

A SURVEY OF PERSONS WHOSE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR WERE PUBLISHED
IN THREE KANSAS NEWSPAPERS DURING MARCH, 1964

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the beginnings of American journalism, the common man has felt the urge to express his opinions through the printed media. Through the years, as man has exercised this urge by writing letters to the editor, publishers and their editors have become increasingly aware of their readers' interests. Once a butt of ridicule, letters to the editor have become a significant factor in American journalism. Today, few publications go to press without their quota of letters from readers.

Letters columns have become public forums through which the press can demonstrate its hospitality to ideas and attitudes differing from editorial policy. Through these forums, aggressive and informed letter writers in a growing army are bringing social and economic problems into new editorial prominence. Letters columns in newspapers have become town meetings, legislatures, or congresses to which the average man and woman can hope to elect themselves for a day merely by taking pen in hand and pouring out the convictions that drive them.¹

As a public forum which gives the readers freedom of speech in print, the letters column serves a two-fold purpose:² it furnishes a safety valve

1. Dan Williams, "Significant Trend Noted in 'Letters to the Editor,'" Editor and Publisher, Nov. 27, 1937, 70:9.

2. George F. Mott, ed., New Survey of Journalism, p. 258.

for the release of emotional and intellectual promptings; and it keeps the editor in touch with his readers by throwing into emphasis those policies in which the readers are most interested or about which they are the most articulate. Readers can express their personal opinions about anything and everything. As Neil MacNeil puts it in Without Fear or Favor:

Here the reader can make his complaint. Here he can sponsor a new idea. Here he can and does make the voice of America heard. Unpopular governmental action is attacked. Injustices are exposed. The editor himself is denounced. Many causes are extolled. Frequently there are many letters advocating each side of an issue. They represent a cross section of the newspaper's readers, a sampling of American thinking.³

The letters column has gained popularity for a number of reasons. James A. Clendinen of the Tampa (Florida) Morning Tribune listed these reasons why letters to the editor were developed into a widely respected department:

The first is the simple fact that people have a common weakness for reading other people's mail. Any letters column which has not shriveled on the vine is bound to arrest the reader skipping by on his way to the sports section or comic page. Once he becomes a letters fan, curiosity may even urge him over to the editorials to see what all the fuss is about. So why neglect your feature with the greatest potential for reader appeal?

The second reason for pampering letters is the bigness which necessarily affects newspapers today. The tremendous costs of investment and operation force an increasing degree of monopoly and chain ownership. This is not in itself bad. But the result is to remove ownership farther from Main Street and give an aspect of corporate aloofness to the free press. The situation is exploited by every political demagogue who comes under editorial fire; he retaliates by crying that the big dailies speak only for the stockholders and not for the people. This, I grant, is not a new trend. But I believe it is a growing one. And I believe city newspapers can strengthen their position by demonstrating, day by day, that they value their readers' opinions and provide an impartial forum for their expression.⁴

3. Neil MacNeil, Without Fear or Favor, p. 322.

4. Hillier Krieghbaum, Facts in Perspective, p. 282.

Robert J. Blakley, formerly an editorial writer for the St. Louis Star-Times, described readers' forums as a substitute for the opportunity to start one's own newspaper, which has now disappeared for all except a few.⁵

Readership studies confirm Clendinen's contentions on popularity. Studies of dailies, weeklies, and magazines show the public's fascination with reading other people's mail. When an editor occasionally replies, either seriously or sassily, the interest increases.⁶

Editors recognize that the volume of mail is a fairly accurate measure of reader impact of a newspaper, and particularly its editorial page. Through its letters column, the newspaper hopes to prompt readers to continue writing, thereby keeping its reader-interest guage in operating order. James F. Fixx explained in the Saturday Review:

An editor quietly rejoices when letters are more numerous than usual, worries and chews fretfully on his copy pencil when they are fewer . . . The editor hopes readers will talk back; he's ⁷ happiest when a good discussion or a lively scrap is going on.

Free to write what he pleases, the letter writer has two advantages. The letter form with the personal pronoun permissible has the natural charm of informality and intimacy (leading to interest in reading someone else's mail). With no money invested in the paper, the correspondent is often less cramped than the editor by fear of growls from advertisers and conservatives and can write with more integrity.⁸

5. Ibid., p. 281.

6. Ibid., p. 282.

7. James F. Fixx, "The Reader Gets His Innings," Saturday Review, Aug. 8, 1960, 43:20.

8. A. Gayle Waldrop, Editor and Editorial Writer, p. 273.

As the letters column has gained in stature, more and more Americans are writing more intelligent letters to the editor. Dan Williams offered the following explanation for the increase in the number and intelligence of letters to American editors:

The increase is doubtless due to a new higher literacy of the American people, their informed interest in social and economic problems of the nation and world.⁹

Some individual instances of letter writing are worthy of mention. The most prolific correspondent on record, Charles Hooper of Cour d'Alene, Idaho, is reported to have written the almost unbelievable total of 78,000 letters during twenty-three years, an average of nine letters a day.¹⁰ A somewhat less active letter writer, Allen Klein of New York City, always wanted to be an author. He has written four novels and dozens of short stories--all unpublished. But his batting average on letters to the editor is considerably higher; of the 3,000 letters he wrote during a nine-year period, 1,500 were published. His targets included all seven New York City dailies, the Washington Post, and the St. Louis Post Dispatch.¹¹ Another frequent letter writer in New York City was a janitor whose material was so provocative and stimulating that his correspondence was welcomed in almost every editorial office of Manhattan's numerous dailies. Not so popular was an anonymous writer who sent three unsigned letters to The New York Times, comprising respectively, 632, 300, and 160 pages--enough to fill most of the news columns of a typical day's edition.¹²

9. Williams, op. cit., p. 9.

10. Krieghbaum, op. cit., p. 284.

11. "Taking Pen in Hand," Newsweek, Jan. 2, 1961, 62:48.

12. Krieghbaum, loc. cit.

Even more unpopular was a correspondent who for years sent a telegram to The New York Times nightly, always collect. He was critical of the way the news was edited in each issue, and offered suggestions for display of the news the next day. His knowledge of news and his judgement were sound, indicating that he may have been a former newspaperman. As his instructions frequently ran to great length--and proved costly--the editors tried to stop them. They refused to accept service from the telegraph companies and tried to make the sender pay the tolls. This effort failed, for he was forever on the move and traveled widely, sending his telegram nightly from a different place. After he finally stopped, the editors never discovered who he was or why he favored them with his advice.¹³

Disappointed because a letter to the editor he had written was not published, one Lemuel S. Todd sought the aid of the Kokomo, Indiana courts, but failed in his efforts to compel publication of the letter.¹⁴

Letter writers often reveal their problems to the editor with a frankness they would not employ with their best friends. Many letters are interesting human documents. Some are the last resort of the desperate. The man contemplating suicide writes to tell about it. The hopeless father pleads for help for his starving children. The distraught wife seeks protection against the brutalities of her drunken husband. The defrauded citizen, the disillusioned taxpayer, the hopeless youth, and the betrayed Broadway-stricken maiden seek the editor's aid and understanding.¹⁵

13. MacNeil, op. cit., p. 326.

14. Williams, op. cit., p. 18.

15. MacNeil, op. cit., p. 325.

In Without Fear or Favor, Neil MacNeil describes a series of anonymous letters received by The New York Times:

He rarely missed a day; when he did, two or more letters repaired the gap. His letters commented intelligently on the current news and especially on foreign events. They obviously came from a cultured gentleman. As they were anonymous, not one was used. But the curiosity of the editors was aroused. They wanted to know who he was and why he persisted in his hopeless efforts. Finally they investigated. They found that the writer was a retired and invalid naval officer. He was confined to his bed and occupied his time with reading newspapers and writing letters to the editor. These letters were his sole outlet. They kept alive his interest in affairs. Some time later he died, and The Times gave him a good obituary, a sort of posthumous recognition.¹⁶

A few letters to the editor have provided exciting clues to front page stories. Just before World War II, The New York Times received a letter from a Pittsburgh citizen who offered a reward of one million dollars for Adolf Hitler, dead or alive. He was serious. The story was carried in newspapers all over the world.¹⁷ When he did not hold cabinet positions, former Secretary Henry L. Stimson frequently contributed letters to New York City editors. His views were widely quoted in news stories in other newspapers.¹⁸

Many groups try to exploit a newspaper's letters columns; thus editors must be awake to the possibility of propaganda in letters to the editor. The House Select Committee on Lobbying Activities in 1950 and 1951 exposed a unique system whereby lobbyists in the grass roots supplied copy for an editorial, and if that failed, submitted it under a local signature as a letter to the editor.¹⁹ A more obvious effort was that attempted by a group of Long

16. Loc. cit.

17. Kriegbaum, op. cit., p. 286.

18. Ibid., p. 287.

19. Loc. cit.

Island school teachers who disagreed with The New York Times' stand on school buses. The teachers prepared a letter attacking the editor's stand and submitted approximately 100 copies over signatures of their students. This clumsy attempt at organizing a pressure group was quickly and easily discovered.²⁰

Other Studies

Each year more than eight million Americans write letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines.²¹ Despite this staggering number of writers, and the almost universal popularity of the letters column among readers, very little is known about those people who practice letter writing. Extensive research has turned up only a handful of studies of letter writers.

A monthly magazine, Speak Up, devoted largely to reprinting letters appearing in newspapers, surveyed 10,000 letters.²² Men outnumbered women among the writers, forty-six percent to thirty-seven percent, with the remainder being anonymous and not classified. Clergymen accounted for the largest single category of letters from men--twenty-three percent. Lawyers, civic leaders, and local officials wrote twenty-one percent, active politicians eighteen percent, secretaries of various organizations fifteen percent, disgruntled public servants twelve percent, and publicity seekers eleven percent. Among the women correspondents, spokesmen for various women's organizations contributed forty-two percent, teachers twenty-eight percent, working women sixteen percent, and housewives fourteen percent.

20. MacNeil, op. cit., p. 323.

21. Kriegbaum, op. cit., p. 283.

22. Loc. cit.

Sidney A. Forsythe, professor at Alabama College, studied letter writers whose letters were printed in the Louisville Courier Journal's "Point of View" column from June 1, 1946 to May 31, 1947.²³ Questionnaires were sent to fifty-five persons who contributed letters during this period; forty-four usable returns were received. Dr. Forsythe found that these writers were: overwhelmingly in the middle and old age-groups, their median age being fifty-nine; predominantly male in sex; conservative in their viewpoints towards marriage and family relations; conservative both politically and religiously; above average in formal education, averaging one year beyond high school graduation; residents of Louisville and Kentucky in great majority, having lived in the localities in which they resided for an average of eighteen years; members of the white collar, business, and professional occupational groups. Dr. Forsythe concluded that the forty-four writers studied, on a number of counts, were far from being representative either of their communities or of the nation.

William D. Tarrant, a graduate student at the University of Oregon, mailed questionnaires to those persons who had contributed letters to the Eugene (Oregon) Register-Guard during a six-month period during 1956.²⁴ Considering these letter writers in comparison to the general public, Tarrant found that the letter writers were better educated, less mobile, more religious, more mature, more self-expressive, better read, more individualistic, and much older than the average citizen. They usually wrote their letters to "get something off my chest." The topics about which they wrote were usually those in which they were greatly interested, or those which dealt with events

23. Sidney A. Forsythe, "An Exploratory Study of Letters to the Editor and their Contributors," Public Opinion Quarterly, Spring 1950, 14:143.

24. William D. Tarrant, "Who Writes Letters to the Editor?," Journalism Quarterly, Fall 1957, 34:108.

with which they had first hand experience. These findings tend to disprove the theory that letter writers are "crackpots" or "cranks."

A more recent study of letter writers was conducted by Robert L. Deurbrouck, a graduate student at the University of Washington, who surveyed writers whose letters appeared in the Seattle Times and the Post-Intelligencer between September 26, 1961 and March 25, 1962. Questionnaires were mailed to 152 letter writers; 100 completed questionnaires were returned.²⁵ Deurbrouck found that:

Writers of letters to the editor average two years of college and tend to be expert in a specialized area . . . Those with some college are more frequent letter writers than graduates and those with advanced degrees. Those of lower education write markedly fewer letters than either.

Some letter writers are ego-centered; others are community centered. Feedback to letter writers was predominantly favorable and was an obvious source of gratification to those with ego-orientation.

Letter writing provides a means of identification for non-expressive and non-action oriented readers.

Letter writers have a strong sense of participation and a conviction they are affecting events.²⁶

Equally little research has been done on the letters appearing in the letters columns. A graduate student at the University of Texas, James L. Cockrum, studied letters contributed to The Dallas Morning News in March and April, 1952. The questions dealt with, and the conclusions drawn, are as follows:

Q. If all letters were printed, would letter writers add many subjects or unusual opinions to those already mentioned on the editorial page of the paper?

25. Robert L. Deurbrouck, An Exploratory Study of the Letters to the Editor Column--Who, What, Where, When, Why, p. 45. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Washington, 1962.

26. Wayne Danielson, ed., Journalism Abstracts, p. 34.

A. No. In the category of unusual topics, letters about the hurry of modern life, weekly shaving of the masculine body, and the cruelty of bear traps might be cited. More numerous were the letters containing possibly unpopular opinions. . . . But by far the majority of letters concerned already popular subjects of the period.

Q. Do letter writers tend to agree or to disagree with the paper?

A. Both. More important, their opinions, unlike their subjects, probably do not reflect those of the paper. Most significant of the tendencies . . . is that writers agreed with the paper when the editors wrote for something. Opinions of the paper's editors on a subject were seemingly incidental.

Q. Do letters which agree with the paper have a better chance of being printed?

A. Only a slightly better chance, if any at all. In no instance did the final ratio of pro to con letters chosen for publication reverse the pro to con ratio of total receipts.²⁷

A readership study conducted in 1944 by Robert Rand, a graduate student at Northwestern University, disclosed that letters to the editor were second to lead news stories and above editorials in readership among reading matter features in the Louisville Times. Rand concluded that:

No newspaper can afford to be without a "letters to the editor" column on its editorial page. The item has more reader interest than editorials or columns. It personalizes the relationship between the readers and the newspaper.²⁸

Barry Bingham, former editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, studied letters printed in seven newspapers for the 1951 National Conference of Editorial Writers, breaking the subject matter down into the following categories: local and state, sixty-five percent; national, twenty percent; international, five percent; general, ten percent.²⁹

27. James L. Cockrum, A Study of Letters to the Editor Contributed to the Dallas Morning News, p. 79. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Texas, 1955.

28. George A. Brandenburg, "Key to Editorial Page Potency Seen in Cross-Section Survey," Editor and Publisher, Aug. 8, 1942, 75:3.

29. Kriegbaum, op. cit., p. 286.

Maj. Hal Davis, United States Air Force, and Galen Rarick, University of Oregon, analyzed editorials and reader comment in twenty-one Oregon daily newspapers on the issue of whether a communist, Gus Hall, should be allowed to speak at state-supported colleges and universities.³⁰ Of the 126 letters on the issue, eighty-one, or 64.3 percent, were against permitting Hall to speak at state-supported colleges. This was true even though eleven of the papers took the opposite stand editorially, while only six agreed with the majority of the letter writers. Four papers took no stand on the controversy. The authors found that of the nine papers which published no more than one editorial on the Gus Hall issue, eight published two or fewer letters to the editor on the same subject. Of the twelve papers which published more than one editorial on the issue, only three published as few as two letters on the subject. The editorials seldom made mention of letters to the editor; the letters contained frequent references to editorials and to other letters. Davis and Rarick concluded that when a paper editorialized on the Gus Hall controversy, it stimulated public discussion on that issue.

The dearth of these isolated works is in itself an indication of the need for a more detailed investigation of the American letter-writing society. In this study, the author will attempt to answer two questions:

1. What kind of people write letters to the editors of The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News?
2. Why do they write them?

Through research into the identity of the letter writer, it is hoped that a more thorough understanding of his background, motives, and interests will be brought to the surface.

30. Hal Davis and Galen Rarick, "Functions of Editorials and Letters to the Editor," Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1964, 41:108.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The Universe

The universe for this study consisted of letters to the editor published in The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News during March, 1964. The Capital, published in Kansas' capital city, is circulated state-wide and has a total circulation of 69,769.¹ Published in Kansas' largest city, The Eagle is rapidly becoming a state paper; circulation is 125,122.² Primarily a city and area paper, The News has a circulation of 51,776.³ The newspapers were selected because all carry letters to the editor regularly and all were available in the Department of Technical Journalism library. The month of March was selected arbitrarily.

The Pre-test

A survey conducted by the author in October, 1963 served as a pre-test upon which the primary study was based. For the pre-test, the author selected The Capital and The Eagle. One-page questionnaires (see Appendix I) were mailed to those persons whose letters were printed in the two newspapers October 1 through 21. Questions were designed primarily to obtain information

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1. Kansas Newspaper Directory 1964, Kansas Press Service, Inc., p. 13.
 2. Loc. cit.
 3. Loc. cit.

about the letter writers' occupations, level of education, and newspaper reading habits. Fourteen questions were included in the questionnaire. Twelve were of the check type; the remaining two questions were left open for the letter writers to answer in their words.

Forty-four letters to the editor were printed in the two newspapers during the period, twenty-one in The Eagle and twenty-three in The Capital. Within two days after each letter was published, a stamped self-addressed envelope (see Appendix II), a questionnaire, and a letter explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix III) were mailed to the letter writers. The letter writers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it at their convenience. No attempt was made to send questionnaires to two letter writers, because the address printed with the letters was not considered adequate to insure delivery of the letter. Three letters were returned, two stamped "Insufficient Address" and one stamped "Incorrect Address." This reduced the possible number of returns to thirty-nine; thirty-four questionnaires were returned, resulting in a return of eighty-eight percent.

Letter writers surveyed in the pre-test varied in age between fourteen and ninety-two; a majority were twenty-six or older. Twenty-five were men.

The most distinguishing characteristics of the letter writers were their levels of education and occupation. Thirteen had completed graduate school, law school, or a similar level of post-graduate schooling. Seven others were college graduates, two of whom had some post-graduate schooling. Although six of the letter writers were housewives--the largest occupational category--twenty-one listed such highly professional occupations as clergyman, physician, dentist, psychologist, and college professor.

Most of the letter writers studied were faithful newspaper readers. Thirty indicated that they read a newspaper every day; twenty-seven said they

read more than one daily newspaper regularly. Twenty-five said they read the front page of a newspaper first; twenty of these reported that they read the editorial page second. Editorials were the favorite editorial page item of twelve letter writers; five others indicated that they look at the editorial cartoon first. Only one said he read letters to the editor first.

Most of the letter writers said they believed their letters affect other readers. While most of the letter writers said they believed their letters affect events, six admitted that they thought their letters affect no one. Personal satisfaction appeared to be the motivating factor for two letter writers.

For the primary study, the author decided to add a third newspaper to the universe and extend the period of study to one calendar month. It was felt that a third newspaper would add to the variety of personalities in the universe and would increase the universe to a magnitude more appropriate for this study. By extending the period of study to one month, the author hoped to increase the universe still further and provide logical beginning and concluding dates for the study.

The author estimated that the three newspapers would publish approximately 200 letters to the editor during March, a figure which, allowing for repeat writers and letters returned because of insufficient or incorrect address, would provide enough returns to provide a somewhat realistic picture of the type of individual who writes letters to the newspapers studied.

Construction of the Questionnaires

The author decided to use a two-page questionnaire (see Appendix IV) in the primary study. Although it was reasoned that response to a two-page questionnaire would not be as high as the eighty-eight percent realized in the

pre-test, the author felt that a longer questionnaire would provide more needed information about the letter writers. The author reasoned that adding a third newspaper and extending the period of study to one month would more than make up for the lower percentage of returns by providing a larger universe.

All fourteen questions used in the pre-test were included in the primary study, and twenty-two additional questions were added, bringing the total to thirty-six. Questions were designed to obtain necessary information about the letter writers to answer questions stated in Chapter I. Twenty-four check type questions were used with the hope of making the questionnaire look as easy to complete as possible. Twenty-three questions were placed on the first page; the remaining thirteen questions were placed on the second page. The questionnaire was typed on mimeograph stencils and was reproduced on eight and one-half by eleven inch sheets.

Questionnaires were printed on white stock and yellow stock (see Appendix V). The author decided to test the rate of return between these colors. In a series of marketing studies, Mildred Parten discovered that yellow questionnaires had the highest percentage of return.⁴

The author felt that editors' viewpoints regarding letters to the editor would supplement information obtained from letter writers. It was felt that questionnaires could be used to obtain the editors' opinions. The questionnaire (see Appendix VI) contained nine questions, all of the open variety. Questions were designed to obtain information about the editors' opinions regarding letters to the editor and the newspapers' policies regarding handling letters. A two-page questionnaire was used. Five questions were placed on

4. Mildred Parten, Surveys, Polls, and Samples, p. 161.

the first page; four on the second page. Three copies of the questionnaire were typed on eight and one-half by eleven inch white stock.

Survey Procedures

The three newspapers carried 193 letters to the editor during the period of study. The Capital carries letters to the editor only on Saturday, in a section called "The Daily Capital Saturday Forum." The four Saturday issues during the period carried fifty-two letters. Letters appear throughout the week in The Eagle in a section titled "Public Forum" and in The News in a section called "Western Front." Seventy-five letters appeared in twenty-seven issues of The Eagle during the period; sixty-six letters were published in twenty-one issues of The News. All three newspapers publish the writer's name and address with each letter. Although most of the letters included the writers' street address and city of residence, in many instances only the city of residence was given.

Where only the city of residence was provided, the author consulted telephone directories in the Kansas State University library in an attempt to learn the writers' street addresses. This proved particularly helpful for those letter writers who lived in Wichita, Hutchinson, and Topeka; telephone directories for most of the smaller towns were not available in the library. The author felt that the city of residence would be sufficient to allow delivery of letters to those letter writers who lived in small towns. He could find no street addresses for eight letter writers who lived in larger cities. No attempt was made to send questionnaires to these eight letter writers because it was felt that the city of residence alone would not be an address sufficient to insure delivery of the letter.

On March 9, a cover letter signed by the author (see Appendix VII), a questionnaire, and a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed in a business size envelope to forty-three persons whose letters to the editor were published in the three newspapers during the first week in March. Thereafter, until March 22, identical mailings were made to letter writers the day after their letters were published. The author left Manhattan during spring vacation at Kansas State University, and no mailings were made between March 23 and March 30. Mailings were made on March 31 and April 1 to those persons whose letters were published between March 22 and March 31.

The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and urged the letter writers to complete the questionnaires and return them at their convenience. The cover letter was typed on a mimeograph stencil and was reproduced on Department of Technical Journalism letterheads. The inside address of each letter writer and a salutation were typed on the cover letters prior to mailing. The author signed each cover letter with a fountain pen.

The letter writers were assured in the cover letter that their names would not be used in the study and consequently were not asked to sign their names to the questionnaire. The author felt that the letter writers would be more likely to return the questionnaires if they were not asked to sign their names.

The author felt that identifying the sender of each questionnaire would prove helpful in tabulating information from the questionnaires and recording the returns. A simple key system was utilized to identify the senders. Before each questionnaire was mailed, a short mark was placed along the right or left edge of the second page. The name of each letter writer was recorded on a key sheet. Each name was marked with a dot which corresponded to the

mark on the back of the questionnaire when the two were compared. Separate key sheets were used for white and yellow questionnaires.

As each letter appeared in the three newspapers, the author recorded the writer's name, the newspaper in which the letter appeared, and the date the questionnaire was mailed. The date each questionnaire was returned also was recorded. The names were recorded in chronological order, beginning with the letters printed on March 1. This list served as the basis for determining which color questionnaire would be sent to each letter writer. The first letter writer on the list was mailed a white questionnaire, and thereafter the colors were alternated throughout the list. Eighty-nine questionnaires of each color were mailed.

The author felt that a minimum of 100 questionnaires would be returned, and that this number would be large enough to supply information that would provide a realistic picture of the type of individual who writes letters to the newspapers in the study.

Thirteen letters were returned, seven stamped "Insufficient Address" and six stamped "Addressee Unknown." Although the author felt that the names printed with the letters were actually those of the writers, he did not rule out the possibility that some letters may have been submitted over fictitious names.

Seven repeat writers, eight other letter writers not mailed questionnaires, and thirteen letters returned reduced the possible number of returns to 165. A total of 123 questionnaires were returned between March 11 and April 15, resulting in a return of 74.5 percent, as compared to eighty-eight percent with the one-page questionnaire used in the pre-test.

Because the return of 123 questionnaires exceeded the minimum of 100 the author had planned on, no attempt was made to induce returns from those letter

writers who did not return questionnaires.

Questionnaires were mailed to the editorial page editors of the three newspapers on March 30, together with a self-addressed stamped envelope and a letter (see Appendix VIII) explaining the purpose of the study and asking the editors to complete the questionnaires and return them at their convenience. All three completed questionnaires were returned by April 7.

Tabulation

Information was taken from the questionnaires and hand tabulated on sheets of nine by nine inch copy paper. Responses to the various questions were grouped and tabled under appropriate headings. Data from the questionnaires was tabulated into two sets of tables. The first tables considered the letter writers as a group, and was concerned only with total responses. In his second tabulation, the author compared the letter writers by occupation against the remaining data taken from the questionnaires. The author believed that the more detailed information to be obtained in the second tabulation would prove valuable in his study of the types of persons who write letters to the editor.

Three additional questionnaires were received during May and June, bringing the number of returns to 126. Because the earlier returns had already been tabulated, these three questionnaires were not considered in the primary findings of this study.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The Letter Writers: A Socio-Economic Examination

The 123 respondents in this study were grouped into nine occupational classifications based on answers to a question about their occupations.

These classifications were:

White Collar worker--salesmen, engineers, high school teachers, newspaper publishers, chiropractors.

Laborer--warehouse employees, service station attendants, construction workers.

Retired--respondents who said they were retired.

Student--grade school, high school, college students.

Housewife--women who said they were housewives.

Farming--men who said they were farmers.

Crafts--electricians, carpenters, barbers.

Professional--physicians, dentists, college professors, ministers, psychologists.

Unemployed--respondents who said they were unemployed, but not retired.

White collar workers comprised the largest occupational classification; thirty-eight letter writers were grouped into this class (see Table 1).

Other occupational classifications represented among the respondents were twenty housewives, sixteen retirees, fourteen farmers, twelve professionals, ten students, six laborers, six craftsmen, and one unemployed.

Table 1. Occupations of letter writers, the number in each classification, and the per cent each represents.

Occupation	No.	Pct.
White Collar	38	30.9
Labor	6	4.9
Retired	16	13
Student	10	8.1
Housewife	20	16.2
Farming	14	11.4
Crafts	6	4.9
Professional	12	9.8
Unemployed	1	.8
Total	123	100.

Although the letter writers were asked to check an age grouping which included their age, many gave a number indicating their age. The youngest age given was ten; the oldest was eighty-six. While these figures represent extremes in ages given in numbers, it is possible that persons who checked age groupings may have been beyond these extremes in age. In all, sixteen letter writers gave their age as being more than seventy.

Most of the letter writers in the study said they were forty-six years of age or older (see Table 2). Sixty-three checked either the "46-55" or "over 55" age groupings. The latter was the largest grouping represented; thirty-nine letter writers indicated they were at least fifty-five. Twenty-four said they were forty-six to fifty-five.

The smallest groupings represented were "18 and under" and "19-25;" seven letter writers checked each grouping.

Fourteen letter writers forty-six to fifty-five constituted the largest age grouping among white collar workers. All sixteen retirees gave their age as over fifty-five, while all ten students said they were twenty-five or younger. Seven students were the only letter writers who indicated they were eighteen or younger; three students said they were nineteen to twenty-five.

All twenty housewives said they were twenty-six or older. Six said they were twenty-six to thirty-five, six reported that they were thirty-six to forty-five, six said they were over fifty-five, and two gave their age as forty-six to fifty-five.

All fourteen farmers said they were at least twenty-six years old. Seven said they were fifty-five or older.

Four letter writers employed in crafts said they were thirty-six to forty-five.

Table 2. Occupations of letter writers in relation to their ages.

Occupation	Age												Total
	18 and under		19-25		26-35		36-45		46-55		Over 55		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	-	-----	3	7.9	7	18.4	9	23.7	14	36.8	5	13.1	38
Labor	-	-----	-	-----	1	16.7	3	50	1	16.7	1	16.7	6
Retired	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	16	100	16
Student	7	70	3	30	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	10
Housewife	-	-----	-	-----	6	30	6	30	2	10	6	30	20
Farming	-	-----	-	-----	2	14.3	2	14.3	3	21.4	7	50	14
Crafts	-	-----	-	-----	1	16.7	4	66.7	-	-----	1	16.7	6
Professional	-	-----	-	-----	2	16.7	3	25	4	33.3	3	25	12
Unemployed	-	-----	1	100	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	1
Total	7	5.7	7	5.7	19	15.4	27	21.9	24	19.5	39	31.7	123

Men outnumbered women by more than a three-to-one ratio among letter writers in this study (see Table 3). Ninety-three men submitted letters to the editors of the three newspapers during the period of study; thirty letter writers were women. Among the women, twenty were housewives, four were white collar workers, three were students, one was a laborer, one a retiree, and one a professional.

Letter writers in this study were characterized by a high level of education. The 123 letter writers averaged fourteen years of formal education (see Table 4). Educational levels referred to in this study represent the highest level of schooling completed.

Fifty-seven letter writers said they were college graduates. Twenty-four of these reported that they had received advanced degrees. Two other college graduates indicated they had received some post-graduate schooling.

Forty-five high school graduates comprised the largest educational level. Nineteen said they had attended college, but did not graduate. Five high school graduates said they had attended barber college, business college, or nursing school.

Eighteen letter writers indicated they had completed grade school. Seven of these said they had attended high school, but did not graduate.

Three letter writers indicated that they had not finished grade school. Two of these were grade school students.

A definite relationship was found between the letter writers' occupations and levels of education. All thirty-eight white collar workers said they were high school graduates; nineteen indicated they were college graduates. Thirteen were high school graduates who had not completed college; six said they had earned post-graduate degrees.

Table 3. Sex of letter writers in relation to their occupations

Occupation	Sex				Total
	Men		Women		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	34	89.5	4	10.5	38
Labor	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Retired	15	93.8	1	6.3	16
Student	7	70	3	30	10
Housewife	-	----	20	100	20
Farming	14	100	-	----	14
Crafts	6	100	-	----	6
Professional	11	91.7	1	8.3	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	1
Total	93	75.6	30	24.4	123

Table 4. Occupations of letter writers in relation to their level of education.

Occupation	Level of education										
	Didn't finish grade school		Finished grade school		High school graduate		College graduate		Post-graduate degree		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	-	----	-	----	13	34.2	19	50	6	15.8	38
Labor	-	----	1	16.7	5	83.3	-	----	-	----	6
Retired	1	6.3	3	18.8	4	25	2	12.5	6	37.5	16
Student	2	20	5	50	3	30	-	----	-	----	10
Housewife	-	----	4	20	9	45	7	35	-	----	20
Farming	-	----	3	21.4	6	42.9	4	28.6	1	7.1	14
Crafts	-	----	2	33.3	4	66.7	-	----	-	----	6
Professional	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	8.3	11	91.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	1
Total	3	2.4	18	14.6	45	36.6	33	26.8	24	19.5	123

Five laborers reported that they were high school graduates; one laborer said he had completed grade school.

Retirees comprised the only occupational classification represented in all five educational levels. Six retirees said they had post-graduate degrees.

Nine of twenty housewives said they were high school graduates; seven indicated they had graduated from college; four reported that they had completed grade school.

Six of fourteen farmers said they were high school graduates. Four of six letter writers employed in crafts reported that they were high school graduates; two indicated that they had completed grade school.

Eleven of twelve professionals said they had earned post-graduate degrees; one said he had a college degree.

The letter writer who said he was unemployed reported that he had completed high school.

Letter writers in this study were predominantly homeowners, but a majority of them did not own their business (see Table 5). Eighty-nine indicated that they owned the home in which they lived. Thirty-six said they owned their business.

Percentage of homeowners was highest among retirees, farmers, laborers, and housewives. At the other extreme were students, three of whom said they owned their home.

The highest percentage of letter writers who owned their business was found among farmers, eleven of whom said they were in business for themselves. Four of six craftsmen reported ownership of their business.

None of the laborers reported that they owned their business. Other occupational classifications with a low percentage of business ownership were professional, student, and white collar.

Table 5. Occupations of letter writers in relation to whether they owned their home and/or business.

Occupation	Ownership of home					.	Ownership of business				
	Yes		No		Total		Yes		No		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.			No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	28	73.7	10	26.3	38	.	7	18.4	31	81.6	38
Labor	5	83.3	1	16.7	6	.	-	----	6	100	6
Retired	14	87.5	2	12.5	16	.	7	43.8	9	56.3	16
Student	3	30	7	70	10	.	1	10	9	90	10
Housewife	17	85	3	15	20	.	5	25	15	75	20
Farming	12	85.7	2	14.3	14	.	11	78.6	3	21.4	14
Crafts	3	50	3	50	6	.	4	66.7	2	33.3	6
Professional	7	58.3	5	41.7	12	.	1	8.3	11	91.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	1	.	-	----	1	100	1
Total	89	72.4	34	27.6	123	.	36	29.3	87	70.7	123

Married letter writers outnumbered their single counterparts by more than a three-to-one margin (see Table 6). Ninety-seven letter writers said they were married. Twenty-five women and seventy-two men reported that they were married.

Table 6. Sex of letter writers in relation to their marital status.

Sex	Marital status				Total
	Married		Single		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
Men	72	77.4	21	22.6	93
Women	25	83.3	5	16.7	30
Total	97	78.9	26	21.1	123

Letter writers were asked to indicate how long they had lived in the community in which they were living. In tabulating this information, the author divided the duration of residence into the following groupings: less than one year, one to five years, six to ten years, eleven to twenty years, twenty-one to thirty years, and more than thirty years (see Table 7).

Decidedly more persons who lived in the same community for a considerable length of time wrote letters to the editors of the three newspapers during the period of study than those who had lived in the same community only a short time. Thirty letter writers who said they had lived in the same community for more than thirty years constituted the largest numerical grouping. Six letter writers with less than one year's residence in the same community constituted the smallest grouping.

Table 7. Occupations of letter writers in relation to how long they had lived in the community in which they were living.

Occupation	Years they had lived in the same community														Total
	Less than 1		1-5		6-10		11-20		21-30		More than 30		No answer		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	-	----	8	21.1	10	26.3	9	23.7	4	10.5	6	15.8	1	2.6	38
Labor	-	----	-	----	2	33.3	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	6
Retired	1	6.3	1	6.3	2	12.5	1	6.3	3	18.8	7	43.8	1	6.3	16
Student	-	----	2	20	2	20	5	50	-	----	-	----	1	10	10
Housewife	2	10	-	----	6	30	5	25	3	15	4	20	-	----	20
Farming	-	----	-	----	1	7.1	-	----	4	28.6	9	64.3	-	----	14
Crafts	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	2	33.3	2	33.3	1	16.7	-	----	6
Professional	3	25	6	50	-	----	1	8.3	-	----	2	16.7	-	----	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	6	4.8	19	15.4	23	18.6	24	19.5	17	13.8	30	24.4	4	3.2	123

Half the white collar workers said they had lived in the community in which they were living between six and twenty years. The largest grouping among white collar workers consisted of ten with between six and ten years' residence in the same community. All the white collar workers said they had lived in the community in which they were living more than one year.

The greatest variation of residence in the same community was found among retirees, whose replies to this question ranged between six months and fifty-five years. Each of the six numerical groupings was represented by at least one retiree; seven who reported that they had lived in the community in which they were living more than thirty years constituted the largest grouping.

Five students reported between eleven and twenty years' residence in the community in which they were living. Six housewives reported between six and ten years' residence in the community in which they were living.

Nine farmers indicated they had lived in the community in which they were living more than thirty years; four reported between twenty-one and thirty years' residence in the community in which they were living.

Professionals constituted the occupational classification with the shortest duration of residence in the community in which they were living. Three reported less than one year's residence and six reported between one and five years' residence in the community in which they were living.

Letter writers were asked to indicate their political affiliation by checking "Democrat," "Republican," or "Independent." Fifty-six said they were Republicans, thirty-five reported that they were Democrats; twenty-five reported that they were Independents (see Table 8). Seven letter writers did not answer the question; one of these commented that the question was not ethical.

Table 8. Occupations of letter writers in relation to their political affiliation.

Occupation	Political affiliation								Total
	Republican		Democrat		Independent		No answer		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	20	52.6	13	34.2	5	13.2	-	----	38
Labor	4	66.7	-	----	2	33.3	-	----	6
Retired	8	50	3	18.8	4	25	1	6.3	16
Student	4	40	1	10	2	20	3	30	10
Housewife	8	40	7	35	4	20	1	5	20
Farming	5	35.7	3	21.4	4	28.6	2	14.3	14
Crafts	3	50	2	33.3	1	16.7	-	----	6
Professional	4	33.3	6	50	2	16.7	-	----	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	1
Total	56	45.5	35	28.5	25	20.3	7	5.7	123

The most even distribution among political affiliations was found among farmers and housewives. Five of fourteen farmers checked "Republican," four checked "Independent," and three checked "Democrat." Eight of twenty housewives checked "Republican," seven checked "Democrat," and four checked "Independent."

One letter writer explained his stand in a letter which accompanied his questionnaire:

I can't for the life of me vote Republican nationally because I have been cleaned out three times by depressions---1908, 1920, and 1929---and would have been again in 1954-60 if it were not for Social Security which the Republicans fought so viciously. As the Indians said---"White Man beat Indian once, White Man to blame; White Man beat Indian twice--Indian to blame."

Letter writers in this study established a remarkable record at the polls during the 1960 Presidential election. Of the 109 who said they were eligible to vote in that election, 104 reported that they voted (see Table 9). None of the ten students said they were eligible to vote. Three white collar workers and one retiree indicated they were not eligible to vote. One white collar worker said he was in Puerto Rico during the 1960 Presidential election; another indicated that he was a British citizen.

Besides the letter writer who said he was unemployed, professionals constituted the only other occupational classification which produced a 100 per cent voting record. Of those eligible to vote, one letter writer in each of these classifications said he did not vote: white collar, labor, housewife, farming, and crafts.

This explanation was offered by one letter writer who said he was eligible but did not vote:

If you are shocked that I do not vote, understand that I am in favor of voting, especially for people who use no other right or talent to assert their political wishes. If I cannot more than

Table 9. Occupations of letter writers in relation to their voting status during the 1960 Presidential election.

Occupation	Voting status									
	Eligible		Not eligible		•	Voted		Didn't vote		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.		No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	35	92.1	3	7.9	•	34	91.9	4	8.1	38
Labor	6	100	-	----	•	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Retired	15	93.3	1	6.7	•	15	93.3	1	6.7	16
Student	-	----	10	100	•	-	----	10	100	10
Housewife	20	100	-	----	•	19	95	1	5	20
Farming	14	100	-	----	•	13	92.9	1	7.1	14
Crafts	6	100	-	----	•	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
Professional	12	100	-	----	•	12	100	-	----	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	•	1	100	-	----	1
Total	109	88.6	14	11.4	•	104	84.6	19	15.4	123

compensate for the shortage of my one vote by convincing others of good qualities to seek in their leaders, then my reasoning must be faulty and I'll not apply my inferior intuition to electing a leader because I am almost sure to be wrong.

Eighty-nine letter writers in this study said they belonged to one or more clubs or organizations (see Table 10). One housewife said she belonged to "twenty or thirty" organizations. Thirty-seven letter writers said they held offices in one or more organizations.

White collar workers and farmers were the most active "joiners" among letter writers. Thirty-three and twelve, respectively said they were members of organizations.

The Letter Writers and the Mass Media

Letter writers in this study were faithful newspaper readers. One hundred thirteen said they always read a newspaper each day, eight said they often read a paper each day, and one said he seldom read a newspaper. (see Table 11). One letter writer did not answer the question.

All twenty housewives and all twelve professionals said they always read a newspaper. Lowest percentage of daily newspaper readers was found among laborers and craftsmen; five in each classification said they always read a newspaper each day. Three white collar workers said they often read a newspaper each day; one white collar worker said he seldom read a newspaper each day.

Fifty-two letter writers said they read two newspapers fairly regularly (see Table 12); thirty-six listed one newspaper; twenty listed three newspapers; ten listed four; four listed five; one letter writer said he didn't read any daily newspapers. The average for all letter writers in the study was 2.11 newspapers.

Table 10. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of clubs and organizations they belong to and whether or not they are officeholders.

Occupation	Number of clubs they belong to and whether or not they are officeholders												Total
	None		1 or 2		3 or 4		5 or 6		7 or more		Officeholders		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	5	13.2	18	47.3	8	21	6	15.8	1	2.6	13	34.2	38
Labor	2	33.3	4	66.7	-	---	-	---	-	---	2	33.3	6
Retired	7	43.8	4	25	4	25	1	6.3	-	---	3	18.8	16
Student	3	30	5	50	2	20	-	---	-	---	2	20	10
Housewife	9	45	5	25	2	10	3	15	1	5	8	40	20
Farming	2	14.3	8	57.1	3	21.4	1	7.1	-	---	5	35.7	14
Crafts	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	-	---	-	---	1	16.7	6
Professional	3	25	4	33.3	2	16.7	2	16.7	1	8.3	3	25	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	1
Total	34	27.6	51	41.4	22	17.8	13	10.5	3	2.4	37	30.1	123

Table 11. Occupations of letter writers in relation to whether they read a newspaper each day.

Occupation	Daily readership of a newspaper								Total
	Always		Often		Seldom		No answer		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	34	89.5	3	7.9	1	2.6	-	----	38
Labor	5	83.3	1	16.7	-	----	-	----	6
Retired	15	93.8	1	6.2	-	----	-	----	16
Student	9	90	1	10	-	----	-	----	10
Housewife	20	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	20
Farming	12	85.7	1	8.3	-	----	1	8.3	14
Crafts	5	83.3	1	16.7	-	----	-	----	6
Professional	12	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	113	91.9	8	6.7	1	.8	1	.8	123

Table 12. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of daily newspapers they read.

Occupation	Number of daily newspapers												Avg.	Total
	None		1		2		3		4		5			
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.		
White Collar	1	2.6	5	13.2	22	57.9	7	18.4	2	5.3	1	2.6	2.18	38
Labor	-	----	4	66.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	-	----	-	----	1.50	6
Retired	-	----	1	6.3	8	50	4	25	2	12.5	1	6.3	2.62	16
Student	-	----	4	40	5	50	-	----	1	10	-	----	1.80	10
Housewife	-	----	11	55	7	35	1	5	1	5	-	----	1.60	20
Farming	-	----	3	21.4	4	28.6	5	35.7	1	7.1	1	7.1	2.50	14
Crafts	-	----	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	-	----	-	----	1.83	6
Professional	-	----	5	41.7	2	16.7	1	8.3	3	25	1	8.3	2.41	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1.00	1
Total	1	.8	36	29.2	52	42.1	20	16.2	10	8.1	4	3.2	2.11	123

Most active newspaper readers in this study were retirees, who read an average of 2.62 daily newspapers each. Other classifications with high averages were farming (2.50) and professional (2.41). At the other extreme were laborers, who averaged reading 1.5 daily newspapers each.

One letter writer answered the question with the following reply: "I read weeklies. The news is more to the point and not so much junk (murder, accidents, divorces) is published."

Besides those published in Topeka, Wichita, and Hutchinson, newspapers listed most frequently were The Wall Street Journal, by ten letter writers, and The New York Times, by five letter writers.

Ninety-one letter writers said they read the front page of the newspaper first (see Table 13); sixty-nine of these indicated that they read the editorial page second. Nine letter writers reported that they read the editorial page first; four said they read the comics first. Seventeen letter writers did not list the sections in order.

Crafts and labor were the occupational groupings with the highest percentage of letter writers who said they read the front page first. Lowest percentage was found among farmers.

One letter writer in each of these classifications said he read the comics first; white collar, student, farming, and professional. One retiree ranked the financial section first; one student ranked the sports section first.

Ninety-one letter writers said they always read the editorial page, twenty-two said they often read the editorial page, and eight said they sometimes read the editorial page. Two letter writers did not answer this question. (see Table 14).

Table 13. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the newspaper sections they read first.

Occupation	Newspaper sections												Total
	Front page		Editorial page		Comics		Financial section		Sports section		Not listed in order		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	29	76.3	3	7.9	1	2.6	-	----	-	----	5	13.2	38
Labor	5	83.3	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	16.7	6
Retired	11	68.8	1	6.3	-	----	1	6.3	-	----	3	18.8	16
Student	8	80	-	----	1	10	-	----	1	10	-	----	10
Housewife	16	80	2	10	-	----	-	----	-	----	2	10	20
Farming	7	50	3	21.4	1	7.1	-	----	-	----	3	21.4	14
Crafts	5	83.3	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	16.7	6
Professional	9	75	-	----	1	8.3	-	----	-	----	2	16.7	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	91	73.8	9	7.3	4	3.3	1	.8	1	.8	17	13.8	123

Table 14. Occupations of letter writers in relation to how often they read the editorial page.

Occupation	Daily readership of the editorial page								Total
	Always		Often		Sometimes		No answer		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	25	65.8	9	23.6	4	10.4	-	----	38
Labor	5	83.3	-	----	-	----	1	16.7	6
Retired	14	87.5	2	12.5	-	----	-	----	16
Student	7	70	1	10	2	20	-	----	10
Housewife	15	75	3	15	2	10	-	----	20
Farming	10	71.4	3	21.4	-	----	1	7.1	14
Crafts	4	66.7	2	33.3	-	----	-	----	6
Professional	10	83.3	2	16.7	-	----	-	----	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Totals	91	73.9	22	17.8	8	6.5	2	1.6	123

Fourteen of sixteen retirees constituted the highest percentage of letter writers who said they always read the editorial page. Others who reported that they always read the editorial page were ten of twelve professionals and five of six laborers.

Two of six craftsmen and nine of thirty-eight white collar workers comprised high percentages among those who said they often read the editorial page. Four white collar workers, two of ten students, and two of twenty housewives reported that they sometimes read the editorial page.

Editorials were listed as the favorite item on the editorial page by thirty-eight letter writers (see Table 15). Twenty-eight letter writers said editorial cartoons were their favorite item. Twenty letter writers checked letters to the editor, ten checked columns, and ten checked features. Seventeen letter writers did not list the items in order.

Editorial cartoons were rated first by thirteen of thirty-eight white collar workers. Twelve said they read editorials first. Editorial cartoons were rated first by six of ten students. Three students said they read letters to the editor first; one said he read editorials first.

Six of twenty housewives reported that they read letters to the editor first; four rated editorials first.

Two letter writers employed in crafts said they read letters to the editor first; two said they looked at the editorial cartoons first.

The 123 letter writers in this study subscribed to an average of four magazines each (see Table 16). One hundred thirteen said they purchased one or more magazines by subscription. Of the ten who did not buy magazines by subscription, one said he bought magazines occasionally at the newsstand, one reported that she traded newspapers to her neighbor for magazines, one said he

Table 15. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the editorial page items they read first.

Occupation	Editorial page items												Total
	Editorials		Editorial cartoons		Letters to the editor		Columns		Features		Not listed in order		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	12	18.4	13	34.2	3	7.9	1	2.6	4	10.5	5	13.2	38
Labor	4	66.7	-	-----	2	33.3	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	6
Retired	5	31.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	3	18.8	1	6.3	3	18.8	16
Student	1	10	6	60	3	30	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	10
Housewife	4	20	1	5	6	30	2	10	3	15	4	20	20
Farming	6	42.9	1	7.1	2	14.3	1	7.1	1	7.1	3	21.4	14
Crafts	-	-----	2	33.3	2	33.3	1	16.7	-	-----	1	16.7	6
Professional	5	41.7	3	25	-	-----	2	16.7	1	8.3	1	8.3	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	1
Total	38	30.8	28	22.8	20	16.2	10	8.1	10	8.1	17	13.8	123

Table 16. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of magazines they bought by subscription.

Occupation	Number of magazines bought by subscription											Total
	None		1-2		3-4		5-6		7 or more		Avg.	
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.		
White Collar	2	5.3	11	28.9	12	31.6	9	23.7	4	10.5	3.68	38
Labor	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	-	-----	-	-----	1.25	6
Retired	1	6.3	6	37.5	3	18.8	1	6.3	5	31.3	4.20	16
Student	1	10	4	40	2	20	1	10	2	20	3.50	10
Housewife	1	5	6	30	4	20	6	30	3	15	4.00	20
Farming	1	7.1	2	14.3	1	7.1	6	42.9	4	28.6	4.50	14
Crafts	1	16.7	-	-----	2	33.3	2	33.3	1	16.7	4.33	6
Professional	-	-----	-	-----	3	25	2	16.7	7	58.3	6.000	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	-	-----	0.00	1
Total	10	8.1	32	26	28	22.7	27	21.9	26	21.1	4.05	123

read magazines in doctors' offices and in libraries, and one, a mail carrier, said he had access to all magazines without subscribing.

Professionals were the most active magazine readers in this study. All twelve professionals said they purchased at least three magazines by subscription. Seven said they subscribed to seven or more. The twelve professionals subscribed to an average of six magazines each.

With an average of 4.5 subscriptions each, farmers comprised the second most active magazine readers in the study. Only one farmer said he did not subscribe to any magazines.

Other occupational classifications with high subscription rates included crafts (4.33 subscriptions each) and retirees (4.2 subscriptions each).

Besides the letter writer who said he was unemployed, the subscription average was lowest among laborers, two of whom said they did not buy any magazines by subscription. The average for the six laborers was 1.25 subscriptions each. None of the laborers said they subscribed to more than three magazines.

Letter writers were asked to list the magazines they bought by subscription. The author classified answers to this question into these categories:

Technical--Industrial Research, The Insurance Salesman, International Oilman.

"Hi Brow"--New Yorker, Saturday Review, Harper's.

General--Look, Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest.

News--U. S. News and World Report, Time, Newsweek.

Special Interest--Hot Rod, Ladies Home Journal, Popular Mechanics.

Eighty-eight letter writers said they subscribed to at least one special interest magazine (see Table 17). Seventy-three reported that they subscribed

Table 17. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the types of magazines they purchased by subscription.

Occupation	Types of magazines purchased by subscription												Total
	Special interest		General		News		Hi brow		Technical		None		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	25	65.8	22	57.9	14	36.8	8	21.1	3	7.9	2	5.3	38
Labor	3	50	3	50	-	---	-	---	-	---	2	33.3	6
Retired	7	43.8	10	62.5	4	25	-	---	-	---	1	6.1	16
Student	9	90	6	60	5	50	1	10	-	---	1	10	10
Housewife	17	85	12	60	5	25	2	10	-	---	1	5	20
Farming	11	78.6	9	64.3	3	21.4	1	7.1	-	---	1	7.1	14
Crafts	5	85.3	3	50	-	---	-	---	-	---	1	16.7	6
Professional	11	91.7	8	66.7	9	75	7	58.3	1	8.3	-	---	12
Unemployed	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	1	100	1
Total	88	71.5	73	59.3	40	32.5	19	15.4	4	3.3	10	8.1	123

to at least one general magazine. Other categories were news, forty; "hi brow", nineteen; and technical, four.

Special interest magazines were more popular, by a narrow margin, than general magazines among white collar workers. Twenty-five of thirty-eight white collar workers said they subscribed to at least one special interest magazine; twenty-two reported that they subscribed to at least one general magazine.

Ten of sixteen retirees said they bought at least one general magazine by subscription; seven said they subscribed to at least one special interest magazine.

Eleven professionals reported that they subscribed to at least one special interest magazine, nine to a news magazine, and eight to a general magazine. Seven professionals and eight white collar workers said they were subscribers to "hi brow" publications.

The most popular magazine among the letter writers was Reader's Digest, with fifty-five subscribers (see Table 18). Other favorites were Look, with

Table 18. Magazines bought by subscription by the most letter writers.

Magazine	No. of subscribers	Magazine	No. of subscribers
<u>Reader's Digest</u>	55	• <u>National Geographic</u>	10
<u>Look</u>	27	• <u>Kansas Farmer</u>	9
<u>Life</u>	23	• <u>Successful Farming</u>	7
<u>Post</u>	23	• <u>McCalls</u>	7
<u>Time</u>	20	• <u>Sports Illustrated</u>	6
<u>Farm Journal</u>	15	• <u>Ladies Home Journal</u>	6
<u>Newsweek</u>	13	• <u>True</u>	5
<u>U. S. News</u>	13	• <u>Better Homes and Gardens</u>	5

twenty-seven subscribers, and Life and Saturday Evening Post, with twenty-three subscribers each.

Answers to the question "How many books have you read in the past year?" indicated that one hundred one letter writers reported they had read at least one book during that period (see Table 19). Students and professionals were the most active readers among the letter writers. All ten students and all twelve professionals indicated that they had read at least two books during the period. One student said he had read between two and five books and another reported that he had read between six and ten books. Eight said they had read more than ten books during the period. Two professionals reported that they had read between two and five books; two said they had read between six and ten books. Eight said they had read at least ten books during the year.

Fourteen retirees, thirty-two white collar workers, and five craftsmen reported that they had read at least one book during the period.

Least active readers among the letter writers during the period were farmers, laborers, and housewives. Nine farmers, four laborers, and fifteen housewives said they had read at least one book during the period. The letter writer who said he was unemployed reported that he had not read a book during the period.

None of the laborers, farmers, or craftsmen reported that they had read more than ten books during the year.

One student said he had read approximately 200 books during the year. Five other letter writers indicated they had read 100 books during the year.

Letter writers were asked to name some of the books they had read during the period. Answers to this question were grouped into these categories:

Classical fiction--Silas Marner, Eliot; Pickwick Papers, Dickens; Notes from the Underground, Dostoevsky.

Table 19. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of books they had read in the past year.

Occupation	Number of books read in the past year										
	None		1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	6	15.8	2	5.3	9	23.7	16	42.1	5	13.2	38
Labor	2	33.3	-	----	3	50	1	16.7	-	----	6
Retired	2	12.5	-	----	6	37.5	6	37.5	2	12.5	16
Student	-	----	-	----	1	10	1	10	8	80	10
Housewife	5	25	-	----	3	15	4	20	8	40	20
Farming	5	35.7	3	21.4	5	35.7	1	7.1	-	----	14
Crafts	1	16.7	-	----	3	50	2	33.3	-	----	6
Professional	-	----	-	----	2	16.7	2	16.7	8	66.7	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	22	17.8	5	4	32	26	33	26.8	31	25.5	123

Popular non-fiction--Black Like Me, Griffin; Profiles in Courage, Kennedy; Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, Shirer.

Popular fiction--On the Beach, Norway; Lolita, Nabokov; The Caine Mutiny, Wouk.

Technical and professional--The Intelligent Investor, Graham; The Science of Man, Titiev.

Eighty letter writers said they had read at least one popular non-fiction book during the year (see Table 20); seventy-four indicated they had read a popular fiction book; twenty-three said they had read a technical or professional book; twenty said they had read a classical fiction book.

Popular non-fiction was the most popular among white collar workers, laborers, retirees, and professionals. Farmers and craftsmen favored popular fiction. Students and housewives were divided evenly between these two categories.

Seven letter writers indicated they had read Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin during the period (see Table 21). Four said they had read Profiles in Courage by John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Table 21. Books read by the most letter writers.

Book	No. of readers	Book	No. of readers
<u>Black Like Me</u>	7	<u>Rise and Fall of the Third Reich</u>	3
<u>Profiles in Courage</u>	4	<u>To Kill a Mockingbird</u>	3
<u>Fail Safe</u>	3	<u>Masters of Deceit</u>	3
<u>Silent Spring</u>	3	<u>The Politician</u>	3
<u>The Carpetbaggers</u>	3		

Table 20. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the types of books they had read during the past year.

Occupation	Types of books										Total
	Popular non-fiction		Popular fiction		Technical, professional		Classical fiction		None		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	28	73.7	26	68.4	12	31.6	6	15.8	6	15.8	38
Labor	4	66.7	2	33.3	-	---	3	50	2	33.3	6
Retired	11	68.8	7	43.8	-	---	3	18.8	2	12.5	16
Student	8	80	8	80	2	20	3	30	-	---	10
Housewife	14	70	14	70	1	5	4	20	5	25	20
Farming	4	28.6	6	42.9	1	7.1	-	---	5	35.8	14
Crafts	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	-	---	1	16.7	6
Professional	9	75	8	66.7	6	50	1	8.3	-	---	12
Unemployed	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	1	100	1
Total	80	65	74	60.2	23	18.6	20	16.3	22	17.8	123

One hundred four letter writers said they watched television each day (see Table 22). Fifty said they watched television one hour or less each day; fifty-four indicated they watched two hours or more.

All six letter writers employed in crafts reported that they watched television each day. Eighteen of twenty housewives and thirty-three of thirty-eight white collar workers said they watched television daily. Lowest percentage of daily television viewers was found among professionals.

Housewives were the most avid television viewers among the letter writers. Eleven said they watched television two hours or more each day. Five students and three laborers reported that they watched television at least two hours daily.

Ninety-three letter writers said they preferred news programs on television (see Table 23). Sixty-six indicated they preferred documentaries; fifty-eight said they preferred comedy; fifty-seven, athletic events; forty-seven, musicals; and five, soap operas. Among letter writers who wrote in other types of programs, seven said they preferred dramatic programs, five indicated they liked westerns, and four reported that they preferred science and space programs.

News programs were named as the preference by the highest percentage of letter writers in six occupational classifications. Six of ten students selected athletic events and six selected comedy as their preference; five of six craftsmen selected comedy.

One hundred seven letter writers said they listened to radio each day (see Table 24). Seventy-three indicated that they listened to radio one hour or less each day; thirty-four said they listened to radio two hours or more.

Table 22. Occupations of letter writers in relation to how much television they watch each day.

Occupation	Hours spent watching television each day						Total
	1 hour or less		2 hours or more		Don't watch television		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	16	42.2	17	44.7	5	13.2	38
Labor	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	6
Retired	7	43.8	6	37.5	3	18.8	16
Student	3	30	5	50	2	20	10
Housewife	7	35	11	55	2	10	20
Farming	6	42.8	5	35.7	3	21.4	14
Crafts	4	66.7	2	33.3	-	----	6
Professional	5	41.7	4	33.3	3	25	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	-	----	1
Total	50	40.7	54	43.9	19	15.4	123

Table 23. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the types of television programs they prefer.

Preference among types of television programs															
Occupation	News		Documentaries		Comedy		Athletic events		Musicals		Soap Operas		Don't watch TV		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	29	76.3	21	55.3	19	50	17	44.7	22	57.9	1	2.6	5	13.2	38
Labor	5	83.3	3	50	3	50	2	33.3	2	33.3	-	----	1	16.7	6
Retired	13	81.3	6	37.5	2	12.5	9	56.3	4	25	2	12.5	3	18.7	16
Student	5	50	4	40	6	60	6	60	1	10	-	----	2	20	10
Housewife	18	90	14	70	11	55	5	25	11	55	2	10	2	10	20
Farming	11	78.6	6	42.9	7	50	9	64.3	5	35.7	-	----	3	21.4	14
Crafts	4	66.7	4	66.7	5	83.3	4	66.7	-	----	-	----	-	----	6
Professional	8	66.7	7	58.3	5	41.7	5	41.7	1	8.3	-	----	3	25	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	1
Total	93	75.6	66	53.6	58	47.1	57	46.2	47	38.2	5	4	19	15.4	123

Table 24. Occupations of letter writers in relation to how much they listen to radio each day.

Occupation	Hours spent listening to radio each day						Total
	1 hour or less		2 hours or more		Don't listen to radio		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	24	63.2	10	26.3	4	10.5	38
Labor	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3	6
Retired	9	56.3	5	31.3	2	12.5	16
Student	7	70	2	20	1	10	10
Housewife	8	40	10	50	2	5	20
Farming	10	71.4	2	14.3	2	14.3	14
Crafts	5	83.3	1	16.7	-	----	6
Professional	8	66.7	2	16.7	2	16.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	1	100	1
Total	73		34	27.6	16	13	123

Crafts was the only occupational classification in which all the letter writers reported listening to radio each day. Eighteen of twenty housewives said they were daily radio listeners. Lowest percentage of daily listeners was found among laborers.

Housewives were the most avid radio listeners among letter writers in this study. Ten reported that they listened to radio at least two hours a day; eight said they listened at least one hour a day.

Two of six laborers said they listened to radio two hours or more each day; two others said they listened one hour or less.

Five craftsmen comprised the occupational classification with the highest percentage of letter writers who said they listened to radio one hour or less each day.

Eighty-three letter writers said they preferred news programs on radio (see Table 25). Seventy-four selected music, thirty-nine, athletic events; fifteen, comedy. Among letter writers who wrote in other selections, three said they preferred commentators and two indicated they preferred editorials.

News programs were selected as the preference by the highest percentage of letter writers in seven occupational classifications. Nine of ten students selected music as their preference.

All six craftsmen said they preferred news programs. Nine of twelve professionals selected news programs as their preference.

Four of six craftsmen said they preferred broadcasts of athletic events. Two craftsmen said they preferred comedy.

Practices in Letter Writing

Answers to the question, "How many letters to the editor have you written?" indicated that the 123 letter writers in this study had written between one

Table 25. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the types of radio programs they prefer.

Occupation	Preference among types of radio programs										Total
	News		Music		Athletic events		Comedy		Don't listen to radio		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	25	65.8	23	60.5	11	28.9	1	2.6	4	10.5	38
Labor	4	66.7	3	50	2	33.3	1	16.7	2	33.3	6
Retired	11	68.8	7	43.8	5	31.3	2	12.5	2	12.5	16
Student	4	40	9	90	3	30	-	----	1	10	10
Housewife	14	70	13	65	3	15	4	20	2	20	20
Farming	10	71.4	7	50	7	50	4	28.6	2	14.3	14
Crafts	6	100	4	66.7	4	66.7	2	33.3	-	----	6
Professional	9	75	8	66.7	4	33.3	1	8.3	2	16.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	100	1
Total	83	67.4	74	60.1	39	31.7	15	12.1	16	13	123

and approximately 2,000 letters to an editor. Thirty-six letter writers said they had written only one letter to the editor (see Table 26). Thirty-nine said they had written between six and ten letters; twenty-eight said they had written more than ten letters.

The most prolific letter writer in this study was a retiree who said he had written approximately 2,000 letters. Another retiree reported that he had written approximately 1,000 letters.

Most active letter writers were retirees and laborers. Five of sixteen retirees said they had written at least ten letters; seven said they had written between six and ten letters. Two of six laborers indicated they had written more than ten letters; two said they had written between six and ten letters.

Three of six craftsmen reported having written at least ten letters, two said they had written between two and five letters, and one indicated that he had written one letter.

None of the ten students reported having written more than ten letters. Only one student said he had written between six and ten letters.

Students and white collar workers were the least prolific letter writers in this study. Five of ten students said they had written only one letter; four said they had written two to five letters. Seventeen of thirty-eight white collar workers reported that they had written one letter; fourteen said they had written two to five letters.

The letter writer who said he was unemployed reported that he had written six to ten letters.

The length of time the letter writers had lived in the community in which they were living was related to the number of letters they had written (see Table 27). Letter writers who said they had written only one letter to the

Table 26. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of letters they had written.

Occupation	Number of letters								Total
	1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	17	44.7	14	36.8	1	2.6	6	15.8	38
Labor	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3	6
Retired	1	6.3	3	18.8	7	43.8	5	31.3	16
Student	5	50	4	40	1	10	-	----	10
Housewife	5	25	8	40	3	15	4	20	20
Farming	2	14.3	4	28.6	2	14.3	6	42.9	14
Crafts	1	16.7	2	33.3	-	----	3	50	6
Professional	4	33.3	3	25	3	25	2	16.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	1
Total	36	29.3	39	31.7	20	16.3	28	22.8	123

Table 27. Length of time the letter writers had lived in the community in which they were living in relation to the number of letters they had written.

Years lived in community	Number of letters								Total
	1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
Less than 1	2	33.3	3	50	-	----	1	16.7	6
1-5	7	35	4	20	5	25	4	20	20
6-10	6	27.3	12	54.5	1	4.5	3	13.6	22
11-20	7	29.2	8	33.3	3	12.5	6	25	24
21-30	5	29.4	5	29.4	2	11.8	5	29.4	17
More than 30	7	23.3	6	20	8	26.7	9	30	30
No answer	1	25	1	25	1	25	1	25	4
Total	35	28.5	39	31.7	20	16.3	29	23.6	123

editor had lived in the community in which they were living for an average of 17.9 years; those who reported that they had written two to five letters had lived in the community in which they were living for an average of 18.9 years six to ten letters, 26.2 years; more than ten letters, 27.3 years. The 123 letter writers in this study had lived in the community in which they were living for an average of 20.1 years.

Of the letter writers who said they had lived in the community in which they were living less than one year, two said they had written only one letter, three reported that they had written two to five letters, and one indicated that he had written more than ten letters. Of those reporting one to five years' residence in the community in which they were living, seven said they had written only one letter. Most of those with six to ten years' residence in the community in which they were living reported having written two to five letters. Most of those who reported living in the same community between eleven and twenty years said they had written no more than five letters. Of the letter writers reporting twenty-one to thirty years' residence, five said they had written one letter; five indicated they had written two to five letters; and five reported they had written more than ten letters.

Most of the letter writers who reported living in the community in which they were living for more than thirty years said they had written more than five letters. Nine indicated they had written more than ten letters; eight, six to ten letters; six, two to five letters; and seven, one letter. Four letter writers did not answer this question.

Nine letter writers who said they were forty-six to fifty-five years old reported that they had written more than ten letters to the editor (see Table 28). Thirteen letter writers who indicated that they were over fifty-five said they had written more than ten letters. None of the letter writers who

said they were under twenty-five reported having written more than ten letters. Five letter writers who said they were thirty-six to forty-five indicated they had written more than ten letters.

Table 28. Ages of letter writers in relation to the number of letters they had written.

Age	Number of letters								Total
	1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
Under 18	3	42.9	3	42.9	1	14.3	-	----	7
19-25	4	57.1	2	28.6	1	14.3	-	----	7
26-35	8	42.1	8	42.1	2	10.5	1	5.3	19
36-45	8	29.6	11	40.7	3	11.1	5	18.5	27
46-55	6	25	6	25	3	12.5	9	37.5	24
Over 55	7	17.9	9	23.1	10	25.6	13	33.3	39
Total	36	29.3	39	31.7	20	16.3	28	22.8	123

Half the letter writers who gave their age as twenty-five or below reported that they had written only one letter. The highest percentage of letter writers who said they had written one letter was found among those nineteen to twenty-five, four of whom said this was their first venture into the practice of letter writing. Three letter writers eighteen or younger reported that they had written only one letter. Seven letter writers fifty-six or older and six forty-six to fifty-five said they had written only one letter.

Women in this study wrote slightly more letters to the editor than men (see Table 29). Seven of thirty women and twenty-one of ninety-three men said they had written more than ten letters. Five women and fifteen men reported that they had written six to ten letters.

Table 29. Sex of letter writers in relation to the number of letters they had written.

Sex	Number of letters								Total
	1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
Men	27	29	30	32.3	15	16.1	21	22.6	93
Women	9	30	9	30	5	16.7	7	23.3	30
Total	36	29.3	39	31.7	20	16.3	28	22.8	123

Eighty-nine persons who wrote letters to the editor during the period of study said they had written letters to their congressmen, legislators, city officials, etc. (see Table 30).

All fourteen farmers and all twelve professionals said they had written to government officials. Farmers and professionals also had the highest percentages of those who had written more than ten letters to government officials.

The lowest percentage of letter writers who said they had written to government officials was found among laborers, students, and housewives.

The letter writer who said he was unemployed reported that he had written six to ten letters to government officials.

Table 30. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the number of letters they had written to congressmen, legislators, city officials, etc.

Occupation	Number of letters										Total
	None		1		2-5		6-10		More than 10		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	13	34.2	1	2.6	14	36.8	6	15.4	4	10.3	38
Labor	3	50	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	2	33.3	6
Retired	2	12.5	1	6.3	6	37.5	4	25	3	18.8	16
Student	6	60	1	10	3	30	-	----	-	----	10
Housewife	9	45	-	----	4	20	3	15	4	20	20
Farming	-	----	2	14.3	3	21.4	4	28.6	5	35.7	14
Crafts	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7	1	16.7	6
Professional	-	----	2	16.7	4	33.3	1	8.3	5	41.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	1
Total	34	27.6	8	6.5	37	30	20	16.2	24	19.5	123

Letter-writing was family oriented in the case of twenty letter writers who reported that members of their families had written letters to the editor (see Table 31). Family orientation was highest among professionals and students. None of the laborers or craftsmen reported that members of their families had written letters to the editor.

One hundred nine letter writers reported feedback to their latest letter to the editor (see Table 32). Seventy-five said friends, acquaintances, colleagues, etc., were the source of feedback. Twenty said strangers were the source of feedback, seven said congressmen, legislators, civic officials, etc., and two said editors were the source of feedback to their letters. Ten letter writers said they received feedback from anonymous persons. Thirteen said they had received feedback, but did not say from whom.

One white collar worker and one student reported feedback from editors. Six housewives reported feedback from strangers; three reported feedback from anonymous persons.

Feedback to letter writers was predominantly favorable (see Table 33). Sixty-five letter writers reported feedback that was in agreement with their letters. Seven letter writers said feedback was in disagreement with their letters. Twenty-one letter writers reported feedback in agreement and other feedback in disagreement with their letters. Sixteen letter writers reported feedback that was neither in agreement nor disagreement with their letters.

Typical of the comments in agreement were these:

In our position, we couldn't write a letter like that.

Good letter--needed saying.

They were glad I had the courage to speak out, and encouraged me to continue.

The editor appreciated my writing what he couldn't in regard to rebuttal of a preacher's letter.

Table 31. Occupations of letter writers in relation to whether members of their families had written letters to the editor.

Occupation	Had members of family written?				
	Yes		No		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	4	10.5	34	89.5	38
Labor	-	----	6	100	6
Retired	3	18.8	13	81.2	16
Student	3	30	7	70	10
Housewife	3	15	17	85	20
Farming	3	21.4	11	78.6	14
Crafts	-	----	6	100	6
Professional	4	33.3	8	66.7	12
Unemployed	-	----	1	100	1
Total	20	16.5	103	83.7	123

Table 32. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the source of feedback to their latest letter.

Occupation	Source of feedback														Total
	Number reporting feedback		Friends, colleagues		Strangers		Anonymous persons		Congressmen, legislators		Editors		Didn't say by whom		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	34	89.5	25	65.8	2	5.3	3	7.9	1	2.6	1	2.6	3	7.9	38
Labor	4	66.7	3	50	2	33.3	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	6
Retired	15	93.8	11	68.8	-	----	2	12.5	1	6.3	-	----	4	25	16
Student	10	100	7	70	4	40	1	10	1	10	1	10	-	----	10
Housewife	19	95	12	60	6	30	3	15	-	----	-	----	4	20	20
Farming	11	78.6	6	42.9	2	14.3	1	7.1	2	14.3	-	----	2	14.3	14
Crafts	6	100	3	50	3	50	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	-	----	6
Professional	9	75	8	66.7	1	8.3	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	1
Total	109	88.6	75	61	20	16.3	10	8.1	7	5.7	2	1.6	13	10.6	123

Table 33. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the nature of feedback to their latest letter.

Occupation	Number reporting feedback		Nature of the feedback								
			Agreeable		Disagreeable		Agreeable, disagreeable		Other		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	34	89.5	20	52.6	2	5.3	6	15.8	6	15.8	38
Labor	4	66.7	3	50	-	----	-	----	1	16.7	6
Retired	15	93.8	8	50	-	----	7	43.8	-	----	16
Student	10	100	2	20	2	20	2	20	4	40	10
Housewife	19	95	12	60	2	10	4	20	1	5	20
Farming	11	87.6	8	57.1	1	7.1	1	7.1	1	7.1	14
Crafts	6	100	4	66.7	-	----	-	----	2	33.3	6
Professional	9	75	7	58.3	-	----	1	8.3	1	8.3	12
Unemployed	1	100	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	109	88.6	65	52.8	7	5.7	21	17.1	16	13	123

Those who agreed with what I said admitted agreement but usually they said they had to be careful not to offend or business would suffer.

These comments are representative of those in disagreement with the letter writers:

. . . suggested I stay out of Kansas, as it was not a part of the United States.

Many of those who disagreed replied in letters to the paper.

One accused me of being a Communist--it was unsigned.

I had five phone calls--one objecting strenuously to my using "hell" in print and others that were offensive. Most of the five would like to be a letter writer but lacked the talent.

One letter writer reported that he had received feedback from "mere nobodies" whose remarks "were ignorant, derogatory, and quite offensive."

Typical of those neither agreeing nor disagreeing were these comments:

. . . didn't really express an opinion--too touchy a subject, I guess.

. . . interested in purchasing a dog mentioned in my letter.

. . . wanted source of information for further writing on the subject.

One retiree who had written approximately 200 letters had the following comment:

I have been writing letters to the editor for 20 years. Good many phone calls and letters, some agreeing, some disagreeing. They call even now, reminding of letters written years ago.

Letter writers were asked to comment on the way their most recent letter to the editor had been edited. The author grouped replies to this question into these categories:

Verbatim--respondents who reported that their letters had not been changed in any way.

Minor changes---respondents who reported that one word or paragraph had been deleted, etc.

Major changes---respondents who reported that half their letter had been deleted, that the editing had changed the meaning of the letter, etc.

No answer---respondents who did not answer the question.

Didn't see---respondents who said they had not seen their letters in print.

Other---respondents who made such comments as: "well done," "fine," "fairly," "in a satisfactory way," "excellently," etc.

Fifty-four letter writers said their letters were published verbatim (see Table 34); twenty-five reported major changes; nineteen reported minor changes; eighteen had other comments. Four letter writers indicated they had not seen their letters in print; three letter writers did not answer the question.

Eight of ten students constituted the highest percentage of letter writers whose letters were published verbatim. Eight of twelve professionals and nine of sixteen retirees also reported that their letters were not changed in any way. None of the laborers and only one of six craftsmen indicated their letters were published verbatim.

Two of six laborers and four of twenty housewives constituted highest percentages of letter writers who reported minor changes in their letters.

Occupational classifications with the highest percentage of letter writers reporting major changes were laborers, craftsmen, and farmers.

Some replies to the question, "Please comment on the way your latest letter was edited by the newspaper" were:

Very little---for a change.

The editing probably saved me from a libel suit.

Table 34. Occupations of letter writers in relation to how their letters were edited by the newspaper.

Occupation	How letters were edited												Total
	Run verbatim		Major changes		Minor changes		Other		Didn't see letter		No answer		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	17	44.7	9	23.7	7	18.4	3	7.9	2	5.3	-	---	38
Labor	-	---	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3	-	---	-	---	6
Retired	9	56.3	2	12.5	1	6.3	4	25	-	---	-	---	16
Student	8	80	1	10	1	10	-	---	-	---	-	---	10
Housewife	7	35	3	15	4	20	4	20	1	5	1	5	20
Farming	4	28.6	4	28.6	2	14.3	2	14.3	-	---	2	14.3	14
Crafts	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7	2	33.3	-	---	-	---	6
Professional	8	66.7	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	-	---	12
Unemployed	-	---	1	100	-	---	-	---	-	---	-	---	1
Total	54	43.9	25	20.3	19	15.4	18	14.6	4	3.3	3	2.4	123

Because of the length, one-half was cut--but the "meat" was printed word for word.

. . . changed the emphasis by leaving out a paragraph of credentials of Mr. Harrington, who is Sargent Shriver's head assistant in the war on poverty.

Censored.

No comment.

The editor, as usual, left out part of the letter.

How did you know? They have been printed verbatim but this last one had been edited in their favor.

. . . added "lack of qualities" for "unqualification" and left out most of one paragraph which only told why I thought differently. He must have thought it wasn't necessary.

They don't "edit" my offerings.

They changed it from "homespun wisdom" to mediocre intellectual by deleting one word several times.

No editing--as an editor myself, I trim them tight.

Motivation and Results

Based on response to the question, "Why do you write letters to the editor?", letter writers were grouped into these categories:

Ego-centered--respondents whose primary reasons for writing were to bolster their ego.

Community-centered--respondents who appeared to be genuinely interested in the community welfare.

Sixty-two letter writers were found to be ego-centered (see Table 35); sixty-one were classified as community-centered.

Comparing occupations of letter writers with their reasons for writing letters showed that farmers, craftsmen, and students were predominantly ego-centered, while most white collar workers and professionals were community

Table 35. Occupations of letter writers in relation to their reasons for writing letters to the editor.

Occupation	Reasons for writing letters to the editor				Total
	Ego-centered		Community-centered		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	15	39.5	23	60.5	38
Labor	3	50	3	50	6
Retired	8	50	8	50	16
Student	6	60	4	40	10
Housewife	10	50	10	50	20
Farming	10	71.4	4	28.6	14
Crafts	4	66.7	2	33.3	6
Professional	5	41.7	7	58.3	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	1
Total	62	50.4	61	49.6	123

centered. Ten of fourteen farmers, four of six craftsmen, and six of ten students were classified as ego-centered. Twenty-three of thirty-eight white collar workers and seven of twelve professionals were found to be community-centered.

The letter writer who said he was unemployed was classified as ego-centered. Laborers, retirees, and housewives were divided evenly between ego and community motivations.

These responses to the question, "Why do you write letters to the editor?" were representative of those which were classified as ego-centered:

Mostly, to see my name in print; secondly because I get angry; thirdly because people have so little opportunity to express ideas and opinions.

To extend my influence and give me personal satisfaction.

A particular gripe against the citizenry as a whole.

I feel my opinions are better than average and I like to try to convince others.

To let off steam; to get in my two cents' worth.

I love to write.

Same reason I eat--urge.

To get something off my chest.

I had to put in my nickel's worth.

When I see stupid editorials by some politicians or other persons.

Typical of those classified as community-centered were these replies:

To correct fallacies by presenting documented facts of volunteer information on subjects currently in the national or international scene.

Since news coverage and editorial policy are so controlled and biased, it is sometimes the only way to get information to the people.

To try to cause people to think, which I don't think many people spend a lot of time at.

To sow the seed, however small, of the value of individual and independent thinking, to reverse, if possible, the trend of mass indifference which the public expresses in the affairs of state and nation.

It is the great American prerogative to express our opinions. When we feel that we should speak out either for or against something, I believe we have a moral and patriotic duty to do so; for unless we Americans exercise this freedom we will lose it as well as our other liberties. The letters-to-the-editor columns present an excellent medium in which to exercise our right to speak out.

In answering the question, many respondents mentioned news articles, editorials, letters to the editor, etc., which had motivated them to write letters. Examples of these responses are:

. . . belief that a previous editorial of personal interest had completely missed the point.

To call attention to errors in articles previously published.

To correct apparent inaccurate articles.

I disagreed . . . with a previously written letter that had been published.

Most editorials are so cluttered with adjectives and statistics the basic facts are lost.

I write only when I feel that the editorial policy, another letter, or an article has been unjust, prejudicial, or ignorant in the position it presents.

Because I feel that some of the articles written about the Beatles were unfair.

Letter writers were asked to indicate from among the following alternatives whom they believed their letters might affect: editor, readers, public officials, all of these, no one. Many letter writers checked more than one alternative.

Sixty-eight letter writers checked readers, twenty-five checked public officials, eleven checked editor, and thirty-six checked all of these (see

Table 36). Eleven letter writers indicated they believed their letters affect no one. Four letter writers said they didn't know who their letters might affect.

Two of ten students, six of thirty-eight white collar workers, two of twenty housewives, and one of twelve professionals were the only letter writers who indicated they thought their letters might affect editors.

Eight of ten students, eight of twelve professionals, and thirteen of twenty housewives constituted the highest percentages among the occupational classifications who said they believed their letters might affect readers.

Four of twelve professionals said they believed their letters might affect public officials. None of the craftsmen said they thought their letters might affect public officials.

Eight of fourteen farmers, three of six laborers, and three of six craftsmen reported that they thought their letters might affect readers, editors, and public officials.

One laborer, one craftsman, two retirees, five white collar workers, one professional, and one housewife indicated they believed their letters would affect no one. Two farmers, one professional, and one housewife said they did not know whom their letters might affect.

Letter writers were asked to state any results they believed their letters might bring. Responses were grouped into these categories:

No answer--respondents who did not answer the question.

Self-satisfaction--respondents who indicated they derived a sense of self-satisfaction from writing letters.

None--respondents who said they did not think their letters would bring any results.

Table 36. Occupations of letter writers compared to whom they thought their letters might affect.

Occupation	Whom letter writers thought their letters might affect												Total
	Readers		Readers, editors, officials		Public officials		Editors		No one		Don't know		
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	21	55.3	8	21.1	8	21.1	6	15.4	5	13.2	-	----	38
Labor	2	33.3	3	50	1	16.7	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	6
Retired	8	50	6	33.3	3	18.8	-	----	2	11.1	-	----	16
Student	8	80	1	10	1	10	2	20	-	----	-	----	10
Housewife	13	65	5	25	4	20	2	10	1	5	1	5	20
Farming	4	28.6	8	57.1	3	21.4	-	----	-	----	2	14.3	14
Crafts	3	50	3	50	-	----	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	6
Professional	8	66.7	2	16.7	4	33.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	68	55.3	36	29.3	25	20.3	11	8.8	11	8.8	4	3.3	123

One particular result--respondents who said they thought their letters might bring about one particular result, such as an improvement in driving safety.

A more informed citizenry--respondents who felt their letters might serve in the public interest by informing the citizenry about the issues under discussion.

Seventy-seven letter writers were categorized as those who felt their letters might bring about a more informed citizenry (see Table 37). Seventeen letter writers reported that they thought their letters might lead to one particular result, ten letter writers indicated that they derived a sense of self-satisfaction from writing letters, thirteen letter writers said they thought their letters would bring no results, and six letter writers did not answer the question.

The percentage of letter writers categorized as those who felt their letters might result in a more informed citizenry varied between 57.1 per cent (farmers) and 68.8 percent (retirees) in seven of the occupational categories. Two of six craftsmen and the letter writer who said he was unemployed were also placed in this category.

Four of fourteen farmers constituted the highest percentage of letter writers who thought their letters might bring about one particular result. Three of twelve professionals constituted the highest percentage of those who said letter writing was a source of self-satisfaction. Percentage of those who thought their letters would bring no results was highest among craftsmen.

Letter writers were asked, "What results do you think your letters might bring?" Typical of the replies made by respondents who indicated they derived a sense of self-satisfaction from writing letters are:

Table 37. Occupations of letter writers in relation to the results they think their letters might bring.

Occupation	Better informed citizenry		One particular result		No results		Self-satisfaction		No answer		Total
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.	
White Collar	25	65.8	6	15.8	5	13.2	2	5.3	-	----	38
Labor	4	66.7	1	16.7	-	----	1	16.7	-	----	6
Retired	11	68.8	-	----	2	12.5	1	6.3	2	12.5	16
Student	6	60	2	20	1	10	-	----	1	10	10
Housewife	12	60	3	15	2	10	2	10	1	5	20
Farming	8	57.1	4	28.6	-	----	1	7.1	1	7.1	14
Crafts	2	33.3	1	16.7	2	33.3	-	----	1	16.7	6
Professional	8	66.7	-	----	1	8.3	3	25	-	----	12
Unemployed	1	100	-	----	-	----	-	----	-	----	1
Total	77	62.6	17	13.8	13	10.6	10	8.1	6	4.9	123

Satisfaction to myself and the comforting knowledge I will never die of ulcers as long as there is a place to let off steam.

Makes me feel better.

They should at least let them know that "housewives" don't swallow everything they are told--we aren't gullible completely--we can think for ourselves.

The self-satisfaction of trying to stop sinful and hateful attitudes among all people.

The following replies are representative of those made by respondents who said they thought their letters might bring about one particular result:

A change in hours of doing business.

Might influence State police to appear at traffic court; might influence readers to avoid speed traps or slow down when travelling in Woodson County.

Better publicity for the Council of Churches.

The end of milk price wars--possibly some kind of legislation.

To strengthen the cause and prove Unification Bill 377 unconstitutional.

Closer harmony between rural and urban residents and a more equitable distribution of the tax load.

Examples of comments made by letter writers categorized as those who believed their letters might bring about a more informed citizenry are:

An awareness of the truth.

An educated people.

Letters-to-the-editor columns are unique in that they are principally read only by thinking citizens, Americans who are interested and concerned about their country. This is the type of people who will fight for causes they believe are just. I entertain a self-flattering opinion that by alerting these people to just causes or dangers, they will become aroused and will do something about the issues.

I hope that it will awaken the public and public officials to their duty as citizens of a free nation.

Cause discussion of new "angles" to current national and international events.

I hope that it will help some people to think more clearly and be honest with themselves and others.

The Editor's Viewpoint

Editors of The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News were in agreement in their appraisal of the significance of letters to the editor. The editors indicated that their papers follow similar procedures in handling letters to the editor.

The editors agreed on the extent of interest in their newspapers' letters columns, explaining their viewpoints as follows:

There will always be interest in such a column. The extent will probably vary in proportion to the liveliness of the major discussion at hand and in evaluation of the intelligence level of the writers. For example, the death of JFK unleashed reams of emotion-packed opinion, much of which was good but a lot of it was, in my opinion, maudlin. At the risk of being tabbed a cynic, I believe some people enjoy sorrow.

Volume of letters and written verbal comment regarding the column testify to its readership.

Readers like to read viewpoints of others like themselves, as much or more than the views of editors and other so-called "experts."

Although they agreed on the type of persons who write letters to the editor, the editors disagreed on whether letter writers were representative of the American public.

These replies were given to the question, "What kind of persons write letters to the editor?"

All kinds, as many as there are citizens. But the preponderance is among those who are, for want of a better term, the "average" citizen.

All kinds. Letter writers range from the nearly illiterate to professional men and public officials.

Housewives, elderly persons, rural residents, persons with a cause to promote--these dominate the list.

Responses to the question, "Do you think persons who write letters to the editor are representative of the Great American Public?" were the following:

Generally speaking, yes, they are representative--all the way from crackpots to the highly intelligent, although we'll get a dozen letters from the latter for every one from the former.

Yes. They come from all occupations, education and income groups, both sexes, and range in age from teens to nineties.

No. They are people who either are intensely dedicated to a cause or have surplus time on their hands. Neither is characteristic of most Americans these days.

The editors agreed that readers look for controversy in letters to the editor, and that controversy can lead to debate among letter writers. These replies were given to the question, "What do you think readers look for in letters to the editor?":

To see if the letter writers agree with the reader's own opinions, or not. In which case, debate frequently begins.

Provocative ideas--that they can agree with or denounce.

Controversy. The editors who complain they don't get letters to the editor simply run such dull editorial pages that no one gets stirred up enough to write. You'll never get letters for being for God, home, mother, or tourism in Kansas; you will if you support Kennedy in Kansas, suggest the need for legalized abortion, fight capital punishment, discuss birth control, mercy killing, liquor by the drink, or co-existence with Russia.

Two editors said they believed letters to the editor exert some influence on public opinion. The other editor said he thought letters might have an indirect influence on public opinion. These responses were given to the question, "Do you think letters to the editor influence public opinion to any significant degree? If so, how?":

They are bound to have some influence on people who are perhaps too lazy to think for themselves. But mostly the

letters reflect public thought as it exists and sometimes this is overwhelmingly one-sided, as in the Murray atheist letters which were largely anti-Murray.

We believe they do, at least to the extent of preventing the editor from influencing public opinion without exposing his ideas to opposing opinion.

Doubtful, except when an issue is hot and the heavy flow may influence some city officials in their actions.

Two editors said they received more letters in opposition to, rather than in support of, the issue being discussed. The third editor said:

They balance out pretty well. It is usually an "anti" letter which touches off a discussion, but it usually is followed by "pro" letters in opposition to it.

All three editors said they try to print all letters received, but that some are rejected for such reasons as obvious untruth, unwarranted incentive, lack of complete name and address of writers, and general inability of writer to express even a simple thought. Two editors said they were receiving an increasing volume of letters, and were forced to edit them tighter in order to save space. Two editors reported that they give priority to less frequent writers.

All three editors said their newspapers frequently carry policy statements regarding letters to the editor. The newspapers seek brevity and clarity in letters to the editor, and require that the writers sign their names. One editor said that exceptions are occasionally made when the subject matter is of special importance and the writer has a legitimate reason for asking that his name be withheld.

Answers to the question, "Approximately how many letters to the editor does (The Capital) (The Eagle) (The News) receive each day?" varied between "about five a day" to "ordinarily about eight to ten." Two editors said the volume of mail increased when controversial issues were being discussed.

One editor said he occasionally used telephone calls to solicit letters to the editor on a key subject or in answer to another letter. Another editor said he occasionally wrote "What do you think?" editorials to solicit letters from readers:

We recently had one asking our readers whether they thought we should publish liquor ads. We got nearly 500 replies, nearly all against our taking liquor ads.

The same editor said he occasionally sent proofs of an editorial to selected persons asking their comments well in advance of its publication:

The fact that they get a look at the editorial ahead of publication flatters them, encourages them to write to us.

This editor added that his problem lately had not been solicitation of letters to the editor, but finding space for all the letters he received.

One editor said his newspaper usually had sufficient response and that no solicitation of letters to the editor was needed.

The Published Letters

Eighty-five of the 193 letters to the editor published in the three newspapers during the period of study referred to items previously published in the newspaper. Twenty-seven letters mentioned, by date of publication, topic, or writer, letters to the editor previously published in the paper. News articles were mentioned in twenty-three letters; editorials were mentioned in twenty letters. Other newspaper features referred to in the letters were nine advertisements and two columns; photographs, editor's notes, book reviews, and comic strips were each mentioned in one letter to the editor.

The author divided subject matter of the published letters into these categories:

Local and state--Wichita University basketball team, Kansas State Supreme Court, township government, Hutchinson animal control law.

National--Barry Goldwater, Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Bill, policies of President Johnson, racial policies in the South.

General--The Beatles, equality for women, sex education, religion.

International--The United Nations, trouble in Cyprus, the cold war.

Seventy-one letters dealt with local and state issues; sixty with national issues, fifty-four with general subjects, and eight with international issues.

Subject matter was further broken down into individual subjects. The most widely-discussed subject in the 193 letters to the editor was civil rights, including the Civil Rights Bill; nineteen letters dealt with this issue. Education was discussed in fourteen letters; religion was discussed in thirteen letters. Five letters dealt with the sale of wheat to Russia; seven others dealt with other phases of agriculture. Four letters dealt with each of these subjects: Kansas Representative Bob Dole, the Boy Scouts, University of Wichita basketball team, and The Beatles.

Thirty-six letters voiced criticism or opposition to the subject being discussed; twenty-six were in favor of the topic being discussed. The remaining sixty-one letters were non-committal.

Miscellaneous Findings

The author discovered a noteworthy similarity between a letter writer in this study and one described by Neil MacNeil in Without Fear or Favor (see Page 6):

. . . the letter writer was a retired and invalid naval officer. He was confined to his bed and occupied his time with

reading newspapers and writing letters to the editor. These letters were his sole outlet. They kept alive his interest in affairs.¹

The letter writer in this study was an 86-year old retiree who reported that he had written approximately 2,000 letters to the editor. An excerpt from a letter submitted with his completed questionnaire is as follows:

I used to be pretty good with a typewriter, but find it rather difficult now that I am bedfast. I fell and broke a hip last summer and did not make a good recovery. Too, I am going on 87 years of age so my writing days are about done. However, I . . . shall keep pecking away . . . as long as I can.

Another respondent refused to return the questionnaire, submitting instead a letter, excerpts from which are:

Thank you for the opportunity to reveal to a complete stranger all the motives of my heart and other incidental information some of which I doubt if the FBI could obtain. As soon as you give me sufficient reason I will cooperate. As it stands now I see no reason for divulging this. I have just read the book The Brainwatchers [sic] and I find it reprehensive and a snare to give out unnecessary information which in too many cases results only in analysis used to further destroy American liberty and freedom.

I will say this like the Prophet Jermiah--I try to keep still because of the opposition and hot water it gets me into but THERE IS A FIRE IN MY BONES THAT CANNOT BE QUENCHED. LEAVE A VACUME [sic] IN ANY FIELD AND THE WRONG FORCES MOVE IN. I suppose this is a bit of information that will label me a psychotic or something . . . but out of politeness I felt I should give you a bit of info out of respect for your work. I assume you are writing a thesis or something. YES? You see, I did some time in institutions of "higher"? [sic] learning.

. . . and now please excuse me. I must get back to work for my Lord Jesus Christ Savior and for my country.

Another response worthy of mention was received on June 6, too late for inclusion in the findings of this study. In addition to his questionnaire, the respondent submitted a reprint of a speech delivered by Rear Admiral Chester Ward, U. S. Navy (Retired), extolling the importance of national

1. MacNeil, op. cit., p. 325.

preparedness, two mimeographed copies of an essay he had written on religion and patriotism, and a seven-page letter describing his patriotism and righteousness. The respondent stated his occupation as "Elijah (or John Baptist) up to date."

Return of Yellow and White Questionnaires

In comparing the rate of return for white and yellow questionnaires, the author confirmed Mildred Parten's findings of a larger return with yellow questionnaires.² Eighty-nine questionnaires of each color were mailed to letter writers. Five letters containing yellow questionnaires were returned, three stamped "Addressee Unknown" and two stamped "Insufficient address," reducing the possible number of returns to eighty-four. Sixty-five yellow questionnaires (77.4 percent) were returned.

Eight letters containing white questionnaires were returned, five stamped "Insufficient Address" and three stamped "Addressee Unknown" reducing the possible number of returns to eighty-one. Sixty-one white questionnaires (75.3 percent) were returned.

2. Parten, op. cit., p. 161.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations

Before presenting the summary and conclusions, it is important that limitations of this study be presented and recognized so that findings can be judged in their proper perspective.

This study involved 123 persons whose letters to the editor were published in The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News during March, 1964. Conclusions drawn were based on information taken from questionnaires completed by these respondents, and were offered only as indications of what other letter writers might be like.

It should be recognized that construction of the questionnaire may have limited or unfairly represented a letter writer's response because of category groupings that were too broad or response lists that were too narrow. It is possible that respondents may have misinterpreted questions or that the author misinterpreted responses.

Summary

The findings are summarized under the same divisions in which the individual findings were reported.

The Letter Writers: A Socio-Economic Examination

Thirty-eight of the 123 persons whose letters to the editor were published in the three newspapers during the period of study were white collar workers,

twenty were housewives, sixteen were retirees, fourteen were farmers, twelve were professionals, ten were students, six were craftsmen, six were laborers, and one was unemployed.

Thirty-nine letter writers were more than fifty-six years of age, twenty-four were forty-six to fifty-five, twenty-seven were thirty-six to forty-five, nineteen were twenty-six to thirty-five, seven were nineteen to twenty-five, and seven were eighteen or under.

Ninety-three letter writers were men; thirty were women.

Forty-five letter writers said high school was the highest level of education they had completed, thirty-three said college was the highest level of education they had completed, twenty-four said they had earned post-graduate degrees, eighteen said grade school was the highest level of education they had completed, and three said they had not completed grade school.

One hundred nine letter writers said they were eligible to vote in the 1960 Presidential election; 104 of these said they had voted in that election.

Eighty-nine letter writers said they owned their home. Thirty-six said they owned their business.

Thirty letter writers said they had lived in the community in which they were living for more than thirty years, seventeen said they had lived in the same community for twenty-one to thirty years, twenty-four reported that they had lived in the same community eleven to twenty years, twenty-three said they had lived in the same community six to ten years, nineteen reported that they had lived in the same community two to five years, and six said they had lived in the community in which they were living less than a year.

Eighty-nine letter writers said they belonged to one or more clubs or organizations. Thirty-seven reported that they were officeholders.

The Letter Writers and the Mass Media

Letter writers in this study were found to be faithful newspaper readers. One hundred thirteen said they always read a newspaper every day, eight said they often read a newspaper every day, and one said he seldom read a newspaper. Most of the letter writers reported that they read at least two daily newspapers fairly regularly.

Ninety-one letter writers indicated they read the front page of the newspaper first; sixty-nine of these said they read the editorial page second.

Ninety-one letter writers said they always read the editorial page. Twenty-two said they often read the editorial page; eight said they sometimes read the editorial page.

Thirty-eight letter writers said editorials were the first item they read on the editorial page. Twenty-eight indicated that they look at the editorial cartoons first. Twenty reported that they read letters to the editor first. Ten said they read the columns first; ten said they read editorial page features first.

The 123 letter writers in this study purchased an average of four magazines by subscription. Only ten said they did not buy any magazines by subscription.

Eighty-eight letter writers said they bought at least one special interest magazine by subscription. Seventy-three said they subscribed to at least one general magazine, forty reported that they subscribed to at least one news magazine, nineteen indicated they subscribed to at least one "hi brow" magazine and four said they purchased at least one technical magazine by subscription.

One hundred one letter writers said they had read at least one book during the year before the survey was conducted. Most of the letter writers said they had read at least six books during this period.

Eighty letter writers said they had read popular non-fiction during the period, seventy-four reported that they had read fiction, twenty-three said they had read a technical or professional book, and twenty said they had read classical fiction during the period.

One hundred four letter writers said they watched television each day. One hundred seven said they listened to radio each day. News programs were rated the preference by most of the letter writers who said they watched television and/or listened to radio each day.

Practices in Letter Writing

Thirty-six letter writers said they had written only one letter to the editor. Thirty-nine said they had written two to five letters, twenty said they had written six to ten letters, and twenty-eight said they had written more than ten letters.

The length of time the letter writers had lived in the community in which they were living was related to the number of letters they had written. Those who said they had written only one letter to the editor had lived in the same community for an average of 17.9 years; those who reported that they had written between two and five letters had lived in the same community for an average of 18.9 years; those who indicated they had written six to ten letters had lived in the same community for an average of 26.2 years; and those who said they had written more than ten letters had lived in the community in which they were living for an average of 27.3 years. The 123

letter writers in this study had lived in the community in which they were living for an average of 20.1 years.

Most of the letter writers said they had written letters to their congressmen, legislators, city officials, etc.

Letter writing was found to be family-oriented for 103 letter writers who reported that members of their families had written letters to the editor.

Feedback was predominantly favorable for the 109 letter writers who reported that someone had talked to them in person or on the telephone or had written letters to them concerning their most recent letter to the editor. Sixty-five letter writers reported feedback that was in agreement with their letters. Seven reported feedback that was in disagreement with their letters. Twenty-one reported feedback in agreement and other feedback in disagreement with their letters.

Friends, acquaintances, and colleagues were the source of feedback to most letter writers. Other sources of feedback were strangers, editors, anonymous persons, and congressmen, legislators, and city officials.

Fifty-four letter writers reported that their letters were published verbatim in the newspaper. Nineteen reported that there were minor changes in their letters; twenty-five reported that there were major changes in their letters.

Motivation and Results

Sixty-two letter writers were found to be ego-centered in their reasons for writing letters to the editor. Sixty-one were found to be community-centered.

Sixty-eight letter writers said they thought their letters to the editor might affect readers. Twenty-five said they believed their letters might

affect public officials. Eleven indicated they thought their letters might affect the editors. Thirty-six reported that they thought their letters might affect readers, public officials, and editors. Eleven said they believed their letters would affect no one.

Seventy-seven letter writers were classified as those who thought their letters might bring about a more informed citizenry. Seventeen reported that they thought their letters might lead to one particular result; ten indicated that they derived a sense of self-satisfaction from writing letters to the editor. Thirteen said they believed their letters bring no results.

The Editor's Viewpoint

Editors of the three newspapers in this study were primarily in agreement on their appraisal of the significance of letters to the editor. Their procedures for handling letters to the editor were similar.

The editors agreed that:

There is a considerable amount of reader interest in the letters columns.

All kinds of persons write letters to the editor.

Readers look for controversy in letters to the editor.

All three editors said they attempted to publish all letters they received, but that some were rejected because of untruth, lack of complete name and address of writers, inability of writers to express a simple thought, and unwarranted incentive.

Two of the editors agreed on each of these points:

People who write letters to the editor are representative of the American public.

Letters to the editor exert some influence on public opinion.

One editor said he occasionally used telephone calls to solicit letters to the editor. One editor said he solicited letters by sending proofs of an editorial to selected persons well in advance of publication, asking their comments.

The Published Letters

Eighty-five of the 193 letters that were published in the three newspapers during the period of study referred to material previously published in the newspapers. Twenty-seven letters mentioned other letters to the editor, twenty-three mentioned news articles, twenty mentioned editorials, nine mentioned advertisements, and two letters mentioned columns. Photographs, editor's notes, book reviews, and comic strips were each mentioned in one letter.

Local and state issues were discussed in seventy-one letters; national issues in sixty letters; general subjects in fifty-four letters; and international issues in eight letters.

Thirty-six letters were in opposition to the issues being discussed. Twenty-six letters were in favor of the issues being discussed. Sixty-one letters were non-committal.

Return of Yellow and White Questionnaires

A higher return was realized with questionnaires printed on yellow stock than with those printed on white stock. Eighty-nine questionnaires of each color were mailed, but the possible number of returns was reduced because thirteen letters were returned, seven stamped "Insufficient Address" and six stamped "Addressee Unknown." Sixty-five out of a possible eighty-four yellow questionnaires (77.4 percent) and sixty-one out of a possible

eighty-one white questionnaires (75.3 percent) were returned.

Conclusions

Answers to these questions, originally stated in Chapter I, constituted the conclusions of this study:

1. What kind of people write letters to the editors of The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News?

2. Why do they write them?

Based on his study of 123 persons whose letters to the editor were published in these three newspapers during March, 1964, the author concluded that persons who write letters to the editors of these newspapers are:

1. of all age groups, but most likely elderly or in their middle ages.

2. male, by a three-to-one ratio.

3. predominantly well-educated, averaging fourteen years of formal education.

4. of all occupational levels, but most likely white collar workers, housewives, or retirees.

5. married, by a three-to-one ratio.

6. likely to write letters to congressmen, legislators, and other public officials.

7. likely to write more than one letter to the editor. Many will write more than ten letters to the editor.

8. likely to receive phone calls, letters, or comments from friends, strangers, anonymous persons, and/or public officials concerning their letters to the editor.

9. likely to receive feedback that is in agreement with their letters to the editor.

10. likely to have their letters published verbatim in the newspaper, although many letters will be edited by the newspaper.

11. likely to vote in Presidential elections.

12. more likely to be Republicans than Democrats or Independents.

13. likely to own their home but not their business.

14. residents of Kansas in great majority, having lived in the communities in which they are living for an average of 20.1 years.

15. likely to read at least two newspapers each day.

16. likely to read the front page of the newspaper and the editorial page, in that order.

17. likely to read the editorials or look at the editorial cartoon first on the editorial page.

18. "joiners," belonging to an average of two clubs or organizations. Many are officeholders.

19. likely to purchase several magazines by subscription.

20. likely to prefer special interest and general magazines.

21. likely to read at least six books a year.

22. more likely to prefer popular non-fiction than popular fiction or classical fiction.

23. likely to watch television and listen to radio each day.

24. likely to prefer news programs on television and radio.

Regarding motives behind their letter writing, the author found that persons who write letters to the editors of the three newspapers are:

1. almost evenly divided between ego and community motivations.

2. likely to believe their letters will affect readers, and to a lesser degree, public officials.

3. likely to believe their letters might affect public opinion by enlightening the citizenry about the topic under discussion.

General Observations

Based on the findings in this study, the author made several general observations and conclusions about letters to the editor and the 123 persons whose letters to the editor were published in the three newspapers during the period of study. These observations and conclusions are:

1. Letter writers in this study did not represent a true cross-section of the Great American Public. On such counts as education and occupation, they were found to be considerably above the national average.

2. Letter writers in this study had a conviction that they were affecting events, either as a result of their letters, or of the public opinion they felt their letters helped to shape.

3. Labeling the letter writers in this study as "crackpots" is not consistent with the facts. Their motivation for writing, while ego-centered in many instances, was found to be logical and sensible.

4. Letters to the editor cannot be considered an accurate index to public opinion. Rather, they are a reflection of their writers' personal thinking, which very often is one-sided.

5. The letters column is a self-generating public forum which measures reader interest of a newspaper, and an editorial page in particular. Many persons who read the letters columns see something that motivates them to write letters to the editor. The volume of mail will vary with the liveliness of the discussion at hand.

6. The letters column is a channel of two-way communication which personalizes the relationship between the readers and the newspaper. No editorial page should be without a letters column.

Response to the Survey

Based on their response, the author found the 123 letter writers to be exceedingly receptive to the study. Several expressed pleasure at being requested to contribute to the study. Twelve submitted letters with their questionnaires, continuing the discussion of the open questions or commenting about their letter writing or about the study. Several respondents requested that the author inform them of the results of the study upon its completion. Although they were assured that their names would not be used in the study, several respondents gave their permission for the author to use their names, if he desired.

Suggestions for Further Study

Five studies could be made to add knowledge about persons who write letters to the editors of the three newspapers in this study and other newspapers. They are:

1. A similar survey of persons whose letters to the editor appear in the three newspapers during a different period. Findings could be compared to findings in this study.
2. A similar study of persons whose letters are published in one of the newspapers in this study. The period of study could be extended to three months.
3. A similar survey of persons whose letters are published in one or more newspapers in other parts of the country.

4. With the cooperation of the newspaper or newspapers involved, a survey of all persons who submit letters to the editor, not limited to those whose letters are published.

5. A detailed study of the published letters which could provide additional information about the subject matter of letters to the editor.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire Used in Pre-Test

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

Age. Under 18 19-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 Over 56

Education. Did you complete: Grade School High School College
 Graduate School (If you did not complete, give the number of years you attended)

Are you: single married

What is your occupation? _____

How many letters to the editor have you written?

1 2-5 6-10 More than 10 (give approximate number) _____

Why do you write letters to the editor? _____

Do you happen to read a newspaper every day?

always often sometimes seldom never

What different daily newspapers do you read fairly regularly? _____

How often do you read the editorial page?

always often sometimes seldom never

Number those features of the editorial page in the order you generally read them.
 If you do not generally read a feature, leave it blank.

editorials	_____	editorial cartoons	_____
columns	_____	letters to editor	_____
features	_____		

Number the sections of the newspaper in the order you generally read them.
 If you do not generally read a section, leave it blank.

front page	_____	editorial page	_____
sports page	_____	financial page	_____
comics	_____	women's page	_____
ads	_____		

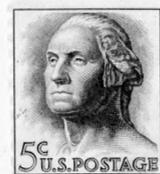
Whom do you think your letters might affect? editor readers
 public officials all of these no one Other _____

What results do you think your letters might bring? _____

APPENDIX II

Stamped, Self-Addressed Envelope

Kansas State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science
Department of Technical Journalism
Manhattan, Kansas



Mr. Gary L. Vacin
Apt. M-32 Jardine Terrace
Manhattan, Kansas

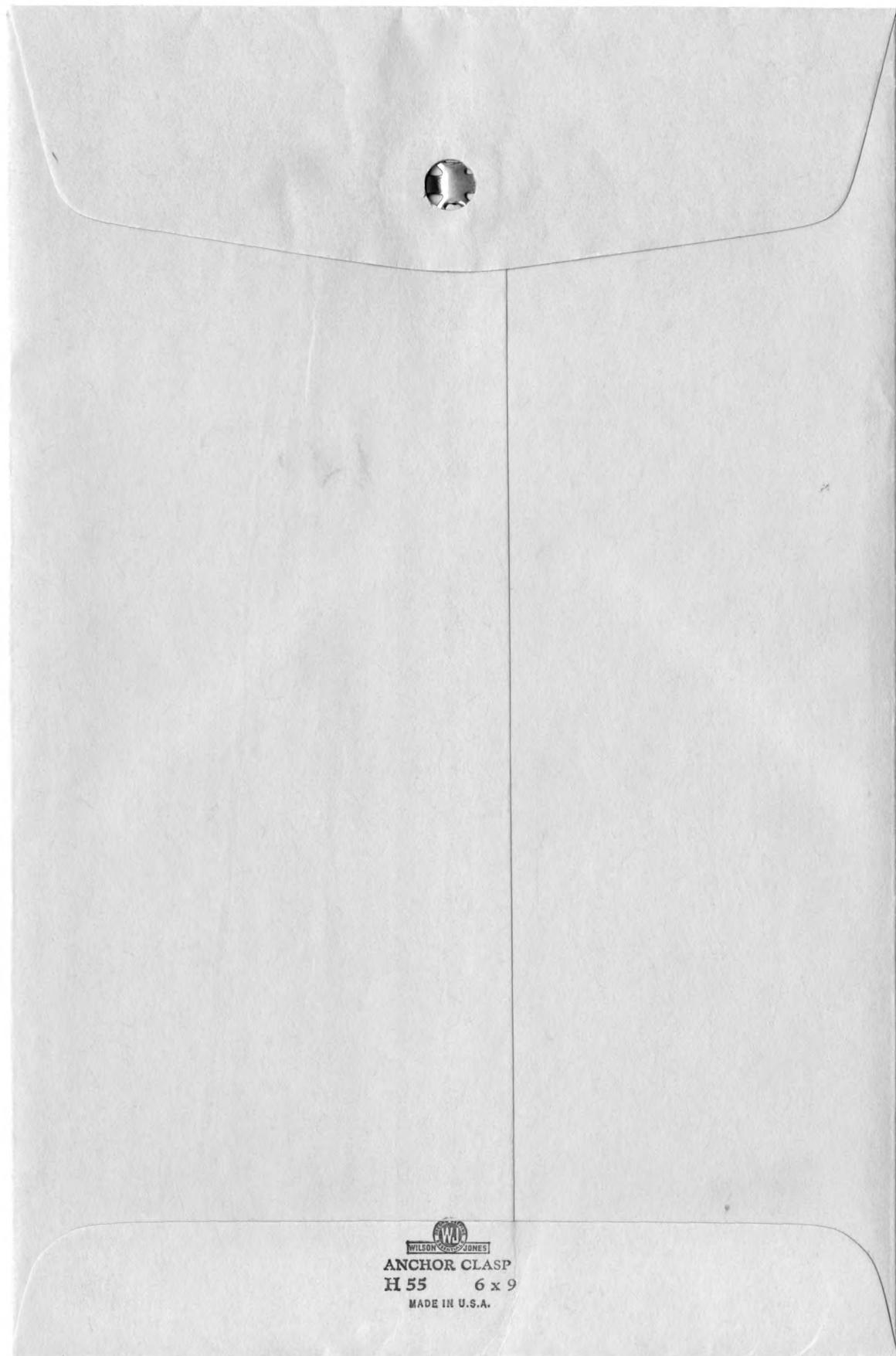
1861—STATE OF KANSAS CENTENNIAL—1961

APPENDIX III

Cover Letter for Pre-Test

APPENDIX IV

The White Questionnaire



ANCHOR CLASP

H 55 6 x 9

MADE IN U.S.A.

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

What is your age? Under 18 19-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 Over 56

Did you complete: Grade School High School College Graduate School
(If you did not complete, give number of years you attended)

Are you: Single Married

What is your occupation? _____

How many letters to the editor have you written? 1 2-5 6-10
More than 10 (Give approximate number.) _____

Why do you write letters to the editor? _____

Have you written letters to your congressman, public officials, etc.? Yes No

If so, how many? 1 2-5 6-10 More than 10 (Give approximate no.) _____

Do other members of your family write letters to editors and/or officials?
 Yes No Which members? _____

Did anyone speak to you or write to you about your latest letter to the editor?
 Yes No Who were they? _____

What did they say? _____

Whom do you think your letters might affect? editor Readers
 Public Officers All of these No one Other _____

What results do you think your letters might bring? _____

Please comment on the way your latest letter was edited by the newspaper _____

Were you eligible to vote in the 1960 Presidential election? Yes No

Did you vote? Yes No

What is your political affiliation? Democrat Republican Independent

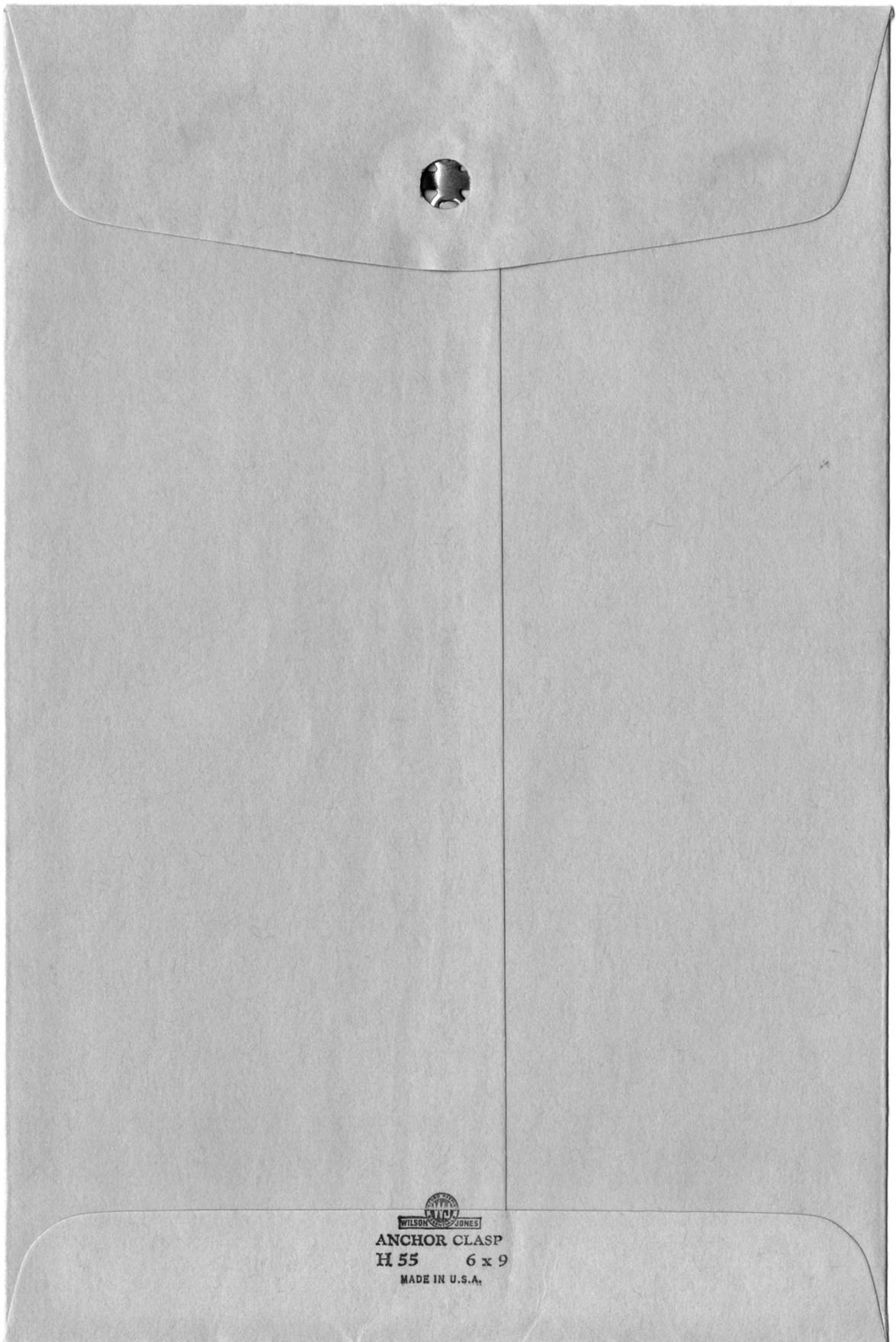
Do you own your own home? Yes No Your Own Business? Yes No

How long have you lived in your present community? _____

Do you happen to read a newspaper every day? Always Often Sometimes
 Seldom Never

APPENDIX V

The Yellow Questionnaire




ANCHOR CLASP
H 55 6 x 9
MADE IN U.S.A.

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

What is your age? Under 18 19-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 Over 56

Did you complete: Grade School High School College Graduate School
(If you did not complete, give number of years you attended)

Are you: Single Married

What is your occupation? _____

How many letters to the editor have you written? 1 2-5 6-10
More than 10 (Give approximate number.) _____

Why do you write letters to the editor? _____

Have you written letters to your congressman, public officials, etc.? Yes No

If so, how many? 1 2-5 6-10 More than 10 (Give approximate no.) _____

Do other members of your family write letters to editors and/or officials?
 Yes No Which members? _____

Did anyone speak to you or write to you about your latest letter to the editor?
 Yes No Who were they? _____

What did they say? _____

Whom do you think your letters might affect? editor Readers
 Public Officers All of these No one Other _____

What results do you think your letters might bring? _____

Please comment on the way your latest letter was edited by the newspaper _____

Were you eligible to vote in the 1960 Presidential election? Yes No

Did you vote? Yes No

What is your political affiliation? Democrat Republican Independent

Do you own your own home? Yes No Your Own Business? Yes No

How long have you lived in your present community? _____

Do you happen to read a newspaper every day? Always Often Sometimes
 Seldom Never

APPENDIX VI

The Questionnaire for the Editors

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

Do you feel there is much interest in The News' "Western Front" column? Why or why not?

What kind of persons write letters to the editor?

What do you think readers look for in letters to the editor?

What is The News' policy regarding selection of letters to be printed?
How often does The News run a policy statement regarding letters to the editor?

Do you think letters to the editor influence public opinion to any significant degree? If so, how?

Questionnaire - 2

Approximately how many letters to the editor does The News receive every day?

Do you think persons who write letters to the editor are representative of the Great American Public? Why or why not?

Are most of the letters you receive for, or against, the subject being discussed?

Does The News ever find it desirable to solicit letters from readers?
If so, what devices do you use?

Kansas State University

Manhattan, Kansas

EUC.

Department of Technical Journalism
Krebs Hall

DEAR F. A. SCHUBERT

The Cover Letter

APPENDIX VII

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Confidence and your name will in no way be used in this
endeavor. Your letter will be held in the strictest
confidence in the enclosed self-addressed stamped
the information you are providing within. We would appreciate
and placed in the Toledo Daily Capital. Michigan State
we are contacting those persons whose letters are

and the business letter letters serve.
your name is being used to learn who wrote letter letters
views of your letter letters. The objective of your letter
the letter is to bring to the attention of the public
the work being done in the field of technical journalism
and your letter letters. We are interested in the views of
most American letter writing society, we need your help.

Kansas State University

Manhattan Kansas

Department of Technical Journalism
Kedzie Hall

Each year more than eight million Americans air their views on subjects varying from ping pong to politics in the letters-to-the-editor section of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals. Because you are a member of this vast American letter-writing society, we need your help.

Although the letters-to-the-editor column is one of the most popular newspaper features, comparatively little is really known about the people who utilize this unique channel of communications. The Department of Technical Journalism is attempting to learn more about letter writers and the purpose their letters serve.

We are contacting those persons whose letters are published in the Topeka Daily Capital, Wichita Eagle, and the Hutchinson News during March. We would appreciate your assistance in filling out the enclosed questionnaire. Please return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Your reply will be held in the strictest of confidence and your name will in no way be used in the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Gary L. Vacin

Enc

APPENDIX VIII

Cover Letter for the Editors

Kansas State University

Manhattan, Kansas

April 1, 1954

Dear Sirs:

Enclosed for you are two copies of the cover letter for the *Journal of Technical Journalism* for the year 1954.

Very truly yours,

Mr. John F. Harvill

Editor, *Journal of Technical Journalism*
Department of Technical Journalism
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

Enclosed for you are two copies of the cover letter for the *Journal of Technical Journalism* for the year 1954. The letter is addressed to you and is intended to be read by you and the other members of the editorial board. It contains a list of the articles which will appear in the journal for the year 1954 and a list of the authors of these articles. It also contains a list of the names of the members of the editorial board for the year 1954. I am sure that you will find this information of interest and value.

Department of Technical Journalism
Keeble Hall

March 29, 1954

Kansas State University

Manhattan, Kansas

Department of Technical Journalism
Kedzie Hall

March 29, 1964

Mr. John P. Harris
The Hutchinson News
300 W. 2nd
Hutchinson, Kansas

Dear Mr. Harris

It is estimated that more than eight million Americans write letters to the editors of newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals each year. Studies have shown that these letters constitute one of the most widely-read features in a publication. Comparatively little, however, is really known about the persons who write these letters and the effect the letters have on the reader.

The Department of Technical Journalism is studying those persons whose letters to the editor were published in three Kansas newspapers during March. The Hutchinson News is one of the papers that we have selected for the study. We are trying to answer two questions: What kind of people write letters to the editor? Why do they write them?

The study is concerned with the letter writers and the editors who handle the letters. Each of these groups is being contacted via questionnaire. Your help in filling out the enclosed questionnaire as candidly as possible will be greatly appreciated. Please return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

When this study is completed in July, we will send a brief summary to all participating editors. We sincerely hope that this study will be useful to you.

Sincerely

Gary L. Vacin

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation to Professor Ralph R. Lashbrook and Assistant Professor Jack E. Backer for their guidance and helpful suggestions during this study and for their counsel throughout the author's graduate work.

Special thanks go to the 126 letter writers and three editors who completed questionnaires from which information for this study was obtained. The study was possible only because of their cooperation.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to his wife, Betty, for her patience and understanding while this study was being prepared.

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A SURVEY OF PERSONS WHOSE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR WERE PUBLISHED
IN THREE KANSAS NEWSPAPERS DURING MARCH, 1964

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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It is estimated that more than eight million Americans write letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines each year. Studies have shown that letters columns constitute one of the most widely read features of a publication. Comparatively little, however, is really known about letter writers or their reasons for writing.

After examining prior studies on letters to the editor, the author saw a need for research which would provide the answer to two questions:

1. What kind of people write letters to the editor?
2. Why do they write them?

The purpose of this study was to answer these questions concerning persons who write letters to the editors of The Topeka Daily Capital, The Wichita Eagle, and The Hutchinson News.

The universe for this study consisted of letters to the editor published in these newspapers during March, 1964. A questionnaire, self-addressed stamped envelope, and a letter explaining the purpose of the study were mailed to letter writers whose letters appeared in the newspapers during the period of study. Questions were designed to obtain information needed to answer the questions stated above. Seven repeat writers, eight other letter writers not mailed questionnaires because of insufficient address, and thirteen letters returned reduced the possible number of returns to 165. A total of 123 questionnaires were returned, a return of 74.5 percent.

Responses to the questions were grouped and tabulated under appropriate headings. Three additional questionnaires which were returned after the tabulation had been completed were not considered in the primary findings of the study.

Questionnaires were mailed to the editorial page editors of the three newspapers. Questions were designed to obtain information about the editors'

opinions regarding letters to the editor and the newspapers' policies regarding handling of letters. All three editors completed and returned the questionnaires.

Based on his study of 123 persons whose letters to the editor were published in the three newspapers during March, 1964, the author concluded that persons who write letters to the editors of these newspapers are:

1. of all age groups, but most likely elderly or in their middle ages.
2. male, by a three-to-one ratio.
3. predominantly well-educated, averaging fourteen years of formal education.
4. of all occupational levels, but most likely white collar workers, housewives, or retirees.
5. likely to write letters to congressmen, legislators, and other public officials.
6. likely to write more than one letter to the editor.
7. likely to receive phone calls, letters, or comments from friends, strangers, anonymous persons, and/or public officials concerning their letters to the editor.
8. likely to receive feedback that is in agreement with their letters.
9. likely to have their letters published verbatim in the newspaper.
10. residents of Kansas in great majority, having lived in the localities in which they are living for an average of 20.1 years.
11. likely to read books, magazines, and newspapers.

Regarding the motives behind their letter writing, the author concluded that letter writers are:

1. almost evenly divided between ego and community motivations.
2. likely to believe their letters will affect readers, and to a lesser

degree, public officials.

3. likely to believe their letters might affect public opinion by enlightening the citizenry about the discussion at hand.