspectival meaning, polysemy, polyvalence, multivocality, and/or recoding can affect how stories are interpreted by different viewers.

Semiotics plays an important role in answering all research questions, particularly the first question. One element studied is the words chosen to frame stories, or the narrative, and the emotions they symbolize and create. As framing theorists (Goffman, 1974; Shaw and McCombs, 1972) have noted, such elements guide viewers into how stories and symbols should be interpreted. Terms such as “devastating” and “miraculous” can add new dimensions to a reported narrative and guide viewers on how
to view each story. To go along with word choice, a reporter’s vocal emphasis and tone also frames a narrative’s overall mood for the viewer, therefore reporters’ vocal deliveries have also been analyzed. Another element examined for symbols is music played for broadcast and story introductions, as well as the music within a report. At times music can be very dramatic and suspenseful while other times it is lighter and elevating. Fonts also add to the overall feeling of news stories as some stations use rougher fonts at times instead of serif and sans fonts; to go along with font choice, the choice of words displayed graphically also help describe the news narrative.

Finally, background images and illustrations have also been analyzed. These images, placed behind a reporter during his or her stand-ups and images shown during a story, give viewers context as to the environment surrounding an event. For example, a reporter may be standing in front of a children’s playground telling viewers the story of how a child was abducted.
This section will look at each of the three chosen Kansas City broadcasts individually. Each broadcast will be described and analyzed using the three research questions and the methodology described above.

**KMBC: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 13, 2012**

The 10:00 pm KMBC news broadcast wastes no time getting to the top story leading off the night’s broadcast. Breaking news has happened, as the deeply-voiced announcer says “KMBC Nine News starts right now, with breaking news” as a trumpet musical arrangement plays and a graphic stating “Breaking News” flies onto the screen. It’s the very first shot of the broadcast, giving the story highest importance (Gerbner, 1969), and the announcer’s deep voice adds a sense of seriousness and concern. The two anchors, Larry Moore and Lara Mortiz, are shown, and both display very serious faces. The camera quickly zooms in on them, and they announce that a murder investigation is “unfolding” in a Kansas City neighborhood. A Google Maps image is shown with street names and a red dot indicating where the murder has occurred, giving viewers an idea of how close it is to their homes. For those within close proximity to the murder scene, it is obviously a scary situation that someone was killed geographically close to them; this would likely cause the viewer to pay more attention to the story. The anchor then says it is Kansas City’s eleventh murder of the year, and it is only February 13.

Viewers are shown reporter on the scene, Michael Mahoney, who is in a heavy coat and hat, holding a microphone. It’s dark outside, but viewers can make out that he is in a residential area. The words “Live” and “Breaking News” are shown in the upper left-hand corner, reminding viewers of the story’s importance. Mahoney says a woman
has been taken into custody after police received a phone call that someone was lying in the street. This imagery could give viewers the feeling of a violent death – being left in the middle of the street to die with no loved ones or friends by your side. A quick shot of a “Troost” street sign is shown to help give viewers an idea of where the story takes place as portions of Troost are known to have a high crime rate. “He had been shot,” Mahoney explains in a simple tone, “but by the time police got him to the hospital, he was dead” (KMBC, 2012).

While viewers listen to the report, they see that police cars with red and blue lights flashing are on location and blocking the street. “Murder Investigation” is the quick summary of the lower-third graphic under the title. A close-up shot of Steve Young, from the KCPD, is shown talking to the media. He says they arrested a female suspect at the scene and are investigating her relationship, “if any”, to the victim. Adding the “if any” creates a violent aspect to the story by hinting that a random crime has occurred, chipping away at viewers’ basic need of safety. Viewers then hear Mahoney’s voice ask Young if there is evidence that another crime, such as a break-in, has occurred. Young’s face has a concerned look as he listens to Mahoney’s question, and he responds saying they do not believe so. Finally, Mahoney is back on the screen with his microphone stating detectives had left the crime scene and will continue their investigation.

Due to the lack of details in the story, such as if the arrested woman and victim knew each other and if other crimes were associated with the shooting, the story could have different impacts on different viewers. A viewer living in a high-crime neighborhood could recode the story to mean they are more likely to be physically
victimized than a viewer in a neighborhood with low crime; while someone living in a rural area could interpret the story as meaning the city is a dangerous place to be and live (especially considering it was only February and this was the eleventh murder of the year).

Immediately following the murder story, the female anchor, Lara Moritz says that temperatures are “teetering” on freezing, putting not only vocal emphasis on the word, but also with her hands. As she says “teetering,” she brings her hands up to shoulder height and width, palms facing the camera, fingers curled in like claws, and does a slight push forward (see Figure 1). Simultaneously, she furrows her eyebrows and brings her shoulders forward. Co-anchor Moore smiles and introduces meteorologist Brian Busby, vocally stressing that he will tell “you what you should be concerned about tonight” (KMBC, 2012), indicating a negative weather forecast viewers must pay attention to. The same trumpets played in the opening of the broadcast are heard, and viewers see a graphic that reads “First Alert Weather” in all capital letters.

Although Mortiz’s emphasis on the word “teetering” indicated some concerned excitement, Busby is smiling and in good spirits. He is outside holding a large clump of snow and says that the earlier snow was good for snowballs, but with temperatures dropping, there is the possibility of refreezing. When Busby says viewers need to worry about refreezing, his eyes get big and he opens up his arms, stressing the word “refreezing.” Busby smiles and has a happy-go-lucky tone to his voice as he goes over current temperatures, which are all either 32 or 33 degrees. He goes on to say he believes temperatures in the morning will be well below freezing, but doesn’t seem to have a lot of worry in his voice. The camera then pans down to the parking lot where Busby has
been standing. He states that particular area has been treated and plowed and the surface is wet, but then the camera pans back up to Busby who says, “but I can’t say the same for each and every neighborhood” (KMBC, 2012) while shaking his finger as if to say viewers should still be leery of ice on the roads. His happy tone has drifted away some, and he seems more serious now as he warns viewers that any surface that has been untreated will turn back into ice. There is a slight vocal emphasis on the word “ice”. Streets that could get slick include bridges, overpasses, and side streets, he warns.

Busby is done with his report, and his happy, carefree tone for the majority of the report made the weather seem not as scary. Yet the placement of the story identifies it as being of high priority as it’s the second the broadcast. During the report, Busby put only slight emphasis on words such as “refreezing” and “ice”. Perspectival meaning may cause some viewers to feel he was enjoying the weather due to his smiles and light delivery; other viewers may have focused on the content of the story instead, interpreting the story as warning of bad weather.

Following Busby's report, anchor Larry Moore announces they already have a school cancellation to report. A full-screen graphic is shown with the text "School Closings" at the top of the screen. The right half of the screen shows a photo of a bright yellow school bus, and the left of the screen contains the words "Lakeland R-3." Moore says Lakeland R-3 will not hold classes tomorrow, and then says KMBC will pass on additional closings as they come in. This indicates to viewers that the station is anticipating weather conditions will be bad enough that additional closing will be needed; therefore, viewers should expect the same.
Moore and Moritz are on screen again, but this time the camera zooms out to shows more of the news set. The camera promptly zooms in on the two of them as Mortiz begins the next story. According to Grabe, Zhou and Barnett (2001), zooming in encourages the viewer to become involved with the story and helps hold their attention. Mortiz says, "A Kansas City Public Works official tonight, telling Channel 9 that crews worked fast opening residential streets" (KMBC, 2012). Viewers are being enticed to listen as Mortiz again uses a hand movement, emphasizing the word "fast" by swiping her left arm from right to left out in front of her. A full-screen graphic zooming in on the Channel 9 logo with the words "LIVE" is shown and viewers see reporter Martin Augustine. Augustine is identified as being in neighborhood near North 87 Terrace that is covered in snow; he stands next to a street that is partially covered and reflecting streetlights. Augustine states somewhat good news, that most residential side streets are open and cleared, yet he does this in a apprehensive tone, going on to say that the biggest concern for residents he spoke with was the wet roads that could refreeze. He steps out of the shot as the camera slowly zooms in on the street, once again drawing viewers emotionally into the story (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). All viewers see is snow, a wet road, and a strong glare on the street. Augustine reminds viewers of what Busby had said; if temperatures drop, roads could become slick.

"If the temperatures fall enough," Augustine says and pauses, "then these winding and hilly streets in this neighborhood are going to get slick" (KMBC, 2012). While Augustine vocally stresses the word "this" in "this neighborhood," the idea that if those streets are slick, then any other street within the KMBC viewing area could also be slick.
This can be inferred by viewers because the words "Covering Kansas City" are being shown at the bottom of the screen, like a title for the story being reported.

We then hear the sound of a snowblower and see a wide camera shot of a house at night with a driveway covered in snow. A male homeowner is clearing his sidewalk and we hear him say, "Now with it being wet like it is, it's very heavy" (KMBC, 2012), referring to the weight of the snow. This is a factual, yet negative statement, which does not directly deal with roads becoming icy. Augustine voices over that it's a tough job clearing the heavy snow for Doug Anderson, the man we were watching, adding, "and after work, no less." Another negative statement. Augustine then says it is Anderson's Tuesday morning drive up the hill that is weighing far heavier (than the snow he's clearing) on his mind. A sweaty Anderson is shown on screen saying he is "a little concerned about black ice." So although Anderson did not seem overly worried and said he was only slightly concerned about the roads, Augustine has already reinforced the idea for viewers that it something he fears.

Viewers are shown an extreme close-up of a wet road as a car tire goes over it quickly. Augustine says Anderson is not alone in his worry. "Everyone can see the gleam of the wet streets" (KMBC, 2012), Augustine says, stressing the word everyone. A different man is shown clearing snow in the dark and is identified through a bottom third title graphic as DJ Dammann. "I'm afraid it might get a little icy around here," he says, vocally stressing "might" by slowing down and saying it a little louder. His name is shown at the bottom of the screen with the description "worried about icy streets" under it. "There's still quite a bit of snow in this area right here. It may be a little icy about the time to leave for work."
Footage of a car driving down the street that evening is shown, and viewers can hear that the car is driving over a wet road and see the reflection of the red brake lights on the street. Augustine says residents in the neighborhood have seen the roads be slick before with "one occasional casualty." There is a slight pause after this statement, leaving viewers to possibly think he's referring to a human being, or maybe an animal...but then we see a slightly dented mailbox as Augustine announces that it is occasional casualty, located at the bottom of a hill. Viewers then see a third male source for the story, Joseph Mazza, who is also given the description "worried about icy streets" through the bottom-third graphic with his name. Mazza says that from his house he can watch people slide through the intersection, going on to say they usually hit the post office box. Multivocality (Fiske, 1987) shows that this could be interpreted a couple different ways. Some viewers may get the sense that the intersection is highly dangerous and people are often hurt there, especially when it is slick. Others may interpret the story as saying it is only a matter of time before two cars hit each other, while others could think that the intersection is not very busy so if you do slide, the chances of hitting another car are slim.

Finally we are introduced to fourth man, Tom Roller, who like the other men, is identified as "worried about the icy streets." Augustine narrates that Roller is worried about conditions in the morning, and another camera shot of the wet road is shown. Roller confirms that the neighborhood's roads can get slick, and drivers have to be careful at the stop sign. As he gives his statement, three cars with their headlights producing strong reflections on the wet road are seen behind him.
Ending the story, Augustine is shown reporting to the camera with the word "Live" in the upper left hand corner. He says the stop sign being referred to is about 150 yards away from him at Amity street. Augustine says that "if indeed this road is slick, it certainly could some unpleasant surprises for people driving through here in the morning if they're not careful."

Augustine is done with his report. The report is somewhat contradictory because on the surface, it is highly negative by focusing on the possibility of slick, dangerous roads. Augustine’s vocal tone is low, insinuating that he is reporting on a serious issue. Yet the four men Augustine interviewed showed less concern and hinted that they were not as worried as Augustine framed them to be. The men stated there were only slightly worried and stressed words such as “might” to demonstrate their levels of concern.

After Augustine’s report, viewers see Mortiz standing in a different part of the news set that has a dark blue-colored theme. She has a computer tablet in her hand, and there is a desk behind her with computers and a staff member working. To her left is a flat screen TV that she motions to by moving her arm toward it. On the screen viewers see a close up shot of a local interstate showing dark asphalt and highway signs light up. Mortiz says road crews on both sides of the state line have been working around the clock to keep roads and highways clear. She introduces reporter David Hall, who is reporting via telephone. While beginning her first question to him, a "LIVE" full-screen graphic appears on the screen. This graphic features a zoom-in effect, once again drawing the viewer in (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). Next we see a shaky, grainy, sometimes blurry camera shot that is being filmed through the windshield of a car. The car is driving down the interstate, and all viewers see is the dark asphalt, a handful of car lights, and the
highway street signs. There are no cars in front of him, only cars on the other side of the median. We hear Hall begin to speak, and it sounds as if he is telephoning his report in, so we assume he is in the car driving down the highway. Hall reports that he has spoken with KDot and MoDot officials and that he is traveling down 435 South, just north of I-70, and that as viewers can see, the road conditions are "fine...pretty much dry where we are" (KMBC, 2012). Hall puts emphasis on the word "fine" by saying it slightly louder with a very short pause afterwards. He says road crews have been out treating roads, and they will continue to do so.

Viewers then see footage of an interview with a bearded man dressed in orange taped earlier in the day as it was shot in the daylight. The man states there could be refreezing on bridges and overpasses, and that if drivers see ice, "just slow down a bit." His tone is matter-of-factly. There is no real concern in his voice, yet he doesn't seem happy by any means. A bottom-third graphic with the man's name finally appears, and he is identified as Rick Looper from KDot. He says they will go back out after rush hour.

A quick close-up of tires going over wet concrete is shown, with corresponding sound. A reporter's voice begins narrating that the dropping temperatures and melting snow is the main concern for road crews Monday night into Tuesday morning. The reporter states that Looper said crews got out before the snow started falling to treat roadways, "and it looks like it paid off." Looper’s voice is heard saying that things went well considering what little snow there was, and that there have only been a few minor accidents. The reporter's voice is then heard saying the road crews are ready for "the possible round two." While all this is being said, viewers are shown footage of different snow plows and salt trucks roads and in traffic.
So far, the reporter has interpreted the story as the road conditions are something viewers need to be aware of, but not worry about too much because road crews have done their job, the roads are dry, and crews will keep working on them. His voice is calm and indifferent. The reporter continues this theme as he narrates over more footage of snow plows; he says "KDot crews are prepared for the possible round two" (KMBC, 2012), putting emphasis on "possible." Viewers then see a pile of salt used on roadways as the reporter says MDot is just as ready.

A middle-aged man is shown and identified as Clem Anderson from MDot. He says one of the main concerns is keeping traffic moving along safely, so they will continue to treat the roads throughout the night. The reporter explains that salt and chemicals will be used to treat the roads as temperatures drop through the night and adds that keeping the roads safe it is a total team effort. Over footage of salt trucks at nighttime, Anderson’s composed voice is heard advising viewers to slow down, think about cars ahead, pass safely, and remember that it’s not just about road crews but everyone else on the road as well.

Viewers are then taken back to the footage being taken by the driving car at night. There is still very little traffic, and the car is moving at a normal speed. David Hall's photo and name are displayed once again at the bottom third of the screen. Hall's voice is heard, and the best way to describe it is bored. He states that officials have told him there have been no serious accidents, only minor fender-benders.

The KMBC broadcast is already six minutes in, and it has focused almost solely on roads being slick with ice in the morning, with the exception of the breaking news murder story. Using multivocality (Fiske, 1987), viewers could interpret this differently.
Some may believe it is inevitable that the streets will freeze, and that all streets will be sheets of ice. After all, why would they focus on the topic so much and place the stories at the beginning of the broadcast, making it the second most important story for viewers (Gerbner, 1969). Plus they have interviewed several men speaking about slick roads and showing that KDot and MoDot crews will be working through the night trying to keep up. Another way these stories could be interpreted is that there is no guarantee the water on the roads will freeze, and even if they do, it may not be as disasters as others think. There are numerous hints at this doubt. Busby's smiles and lighthearted tone during the initial weather update adds polyvalence (Condit, 1989) because while Mortiz had interpreted cold temperatures and snow as worrisome, Busby appears to mostly be in high spirits. As additional segments, Augustine said "if" the street freeze; Anderson and Dammann seemed only slightly concerned. The report about road crews is also not as frightening, explaining that road crews are hard at work to ensure travels have a safe drive in the morning. Plus, it has been said twice that there have only been minor accidents so far.

Before moving on to check in with meteorologist Busby, anchor Mortiz says viewers can visit KMBC's website anytime to get an update on road conditions. As she says this, the camera slowly zooms in towards her, again drawing the viewer in. She adds that their mobile sites and apps for phones and iPads set a record that morning. As she plugs the company's website, she vocally emphasizes, "So many of you used the website to check on school closings and road conditions" (KMBC, 2012), by slowing down and speaking a little louder, particularly on the word "so" at the beginning of the sentence. She mentions that the app provides a radar to let viewers know when rain and
snow will be in their neighborhood. Situational variance can be used to analyze how viewers may interpret this website plug. In today's internet-prevalent society, people flock to websites when something is entertaining. Yet in this case, people are visiting KMBC's app because of a more negative situation, based on the context the website plug was stated (after stories concerning slick and dangerous roads). Mortiz's emphasis on a large number of website visitors reinforces the idea that many of the viewer's peers are concerned and looking at the site, so maybe others should be worried as well.

After plugging the website, Mortiz introduces Busby again, asking how much snow has fallen. Busby answers two to three inches and then throws in his happy polyvalence interpretation (Condit, 1989) by saying this has helped the current snowfall total that was below one inch. He really emphasizes this point by leaning in towards the camera with his eyes getting wider with a slight smile. While saying the previous total was below one inch, he burrows his eyebrows together, makes a smirky face, and visually holds up one finger on his right hand, as if to show disappointment at the season’s snow totals. Busby continues to bring cheer to the weather story by showing snow totals viewers have sent in to him via his Facebook profile, making the broadcast interactive and continuing to have a bright, almost excited, tone in his voice. He even invites viewers to "join the party" on his Facebook page. Just before he is finished, Busby switches tone just a bit by adding that while it depends on where viewers are, the "real big concern" is refreezing as temperatures continue to go down. Yet despite the momentary negative tone, Busby ends his segment with a smile.

For now, the KMBC broadcast is done covering the slick roads and weather; however they immediately dive into a quick breaking news story. A full screen, dark
blue graphic with the station's logo is shown, and the words "This Just In" in all caps flies in from the left side of the screen while there is a zooming in on the graphic simultaneously. Anchor Moore says video has just come in of a fire that "destroyed a house inside and out" on east Ninth Street in Kansas City. He has added a dramatic tone to the introduction by strongly pronouncing the the "f" in "fire," plus by saying the destruction was both inside and outside, rather than ending the introduction after saying the house was destroyed. Viewers are shown a firefighters tending to a white house that is emitting a small amount of white smoke. While Moore has said the house was destroyed inside and out, it actually does not look that bad. The front of the house does not have soot from flames around the doors or windows, and the roof appears to be intact. So perspectival meaning and polyvalence both play a role in analyzing this story in similar ways in that a house being destroyed inside and out may mean different things to different people. To Moore, it indicates that the house is simply unlivable and possibly dangerous to people inside. For others, the phrase could mean that they house was burned to the ground or burned through portions of the exterior walls.

This house fire story may add to viewers’ development of mean world syndrome by having its content sensationalized. The "This Just In" status adds importance to the segment, insinuating viewers need to pay attention (Gerbner, 1969). The flying graphic that zooms in grabs attention as well. Additionally, Sturken and Cartwright (2005) explained that in the world of television news, the value of an image is dependent on how quickly it can be disseminated via broadcast and how many viewers it reaches (p. 35). Therefore, the “This Just In” label created added value for viewers; however, one could make the argument that KMBC has had the footage of the house for a couple of hours as
it is shown in the daylight and the report is being given when it is dark out. So the title of just coming into the newsroom is somewhat false and used for the station’s benefit.

The next story in the broadcast addresses financial funding potentially being pulled from a laboratory in Kansas, and is delivered with numerous adjectives that not only report the story, but also lead viewers into how they should feel. To begin the story, Moore and Moritz are shown on screen at the news anchor desk. Once again, the camera is zooming in on them as Moritz says, "Kansas gets a jolt," with a somewhat angry look on her face and tone in her voice. As she says stresses the word “jolt” vocally, she simultaneously leans forward, adding power to the word, and therefore the story. She explains with a serious tone in her voice that President Barack Obama's budget proposal "strips the funding for a top Kansas project" (KMBC, 2012). Moore continues the introduction by saying the lab is a state-of-the-art at Kansas State University and is intended to protect food supply and fight terrorism. Moore says that correspondent Michael Mahoney, who we saw earlier, has coverage on how "almost nobody saw this coming," while raising his eyebrows with a serious look on his face.

Mahoney immediately starts the story off on a negative note. While showing images of cattle and corn, he starts the story by saying that the "fear is that the open spaces of the bread basket are an inviting target for bioterrorism or twenty-first century viruses" (KMBC, 2012). By opening with this line, viewers' sense of safety is played upon and may insight feelings that the lab is vitally needed. The lab is called the National Agro and Bio-Defense Facility (NABD) and is a $700 million project set for Kansas State University. A close-up of Craig Wallace, a middle-aged man with glasses is shown, and he is looking downward so he can look out the top of his spectacles. Wallace
Analyzing News 42

says the lab would be Level Four and be able to work with the most dangerous viruses. Through a bottom-third title graphic, Wallace's name is shown and he is identified from the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor.

A map of Kansas and Missouri is displayed with Manhattan, Kansas, and Kansas City and Columbia, Missouri, highlighted. Mahoney says NABD would be a "key lab" in the booming Animal Health Corridor. Kansas City's skyline is shown and Mahoney states that an "astonishing amount of animal health work is concentrated"(KMBC, 2012) in the area. He vocally stresses astonishing making it stand out within the entire sentence. Wallace explains that 32 percent of the animal health products in the world are produced in Kansas City, illustrating the importance of the NABD lab for viewers.

Viewers are then shown a camera shot panning down a large outdoor banner on the side of a building that says, in all caps, says "1 in salmonella vaccines, vector vaccines, custom vaccines" (KMBC, 2012). Mahoney voices over that the vaccines are made, invented, and sold from Kansas City. He says that Wallace's company opened a $40 million lab last summer, then makes the comment that it is “serious money.” The analogy to Kansas City's old stockyards is made by Wallace, demonstrating the concentration of assets the company has in the area.

A cutout, still photograph of Kansas governor Sam Brownback is shown against a dark blue background and a faded Kansas state logo. In his photo, Brownback looks as though he is mid-sentence with a stern look on his face. The title at the top of the screen says "Obama budget pulls NBAF funding" in all caps. Mahoney says the governor's office is furious and issued a news release. Key phrases from the release are shown as Mahoney also reads them allowed. The key phrases are "a needless effort to reassess"
and "a change in direction that is unacceptable." The last phrase varies from what was written in the release to what is shown on screen; the quote from the release reads "will leave our country vulnerable," but Mahoney says "that could leave our food supply vulnerable" (KMBC, 2012). Both of these phrases play off humans' physiological needs. The quote from the release could leave viewers feeling a lack of physical security, while Mahoney's addition of specifying that the food supply would be in danger decreases confidence in the safety of what we eat.

Up until now, Mahoney's report has been framed to have viewers think about how important the NABD's lab is. The story has guided viewers to believe the lab is vital to their safety and security, particularly with the quotes from Governor Brownback. Mahoney has emphasized words like "astonishing," "key lab," "serious," and "furious." Yet all the sudden, while showing stock footage of lab workers on the job, Mahoney says quietly, compared to the rest of his reporting, says the "Now, the Animal Health Corridor is already thriving without the lab, but they want it badly" (KMBC, 2012). Viewers are now being told that the lab is not an absolute necessity.

One last shot of Wallace is shown as he says the NABD lab will bring additional credibility that Kansas City is the epicenter of the animal health industry. Mahoney's segment is over, and anchor Larry Moore is shown as the camera zooms in towards him. Moore explains that Republicans will fight to kill the President’s budget all together, and Kansas senators will try to retain funding for the NABD lab in the federal budget.

Since Mahoney largely focused on how labs such as the proposed NABD’s protect food supplies and their large presence in the Kansas City area, viewers are likely to be left with a couple of ideas. One, that if the lab is not funded their health is at risk.
second possible interpretation is that many threats to our food supply exists, otherwise such labs would not be important or exist as much as they do.

The next news story is about a suspicious powder that was found. A map with the title "Suspicious Powder" in all caps is shown, and the town of Leavenworth, Kansas is highlighted. Moore announces that the powder caused a Hazmat scare at the federal prison and that the news story is an update to the breaking news story KMBC reported on the five o'clock broadcast. Mentioning the story had elevated importance earlier helps elevate its importance in the 10:00 broadcast, despite being one of the later stories in succession (Gerbner, 1969). Moore explains a letter with a suspicious white powder came into the mail room that afternoon, and footage taken from the outside of Leavenworth Penitentiary is shown for viewers to look at. The footage shows firefighters in their safety gear talking to one another while a title graphic at the bottom third reads "Suspicious Powder Update," reinforcing the thought that it was breaking news earlier. Moore says there were no evacuations and the powder was tested as non-hazardous.

The suspicious powder story may not worry viewers as much as others in the broadcast because of proximity. Viewers could dismiss the story because it took place in a location they never plan to be, federal prison. However, recoding (Real, 1989) could cause other viewers to be reminded of past Anthrax scares that took place after the September 11, 2001 attacks, thereby prompting a fear of bio-terrorism. This is especially relevant after bioterrorism threats were just mentioned in the previous report about the NABD lab.

The next report is the second in the broadcast to focus on a house fire. The camera slowly zooms in on Mortiz who has a warm smile while she announces they have
spoken with the Olathe police officer who rescued a couple's dog from a house fire. A still photograph of a small white house with large red and yellow flames flowing out of it is displayed on screen. A top-third title identifies the photo as "Olathe House Fire" and Moritz says the photo "shows the flames shooting from the home." She states where the house is located, and footage of the house following the fire is shown. There are trace amounts of white smoke coming from the house, and firefighters are shown in their gear. The title "House Fire" is now shown on the bottom third of the screen, despite the fact that the story was supposed to focus on a man who saved a dog's life. Nobody was home at the time of the fire, Mortiz says, and a police officer first on the scene kicked in the front door after being told "family pets" may be inside. Describing the pets as "family" adds emotion and the feeling that loved ones were in serious danger. Finally, Moritz reports that the police office rescued a yellow labrador dog named JJ.

The next shot is a close-up of a man wearing a black stocking cap and police officer's uniform. He is identified on a title slide as Office Travis Shoemaker from the Olathe police. He simply states that the front door was locked so he kicked it in and saw the dog laying on the couch. He let the dog out, then went through the rest of the house as far as he could go before the smoke got too strong. Footage of the scene continues as viewers hear a sympathetic "ohh" from Mortiz, who then continues by says a "family cat" is still missing. She reports an investigation into the fire is ongoing and the damage to the house, "as you can see, is extensive" (KMBC, 2012).

This house fire story could add to and neutralize different viewers’ mean world syndromes. It could add to mean world syndrome by its simple nature - it's about a large house fire. The photo of the blaze showed large, hot, smoky flames coming from the
house. For viewers with pets, choosing to describe the animals inside the house as "family" elicits a more emotional response than if the word was excluded; this would be due to differences in perspectival meaning between viewers with pets and those without.

The next story is about thefts at a local Best Buy electronics store. Mortiz is shown, with no camera zoom effects, to the left of the screen. A small over-the-shoulder graphic is shown to the right of her with the image of a Best Buy logo. The title underneath the box reads "Theft Ring." Moritz reports that metro area Best Buy "may be the latest target in a sophisticated theft ring" (KMBC, 2012). As she delivers this line, viewers see her facial expression is a mix of surprise and interest. She tilts her head slightly to the right, momentarily opens her eyes widely, and brings her eyebrows together. This animation can make viewers more interested in the story due to Mortiz's own interest in the report. The use of the words "latest" and "theft ring" denotes that the thefts are happening often, which can make viewers nervous that this is not a onetime event and is likely to occur again. Three surveillance images of the suspects from the Best Buy at 113th and Metcalf in Overland Park, Kansas, are shown on the screen at one time with the title "Best Buy Theft Suspects." All are average looking, middle-aged white males; one is even on a cell phone smiling. Moritz says Overland Park police think there "may be as many as five people involved in theft ring striking stores across the Midwest." She vocally stresses the word "five" and "Midwest" by saying the words a little slower and added voice inflections. Ending the brief story, she reports that some of the men involved remove security sensors, others distract store employees, and others take merchandise out of the store.
The theft ring story is very brief and ends rather suddenly. They do not ask viewers with information to call a crime-stopper hotline or offer any kind of advice. The story could add to mean world syndrome as it was framed as a secretive, mysterious theft ring that has been successful in various cities. Viewers living in Overland Park may feel particularly threatened due to close proximity to the story, and because of Moritz's emphasis on the number of men involved (five), it could be interpreted as a large number.

While more local news is still to come in the broadcast, the next two segments revolve around singer Whitney Houston's death, which occurred two days before this KMBC broadcast. Being placed before local news positions the story as more important than those following it. The segments also take up 2:45 minutes of the broadcast, a major portion of time compared to the other stories in the broadcast, which are typically only thirty seconds to one minute in length.

The first report is a story narrated by anchor Larry Moore and features national footage and interviews with Houston's friends. The report focuses on Houston's mental status the last days of her life; Moore announces that some say she was erratic, but those interviewed in this report say this was not the case. Images of Houston performing and smiling are shown between clips of interviews. The segment does not contain any sensationalism or stressed phrases by Moore, and unnecessary adjectives are not used, making this story one that is unlikely to add or create mean world syndrome in viewers because there is a lack of proximity.

The second segment about Houston is a little more sensationalized, as takes a brief look at how the public has been impacted by her death. The camera zooms in on Moritz as she explains fans "across the country are remembering Houston and the impact
her music had on their lives” (KMBC, 2012). Her music begins to play and an unidentified woman is shown saying that she feels like she lost a family member. Moritz then voices over the report stating that students at a school named after Houston in East Orange, New Jersey, had been honoring her memory. An innocent looking, young, black child with a high vocal tone is shown with several television microphones in front of him. He says Houston was his mom's inspiration so he wanted to mimic that and show how much he misses her. While this story may not add to mean world syndrome directly, the story does revolve around a woman's death and demonstrates that it has had a large impact, even on children.

Now Mortiz is shown on screen again at the news desk. She is placed to the left of the screen and a graphics box appears to her right. A photo of Houston smiling is shown in the box and the title "Expert Insight" is shown. Mortiz says with conviction, "Experts say there is a reason Houston's death has touched so many people" (KMBC, 2012). She pauses to allow footage of the "expert" play, which features a young, long-haired blonde woman who is identified as Dorothy Cascerceri, InTouch Weekly's senior editor. For viewers, situational variance determines how much of an expert they perceive Cascerci to be. In a non-entertainment context, an expert who could explain how people react to a death would likely be a psychiatrist or psychologist. Yet in this context, the editor of an entertainment tabloid that focuses on the lives of celebrities is considered an authority on the subject. The passionate Cascerceri puts vocal emotion behind her words and moves her head from side to side as she says Houston was a music icon and that her voice was stronger than many of her peers. She smiles excitedly as she explains Houston inspired many women and many young girls through her music. The camera remains
focused on Cascerceri with no b-roll footage of Houston as she continues, saying Houston struggled a lot in her life (referring to Houston's public divorce and drug addiction), so she believes the public had a soft spot for Houston because they saw her life troubles.

Now that the segments on Houston are complete, the focus returns to local news. Anchor Larry Moore is shown as the camera moves quickly and slightly upward over the course of approximately one and half seconds. He looks at the camera and reports that a teenage girl is in serious condition after being an accidentally shot in Lee's Summit. Video footage of a suburban home with a police car, red and blue flashing lights on, in front of it is shown. The lower-third title graphic reads 'Teen girl shot: Serious, but stable." Moore says the young girl was shot in the head and that KMBC originally reported on the story a couple of days ago. Close up shots of the house are shown, and viewers can see police caution tape around the perimeter of the house. A shot of a man's silhouette inside the house is shown as the anchor says police have explained a friend accidentally shot the girl in the head with a nine millimeter handgun and that no names have been released and no charges have been filed.

This story is likely to make the most impact on viewers with guns in their household and/or with parents who have children. Viewers with guns may worry that a child could get a hold of a gun, while parents with children may fear that one of their child's friends live in a house with a gun, and that their child could also get hurt. Other viewers may recode the story by assuming the gun was not kept in a locked gun safe, which could have prevented the accidental shooting.
Now Moore is shown again to begin the next story, but this time there is no camera movement. He states that the semi-truck driver involved in the accident seriously injured a pregnant woman has been located. He stresses "pregnant woman" by saying it a little louder. Moore states the woman's name and age, and then explains that she rear ended the semi-truck last Wednesday on I-35 south of Olathe. Images of police cars alongside the interstate are shown as a bottom third graphic identifies the images as "Near Olathe" and "I-35 North of 175th Street," giving viewers a specific location of where the accident occurred. As the footage continues, Moore says the semi-truck had been fully loaded and the driver and co-driver did not realize the accident had occurred. The pregnant woman was "rushed to the hospital where doctors delivered her a healthy baby." This story is extremely brief and is unlikely to cause much anxiety in viewers. The narrative is not given much attention from KMBC, giving the impression that the producers also did not find it overly important for viewers to know. Viewers may also feel that a similar situation is not as likely to happen to them because the woman had rear ended the semi-truck, meaning she may have been following it too closely or not paying attention while driving. Such a situation is controllable, giving viewers more power over their destiny rather than being innocent by-standers like other news stories have focused on.

The broadcast is now into its fourteenth minute, and the next story is an investigative report into toxic chemicals being used in baby shampoo. To introduce the story, a wide shot of Laura Moritz standing behind a small table is shown. Behind her is a large graphic featuring a young child, approximately 18 months old, in a bathtub with a toy. The words "Toxic for your baby?" are displayed over the image as a title for the
upcoming story. The discord between the innocent image of a young child and the words "toxic for your baby" invoke concern and possible worry because the last thing mothers and fathers want to do is hurt their children.

"Is your baby's tub toxic?" (KMBC, 2012) Mortiz asks viewers as she brings her hands up to chest level then slightly down as she says "toxic." She says many moms are now looking at labels after a recent discovery that there are cancer causing chemicals in baby shampoo and that KMBC reporter Donna Pitman spoke with local moms about the issue. A mother watching will obviously be interested in the story, and hearing about other moms looking at labels is likely to make the viewing mother go check her baby shampoo as well. The story is directed towards mothers and not fathers, as Moritz only says “mothers” and “moms” during the story, alluding to the idea that mothers are the ones who the story affects.

The first shot of Pitman's report is a young red-haired girl smiling and playing with a dancing Elmo toy. The young girl playing with a well-known and liked Sesame Street character can be interpreted as symbolizing innocence and playfulness. The title "Lee's Summit" is shown on the bottom third of the screen letting viewers know the girl and her family is from the viewing area. Pitman is heard saying the girl is 19 months old, named Katie, and is the "light of her mother's eye, a mother leaving nothing to chance" (KMBC, 2012). The mother is identified through Pitman’s voiceover as Mary Barry and is shown with Katie on her lap saying that she thought "it was a trusting company but..." Pitman's voiceover interrupts Barry’s statement as she reports Barry is talking about Johnson and Johnson's No More Tears baby shampoo. The shampoo is shown against a dark black background that has a slightly eerie feel. Barry's statement suggests that
Johnson and Johnson is not to be trusted and puts this thought into viewers’ heads that the company, no matter what it is going to be, is misleading its customers.

A close up of the soap bottle is shown, focusing on the "Johnson's baby shampoo" portion of the bottle’s label, as Pitman calls it "the ubiquitous golden soap." The bottle of the bottle lets off a slight glisten of light. Viewers hear that the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics raised a red flag. An extreme close-up of the listed ingredients on the bottle is shown, and Quaternium-15 is highlighted by shading everything else on the screen but those words. Pitman says it is a preservative that also releases formaldehyde and "can lead to cancer." At the same time, an extreme close up of bubbles with running water feeding into them are shown, and chemical compound symbols zoom in on the screen. The word "Formaldehyde" in a basic Arial font, zooms in and is stretched out to fill the entire bottom fourth of the screen. The graphics fade away quickly and all viewers see is an even closer shot of the bubbles. Pitman says the chemical that creates bubbles is also a possible carcinogen, but viewers will not find that ingredient listed on the bottle’s label. The letters "1,4-Dioxane" fly onto the middle of the screen and appear rather large, taking up the middle third of the screen.

Pitman is shown sitting at a desk with two computer monitors and the KMBC office behind her. She looks as though she is at her regular work desk and not on a television set. She explains that she tried repeatedly to contact Johnson & Johnson officials, but each time they directed her to the company’s website and a statement on it. Pitman points to one of the computer screens. Another extreme close-up, this time a skewed angle of the Johnson and Johnson statement, quickly flies onto the screen and is
Pitman reads a portion of the statement as the words appear on the screen, filling most of the frame. The on-screen words read:

> The level of exposure to formaldehyde...is about the same in an entire bottle of...shampoo...as a person would be exposed to by eating an apple or pear. We also are well along in word with our global suppliers to require them to use state-of-the-art technologies that reliably reduce traces of 1,4-dixone (KMBC, 2012).

Pitman emphasizes the words "entire", "apple," "well along," "global," and "reduce." She finishes the statement with a somewhat calm tone, rather than sounding as if she is accusing the company and unsatisfied with their answer.

Just before the graphic goes away, viewers hear the mumbles of a small baby. Yet another extreme close-up is shown, this time of a baby's face. Its eyes are slightly watery and it looks unhappy. The camera zooms out and viewers begin to see the baby is being held by his mother who is smiling at him. Pitman identifies the mother as Amanda Brown and says her five-month-old Colton receives baths using Johnson & Johnson's shampoo, as well as Brown’s two-year-old twins. A professionally taken photo of the three children is shown and zoomed in on. Pitman pauses to say that Brown is a nurse, as if to emphasis that she is knowledgeable about health topics, and is not worried about the chemicals. Brown appears on screen, and her name appears in a graphic at the bottom third of the screen. Under her name, she is described as a mom.

Brown explains that when someone hears there is formaldehyde in the shampoo, it makes him or her take a step back. "But then you hear how much is really in it," she says, then gives a slight smirk as she says, "it's really not that much" (KMBC, 2012). After that sentence, an extreme close-up of the bottle's "No More Tears" logo is shown,
followed by a close up of the bottle’s front label that features the logo and the Johnson's baby shampoo name. The shading around the bottle is very dark, essentially black, giving the shampoo a dark and eerie feel. Yet this eeriness is offset by a voiceover by Brown explaining that feeding a child a pear gives him or her more formaldehyde in one day than the pea size amount of shampoo that is used.

No transition is used as the reporter suddenly jumps to a close-up of a different shampoo bottle, this one with bright, calming colors, called "California Baby." Pitman says Berry feels better with this new shampoo that is chemical free. Due to the lack of a transition and moving from a close-up of the Johnson's shampoo straight to the shot of the California Baby shampoo, it is hard to pick up that Pitman has moved back to the mother who was disturbed by the presence of chemicals in the No More Tears shampoo. Viewers may think that the story is still focusing on Brown, and initially interpret the story as saying that even though she was not frightened by the presence of chemicals, she still switched shampoos. This possible misinterpretation can reinforce the idea that viewers should consider changing shampoos.

Finally, Berry, the original mom featured in the news story, is shown on screen in front of the California Baby shampoo. She is shown saying very confidently that she doesn't care if there is even a small drop of chemicals in a shampoo, and that it simply should not be there. As the story ends, the bottle of No More Tears against the black background is shown once again.

Anchor Laura Moritz is shown once again standing at the small table. The graphic placed to the right of her has changed from "Toxic for your baby?" to showing the words "Safety Standards" at the top and three bottles of the No More Tears shampoo
An image of Moritz pictured below the wording. The camera moves to the left to provide a slight zoom in to Moritz. She announces that the Johnson and Johnson formula has been changed in parts of Europe, but not in the United States, "because it's okay by current safety standards." She stresses the “okay” by slowing down on the word and by moving her right slightly hand up and down just above her waist. Adding that "current" safety standards say nothing is wrong with the presence of chemicals, may give viewers the impression that it will eventually not be approved by government regulating organizations. This inherently negates Moritz's statement that it is safe, and can lead viewers to believe the shampoo is still unsafe to use. This is backed up by Moritz then stating with the slightest smile that Johnson & Johnson has vowed to remove the chemicals over the next two years.

Moritz states that KMBC asked a representative, Stacy Malkan, from the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics for their reaction to see if Johnson & Johnson was doing enough. A full screen graphic shows their statement written out, and the No More Tears bottles can be seen in the background. Moritz reads that statement, which states that the organization is pleased, but they urge Johnson and Johnson to do the same with additional products they make, such as Neutrogena and Aveeno. Three general elements of this could add to viewers' development of mean world syndrome. By having Moritz pose the question of if Johnson & Johnson "was doing enough," can be interpreted that the news station felt the company was in fact not doing enough, and they were looking for confirmation from the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. Another element is that in the campaign’s response, they have only added to viewers' worry about products on the market as they learn there are chemicals in Neutrogena and Aveeno; not only does baby shampoo have this cancer-causing chemicals, but so do the products viewers may use.
themselves. Finally, viewers who use the No More Tears shampoo will feel directly impacted, especially parents using the product on their children; they must now consider the daunting idea that a product they have been using may cause cancer in someone they love.

Once the baby shampoo story is complete, Larry Moore is shown with a large smile and happily says that some kids got the day off and went sledding. This is used as an introduction into the weather and is very lighthearted. Moore continues to show a big smile as he hands off to meteorologist Bryan Busby who is in front of a green screen displaying a still photograph of cars on the road at night.

Earlier in the broadcast, Busby spoke in a mostly lighthearted tone, but also mixed in serious moments too. The full weather forecast is very similar. Busby takes on an upbeat tone in his voice, even when mentioning more negative aspects of the forecast. For example, in the middle of the forecast, he quickly says that the next afternoon will be 38 degrees so the snow will be thawing; he then advises viewers to make sure they have plenty of windshield washer fluid in their cars. Busby could have spun the advice to have a negative tone in that viewers could be in danger of not seeing clearly because of dirt buildup. Instead, he states his advice in an unbiased tone. The same idea goes for his mentioning that temperatures will eventually go below freezing overnight. Rather than demonstrating a low, forceful voice, he simple explains that temperatures are dropping. Graphics appear on the left half of the screen and displays current temperatures from select towns in the area. A few of the towns are at 34 degrees, others at 33 degrees; Grandview, Missouri, is already at 30 degrees; however, when Busby mentions this, he quickly mentions the temperature, then thanks the viewer who sent the number in.
One of the few negative statements given any emphasis was actually done in a positive manner. Still in front of the green screen, Busby displays a full screen graphic behind him featuring large snowflakes faintly in the background and a list of years with the lowest snow totals; the current winter season is at the top with the lowest snow total on record, only 3.1 inches have fallen in Kansas City. The next lowest season was 1922-1923 when only 4.5 inches fell. Smiling, Busby says "We're still in first place, but we're up to 3.1 inches as opposed to 4.5" (KMBC, 2012). An audio track of fireworks and patriotic music, similar to what one would hear on 4th of July, is played as Busby smiles and looks at the camera for a moment. Because KMBC played the happy, celebratory music to highlight the lack of snowfall, most viewers will likely interpret this as a good thing; the less snow that falls the better. Especially after seeing all the accidents and ice mentioned throughout the same broadcast.

After the celebration, a two-part graphic is displayed behind Busby titled "What to Expect" with the description underneath reading "Overnight." One the left side of the screen, the words "freezing drizzle," "Slick bridges?", and "refreezing?" appear as Busby says bridges will be the first thing to freeze, plus any side streets that are not treated. During this, the second half of the graphic is showing video of salt trucks and snow removal vehicles driving on wet highways during daytime. Because this is framed within the context of discussing slick and icy streets, viewers may assume that there will be snow vehicles out in the morning, indicating that roads will be dangerous.

After a set of commercials, the KMBC broadcast returns with four quick reports. Anchor Laura Moritz is shown on the right half of the screen while textual graphics appear on the left half as she reports there was an attack at Columbine High School in
Colorado. The Columbine High School shooting that happened in 1999 was such a memorable, negative event that a graph on the left half of the screen is simply titled “Columbine Attack” rather than “School Attack” (Figure 3). Mortiz, with a very serious tone, says that a teenage girl attacked two students with a hammer, and the same words appear to the left. Moritz, looks and sounds almost surprised when she opens her eyes wide, slightly tilts her head to the left, and says, "Now this is the first assault with a weapon at the Littleton, Colorado school since it was the site of one of the worst school attacks in U.S. history." The words "1st assault with a weapon since 1999" appear on the left and the font size is larger than the first bullet point, bringing attention to the phrase. With less emotion, Moritz ends the story by reporting the incident is being investigated. While the entire story, despite its briefness, is likely to add to viewers' mean world syndrome due to the violent subject matter, Moritz's emotional delivery adds even more to it. Her somewhat stunned tone when she mentions it is the first assault with a weapon since 1999, could be interpreted differently by viewers due to polyvalence (Condit, 1989). Some may infer that Mortiz's reaction means that twelve years is a long time to go without a weapons assault and that assaults happen more often than that. Other viewers could interpret this as the exact opposite, feeling it is a shock that a violent act would happen twice to the same school. Yet, due to the lack of proximity for KMBC viewers, with Colorado being several hours away, viewers may not feel an immediate fear.

The next story is delivered by Moore. As the camera slowly zooms in on him at the news desk, he states that a 14-year-old kidney transplant patient has been taken from a St. Louis hospital. He stresses the word "taken" by saying it slightly slower and louder
than other words. His serious tone, plus the context of the story coming after one about violence in a school gives the impression that the patient was taken against her will. Viewers are then shown surveillance video from the hospital lobby. The title at the bottom third of the screen says "Search for transplant patient," as Moore describes the video as showing the kidney transplant patient with her father. The young girl appears to willingly leave the hospital with her father. Moore's tone becomes less concerned and more explanatory, as he states the father does not have custody of the young girl. He explains that the state of Illinois had taken over her care when state authorities decided she was not getting proper medical attention. While the title "Search for transplant patient" hints that the girl and her father are still missing, Moore closes the story by saying authorities tracked them to a hospital in Milwaukee and arrested the father. So while there was no violence or major mystery to the story, it has been framed as a sort of kidnapping, despite the father taking the girl to another hospital.

Next, anchor Laura Moritz is shown on screen at the news desk and the camera zooms in on her as she says they have surveillance photos of a suspected bank robber. She narrows her eyes into a squint and while nodding her head forward, tells viewers to look at the pictures, as if they will be interested in seeing it. A full screen graphic shows two photos, each on one half of the screen. The photo on the left shows a person with a long sleeved jack with the hood up going to open a door. The photo on the right shows the same person with what appears to be a gun in one hand and the other hand up to his face, which is completely shaded by his hood. Other than the approximate height and weight of the robber, viewers cannot make out anything else about him. The title at the top of the screen is "Bank Midwest Robbery" and the phone number for a tips hotline is
listed below the title. Mortiz reports that FBI said he showed a weapon and demanded cash from the bank. Mortiz gives the banks address and general location, and states that the man ran out of the bank after receiving the cash. She ends the story by asking viewers to call the hotline if they have any information on the case.

To lead into the last report before sports news, Moritz says that viewers' tips helped catch a suspect on the run. A full screen graphic with the title "Crimestoppers Fugitive" at the top is displayed. The photo of a white male identified as Joshua Brown with a slight smile is shown in the middle of the screen with the word "Captured" featured in a stencil font across the bottom of his photo. Mortiz explains that he was caught last week after being wanted on several outstanding warrants for theft and burglary and is now behind bars. While the quick report may not add to mean world syndrome, especially since the man had been caught, viewers could interpret the story as confirming there are always people on the run who may harm them. Using polyvalence (Condit, 1989) to analyze the man's photo, viewers may also interpret the man's smile differently. Some may see the man's smile as a genuine smile; he does not look exceptionally harmful or hateful. Alternatively, other viewers could see his smile as spiteful. They could also interpret the photo as demonstrating that no matter how friendly someone appears, there is always a chance he or she could rob them.

Analyzing the KMBC broadcast as a whole, there are a few elements that can add to or create viewers' mean world syndrome. To begin, anchors and reporters all framed the stories about snow at the beginning of the broadcast as something viewers needed to be worried about. Specifically, the word "concerned" was used seven times in the first seven minutes, and additional terms like "worried" and "afraid" were also used often.
Plus, those negative stories were symbolically given the most importance by being at the very beginning of the broadcast.

Proximity is another other element that affects how a viewer is emotionally impacted by specific reports. The closer a viewer is to the neighborhood where a story took place, the more impactful the story will be. For example, a viewer from Sedalia, Missouri will not be as concerned about a murder in downtown Kansas City as a viewer living in the neighborhood where the murder took place.

Comparing the mannerisms of the anchors, Mortiz was far more illustrative and energetic than Moore in her physical movements and vocal pronouncements, and she added tones of sensationalism to the broadcast (see Figure 1). She often interjected emotion behind her reporting, such as in the beginning when she emphasized that temperatures were "teetering" at the freezing point. She also performed movements with her hands, plus had very descriptive facial expressions when introducing and reporting stories. Moritz's nonverbal action and vocal emphasis create a much more intense sentiment to the negative stories.

The broadcast almost soley focused on stories that dealt with either violent acts, such as murder, or threats to viewers' basic physiological needs, such as house fires (shelter), potential car accidents (safety), or health issues. Not only are the local Kansas City reports focused on threats to physiological needs, but the national news reports, such as the assault at a Colorado school, are also negative in nature. Proximity in these cases may cause viewers to be less impacted, but the reports still serve as a reminder of the dangers in our society.
KCTV: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 3, 2012

From the moment the KCTV broadcast begins, viewers are drawn into the program with intense, suspenseful, and staccato music consisting of drums and string instruments. The dynamic opening music is an element likely to create a feeling of nervous excitement for viewers as it sounds like a special report is breaking. One could compare it to the music that is played when national news interrupts regular broadcasting after a major event has occurred. As the music plays for just a few seconds, viewers see the KCTV5 square logo fly onto the screen against a faint photo of the Kansas City skyline. The logo moves to the left side of the screen and “at 10:00” appears on the right with “It’s Your News” underneath. A man with a deep voice announces that it is the 10:00 broadcast just before the graphics transition to show a preview of a special report.

The special report preview consists of a lady in a pink jacket standing to the right in front of a green screen. On the left is the title “ComputerCop ON PATROL” in a bold Helvetica font in light blue and white colors. The background graphic is a computer keyboard and hundreds of faint, random words like “welcome”, “My 2 cents”, and “how old are you.” In a very loud voice, the woman says the broadcast will feature a story about a computer program so advanced tells parents everything their children are doing on the internet. As she says the program knows “everything,” she brings her right arm up and swipes it across in front of her to emphasize to viewers the power of the computer program. Viewers are left to wonder about the software’s power and just what it does as her preview ends, and the broadcast’s two anchors are shown at the news desk.

The night’s two anchors are sitting at a news desk in front of a dark cityscape. Brad Stephens, a middle-aged man with gray hair, is on the left side of the screen while a
blonde woman of the same age, Karen Fuller, is on the right. The camera is zoomed out farther back than KMBC’s broadcast, plus there is about three feet of distance between Stephens and Fuller. So the two anchors feel as though they are a considerable distance away from the viewers. Because the camera is zoomed out, viewers may feel less of a connection with the anchors and not as drawn into the broadcast.

Stephens opens by saying the day’s rain “may have moved out…for now.” His voice gets high as he says “for now” as he lifts his left arm off the table, showing his palm to the camera to nonverbally tell viewers to wait for more information. Fuller joins in by saying that more rain is on the way and could become a wintery mix. She introduces chief meteorologist, Chris Suchan. Because Suchan is the lead meteorologist at the station, viewers will have added trust in his weather predictions as they are likely to feel he is the most knowledgeable. As Suchan is introduced, a full-screen graphic is briefly shown. The focus of the graphic is a long rectangle that quickly flies in and contains the words “StormTrack” next to a large numeral five. The title image is in front of more graphics that contain lightly animated red and blue lines that gently move with an overall background of silver. It is visually appealing as it gently swivels from front to back. After just very brief moment, it quickly zooms towards the camera at viewers and they see Suchan in front of a large flat screen television displaying a Doppler map of the region. The radar is showing rain around the viewing area, but it is mostly light rain judging by the green and yellow colors on the map. Suchan confirms that rain is moving into the area, but then raises his voice to say that it is not a wintery mix, holding the word “not” longer than others to add importance. This is complete opposite of what Fuller said in her introduction, which hinted at snow and sleet.
Suchan continues a preview of the weather by explaining that rain is approaching from the west, but will not consist of heavy showers. He describes where the rain will be, but with very little description; rather, he simply states the facts without much drama in his voice. Yet before his weather preview is done, a graphic previewing weather for the morning appears, and in the top right hand is a logo reading “Storm Ready” with “Storm” being in italics and a blue cloud above it. On the left is the “Storm Track” logo that first appeared at the beginning of the segment. So while there are no storms in the forecast, only a small amount of rain at 7:00 am, the two logos could be interpreted through recoding as reminding viewers of bad weather, eliciting feelings of anxiety for those who dislike storms. For viewers who, like myself, fear severe storms, the weather logo serves as a constant reminder of the seriousness a storm can present. Plus, there is added emphasis on the weather due to its placement; it is the first story reported on, making it the most important (Gerbner, 1969). Therefore, viewers are indirectly told they should be most interested and concerned with whether or not it is going to rain.

Following the weather preview, the KCTV5 news logo flies onto the screen from the front with the words “NEW TONIGHT” underneath it. At the same time, the graphic appears, a short, electronic sound effect is played to symbolize breaking news. These three elements (being the second most important story, the emphasis on its newness, and the added sound effects) are not only likely to heighten viewers’ interest, but also symbolizes that the news station believes the story is important.

The anchor Stephens is shown from the stomach up with a serious look on his face. He announces that Kansas City gang units have raided an apartment on the east side of the city. Stephens reinforces the idea that the story is about violence by stressing
“gang,” saying it slower than any other word in the sentence. Viewers will not see this story covered by any other news outlet, he says. The screen is then split, with Stephens on the left and reporter Jeanene Kiesling on the left, with a title graphic “Police raid apartment” at the top fourth of the screen. Kiesling is wearing a red coat with the KCTV logo on it and a black stocking hat. Stephens states she reporting live at police headquarters.

A straight faced Kiesling opens her report by saying the local police chief has had a “plan in place to target troubled areas.” As she begins, a small red LIVE graphic in the upper left corner appears at the same time a bottom third title graphic appears at the bottom. The main title is “Big Bust” with “Kansas City, Mo.” in small letters. After just a brief few seconds focusing on Kiesling, the camera pans to the left to show the outside of the police headquarters building. She reports that earlier in the day, “the gang unit took down a suspect [who] undercover officers” had been looking for.

The scene changes for viewers as they are shown footage taped earlier that day. Viewers see a black male with a gray hooded sweatshirt and handcuffs standing outside the back of a white van. The back doors to the van are open, and as the suspect is being patted down by a police officer, he looks towards the camera. A male’s voiceover is heard saying, “Anytime we can get hardcore narcotics off the street in an area and complex where a lot of children live, it’s really significant” (KCTV, 2012). The voice will eventually be identified as an undercover officer. After his statement, a closer image of the suspect and police officer is played; the suspect appears to be calm and cooperative. Despite the suspect’s non-threatening demeanor, viewers who are parents
may find him more frightening than others because the prior male voiceover pointed out
that he was living in the same neighborhood as children.

An assertive Kiesling finally begins to narrate the story again, this time saying it
was a big bust that occurred in Friendship Village apartment complex on East 56th
Terrace, giving viewers an idea of where the suspect had been living and dealing drugs.
Kiesling continues by explaining the bust had tactical officers and the gang unit on high
alert. Once again, “gang unit” was vocal stressed, this time by vocally lifting the voice to
a higher pitch. The emphasis on the fact that the police gang unit may add a sense of
seriousness for viewers as gangs are historical known to be violent. To add to this, as
Kiesling says “gang unit,” the camera pans from a close-up of grass to a children’s
playground set, a sign of youth and innocence, located on the Friendship Village
apartment grounds.

Footage of the apartment complex, mixed with more close-up footage of the
suspect inside the van and the officer checking his shoes. While shots of the suspect’s
face are few and typically have his face obstructed, he appears to be reserved. Kiesling
says she spoke with an undercover gang sergeant immediately after tactical officers
“kicked the door down” and the apartment was searched. This adds another element to
the dangerous tone. A quick shot of the officer behind the white van is shown as he
inspects the suspect’s shoe, then smacks the bottom of the shoe against his hand three
times, and the sound is played for viewers to hear. Kiesling then continues by saying
PCP, marijuana, and a gun were all found inside the suspect’s apartment. A shaky
camera quickly zooms in on a window at the apartment complex; viewers are likely to
interpret that the window signifies which place was his. As the camera zooms in,
Kiesling reports the drugs and gun are likely to turn the search warrant into a federal case.

The window shot dissolves into an extreme close-up of the address numbers located on the apartment complex, and the camera quickly zooms out to show a wide shot of the apartment building. The undercover officer is heard saying the bust went well; they arrested their target, plus got narcotics and a weapon off the street. “Hopefully the people who live in this apartment complex are a lot safer,” he says (KCTV, 2012). This tells viewers, especially those living in close proximity to the apartment complex or at the complex that they had been in danger, yet it is never said that the suspect had been involved with previous violent cases.

Kiesling explains that the arrest plays into a bigger plan, because in December, the police chief doubled the size of the gang unit to reduce violent crimes. The chief had also announced a crackdown on areas where the majority of homicides and violent crimes occur. “Today’s bust is in the middle of one of those hot spots,” Kiesling states, pausing after “middle,” which can give viewers time to consider the importance of her statement. So viewers in close proximity to this specific neighborhood will now get the sense that they live in an area with gang members, drugs, and a heightened potential for violence.

More shots of the complex are shown, including a repeat shot of the children’s playground. In terms of proximity and perspectival interpretation, those living close to the area of the arrest may feel reinforced thoughts that they live in a high crime, dangerous neighborhood, endangering their physiological needs of safety and security. The story could also reinforce the worries and memories of a viewer who had been the victim of an attack or witnessed violence in the area. Viewers outside of the featured
neighborhood will now have a negative impression of it and may avoid visiting or driving through. Yet other viewers may feel the neighborhood and apartment complex are actually safer now that the suspect has been apprehended. Reinforcing the latter interpretation of having a higher sense of security, the undercover sergeant is heard saying neighbors and their children may feel more at ease. “For the neighbors, it’s really significant,” he says. “If you look around at the porches, there are a lot of bicycles, a lot of other stuff. There are a lot of kids who live in this neighborhood” (KCTV, 2012).

The broadcast returns to Kiesling reporting live at the police station, and again viewers are shown the “Big Bust” title at the bottom. She reports that the suspect’s name hasn’t been released, and police are speaking with federal prosecutors to see if they plan to charge the suspect. When she says “federal prosecutors,” she says the words with added stress, which may be interpreted as symbolizing the seriousness of the suspect’s illegal behavior and his arrest. This interpretation adds to the story’s impact on viewers, reemphasizing either the increased danger or safety felt by those watching the report. Plus, she included many negative, serious words, including “drugs”, “gang units”, “kick the door down” and “federal case.”

The next report is a light-hearted feature about the new Hollywood Casino opening by the Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kansas. Fuller stands in front of a very large flat-screen television that takes up the right half of the screen. As she introduces the story, she smiles and has excitement in her voice. This reflects the tone of the entire story, which highlights the popularity of the new casino and its high quality, and has almost no negative aspects to it. A man from Wyandotte County even says that the county has improved greatly and he is proud to say he is from the area; he claims the
speedway, the Legends shopping area, and now the casino have truly turned the county around.

For more viewers, the story over Hollywood Casino will be a neutral or positive report. On the other hand, a viewer with the perspective that casinos are overall bad and produce gambling additions will not find the story quite so positive. Still, the only hint of negativity is at the very end when reporter Justin Schmidt says the casino owners had been watching the weather closely all week to see how it could affect the number of people visiting on opening day. Schmidt says the owners, “just feel lucky it didn’t snow,” with a large pause before “it didn’t” snow.” By mentioning snow in this manner, Schmidt has interpreted such a weather event as negative. Viewers at home, however, may have different polyvalence meanings of the word “snow.” While all viewers understand what snow is, some viewers may feel it is beautiful, peaceful, and quiet in nature; others may view snow as dangerous and an inconvenience.

After Schmidt’s report, the anchor Stephens is shown with a slight smile on the left half of the screen. He thanks Schmidt for his report, and leads into the next story. On the right half of the screen, a photo of an infant girl with blue eyes looking into the camera is shown. The words “Search for baby Lisa” are just below the photo. Stephens opens the report by saying, “It is the interview so many have been waiting for,” emphasizing “so many,” essentially telling viewers it is a popular story that many viewers are concerned about. Stephens explains that the baby’s parents spoke with television personality Dr. Phil and discussed the most controversial part of the case, how much Deborah Bradley, the mother, had to drink the night her child went missing. As Stephens announces that Bradley spoke about the controversial drinking, he leans back slightly,
raises his eyebrows, and makes extremely small shakes of his head from left to right, creating interest for viewers.

Viewers are then shown footage from the television show of Bradley talking to Dr. Phil via satellite. Over the show’s bottom fourth graphics, KCTV put on their own title graphic that reads “Irwin family talks” in large letters and “Search for baby Lisa” in smaller letters above. The image of the baby girl shown in the intro to the story is now shown as a small image on the far right of the title graphic. Bradley is the only person on screen; she looks as though she has been crying and says the only thing she is guilty of is drinking too much the night her daughter was abducted. As she speaks, she sniffs, and the KCTV graphic disappears leaving the show’s original title for viewers to see. It reads “Deborah Bradley” in large letters with the words “Admits she was drunk the night her baby Lisa went missing.” Bradley continues speaking, declaring she has to live with the fact that because of her drinking, she may have missed the warning of an intruder, helping her to stop him or her. She sniffs again and says that her drinking that night has been blown very far out of proportion.

That portion of the interview is quickly cut off, and viewers can hear Bradley say “desperate to find her” in a pleading tone of voice as they see the beginning of another clip from the Dr. Phil show when they zoomed in on a picture of Lisa dressed in a pink and white polka dot shirt that reads “Princess.” Over the sounds of the Dr. Phil show, Stephens reports that a retired Kansas City police captain and homicide detective watched Bradley’s interview, and he says her drinking that night is more critical to the case than many think. Viewers are shown the retired captain, who is dressed in a suit and tie, sitting at a desk with a computer and family photos. His title graphic appears with
“Search for Lisa” at the top and his name “Retired Cpt. Roger Golubski” in larger letters. The image of baby Lisa is once again at right side of the graphic. Golubski explains that from a law enforcement point of view, he disagrees with the idea that how much she drank is unimportant. He says it is a critical aspect as it affected her condition and behavior at the time of the baby’s disappearance.

Viewers of the news broadcast are then shown more footage of the Dr. Phil show that illustrates Dr. Phil on his set and Deborah, her husband, and their lawyer on a television screen. At the bottom, from the show, are the words “If you have information about Baby Lisa, please call 816-474-TIPS.” As viewers watch the footage, Stephen’s reports that Golubski felt nothing new was learned from the Dr. Phil interview, but that is still critical the parents continue cooperating with law enforcement.

Analyzing the baby Lisa report, it is a lot like the other stories thus far in the broadcast in terms of delivery and interpretation. One thing that stands out is the use of the baby’s photo with title graphics introducing Bradley and Golubski; this visual feature is used only during this specific story and serves as a reminder for viewers that a young, innocent child is missing. As with all stories focused on a child, viewers who are parents will feel an added impact from the story. Additionally, Stephens uses the word “critical” twice in the report, while Golubski says it once. This redundancy may lead viewers to perceive the story itself as critical as it is treated as a key word in the report. It is also noteworthy that the story focuses entirely on the mother and how the amount of alcohol she drank plays a role in the baby’s disappearance. The mother says it has been blown out of proportion while the retired police chief says it is a critical factor. Polyvalence plays a factor in how viewers interpret this story; some may feel her drinking equals her
being guilty, while others may disagree. Yet the report and overall coverage of the
“Baby Lisa” story interprets the story as placing guilt on the mother as it never discusses
another person possibly being responsible for the baby’s disappearance. Finally, the fact
viewers are told no new information was learned, the story has still been placed near the
beginning of the broadcast, reemphasizing its importance.

Following the baby Lisa story is another story focused on losing a loved one. In a
somber voice, Stephens reports that police in the town of Shawnee are investigating how
a garbage truck ran over a man and killed him. Stephens pauses momentarily before
stating the truck actually killed the victim. As he begins the report, viewers see footage
of a green garbage truck parked horizontally in the street of a neighborhood; unmarked
police cars are on both sides of the street with the blue and red lights inside of their cars
flashing. A few men, some wearing neon yellow vests, are shown walking around the
scene. Then a bottom fourth, blue-colored title graphic swipes in from the left. The main
title reads “Deffenbaugh driver killed by truck” with “Shawnee, KS” in small letters
underneath. At first, the story sounds as though it will be about a man who was killed by
another driver who accidentally hit him, but as Stephens continues, he explains that a 61-
year-old man working for Deffenbaugh, a waste management company, stepped out of his
own garbage truck and it somehow rolled over him. Viewers continue to see images
from the scene, including a man getting out of the garbage truck and a yellow and white
tent set up close to the scene. Stephens, still speaking softly and with a melancholy tone
in his voice, says the police are investigating and a company spokesperson is heard
saying “everyone is feeling this loss,” stressing the term “everyone.”
Although this story is brief, it is still a report focused on a sad, unfortunate event; an innocent man has lost his life. Yet viewers could be affected on different levels. Some may believe the man had control over the situation; maybe he forgot to put his truck in park or use the emergency brake, thereby causing the accident himself. Other viewers, however, may feel the story is an example of how death could happen at any moment, even while doing daily routines, so we must be extra cautious even with the simplest of tasks.

The next story is introduced by Fuller and is also about a local citizen dying. Fuller is shown on the left side; as she begins talking, an above the shoulder graphic gently flies in from the right side of the screen. The graphic is square and filled with a still image of intense fire flames, and the words “No Threat” are under the box, presenting contrasting ideas for viewers. The flames pictured are so powerful looking that it may be hard for some viewers to believe that there truly is nothing for them to worry about. Fuller introduces the report by stating that KCTV checked, but the Platte County Sheriff’s office had still not released the name of a man “found dead in a torched truck.” Viewers are then shown footage of various cars with police caution tape on them. Some have broken windows; a few have fire damage. One of the shots is an extreme close-up of a burned head rest in one of the vehicles. Other shots are less graphic, showing only a broken window of a truck, a white car that appears to have no damage. Fuller explains that 14 cars had been broken in to, 12 of them set on fire, near Gates Drive in Wilkerson. A bottom forth title graphic is shown with the main words reading “12 cars burned, 1 body found,” re-emphasizing what Fuller has just mentioned. She goes on to report that in one of the cars was a burned body that police believe was the arsonist. Rounding out the
report, Fuller announces that police do not yet know why he decided to set the cars on fire.

For some viewers, the idea behind the “No Threat” wording featured under the fire graphic at the beginning of the story is never really backed up; while police believe the man burned to death is the arsonist, it is not known for certain. So viewers may get the sense that a criminal could still be on the loose. Viewers who have experienced someone breaking into their car may feel more vulnerable than others after seeing the story because of recoding (Real, 1989). Finally, using the idea of polyvalence (Condit, 1989), viewers may differ on if the arsonist experienced adequate punishment for his actions. Some may interpret the possibility that he/she was burned to death enough justice, while others may believe victims were shorted in not seeing the criminal in a court room receiving jail time.

Following the car story is yet another gloomy report focused on a death; this one accidental. Stephens is shown in the center of the screen, still seated at the news desk. He announces with little emotion that a man will spend three years in jail for his role in an 11-year-old girl’s death; the only noticeable facial expression from Stephens is a quick eyebrow raise and small head turn when he says “three years.” Immediately following the statement, a close-up shot of a well-dressed black man with sunglasses is shown. Viewers cannot see much of a background because the man takes up most of the shot, but a NBC television microphone can be seen in the shot and a courtroom sign peaks out on the right side. The man says in an explanatory manner, “It was an accident. You know I didn’t, um, try and run and hide.” A bottom-third title graphic is shown, and the man is identified as Aaron Sullivan, and in small letters below, described as “Sentenced to 3
years.” The graphic disappears as Sullivan continues to speak calmly to reporters. “I didn’t lie, you know. It was a simple accident. I made a bad judgment,” he admits (KCTV, 2012). Sullivan seems relatively at ease with the exception of small head shakes and slight stutters.

Footage of men in suits and Sullivan moving around outside the courtroom is then shown as Stephens’s reports in a somber tone and slowed pace for added effect that on July 4, Sullivan and friends were shooting his gun when one of the bullets struck 11-year-old Blair Shanahan Lane, killing her. An extreme close-up of the victim is shown; she is smiling and her eyes are positioned near the center of the screen, and the camera slowly zooms even closer in to the picture (see Figure 3). Viewers then see red and blue police lights at night as past footage of police cars at the scene of the crime is shown. Stephens then says that police are not sure which of the men’s shots actually killed Lane, but since it was Sullivan’s gun, charges were filed against him. Stephens places slight emphasis on the word “him” at the end of the sentence by saying the word in a higher vocal tone and added volume. Viewers may interpret this a couple different ways. Some may feel that as long as someone was punished, and the gun did belong to Sullivan, that justice was served; other viewers may get the sense that Sullivan is now going to have to suffer three years in jail for someone else’s crime. Yet as footage of police cars continues, Stephens states that Sullivan pleaded guilty and apologized to the family.

Viewers are then shown Lane’s mother close up, also being interviewed outside the courtroom. A bottom-third title graphic is displayed just under her chin, naming her as Michele Shanahan DeMoss, and she is described as “Mother.” Her voice is slightly shaky as she is shown saying, “You know, it is time that people realize that a gun is
“it’s not a toy. A bullet is meant to do two things…” She pauses again, then continues, now a little shakier yet still composed and serious, “maim and to kill, and that day it did two things.” She ends in a somewhat higher vocal tone, possibly out of emotion as her eyes are showing hints of watering.

More footage inside the courtroom is shown as Stephens wraps up the report. The judge is shown, followed by the back of Sullivan as it is said he has two weeks to get his affairs in order, and then he must begin serving his jail sentence.

Due to the story’s later placement in the broadcast, viewers are given the impression that this story is not as important as others decreasing the effect of mean world syndrome. Sullivan was also forthright about his involvement and guilt, which may help put viewers at ease. Yet there are still elements that may create mean world syndrome, mostly the fact that a completely innocent, young girl was killed. This is reinforced by the extreme close-up of smiling, happy Lane. While her personality is never described, viewers may get the impression from the photo that she was a happy, friendly girl, adding sorrow to the story. Then there are the brief remarks from Lane’s mother. Although the mother is mostly calm, viewers can still sense the pain she feels due to her watery eyes and vocal tone. The story is likely to have additional impact on viewers who are mothers of young children because of their different perspective. They may imagine what it would be like if this had happened to them; after all, it was a complete accident and Lane’s mother appears to be a normal woman who viewers can relate to. Finally, there was the footage of police cars at night with their lights on. Some viewers may recode the images as reinforcement of a criminal and dangerous situation.
The next story is the fourth one in a row that revolves around somebody dying. Stephens is heard reporting that a second man has been arrested in connection with a Christmas Eve homicide. Viewers do not see Stephens, but rather a full-screen graphic. The background is blue with gentle lines of red, navy, and white moving gently up and down. At the top is the title “2nd Degree Murder Charge” and in the center of the screen is a close-up mug shot of a man identified as Dalvin Johnson. Johnson is a younger black man with short hair and a wide nose. His lips are pressed together as he looks to the left of the camera. Stephens calmly states Johnson is 17 years old and is accused of trying to rob Joseph Jones, then killing him. Viewers are still being shown the same image of Johnson as Stephens says another man, Adrian Botello, had already been arrested. It is explained that the two men reportedly “lured their victim in to rob him, but when Jones resisted, they allegedly shot and killed him” (KCTV, 2012). Stephens does not emphasize many words in his delivery, except for a hint of stress on the phrase “lured their victim.” Polysemy can lead viewers to feel differently about the use of this phrase. Some viewers may feel more disconnected from the story, because despite the victim’s name already being identified, the term “victim” is being used, making it less relatable. On the other hand, others may feel the phrase “lured the victim” sounds cold, unsafe, and chilling.

Although the Johnson story was brief and had no video footage, there are a few elements that can add to mean world syndrome. The idea that this is the fourth story in a row focused on a local citizen dying reinforces the idea for viewers that murder is a common occurrence in the area. Adding salt to the wound is that the report mentions Jones was killed on Christmas Eve, a time when families especially look forward to being together. Then there is the fact that the only things viewers are shown throughout the
entire report is Johnson’s mug shot (see Figure 4). The image is shown for 21 straight seconds, giving viewers plenty of time to look at and analyze the photo. He seems remorseless and shows no emotion in his facial expression and eyes. Some viewers may get the feeling that they are looking into the eyes of a murderer, even though he has not been convicted of the crime. Finally, viewers may have a heightened sense of fear when they learn that there were two people responsible for the murder. Because of multivocality, these viewers may imagine themselves being robbed and how hard it would be to defend themselves from more than one person, creating a sense of doom.

The Johnson story is the final one focusing on someone dying; now the broadcast turns to focus on the race to find a republican presidential nominee. Candidate Rick Santorum was in the area that day, and KCTV sent a reporter to cover the story. Fuller is shown in her pink jacket, holding papers down by her waist, standing next to a flat screen television oriented in a vertical position. Behind her is a wall covered in varying shades of brown wood. Displayed in the center of the television is a square image of the White House with the words “@Road2WhiteHouse” in a red block just underneath the image. Also on the television underneath the image and wording is “Santorum Visits.” Fuller explains calmly, but speaking quickly, that the GOP candidate made a stop in Missouri that day and KCTV report Betsy Webster was there. The entire screen for viewers changes to show a faded American flag in the background and the square White House graphic quickly flies onto the screen as a “whoosh” sound is played.

Webster is shown on screen wearing a solid red coat with a large, empty conference room behind her. A couple hundred empty chairs are set up in straight rows. She states that Santorum’s stop there at John Knox Village Pavillion in Lee’s Summit was the
fourth stop in Missouri that day, adding that he is the only candidate campaigning in the state, just before the primary election the following Tuesday. So far, Webster has stressed the words “fourth” in “fourth stop” and “only” in “the only candidate.”

Viewers now see the back of a full crowd standing and cheering, and Webster says that many of those in attendance, even those not old enough to vote, were “fired up” about the possibility of having Santorum win another state primary election after losing the last three. Various people in the crowd are shown clapping, including two young girls, approximately age four, as a bottom title graphic reading “Santorum Campaigns in Missouri” comes onto the screen. Santorum is shown on a stage, walking around, moving one of his arms sharply up and down in front of him, and talking through a microphone strapped from his ear.

Close-up footage of two separate adults are then shown to give an idea of participants’ opinions. The first is a bearded man who says Santorum is focused on values and doesn’t flip-flop his views. Then a woman with glasses says with growing excitement in her voice that “We’ve prayed him here, prayed him to Missouri; we’re going to pray to the White House” (KCTV, 2012). She quickly continues, saying that Santorum stands for family, and they (referring to the crowd) appreciate he also stands up for the unborn. Following the lady’s statements, an extreme close-up is shown; it’s unclear of what exactly is being shown but on the right side of the screen is a Santorum button and on the left is the image of a fetus.

The reporter continues speaking over images from the day’s political rally. She says that the “passionate religious conservatives who favor Santorum have also spoken out against Mick Romney” (KCTV, 2012). She state that Romney will be Santorum’s only
competition in the Missouri primary election because Newt Gingrich, another candidate, missed the filing deadline.

Webster states Santorum is ahead of Romney in Missouri polls despite Romney having more money. Viewers then see and hear a wide-eyed Santorum on stage rallying the crowd by matter-of-factly stating that even though Romney has more money now, he won’t have more money than President Obama. Webster continues after the short Santorum clip, saying the primary election is a “big opportunity for him and his Tea Party rich following that could also be a day of reckoning for them” (KCTV, 2012), as a close up of a button with Santorum’s photo and the words “The True Conservative” on it.

An older gentleman in an entirely different setting is suddenly shown. He is bald with short gray hair on the sides, has a short gray beard, and is wearing glasses. As he begins speaking, a title graphic comes across on the bottom third of the screen and identifies him as Steve Gloriso, KCTV5 political consultant. He says that Santorum can make face-to-face pleas to the conservative base of the Republican party, encouraging them to vote so he can get a win. “And he really needs one,” Gloriso says. “You can’t go very long, a month or more, without winning somewhere” (KCTV, 2012).

Viewers now see Webster where she began her report, standing in the empty Pavilion room. She takes a deep breath and says that if Santorum wins on Tuesday, it will mostly only be symbolic because the Missouri delegates are not bound to the results of the election. Yet she adds that if he does win, it will give him momentum and help keep his campaign alive. She throws it back to those in the KCTV studio, thus ending her report.

Overall, the Santorum report is void of any violent or scary themes; however, the report may make viewers uncomfortable, if they are Santorum fans. Webster’s report
consistency alludes to the idea that he could soon be out of the race if he does not succeed in the Missouri primary election. Near the beginning of the report, she reminds viewers that he has had three consecutive losses in other state primaries, and then mentions he had a narrow victory in Iowa. She also sprinkles in negative phrases, such as “day of reckoning” and “keep his campaign alive” as if it is in need of help. Even the station’s political consultant re-emphasizes the point that he needs to win the Missouri election. So, strong Santorum supporters may experience feelings of nervousness and worry that this is a must-win situation for their candidate, who stands for their family and pro-life values.

Stephens thanks Webster for her story, and takes on a more serious tone. An above-the-shoulder box graphic is shown displaying the image of a laptop and the words “Computer Cop” underneath. The broadcast has reached the report of the ComputerCOP story it previewed in its opening moments. The story is filled with obvious references to the dangers children face while online, and these suggestions begin the moment Stephens introduces the story. He becomes somewhat conversational in tone, and begins emphasizing key words. “Well online dangers give parents plenty to worry about. How much do you really know about your kids’ web friends, the sites they visit, or how much information they share?” (KCTV, 2012). Here, he has stressed “plenty” and “do you really know” by pronouncing the words slower. He says that a software program can answer these concerns by tracking a computer’s every move, and then throws to investigative reporter Dana Wright.

Wright is shown on screen with the same backdrop as the show’s opening; a mostly blue background behind her with the words “ComputerCOP on Patrol” over her right
shoulder. Wright speaks loudly and with excitement in her voice as she holds up the ComputerCOP disc and says that once it is put in a computer, “it goes immediately on patrol.” As she says “immediately” she squints her eyes and moves her head from right to left.

Viewers are shown the location where the report was filmed. They see Wright and a middle-aged man looking at a computer screen. In the background are several additional tables and chairs. The man, gently moving his arm and hand around while speaking, is saying that “every parent with a kid who has a cell phone or a computer needs to have this program.” If parents are not already interested in the story, the man’s suggestion is likely to draw them in. A voiceover recorded by Wright identifies the man as Calvin Moore and gives him credibility on the subject by stating he is a professional IT person. Moore says he considers himself to be knowledgeable and “savvy” on monitoring the teenagers who log on the computers at his “church,” a word Wright says just slightly louder for emphasis. Being set in a church is a significant element to the story as it is centered on teenagers engaged in negative or dangerous behaviors. This is likely to draw viewers in due to the contrast in their situational variance the story has just presented; many KCTV viewers are likely to believe churches provide a safe environment where children are respectful, responsible, and well-mannered.

Yet before viewers learn of any behaviors teenagers have displayed on the church computers, they see a couple of young adults and children around the computers. One child’s back is shown as the camera focuses on the computer screen, where he is solving the math problem, 6x1=?. This may add a stronger sense of innocence to the church
setting; viewers can tell it is a very young student who is unlikely to be familiar with sexuality and online relationships.

Wright states that dozens of students use the church computers after school and on weekends. Moore uses the ComputerCOP software to take online activity monitoring to a “whole new level.” Footage of Moore putting the disc into the computer is shown as Wright explains how easy it is to use; just put the disc into the computer, “and it reveals every post, email, upload, download by every user,” with Wright saying each element slowly. Moore is then shown saying that “it is all about keeping the kids safe…so often teenagers don’t think that we are as bright as they are.” An extreme close up of a child’s fingers on a computer mouse, followed by another extreme close-up of a young girl’s eyes looking at a screen are shown, another symbol of innocence. Then a close-up of Moore is shown; he is smiling and explains that ComputerCOP lets the teenagers know that he is aware of all their activities online.

Two young children are shown on the screen at the computers inside the church; they appear to be between nine and twelve years old. Wright is heard saying that the day the news cameras stopped by, the two younger students were using the computers to do their homework. Her voice is slightly lighter in tone compared to the rest of the story; she sounds more lighthearted, like she could be smiling. This lighthearted tone could be interpreted as an added reminder of childhood innocence. Another close-up of a simple mathematical problem is shown, but Wright’s tone changes back to being serious when reminding viewers at home that the software is always watching, stressing the word “always.” Finally, viewers are ready to learn what the software has captured. She explains that while they were at the church filming, the software “detected a
pornographic video and a handful of inappropriate photos uploaded by different users a few days before.” She emphasizes the words “handful” and “different” by elevating her vocal tone on the words. During her delivery of this information, the camera slowly zooms in to a pixelated computer image indicating the pornographic images she mentioned, followed by a slow camera panning across an extreme close-up of the computer screen showing an electronic “Images” button.

A close-up of Moore is shown again, but this time he is serious. “Unfortunately, there are pictures like teenage girls posing in their underwear and sending those pictures to individuals” he says solemnly (KCTV, 2012). “These are the things that can be harmful.” For some viewers, particularly parents, the fact that teenage females are exhibiting these behaviors may be shocking; if young adults are acting this way on church computers, just imagine what they are doing at home or elsewhere.

After Moore states the behaviors can be harmful, viewers see Wright in a different setting. Now she is in a large office-like setting, sitting behind a large, empty desk next to an officer from the sheriff’s office. As they look at an open laptop, Wright points to the screen and asks, “So you just click on that and it’s that easy?” Wright is speaking with Jackson County Sheriff Mike Sharp, who told her that the software was designed to find exactly what Moore discovered on the church computer. A close-up of the ComputerCOP DVD cover is shown, panning down, as Wright says the sheriff’s office used “seized drug money” to bring the program to county residents, slowing down and saying “drug money” louder for emphasis.

Wright then goes into more depth on how Computer COP works. The camera shows yet another close-up shot, this time of the disc being inserted into the computer,
followed by dizzying shots of large amounts of text being quickly zoomed in on, with each shot dissolving into another shot of more words. Viewers see that some individual words have been highlighted to signify possible abuses; words highlighted include “death”, “crash”, and “private.” Wright says once the disc is in, it “immediately begins searching for thousands of acronyms, codes, and shorthand which could signal a problem.” In the one sentence, she stresses “immediately” and “shorthand.”

The sheriff is back on the screen working at a computer while explaining that the software scans everything that is on the computer. Although viewers cannot see Wright, they hear her half-heartedly say, “Oh, wow” that is quickly followed by an exclamatory, “Already?” as she realizes how fast the program goes to work.

Viewers are once again shown a close-up shot of the computer screen filled with text, but this time it is a single shot rather than a compilation of quickly moving images. There are six words highlighted by the computer software: hate, steal, kids, hack, satanic cults, and kids. Wright explains that some words that it finds are obvious, like hate, hack and steal. Yet viewers may be surprised to learn the software has a 37-page-long list of shorthand and acronym terms that "you might not know." Wright has possibly created a sense of alarm in viewing parents. First, the large number of terms parents may not be aware of can be overwhelming and reinforce the idea that the software is necessary. Second, for the first time in the report, she refers directly to the viewers through the word "you," giving them a sense of ownership in the story. Yet another close-up of the computer screen is displayed, this time featuring a portion of the 37-page acronym listing. Wright's finger points to the acronym "P911" and the sheriff is heard interpreting this as meaning parents are coming in the room. This would certainly draw the attention
of parents, both mothers and fathers, viewing the KCTV broadcast. They may feel the “P911” is something their teenaged children would only use if they were doing something they know their parents will disapprove of.

While showing the long list of acronyms ComputerCOP interprets, Wright once again speaks directly to parental viewers. "And parents, even if you are looking over your teen’s shoulder, would you know that number eight is code for oral sex?" (KCTV, 2012). While saying this, she stresses “are,” slows down considerably for the latter half of the question, and asks the question while "8" and "oral sex" are highlighted on the screen. Not only has Wright drawn viewers, especially parents, in by speaking directly to them, she creates more involvement by posing a question. Viewers are likely to consider if they did or did not know this information. Plus she has also highlighted what many may feel is a major concern, a teenager either performing or talking about a sexual act.

Yet Wright is not done giving examples of acronyms parents should be aware of. She gets a very serious tone, even more serious than when mentioning oral sex. "And then there is ASLA, which stands for age/sex/location/availability," she says progressively slower and in a low tone of voice. The camera pans from left to right, showing the acronym, then its meaning. Because Wright has created drama through her slow tone, viewers are likely to perceive the acronym ASLA as being the most serious. If viewers had previously felt this sort of a question was harmless, it is likely they will think otherwise after this report based simply on the way Wright has interpreted it as being negative.

Footage of the sheriff and the ComputerCOP program continues as Wright reports that the software has "already alerted one local parent to an inappropriate online
relationship between a man and an underage girl." Wright raises her vocal tone while saying "already," which viewers may feel means that it did not take long for the software to help a parent discover something dangerous. This could then be interpreted a step farther, meaning that there may be a large number of teenagers in similar situations since it did not take long for one to be discovered. To follow this up, Sheriff Sharp is shown with a serious look on his face, eyebrows furrowed together, saying that cyber friends can be anybody, adding even more alarm for viewers. Anybody could mean pedophiles, rapists, and murderers.

Following this information, viewers learn that they can get the software (which retails for $40) for free by attending a short, ten-minute training class with the sheriff’s office. A small group of about five citizens is shown at a ComputerCOPS class. Then the report suddenly shifts to a new setting as a close-up of an older woman is shown as she says, “And I’m really strict,” slightly nodding her head. A wider shot of the woman is shown as the camera pans up from her kitchen floor to show her sitting in front of a laptop at her kitchen counter. She is identified as “mom Janet Richardson,” who attended the software training. An extreme close-up showing the side of her right eye is shown, followed by a shot of the computer performing a ComputerCOP scan. Wright says her disc has not found anything questionable on her computer, but that it is “comforting just knowing the software is there constantly searching on her behalf,” stressing “comforting” by saying the word louder.

To round the report out, Wright is once again shown wearing her pink jacket in-studio, still in front of the “ComputerCOP On Patrol” background graphic. She holds the software disc up and says it comes with “some serious warnings.” If the software
Analyzing News 88

discovers activity such as child pornography, users must call authorities because it is illegal to view it. The KCTV audience is told they cannot install it on another person’s computer without their knowledge, and “spying on anyone else’s kid, your own kid over the age of 18, or any adult could violate their privacy rights.” Ending her report, Wright smiles and suddenly appears upbeat as she informs viewers that they can learn where to get their own copies on KCTV5’s website.

The ComputerCOP story as a whole is very mean world syndrome oriented. Firstly, it was given added attention by being previewed at the very beginning of the newscast. So while it was not one of the first stories reported in the broadcast, the manner in which it was highlighted gave it just as much importance. It lasts longer than other reports, lasting a lengthy four minutes and nineteen seconds. The report creates the assumption or idea that a large number of teenagers are involved in unsafe online activity, whether it is sending and viewing sexual photos or creating online relationships with strangers who could be dangerous. Finally, the abundant use of close-ups and extreme close-ups of people’s faces and computer screens adds emotion and intensity to the story, helping draw viewers into it even more (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001).

Situational variance could also cause a stronger negative impact on viewers. Because the story is aired after reports on drug dealers, murders, and a young girl being shot, it automatically has a negative connotation, especially when referring to the strangers who teenagers may be giving their age, sex, location, and relationship status to. Who knows, they may be chatting with someone just as terrifying as the suspects in previous stories. Multivocality will also cause viewers who are parents to be more affected as it is presented that ComputerCOP is an important topic for them to know
about. Every parent wants to make sure their kids are safe and not putting themselves, sometimes unintentionally, in harm’s way.

Once the ComputerCOP story is over, it is time for the weather. To transition, there is a silent fade from ComputerCOP to a black screen. Suddenly, viewers are shown a full screen graphic with the Storm Track 5 logo flying in piece by piece. At the same time, somewhat intense music made up of violins is played. Behind the Storm Track logo are three circular lines with a red Doppler-like line moving inside the circle, symbolizing a weather radar. Overall, the weather broadcast is fairly mundane. The chief meteorologist, Chris Suchan, explains that there was some rain that day with record rainfalls at Kansas City International Airport, but this is explained with a tone of surprise and excitement, describing the rain as beneficial. His excited tone calms down as he shows close-ups of the radar and explains the future rain forecast, but it is still not a scary tone.

After Suchan is done showing the current radar, he steps to the left side of the screen as the green screen background changes to blue with the title of “What to Expect” at the top. Below it are three bullet points, “More Showers Tonight”, “Late PM Lt. Rain to Snow”, “Dusting to 1.5 inches (Mainly N).” Suchan explains the first bullet point at a regular pace, but when he comes to the information about snow, he slows down slightly and points to the words. “Tomorrow evening we do get a light rain to snow mix,” Suchan tells viewers, emphasizing the possibility of snow by widening his eyes, raising his eyebrows, and taking a noticeable pause after the word “snow” (KCTV, 2012). Yet this is the only time he adds a sense of negativity to the forecast. To back up the positivity, he says that roads should be just fine for travelers. Furthermore, as Suchan
Analyzing News 90

wraps up the forecast, he is shown at the news desk with Fuller and Stephens and he says that winter will arrive shortly, a concept many viewers may interpret as bad because of cold temperatures and possible snow. Yet Stephens says, “About time” and Suchan agrees, signifying they have all interpreted the winter season in a positive manner.

The weather is the last segment in the broadcast before sports, so this broadcast’s analysis is complete. Overall, most of the stories KCTV reported on were about somebody dying. There were five reports in a row that revolved around death, including a missing baby, a man accidentally getting run over by a truck, a man apparently burning himself to death, an eleven year old accidentally being shot, and two men being arrest for second degree murder. This repetitive theme may be interpreted by viewers as meaning murders and losing a loved one happens routinely in the Kansas City area. For viewers living in Kansas City, the close proximity will multiply this effect.

Another common technique used by the station is camera close-ups of subjects. Used throughout the broadcast, the enlarged images help to draw viewers into the story and also provide added emotional impact (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). For example, the extreme close-up of the 11-year-old girl killed, the incinerated headrest in a car, and the close-up of computer screens during ComputerCOP.

The KCTV news anchors, Stephens and Fuller, were mostly composed when reporting stories. They did not use sensational words, exaggerated facial expressions, or body movements, and did not display overly strong emotions behind their vocal delivery. This would actually help prevent or decrease the development of mean world syndrome; however, it may not be enough to overcome the high number of violent or distressing stories.
KSHB: 10:00 pm Broadcast on February 13, 2012

The first thing viewers of the February 13, 2012, KSHB news broadcast see is a full screen, orange-yellow graphic reading “Breaking New” that flies in. The words are in all caps and in a 3D Helvetica font. At the same time, viewers hear a high pitched ding and dynamic, fast-paced violins, quickly followed by two news anchors’ voices. A female says they are going to begin with breaking news out of Kansas City; a male voice quickly follows, stating a man was shot and killed near 34th and Forest Streets. As the location is given, viewers are shown a Google map that has the specific location pointed out by showing a pointer to the specific location with the street names in a large font above the pointer. At the top of the map is a title that simply reads “Shooting”. The male throws the broadcast to reporter Syed Shabbir who is live at the scene.

Viewers see Shabbir from the chest up, holding a microphone, with a serious facial expression. It is dark outside and a blanket of snow is visible in the background. He reports that police cleared the scene 30 minutes ago after they found a man who had been shot lying in the middle of the street; he stresses the words “shot” and “lying in the middle of the street” by saying them a little slower to add emphasis for viewers. A bottom-third graphic displays Shabbir’s name, but then changes to read “Deadly Shooting.” At the same time, a small graphic in the top left-hand corner shown to read “Breaking News.” These two graphics serve as visual signals for viewers, reminding them of the story’s seriousness.

As Shabbir continues describing the scene, footage of police vans and cars with their lights flashing are shown. The bottom third Graphic now reads “Kansas City” in large letters, and “34th & Forest Ave.” in a smaller font underneath. Shabbir reiterates the
location by saying the street names, adding that it is “just one block east of Troost.” He
states the victim was taken to a hospital where he died from his injuries. Footage of
police officers at the scene remains on screen as Shabbir reveals police arrested a woman
believed to be the only suspect in the case. Shabbir puts a large amount of vocal
inflection when reporting the word “woman” by saying it in a higher vocal tone and
pausing slightly after saying it. Some may take this vocal cue as meaning it is a surprise
a female was arrested.

Wrapping up the report, Shabbir is shown back on screen with “Live” in the top
left corner. He says a maroon truck was towed from the scene, and the names and ages of
those involved have not been revealed. The “Live” graphic changes back to reading
“Breaking News” as Shabbir repeats the most important details of the story one last time
for viewers – that one man was shot to death near 34th Street and Forest Avenue and one
woman was arrested.

Analyzing the first story of the broadcast, there are a couple aspects that could
add to viewers’ mean world syndrome. First, it is the very first report, symbolizing that it
is the most important thing for viewers to learn about (Gerbner, 1969). The fact that it is
labeled breaking news and given special music and graphics only adds to this idea. Then
there is the element of repeatedly saying someone was shot to death; during the story,
which lasts one minute, this is said three times. Plus there are visual reminders through
the word “Shooting” at the top of the Google map “Deadly Shooting” is shown as a
bottom-third title graphic at the beginning and the end of the story. There is also a lot of
redundancy in stating the location of the murder. It may add to the story’s scariness
when the reporter mentions the shooting took place just one block away from Troost.
Troost is a street known for violence in Kansas City (an idea also referenced in the
KMBC broadcast), so by referencing Troost’s close proximity, viewers may interpret the
location of the crime to also be a violent neighborhood. This goes the same for those
living close to or in the neighborhood where the shooting occurred; they are likely to get
the sense that they live in a dangerous location.

Immediately after Shabbir signs off, viewers are hit with another dark story.
Viewers see footage of someone holding a flashlight in a pitch black location, lighting up
a wall that has a message spray painted on it; it appears to be inside a building. The
environment is eerie enough, but adding to it is a distorted male’s voice. The voice says
in a very deep tone, “This here says ‘Kara is gone,’” and as he says each word of the
graffiti message, the camera and flashlight highlight each word. Following the short clip
is more footage of two dark figures walking through the building holding flashlights to
light the way. The KSHB male anchor’s voice announces that later in the broadcast, 41
Action News investigates the “secret search” for Kara Kobetsky. Then the female
anchor’s voice breaks in. “What we’ve uncovered could change everything,” she says,
adding anticipation by stressing “everything,” saying it slower than other words in the
sentence.

Quickly after saying the investigative story could change everything, as if she is
reading a run-on sentence, the female anchor leads into a brief weather preview, stating
temperatures are about to drop. Viewers now see both the male and female anchors
sitting at a news desk, around two feet away from each other. A bottom-third title
graphic identifies them as Mark Clegg and Christa Dubill. Clegg speaks up with his
eyebrows raised, posing a question about the dropping temperatures. “Will that lead to
any icing on the morning drive to school or work?” he says as he gently raises his left hand, palm upward, towards viewers. Yet viewers are about to find out that both Dubill and Clebb have mislead them in this weather introduction. Weatherman Gary Lezak is shown behind a glass-top desk with a large flat-screen television behind him. Just after saying the last bit of snow is moving out the area, Lezak contradicts Dubill’s claim that temperatures are about to drop. “The temperatures tonight have not gone down, they’ve gone up,” he says in a strong tone of voice. He puts considerable emphasis on “not” and “up” by pronouncing them in a higher tone of voice and pausing before and after the words. As a map of current temperatures is shown, Lezak continues by explaining most temperatures are above freezing, “so we do not have any icing at all,” saying each word very clearly. Just before he turns the broadcast back over to the anchors, he adds in a relaxed tone that by morning there may be a little bit of ice in areas that have been untreated, but he does not appear worried or concerned by the conditions.

Even though Lezak did not give overly negative news, the anchors introduced the weather as something viewers should be concerned about. They phrased the potential of ice in a serious question for viewers. Lezak does his best to overcome the negative intro by putting strong emphasis on the fact that temperatures had risen, and he downplays the possibility of ice in the morning. So depending on whom viewers choose to listen to, the weather forecast could be scary or not.

The next story also focuses on the weather and the snow. Clegg has a closed half-smile as he half-heartedly says the first snow of the season has finally fallen, but then adds more pep to his voice as he reports the mild winter has been both good and bad on
the city’s budget. A smiling Dubill joins in by explaining money is being saved by not salting the roads; however not as many tax dollars are being collected for high heat bills.

The story has been introduced as focusing on the city’s spending and budget, but the report quickly changes focus and becomes somewhat jumpy. A golden-colored full screen graphic similar to the breaking news image at the beginning of the broadcast is shown; this time it says “Live” in a large, Helvetica font. Viewers faintly hear a zooming sound as the graphics fly on screen, then the sound of violins quickly going down a musical scale. Following the graphic, viewers see live footage being shot out the windshield of a car driving down the interstate at night. Dubill introduces Christina Medina who is on the road to “see if there are any slick spots.” As she introduces Medina, a title graphic at the top of the screen displays Medina’s name in the largest font. Above her name in smaller letters are the words “Winter Blast”, and to the left is a moving laptop clip-art graphic that spins around at a moderate speed to display the Skype logo on its screen. As viewers watch the shaky footage being shot out of the windshield from a car driving down the highway in the dark, they hear Medina say that she has only seen two snowplows and drivers are taking it very slow. Things look good, Medina says, but throughout the day, “they said this first snow fall was quite the experience,” yet she does not reference who “they” are. So far, Medina has hinted at the idea that overall the roads are safe, but stresses that drivers are taking it slow as if conditions are still dangerous. She then repeats this idea by setting viewers up to believe that earlier in the day, “they” had trouble in snowy conditions.

The jumbled, jumpy snow story continues. Next, viewers suddenly see the sights and sounds of a college basketball game: a player dunks a ball against his opponent; a
coach is yelling from the sidelines; an extreme close-up of a fan with face paint jumping up and down - all the excitement of a game. This footage is justified by Medina’s voiceover as she says that like a rivalry between colleges of like KU and Mizzou basketball teams, there is a similar rivalry on the road when it snows. Now quick clips of two middle-aged males are shown; one smiles and says Missouri did a good job keeping the roads cleared, and the other clips had another man saying that Kansas spends more money on their roads. Following the two men’s opinions, Medina reports that the Kansas Department of Transportation admits they have fewer roads to salt as they only do the interstates, Kansas highways, and U.S. highways. Footage of a highway sign and cars driving while snow falls appears on screen as she gives this explanation. More images of snowy traffic conditions continue as Medina says Missouri has to also take care of secondary and county roads.

Suddenly a close-up of a gas pump being lifted off the machine is shown. Viewers quickly see a man filling up his car, followed by a close-up of the gas machine’s digital display showing the gallons pumped and dollars spent. Medina states that during the day, drivers were having issues with others on the road and slow speeds. A middle-aged woman wearing glasses is shown close-up saying her problem was since that it was the first snow of the season, people weren’t acclimated to the driving conditions and drove too fast. One of the men already featured in the story is shown complaining that traffic was slow at first but after a while it was fine.

More close-ups continue, now showing a car being driven. One shot is the steering wheel being moved and the other a shot of the side-view mirror. Medina says that some drivers say the mild winter made it difficult to remember how to maneuver a
car in the snow, but for the city budget, it is both good and bad news. As footage of cars in wet and snowy conditions continues, Medina says the city has a $2.75 million snow budget, but as of the previous week, had only spent $1.6 million, most of which was on salt and chemicals. On the other hand, she points out, the city earns money from taxes on heating bills; colder temperatures equal higher bills. More footage continues, including highway signs and an extreme close-up of someone inserting his or her credit card at a gas machine, followed by footage of the Quik Trip gas station where Medina interviewed people. She says the budget will likely even out, and drivers want better conditions. The woman interviewed earlier is now shown saying, “I thought they were very treacherous this morning.” Viewers are shown footage filmed through a car’s smudgy windshield as the wipers streak, making it hard to see cars ahead. This acts as a visual emphasis of the snowy roads, as it gives viewers a sense of having difficulty driving. Another female, who viewers have not seen yet, is shown saying her back tires lost control.

Rounding out the report, viewers are once again shown the Skype footage from inside a car driving down the highway at night. Viewers hear Medina’s voice being transmitted to the station via telephone. She states that she and the driver are still on Interstate 435 on the Missouri side getting ready to cross the state line. She says from their viewpoint the roads are good and traffic is moving smoothly.

While Medina’s report had been originally introduced as a narrative about Kansas City’s snow removal budget, it turned out to mostly be focused that day’s poor driving conditions. This may have been Medina’s personal interpretation of how such a budget story should be addressed. Instead of getting quotes and interviews with staff from the roads department on either side of the state line, she filmed the reactions of common
people who had driven in the snow. This is a reinforcement of the idea that snowy conditions are an annoyance for drivers and sometimes dangerous. Yet Medina’s did not use vocal emphasis on many words, avoiding the opportunity to highlight words such as “snow” and “difficult,” which helped to keep her report somewhat neutral. On the other hand, it did mostly center on how the snow made for rough driving conditions and included the shot of a smeared windshield that was hard to see out of.

Following the story, viewers are shown a shot of the KSHB website while the male anchor Clegg says viewers can visit the site to track the latest weather, send in photos, and see business and school closings. Mentioning the closings adds a negative tone, indicating that the weather is or will be bad enough to cancel events, businesses, and schools, which may increase worry for viewers.

After plugging the website, Clegg presents the next story as he is shown on screen at the news desk with an over-the-should graphic. The graphic shows Time Warner Cable’s logo with the words “Game Outage” underneath. As Clegg begins to speak, he has his eyebrows raised and says, “Well some of the Sunflower Showdown became a no-show for thousands of cable customers.” He moves he head slightly to the left while elongating “well” and then drops his voice to emphasis “no show.” He relaxes his eyebrows and explains that Time Warner Cable had a power outage during the KU versus K-State basketball game that aired on ESPN. Viewers are shown Time Warner Cable’s Twitter page where angry fans had left posts; this then dissolves into close-ups of updates Time Warner posted to the page in response. Yet Clegg says many fans had to go to local bars to watch the game. Footage of fans in a bar is then shown, with some people watching television screens. Clegg says the news station caught up with fans at the 810
Zone, leading into footage of fans speaking on the situation. The first fan, shown from
the chin up, is identified as Brian Hargrave. With eyebrows furrowed together, he simply
says he and his friends decided to go to the bar to watch the game. Next a very happy
girl with a large smile on her face is shown, also from the chin up. She is identified as
Ceri Lofin, and although she seems happy, below her name is the description “Had to
watch game at bar.” This may be interpreted by some viewers as meaning she was forced
to watch the game at the bar when she would rather be at home. Lofin says she and her
friends waited to see if the game would come back on at home, but it didn’t happen.
After her quote is shown, Clegg is shown back in the studio, centered in the camera shot.
He says Time Warner Cable stopped receiving the feed from ESPN, but it was back on
the air at 9:00 pm; the company plans to re-air the game at 12:30 in the morning.

The basketball story, like the snow story, was not overly negative. Clegg’s
introduction was somewhat illustrative with his raised eyebrows and emphasized words,
but that was about it. The only other hint at pessimism was Lofin’s description on her
lower-third graphic, “Had to watch game at bar,” yet that may not have even been
interpreted as negative by all viewers. So overall, this story was not likely to add to
viewers’ mean world syndrome.

The subsequent story, however, is highly likely to increase one’s mean world
syndrome. Anchor Dubill is shown at the news desk from her chest up. With a serious
face and eyebrows somewhat furrowed together, she begins with, “Fire destroyed an
Olathe home this afternoon,” stressing “destroyed” and adding empathy to her vocal
delivery. Viewers see a white one-story home with heavy white smoke flowing out its top
edges. Then, as she says the story is an update to one they previously reported on,
viewers can see a large, sudden burst of flames within the house, immediately following by an immense amount of black smoke emerge from the home. Dubill explains where the house was located, and then reports, with compassion still in her voice, that heavy smoke and fire made it difficult for firefighters to extinguish the flames. Nobody was home “during the blaze,” she says, but firefighters did rescue a dog. She then adds in a quieter voice that a cat is still missing as footage of the firemen is shown. They are in their full gear and all that is visible is the white smoke from the home. The fire story is rather brief, lasting only 18 seconds, but it is negative in nature, and Dubill emphasizes key words such as “heavy smoke” and describes the fire as a “blaze,” which adds color to the report. The footage is also dramatic, especially when the flames suddenly enlarges within the house, and the idea that animals were inside may emotionally touch viewers who also own a dog or cat. They may imagine their own homes being destroyed by a fire and how they would lose all their belongings. There is also no stated cause of the fire, information that could have helped ease some viewers fears of a similar situation; for example, if the cause was a cigarette and a viewer does not smoke, he may feel less threatened. Likewise, if the cause was a stove that was left on, the viewer could take that as a sign to always check that their stove burners are always turned off.

Following the fire story is a report focused on raising awareness for a young girl shot in the head. To announce the story, Clegg is shown in the center of the screen, looking directly into the camera. He quickly says that purple will be the color to wear tomorrow at a Lee’s Summit Middle School as students plan to wear the color to show their support for a Campbell Middle School student who was accidentally shot in her head by a friend. Two unidentified young girls wearing purple sweatshirts are shown
Analyzing News 101

calmly sitting on a couch, looking off to the side of the camera, most likely at a reporter, then a separate shot of them texting on a phone. A bottom-third title graphic comes across the screen and reads “Wearing Purple for Alyssa.” As various footage of a house in the dark of night is shown, first a mailbox, then the front door, Clegg says in a slightly lower tone of voice that officers say the girl being honored was accidentally shot Friday night when one of her friends picked up a gun that was in the home. Family and friends of Alyssa Howe say she is now in a medically induced coma, information Clegg reports in a straightforward manner as viewers see a close up of police caution tape. Then viewers are shown a close-up of one of the original girls shown, who is now identified as Alyssa’s friend Kayla Bock; Bock says that she loves Alyssa. “I know she’ll make it through this because she’s strong, and she won’t ever let anything take her and tear her apart,” she states with a tiny hint of hope in her voice. She adds that she knows Alyssa will get through it because of all the prayers being said for her. While Bock does not display much emotion, she does shift her eyes often, sometimes looking down, other times at the reporter, and a couple moments directly into the camera as if she is having a hard time speaking about Alyssa or that she is nervous. After Bock’s quote, viewers are taken back to Clegg inside the KSHB station; he reports that no charges have been filed against the gun owner, then lifts his voice up in tone and leans slightly back as he says prosecutors are reviewing the case.

This story has a few aspects that could add to mean world syndrome. For viewers who are parents of teenagers or children, they may interpret the story through perspectival meaning, and it could make them worry about their own children accidentally being shot. Even if they do not own a gun, they may wonder about the
parents of their children’s friends having unlocked weapons around their homes. The footage of the two teen girls may also impact viewers; the blonde girl who is quoted in the story seems nervous and somewhat emotional when mentioning Alyssa’s willpower. Yet Clegg gives viewers a disheartening update by stating Alyssa is in a drug-induced coma, adding to the story’s sadness, especially for parents who may imagine their own children in such a state of health. Then there are visual symbols that can be recoded for this specific story, such the camera footage in the dark of night displaying the home where the shooting took place, plus the close-ups of police caution tape. These visual symbolizers of danger add to the story’s impact.

The next story is introduced by Dubill, who has a serious tone in her voice and her eyes narrowed toward the camera. She states that a local group has joined in the fight to keep a Missouri senate bill from moving forward. She then explains that the group is called the Kansas-Missouri Dream Alliance, and they are against bill 590. As she says the group is against the bill, she highlights the word “against” by pronouncing it louder and a couple tones higher than other parts of the sentence, most likely done to help viewers understand which side of the issue the Alliance is on. Viewers are shown footage of the group at a meeting in a small room. The group appears to be made up of Latino members who are young adults to middle age, and members are sitting around tables listening to others talk. Dubill explains that bill 590 is “a proposal requiring Missouri public schools to verify legal status of students and their parents.” She reports this in a straightforward tone, but then picks up her intensity as she goes on. “Plus people would have to prove that they are legal during police stops,” she says emphatically,
add more importance to that specific sentence for viewers. Her tone calms back down as she adds they must have their documentation on them at all times.

Viewers could interpret Dubill’s delivery a couple different ways due to perspectival meaning. Those against such laws could believe she feels the idea of people having to prove their legality during police stops is going too far. On the other hand, viewers who like such an idea may interpret her emphasis as highlighting the most important part of the bill. Just before an interview clip is shown, Dubill explains that members of the Dream Alliance feel it is a federal issue, not state, and that lawmakers should be focusing on other issues such as the economy. A Latino female is shown speaking to the reporter, who is off camera, and a bottom-third graphic identifies her as Yahaira Carrillo. She appears to be around twenty years of age and has a black shirt with the words “Educate” in large letters across the front. “We have to make sure they are getting educated, that is the law,” she says confidently with a straight face. “Anything that gets into the way of that, we really can’t support.” After the quote, viewers are shown a wide shot of Dubill and Clegg at the news desk. Clegg watches Dubill conclude the report as she says the bill passed the general laws committee in the state senate last month. After stating this, she looks to her left at Clegg, then they both turn their heads towards the camera smiling and move on to a teaser for a light-hearted story to be featured after a commercial break.

Latino viewers may experience the most concern after seeing the Dream Alliance story. This is due to polysemy; while Dubill never mentions a specific race or ethnicity that would be expected prove their legal status, all the members shown at the Alliance
meeting appeared to be Latino, so viewers are likely conclude that senate bill 590 only or mostly affects this specific ethnicity.

Another way to analyze the report is to use polyvalence. Viewers who agree with the rightness of such legislation will view the report as a welcome sign of progress; however, they could also feel threatened by the Dream Alliance as the group could be instrumental in stopping the bill from passing. Others who disagree with bill 590 will feel the exact opposite. These viewers will have a negative reaction to the idea behind the bill and will be thankful the news covered a group opposing it. These viewers will be glad to see their side of the issue being addressed, especially before the first commercial break in the news broadcast, because while it was not considered a top story, it is still placed early enough to be viewed as important.

As noted earlier, after the Dream Alliance story, Clegg and Dubill look at the screen smiling to preview three stories before going to a commercial break. In the background is a heroic soundtrack featuring horned instruments, creating an atmosphere of power and prestige. The first story the news anchors highlight is a light-hearted preview about a local dancer who will appear on the NBC show “Smash.” Then there is a weather preview where the meteorologist is shown pointing to a radar map of the United States; he says the next weather system is near California, but poses the question of what does it mean for Kansas City residents. Finally, the tone turns dark, but the music remains the same heroic soundtrack. On the screen is a very dark and shadowed silhouette of a person who could be either male or female. The silhouette speaks and says, “He is alerting on,” then pauses, “human remains.” This very brief sound clip creates a sense of suspense for viewers, particularly through the dramatics of the pause before “human
remains.” After the clip, a male reporter with gray hair is shown in front of a flat screen television being used to show an over the shoulder graphic. On the screen is the word “Investigators” with clip art of a magnifying glass hovering over a fingerprint. The reporter says he is investigator Russ Ptacek. He speaks slowly with quick pauses and says he is going to take viewers into the secret group searching for Kara Kobetsky. Then the broadcast fades to commercial.

When the broadcast returns, it is time to air the investigative story that has been previewed twice now within the broadcast. The camera shows the two news anchors at the desk and slowly zooms in on the two of them, helping to engage viewers (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001). Clegg calmly, yet seriously, begins by saying a “secret group is trying find Kara Kobetsky.” Dubill then takes over with a more serious tone and expression on her face. She says KSHB’s investigative team was there “when a cadaver dog made a hit,” and she adds that for six months, their reporter “has been imbedded with the secret group.” An illustrated graphic with the KSHB logo appears and the words “Investigators” flies in from the front of the screen while dark and suspenseful music is played in the background. Both the previews and the introduction have already drawn viewers into the story. The initial camera zooming in on the anchors, mixed with attention-grabbing words like “secret” and “cadaver dog” are likely to peak interest. Plus there is the zooming graphics and suspenseful music to also draw viewers in.

The broadcast continues to feature the zooming-in technique as Ptacek is shown in the studio. He has a television located on each side of him, one showing the word “Investigators” in a large Helvetica font and the other displaying photos of a teenage girl. The camera zooms in to him as he says the story being reported is known too well for
viewers. Apparently, KSHB covered this story back in November when it escalated.

Now, another investigation by the news station reveals clues they felt the Belton police overlooked. Despite the report just beginning, it has already taken on an illustrative tone which was done through attention-grabbing key words and now Ptacek’s vocal delivery. He draws out his words and raises his voice when mentioning the possibility of the police overlooking important details. He explains that the news station introduced experts to the Kobetsky family while other experts contacted the family on their own; in the end, Ptacek says they all came together, free of charge, to try and help find the young girl. “You’ll soon understand why we are blurring their identities,” Ptaceks says, then pauses, “even that of the cadaver dog.”

Thus begins the investigative report. From here on out, a majority of the images viewers see are dark, mysterious, and at times blurry. A blurred dog that resembles a German Shepard is shown walking down stairs and in unlit rooms. Images of what looks like the inside of an abandoned building continue and flashlights are often used to light paths. Spray-painted words on walls are also shown, including the words “Kara is gone,” which are shown as a computerized deep voice reads the words allowed. Ptacek says that viewers are watching a cadaver dog begin its search for Kobetsky, who has been missing for “nearly five years,” and he emphasizes the number five. He explains the search is part of a month-long investigation by private individuals checking out clues, which he describes as “obscure.” Viewers see shadowed figures walking around holding up bright flashlights to illuminate their way. To explain why their identities are being hidden, Ptacek says the group fears retaliation from police and suspects in the case. All these components, the dark, blurred images, deep distorted voices, close-ups of graffiti, hidden
identities, and information reported by Ptacek are creating an atmosphere of mystery and distress for viewers.

After stating the group wishes to remain unidentified, viewers are shown a canted angle of black, cursive words written on a wall in spray paint. Flashlights help light up the wall, and the camera has to be tilted to show the words so viewers watching the report can read them. Ptacek is heard asking one of the so-called Kobetsky Sleuths if it says, “Murder make me happy.” He says each word slowly and separated from one another, rather than reading it as a fluid sentence. Immediately after that, another close-up of spray paint is shown and a distorted voice reads the words as being “I did it,” once again pausing between each word while illuminating each word with a flashlight.

Footage of dark silhouettes walking about the abandoned building continues, and Ptacek says that some of the sleuths are retired police officers, while others are civilians with knowledge of psychology and research. Viewers see footage shot in what appears to be a concrete basement, but a dark moving blurred out image takes up approximately 80 percent of the screen. Ptacek says it is a woman who is an expert in human remains, referring to the woman who accompanies the cadaver dog mentioned earlier in the report. Viewers are able to hear what sounds like a dog’s whine and the woman giving commands to the dog.

Next, two clips from home movies of Kobetsky are shown to viewers. One features her opening a Christmas present and another has her laughing, looking at the camera, getting ready to go sledding in the snow. Over the home movies, Ptacek says Kobetsky appeared “trouble free,” but then footage from a security camera swipes onto the screen. Ptacek says Kobetsky is mostly remembered from high school surveillance
footage recorded the day she disappeared. She is shown walking down the school hallway. Next, viewers are shown a mug shot of a young male who has messy, curly hair and a large tattoo that begins under his chin and covers his neck. On screen, the mug shot image of her boyfriend is placed side-by-side a handwritten restraining order. It’s revealed that “Kobetsky vanished just days after filing this restraining order against her boyfriend.” Ptacek pauses in between “vanished” and “just days,” highlighting the irony of the short time period between the restraining order request and her disappearance. With the boyfriend still visible on the left side of the screen, the still of the restraining order on the right half zooms into a specific portion of the paperwork Ptacek wants to highlight for viewers. As he says Kobestky claimed the boyfriend kidnapped and restrained her, as well as threatened to slit her throat, and the corresponding words on the restraining order are highlighted in a bright yellow.

The setting of the story changes to a residential home as viewers see an older man placing a custom-made flag into a holder. On the flag is a large picture of Kobestky and words that are not entirely visible as the flag moves around. It appears to have the girl’s name and the date she went missing. Ptacek says the flag flying outside her home and family heirlooms are further proof that the family has not given up hope. Various shots of a small purple quilt featuring numerous photos of Kobestky are shown, some close-up. Her mother is now shown in front of what looks like a dresser; it is completely covered in photos of Kobestky, angel statues, and reward posters. Ptacek says more photos are on the family Bible, and her mother is then shown saying it is open to the passage with “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of darkness.” Kobestky’s mother is emotionless and distant, and she stands with her shoulders hunched forward.
extreme close-up of Kobetsky’s photo is shown as her mother reads the previously mentioned Bible passage, and the camera slowly zooms in on the photo, a camera technique to help engage viewers in the story (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett 2001). In the photo, Kobetsky is looking directly into the camera with a straight face; it looks as though it could be a school yearbook photo. As the mom is looking at the small shrine, Ptacek asks the mother which piece of memorabilia is the most “precious” to her. An extreme close-up of a long purple, pink, and teal crotchet string is then shown in the mother’s hand, as she chooses a finger crotchet “because she made it with her own hands and her own love.”

Immediately following the sentimental quote from Kobetsky’s mother, the screen flashes back to the pitch black, abandoned house with a guy holding a flashlight illuminating graffiti on the wall. At the exact same moment, a distorted voice says, “This here says ‘I will kill.’” The image when juxtaposed has just added drama to the story. Additionally, the sequence of the story heightens the value of the “I will kill” quote as it was placed directly following the mother remembering her daughter (Saussaure, 1959).

Moving on after the “I will kill” highlight, footage of the dark building and flashlights continues as Ptacek says, “The secret Kobetsky sleuths fear Belton police are not following up on clues their group has uncovered.” He pauses after the words “secret” and “fear,” highlighting these more dramatic words. It is revealed that the sleuths think that rather than following clues, the Belton police are trying to intimidate them into ending the family’s investigation. Viewers now see Kobetsky’s mother and an unidentified man sitting on a couch with the his arm around the mom. The mom remains completely emotionless; her face is so relaxed that she appears to have a permanent
downtrodden look. A close-up of her speaking is shown as a bottom-third title graphic is shown that finally reveals her name. She is identified as Rhonda Beckford, Kara’s mother, and she says that from what she has been told, she feels the police have in fact been intimidating the investigators in attempts to get the investigation stopped. Ptacek emphatically says that one of the sleuths claim the group has been threatened that a grand jury could possibly subpoena them for interfering, and Ptacek stresses the words “grand jury” and “subpoena,” as if to sway viewers into believing these threats are baseless and bullying.

Then an extreme close-up of the man sitting on the couch is shown as he says nobody wants to be threatened by a grand jury “when you’re trying to do the right thing.” Similar to the mother, he is relaxed and straight-faced; however, he does not seem as worn down. The camera then shows Ptacek sitting on an opposite couch, leaning forward. He asks if the man or any of the sleuths have done anything “even bordering on illegal.” The man is shown saying that as far as he knows, everyone in the group trying to bring his daughter home has put everything front and center and within the law. A bottom-third graphic appears and identifies the man as “Jim Beckford” and describes him as “Kara’s step-father.”

Immediately after the step-father finishes his sentence, Ptacek is shown outside, just in front of a white Belton police car. He says the police denied his request for an interview. Yet he follows up with, “Witnesses say they [the police] have been to the house where the cadaver dog hit.” This is the only credit Ptacek gives the police in the report; everything else mentioned regarding the police department’s job is put in negative context.
There is a brief moment of silence as footage of a street at night is shown and viewers can hear and see cars going down the street. Ptacek said he went to Belton at night to see the house in question for himself. An outside shot of the Belton Historical Museum awning showing the business’ name is shown on screen, filling most of the frame; this is particularly odd because at the exact same moment, Ptacek said the sleuths asked the station not to reveal who they were or even what part of town the home in question is located in order to protect the possible crime scene. So viewers are left to think that the house may be located close to the Historical Museum, even despite the sleuths hoping the location remains secret.

Footage of the step-father flashes back on screen. “There have been a lot of rumors and innuendos about that house. I don’t know if she is or isn’t there; there’s a lot of unanswered questions.”

As if to answer the father’s concern, the screen switches to show the blurred cadaver dog inside the dark house, sitting and barking. Ptacek’s voiceover says the cadaver dog is trained to sit when it smells human remains. “As our cameras rolled, it sat repeatedly in the same area,” he says, indicating that the dog must be alerting to remains. The dog’s trainer is then shown against a very dark, blue background. The trainer is completely blacked out in a silhouette that takes up three-quarters of the screen, and her voice is distorted to hide her identity. The shadowy images on screen mixed with the deep, distorted voice create a dark feeling for viewers. This feeling is important to note as the trainer states, “At some point there was human remains; I am 100% sure he is alerting to human remains.” Although what the trainer says can easily be understood by viewers, KSHB decided to display words on screen as well (See Figure 5). So viewers
are not only hearing that there was supposedly a dead body at the house, but they are also reading the information as well, making the statement more memorable and impactful.

A quick shot of the cadaver dog standing on top of a table is shown as Ptacek says a family is actually lives upstairs in the home where the dog is alerting to human remains. His vocal tone when delivering this news interprets the meaning of this for viewers; he stresses the word “living” and has the sound of astonishment in his voice. Following this revelation, he says the family living in the home lives in constant fear, but Ptacek never says what the residents live in fear of.

Another shadowed and blurry figure is shown on screen giving information for viewers. As with the trainer, subtitles are shown on screen even though this is not necessary. “I’m convinced something happened to her here,” the person, who appears to be a woman, says. “It is very possible that Kara is here and nothing is being done about it.” The person is not identified, but viewers may assume it is one of the people living in the home since the quotes are given just after Ptacek states someone lives in the house. She has reiterated the theme that the Belton police are hindering justice for the young girl.

Ptacek goes on to say that after the sleuths revealed their findings to police, the police stopped by the home but left after “only 40 minutes.” To some viewers, forty minutes may be a justifiable length of time for the officers to visit the home, especially if they had already been there before. Yet Ptacek’s interpretation for viewers signifies that he feels this was not a substantial time; he pauses before saying “only 40 minutes,” plus adds the “only,” essentially telling viewers the police should have taken more time. To back up Ptacek’s interpretation, Kobetsky’s mother is shown stating that she does not
believe 40 minutes is enough time to perform a thorough search. Ptacek asks her if she believes there is a chance her daughter’s body is inside the house, to which she answers that since the dog was alerting to something, she feels it is definitely possible.

Wrapping up the report, Ptacek states the mother claims the police have not returned to visit the home where the cadaver dog hit. To remind viewers of the dog alerting to human remains, a quick clip of the dog sitting and making noise is shown. “But the Kobetsky sleuths say tonight, police continue to investigate them,” pausing for effect before “them” and stating the word in a higher vocal tone, once again insinuating questionable behavior from the Belton police.

The report has ended, but to tie up loose ends, Ptacek is shown in the KSHB studio at the news desk. Speaking very slowly and with a lot of pauses, he says, “In a statement, Belton’s elected police chief acknowledged considering a grand jury to question what he terms, uncooperative witnesses.” This statement is filled with a lot of loaded vocal emphasis by Ptacek. He strongly vocally stresses “elected,” saying it louder and adding a pause afterwards, as if to sway how viewers should act at the voting polls. He then pauses slightly before and after “acknowledged,” helping viewers to process that the police chief has admitted to the idea of a grand jury. The final major pause comes after “what he terms”. Then, moving his hands and arms up and down at chest level, he says “uncooperative witnesses.” Ptacek has made it extremely clear for viewers that they should believe the Belton police and the police chief have not done a thorough investigation and are preventing justice.

Finally, Ptacek turns to the Dubill and Clegg, and says that every one of the Kobetsky sleuths say they have turned over all their evidence to either the crime squad or
the FBI. To emphasize his statement, which is defending the sleuths, he once again moves his arms and hands up and down at chest level, putting emotion behind his words. “They acknowledge they are not handing it over to Belton [police] because they say they don’t trust the Belton police chief after four and a half years to solve the case”; another stab at the police. He adds that a grand jury is not possible without a prosecuting officer to sign off on it. Dubill asks what the prosecutor says about a grand jury, to which Ptacek answers the prosecutor claims there has not been a submission from police and there is no plan for a grand jury.

Ptacek’s investigative report is highly likely to create or add to mean world syndrome in viewers. Ptacek exhibits such emotion behind all of his words, and the report as a whole is set in a dark atmosphere. The pure nature of the story can create feelings of danger due its focus on death, a missing child, and the abundance of nighttime images. Plus there are the graffiti walls with messages about killing and the low, distorted voices that may create feelings of danger and mystery in viewers. The report also leads viewers to doubt the Belton police, a government service many depend to prevent and solve crimes. Because of this, viewers living in Belton or those with family members in the town are likely to feel their basic physiological need of safety is not being met. At the end of the report, when Ptacek is sitting at the news desk concluding his report, he blatantly points fingers at the Belton police chief, strongly emphasizing for viewers that he is an elected official. This can be directly linked to mean world syndrome; Nari and Sullivan (2001) suggested that mean world syndrome could have the power to influence how one votes in elections. Yet through polyvalence, viewers may have varying opinions on whether justice is being served for Kobetsky. A few viewers may feel the Belton
police have done all they can, but Ptacek’s very persuasive interpretation of the story for viewers is that the police are ignoring facts and focusing on the sleuths rather than the crime, so it is likely most viewers will side with Ptacek.

Immediately following Ptacek’s investigative report on the disappearance of a teenage girl, the camera switches to focus on the male news anchor, Clegg. He has a straight face and speaks in a low, hushed tone. He says they have an update to a story aired last week that featured a sick thirteen-year-old girl name Gloria Mengel. Footage of Mengel begins and shows her sitting in a wheelchair speaking to what appears to be a speech therapist. Clegg explains that she has suffered several episodes of cancer, blindness, and a stroke. Clegg’s vocal tone rises, and he sounds happier as he states that through all her troubles, Mengel has always shown courage and heart. Viewers continue to see footage of the young girl with long, brown hair at therapy and some shots of her smiling. Viewers learn that after the original story aired in a previous KSHB broadcast, the Supporting Kids Foundation made a monetary donation to the family to help with Mengel’s medical bills. Mengel’s mother, Clegg says, is grateful that she can now focus on caring for her daughter. Clegg tells viewers of the broadcast that they can learn more by visiting the KSHB website.

This brief story is essentially a positive report for viewers. Yet through multivocality, viewers may differ on what they take away from the story. Despite Mengel’s continuous medical troubles, she is shown smiling and casually laughing, so some viewers may feel more at ease about her condition and see that she is getting help. Other viewers may focus and remember the negatives; Mengel is a young, innocent looking girl who has had to suffer through medical conditions that no child should
endure, not to mention the financial stress it has all caused her mother. Viewers with young children may also feel added impact from the story if they envision their own children being diagnosed with cancer or having a stroke.

After the update over Mengel, the broadcast goes straight into its weather segment. Unlike other broadcasts in this analysis, this weather broadcast and meteorologist is undeniably happy and positive. The entire weather segment lasts five minutes, but only a small portion of that time is actually spent on a forecast. Instead, the meteorologist, Gary Lezak, happily announces the winner of a first snow contest the station held and spends two minutes and thirty seconds discussing the contest. In that time, Lezak is shown surprising the winner, LaToya Fraser, at her home. Lezak, Fraser, and her husband are all smiles and even laugh as they discuss guessing when the first snow would arrive. Finally, Lezak gets to the current weather conditions and forecast. While he doesn’t smile throughout the forecast, viewers are likely to sense the excitement behind his voice. He speaks with a lot of emotion and projection in his voice, but for this broadcast, the news is mostly positive. He says that while the temperature is 33 degrees, it is rising and refreezing of water on the roads is not occurring. He explains that clouds will be moving out of the area, and although he does not create a negative narrative for viewers, his eyebrows are furrowed together rather tightly. He even avoids the opportunity to create worry over refreezing in viewers when saying the temperature will drop to 26 degrees overnight. On the radar, he points out a storm approaching the California coast and says it will eventually make its way towards Kansas City, but keeping with the positive theme, says it is not an impressive storm and will give the viewing area a good chance of drizzle, showers, and maybe a thunderstorm. Some
viewers may worry at the thought of a thunderstorm, but Lezak’s laidback tone is likely to leave viewers feeling comforted. He wraps up the forecast by giving the Tuesday forecast, which includes the chance of refreezing, but will mostly be driveways and puddles that were not treated earlier. After the forecast, the weather segment continues, but features fun photos of viewers with snowmen; this portion also has a lighthearted tone. Even the two news anchors get in on the positive atmosphere and say the snow that fell was good packing snow. Rather than complaining about snow, they end on a positive note.

That is the end of the KSHB broadcast before sports begins. Overall, the broadcast covered a variety of stories, including some that could add to mean world syndrome in viewers, as well as other narratives that were neutral or more positive. The broadcast began on a very negative note with breaking news of a man killed in the middle of the street, a fact that was repeated numerous times in that specific story. Then there were reports and images that illustrated a disastrous home fire, a teenager who was shot, and of course the extensive investigative piece covering a missing teenager. The KSHB broadcast included a couple of stories that were either more positive or could be considered neutral. The more neutral stories were the basketball game not being aired on television, the DREAM alliance senate bill, and the update on the young girl facing an illness. The most positive report by far was the weather, largely in part to the meteorologist’s cheerful attitude.

The broadcast demonstrated a brief theme of including misleading introductions done by the two news anchors. They first attempt to create a negative tone for a story by teasing viewers on the idea that refreezing of water on the streets is possible with low
temperatures, which could create hazardous driving conditions. Yet the meteorologist immediately denies those claims; therefore, the anchors possibly created anxiety in viewers for no reason and had misinterpreted the report. The next misleading introduction follows the weather preview, as the anchors interpret the next story as being about how the lack of snow so far that season could hurt the city’s budget, but the actual story is more about that day’s driving conditions and how drivers adapted to the first snow of the season.

Several of the broadcast’s nonverbal communications were not overtly negative, but there were a few techniques that were apparent, including the use of a few extreme close-ups. For example, there are extreme close-ups of inanimate objects such as snow, car tires moving against the road, and basketball fans, but then are also close-ups of fire flames inside a house and the menacing graffiti phrases. The mother and step-father of Kobetsky, the missing girl, are also shown very close-up speaking about their missing daughter. These close-ups essentially force viewers to see the image put on screen and process their meanings, whether or not that meaning will be construed as negative.

For most of the broadcast, the anchors and reporters keep the excitement and illustration out of their voices. Stories are introduced without unnecessary emotion by Clegg and Dubill. Yet the very first reporter, Shabbir, does have a sense of urgency in his voice, which adds impact to the breaking news story over a murder, plus it is the very first report of the broadcast. By far, the most illustrative reporter was Ptacek with his investigation. Nearly every sentence he spoke contained some sort of vocal emphasis on key words or tones of concern and bewilderment at either the actions of Belton police or surprise at what the Kobestky sleuths had discovered.
Of course, the most damaging segment in terms of creating mean world syndrome in viewers is most likely the investigative piece by Ptacek. As discussed earlier at length, it is likely the story’s dark visual images, emphatic narration by the reporter, and hints of injustice will have a negative effect on viewers, particularly those who interpret the story as showing the Belton police are not protecting local citizens. Additionally, Ptacek leads viewers to feel the town of Belton needs a new police chief, causing a person to change how they vote is a possible side effect of mean world syndrome (Nari and Sullivan, 2001).
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

My methodology listed three research questions. Research question number one asked how news stories were interpreted by producers, anchors, and reporters through framing. Tying this into question three, how may this add to viewers’ mean world syndrome? In answering these questions, three themes became rather apparent. The prevailing themes were the anchors and reporters, framing, and breaking news.

Anchors and Reporters

Anchors and reporters often signaled key information for viewers through their illustrative vocal tones, body movements, and which key words they stressed. A few reports were particularly illustrative. By far, KMBC anchor Laura Moritz is the most illustrative in framing stories for viewers. Her emphatic vocal delivery, facial expressions, and body movements when introducing stories added an emotional element that would otherwise not be there for viewers. For example, at the beginning of the KMBC broadcast she stresses that temperatures are “teetering” at the freezing point, while she leans forward and bringing her hands up with fingers curled. Ultimately, the weatherman will try to calm viewers as he says refreezing of water on roads is not a main concern. Yet it is too late; Moritz’s confident and emotional delivery comes across as though she believes this is a legit concern and important news for viewers. The KMBC broadcast as a whole seems to be most vivid in the words used to report stories. It is often not just the words used themselves, but also the vocalized emphasis used to make the descriptive words stand out for viewers. Seven minutes into the broadcast, a story regarding a house fire is described as “destroying a house inside and out,” and immediately after that story, Moritz says “Kansas gets a jolt” with much concern on her
face. She then says that the president’s budget “strips the funding for a top Kansas project.” Anchor Larry Moore continues reinforcing the project’s supposed importance by saying it “state-of-the-art lab” to protect food supply from “terrorism” and that almost nobody saw this possible de-funding coming. The introduction into the story has already directed viewers to believe it is a vital project that must get funded; otherwise they could be in danger. A little later, a photo of a house fire is shown and Moritz describes the flames as “shooting out of the home.” The broadcast’s featured investigation poses the idea that baby shampoo is “toxic.” All these highly descriptive words create the framework for how viewers may interpret the stories.

Comparing KMBC to other stations, Brad Stephens during the KCTV broadcast is somewhat similar to Moritz’a enthusiasm. He often adds unnecessary emphasis behind key words and phrases, such as “gang” in “gang unit” when introducing the broadcast’s first main story, a word then repeated throughout the story. When it comes to introducing an update to the missing “Baby Lisa,” story he leans forward, nods his head, raises his eyebrows, and projects his voice a little louder to say that they have an interview that “so many were waiting to see.”

The most illustrative and dramatic report in all three broadcasts was the investigative piece on KSHB by Ptacek. His report on the secret sleuths looking for Kara Kobetsky was filled with dark images, but he was rather forceful in his interpretation of the story. He said highlighted key phrases such as when he states the police have threatened a grand jury and taking noticeable pauses before implicating phrases all direct viewers on how they should interpret the story.
Framing Investigative Reports

All the broadcasts included an investigative or in-depth report that was framed in negative connotations for viewers. KMBC’s Johnson & Johnson report over cancer causing chemicals in baby shampoo was the least negative in that both sides were covered. However, the “Toxic for Your Baby?” title at the beginning sets the report off on a worrisome tone. The bottle is shown in a dark environment and the overall story seems to point fingers at Johnson and Johnson. This is illustrated by a mother’s quote saying she “thought it was a trustworthy company.”

KCTV’s ComputerCop report was the second more negative and had more reasons to cause worry in viewers. This story is framed through illustrating that even kids in a church are looking at inappropriate images online. Wright, the reporter, speaks loudly and seems very interested in the topic, helping to draw viewers in. Her voice inflections when directly asking viewers if they know what P911 and the number eight stand for. The report also creates the assumption or idea that a large number of teenagers are involved in unsafe online activity, whether it is sending and viewing sexual photos or creating online relationships with strangers who could be dangerous. Finally, the abundant use of close-ups and extreme close-ups of people’s faces and computer screens adds emotion and intensity to the story, helping draw viewers into it even more (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001).

Still, the most direct and forceful interpretation of a story came from Ptacek’s investigation into the missing girl, where he clearly stressed the fact that the police chief is an elected official, as if to encourage viewers how to vote.
**Breaking News**

My second research question asked what narratives in news broadcasts are given the most importance by being placed at the beginning of newscasts or under the title, “Breaking News”? To answer research question number three, how may this add to viewers’ mean world syndrome?

KMBC and KSHB broadcasts kick off their broadcasts with the same story. They use “Breaking News” graphics that both fly onto the screen and, more importantly, both focus on murders. Not only have the killings received top billing in the broadcasts, but their importance is highlighted through the “Breaking News” designation. This signifies for viewers that the topic they should be most concerned with is homicide (Gerbner, 1969). This idea is especially emphasized in the KMBC broadcast as the story’s introduction includes the statement that it is Kansas City’s eleventh murder of the year, yet it’s only mid-February.

While KMBC and KSHB have breaking news first thing, KCTV has a preview of an in-depth story over the ComputerCop software. It is billed as a “special report” and the reporter previewing the story says the software is “so advanced it will monitor everything your kids do online.” By addressing the viewer’s directly through “your kids,” it gets viewers involved into the story and they begin applying the subject to their own lives. Yet this is not the first official story. The first report is a glimpse at the weather. The anchors insight worry into viewers by saying rain has moved out of the area for the time being but a wintry mix is possible; yet the meteorologist ultimately tells viewers that snow is not in the forecast, yet it is too late. Viewers already have experienced a heightened worry that it is in the forecast.
Other stories placed at the beginning of the broadcasts include a story on police raiding the apartment of a gang on KCTV, a preview of snowy weather on KMBC, and a preview of the investigation into Kara Kobetsky’s disappearance on KSHB, followed by a weather preview. Again, I feel it is imperative to note that all three broadcasts discuss a murder (or the possibility of a killing) and the weather within the first three stories, signifying that the top concern for viewers should be death.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it only focuses on only three broadcasts that were not chosen at random. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to all local newscasts. Yet the purpose of this study was not generalization, but rather to get an in-depth, descriptive analysis of how more than just quantifiable data can help cause mean world syndrome. While I was performing initial research for this thesis, it was almost impossible to find qualitative studies regarding mean world syndrome. I wanted to build on the numerous quantitative studies I found by focusing past the statistics and research the symbols seen by viewers daily.

A second limitation is that all segments after weather were not analyzed. This means sports and feel-good stories at the end of the broadcast were not included. The reason they were not included in this paper is because they are one of the last blocks to air in newscasts, decreasing their importance. Also, these later stories typically do not directly affect viewers in their basic lives or precautions they take to protect themselves against those they feel may try to harm them.
A final limitation of the study is that it incorporates only my own analysis of broadcasts. Ideally, another person should also view the same broadcasts to see he or she agrees with my interpretations of symbols such as vocal tones, camera techniques, and graphics.
Figure 1. KMBC anchor Lara Mortiz emphasizes that temperatures are teetering around the freezing mark while co-anchor Larry Moore smiles. This image is typical of Mortiz’s serious and illustrative delivery, while Moore is more relaxed.
Figure 2. KMBC anchor Lara Moritz demonstrates a concerned emotion while reporting a school attack at Columbine High School in Colorado. Viewers are reminded of a mass shooting that happened in 1999 at the same school in the second bullet of information, which uses a larger font than the first bullet.
Figure 3. An extreme close-up of 11-year-old Blair Shanahan Lane, who was accidentally shot and killed. Close-up shots were used throughout the KCTV news broadcast.
Figure 4. For 21 seconds, this is the only image viewers see as KCTV reports Dalvin Johnson has been arrested for murder. This gives viewers plenty of time to analyze the lack of emotion on Johnson’s face, which may cause viewers to feel a greater sense of fear.
Figure 5. KSHB’s investigative report of Karla Kobestky’s disappearance featured numerous dark, blurred, and mysterious images. To hide the identity of the cadaver dog’s handler, featured above, the person was silhouetted and placed in front of a dark background. The person’s voice was distorted, yet was still understandable. Yet the station displayed quotes on screen, ensuring viewers get the message.
REFERENCES


