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ABSTRACT

The Mass Communication and Society Division of the proceedings contains the following 12 papers: "Free Congress Research and Education Foundation: An Extremist Organization in Think Tank Clothing?" (Sharron M. Hope); "Presence in Informative Virtual Environments: The Effects of Self-Efficacy, Spatial Ability and Mood" (Lynette Lim, Linda A. Jackson, Frank Biocca, Gretchen Barbatsis, Keith Bradburn, Ming Tang, Alexander Von Eye, Yong Zhao, and Hiram Fitzgerald); "Cognitive Mapping: Another Window Into the Ethical Reasoning of Journalists" (Sandra L. Borden); "Sources of Influence on People's Perceptions of the Quality of Life Available in Their Communities and Elsewhere" (Leo W. Jeffres, Kimberly A. Neuendorf, Cheryl Campanella Bracken, and David Atkin); "September 11 and the Newslore of Vengeance and Victimization" (Russell Frank); "Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations" (Wayne Wanta, Guy Golan, and Cheolhan Lee); "Public Perceptions of the Phrase 'God Bless America'" (John V. Bodle and Larry L. Burriss); "Quantifying Globality in Hollywood Film" (Jonathan Obar); "Mapping Deviance: The Role of News Content in Communicating Legitimacy" (Tim P. Vos); "Modeling Internet Current Affairs News Usage from Perceived Credibility of Internet News, Internet Dependency Relations, and Social Locus" (Jin Yang); "Exploring the Effects of Web Advertising on Readers' Perceptions of On-line News" (Hyeseung Yang and Mary Beth Oliver); and "Patriarchy v. Functional Truth: Assessing the Feminist Critique of Intimate Violence Reporting" (John McManus and Lori Dorfman). (RS)

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Running Head: FREE CONGRESS FOUNDATION

Free Congress Research and Education Foundation:

An Extremist Organization in Think Tank Clothing?

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Free Congress Research and Education Foundation:

An Extremist Organization in Think Tank Clothing?

When one thinks of "extremist rhetoric," one may think first of the words of fanatical organizations like the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) or the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC), whose views of white superiority are clearly expressed in their literature and on their websites. One is less likely to think of the language of organizations such as the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation (FCF or Free Congress Foundation), a conservative think tank based in Washington, D.C.

How does an organization concerned with promoting the conservative view on particular policy questions measure up as an extremist organization? How do the ideas of the FCF compare to those of groups openly advocating "white power"? Is the FCF simply promoting the conservative policy view, or is it more of a reactionary wolf dressed in conservative think tank clothing? As critical thinkers and participating citizens in a democracy, it is our responsibility to place every political organization's rhetoric under careful scrutiny. Being aware of the depth and breadth of a group's perspective allows us to make informed choices on whether to adopt and/or promote that point of view. This scrutiny surely should include policy think tanks, who are welcome participants in the political process and whose views may, on the surface, seem reasonable and acceptable.

This study provides a short background of the Free Congress Foundation, identifies three characteristics of extremist rhetoric, and examines the ideas nested in the FCF website for those characteristics. This study examines the implicit messages as well as the explicit messages of the FCF to answer the research question, "Does the rhetoric of the Free Congress Research and

Education Foundation website demonstrate that the organization should be characterized as an extremist group?"

Free Congress Foundation

The Free Congress Research and Education Foundation was founded in 1977 by Paul Weyrich. He served as president until 2002 and is now the Chairman and CEO of the organization. In an editorial published in *The Washington Post* in 1999, Weyrich explained the conservative strategy: "(T)o elect conservatives to office and then to rely on their help to retake society's institutions: not only the government but also the public schools, the universities, the media, the entertainment industry and so on" (2003, Separate & Free, ¶ 3). This strategy met with some political victories, for example the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and Republican control of the House of Representatives in 1994. "But in terms of the culture war, this strategy failed. The culture has continued to deteriorate" (2003, Separate & Free, ¶ 5) because "culture is stronger than politics" (2003, Declaration of Cultural Independence, ¶ 12). According to the FCF, America has fallen into moral decay as the counterculture of the 1960s with its "cultural Marxism know as 'multiculturalism' or Political Correctness" became the dominant culture (2003, Declaration of Cultural Independence, ¶ 1). The Moral Majority, a term that Weyrich coined, has become the Moral Minority. While not abandoning its political commentary, the FCF now has a higher priority, the Culture War:

> Will America return to the culture that made it great, our traditional, Judeo-Christian, Western culture? Or will we continue the long slide into the cultural and moral decay of political correctness? If we do, America, once the greatest nation on earth, will become no less than a third world country. (2003, About The Free Congress Foundation, ¶ 2).

Since the foray into the political arena failed, the FCF website presents a new strategy designed to get us out of the "sewer" that is present-day culture: "We seek nothing less than the creation of a complete alternate structure of parallel cultural institutions" (¶ 14). On this isolationist note, let us consider some of the characteristics of extremist rhetoric.

Characteristics of Extremist Rhetoric

Page limits for this paper make it impossible to consider all the applications of extremist rhetoric on the FCF website. Therefore I will focus on the elements of isolation/polarization, moral conflict, visions of utopia, and finally the implicit messages contained in the website rhetoric. First, let us consider the use of the term "reactionary revolutionary" and whether it is an appropriate label for the Free Congress Foundation.

The thrust of the FCF message is a return to "traditional, Judeo-Christian, Western values." According to Dale Leathers in 1968, one of the basic assumptions of the Radical Right is that the "values of religious fundamentalism dictate the political thrust of reactionary rhetoric" (p. 246, italics in original omitted). This was indeed the initial strategy of the Free Congress Foundation as its religious values guided its political approach. With the Communists no longer the threat that was perceived in 1968, the focus is now on the "cultural Marxists" with their threats of political correctness and multiculturalism.

In summarizing the left-right continuum of Clinton Rossiter's typology of seven political types (revolutionary radicals, radicals, liberals, conservatives, standpatters, reactionaries and revolutionary reactionaries), Leathers notes that both revolutionary radicals and revolutionary reactionaries "agree that present institutions, traditions, and values are oppressive and untrustworthy" (xxxx, p. 126). Both want to destroy, rather than replace, the present political institutions. However, while the radicals have a commitment to the future, the reactionaries have a similar commitment to the past.

In considering the position of the Free Congress Foundation, its members are definitely inspired by the strength of an historical America. According to the FCF, the U.S. past was pure *Leave It to Beaver:* two-parent families where Dad worked at a well-paid job, Mom kept house, their children attended excellent schools and played in safe neighborhoods. Entertainment was "moral, instructive and healthy." The FCF contrasts this perfect past with today's broken and blended families, unsupervised children, poor quality schools where students learn only the lessons of political correctness. The entertainment industry is referred to as a "bottomless sewer." This dependence and commitment to the past qualifies FCF rhetoric as reactionary.

Other qualities of the FCF rhetoric match the "attack and destroy" language seen in revolutionary rhetoric. In the words of the FCF, "Our strategy is to bleed this corrupt culture dry" (2003, Integration of Theory and Practice ¶ 19) by attracting to their movement those who would otherwise become leaders in the mainstream culture. By people joining or patronizing the alternative institutions that the FCF members will build, the dominant institutions will be abandoned and thus, claims the FCF, the "reigning leftist regime will collapse from lack of support. Our movement will be entirely destructive and entirely constructive. We will not try to reform the existing institutions. We only intend to weaken and eventually destroy them" (2003, Integration ¶ 20). The rhetoric continues with a volley of war metaphors. The phrases "launch our movement", "knock the opponents off-balance", "maintain a constant barrage of criticism at the Left", "attack their legitimacy", "not give them a moment's rest", and "use guerilla tactics" all appear in a section of the website devoted to the "Integration of Theory and Practice: A Program for the New Traditionalist Movement" (2003, ¶ 17-20).

The lack of interest in reform and the focus on destroying the existing institutions is distinctly revolutionary. However, the Free Congress Foundation is not *all* about destruction, since the FCF proposes building an alternative society that will remain physically, economically and politically part of the United States, but culturally separate (that is, based on traditional, Judeo-Christian, Western values – unlike the dominant culture). However, since the purpose of these alternative institutions is to undermine and ultimately destroy the existing institutional structures, the rhetoric remains classified as revolutionary.

Isolation/Polarization

The alternative institutions created by the FCF will allow members to culturally separate from the dominant decadence of pop culture. The objective is to create institutions "where people who want to live according to the old rules of our civilization can find comfort" (2003, Independents' Forum, ¶ 5) This isolationist position is another trait of extremist rhetoric.

It is true that birds of a feather flock together. In 1951 Asch demonstrated that people naturally tend to congregate with those who share their attitudes and values, and to separate themselves from others whose values counter their own (Whillock, 1995, p. 33). Whillock further points out that these factors result in polarization, which occurs "whenever people become accustomed to the comfort of similar others, isolate themselves from those who are different, and begin constructing barriers to maintain a 'proper' social distance from the designated out-group" (1995, p. 34).

This could just as easily be a quote from the Free Congress Foundation website as a book entitled *Hate Speech*. Cultural isolation is the new goal of the Free Congress Foundation. Using home schooling as their model, the FCF strategy is to provide Judeo-Christian alternatives in government services, news and other media, art and music, libraries and health care, to name but a few opportunities. FCF Chairman and CEO Paul Weyerich justifies this strategy by noting that the word "holy" means "set apart." He points out that examples of separation to preserve beliefs and culture appear throughout the Old Testament and Christian history, so this idea is not without precedent. The FCF vision includes the possible development of neighborhoods, towns, and even small cities "where people who adhere to traditional morals and culture might live among others like themselves" (2003, Independents' Forum, ¶ 5). Part of their long range plan is to identify states that might welcome such communities.

The plan is not without risks. According to Whillock (1995), groups who adopt self-imposed isolation begin to create self-justifying reasons for their behavior, in order to maintain the social order. The narratives would serve to simply further alienate the FCF group members from the dominant culture they are trying to avoid, but not withdraw from. "The significance of this self-polarizing behavior is that it creates conditions ripe for hate appeals" (Whillock, 1995, p. 34). When the culturally isolated FCF members compete with nonmembers in the physical, economic and political spheres, the self-justifications would only contribute to the inevitable conflict.

Moral Conflict

Another characteristic of extremist rhetoric is that opponents are engaged in moral conflicts that emerge from "very deep differences in opponents' assumptions about fundamental reality" (Freeman, Littlejohn & Pierce, 1992, p. 313). Moral conflicts generally do not rise from differences in policy, but in the confrontation between mutually exclusive belief systems. These fundamental differences make resolution difficult; sometimes the two belief systems are incommensurable. Freeman, et al. (1992) observed three characteristics of moral conflicts: they are persistent, patterned, and their discourse is attenuated. The conflict of the Free Congress Foundation with the "MTV culture" "leftist regime" certainly meets all three criteria.

First, the Free Congress Foundation was formed over 25 years ago, thus its conflict with the Communists and now with the "cultural Marxists" has been persistent. (The conservative disagreement with the Communists is even more persistent, reaching back into the 1950s.) There is little doubt from the rhetoric on the FCF website that the conflict will not be over soon. In discussing the new cultural approach, the FCF mentions that the seeds sown now that will have "dramatic repercussions in the long term," well into the 21st Century. Secondly, the patterns of interaction follow those observed by Freeman and her fellow researchers: depictions of the conflict have been reduced to simplified descriptions of events, narrow definitions, and linear-causal explanations. The societal upheaval of the 1960s is simply the "counterculture revolution," political correctness is defined as "cultural Marxism." Multiculturalism itself is tossed out as the worst sort of epithet but is never specifically defined. However, it contributes heavily to the poor state of America today.

The third characteristic of moral conflict is that the discourse tends to be provided in short cuts rather than in full-bodied description. Frustration with understanding the other point of view reduces the desire to fully explain one's own perspective, and thus the shared rhetoric becomes shallow, narrow, and generally insufficient to clarify one's position. This is clearly evident on the Free Congress Foundation website. The often-used phrase "traditional, Judeo-Christian, Western culture" is never explained. "Multiculturalism" is never defined. "Political correctness" is only discussed as a way that freedom of expression is being curtailed. The author of the section on "Integration of Theory and Practice" notes that his essay contains no theory or evidence, or even a definition of a traditionalist (aka "culturally conservative) society! He claims that others have performed that task better than he could, and that his intention is not to convert anyone. His objective is rather to provide practical steps that will rally support and move the New Traditionalist Movement forward and closer to its utopian dream.

Recreating Utopia

In discussing the use of utopian discourse by reactionaries and radicals, McGee notes that such rhetoric is no longer limited to artifacts that meet conventional expectations, such as 19th and early 20th century novels, nor do they need to be entirely devoted to describing how utopia was achieved in some past, transitional era (2000). Constructing this utopian vision, "whether anticipated or already achieved, is evidence of rhetorical radicalism or reactionism....(R)hetoric is *reactionary* if it envisions a future order whose ideology and material conditions are recognized...as part of the myth of the past for that community" (McGee, 2000, p. 313, italics in original). This clearly is the position of the Free Congress Foundation. Here is their utopia:

> Once, not so very long ago, America was a good place to live. Families were strong and stable. One breadwinner, almost always the father, brought home enough income to give a whole family a middle class standard of living. Wives and mothers could devote themselves to making good homes and rearing their children. Those children played in safe neighborhoods, surrounded by good neighbors. They went to schools that inculcated discipline, built character and taught reading, writing and arithmetic well. Entertainment was moral, instructive and healthy. Civilization was passed successfully from one generation to another, and even improved a bit along the way. (2003, Declaration of Cultural Independence, ¶ 4)

This vivid scenario sounds much like the set-up for *Leave It to Beaver* or a similar situation comedy of that era. Of course, even in the 1950s, millions of Americans were not living in the suburban landscape depicted on these television programs. Yet this is the vision of the past that the Free Congress Foundation would have us believe to be true, and the utopia that is again attainable and thus worthy of being pursued. This description provides a touchstone for what the future can become, which is simply a restoration of the perceived perfection of the past.

As McGee notes, "The good society envisioned in utopian literature is radically dependent on conceptions of the good held by author and audience…The audience is given evidence that the utopian vision is preferable to the *status quo*" (2000, p. 304, italics in original). As evidence that the past is preferable to the present (and thus we must change the future), the FCF contrasts the Good Old Days with the existing status quo. Today "divorce and illegitimacy have shattered families and crippled children" and the single-breadwinner middle class family is the rare exception rather than the rule. The children, left to grow up on their own, go to public school "attendance centers" where the focus is not the 3 Rs, but rather on "inculcating the 'attitudes' demanded by the reigning ideology of Political Correctness." The "bottomless sewer" of the entertainment industry "flood(s) the land with sex, violence and degradation of every sort. Popular music glorifies killers and reduces women to whores." Serious music has become a "self-parody," publishers seek out celebrity authors rather than good writers, and the news media value sensationalism over facts (2003, Declaration of Cultural Independence, ¶ 5-8). This dystopian description will certainly resonate with many people; after all, one doesn't need to be a conservative to believe that there are significant problems in American society. But is a return to a previous age the proper solution? McGee warns against taking the reactionary utopia lightly, noting that Americans, especially, seem to be moved by appeals to tradition and the past. That is certainly what the Free Congress Foundation is depending on.

In speaking about the American past, however, the FCF chooses a very narrow image – one that relegates women to the home and one that excludes people of color.

Implicit Messages

The issue of race is apparently a taboo subject for the Free Congress Foundation. While the White Aryan Resistance and the World Church of the Creator blatantly advocate white power, the issue of color is obvious via its absence on the FCF site. Even though professing Judeo-Christian values, thus removing the organization from possible anti-Semitic claims, any instruction similar to "Be kind one to another" is noticeably missing.

One detects a distinctly white flavor in digesting the FCF rhetoric. Consider the FCF version of utopia, a return to the time prior to the 1960s counterculture movement – and also the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement. If the FCF is concerned about how television "'normalizes' every deviance, including homosexuality and the inversion of the traditional roles of men and women," (2003, Declaration of Cultural Independence, ¶ 7) it is a short leap to the notion that the FCF would also be concerned about the expanded role of minorities in society. If the 1950s America is the FCF ideal, then Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other ethnicities should recede into the "seen but not heard" position of subordinate citizens.

The Free Congress Foundation website continually rails about the "long slide of the country into political correctness" that will result in America becoming "no less than a third world country" (2003, About Free Congress, ¶ 2). The concern about becoming a third world country may be as much about the ethnic make-up of the U.S. population as it is about the country's economic status. One reason members join the FCF, according to Weyrich, is concern for "the cultural effects of uncontrolled immigration and the loss of our European heritage" (2003, Independents Forum, ¶ 7). The possible benefits generated from a diverse population are never considered. The total dismissal of political correctness translates into simple lack of respect and insensitivity for others. This does not bother members of the FCF. Indeed, another Weyrich letter posted on the FCF website notes that, for the first time in U.S. history, we have to be careful of what we say. "Certain topics are forbidden. You can't approach the truth about a lot of different subjects. If you do, you are immediately branded as 'racist', 'sexist', 'homophobic', 'insensitive', or 'judgmental'" (2003, Free Congress Foundation, ¶ 7).

As rhetoricians, we can appreciate the power that "mere words" have on those who hear them. Much of political correctness is being more aware of how one's words can be interpreted in ways that were not intended.

Summary and Conclusion

This study was begun to answer the question, "Does the rhetoric of the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation website demonstrate that the organization should be characterized as an extremist group?" Examination of the FCF website included consideration of revolutionary reactionary rhetoric, isolation/polarization, moral conflict, visions of utopia, and implicit messages on race. The rhetoric

p. 48 In order to stop ourselves from responding to hate appeals, we must first understand how we are manipulated by them. Perhaps then we will better understand the need to expose these appeals, for only members of the dominant class have the power to expose hate as a stratagem for victory; only members of the in-class have the power and the voice to defend the out-class against stereotypic depictions and false injury claims.

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Presence in Informative Virtual Environments: The Effects of Self-Efficacy, Spatial Ability and Mood

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate whether 3-D virtual environments have an effect on learning in virtual environments. The same information is presented on a regular webpage and a custom constructed 3D spatial environment. The results show (1) a correlation between an individual's positive attitudes about the environment and a sense of presence; and (2) partial support for the hypothesis that users with high computer and Internet self-efficacy would experience a higher sense of presence in the 3D virtual environment.

Keywords: human-computer interaction, virtual environments, 2D & 3D environments, mood, learning, spatial ability, self-efficacy

Introduction

One of the most common applications of three-dimensional (3D) environments today is in computer games. Games where users can take on the first person perspective such as Counterstrike, Unreal Tournament, and the Grand Theft Auto series are found in most top 10 lists of computer gaming software (e.g. Klappenbach, 2000). These games though given their entertainment value, tend to be addictive and have even been suggested to inculcate personality traits such as violence in frequent users (e.g. Ballard & Lineberger, 1999). But what if the popularity and entertainment factors of 3D virtual environments can be transferred into informational and educational contexts? Would users feel the same level of presence in these environments?

In this study, a 3D environment was constructed to simulate the first-person interface view of many popular 3D computer games. However, instead of weapons or vehicles, informational material was placed within buildings in the environment and users were instructed to seek out the information. Creating a 3D environment for informational and/or educational purposes poses several questions: Will an informational 3D virtual environment yield greater knowledge gained for the user compared to a traditional two-dimensional (2D) website? Does affect and individual differences in spatial ability have have a relationship on level of knowledge gained? Does a 3D environment yield higher levels of physical presence felt by the user than a standard 2D webpage? The purpose of this experimental study is to address these questions.

Physical Presence in 3D Virtual Environments

Presence has been defined as a basic state of consciousness, where sensations felt are attributed to distal stimuli or artificially constructed environments (Loomis, 1992 in Kim & Biocca, 1997). It is a user's subjective experience of being in one setting or environment, when in reality the user is in another physical location. Virtual presence or telepresence is defined as "a subjective sensation of being present in a remote or artificial environment but not in the surrounding physical environment" (Kim & Biocca, 1997). According to Biocca (1997), the levels of physical presence felt by a user alternates between three environments: a physical or immediate environment, a virtual or mediated environment, or an imaginal environment, which is analogous to a state of dreaming or daydreaming. In a virtual environment, users respond and attend to cues within the environment and experience presence more easily than in an imaginal environment. However, the level of presence cannot compare or be maintained at the same level as the presence experienced in an immediate physical environment.

Because we live in a three-dimensional world, it has been argued that 3D virtual environments will enhance certain actions that have been more commonly attributed to 2D environments. For example, Li, Daugherty, and Biocca (2002) explore three-dimensional (3D) advertising and how presence mediates the formation of personal experience. Li et al. (2002) found that 3D advertising will result in a greater sense of presence than 2D advertising and that 3D advertising will result in more favorable brand attitudes. In the case of 3D virtual environments, users are experiencing a computer-generated environment made to simulate objects in the real world. Regenbrecht & Schubert (2002) argued that interaction with a 3D environment will enhance a user's sense of presence. It is assumed that presence results when a user perceives interaction with the 3D virtual environment as being similar to interactivity in the real world (Schuemie & van der Mast, 1999).

Witmer and Singer (1998) posit that users of virtual environments would feel a sense of presence when they are interacting directly or have become part of the environment. They address measuring presence in virtual environments by means of a presence questionnaire. The relationship between presence and learning is also discussed. Witmer and Singer assume that since aspects related to learning and performance increase presence, there may also be a positive relationship between presence and performance. When users interact with a computer-generated environment their experience with that environment becomes more meaningful. It is assumed that when a user's interaction is meaningful their learning improves.

Nunez and Blake (2003) examined whether or not users of non-graphical displays experience presence. Participants in the study interacted with both graphical and text-based environments. In the graphical environment users explored a series of virtual rooms using mouse and keyboard. The text-based environment presented users with a still image of a room, and navigation was accomplished by choosing a command from a list of options. The results of this study confirm that while users of both graphical and text-based systems experience presence, users of graphical-based virtual environments experience higher levels of presence. These findings suggest that interaction with graphics-based virtual environments will also result in an improvement of task performance.

It has been suggested that individual differences have an effect on users in virtual environments (Chen, Czerwinski & Macredie, 2000; Chen, 2000; Waller, 2000). Because an individual experiencing presence in a virtual environment engages a series of cognitive faculties, the role of individual differences such as cognitive ability, mood or affect, and self-efficacy may play a role in determining learning in virtual environments. Rusting and Larson (1998) found that when given a series of cognitive tasks, test subjects showed enhanced performance when they reported positive reactions to stimuli. It has been suggested that mood variables play a part in test performance and memory recall (e.g. Fiedler & Stroehm, 1986; Tanis, Sarup & Sullivan, 1996; Levine & Burgess, 1997; Lee & Sternthal, 1999). Their study found that individuals with positive emotions had higher memory recall rates and test performance and those with negative emotion had selective information processing. Finally, Lee & Sternthal's (1999) study on the effects of a positive mood on the memory and recall of brand names showed that positive mood in an individual enhances the "strategic allocation of cognitive resources to stimulus processing" and "more strategic deployment of these resources" (p.125-126).

Hypotheses

The constructed 3D virtual environment in this study is more graphically and visually intense than the static two-dimensional webpage, which creates a greater sense of realism for users. Li, Daugherty & Biocca (2002) assert that interactive virtual environments present a richer media experience than in passive two-dimensional (2D) environments such as those in print form or on television or computer screens. Participants were also allowed some extents of freedom of choice, movement and interactivity within the 3D environment. Burgoon, Bonito, Bengtsson, Ramirez, Dunbar & Miczo (2000) define interaction involvement as "the extent to which users experience high cognitive, sensory, visceral, and motor engagement of an interaction" and assert that "interaction creates a sense of presence" (p. 36). Because of the graphically intense and interactive nature of the 3D spatial environment, we hypothesize that:

H1 = Users of the spatial environment will report higher levels of presence than users of the control environment.

Waller (2000) suggests that spatial ability increased a user's acquisition and transference of spatial knowledge in a virtual environment. The results from Lawton & Morrin's (1999) experiments found that there is a relationship between spatial ability and the ability to orient oneself in a 3D maze environment. Infering that high cognitive spatial ability would increase the level of cognitive processing in virtual environements, we hypothesize that:

H2 = Spatial ability will be correlated with the level of presence

Witmer and Singer (1998) contend that if factors that increase presence are manipulated in virtual environments, there will also be an increase in both learning and performance. Citing Bower, Gilligan & Monteiro's (1981) mood-congurent learning effect hypothesis, Chebat, LaRoche, Badura & Filiatrault (1995) assert that individuals with positive affect toward specific elements during the learning process would have better memory recall towards those elements when compared with other elements that they were exposed to. Debowski, Wood and Bandura (2001) also assert that in addition to self-efficacy and sustained interest, positive affect is also a necessary factor for people with only basic abilities in the accomplishment of challenging tasks. Based on the research, we hypothesize that:

H3 = Higher levels of presence will be correlated with positive attitudes towards the interface.

H4 = Positive affect and presence will have an effect on learning.

Self-efficacy is a component within Bandura's social cognitive theory (1982, 1986, 1997) and can be defined as the self-perception of an individual's ability to perform. It has been used in studies to explain behavioral changes and affect responses to various technologies, including computers and the Internet (e.g. Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Eastin & LaRose, 2000; Debowski, Wood, & Bandura, 2001). High computer and Internet self-efficacy is characterized by how proficient users perceive themselves to be with the technology. The spatial environment used computer game engines to simulate movement not unlike that of a first person shooter computer game. Many of these games are played online in which communities are formed and users can interact with one another. Participants with prior experience to such are more likely to feel that they are more adept in such environments than first-time users. Based on this reasoning, it is predicted that:

H5 = Users with high computer and Internet self-efficacy will experience presence in the spatial 3D environment.

Method

Participants

58 students (16 male, 42 female) from a 4th-year advertising class at a large, Midwestern university were asked to participate in the study in exchange for extra credit. Participants were randomly assigned to each condition using a random number generator. The final number of participants for each condition was 28 for the control environment and 30 for the spatial environment. Each subject was asked to complete online questionnaires on a computer located in a different room from the stimulus materials and the results were deposited into a server-side database for retrieval. Participants were asked to complete online questionnaires twice during the experiment: once before and once after viewing the stimulus materials. In addition, subjects were asked to complete a card rotations test (Ekstrom, French, Harman, & Derman, 1976) test on paper to test their spatial ability.

Stimulus Materials

Two sets of stimulus materials were constructed for this experiment. The subject matter covered in this experiment was basic informational material on high blood pressure. The rationale behind the selection of this information was (1) that high blood pressure was a condition that affects or could potentially affect anyone in the general population; and (2) that most people would pay attention to health information for their personal well-being.

The subject matter was obtained directly from informational material on the American Heart Association homepage (American Heart Association, 2002) and divided into five sections: (1) effects; (2) consequences; (3) risks; (4) prevention through behavior change; and (5) prevention through dietary change. Icons were used to represent each section, and each icon was placed upon a heart background with the intent of using it as a memory aid for users in identifying each section (see Appendix I) The icons used to represent each section respectively were: (1) a book; (2) a red cross; (3) a lightning bolt; (4) a man exercising; and (5) a fork and knife. The use of icons are said to have an effect on user performance (McDougall, de Brujin, Curry, 2000). According to Morrow et al. (1998), icons can aid adults in their comprehension of medical and medicinal information through better cognitive reasoning and memory recall.

The control interface was constructed in basic Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) to look like a regular two-dimensional Internet webpage. It had a clickable menu bar with the representational icons on the left frame and the relevant information when clicked would appear in the right frame. A photograph or graphic would also appear in the right frame to help illustrate the text within each section or sub-section. Users were provided a mouse to navigate around the webpage.

The spatial interface was constructed to look like a three-dimensional "cybertown". The buildings and objects of this "cybertown" was constructed using 3D Studio Max and the navigational controls utilized the Macromedia Director 8.5 game engine. The town consisted of five buildings; each made to represent a section of the informational material. The exact same information was located within each of the buildings in the form of posters on the wall. The "cybertown" took up the top half of the screen, and the bottom half of the screen remained blank until the user would click on a poster.

From a first-person perspective, users would maneuver around the town using a joystick. A pre-test of 25 subjects of similar demographic other than those who participated in the actual study showed that subjects encountered minimal difficulty navigating around in the environment. In addition, the pre-test also helped debug the spatial interface. There were no other people within the environment for users to interact with. Once inside a building, the user would be able to see posters bearing the same illustrative photographs or graphics used in the control interface. Users were instructed to click on the posters to bring up textual information on the lower half of the screen. Once a poster was clickedthe exact same text, information, and graphics as the control webpage would be displayed in the lower portion of the screen for the user to read. Screenshots of both these interfaces can be viewed in Appendix I.

In order to simulate a life-sized environment so as to generate a greater sense of presence for participants in the 3D environment, the stimulus material was projected on a large, rear projection screen that measured 3 meters in length by 2 meters in height. The participants were situated on an elevated platform so as to give each participant the sense that he/she was walking at eye-level amongst life-sized buildings and objects. In order to achieve control between the two conditions, participants assigned to the control interface were also made to view the control interface on the large projection screen, even though the information could have easily been viewed on a regular computer screen. In order to filter out extraneous noise from the background, participants were made to wear noise-cancellation headphones. Participants in the control environment did not hear anything through the headphones, and participants in the spatial environment heard footstep-like noises everytime only when they moved the joystick. The intent of adding the audio was to increase the sense of presence by simulating "walking" in the environment.

Measures

As mentioned earlier, each participant was asked to complete a pre-stimulus and a post-stimulus questionnaire. Repeated measures that were present in both questionnaires were the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and the knowledge tests – a set of 20 questions that tested the participant's knowledge of the subject matter both before and after experiencing the stimuli.

In the pre-stimuli questionnaire, participants were asked self-rating questions on their own computer and Internet self-efficacy and their learning styles in addition to the PANAS and knowledge tests. In the post-stimuli questionnaire, participants were administed the Independent Television Commission's Sense of Presence Inventory (ITC-SOPI) to evaluate their levels of physical presence felt (Lessiter, Freeman, Keogh, & Davidoff, 2000).

ITC-SOPI (The Independent Television Commision Sense Of Presence Inventory)

The intent of the experimental interface was for users to experience being physically presence in a virtual town. The ITC-SOPI is a validated 44-item self-report questionnaire that was used in this study to measure how physically located users feel within any mediated space, how the mediated environment compares to the real world, and how realistic the environment feels (Lessiter, et. al., 2000). The items generate four factors: (1) Spatial Presence – how physically present users feel in the virtual environment; (2) Engagement – how involved users would feel toward the content of the virtual environment; (3) Ecological Validity – the level of realism and naturalness of the environment; and (4) Negative Effects – any harmful physical effects, such as eye-strain or nausea, that users may experience by being within the environment (Freeman & Lessiter, 2001). Given the relative age of the audience, the participants' short length of engagement with the environment (5-10 minutes), and the absence of any loud audio or high-speed video stimuli, it was assumed that participants are unlikely to experience such effects. Earlier research has shown that no negative effects were felt from a similar environment (Li, et. al., 2002).

Computer & Internet Self-Efficacy

The computer self-efficacy and Internet self-efficacy scales were administered separately, with the words "computer" and "the Internet" being the only verbal differences in the two scales. Computer is the physical technological access point and is differentiated from the Internet, which is the intangible hypertextual content in cyberspace. In both scales, participants were first asked to rate their own computer or Internet skills (1=No, 2=Poor, 3=Average, 4=Good, 5=Very Good), and then asked a series of 16 questions that was used to rate their level of enjoyment derived from the computer or the Internet. Half of the questions measured positive affect towards computers or the Internet, and the other half measured negative affect. Sample questions include "Using a computer/the Internet is fun," "I get nervous when I use a computer/the Internet," "I feel relaxed when I use a computer/the Internet," and "I feel relaxed when I use a computer/the Internet." Responses were in the form of a 5-point likert-type scale where 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicated "Strongly Agree".

Mental Rotations Test

The role of individual differences such as spatial ability on learning and performance in 3D virtual environments has been addressed in many studies (e.g. Chen, 2000; Waller, 2000; Czerwinski, Tan & Robertson, 2002). The mental rotations test from Educational Testing Service's (ETS) The Kit of Factor-Referenced Cognitive Tests (Ekstrom, et.al., 1976) was administered to measure the spatial orientation and visualization cognitive abilities of participants. The authors defined an individual's spatial ability as how well users can cognitively manipulate images into other spatial arrangements (Ekstrom, et. al., 1976). This was the only test in the entire study to be administered with pencil and paper.

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)

The PANAS scale was developed and validated by Watson, Clark & Tellegen (1988). It consists of 20 self-report mood items such as "interested," "distressed," "excited," and "upset": 10 items were intended to measure positive affect and 10 measured negative affect. Both positive and negative affect scales should ideally be strongly negatively correlated. The authors defined affect as used in their initial and validation studies as follows:

> "Positive Affect (PA) reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement. Low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy. In contrast, Negative Affect (NA) is a general

> dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, with low NA being a state of calmness and serenity."
>
> --- (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988, p. 1063).

Other Measures

Knowledge Tests: A 20-item multiple-choice knowledge test was developed to test the participants' basic and behavioral knowledge of high blood pressure information. 10 questions were related to the basic knowledge and 10 questions related to the behavioral knowledge of the respondent. Basic knowledge was general information that the respondent knew about blood pressure (e.g. "High blood pressure is also known as hypertension") and behavioral knowledge was information that was related to behavioral causes and consequences of having high blood pressure (e.g. "Smoking will increase your blood pressure"). The same test was administered both before and after participants' exposure to the stimuli and participants were instructed to answer the questions to the best of their knowledge. A prelimary version of the knowledge test was administered to 20 people of a similar demographic to the actual participants of this study. Some of the changes that were made include: clarifying ambiguous language, remove confounding test options, and removing questions that were too vague in relation to the content presented.

Attitudes towards the environment: While the ITC-SOPI asked participants to report how they felt while they were experiencing the environment; a 7-item set of scale questions was developed to ask participants what they thought about the content of the environment in general. Sample questions include "The site I just visited is enjoyable," "I will visit the site again," and "I learned a lot from this site." The questions were answered on a 7-point likert-type agree-disagree scale.

Results

Reliability assessment was conducted on all dependent scale measures (Computer & Internet self-efficacy, ITC-SOPI, PANAS, & attitudes toward the environment) using Cronbach's alpha and all exceeded the generally-accepted $\alpha \geq .7$. Paired sample T-tests showed no significant difference in the participants' positive affect ($p = 0.415$) or negative affect ($p = 0.940$) before and after viewing the stimuli when the means were compared. Hence, exposure to the stimulus did not increase or decrease participants' positive or negative affect.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that users of the 3D spatial environment will report higher levels of presence than users of the control environment. An independent sample t-test conducted to compare the means of the of the four factors in the ITC-SOPI showed no significant differences in spatial presence (M_1 control = 2.58, M_2 spatial = 2.53, $t(56)=.256$, $p > .05$), engagement ($M_1 = 2.97$, $M_2 = 2.84$, $t(56)=.755$, $p > .05$), or ecological validity/naturalness ($M_1 = 3.19$, $M_2 = 2.97$, $t(56)=1.095$, $p > .05$). Hence, the results failed to prove hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that spatial ability would be correlated with the level of presence. Pearson correlation between participants' attitudes towards their respective environments showed no significant correlations for all three factors of the ITC-SOPI. The correlation matrix can be viewed in Table 1. Hence, the results show failed to support hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that positive attitudes towards the environment would be correlated with presence. Pearson correlation between participants' attitudes towards their respective environments showed significant positive 2-tailed correlations at the .01 level for spatial presence ($r = .419$), engagement ($r= .526$), and ecological validity/naturalness ($r = .510$). The correlation matrix can be viewed in Table 2. Hence, the results show that there is a correlation between the attitude of the user toward the environment and the level of presence experienced in that environment.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that positive affect and presence will have an effect on learning. Since there was no difference in positive mood, the post-test PANAS positive mood score was used as the variable for positive affect. Based on the mean knowledge test scores, participants showed a 40.8% increase in basic knowledge and a 20% increase in behavioral knowledge. However, with learning as the dependent variable, tests of between-subjects effects showed no significant interaction between positive affect and spatial presence ($F(1,58) = .024$, $p > .05$), engagement ($F(7, 58) = 10.647$, $p > .05$) or ecological validity/naturalness ($F(14,58) = 1.950$, $p > .05$). Hence, hypothesis 4 was not supported in this study.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that users with high computer and Internet self-efficacy will experience presence only in the spatial 3D environment. An ANOVA on participants in the control condition showed no significant effect of computer and Internet efficacy scores and on spatial presence ($F(21,27) = .659$, $p > .05$), engagement ($F(21,27) = .597$, $p > .05$) or the ecological validity/naturalness of the environment ($F(21,27) = .838$, $p > .05$). An ANOVA on participants in the spatial condition showed only a significant effect in spatial presence ($F(24,29) = 5.238$, $p < .05$) but not engagement ($F(24,29) = .976$, $p > .05$) or ecological validity/naturalness ($F(24,29) = 4.211$, $p > .05$). Hence, the results only partially support hypothesis 5.

Discussion and Limitations

While hypothesis 1 was not supported by the data, previous research that shows a difference in presence felt between 2D and 3D environments (Li, et. al. 2002; Regenbrecht & Schubert, 2002; Schuemie & van der Mast, 1999) suggest that it is worth another look. The results of this study is only preliminary, and significance can be increased of the data could have been enhanced by increasing the N level in the study.

Failure to find any significant results in spatial ability and learning (hypothesis 2 and 4) after using the stimulus could be due to the fact that participants are college students, and are in a sense professional test takers, and are more accustomed to how questions were asked and answered compared to a population that has had a certain length of absence from test-taking. High computer and Internet efficacy scores were probably due to the fact that college students have access to and constantly use computers in their everyday life. In addition, since participants were maneuvering in an environment with no ultimate reward or goal, such as minimum completion time or a high score, there may have been less motivation to learn or read the information.

Users of the 3D interface had a sense of spatial presence, but did not feel engaged in the environment, nor felt that the environment was real (hypothesis 5). One possible explanation as to why they did not feel engaged was the lack of characters with human characteristics (avatars) to interact with. Although there were buildings and objects to simulate a real environment, the user was essentially alone in the environment. The lack of other interactive characters could also explain the lack of ecological validity or naturalness of the environment that participants felt. In addition, the environment was essentially a restricted space in which users could not wander beyond the dimensions. Adding characters would help enhance a user's engagement and sense of realism towards the environment, but would also increase issues of control between the spatial and control conditions.

Finally, it is hard to assess whether the novelty factor played a part in the results. While it is possible that participants have experienced similar 3D environments such as in computer games, for most of them it was the first time that they had viewed an environment on a large screen with life-sized objects. Repeated exposure of the same subjects to the same environment would cause participants to become familiarized with the content and they would naturally score better in the knowledge tests. Providing different content matter would have been a solution to control for the novelty factor through repeated exposure. However, with the average time taken to complete the experiment from start to finish taking between 20-30 minutes per participant, repeated exposure would have caused them to be exhausted or bored, and this may increase their negative affect.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Study

With only 16 male participants in this study, there were insufficient subjects to conduct reliable comparisons between males and females. This experiment was originally designed to control for gender by evaluating respondents based on their spatial ability and learning. However, since studies have shown that there are discrepancies in cognitive ability between genders in terms of cognitive performance (e.g. Knez & Kers, 2000), memory (e.g. Heubner & Fredrickson, 1999), learning (e.g. Waller, 2000), and spatial ability (e.g. Lawton & Morrin, 1999) and these differences can be explored in relation the levels of physical presence in the 3D spatial environment.

The results of this study can be considered preliminary, and helps lay ground toward future studies using similar 3D environments. Additional studies have been planned to administer this experiment to other non-student populations. One reason that accounts for the insignificant variance in test score difference, computer and Internet efficacy, and spatial ability could be that college students exist in environments that encourage these factors and this may account for higher scores in the respective scales when compared with populations of different ages and social economic status with more diverse educational background and technical abilities. Finally, one direction that this study could take to enhance the 3D stimuli so that it would better reflect the real world, such as adding interactive characters within the 3D environment. Additional pre-tests and evaluations will be needed in order to find suitable characters that human users would be comfortable with.

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Tables

Table 1
Correlation matrix of computer and Internet self-efficacy and ITC-SOPI measures.

Correlations

		ITC-SOPI - Spatial Presence	ITC-SOPI - Engagement	ITC-SOPI - Ecological Validity/Naturalness	Computer and Internet Self-Efficacy
ITC-SOPI - Spatial Presence	Pearson Correlation	1	.795**	.782**	-.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.325
	N	58	58	58	58
ITC-SOPI - Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.795**	1	.704**	-.141
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.290
	N	58	58	58	58
ITC-SOPI - Ecological Validity/Naturalness	Pearson Correlation	.782**	.704**	1	-.008
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.953
	N	58	58	58	58
Computer and Internet Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	-.132	-.141	-.008	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.325	.290	.953	.
	N	58	58	58	58

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2
Correlation matrix of attitudes towards the virtual environment and ITC-SOPI measures.

Correlations

		ITC-SOPI - Spatial Presence	ITC-SOPI - Engagement (mean)	ITC-SOPI - Ecological Validity/Naturalness	ITC-SOPI - Negative Effects	Attitudes towards the environment
ITC-SOPI - Spatial Presence	Pearson Correlation	1	.795**	.782**	.235	.419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.076	.001
	N	58	58	58	58	58
ITC-SOPI - Engagement (mean)	Pearson Correlation	.795**	1	.704**	.172	.526**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.196	.000
	N	58	58	58	58	58
ITC-SOPI - Ecological Validity/Naturalness	Pearson Correlation	.782**	.704**	1	.111	.510**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.409	.000
	N	58	58	58	58	58
ITC-SOPI - Negative Effects	Pearson Correlation	.235	.172	.111	1	-.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.076	.196	.409	.	.718
	N	58	58	58	58	58
Attitudes towards the environment	Pearson Correlation	.419**	.526**	.510**	-.048	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.718	.
	N	58	58	58	58	58

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix I

Figure 1. Closeup of Icon Representation used to represent each section of information in both interfaces.

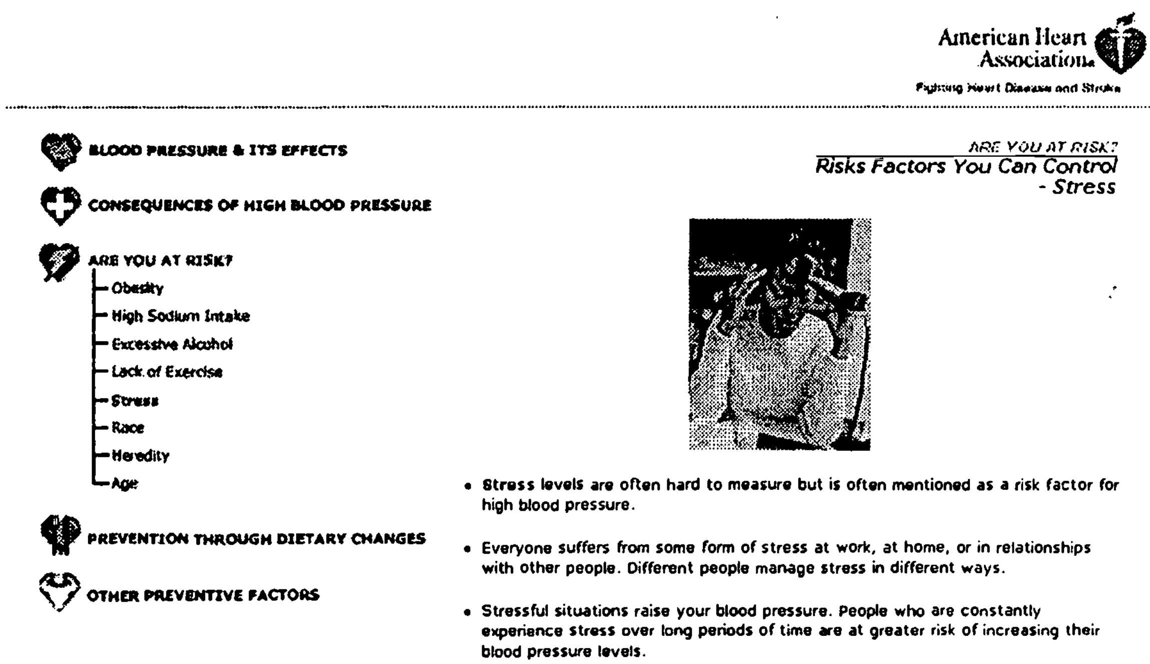

Figure 2. Screenshot of control environment

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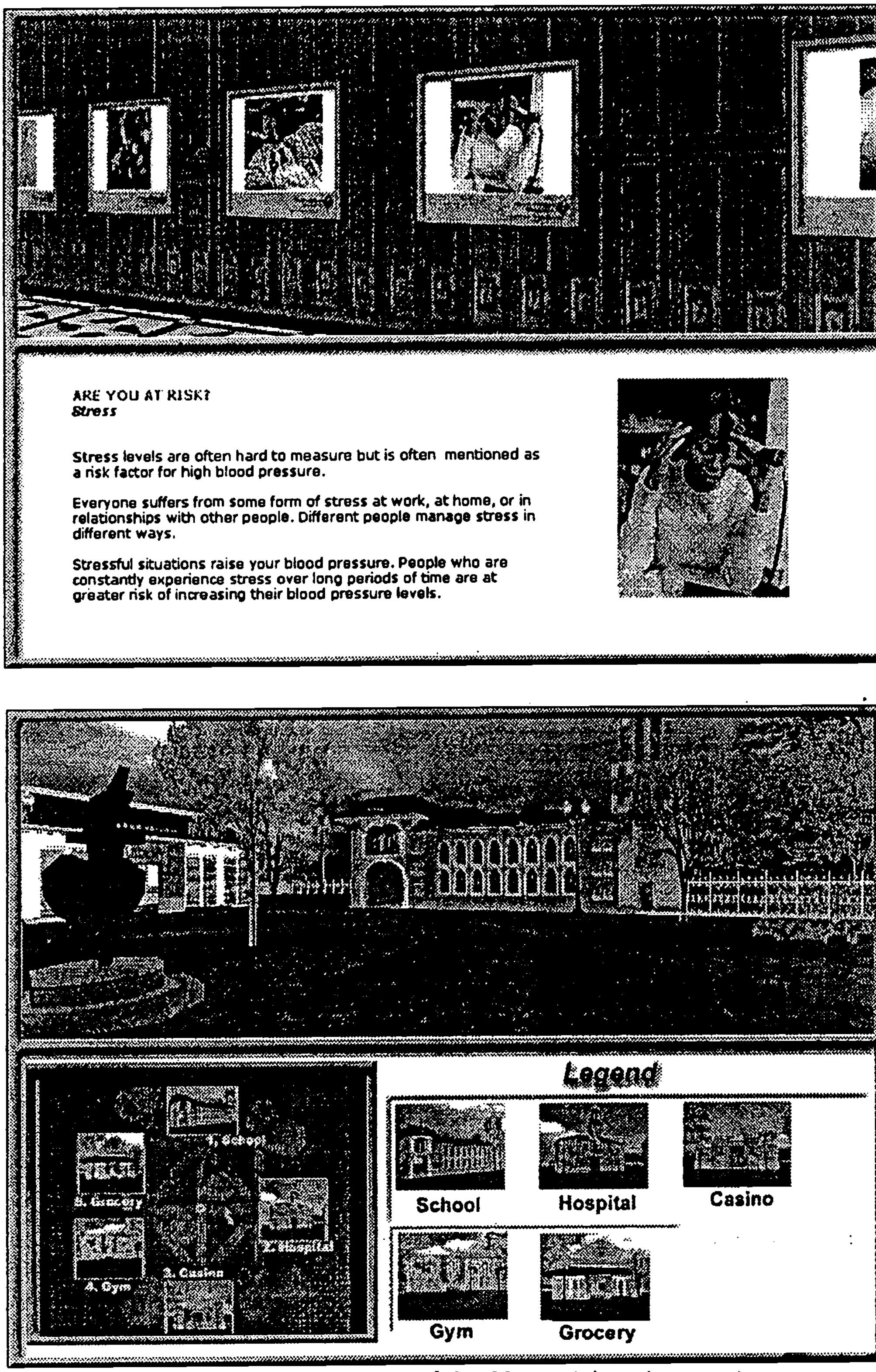

Figure 3. Screenshots of the 3D spatial environment

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Running head: COGNITIVE MAPPING

Cognitive Mapping: Another Window Into the Ethical Reasoning of Journalists

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential of a coding technique called cognitive mapping, which is a systematic way of coding discourse that allows researchers to transform data into a visual representation of another's thinking. A subset of data from an earlier study was coded using cognitive mapping to analyze journalists' ethical reasoning in the first phase of a project that also will involve transferring coding decisions to mapping software in a second phase of analysis.

Cognitive Mapping: Another Window Into the Ethical Reasoning of Journalists

Purpose of Study

Little scholarly work has been done on the processes involved in making ethical choices in organizations generally and in media organizations particularly. Previous studies have tended to focus on the outcome of decisions. What are needed are more analyses that allow us to see *how* journalists reason through ethical decisions in media organizations (Borden, 1997). However, such analyses require methodological innovation. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential of a coding technique called cognitive mapping, which is a systematic way of coding discourse that allows researchers to transform data into a visual representation of another's thinking. This study builds on earlier work by the investigator examining how journalists make sense of ethical decisions; on the work of Barbie Zelizer (1993) and Samuel Winch (1997), who provide models for examining the discourse of journalists; and on the research program of Rebecca Ann Lind and her collaborators (e.g., 1993, 1994, 1999), who have used a simpler type of cognitive mapping to identify levels and types of ethical sensitivity among viewers of television news. A subset of data from an earlier study was coded using cognitive mapping to analyze journalists' ethical reasoning in the first phase of a project that also will involve transferring coding decisions to mapping software in a second phase of analysis. The preliminary results of the first phase – including what worked with the coding and what did not -- will be reported after establishing the appropriateness of cognitive mapping for studying ethical discourse and explaining the coding technique itself in more detail. The paper concludes with a short discussion of the method's strengths and limitations, as well as suggestions for further research.

Ethical Discourse's Connection to Moral Reasoning

Research shows that organizations constitute an important interpretive context for their members, affecting decisions subtly by conditioning members to accept certain assumptions as the bases for their decisions (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Thus it is important to study the reasoning of professionals who are employed by organizations in the context of the workplace and to gain an adequate understanding of the organizational setting and of group assumptions. This includes, of course, journalists. Scholars who study organizational culture–what may be thought of as the "deep structure of a work setting" (Barley, 1991)--have drawn our attention to the fact that discourse provides a unique window into how people think. It is by "talking things out" with each other--even in our heads--that we make sense of the world, including organizational realities. In organizations, some of the most important talk-based devices for making sense of organizational life are arguments (Weick, 1995). People engage in arguments to think through and justify solutions to ethical problems, i.e., those involving issues of moral right or wrong. That is, they engage in moral reasoning--one of the four essential components of moral behavior (Rest, 1986).

Up to now, scholars interested in journalism ethics have rarely used organizational culture as a construct to examine journalists' ethical reasoning (Boeyink, 1994, 1998), although a number of scholars have noted the importance of day-to-day peer influences on journalists' ethical views (e.g., Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). They also have focused mostly on the *outcomes* of ethical decisions, rather than on *how* journalists arrived at them. In addition, such studies also tend to take place *after* the fact, rather than *while* the decision was being made. They also have tended to rely on indirect evidence of ethical reasoning, i.e., inferring reasoning from the stories produced by journalists (see, e.g., Kochersberger, 1988; O'Brien, 1993; Smith & Becker, 1989;

Berkowitz, 1993). Sometimes these conclusions have been supplemented by surveys (e.g., Parsons & Smith, 1988) or interviews (e.g., Ehrlich, 1995). An exception is Williams (1995), who studied the reasoning process of 17 Indiana journalists participating in a computer simulation involving a privacy decision. But even this study focused on discrete responses, rather than on open-ended reasoning in progress.

As far as focusing on ethical discourse as such, notable contributions in media ethics include Samuel Winch's (1997) examination of discourse produced by journalists to distinguish themselves from entertainers or from deviant journalists; Zelizer's (1993) analysis of journalists' collective interpretation of Watergate and McCarthyism; Sandra Borden's (2002) analysis of journalists' Internet postings discussing Janet Cooke's bid for rehabilitation in 1996; and Thomsen's (1998) analysis of ethical discourse produced on the Internet by public relations practitioners debating the ethics of representing tobacco interests. Despite these milestones, however, the bulk of the research being done regarding ethics and discourse has involved mostly non-journalistic actors and topics (see, e.g., Haan, Aaerts & Cooper, 1995; Rymes, 1995; and the special double issue of *Research on Language and Social Interaction* edited by Bergmann and Linell, 1998). And even those studies with journalism or related occupations as their focus have either relied on theoretical categories imposed on the data (in the case of Thomsen) or have focused on such functions as "boundary work" (Winch, p. 3) or reframing events (Zelizer).

<u>Cognitive Mapping's Potential for Analyzing Moral Reasoning</u>

Although cognitive mapping cannot literally get inside journalists' heads as they engage in moral reasoning, this procedure brings us closer to understanding the kind of intentional choice involved in making ethical judgments than anything else (Huff, 1990). There are limitations to the method, to be sure. Maps inevitably simplify the reasoning process, and they may not adequately capture taken-for-granted assumptions. However, maps allow us to at least get close to what people *think* they are doing when they are making decisions. As Russell (1999) notes, cognitive mapping has certain advantages over outcome-oriented descriptions: It permits analysis of relationships between concepts and outcomes in the context of a *process*, and it is a holistic approach that gives insight into how beliefs interact as a *system* to create outcomes.

Axelrod (1976) was one of the pioneers of cognitive mapping. He described the basic elements of the technique and how they interact. The basic elements are the concepts asserted by decision makers and the relationships that link concepts to each other. This system is represented in the form of a graph of points and arrows between those points. The points represent the concepts, and the arrows, the linkages among them. In the years since Axelrod's study, cognitive mapping has been used in a wide variety of disciplines interested in understanding how people make sense of the world (Huff, 1990). Lind and her colleagues (see, e.g., 1994, 1999) have introduced the method to the study of ethics, but organizational scholars already have used the method to study other kinds of decisions (Putnam & Geist, 1985; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

The complexity of the cognitive model and the nature of the relationships represented by the links in cognitive maps vary, depending on the aims of the analysis. The most appropriate kind of mapping for this project would seem to what Huff (1990) calls argument mapping. This variant tries to "show the logic behind conclusions and decisions to act" (p. 16). Argument mapping assumes that decisions involve the weighing of ambiguous evidence that has to be backed up by disputable assumptions, usually resulting in a chain of arguments, such that one argument is dependent on another argument and so on. This method relies on a relatively complex cognitive model and requires a good deal of interpretation on the part of coders. By contrast, the causal mapping technique used by Lind (e.g., 1997) is able to capture only which concepts are linked, but not also the hierarchical structure of these links or the specific purpose of each link.

To test the suitability of argument mapping for examining journalists' ethical reasoning, the technique was applied to transcripts of five focus group discussions conducted in 1995 with 25 journalists from a small daily newspaper in the Midwest (about half the newsroom staff). The investigator did prior ethnographic research at this site. The journalists evaluated scenarios in which journalistic ideals were pitted against business goals in potential conflicts of interest (see Ludtke, 1999, for background on issues raised by the growing economic pressures faced by journalists). Responses to the scenario that elicited the largest number of themes in a previous analysis were analyzed, under the assumption that participants viewed this as the most complex of the seven scenarios they evaluated. The analysis reported here extends the previous thematic analysis by explaining how key concepts displayed in the themes are linked in arguments. That is, besides telling us what the journalists decided and the criteria they used in deciding, we are now able to see how these criteria were linked in reasoning patterns and how these reasoning patterns led to their decisions regarding the resolution of ethical problems posed by conflicts between journalism and business values. This approach takes seriously the following advice of argumentation scholars Toulmin, Rieke and Janik (1979, p. 320): "In studying the actual *practice* (emphasis in original) of ethical debate and decisions, we need to consider not only the separate items that people find good (physical health, satisfying work, rewarding leisure, and so on) but also the manner in which they balance off the claims (or values) of these different items, when they conflict." In other words, cognitive mapping allows us to see the specific tradeoffs these journalists made when arbitrating (in this instance) between professional and business values.

<u>What Are Arguments Made Of?</u>

The coding system developed for this demonstration modifies Fletcher and Huff's (1990), who formalized the elements of Toulmin et al.'s (1979) argumentation model. According to Toulmin et al., an argument is a "train of reasoning" (p. 13) by which one states a position and backs it up with reasons. The main elements of arguments coded using Fletcher and Huff's procedure are claims, grounds, warrants, qualifiers and rebuttals.

The claim is the position for which a person is arguing and is always controversial and, therefore, open to dispute (Toulmin et al., 1979). The grounds are the various pieces of evidence a person offers in support of a claim, such as statistical data or personal knowledge. The warrant is the underlying assumption that justifies the movement from evidence to claim. Warrants may take the form of legal principles, statistical formulas, rules of thumb.

The degree of certainty with which warrants support their claims determines the necessity for qualifiers such as "probably" and "usually," which place limitations on the scope of one's position. Most practical reasoning, including ethical reasoning, requires such hedges. We usually cannot be 100 percent sure that our position is the right one when we try to work through everyday problems in specific situations (Toulmin et al., 1979). That is, practical reasoning is probabilistic. Practical reasoning also is particular: We usually have to anticipate possible rebuttals to our claims by stating up front the conditions under which an exception to our position might be justified.

Argument mapping should be able to acquaint us with the kinds of claims that are culturally available to journalists confronted with ethically problematic business demands, as well as the reasoning processes used to support these claims. With these considerations in mind, the following research questions will be examined:

- *RQ1: What claims did the journalists assert in making their judgments, and which* *claims tended to be made first?* The assumption is that claims made first are perceived as more salient.

- *RQ2: How do the chains of reasoning supporting these claims vary in terms of complexity (number of grounds), certainty (presence and number of qualifiers and rebuttals) and types of assumptions (specific warrants evoked)? Do any "typical" argument patterns emerge from the data?*

Coding Procedures

The transcripts were independently coded by two paid graduate students in a predetermined sequence of passes using a modified version of Fletcher and Huff's (1990) argument mapping technique. Originally, the plan was to incorporate van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs' (1993) argumentation stages into the coding technique. Fletcher and Huff's (1990) emphasis on locating claims suggests that they coded only at the point at which assertions are actually exchanged and perhaps the final stage in which the argument concludes. The thought was that it might be of interest to see under what conditions, if any, the argumentation process is cut off in the initial stages. If nothing else, observing when the first shots are fired, in addition to when the white flag goes up, could increase our certainty that the boundaries of arguments have been properly located. But the incorporation of Eemeren et al.'s stages eventually was abandoned because the stages did not seem to have much relevance to this specific argumentation context. However, coders were instructed to record the line of the transcript from which they were pulling argument elements so that the chronology of the argument was preserved. An anticipated complexity was the occurrence of nested arguments (Fletcher & Huff). However, this task ultimately was removed from the coders' protocol; this simply proved to be too complex a task to do efficiently and reliably.

Fletcher and Huff (1990) call for identifying issue blocks (in this case, identifying the beginning and end of discussion about distinct issues related to the same scenario). An issue block may contain more than one argument. Then claims are identified to figure out where arguments begin and end. Finally, the rest of the text is classified as one of the other argument elements, with warrants coded last because of the importance of context for understanding what warrants the move from evidence to claim. It proved necessary to depart from some of the specifics of Fletcher and Huff's technique in order to obtain good reliability and deal with the complexities presented by spoken, group-generated discourse (Fletcher and Huff used their technique on written discourse). First, issue blocks were abandoned in favor of "argument blocks," i.e., consecutive portions of the transcripts that dealt with a given key claim and its supporting elements. Issue blocks coincided with the boundaries of scenario responses and, so, were not of much help pinning down arguments per se. Using argument blocks instead focused coders' attention on finding arguments within the scenario responses. Argument blocks begin with key claims, the rare exception being when the grounds precede the key claim.

Identifying key claims, then, proved to be the central coding decision. This is how coders had to locate the beginning of argument blocks, and the determination of key claims affected how all the other parts of the surrounding discourse were interpreted. To make coding key claims more consistent, key claims were required to have at least one coded grounds within the transcript. Incomplete or ambiguous statements could not be coded as key claims. Correctly identifying key claims proved to be so important that the protocol ultimately developed for this project specified that coders had to meet to establish agreement on key claims in a given transcript before proceeding with the rest of the coding. Only key claims found independently by the two coders were retained and used for subsequent coding. The protocol was pre-tested until intercoder reliability (based on simple percent of agreement, following Fletcher and Huff, 1990) reached 90% for key claims. Average reliability for the actual coding was also 90%.

After determining the key claims that would form the basis of further analysis, coders independently identified argument blocks, then checked for agreement on the boundaries of these blocks before proceeding to code the remaining elements. This procedure for obtaining agreement on key coding decisions is a significant departure from Fletcher and Huff (1990), who conducted reliability checks only after all the coding was completed. Because of the decision to make the beginning of argument blocks typically coincide with the location of key claims, agreement on where argument blocks began was excellent. However, locating the end of arguments proved more difficult, as discussion in the focus groups sometimes just trailed off. Often, the coders had to negotiate the ending line of an argument block before proceeding. Another complexity found with spoken discourse is that sometimes an argument resurfaces after it apparently has been laid to rest. Obtaining consistent agreement on these argument "remnants" was very hard, lowering reliability on argument blocks during the pretest to about 70%. As a result, such segments were flagged for review automatically when actual coding began. Average reliability for the actual coding using this technique was 85% for argument blocks. The agreement levels reached for key claims and argument blocks were deemed acceptable due to the large number of coding decisions and the degree of judgment required by the technique. The coding protocol is in the appendix.

Results

The scenario discussed by the journalists in the five focus groups concerned whether a newspaper should send a reporter to cover the state legislature after receiving feedback from readers that they did not consider such news to be interesting (this is related to circulation and, therefore, profit concerns). The actual scenario participants read follows:

> The paper is going to stop sending a reporter to cover the state legislature. The reason given is that readers interviewed in focus groups at the newspaper said they aren't very interested in news about the state legislature.
>
> What is the best response to this decision?

Relevant elements of the journalists' arguments were tabulated to answer the research questions. The first research question was: *What claims did the journalists assert in making their judgments, and which claims tended to be made first?* The most common kind of claim made by the journalists were claims that readers would find government stories interesting if these were well-written and that covering the legislature, in any case, should be a priority. Both claims relate strongly to traditional journalistic norms regarding the press's watchdog role and storytelling proficiency (see, for example, the Statement of Shared Purpose that the Committee of Concerned Journalists developed using the results of a three-year study into journalism's key norms at http://www.journalism.org/resources/guidelines/principles/purpose.asp). The claim about making important news interesting came up four different times in three of the five focus groups. An example (streamlined for clarity) comes from a reporter, Sid[1], in focus group 2:

> KEY CLAIM: "... [I]f stories are well-written and well-chosen ...I think that there are stories there that anybody and everybody would read."
>
> GROUNDS: You know, it may be---maybe you're not doing the right stories, you know. Maybe you're not picking the right approach to writing those stories. Maybe you're not writing them well or not presenting them well or something like that.
>
> IMPLICIT WARRANT: [The way a story is written, not just the topic, affects readership and interest.]

This kind of claim defended the decision to cover the legislature indirectly by suggesting that the beat itself was not responsible for any lack of interest that might be expressed by readers. Rather, the journalists covering the legislature were not doing a good job of choosing and writing stories in a way that would make plain how relevant this news is to readers' lives. In short, the journalists were taking some of the blame for not connecting with readers.

The second kind of claim, emphasizing the paper's obligation to cover the legislature, surfaced once in all the groups except one. Here is an example from another reporter, Peter, who participated in focus group 1:

KEY CLAIM: "... [T]he legislature should be a priority... ." (lines 13-14)
GROUNDS: "... because it affects the lives of everybody in the community." (line 14)
IMPLICIT WARRANT: [News that affects many people is important.]

Thus, regardless of what readers might want (and the journalists were not so sure that focus groups could determine this accurately in any case), they need legislative coverage because of its impact on their lives. Will this sell newspapers? Irrelevant.

The next most common kind of claim, however, asserted that there are, in fact, resource constraints that constitute understandable grounds for not assigning someone to cover the legislature–a claim that relates to bottom-line concerns. In two of the five groups, this business-based claim was not made at all. In two of the remaining three groups, it came up after one or both of the journalism-based claims was made first. Thus, at least at first glance, it seems these journalists tended to rely more on journalistic claims than on business claims when trying to manage the professional ethics dilemma posed by this scenario. Here is an example from an editor in focus group 1:

KEY CLAIM: "...[W]e're right on the edge of *how* we cover the legislature in terms of distance." (lines 54-55)

GROUNDS 1: "If we were any further, we would probably would (think) about staffing a person there, putting somebody in (the capital)." (lines 55-56)

GROUNDS 2: "Here, it means taking an extra reporter off the beat, where they have to travel every day back and forth." (lines 55-57)

WARRANT: "I mean, it wouldn't be legi-it wouldn't be fair to ask somebody to drive much farther than we do now. And, if we were any closer, it would be easier. Then they *could* drive." (lines 63-65)

In short, reporters could lavish in-depth coverage on the legislature in an ideal world. But with limits on money, time and bodies, sometimes the bottom line has to set the standard for news coverage. It might be worth probing into whether journalists accept certain kinds of business claims (such as efficiency arguments) more readily than others (e.g., arguments about increasing circulation or ratings).

The second research question was: *How do the chains of reasoning supporting these claims vary in terms of complexity (number of grounds), certainty (presence and number of qualifiers and rebuttals) and types of assumptions (specific warrants evoked)? Do any "typical" argument patterns emerge from the data?* In relation to this question, preliminary analysis shows that most arguments were supported by a single grounds and that most warrants, as might be expected in an in-group situation, were implicit rather than expressly articulated (see the first two examples above). The warrants tended to rely on common-sense knowledge of how newsrooms work and on widely accepted journalistic norms (e.g., the importance of a topic is related to how many people it affects in the second example above).

Few qualifiers were coded, but rebuttals were more common. A possible explanation is that qualifiers might come off as "weakness" in an argument (i.e., a hedge), whereas rebuttals provide counter-arguments that are themselves good reasons duly credited to the arguer, who also manages in this way to pre-empt possible challenges to her position. It also may be that coders simply misinterpreted qualifiers (typically short sentence fragments such as "It's just my opinion") as conversation fillers serving no argumentative function. Rebuttals, on the other hand, are more substantial both in length and content because they specify conditions under which the claim would not hold. Therefore, they might have been easier for the coders to identify than qualifiers.

The typical argument coded in the case study, in short, consisted of a claim supported by a single grounds. These elements frequently were connected by an unspoken, common-sense warrant (by journalistic standards). Finally, arguments tended to display a relatively high degree of certainty as indicated by the rarity of coded qualifiers. When uncertainty was conveyed, it typically was through the means of one or more rebuttals specifying counter-arguments.

Two relatively minor elements in Fletcher and Huff's (1990) original protocol were quite pervasive: reiterations (restatements of elements, especially claims) and elaborations (more precise explanations and examples of elements). This may have to do with the dynamics of group communication. For example, a speaker might pick up on interpersonal cues suggesting a previous point was not clearly communicated, or someone might get interrupted and feel the need to restate a claim for emphasis.

Lessons Learned and Future Research

Cognitive mapping provides more rigor and reliability than discourse analysis, which typically does not try to meet any standards of intersubjectivity. At the same time, it offers more flexibility and complexity than traditional content analysis, which imposes predetermined categories on the data. As such, it seems to provide a happy medium. However, the method has its own limitations that must be addressed. One practical difficulty for this project involved the judgment of the coders. They had limited knowledge about journalism and the topic being discussed in the focus groups. Therefore, they often had difficulty interpreting the journalists' lines of reasoning. This proved to be especially significant for identifying warrants. As noted earlier, understanding the context provided by all the other elements is needed to correctly pinpoint warrants, which is why the investigator followed Fletcher and Huff (1990) in saving the coding of warrants for last. However, because so many of the warrants relied on common-sense knowledge of journalism – something the coders did not possess – coding warrants was challenging, especially implicit warrants. The strategy ultimately developed was to deduce the logic that would be needed to connect a key claim to its grounds, then look for an explicit articulation of this logic in the transcript. If such a statement could not be found, the coders were instructed to supply such a statement and code the warrant as implicit. Because of difficulty in interpretation, both explicit and implicit warrants, automatically were flagged for review (Fletcher and Huff flagged only implicit warrants for review). To ease interpretation in future projects, coders should be sought in part on the basis of their familiarity with both the relevant organizational processes involved and the topic of discussion.

Of course, the decision to standardize interpretations inevitably means loss of data. For example, by limiting coders' attention to portions of the transcripts containing an agreed-upon key claim, it is very likely that some bona fide key claims were missed because they were not "obvious" enough. For example, a complexity encountered during the pretest was implicit key claims. Because these must be inferred, for example, from a narrative that seems to be told to "make a point," they are inherently ambiguous and not very amenable to consistent judgments. Indeed, coding arguments was such a complex task that ultimately coders were directed to pay particular attention to the most crucial argument elements: key claims, grounds, rebuttals, qualifiers and warrants. Quite possibly, many minor elements (such as elaborations and statements of support) simply were not coded. As indicated earlier, even qualifiers might have been missed despite being emphasized in the coding protocol. Even on the major elements, there was a tendency to code every utterance as one element, even though review of the transcripts indicates utterances commonly contained more than one element. Cognitive mapping projects commonly involve codebooks with pre-determined categories developed by coding a subset of the data. By directing coders' attention to specific key claims, grounds, etc., they probably would be able to code these more reliably when compared to the open-ended approach used for this project.

Despite these limitations, this project addresses a central deficiency in our current understanding of ethical reasoning among journalists by shedding light on the *process* (rather than the *outcome*) of ethical decision making. Argument mapping accomplishes this by highlighting how the actual criteria used by journalists to manage ethical problems are linked in observable reasoning patterns. For example, in this exploratory study, journalists used mainly professional criteria regarding newsworthiness and proficiency to navigate dilemmas posed by economic pressures. Understanding this process can alert us to the kinds of moral compromises that journalists might make, what kinds of evidence carry the greatest weight in their decisions and how claims may be warranted in such as way as to preserve key ethical goals. For instance, the journalists in this study advanced claims giving decisive weight to resource constraints. However, these were relatively rare and were not the journalists' first choice for a line of argument. Also, in terms of other kinds of business-oriented claims that could have been advanced (e.g., we should not cover the legislature if we can increase our circulation with alternative coverage), claims acknowledging resource constraints do not necessarily express an appreciation for efficiency from the news organization's point of view. Rather, they seem to be expressions of acquiescence to the realities of their work environment.

Analyzing argument maps also should shed light on the influence of the organizational setting. Already, the preliminary results suggest there are certain decisional premises in use (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) in the newsroom that was studied, based on key claims that recurred from focus group to focus group. The fact that certain assumptions are made over and over again by these journalists, even when they are outside their usual work context (e.g., shift, task, co-workers), says something about bases for making decisions in this particular newsroom that transcend the individuals who practice journalism there. There are other interesting questions to be answered regarding the organizational context of the ethical discourse being studied: What does the structure of the arguments reveal about the way the journalists negotiated disputes involving status differences or deviance in the focus group discussions? For example, did people holding minority views drop their claims as an argument progressed? Did superiors strengthen their claims by piling on additional evidence? Did subordinates modify their claims by adding qualifiers and rebuttals in order to shift from disputation to problem solving? To what extent were the arguments jointly constructed in the journalists' peer interaction, and how did they accomplish this? The investigator is pursuing this phase of the analysis with the aid of the software package *Decision Explorer*, which permits the construction of actual maps using the coded elements from the first phase of analysis. Grids summarizing features of these maps will be examined to pick out particular patterns of reasoning, in response to these questions. It might even be possible, following Russell (1999) and others, to transform these group maps into an organizational-level map.

Finally, these maps have practical applications for professionals, especially in conjunction with the display capabilities of *Decision Explorer*. For example, mapping ethical discourse and using the maps as discussion aides can help professionals clarify and identify the types of ethical reasoning they use, identify their premises for ethical decisions, discover the most persuasive grounds for ethical decisions, and assess their levels of moral reasoning. It also is possible that this kind of analysis could give consumers a tool for criticizing professional performance.

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Notes

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[1] All research participants were given aliases to honor the informed consent agreement promising anonymity.

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Sources of Influence on People's Perceptions of the Quality of Life Available in their Communities and Elsewhere

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Sources of Influence on People's Perceptions of the Quality of Life Available in their Communities and Elsewhere

Abstract

Research into the "good life" has recognized that people's assessments of their quality of life may be affected by their assessment of the larger environment and its impact on them. Few researchers have empirically examined sources of influence as people make comparisons based on personal experiences and observation as well as the mass media and interpersonal communication channels. This investigation has two parts: 1) a survey that focused on a particular metropolitan area of the Midwest but was administered to two different populations--a national survey administered via the Internet and a regional phone survey of the metropolitan area in question. This netted data that allow us to compare the potential influence of different mass media on quality of life perceptions of residents and non-residents; 2) An additional survey in the same metro area includes a wider variety of factors influencing QOL assessments, including access to new technologies. The two studies provide evidence that media use variables play a role in predicting quality-of-life assessments, notably for newspaper readership, radio listening, and Internet usage.

Sources of Influence on People's Perceptions of the Quality of Life Available in their Communities and Elsewhere

Introduction

Research into the "good life" has recognized that people's subjective assessments of their quality of life may be affected by their assessment of the larger environment and its impact on them. In a bottom-up view, an individual's perceptions of the quality of life in specific domains—family, school, culture and leisure—affect their overall assessment and level of satisfaction (see Headley et al., 1991; Andrews & Withey, 1976). We also know that there is a comparative element to this process. Comparisons are central to a discrepancy model described by Campbell et al. (1976), Inglehart and Rabier (1986), Michalos (1986), and others. They propose an aspiration-adjustment model in which one's subjective well-being, or perceived quality of life, reflects the gap between one's aspirations and goals and one's perceived situation.

Since one's assessments of one's quality of life are affected by the environment, our attention also is drawn to how people perceive that environment and how they make comparisons that ultimately lead to individual assessments. However, relatively few researchers have empirically examined people's perceptions of their environment and alternatives (Campbell, 1981).[1] One exception is a study by Jeffres and Dobos (1995), who examined people's overall satisfaction with life as well as perceptions with the quality of life available in their communities, finding communication processes more significant in estimating the latter than the former.

Comparative processes should operate when people assess the state of their personal lives as well as the quality of life available in their communities. Thus, one compares how well he or she is doing at work with one's coworkers or peers, and one assesses how the community is doing by making comparisons with other communities. Sirgy (1998) concluded that the use of more remote references in social comparisons was responsible for materialists' inflated expectations of their standard of living.

The sources of influence in these comparison processes include personal experiences and observation as well as the mass media and interpersonal communication channels. At a close, personal level, one learns of how others are doing at work through experience or talking with others (also see House, 1986; Schuessler & Fisher, 1985). At the neighborhood level, Ahlbrandt (1986) found links between interpersonal interaction and satisfaction in neighborhoods, and Fried (1986) makes a similar point. When we shift to the metropolitan level, the relevant comparisons may be quite distant and our focus may therefore shift to the mass media, through which people learn most of what they know about job opportunities, leisure, culture and life styles available in other communities.

However, the communication literature seldom attends to quality-of-life issues. In a rare exception, Sirgy et al. (1998) found that congruity life satisfaction was positively correlated with television viewing. And Neuendorf et al. (2000) note that mass media channels can influence quality of life evaluations in two ways: (1) as sources of gratification for audience members actively seeking fulfillment of various needs, and (2) as instrumental sources for learning about the environment (i.e., surveillance), as when audiences seek information about leisure and other activities that can enhance personal or environmental QOL perceptions.

Our focus draws on earlier work in the field in an investigation into influences on people's perceptions of the quality of life in their communities and elsewhere.

There are two parts to this investigation. First, a survey conducted for a political study just before the fall 2000 election included measures of quality of life, focusing on a particular metropolitan area of the Midwest. A unique characteristic of this survey is that it was administered to two different populations: One was a national sample with administration conducted over the Internet, and the other a regional sample in the metropolitan area in question, administered via phone interviews using a CATI system. This dual administration netted data suitable for a comparison of how residents assess the quality of life in their metropolitan area with how those outside the area rate that region's QOL. The study allows us the chance to compare the potential influence of different mass media on quality of life perceptions of residents and non-residents. Second, an additional survey in the same metropolitan area at a different time includes a wider variety of factors influencing quality of life assessments, including attitudinal variables and access to new technologies.

Predictions

While interpersonal, or face-to-face communication, is largely an immediate, "locally-focused" activity, the mass media connect people to both local and distant sources of influence. Newspapers tend to be local institutions for the most part, although they certainly cover the broadest range of news and topics from outside communities. After many years of primarily local coverage, radio has begun to move toward central control by conglomerate ownership, although much "local flavor" remains. Other media--television, magazines, and books—tend to have stronger non-local components, and, thus, should be more influential in our perceptions of distant communities than do the more locally-based media. An exception would be the local news component of television, which does focus on the immediate community. Thus, we would expect the "local" media to affect images of "ourselves," while the "non-local" media have a stronger impact on our images of "other" communities.

Into this mix we add newer, more location-ambiguous media such as the Internet and videos. Websites may make a distant location seem as close as the computer screen, while being constructed by sources ranging from international corporations to the shop around the corner. Websites may disseminate information about both local and distant locales with equivalent ease and vividness. Videos viewed in the home are more frequently produced regionally, and lack the homogenizing influence of commercial television.

In light of existing theory and evidence, we offer the following hypotheses and research questions:

> H1: Those living closer to a given metro area will evaluate the area's QOL as higher than those living far.

> H2A and H2B: In predicting QOL for one's own metro area, exposure to local media will be a stronger positive influence than will exposure to national media. In predicting QOL for an "other" metro area, exposure to national media will be a stronger positive influence than will exposure to local media.

> RQ1: What is the role of location-ambiguous media such as the Internet in predicting metro QOL near and distant?

An individual's background and personal characteristics affect quality of life assessments, as numerous studies over the past 20 years have shown. Indicators that have been related to QOL include: life cycle variables, such as age,[2] and marital status[3] ; achievement factors such as adequacy of income and satisfaction with standard of living,[4] occupation,[5] and education[6]; ascriptive factors such as nationality,[7] ethnicity,[8] and gender[9]; physical factors such as health[10] and physical appearance[11]; and geographical factors such as where one lives, e.g., urban vs. rural.[12]

Since quality of life assessments are subjective, we would expect the same range of factors that affect perceptions of other people and institutions to be operative. In the process, people's local orientation as well as one's interest in the broader world should be factors. Those lacking experience or knowledge about a community have to rely on others' perceptions, whether those are achieved through media use or interpersonal communication. Furthermore, do those with different interests gravitate toward more positive or negative assessments, or are they merely incentives for use of one communication channel more than another, the channels themselves leading to knowledge and that to assessments?

In making assessments, people with a broader range of interests and experiences, and those who are more cosmopolitan and less parochial, may arrive at different conclusions than those with fewer interests or experiences, and those whose horizons are more local and less national or international. In general, "cosmopoliteness" has been invoked as a dimension reflecting people's broader outlook on life, and it has been linked to education and social categories, particularly in the literature on the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995; also see McLeod et al., 1996 and Neuwirth, Salmon & Neff, 1989, for using the concept to study communication). One interpretation of "cosmopoliteness" stresses the extent to which one is oriented toward the community in which one lives or is oriented beyond that toward the nation and international context (e.g., Cunningham, Cunningham & English, 1974). "Cosmopoliteness" also has been conceptualized to refer to identification with a broader context, beyond one's nation or culture, as attitudes showing more tolerance of ideas or cultures other than one's own (Robinson & Zill, 1997), and as appreciation-understanding of contexts and cultures beyond one's own (Merton, 1957). It is an empirical question whether people who are more cosmopolitan have more positive or negative assessments of the quality of life in their communities, and we pose the following research questions:

> RQ2: [Given the known role of social categories in predicting QOL] Will interpersonal contact and mass media exposure predict QOL, after social categories have been controlled for?

> RQ3: Do those with more diverse interests have a more positive QOL assessment of the metro area?

> RQ4: Do those with a more cosmopolite orientation have a more positive QOL assessment of the metro area?

Two studies were conducted to address the above two sets of research questions and hypotheses.

Study 1--Comparing Sources of Influence on QOL Perceptions of Residents & Nonresidents—A Metro Poll and National Internet Survey

Methods (Study 1)

A dual-administration survey was conducted in the two and a half weeks leading up to the 2000 presidential election (Oct. 23 through Nov. 6). One administration was conducted in a metropolitan area of the Midwest, with interviews of 505 adults using a computer-aided telephone-interviewing (CATI) system. The second was a national data collection of 2,172 respondents conducted over the Internet by a commercial research firm that sends requests to a diverse set of potential respondents, who logged onto the survey site to participate. The interview schedule for both administrations followed parallel forms, with no differences in wording other than those created by the unique nature of the formats. Thus, the Internet instrument included some matrices to display items that were administered serially in the telephone interviews.

Quality of Life Assessments. The survey asked respondents to assess the quality of life in the Midwest metropolitan area using the following item: “I’d like you to imagine a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the worst place to live and 10 being the best place to live. On this scale, how would you rank the [Metro] area?” This item is frequently used in the quality-of-life literature.

Mass Media Channels as Sources of Influence. The survey included several measures of respondents’ exposure through different media channels, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, videos and films in theaters. The exact wording was as follows: "How many hours of television did you watch yesterday?" "How often do you usually watch the news on television," "How many hours did you listen to the radio yesterday?" "How many days last week did you read a newspaper?" "How many different magazines do you read regularly?" "In the past six months, how many books have you read?" "In the past month, how many borrowed or rented videos have you watched?" "In the past month, how many times have you gone out to see a movie in a theater?" In addition, respondents were asked if they had ever gone on the Internet and, if so, how often they did so at work (0=never to 7=several times a day) or at home (same scale); the two measures were combined for a summary measure of Internet use. Those who had never gone on the Internet were coded as 0. In addition, respondents were asked how often they "visit media websites, such as one of the TV networks, a newspaper or radio site." Respondents also were asked how often they visit chat rooms (0=never before to 6=every day).

Social Categories and Community Links. In addition, the instrument included measures of community ties and social categories. Respondents were asked if they "belong to any neighborhood or community organizations, including block clubs, social groups, religious groups, business groups or ethnic groups." The number cited by the respondent after probes was tallied for an index. In addition, measures of social categories included gender, number of people in the household, age, household income, education, ethnicity and marital status. Gender was coded as a dichotomy (male=1, female=2), while the number of people in a respondent's household and age were standardized as variables. Household income was measured through eight categories (ranging from 1=$10,000 or less to 8=more than $100,000) and level of education in six categories (from 1=completed grade school or less to 6=advanced college degree). Ethnicity was tapped as a single item and then coded as a dummy variable when appropriate ("What is your ethnic or racial background?"), as was marital status ("What is your marital status? Are you married, divorced, widowed, separated, or never been married?"). In the national Internet version, respondents indicated the state in which they lived. The states were then grouped into regions for additional analyses.

Results (Study 1)

Results show that residents and non-residents have divergent views of the quality of life available in this Midwestern metropolitan area. The mean QOL for residents of the area was 7.0, with a median of 8.0 on the 0-10 scale. In the national sample, the mean was 2.9, with a median of 3.0. To identify influences for these widely divergent images, correlations were examined between the QOL assessment and measures of media use, community ties and social categories (see Table 1).

The pattern of correlations shows the differential reliance on media for local, or "self," images, versus images of other areas. Thus, within the metro area that is the subject of assessment, use of the newspaper seems to reinforce positive images, as does use of the Internet at work and overall Internet use. That usage appears to include heavier use of media websites, which lead to an overall favorable assessment of the region. In contrast, images of people living outside the area are affected only by listening to the radio and Internet use, both of which have positive relations with QOL assessment.

The sample was broken down by regions to see if respondents differed by geographic area. We would expect higher ratings of the area by affinity, i.e., those living closer to the area would rate it higher while those in more distant locations would rate it lower. As Table 2 shows, the most positive QOL assessment is given by respondents in the Midwest (3.58), followed by those in the Northeast (2.90), then those in the Southeast (2.68) and, finally, those in the West (2.31); the differences are statistically significant ($F=21.8$, $p<.001$).

Regression analysis was used to identify potential predictors of the metro quality of life assessment in both surveys. As Table 3 shows, in the metro area that is the subject of assessment, only age and household income are significant predictors, and both are positive. Age is likely to be an indicator of one's attachment to and familiarity with the area. Of the media use variables, only two are significant predictors, reading the newspaper and using the Internet at work. Thus, those who read the local newspaper more often and those who use the Internet at work most are more likely to have positive assessments of the quality of life available in the community once social categories and community ties are controlled for. For the national Internet sample, local ties and social categories are unimportant, but two media variables have an impact—listening to the radio and going out to see films in the theater; the former is largely a "local" medium but the latter is a national or international medium. When regressions are run by region, we see a mixed pattern. Age and education in the Northeast are positive predictors, while belonging to community groups is a positive predictor in the West. Whites in the west are more likely to have a negative quality of life assessment of this Midwest metro area. Some specialization by media channels is noted. Watching television is a positive predictor in the Northeast but not elsewhere. Listening to the radio is a positive predictor in the Northeast and Southeast. The positive association between watching films and the positive QOL assessment is found only in the Midwest region itself, where watching videos is a negative predictor. Midwesterners also seem to find positive images of this metro area in chatrooms. Among westerners, only frequenting media websites is a predictor, and that's a positive relationship. We must caution that the regressions are only significant for the Metro poll, the overall Internet poll and for Midwest region, although that for the West approaches significance.

Study 2--Expanding the Range of Variables Affecting QOL Perceptions of the Midwest Area—An Extended Metro Poll

Methods (Study 2)

A second survey conducted in the same Midwest metropolitan area that was the subject of this investigation included a wider variety of factors drawn from the quality of life literature. These include social categories, community ties, personal interests, communication variables, and attitudes reflecting one's focus on the larger world. All of these could affect comparisons involved in quality of life assessments.

As the first study showed, use of particular communication channels can affect one's quality of life assessments. In the "information age," we need to expand beyond the traditional media to look at access to other communication technologies to see how they affect quality of life assessments. In addition, the nature of one's interpersonal communication network can be a factor, since research has shown that isolation limits external influences. Thus, we need to look at the size and strength of one's interpersonal communication network to see if it affects one's quality of life assessments.

These and other variables were examined in a survey conducted in spring, 2000, in a Midwest metropolitan area. Some 351 respondents were interviewed using a computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) system, with a response rate of about 50 percent. Interviewing was conducted in the evening hours, and the survey was introduced as a metro poll containing a variety of items. Variables were operationalized as follows:

<u>Quality of Life Assessments</u>. Respondents were asked to assess the quality of the metropolitan area with the following item: "First, I'd like you to imagine a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the worst place to live and 10 being the best place to live. On this scale, how would you rank the [name of city] area?" Next, they were asked to assess and the neighborhood in which they live: "Using the same 0-10 scale, how would you rank the quality of life in the neighborhood in which you live?"

<u>Community Ties</u>. Several measures of community ties were included. First, five items were used to assess knowledge of the community. One asked respondents to

identify from five options the current president of the city council (correctly chosen by 43%), one asked respondents to pick from six choices the neighborhood in which the metro zoo was located (correctly identified by 50%), one asked which of five individuals was the new owner of the professional baseball team (58% correct), one asked respondents to select from six options the founder of a well-known suburban community with a national reputation (26% correct), and one asked which of six businesses did not have its headquarters in the metro region (25% correct). The mean number of correct items was 2.0 (standard deviation = 1.35), with 16.8% getting none correct, 19.4% one correct, 26.2% two correct, 22.5% three correct, 12.5% four correct and 2.6% all five correct. Another measure asked how long respondents had lived in the community and a third asked respondents, "Do you belong to any neighborhood or community organizations, including block clubs, social groups, religious groups, business groups or ethnic groups?" The number cited was coded for the number of community groups one belongs to.

Interests. Respondents were told, "Now, I'm going to ask how interested you are in a variety of things, using a 0-10 scale where 0 means you're not at all interested and 10 means you're extremely interested. You may give any number between 0 and 10 to indicate how interested you are." The items were: sports and recreation, politics, health, history, music, nature and the environment, business and industry, science and outer space, religion, travel to different countries, current events in the U.S., current events in other countries, the lives of entertainers and celebrities, food and cooking, other cultures, other people's lifestyles, clothes and fashion, technology, and the arts--such as painting and sculpture. For the analysis, the items were standardized and a summary score computed for an overall measure of "diversity of interests." The 19 items measuring interest were factor analyzed, with an orthogonal (varimax) rotation and principal component analysis. Five dimensions emerged. Loading on the first factor, which explained 13 percent of the variance, were travel, other cultures, current events in other countries, lifestyles and the arts; the dimension was labeled "International & Cultural Interests." The second factor (accounting for 12% of the variance) was a mixture reflecting a set of quite specialized interests--health, cooking, religion, nature, history, and music; since most of this falls under "non-fiction" or "actualities" content, it was labeled "Information Seeking." The third factor (10.2% of the variance) seemed to represent an interest in popular culture, with interests in entertainers, clothes, cooking, and sports. The fourth factor represented politics and sports and accounted for 10.2% of the variance; loading here were politics, current events in the United States and sports. The fifth factor (10% of the variance) was labeled business and technology; loading here were business, technology, science and outer space, as well as sports. Three of the interest items also were utilized in the cosmopoliteness measures that follow.

Cosmopoliteness. Several different types of items were used to measure cosmopoliteness. Respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale (where 0=strongly disagree, 5=neutral, 10=strongly agree) to tell how much they agreed with three items, one focusing on how people see themselves as international citizens ("I think of myself as a citizen of the world."), another focusing on communication with people from different backgrounds ("In any given month, I communicate with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures."), and one emphasizing awareness of events around the world ("I'm more aware of what's going on around the world than most of my friends."). Three additional items asked respondents to use a 0-10 scale to rate their interest in travel to different countries, current events in other countries, and other cultures. Finally, respondents were asked for the number of times they had traveled outside the United States in the past five years. These items were factor analyzed, with principal component analysis and orthogonal (varimax) rotation, yielding two factors. Loading on the first factor, which accounted for 36 percent of the variance, were four items: interest in current events in other countries, interest in travel to different countries, interest in other cultures, and the number of times one has traveled outside the United States in the past five years; the factor was labeled International Focus.[13] Loading on the second factor were three items--agreeing with the following statements: "I think of myself as a citizen of the world," "In any given month, I communicate with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures," and "I'm more aware of what's going on around the world than most of my friends." Interest in other cultures loaded on the second factor as well. This factor was labeled Cosmopolitan Communication & Attitude; it accounted for 17.3 percent of the variance.[14] An Overall Cosmopoliteness Score also was computed by summing up the standardized scores across all seven items (alpha=.63).

Access to Communication Technologies. Several items tapped access to technologies for communication--either to send or receive messages. Respondents were asked if they had access to the Internet at home or at work and whether they had ever gone on the Internet. Respondents also were told, "Now, I'm going to list some technologies and I'd like you to tell me which ones you use regularly." The list included: a VCR at home, a TV satellite or cable TV at home, a computer at work, a DVD player, email at work, email at home, and a fax at home. Summary scores were computed for measures of communication technology access and usage.

Internet Use. Several items measured Internet use. Those who reported they had gone on the Internet were asked, "How often do you go on the Internet at work?" A separate item asked the same question for home. The response options were: several times a day, about once a day, several times a week, about once a week, every couple weeks, about once a month, less often than that, almost never. For one measure the two items were standardized and added for a measure of Internet use among those who had gone on the Internet. For another measure, those who had never gone on the Internet were assigned a 0 for each of the two items, which were then standardized again and added for a measure of overall Internet use in the entire sample. Two additional items asked for the amount of time per session spent on the Internet (ranging from less than a half hour to more than four hours) and for how long respondents had been going on the Internet (from less than six months to more than 10 years). Another item focused on the purpose of Internet use at home; respondents were asked, "When you go on the Internet at home, how often is it for pleasure rather than work?" The response options were: almost always for work; most of the time for work; about half work, half pleasure; most of the time for pleasure; almost always for pleasure.

Web Diversity. Respondents were told, "Now I'm going to give you some different types of websites and ask you how often you go to each one." Then they were asked to use the following response set for each of nine sites: several times a day, almost every day, a couple times a week, once a week, every couple weeks, once a month, almost never. The sites were: websites representing the metropolitan area (examples given); a website representing your neighborhood or local community; media websites such as one of the TV networks, a newspaper site or radio site; websites of businesses or companies; entertainment websites such as those for movies, games, hobbies, etc.; sports websites; websites of organizations; websites in other countries, outside the United States; websites in other languages. Responses were standardized and summed up for a measure of diversity of Internet use. The scale summarizing web use across nine different websites ranged from 9 to 53 (alpha = .89).

Media Use Patterns. Traditional items were used to measure media use. Respondents were asked how many hours of television they watched yesterday, how many hours they listened to the radio yesterday, how many days last week they read a newspaper, how many different magazines they read regularly, the number of books read in the past six months, the number of borrowed or rented videos watched in the past month, and the number of times in the past month they went out to see a movie in a theater. Responses were standardized and summed up for a measure of overall mass media use.

Interpersonal Communication Pattern. Respondents were told, "Now, I'd like you to think about the number of people you talked with today. Please indicate how many people you talked with in each of the following." The contexts given were: people in your household, including spouse, children, others; people in your neighborhood, including neighbors or people at local stores, in public places or on public transit; people elsewhere in the city; people in the [metro] area you spoke with on the phone; people outside the area you spoke with on the phone. Two variables were derived from these items. First, a summary score of the number of people talked to was computed. Second, the items were standardized and a summary score computed for a measure of the strength of interpersonal communication links across contexts.

Social Categories. The commonly-accepted measures of ascriptive (gender, race), achievement-oriented (education, household income) and life cycle (age, marital status) variables were used.

The survey also included other items not relevant for this analysis.

Results (Study 2)

The sample included 56 percent women and 44 percent men. The median age was 40, with 15 percent age 60 or older and 15 percent age 25 or younger. Twenty percent were high school graduates, 29 percent had some college, and 30 percent were college graduates. The median household income was about $40,000. Some 19 percent of respondents were black/African American, two thirds were white/Caucasian, 2 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent Asian and the others mixed or other.

First, correlations were computed between the assessment of the quality of life in the metro area and the other variables (see Tables 4 and 5). We see that relatively few variables appear in statistically significant relationships. Only two of the social categories approach significance (age and number of people in household, the former positively related and the latter negatively related). With regard to the interest variables, those more interested in politics and sports have a higher QOL assessment, while the positive correlation with an interest in international topics and other cultures approaches statistical significance. When social categories are controlled, the partial correlation between an interest in business and technology and the metro QOL assessment approaches significance. Two community factors are correlated with the metro QOL assessment, knowledge of the metro area and the perceived quality of life available in the neighborhood. The latter relationship has been found in other studies (e.g., Andrews & Withey, 1974; Jeffres & Dobos, 1995; Jeffres, Neuendorf & Atkin, 2002). Time spent in the metro area is related to the QOL assessment but the relationship drops out when social categories are controlled. Both dimensions of cosmopoliteness and the overall index are related to the metro QOL assessment, and the relationships increase in magnitude when social categories are controlled, suggesting that those with broader interests appreciate their community more than those who are more parochial.

Relationships between the metro QOL assessment and communication variables are found in Table 5. Of the traditional media variables, only readership of a daily newspaper is correlated with the perceived quality of life available in the metro area. That relationship is positive and it persists with controls. Access to the Internet approaches significance when controls are in place, but actually going on the Internet drops out as a negative factor when social categories are controlled. Among those who have visited a chatroom, frequency of visits is associated with a positive QOL assessment.

Communication variables are related to the other measures of interests, knowledge, community and attitudes. Bivariate correlations are in Table 6 and partial correlations controlling for social categories in Table 7.

<u>Interests</u>. People's interests were broken down into five factors. In particular, interests in international topics and other cultures is related to overall media use, particularly print media such as magazines and books. A negative correlation with watching TV and a positive relationship with going out to see films drop out when social

categories are controlled. The same international interests seem to stimulate Internet use and visiting websites of organizations, as well as those in other countries or other languages. These relationships persist with social categories controlled. People more interested in actuality, or non-fiction programming such as health, religion, nature, and history, show lower Internet use but these relationships drop out in the partials. Those more interested in popular culture—entertainers, clothes, cooking—watch more television, listen to the radio more often, and go out to see more films but read fewer books; these relationships persist with controls. The interpersonal communication measures also are linked to popular culture interests but these are diminished with controls. Although folks with these interests show somewhat weaker ties to the Internet, those with access frequent entertainment and sports websites more often and avoid those of businesses or in other countries. Those with an interest in politics and sports show a stronger attachment to newspapers and magazines, and have access to more technology. They also use the Internet and email more often and shower a higher sampling of different types of websites. These also are the individuals who frequent the metro website more often, and also visit business and sports websites more often. They also show more frequent use of chatrooms. Most of these relationships persist with controls. Interest in business and technology is unrelated to any of the traditional media use variables, with or without controls, and correlations with the interpersonal variables drops out in the partials. However, business and technology interests are correlated with access to technologies and both Internet use and a broader sampling of different websites. And, as we'd expect, such interests are correlated with visiting websites of businesses more often; visits to organizational websites also are more frequent.

Community Variables. Four community variables were included in the study. Knowledge of the metro area is correlated with only one media use variable—reading the newspaper more frequently. Higher knowledge also is linked to use of neighborhood websites and those of organizations, although these are reduced with controls. Those who assess the quality of life in their neighborhoods more highly read the newspaper more often, while negative relationships are found with going to films and watching videos. The latter relationships fall below the significance level with controls, but a statistically-significant negative relationship appears with the amount of time spent watching television. Those who frequent chatrooms most often also have higher assessments of the quality of life in their neighborhoods, and this persists with controls. The longer one has lived in the metro area, the more time spent watching television and reading the newspaper, although the latter relationship drops below significance with controls. Negative correlations with watching films and going out to see films also drop out. A strong pattern of negative correlations between tenure in the area and Internet use drops out with controls, but controls reveal a broader sampling of websites and more frequent visits to entertainments, sports and organizational websites among those with Internet access. Those involved in more community groups shower a higher media use, particularly magazines, books and films. They also show stronger patterns of interpersonal communication across contexts. Those who show a stronger sampling of different websites also have lived in the area longer, and the relationship persists with controls. Similarly, belonging to more groups is linked to more frequent visits to neighborhood websites, as well as those of organizations, in other countries, in other languages, and those focusing on sports. However, there is a strong negative relationship with visiting chatrooms, and this persists with controls.

Cosmopolite Variables. Cosmopoliteness measures are correlated with several media use items. The factor tapping an international focus is positively related to the overall media use index and several media use variables—listening to the radio, reading magazines and books and going out to see films in theaters. The correlation with reading books and a negative relationship with TV viewing drop out with controls. An international focus also is linked to a stronger interpersonal pattern, although controls weaken the relationship. An international focus is strongly related to the Internet measures, but only three persist with controls—hours on the Internet, years on the Internet, and the diversity of websites visited. In addition, those with an international focus and Internet access visit neighborhood, media and business websites more frequently. And, as we'd expect, they also visit websites in other countries or other languages more often. They are less likely to visit chatrooms very often. Those with a more cosmopolite attitude spend less time watching television and read books and magazines more often. They also have a stronger pattern of interpersonal links and access to more technology but not the Internet. Of those with Internet access, a stronger cosmopolite attitude is linked to visiting websites of organizations more frequently and entertainment websites less frequently. The overall cosmopolite index is positively related to the media use index, reading magazines and reading books and negatively associated with watching television. The cosmo index is positively related to both interpersonal measures. The cosmopolite index is positively related to the technology index and several Internet measures, including several that persist with controls—time spent on the Internet and diversity of websites visited. Of those with Internet access, the cosmopolite index is associated with visiting websites of businesses and organizations, and those in other countries or other languages more frequently; all of these correlations persist with controls.

A Path Model

A path model was constructed using variables identified as significant in the literature. They were arrayed as in Figure 1, beginning with two social categories and proceeding to other subjective measures of personal interests, the key media use variable—newspaper readership, then community ties and the criterion variable—perceived quality of life in the metro area. The paths replicate some of those demonstrated in the literature, but with inclusion of concepts not previously examined in relationship to people's assessment of the quality of life in their communities. For parsimony, only the strongest measures are included from each set. However, since we know from other research that education is highly correlated with communication measures, that variable was selected from the demographics to represent the most significant social category.

As the model shows, education and age, the latter not only an indicator of life cycle position but also a proxy for tenure in the community, affect one's interests in international topics and other cultures as well as politics and sports. The two demographic variables also have direct paths to other variables in the model. Thus, more educated people read the newspaper more often, know more about the community, and, are more critical of the quality of life in the metro area. Older people also read the paper more often and have more knowledge about the area but there is no direct path to the metro QOL assessment. Interest in politics and sports affects newspaper readership and also has direct paths to metro knowledge and the neighborhood QOL assessment. All other paths from the second interest dimension—interest in international topics and other cultures—drop out. Newspaper readership is a positive predictor of knowledge about the community, confirming a long-standing finding that the print media have strong cognitive effects on audiences. Both metro knowledge and neighborhood QOL assessment are then positive predictors of the metro quality of life. Interest in international topics was expected to be negatively associated with metro knowledge and the metro QOL, acting as a measure of priorities—for the international rather than the local. However, that does not appear to be the case, a finding consistent with more recent interpretations that the local-national/international dimension is an inaccurate picture for many people, who may be equally intensely interested and knowledgeable about the local, the national and the international, i.e., there is not just one dimension of interest, but several dimensions. The positive relationship between an interest in international topics and other cultures and the metro QOL assessment tends to support this interpretation.

Discussion

The first hypothesis forwarded the notion that those living closer to a given metro area will evaluate the area's QOL as higher than those living far. The data from Study 1 support this hypothesis. Hypothesis H2A further predicted that QOL for one's own metro area will be more strongly predicted by exposure to local media than by exposure to national media. Hypothesis H2B noted that in predicting QOL for an "other" metro area, exposure to national media will be a stronger positive influence than will exposure to local media. The findings of Study 1 provide limited support for H2A, with newspaper readership the only significant positive predictor of QOL among conventional media. However, the Study 1 analyses do not support H2B. Neither television nor other "national" media appear to be predictors of metro QOL for those in distant locations, with the exception of theatrical film exposure (which holds for Midwestern respondents only, when the sample is broken down by geographic area). Rather, the presumed "local" medium of radio is the only conventional medium that significantly predicts a positive QOL for those living in other locations.

Research Question 1 asked what the role of location-ambiguous media such as the Internet is in predicting metro QOL near and distant. Overall, use of the Internet is seen to be related to QOL for both locals and those living afar, a relationship that holds when controlling for social categories, but not when all media are included in a predictive model simultaneously. The Internet does seem to play a limited role in the formation of QOL assessments.

The pervasiveness in the U.S. national media of positive images of the American West and West Coast may well contribute to a greater gap between expectations and reality for Western respondents. Of particular interest in the realm of QOL perceptions, mass media can help "cultivate" the audience's world view via fictional and nonfictional accounts about the state of the world. The cultivation theory offered by Gerbner and colleagues (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) suggests that homogenous, repetitive media images cultivate audience perceptions that mirror what they see in the media, particularly television. Jeffres et al. (2000) found only mixed support for this perspective in QOL domains, however, in their analysis of five studies. They found instead that media exposure prompts only fragmented and particular impacts on audience QOL perceptions. In particular, television's impact was limited, negatively predicting only national, metro, and neighborhood QOL evaluations for selected years. Newspaper readership was the strongest and most consistent predictor of QOL evaluations, influencing perceptions of neighborhood, metro, work, and family domains.

In Study 1, radio proved to be much more important to the apparent process of image-making than expected. Radio's role as a primarily local medium must be called into question. The trend toward central ownership of radio may herald a sea change in the way in which local and national images are presented. Additionally, one may wonder whether National Public Radio (NPR), with its frequent emphasis on culture, medicine, and technology, presents a brighter-than-average view of the metro area in question, an area long known for its cultural achievements and leadership in medicine.

The Research Questions addressed by Study 2 included the following: [Given the known role of social categories in predicting QOL] Will interpersonal contact and mass media exposure predict QOL, after social categories have been controlled for? Evidence from the study shows little contribution from key communication variables in predicting local metro QOL. Contrary to past findings, interpersonal links and exposure to most "conventional" media do not correlate with QOL. Consistent with the findings of Study 1, both radio listening and certain Internet behaviors relate to QOL, notably with a fairly strong positive relationship between chatroom visiting and metro QOL.

Research Questions 3 and 4 asked whether those with more diverse interests and more cosmopolite orientations have a more positive local metro QOL. The evidence regarding interests is mixed, with only one of the five interest factors relating significantly to QOL after social categories are controlled for. The evidence for cosmopoliteness, however, is stronger, with all three cosmo dimensions enjoying a significant, positive relationship with QOL. This relationship was strengthened when social categories were controlled for (i.e., a case of statistical suppression). The mechanism for this relationship cannot be revealed via these data, but it might be useful to posit a couple that could be tested in future research. One, those who are more cosmopolite are clearly more well-informed about the quality of life in locations worldwide, and thus are a better position than others to make informed assessments about the objective characteristics of life in their own community. A second explanation might be that a cosmopolite individual possesses an overriding optimism that both attracts them to diverse experiences (cosmo) and prompts them to see the good in life, including life in their own community.

The pair of studies presented here provide evidence that media use variables play a role in predicting quality-of-life assessments. This is notably true for newspaper readership, radio listening, and Internet usage.

Figure 1
A Path Model of Relationships Predicting
Assessments of the Quality of Life in a Community (Extended Metro Poll)

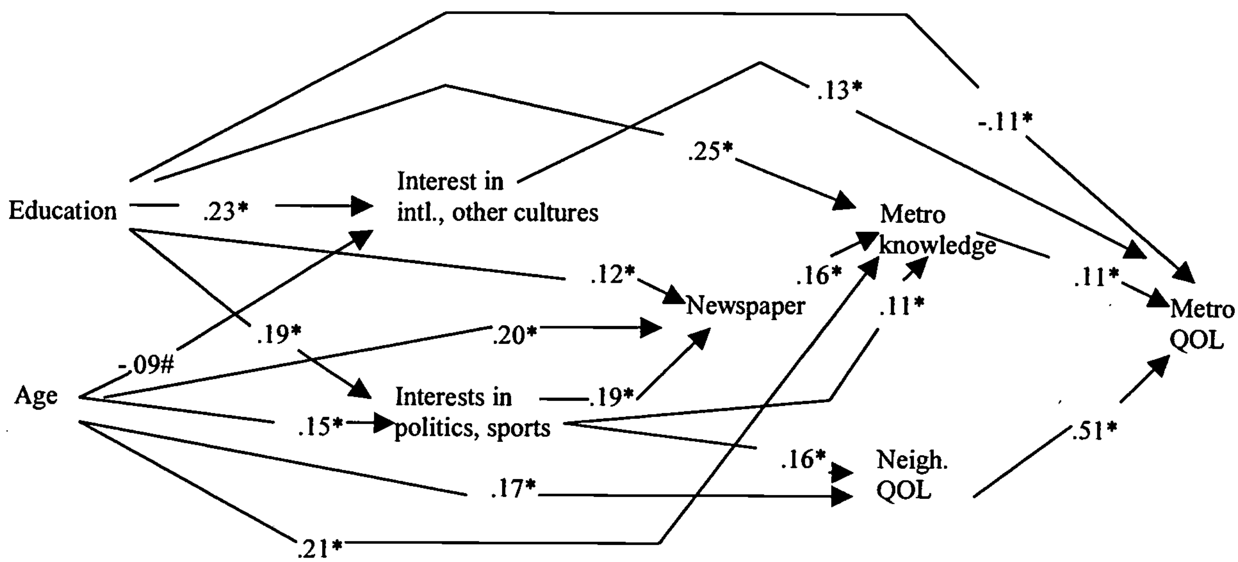

Table 1
Correlations between QOL Assessment and
Measures of Media Use, Community Ties, Social Categories

	QOL Assessment of Midwest Metro Area			
	Metro Poll		National Internet Survey	
	Bivariate Corr.	Partial Corr.	Bivariate Corr.	Partial Corr.
Media Use:				
Hours watched TV yesterday	.05	.02	-.03	-.02
Frequency watch TV news	.05	-.01	-.01	-.01
Hours listened to radio yesterday	**-.09***	-.08	**.07****	**.06***
No. days read paper last week	**.18*****	**.12****	**.05#**	.03
No. magazines read regularly	**.10***	.07	.01	-.01
No. books read past six months	.03	-.00	.01	-.02
No. of videos seen in past month	-.04	.01	-.02	-.02
No. of times saw film in theater	-.04	-.01	**.09*****	**.08****
Frequency use Internet at work	**.13****	**.15****	**.07***	**.05#**
Frequency use Internet at home	**.08#**	**.09#**	.02	.02
Overall frequency of Internet use	**.12****	**.15****	**.08****	**.06***
Frequency visit chat rooms	.02	**.09#**	.01	.00
Frequency visit media websites	**.08#**	**.10***	**.05#**	.03
Social Categories/Community Links				
No. community groups belong to	.07		**.08****	
Age	**.18*****		.00	
Education	**.08#**		**.05***	
Household income	**.10***		.01	
No. of people in household	**-.09***		-.01	
Married marital status	-.02		-.02	
White ethnicity	.02		.03	
Black ethnicity	-.06		-.03	

Note: The partial correlations control for the social categories/community links identified in the table. The sample sizes vary slightly from 500 for the metropolitan survey and from 1,360 for the national Internet survey.

Table 2
QOL Assessments by Region (National Internet Survey)

	QOL Assessment of Midwest Metro area	
Midwest	3.59	N=385
Northeast	2.90	N=290
Southeast	2.68	N=361
West	2.31	N=379
All respondents	2.88	N=1,361
	F= 21.8, p<.001	

Table 3
Predicting QOL Assessments (Metro Poll/National Internet Survey)

	Metro Poll	Internet Poll	Northeast	Southeast	Midwest	West
Social Categories:						
No. community groups	.04	.08	.00	.10	.08	**.10#**
Age	**.17*****	-.00	**.12#**	.02	-.06	-.02
Education	.03	.04	**.15***	.01	.01	.03
Household income	.10#	-.01	-.03	-.02	.05	-.06
No. in household	-.04	.00	.01	-.01	-.08	.08
Married	-.08	-.02	.05	-.00	-.03	-.07
White ethnicity	-.05	.03	.09	.12	.05	**-.10#**
Black ethnicity	-.07	-.03	.05	.02	.04	-.07
R Sq. Change, **F, Sig.**	**.05** **3.0, p<.01**	**.01** **1.71, p<.09**	.04 1.2, n.s.	.02 .94, n.s.	.02 .90, n.s.	.03 1.6, n.s.
Media Use:						
Hours watch TV	.02	-.02	**.15***	.03	-.04	-.08
Freq. watch TV news	-.04	-.01	-.03	-.06	.01	.09
Hours listen to radio	-.07	**.06***	**.12#**	**.10#**	-.02	.03
No. days read paper	**.11***	.03	-.08	.06	.04	.01
No. magazines read	.02	-.02	-.10	-.06	-.06	.08
No. books read	-.03	-.02	.07	-.03	-.02	-.03
No. videos watched	.00	-.04	-.08	.08	**-.12***	-.01
No. films seen in theater	-.01	**.09****	.09	.10	**.22*****	.02
Freq. use Internet work	**.13***	.04	.12	.03	.07	.07
Freq. use Internet home	.03	.04	.06	.06	.06	.01
Freq. visit chat rooms	.04	-.01	-.08	-.02	**.10#**	-.08
Freq. media websites	.00	.02	.10	-.02	-.07	**.15****
R Sq. Change, **F Sig.**	**.04** **1.7, p<.07**	**.02** **1.79, p<.05**	.08 1.5, n.s.	.04 1.1, n.s.	**.07** **2.2, p<.01**	**.05** **1.5, p<.10**
Equation: **R, R Sq.** **F, Sig.** **N**	 **.31, .10** **2.23, p<.01** **441**	 **.16, .03** **1.76, p<.02** **1,297**	 .35, .12 1.40, n.s. 217	 .25, .06 1.06, n.s. 342	 **.30, .02** **1.7, p<.03** **376**	 **.29, .08** **1.6, p<.06** **361**

Note: Social categories were entered in the first block and media use variables in a second block. Standardized beta weights are given for each variable.
#=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001

Table 4
Correlation between Metro QOL Assessment & Social Categories, Attitudes, Interests, Community Variables (Extended Metro Poll)

	Bivariate Correlations	Partial Correlations
Social Categories:		
Age	.09#	
Married marital status	.01	
No. in household	-.09#	
White ethnicity	-.00	
Gender	.02	
Education level	.00	
Household income	-.01	
Interests:		
International, Other Cultures (factor score)	.09#	.10#
Actuality/Non-fiction Interests (factor score)	.07	.06
Popular Culture (factor score)	.06	.08
Politics and Sports (factor score)	.14*	.13*
Business and Technology (factor score)	.07	.09#
Community Variables:		
Knowledge of Metro Area	.14**	.14**
Neighborhood QOL Assessment	.53***	.53***
Years in metro area	.11*	.07
No. community groups belong to	-.06	-.07
Cosmopoliteness Variables:		
International Focus	.16**	.18***
Cosmopolitan Attitude	.12*	.13***
Overall Cosmo Index	.20***	.21***

Note: The first column includes bivariate correlations between the metro QOL assessment and other variables, while the second column includes partial correlations controlling for the social categories listed in the table. The sample sizes vary slightly from 351 for those based on the entire sample. #=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001.

Table 5
Correlation between Metro QOL Assessment & Communication Variables
(Extended Metro Poll)

	Bivariate Correlations	Partial Correlations
Communication Variables		
Media Use:		
Hours watch television yesterday	.05	.03
No. days read newspaper past week	.12*	.12*
Hours listened to radio yesterday	.06	.08
No. magazines read regularly	.04	.03
No. books read in past six months	.03	.03
No. film seen in theater in past month	.02	.04
No. videos watched in past month	-.06	-.02
Interpersonal Communication:		
Sum of interpersonal links	-.03	-.01
Index of interpersonal links	-.03	-.00
New Communication Technologies:		
Technology Index	.01	.07
Access to Internet	.05	.09#
Has gone on Internet	-.11*	-.08
Frequency use Internet	-.05	-.02
Extent use email	.05	.10#
Diversity of websites visited	-.00	.02
Freq. visits websites representing metro area	.00	.00
Freq. visits neighborhood website	-.07	-.07
Freq. visits media websites	.01	.03
Freq. visits websites of businesses, companies	.01	.03
Freq. visits entertainment websites	-.08	-.07
Freq. visits sports websites	-.00	.03
Freq. visits websites of organizations	.04	.05
Freq. visits websites in other countries	.04	.03
Freq. visits websites in other languages	-.07	-.07
Freq. visits chatrooms	.22*	.23*

Table 5 Note: The first column includes bivariate correlations between the metro QOL assessment and other variables, while the second column includes partial correlations controlling for the social categories listed in the table. The sample sizes vary slightly from 351 for those based on the entire sample, while the sample size for those who have gone on the Internet vary slightly from 250. The chatroom variable is based on the 116 who have visited one in the past. #=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001.

Table 6
Correlations among Communication, Interests, Knowledge, Community, Attitude Variables (Extended Metro Poll)

A. Interests: Intl./Other Cultures
B. Interests: Actuality/Non-fiction
C. Interests: Popular Culture
D. Interests: Politics and Sports
E. Interests: Business & Technology
F. Knowledge of Metro Area
G. Neighborhood QOL Assessment
H. Years in Metro Area
I. No. Community Groups
J. Cosmo: International Focus
K. Cosmo: Cosmo Attitude
L. Overall Cosmo Index

	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	I.	J.	K.	L.
Com. Variables												
Media Use Index:	.12*	-.01	.08	.12*	.08	.10#	-.06	-.00	.18*	.17*	.06	.16*
Hours watch TV	-.17*	.04	.12*	-.07	-.06	.03	-.07	.22*	.06	-.14*	-.10#	-.17*
Days read paper	-.02	.05	-.06	.23*	.08	.26*	.11*	.19*	.08	.08	.05	.10#
Hrs listen radio	.08	.06	.16*	-.05	.06	.02	-.04	-.02	.01	.11*	-.03	.05
No. mag. read	.15*	.05	.01	.13*	.08	.03	-.01	.00	.10#	.17*	.11*	.19*
No. books read	.21*	-.00	-.15*	.07	.00	.06	.02	-.07	.15*	.13*	.16*	.20*
Film in theater	.11*	-.13*	.18*	.07	.04	.03	-.10#	-.11*	.09#	.16*	-.03	.10#
Videos watched	.03	-.08	.03	-.00	.05	-.08	-.14*	-.21*	.06	.02	.05	.06
Interper.Com.:												
Sum/Interp.links	.06	-.01	.11*	.09#	.10#	.03	.02	-.12*	.11*	.09#	.14*	.18*
Index/Interp.links	.10#	.02	.13*	.08	.12*	.04	.02	-.10#	.13*	.13*	.14*	.20*
New Com. Tech.:												
Technology Index	.16*	-.13*	-.01	.17*	.13*	.10#	.02	-.31*	.01	.20*	.10#	.21*
Access to Internet	.18*	-.12*	-.06	.10#	.12*	.08	.03	-.25*	.09#	.20*	.08	.20*
Been on Internet	.20*	-.15*	-.00	.00	-.03	.10#	-.06	-.34*	.06	.16*	-.02	.10#
Freq. use Internet	.18*	-.16*	-.06	.11*	.14*	.10#	-.02	-.28*	.07	.20*	.04	.17*
Hours on Internet	.13*	-.03	-.01	-.02	.13*	.06	-.09	-.02	.07	.25*	.00	.21*
Years on Internet	.13*	-.15*	-.10#	.04	.13*	.10	-.04	-.12#	.00	.21*	-.07	.12#
Extent use email	.12*	-.15*	-.04	.10#	.07	.12*	.05	-.28*	.02	.20*	.00	.15*
Diversity/websites	.11#	-.08	-.02	.17*	.19*	.11#	-.02	.00	.18*	.24*	.02	.20*
Freq.Visit Website												
Of metro area	-.05	-.09	-.04	.18*	.06	.04	-.01	.07	.08	.03	.04	.05
Neighborhoods	.04	-.05	.02	.07	.07	.16*	-.04	.04	.32*	.15*	-.04	.10
Media websites	.10	-.01	-.07	.10	.04	.03	-.04	.01	-.04	.16*	.04	.14*
Of businesses	.06	-.04	-.15*	.11#	.30*	.08	.02	.05	.05	.20*	.02	.18*
Entertainment	.01	-.04	.13*	-.01	.02	-.03	-.06	.00	-.04	.03	-.10	-.06
Sports websites	-.10	-.12*	.18*	.26*	.21*	.10	.00	-.07	.11#	.11#	-.07	-.06
Of organizations	.19*	-.02	-.13*	.02	.11#	.14*	-.00	.04	.17*	.12#	.13#	.18*
Other countries	.21*	-.00	-.11#	-.02	.02	.03	.04	-.02	.26*	.24*	.08	.26*
Other languages	.17*	-.00	.02	.03	.04	-.04	-.11#	-.00	.16*	.17*	.04	.16*
Freq. chatrooms	.08	-.07	-.03	.33*	.04	-.05	.24*	-.09	-.27*	.16#	.08	.15

Table 6 Note: The sample sizes vary slightly from 351 for those based on the entire sample, while the sample size for those who have gone on the Internet vary slightly from 250. The chatroom variable is based on the 116 who have visited one in the past. #=p<.10; *=p<.05.

Table 7
Partial Correlations among Communication, Interests, Knowledge, Community, Attitude Variables Controlling for Social Categories (Extended Metro Poll)

A. Interests: Intl./Other Cultures
B. Interests: Actuality/Non-fiction
C. Interests: Popular Culture
D. Interests: Politics and Sports
E. Interests: Business & Technology
F. Knowledge of Metro Area
G. Neighborhood QOL Assessment
H. Years in Metro Area
I. No. Community Groups
J. Cosmo: International Focus
K. Cosmo: Cosmo Attitude
L. Overall Cosmo Index

	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.	I.	J.	K.	L.
Com. Variables												
Media Use Index	.09	.02	.09	.09	.04	.09	-.05	.02	.18*	.13*	.04	.12*
Hours watch TV	-.10	-.03	.15*	-.08	-.06	.01	-.11	.10#	.08	-.06	-.10#	-.12*
Days read paper	.00	.05	.02	.16*	.03	.15*	.07	.07	.03	.06	.07	.09
Hrs listen radio	.08	.08	.13*	-.04	.02	.08	.00	.02	.05	.13*	-.06	.04
No. mags. read	.12*	.08	.04	.09	.09	-.00	-.03	-.02	.10#	.12#	.11#	.15*
No. books read	.14*	-.02	-.15**	.06	.07	.05	-.01	-.10	.12*	.06	.16*	.15*
Films in theater	.08	-.07	.16**	.06	-.02	.08	-.05	.04	.12*	.12*	-.05	.05
Videos watched	-.02	-.04	-.02	.04	.04	-.04	-.09	-.05	.06	-.02	.04	.03
Interp. Com.:												
Sum/Interp.links	.03	.01	.09	.09	.09	.06	.05	-.02	.12*	.07	.14*	.16*
Index/Interp.links	.09	.04	.10#	.09	.09	.07	.07	.01	.14*	.12#	.13*	.19*
New Com. Tech.:												
Technology Index	.10#	-.00	-.01	.16*	.08	.05	.08	-.03	-.03	.09	.13*	.15*
Access to Internet	.08	-.06	-.10#	-.01	.05	.02	.03	-.05	.02	.07	-.03	.03
Been on Internet	.13*	.00	-.02	.00	-.07	.11#	-.01	-.04	.04	.06	.00	.03
Freq. use Internet	.11#	-.03	-.07	.08	.11#	.06	.02	-.04	.04	.09	.07	.11#
Hours on Internet	.13*	-.01	.01	-.07	.11	.01	-.10	-.05	.06	.24*	.00	.20*
Years on Internet	.12#	-.08	-.06	-.03	.09	-.00	-.06	-.15	-.04	.17*	-.05	.09
Extent use email	.03	.00	-.03	.06	.03	.05	.09	-.00	-.03	.06	.03	.06
Diversity/websites	.10	-.04	-.02	.12#	.13#	.10	.00	.13#	.20*	.19*	.01	.15*
Freq.Visit Wbsites:												
Of metro area	-.03	-.14*	-.05	.16*	.04	.05	-.01	.05	.09	.05	.02	.05
Neighborhoods	.04	-.03	.05	.04	.04	.12#	-.05	.06	.32*	.14*	-.02	.10
Media websites	.08	-.03	-.10	.07	.00	.08	-.01	.06	-.02	.15*	-.00	.10
Of businesses	.05	.03	-.12#	.04	.27*	-.00	.01	-.02	.02	.15*	.02	.14*
Entertainment	.01	-.02	.10	.00	-.02	.03	-.01	.15*	.00	.03	-.12#	-.07
Sports websites	-.14	-.03	.19*	.24**	.12#	.10	.07	.14*	.14*	.05	-.08	-.02
Of organizations	.18*	-.01	-.12#	-.01	.13#	.11#	-.01	.11#	.15*	.10	.13*	.17*
Other countries	.22*	.02	-.08	-.06	.01	-.03	.02	-.05	.26*	.23*	.10	.26*
Other languages	.16*	.01	.02	.03	.04	-.03	.26*	-.10	.18*	.17*	.04	.15*
Freq. chatrooms	.10	-.04	-.02	.34**	.02	-.07	.26*	-.10	-.28*	.18#	.09	.16

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Table 7 Note: Figures in the table are partial correlations controlling for age, married marital status, no. in household, white ethnicity, gender, education and household income. The sample sizes vary slightly from 351 for those based on the entire sample, while the sample size for those who have gone on the Internet vary slightly from 250. The chatroom variable is based on the 116 who have visited one in the past. #=p<.10; *=p<.05.

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Endnotes

[1] Campbell (1981) notes that most people are moderately satisfied with their communities, neighborhoods and dwelling units.

[2] Younger adults are less satisfied with where they live (Brennan, 1986); levels of satisfaction for all aspects of life except health rise with age (Campbell et al., 1976; Herzog & Rodgers, 1986). Also see Powell (1998) for "myths of aging" and the quality of life and Abeles, Gift and Ory (1994) for research on factors affecting the quality of life over the life course.

[3] Marriage contributes to overall happiness in U.S. and cross-national data (Campbell et al., 1976). Keith and Schafer (1998) looked at three marital types (e.g., equal partners) and the quality of life. Others have examined the quality of life during widowhood (Shea & Schewe, 1995) and of single parent homeless families (Cline, 1995).

[4] Income is positively related to both objective and subjective measures of QOL (Ackerman & Paolucci, 1983; Campbell, 1981), but income explained only a small part of the variance of subjective QOL in cross-national data (Inglehart & Rabier, 1986).

[5] Occupation makes minor contributions overall; executives and professionals are highest in perceived QOL and the unemployed are lowest ranking on QOL. Job satisfaction was related to overall QOL perceptions (Michalos, 1986). Also see Warburton and Suiter (1996) for the impact of job dissatisfaction on quality of life.

[6] Education is unrelated to QOL or only modestly related, Campbell et al. (1976) note, but modest relationships were found in cross-national data.

[7] International comparisons show many similarities in perceived QOL (Inglehart & Rabier, 1986; Szalai & Andrew, 1980).

[8] Ethnic differences on QOL have been found but there is an interaction between race and income (Campbell et al., 1976).

[9] Bryant and Veroff (1986) found men and women use the same six dimensions in making personal QOL assessments. Also see Camporese, Freguja and Sabbadini (1998) for a recent survey that looked at a woman's lifestyle and quality of life.

[10] Health is important for older people and a priority when problems occur (Campbell et al., 1976). Bowling (1997) looks at measurement of health as a factor in one's quality of life.

[11] People judged as more attractive report they are more positive but not "more satisfied" with their lives (Campbell et al., 1976).

[12] Urbanites are less satisfied (Fernandez & Kulik, 1981). Also see Parfect (1997) for planning as a factor affecting urban quality of life.

[13] All items loaded at .70 or higher.

[14] All variables loaded at .50 or higher on this factor. Communalities for the cosmopolite variables, which represent the proportion of a variable's total variance that is accounted for by the factors, were: interest in current events in other countries, .54; interest in travel to different countries, .54; interest in other cultures, .51; the number of times one has traveled outside the United States in the past five years, .59; thinking of oneself as a citizen of the world, .68; communicating with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, .67; and awareness of what's going on around the world compared to friends, .57.

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September 11 and the Newslore of Vengeance and Victimization

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September 11 and the Newslore of Vengeance and Victimization

Abstract

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States inspired an outpouring of electronic folklore. This "newslore" is of two types. The newslore of vengeance consists of fantasies of annihilation or humiliation aimed at Osama bin Laden or Afghanistan. The newslore of victimization expresses bewilderment at the role of fate or chance in who lived and who died. This article analyzes the newslore of September 11 in light of Oring's "unspeakability" hypothesis.

Key words: folklore and the mass media, urban legends, jokes, hoaxes, Netlore

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September 11 and the Newslore of Vengeance and Victimization

The relationship between folklore and the news is symbiotic. Much contemporary folklore is topical. That is, countless jokes and urban legends take as their subject matter issues and events that came to the public's attention through the news media. I propose to call such material "newslore." Sometimes this material finds its way back into the news as a pernicious, but false tale that journalists take upon themselves to debunk. Even folklorists not named Jan Brunvand will get an occasional call from a reporter seeking confirmation that warnings about Blue Star acid (DeFao 1995) or gas pump handles booby-trapped with AIDS-infected needles (Rivers 2000) or terrorists targeting shopping malls on Halloween (Bridges 2001) are groundless. Sometimes, the journalists themselves are fooled and report an urban legend as true. This article is about the newslore that responded to news of the September 11 attacks.

The data – jokes, warnings and digitally altered photographs – first came to my attention via e-mail from friends, family, colleagues and students. Then, when I began to take an active interest in collecting more of it, I found troves on the World Wide Web, but scant coverage of it in the mainstream press, presumably because it was deemed tasteless or obscene. In his article on the riddle-jokes that circulated after the space shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986, Elliott Oring (1987) argued that the "unspeakability" of the Challenger jokes was, on some level, deliberate: To the extent that they were a "strategy of rebellion" against slick media packaging of disaster, making them unspeakable according to the news media's canons of good taste effectively barred the news media from appropriating them. I intend to analyze the September 11 newslore in accordance with Oring's unspeakability hypothesis. By contrasting the newslore with those expressions of rage and dismay that were deemed fit for public consumption, I will show how newslore functions as a an alternative "discourse on disaster."

Oring (1987:279) contends that jokes have both base and performance meanings. The base meaning "proceeds from a close and critical analysis of the structure, plot and content of the joke texts." The performance meaning emerges from an analysis of the "cultural, social, or psychological environments in which [the jokes] are told." He chides those who would interpret jokes "without any reference to individual human beings," but his own interpretations rely wholly on his observant participation in the mass media audience and not at all on any observation of or interaction with any actual tellers of the jokes. While I, too, intend to examine the base and performance meanings of the September 11 newslore without recourse to the anonymous crafters or senders of the material I found on the Internet or in my e-mail inbox, I do think it's important to ground the act of interpretation in something other than one's own speculations. By going to newspaper reaction stories from the fall 2001, I hope to show that the attitudes that I believe are embedded in the newslore have their ethnographic correlatives in the comments elicited by reporters. At the same time, I would like to call attention to the limits that newspapers' adherence to the canons of good taste impose on the coverage of those attitudes.

First, though I will review the arguments for considering certain kinds of "computer-mediated communication" or "CMC" (Fernback 2002) as folklore, and present the similarities between the Challenger jokes and the newslore of September 11 in making a case for the applicability of Oring's discussion to the present one. The newslore itself I have split into two categories that I call the folklore of vengeance and the folklore of victimization. The folklore of vengeance seems to manifest itself as a desire to either destroy or humiliate those responsible for the attacks. Accordingly, I have further divided the material into the folklore of annihilation and the folklore of humiliation.

CMC as Folklore

With their first collection of "urban folklore from the paperwork empire," Dundes and Pagter (1992) made a case for the consideration of hand-drawn cartoons and typewritten jokes and legends as folklore. Though such material was inscribed and photocopied rather than told and retold, the authors argued that it exhibited the same folkloristic traits as orally transmitted jokes and tales:

- It existed in multiple versions and variants.
- It expressed anxiety about threats to our health, safety and psychic equilibrium that government and big business either inflicted or were unable to turn aside.
- It bound sharers into communities, thereby alleviating some of the very alienation that the jokes themselves expressed.

Photocopied jokes and cartoons became "faxlore," which was then quickly overtaken by Netlore – jokes, parodies, legends, cartoons and digitally altered photographs ("photoshops") circulated via e-mail.[1] Of course, other non-oral genres of verbal communication have long been of interest to folklorists: autograph album verse, fraktur, samplers, chapbooks, broadside ballads. And as Linda Degh (1994) has observed, contrary to what folklorists once thought, the oral and the written have always overlapped and influenced each other. Of particular interest for our purposes is the intertwining of newspaper accounts and ballads (see, for example, Cohen 1973; Seal 1996). Indeed, where once the news served as grist for the ballad singer, it now is the generative force behind countless legends and jokes.

While it may seem obvious that much contemporary folklore responds to "current events," it is easy to forget that strictly speaking, the lore does not respond to the events themselves but to accounts of the events. As countless sociological and rhetorical studies of news have pointed out, the news is a story about an occurrence (see, for example, Gans 1980; Fishman 1980; Schudson 1989; Bird and Dardenne 1997). As such, it is important to recognize that newslore is as much a response to how that story is told – to what is left out as well as what is included – as it is a response to the occurrence itself.

September 11: The Speakable and the Unspeakable

While the news media responded with all due solemnity and piety to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in 1986, the folk responded with sick jokes. The key to understanding the Challenger jokes, according to Oring (1987), is not to see them as a response to the disaster itself, but as a response to the disaster story – in other words, to the solemnity and piety of the news media's narrative of the disaster.

No one, other than people who were close enough to the launch site to see it in person, could have known about the Challenger explosion other than by seeing it on television, hearing about it on the radio, reading about it in the newspaper the next day (this was before newspapers had Web sites), or hearing about it from someone who had been paying attention to the mass media. For those of us who watched the disaster on TV, the experience was visually framed and reduced by the screen itself, bracketed by the commercial messages that underwrite the news programming, and filtered through the personality of whichever anchorman told us the story. The juxtaposition of extraordinary tidings with the business-as-usual production values of network news was jarring and more than a little absurd. Oring infers public attitudes toward the "packaging" of disaster from the content of the jokes themselves – and from the cultural knowledge one would need to possess in order to understand the content. Here, as promised, I would like to use newspaper reaction stories as a guide to the public mood in the immediate aftermath of September 11, when most of the lore began circulating.

When big news happens, reporters, as a matter of course, will report what happened and how people reacted to what happened. If the event is deemed to be of major importance, a separate reaction story will run alongside the main news story. By any measure, the September 11 attacks were the biggest story in the history of American journalism. Beginning with extra editions that hit the streets on the afternoon of September 11, coverage included not just one-story roundups of the latest developments, but multiple stories, including stories that focused exclusively on the reaction – from world leaders, from members of Congress, from military personnel, from terrorism experts, from clergy, from people in the street at home and abroad, and so on.

The stories are inevitably balanced. The rituals of objectivity require reporters to present, if not a range of viewpoints, at least representative expressions of opposing views. The message to readers is that, in its news columns, the paper does not privilege one view over another. It does, however, limit its sampling of views to those that do not violate the canons of good taste. The dual imperatives of balance and taste produce a muting effect. There is anger in the post-September 11 reaction stories, but it seems rather restrained compared to the revenge fantasies that are played out in the folklore.

On September 19, for example, USA TODAY asked, "Do we seek vengeance or justice?" and noted that "the sentiments of Americans run the gamut." Four voices calling for rage and retribution followed, including one who said, simply, "Nuke 'em." Then came the balancing act: "Others prefer the guidance of the old saying 'Revenge is a dish that is best served cold' " (Peterson 2001).

The St. Petersburg Times noted that polls showed "overwhelming support for a military response" and illustrated the point with a quote from a local official that was as risqué as most general-circulation American newspapers ever get: "I think we need to go kick some ass big time." After three other blustery quotes, though, the story turns to the more measured responses: "While most Americans support whatever action is necessary, not everyone is quite ready for what that could mean" (Caldwell 2001).

A September 14 story in The New York Times began thus: "Having donated more blood than victims needed, having wallpapered their towns with flags, and with little choice but to stew over television reruns of terror in their homeland, more than a few Americans are beginning to obsess about how to get even." One interviewee suggested finding and killing "these Arab people," then "wrap them in a pigskin and bury them. That way they will never go to heaven." Another said, "If I could get my hands on bin Laden, I'd skin him alive and pour salt on him." Such talk, reporter Blaine Harden noted, "also alarmed many Americans" (Harden 2001).

Another New York Times story, "Fantasies Of Vengeance, Fed by Fury," published on September 18, included calls for parading bin Laden's head through the city on a pike, burning him alive and "nuking" Kabul (Tierney 2001). Then President Bush himself weighed in, invoking "Wanted: Dead or Alive" posters from the old West. The Times disapproved, taking the president to task in its lead editorial for his "overly bellicose" language (New York Times 2001).

Taken together, these stories and others like them offer specific evidence of American anger. But that anger found its fullest and most profane expression in the folklore that circulated among friends and acquaintances via e-mail. People were eager to avenge the attacks. The military campaign in Afghanistan, when it came in October, would be undertaken in the name of all Americans, but there was little or nothing most citizens could do to vent their anger other than make symbolic gestures. The classic symbolic expression of impotent rage is the same one we make while driving when another motorist cuts us off: We "flip him the bird."

In 1979, when Iranian students seized the American embassy in Tehran the folk intensified the profanity of the digitus impudicus by putting it in the hand of Mickey Mouse. The cartoon, photocopied and faxed, expressed the feeling that after Vietnam, America had become too innocent, too cuddly and so risk-averse that we had given our enemies the impression that if they hit us we would not hit back. The cartoon said, in effect, hey, don't underestimate us. In 2001, Mickey gave way to Lady Liberty, perhaps because the Statue of Liberty appeared in some of the New York harbor photos and video footage of the World Trade Center site and is as much a New York symbol as it is an American symbol.

Then there was "the finger" as the design motif for a new, improved World Trade Center. There has been a steady stream of proposals for the Twin Towers site. The photoshop of a five-towered World Trade Center, with the middle tower taller than the rest, was one of the first. As Oring (1987) points out, the news anchors may offer reassurance and a sense of control in times of national trauma, but when it comes to expressing anger, they are too constrained by decorousness to be up to the task. Americans weren't just angry, they were cursing angry.

[Figure 1]

Much of the anger was directed specifically at Osama bin Laden. Much of it echoes the folk responses to the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 and the Gulf War in 1991. As Dundes and Pagter (1991:303) say, "stressful and traumatic events of national or international scope often stimulate the generation of new folklore – although the new folklore may turn out to be old folklore in disguise." And much of it is explicitly or implicitly sexual or scatological in nature – and therefore, unspeakable in the mainstream news media.

The Newslore of Annihilation

As soon as Osama bin Laden's name surfaced in connection with the September 11 attacks, the faceless enemy had a face. Following President Bush's lead, much of the post-September 11 newslore was directed specifically at bin Laden, just as it had been directed at the Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein before him. The bin Laden connection also provided a geographic target: He was believed to be hiding in Afghanistan. San Diego Union-Tribune columnist Joseph Perkins (2001) may have been one of the first to suggest that Afghanistan be "bombed back to the Stone Age." The next day, New York Times reporter Barry Bearak (2001) grimly joked that that the war-torn land was "already there." The idea of bombing back to the stone age, which San Francisco Chronicle columnist Rob Morse (2001) reminded me is a recycled Vietnam-era quote from General Curtis LeMay, and the observation that Afghanistan was already there, appeared in scores of newspaper columns and stories. The folk were more creative. The desire to lay waste to Afghanistan found pictorial expression in cartoon maps showing the country transformed into either a lake or a parking lot (radio talk show host Howard Stern reportedly made the same suggestion on the air [Hinckley 2001]), and in several riddles, including one that picks up the Stone Age theme and runs with it:[2]

> Q: How is Bin Laden like Fred Flintstone?
>
> A: Both may look out their windows and see Rubble.

While most receivers of the e-mailed riddle and readers of this article share the cultural knowledge to get the joke, I should, for the record, if not for posterity, explain that Rubble refers to Barney Rubble, sidekick of Fred Flintstone, who headed a "modern Stone Age family" in a popular animated situation comedy on American television in the 1960s.

The following pair of riddles refers to the weapons and aircraft that would wreak the desired destruction. The first puns off the tomahawk as a Native American weapon and the name of a missile (General George Armstrong Custer met defeat at the hands of the Sioux at Little Big Horn, South Dakota, in 1876). The second refers to the similarities between the numbers on bingo cards and the designations for American warplanes.

> Q: What does [sic] Osama bin laden [sic] and General Custer have in common?
>
> A: They both want to know where those Tomahawks are coming from!
>
> Q: How do you play Taliban bingo?
>
> A: B-52...F-16...B-1...

These next three riddles, I trust, require no explication:

> Q: What do Bin Laden and Hiroshima have in common?
>
> A: Nothing, yet.
>
> Q: What's the five-day forecast for Afghanistan?
>
> A: Two days.
>
> Q: What is the Taliban's national bird?
>
> A: Duck.

The September 11 newslore includes a large cycle of photoshops that centers on the idea of targeting. Just as Khomeini's face appeared in a gun sight's crosshairs in a

1979 photocopied cartoon that circulated via fax machine, in a series of images that circulated by e-mail in fall 2001, bin Laden's face appeared behind a shooting range target, on a dartboard, and in two pop-cultural parodies. In one, bin Laden appears in the crosshairs with the legend "Who wants to bomb a millionaire?" on the perimeter of the circle – a reference to the popular program "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" In the other, bin Laden appears in the crosshairs in a parody of a credit car company ad that offers an opportunity to assassinate the al Qaeda leader:

> Trip to Afghanistan: $800
>
> High Powered Sniper Rifle: $1000
>
> Hotel Stay With Accessible Roof: $100
>
> Scoring A Head Shot On A Piece of SHIT Like Osama Bin Laden: PRICELESS

The parodying of commercial messages is consistent with what Oring (1987) found in the Challenger joke cycle, with its plays on well-known TV spots for beer (Bud Lite), shampoo (Head and Shoulders) and soft drinks (7UP).

The Newslore of Humiliation

Another set of target images turns scatological. Just as the face of the president of Iraq appeared on a cartoon "Saddam Hussein Urinal Target" that was widely photocopied and faxed during the Gulf War in 1991, bin Laden's face was emblazoned on a photoshopped urinal 10 years later. Both parody the "targets" designed to help in the potty training of little boys. Echoing the credit-card parody's characterization of bin Laden as "a piece of shit," another photoshop depicts a dog using bin Laden's face as a target. In a similar vein are the punning photoshops of bin Laden's face on a roll of toilet paper. One carries the motto, "Get Rid of Your Shiite." Another says, "Wipe Out Terrorism."

[Figure 2]

References to defecation lead, in turn, to an array of images that follow a chain of associations connecting defecation, military assault and homosexual assault. Symbols of military and sexual aggression, Dundes and Pagter (1991) point out, are often interchangeable. To begin with antecedent material, there is the Gulf War cartoon of an American military plane chasing an Iraqi camel. At the risk of sounding too much like Dundes, just as the plane rides the camel's ass – with the appropriate "Holy shit!" response – a warplane tails Osama bin Laden's flying carpet or appears in the "rearview" mirror of his car in photoshops that circulated in 2001. A photoshop of the batwing B-2 bomber is inscribed with a parody of the bumper sticker designed to tweak tailgaters: "If you can read this, you're fucked." Another photoshop shows a cache of missiles on the deck of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Enterprise with the words "Taliban-Brand Extra-Strength Suppository" stenciled on them. The "ass" motif continues in parodies of side-of-the-milk-container campaigns on behalf of missing children. On a container of "Afgan [sic] Farms" goat milk ("already expired") it says: "Last seen: Mounting his donkey before crawling his skinny little pajama, towel headed lanky ass into some elusive Afghan cave." A poster version asks: "Have you seen me? I'm about to get my ass nuked off the face of the planet." This echoes an earlier milk-carton parody of the missing Mars Explorer spacecraft.

[Figure 3]

In yet another cycle of newslore, the humiliations are heterosexual rather than homosexual, which reflects news reports of the puritanism and misogyny of fundamentalist Islamic movements such as the Taliban and the Wahaabi sect in Saudi Arabia, of which bin Laden is a member. One curious bit of lore that circulated after September 11 was a mock Web site, Taliban Singles Online, which featured a testimonial from bin Laden: "Before I found this site my love was limited to the beasts of the field, but now I have found many women to subjugate and brutalize." A photoshop showed a bin Laden lookalike being squashed by a large female bed partner. Showing bin Laden in any sort of sexual encounter shows disrespect for his religious beliefs. Showing the woman crushing him violates folk ideas about "man-on-top" male dominance. In the following joke, bin Laden is dominated in another way by three strong women who themselves were the subjects of a considerable outpouring of newslore in the 1990s:

> Osama bin Laden found a bottle on the beach and picked it up. Suddenly, a female genie rose from the bottle and with a smile said, "Master, may I grant you one wish?"

"Infidel, don't you know who I am? I need nothing from a lowly woman," barked bin Laden.

The genie pleaded, "But master, I must grant you a wish or I will be returned to this bottle forever."

Osama thought a moment. Then, grumbling about the inconvenience of it all, he relented. "OK, OK, I want wake up with three white, American women in my bed in the morning. I have plans for them." Giving the genie a cold glare, he growled, "Now, be gone!"

The genie, annoyed, said, "So be it!" and disappeared back into the bottle. The next morning, bin Laden woke up in bed with Lorena Bobbitt, Tonya Harding, and Hillary Clinton. His penis was gone, his leg was broken and he had no health insurance.

Bobbitt, of course, "enjoyed" brief celebrity when she cut off her husband's penis in 1994. Tonya Harding became notorious when she was suspected of hiring the assailants who clouted rival figure skater Nancy Kerrigan on the leg on the eve of the 1994 Winter Olympics. Among the many offenses Hillary Clinton committed against the traditional role of the first lady during her husband's first term, the most egregious, perhaps, was her central role in the healthcare reform fiasco. It is a measure of celebrity when veterans of old newslore resurface in new newslore.

The Newslore of Victimization

The news media devoted an enormous amount of attention to the seeming arbitrariness of fate. There were countless tales of people who were supposed to be on one of the four planes or at the World Trade Center, but were delayed or had to change their plans. The stories emphasized the gratitude and guilt of these survivors. The dominant attitude was awe in the face of so many reminders of the slender thread on which our lives hang. Consider these headlines:

Running Late Saved Them from Trade Center Death (Connor 2002)

Fiery Escapes, Surreal Stories at Trade Center (<u>The Wall Street Journal</u> 2001)

She Got Laid Off, He Missed a Train; Such Lucky Breaks (Tomsho, et al., 2001)

The folk were also aghast at the precariousness of life, but took a darker view. Sudden death makes a mockery of our plans. It is the ultimate cruel joke. Where the news media dwelled on the solemnity of it all, the folk focused on the absurdity. If Osama bin Laden was the face of evil, the "Ground Zero Geek" became the face of absurdity.

"For just the briefest split-second of gut reaction, " wrote <u>Chicago Sun-Times</u> columnist Richard Roeper (2001), "we thought we were seeing one of the most astonishing photos in recorded history." The photo Roeper referred to showed some poor schlemiel standing on the observation deck of one of the Twin Towers, unaware that he's about to be pulverized by a hijacked jet.

[Figure 4]

Roeper saw the Ground Zero Geek on September 21. My brother-in-law e-mailed it to me on September 28, along with a noncommittal message: "Check this out." Also included were prior forwarders' similarly neutral messages: "If you haven't seen" (September 26) and "This is interesting" (September 25). But the message that appears to have accompanied the original transmission goes like this: "This picture was developed from film in a camera found in the rebble (sic) of the wtc!!!!!! person in picture still not identified." A tag line at the bottom of the photo said, "SUPPORT YOUR POLICE, FIRE, AND EMS PERSONEL (sic)." Do misspellings alone constitute evidence that we may be in the realm of folklore?

Another version of the accompanying message, reproduced on the Netlore Web site, appeared under the subject line "Different Perspective on the New York Tragedy":

> Attached is a picture that was taken of a tourist atop the World Trade Center Tower, the first to be struck by a terrorist attack. This camera was found but the subject in the picture had not yet been located. Makes you see things from a very different position. Please share this and find any way you can to help Americans not to be victims in the future of such cowardly attacks. (2001)

On closer inspection, of course, one sees that there are enough holes in this image to fly several airplanes through. Netlore enumerated most of them:

- Why isn't the fast-moving aircraft blurry in the photo?

2002 Why doesn't the subject (or the photographer, for that matter) seem to be aware of the plane's high-decibel approach?

1. The temperature was between 65 and 70 degrees that morning. Why is this man dressed for winter?

- How did the camera survive the 110-story fall when the tower collapsed?
- How was the camera found so quickly amidst all the rubble?
- Why has this one-of-a-kind, newsworthy photo not appeared in any media venue? (2001)

Those were the obvious illogicalities. Roeper (2001) pointed out a couple of more arcane clues to the image's inauthenticity: "There was no observation deck on the north tower, and the deck on the south tower wasn't scheduled to open until 9:30 a.m. that day." Also, "The American Airlines jet shown in the photo is a Boeing 757, but the American Airlines plane that struck the tower was a Boeing 767."

And so the Ground Zero Geek was revealed to be a hoax. Did that cause him to disappear from view? Hardly. The hoax gave way to parodies of the hoax. We see the same guy on the same observation platform. Only now, a subway car is coming at him. Or a hot-air balloon. Or the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man from the 1984 movie "Ghostbusters." Then, instead of the disaster coming to him, the Ground Zero Geek goes to the disaster: the crash of the Concorde in 2000, the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole at port in Yemen in 2000, an unnamed volcanic eruption, the Kennedy motorcade in Dallas in 1963, the crash of the Graf zeppelin in 1937, the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, the sinking of the Titanic – the movie – in 1997, and the Lincoln box in Ford's Theatre in

1865. He also drives the bus in the 1994 movie "Speed" and feels the hot breath of Godzilla on his neck.

Finally, we go back to the observation platform and the looming menace of the plane, only now, it's not the disaster that has morphed into something else, but the Ground Zero Geek himself. He becomes the owner of a giant cat named Snowball in one meta-parody– an image that was almost as popular on the Internet in 2001 as the Ground Zero Geek himself – and none other than Osama bin Laden in another.

The Ground Zero Geek is the quintessence of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In his ignorance of what is about to befall him, he represents all of us on the morning of September 11. The stories about the real victims of that terrible day struggle to particularize them, to assert the meaningfulness of all their lives, "to make sense of life in the face of the seeming randomness of human existence" (Lule 2002:282). Victims became heroes. Death became sacrifice. In contrast, the folk counter the pious approach with an anonymous fictitious victim that allows for the expression of the subversive, unspeakable view. These deaths were senseless, absurd. We're here one minute, gone the next. What's heroic about it? We're geeks, tourist guys, on planet Earth. As is often the case, the folk response may have been the more honest response.

Conclusion

News coverage of September 11 may have been the most exhaustive journalism the world has ever seen. All that news inspired a concomitant outpouring of newslore. The two parallel communicative tracks intersected in extensive news coverage of the lore. These stories were very much of a piece: The reporter notes the volume of lore bouncing around the Internet and finds a folklorist to explain what it all means. (Among the folklorists quoted are Gary Alan Fine, Tom Rankin and Alan Dundes [Marks 2001], Steve Jones [Smith 2001], Bill Ellis [Dempsey 2001], Steve Winick [Thomas 2001], and, most frequently, David and Barbara Mikkelson of snopes.com and David Embry of about.com.) Much was written about the Ground Zero Geek, the rumor of terrorists attacking malls on Halloween, the Klingerman Virus, and the predictions of Nostradamus. Conspicuously absent, though, was the obscene material. A USA TODAY story about humor on the Web noted that the goat milk carton contained "language unsuitable for a family newspaper." A Rocky Mountain News story mentioned photos of Osama bin Laden "in none-too-flattering poses."

The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists calls on members to "be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information," to "tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so, and to "support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant." But those calls for fearlessness and inclusiveness are canceled out by another provision of the code that urges journalists to "show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity." And so, those aspects of the human experience that include obscene gestures, vulgar language and tasteless jokes remain hidden from view.

The folk, I suspect, wouldn't have it any other way. Like the accused miscreant who makes an obscene gesture at the cameras during his "perp walk," those who with a taste for newslore can fight off news media co-optation and thereby maintain the world of computer-mediated communication as an alternative or parallel universe of discourse simply by making the material "unspeakable."

Also given short shrift in newspaper stories about September 11 newslore is any analysis beyond broadly functionalist "steamvalve" explanations. The rumors and jokes are expressions of our fear, all the folklorists are quoted as saying. As Oring (1987:281) said of similarly general explanations of the Challenger jokes, they do not depend "on a close reading of the jokes themselves." My own close reading of the jokes themselves led me to group them according to recurrent themes – annihilation, humiliation and victimization – to trace the expression of those themes to advertisements, popular culture and news stories about America's military might, Afghanistan's weakness and Islamic fundamentalists' attitudes toward women, and to note, with Dundes, that the thirst for revenge often takes sexual and scatological forms.

As unsavory as much of this material might be, it is, as folklore so reliably is, an excellent guide to the national mood after September 11.

Notes

1. Originally developed for and marketed to graphic designers, Adobe Systems Inc.'s Photoshop software and Microsoft's Paint are now widely used by amateurs to say what cannot be said in the mainstream news media. Hence the name photoshops. Chicago Sun-Times columnist Richard Roeper (2001) aptly refers to them as "photographic urban legends.' Writing in 1994, Preston noted "how quickly 'folk' ...adopt a device to assist them in carrying out their traditional practices" (p. 163).

2. Unless otherwise noted, the jokes and photoshops referred to here were found at the following Web sites: www.southtbar.org/wtc/hegetsaround.htm; www.somethingawful.com/photoshop/; urbanlegends.miningco.com; snopes.com and urbanlegends.com.

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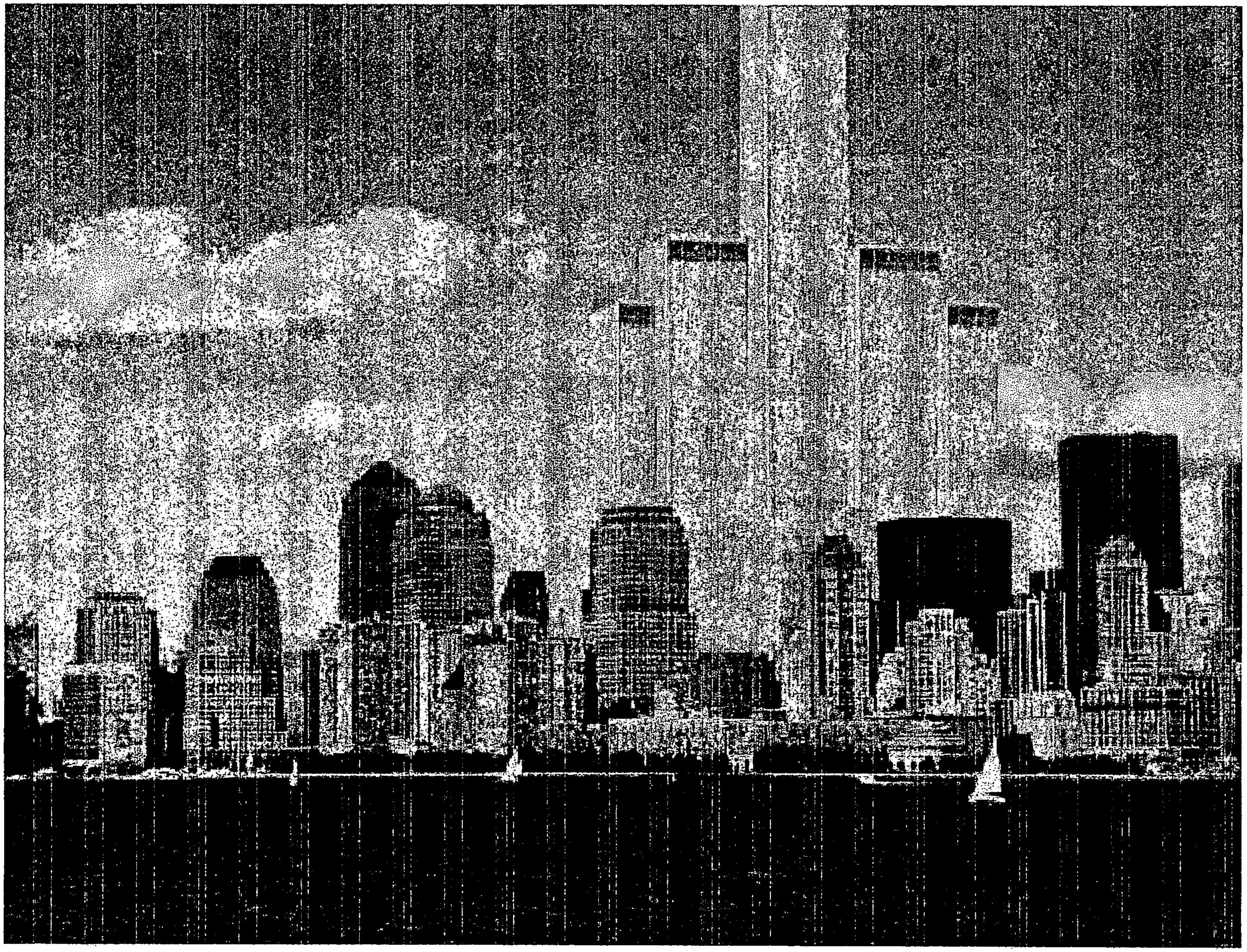
FIGURE 1: DESIGN FOR NEW WORL TRADE CENTER



1/23/03 NewWorldTradeCtr copy.jpg Page 1

FIGURE 2: BIN LADEN URINAL TARGET

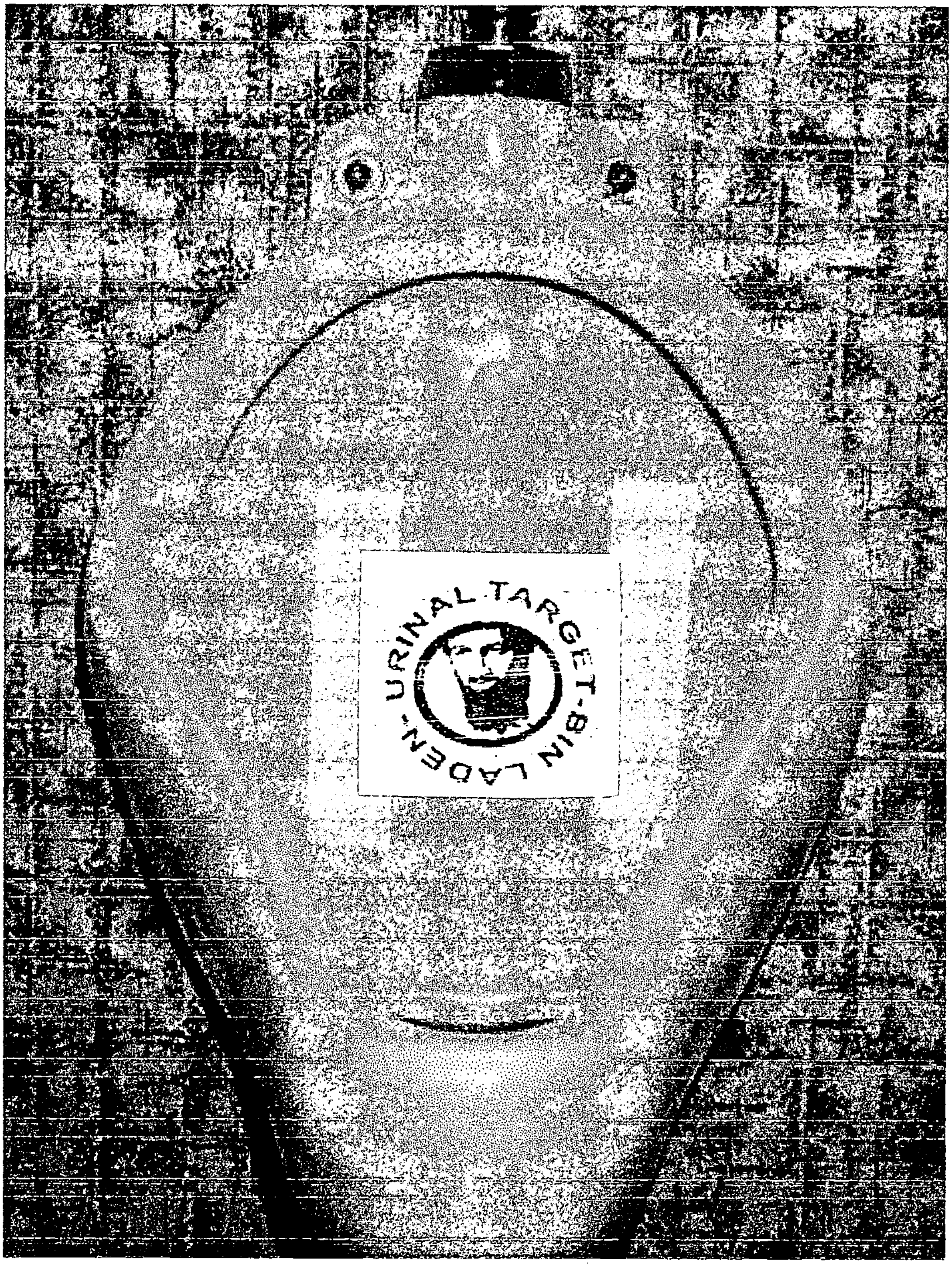


FIGURE 3: bin Laden being tailed

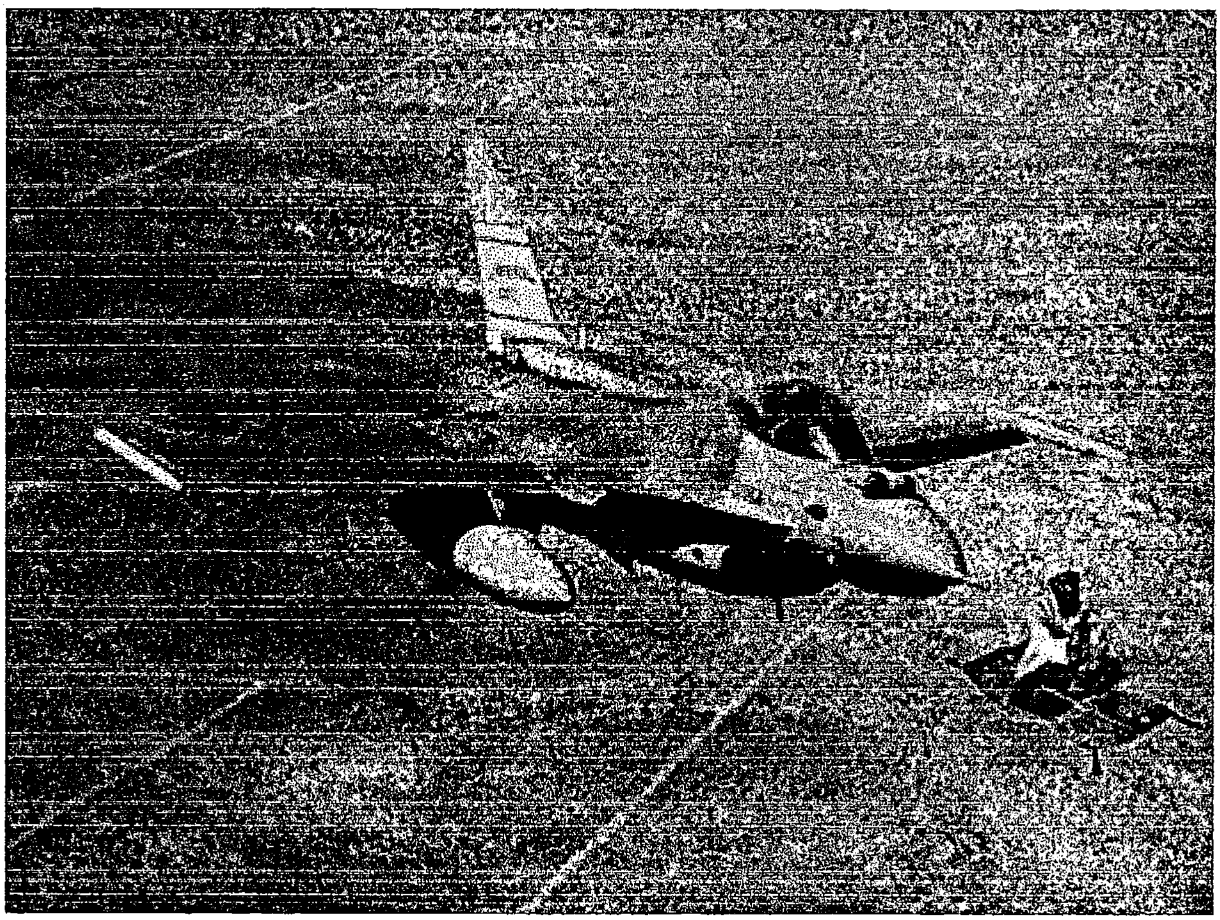


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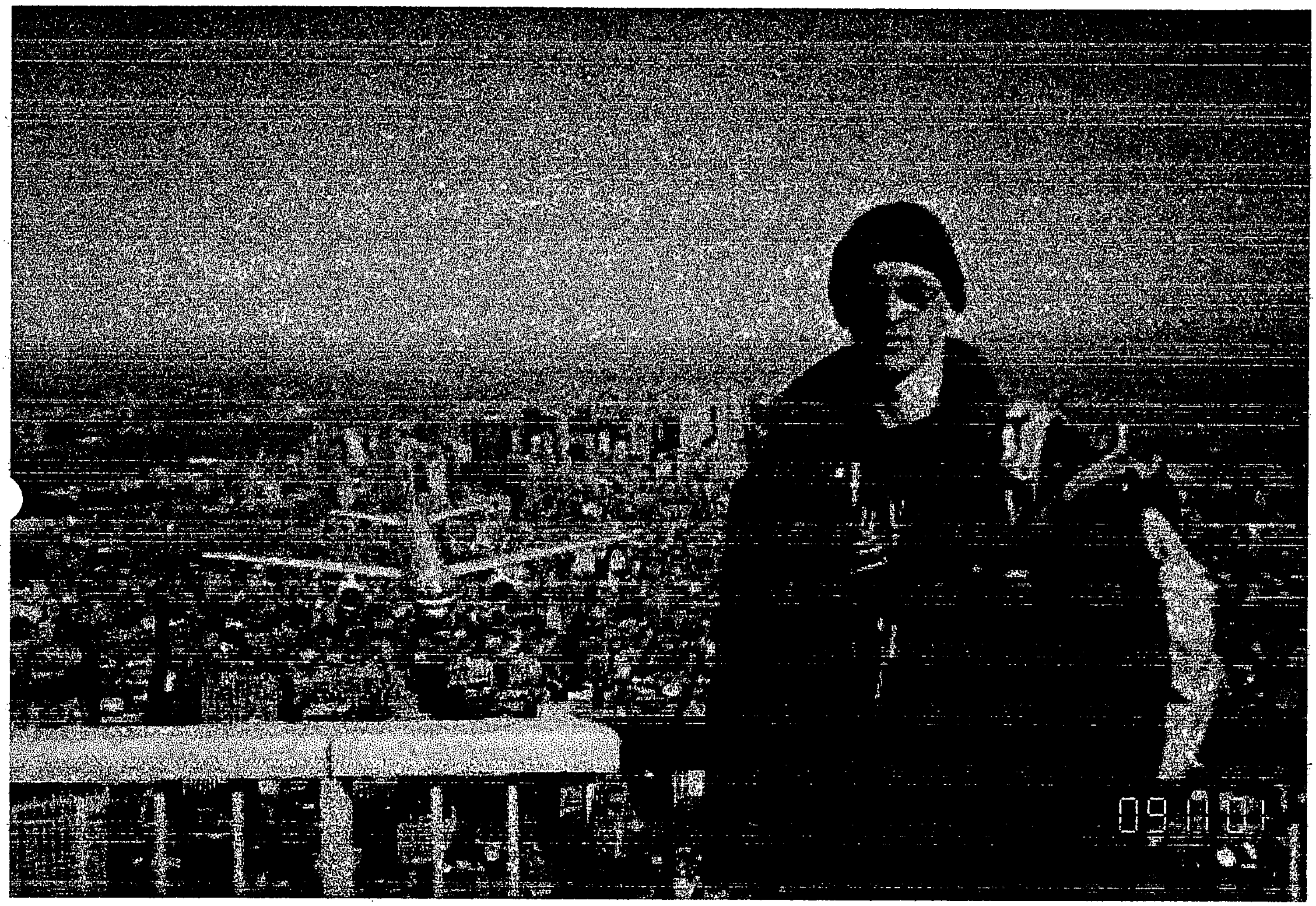
FIGURE 4: The Ground Zero Geek



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Agenda Setting and International News:
Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations

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Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations

Abstract

A national poll and a content analysis of network newscasts examined if coverage of foreign nations had an agenda setting influence. The more media coverage a nation received, the more respondents were to think the nation was vitally important to U.S. interests, supporting the first level of agenda setting. The more negative coverage a nation received, the more respondents were to think negatively about the nation, supporting the second level of agenda setting. Positive coverage of a nation had no influence on public perceptions.

Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations

Research examining the agenda-setting function of the news media has undergone a dramatic reconceptualization in recent years. No longer is research based on the notion noted by Cohen (1963) that "the press may not be successful in telling us what to think but is stunningly successful in telling us what to think about." Indeed, researchers now argue that, under certain circumstances, the news media do tell people what to think by providing the public with an agenda of attributes – a list of characteristics of important newsmakers. Individuals mentally link these mediated attributes to the newsmakers to a similar degree in which the attributes are mentioned in the media.

Early studies in this "second level of agenda setting" have met with some success. McCombs, Escobar-Lopez and Llamas (1997), for example, found that both substantive attributes – factual information – and affective attributes – positive vs. negative information – that the public linked to candidates in Spanish elections were correlated with media coverage of those attributes.

The present study attempts to examine agenda setting in a new context. First, our study will test both the first and second levels simultaneously. Second, the focus of the study will be foreign nations and not individuals in the news, as previous studies have used (McCombs et al, 1996; Golan and Wanta, 2001). Data come from a survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that has conducted surveys every four years since 1974. The media agendas come from a content analysis of network newscasts.

The analysis here, then, will first test whether coverage of foreign nations in the news influence how important these nations are viewed by individuals – a test of the first level of agenda setting. Next, the analysis will test whether positive or negative coverage of foreign nations influence individuals' evaluations of countries – a second level agenda setting test.

The second level of agenda setting offers new challenges and opportunities for mass communication researchers. It implies a deeper, more thorough processing of information in media content. While the first level examines the transmission of issue salience cues from media coverage of issues to public concern with issues, the second level investigates the transmission of attributes of actors in the news from media coverage of these attributes to the public's recall of the same attributes – a much more subtle level. By examining both levels through international news coverage, we hope to find insights into how public opinion is constructed in the increasingly important area of foreign affairs.

Theoretical framework

Television news programs serve as an important source of information for most Americans about events that occur around the world. Limited by time and space, news editors often have to select less than a handful of international stories, while leaving dozens of news stories off the air. Following the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the world entered an era of global economics that would make international events more salient then ever before. In this new era of globalization, knowledge about events from around the world became a necessity.

In addition to presenting new opportunities, globalization has also created new threats. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, revealed a web of terror that spun across many different nations of the world. The emergence of the Al-Quida terror organization in such countries as Sudan, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Yemen demonstrated to policy makers, the mass media and the public the need for a more global perspective in coverage of international news.

U.S. television news media, however, continue to focus their coverage of international news events on a limited number of nations and regions (Golan and Wanta, 2003; Wu, 1998). This lack of balance in coverage provides strong support for the new world information order perspective (Masmoudi, 1979) and is likely to impact Americans' view of the saliency of international events Wanta and Hu (1993).

Since the early days of television news, communication researchers have investigated the role of international news in network television news programs. The emphasis on television is of particular importance due to its role as the key source of news in the United States (Larson, 1982).

Foreign News on the Network Agenda

Research consistently indicates that international news stories account for a significant percentage of broadcast news content. Larson and Hardy's (1977) content analysis of news content from three network news programs revealed that international news accounted for 35 to 39 percent of news content. Larson's (1982) content analysis of more than 1,000 television news stories from 1972 to 1981 revealed that about 40 percent of the content dealt with international news. Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazzarella and

Rakow (1989) found that nearly 34 percent of all network television news content (between 1982-1984) was composed of international news. Recently, Riffe and Budianto (2001) identified a decrease in the proportion between international and domestic news. Despite the differences in findings, most studies point to the importance of international news in network television news content.

However, Chang (1998) notes that not all countries in the world are create equal to be news. While most powerful core nations consistently receive coverage from U.S. news media, small peripheral nations remain largely uncovered. Research on international news coverage by U.S. network television news programs reveals a lack of balance in the coverage of the world's different geographic regions (Wu, 1998).

A content analysis by Larson (1982) reveals that between 1972 and 1981, coverage of Western Europe accounted for 23.8% of international news references. The Middle East came in second at 22.7%, while Asia came in third with 21.8%. Latin America and Africa trailed far behind with 8.6% and 5.6%. His study also indicated that some nations received much more coverage than other nations. Stories about the USSR, Israel, Britain and South Vietnam dominated international news coverage on U.S. network television news.

A ten-year analysis of foreign news coverage on network television news (Weaver, Porter and Evans, 1984) indicated that the ABC, CBS and NBC networks covered the world in an unbalance manner. Their results show that between 1972 and 1981, the three networks focused 32.4 percent of their coverage on the Middle East, 21.1 percent on Western Europe, 10.8 percent on Eastern Europe, 9.5 percent on Asia, 6.7 percent on Africa and only 6.2 percent on Latin America.

In a more recent study, Golan and Wanta (2003) examined how 138 elections held between January 1, 1998, and May 1, 2000, were covered by U.S. network television newscasts (ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN). They found that of the 138 elections, only eight received coverage on all four newscasts, ten received coverage on more than one newscast, 18 received coverage on one newscast and 102 received no news coverage. The study indicated that the majority of elections that received substantial coverage from U.S. television networks occurred either in Europe, Asia or the Middle East. Only one election that took place in Latin America was covered by more than one network and none of the elections in Africa were covered by more than one network.

Understanding the nature of international news coverage by the news media is of great importance when considering its possible implications. As suggested by previous studies, the nature of international news coverage has a direct influence on U.S. public opinion. For example, a study by Salwen and Matera (1992) found correlations between foreign news coverage and public opinion that suggested that international news coverage does indeed have an agenda setting effect. Wanta and Hu (1993) examined the agenda setting impact of international news and found strong agenda setting impact of international news stories on American public opinion, especially on conflict related stories and concrete presentations. McNelly and Izcaray (1986) found that news exposure significantly related to positive feelings towards countries and to perceptions of those countries as successful. Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver and Willnat (1992) found that attention to foreign affairs news was better predictor of positive perceptions of nations than simple exposure to newspapers.

The implications of international news coverage by the news media are further highlighted when considering the possible impact of coverage on U.S. foreign policy. Bennett (1990) notes that the nature of international news coverage by news media is often consistent with the foreign policy of the nation. The potential agenda setting effect of television programming on audiences was recognized by Theodore White (1973, p. 27): "No major act of the American congress, no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no great social reform, can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind." Cohen (1963) identified three major roles of the press in the field of foreign policy. These included: role of observer of foreign policy news, role of participant in the foreign policy process (along with policy makers), and the role of catalyst of foreign news. This final role might perhaps be the most central to the press and its agenda setting influence over the public agenda.

First and second level agenda setting

Agenda-setting has been the focus of hundreds of systematic studies, the vast majority of which have found support for the idea that the public learns the relative importance of issues from the amount of coverage given to the issues in the news media. Recent studies, however, have looked at the influence of media coverage at a more detailed level (see McCombs, Llamas, Escobar-Lopez & Rey, 1997; Golan and Wanta, 2001). These "second-level" agenda-setting studies, which merge traditional agenda-setting with framing research, have had some success in demonstrating a process of media influence that suggests that the attributes linked to newsmakers influence the attributes members of the public link to the newsmakers. Thus, the "agenda of attributes" covered in the media sets the "agenda of attributes" for the public.

The dependent variable in first level agenda setting is issue salience. As Ghanem (1997) notes, issue salience involves objects, or issues. Media coverage of an object increases the importance of that object among members of the public. Thus, the public learns the relative importance of issues based on the amount of coverage that those issues receive.

Since the seminal work by McCombs and Shaw (1972), hundreds of studies have examined this media effect on the public. The vast majority have found support for the notion that media coverage influences the perceived importance of issues. In other words, media coverage of objects influences the perceived importance of those objects.

The second level, however, implies a more subtle form of media effect. The focus has shifted from coverage of objects to coverage of attributes of those objects. While coverage of the object continues to influence the perceived importance of that object – as first level agenda setting argues – second level agenda setting argues that the attributes linked to the object in the news media are mentally linked to the object by the public. Thus, while first level agenda setting suggests media coverage influences what we think about, second level agenda setting suggests media coverage influences how we think.

Early studies have found some support for the second level of agenda setting. McCombs, Llamas, Escobar-Lopez and Rey (1997), for example, found support for a second level of agenda setting during the 1996 Spanish general election on two attribute dimensions – substantive and affective descriptions. Substantive attributes dealt with information about qualities of the candidates: experience with foreign affairs, for example. Affective attributes dealt with positive, neutral or negative comments about candidates: good leader, for instance.

Golan and Wanta (2001) conducted a similar study during the 2000 Republican presidential primary in New Hampshire. Results show that John McCain was covered much more positively than George W. Bush. The findings also show that respondents linked four of six cognitive attributes – akin to the substantive attributes of the McCombs et al (1997) study – to candidates in direct proportion to media coverage. The results show less support for media influence on the affective (positive) attributes individuals linked to candidates.

Several other recent studies have found support for the second level of agenda setting. Tedesco (2001), for example, content analyzed 1,479 candidate press releases and 756 network news stories using key words in context frames during the 2000 presidential primaries. Candidates and media issue agendas were positively correlated, especially for the Republican candidates. Tedesco further examined the direction of influence by examining autocorrelations, which suggested the relationship between candidates and media is reciprocal. However, the process frames were significantly correlated only for Republican candidate John McCain and the networks, which Tedesco explains may demonstrate that McCain and the media had a "love-affair" during the 2000 presidential primary.

Kiousis, Bantimaroudis and Ban (1999) examined the second level of agenda setting through two experiments that manipulated media portrayals of candidate personality and qualification traits. They found subjects' impressions of candidate personality traits mirrored media portrayals of those traits. However, media portrayals of personality traits did not affect a candidate's overall salience. Results also indicate that candidate qualifications influenced affective perceptions of politicians.

Rhee (1997) examined how news frames in campaign coverage affect individuals' interpretation of campaigns. Results suggest that both strategy-framed and issue-framed print news stories are effective in influencing interpretation.

Shah, Domke and Wackman (1996) examined the relationships among media frames, individual interpretations of issues and voter decision-making. They found media frames and issue interpretations substantially influence the type of decision-making strategy that voters use.

Previous studies, however, have limited their analyses to newsmakers as the object in media coverage. Our present study focuses on nations as the objects under investigation. Here, the effects of positive and negative news stories – dealing with affective attributes – on public perceptions of foreign nations will be examined. Thus, the present study will examine agenda setting at both the first level – whether the amount of media coverage devoted to foreign nations is correlated with public perceptions regarding the importance of the nations to U.S. interests – and the second level whether positive or negative coverage of foreign nations is correlated with public perceptions regarding individuals' feelings toward the nations. Thus, the hypotheses for the study are:

First level: The more overall media coverage a nation receives, the more individuals will think it is of vital importance to U.S. interests.

This is a modification of the original hypothesis first proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972). Instead of coverage of issues leading to issue salience among members of the public, or study proposes the coverage of nations will lead to the nation becoming more salient among the public. As Ghanem (1997) argues, coverage of an object will lead to more concern with an object. Here, coverage of a nation will lead to more concern with the nation.

Second level: The more negative media coverage a nation receives, the more individuals will think negatively about that nation. The more positive media coverage a nation receives, the more individuals will think positively about the nation.

These hypotheses address the affective attribute agenda noted by Ghanem (1997). If a nation receives negative coverage, the negative attributes mentioned in the news reports will cause individuals to mentally link these negative attributes to the nation. Thus, when asked how they feel about this nation, respondents will recall the negative news coverage and respond that they think negatively about the nation. The reverse should be true about positive coverage.

Method

The analysis of the present study compared responses to a public opinion survey and media coverage in the period leading up to the survey period. Both looked at countries as "objects" and whether media coverage of the individual countries set the agenda for public perceptions of those countries.

Public Agenda

The public agenda came from data collected during a survey in 1998 by the Chicago Council for Foreign Relations. The Council is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that has conducted similar surveys every four years since 1974. The 1998 survey is the most recent data available. The surveys examine the extent that the American public supports an active role for the United States overseas and addresses which nations that the public believes are most important to the United States and which nations are threats to the U.S. The Council commissioned the Gallup organization to conduct the polls. The survey was conducted between October 15 and November 10, 1998, and included 1,507 completed surveys.

Two series of questions were used for the present study. For the first level of agenda setting, respondents were read a list of 26 countries and asked if the United States had a vital interest in each. The percentage of the respondents answering "yes" determined the score each country received on the public agenda. For example, 87 percent of the respondents believed the United States had a vital interest in Japan – the largest total in the survey – while 27 percent believed the United States had a vital interest in the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – the lowest in the survey. Thus, the foreign nation agenda for the public ranged from 87 for Japan to 27 for the Baltic countries.

For the second level of agenda setting, a series of questions dealing with a "feeling thermometer" for countries were used in the analysis. Respondents were asked to rate 21 countries on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. A warm feeling toward a country ranged from 50 to 100, while a cold feeling toward a country ranged from 0 to 50. In other words, the more positive an individual felt toward a country, the higher the "temperature" that country would receive. Thus, the responses to these questionnaire items showed the public's affective attribute agenda. Scores ranged from 72 for Canada to 25 for Iraq.

Media agenda

Four network newscasts were content analyzed for the period of January 1 to October 15, 1998. Previous time-lags employed in agenda setting research have ranged from one week (Wanta and Hu, 1992) to nine months (Atwood, Sohn and Sohn, 1978). Watt, Mazza and Snyder (1993) found that issue salience memory can decay as slowly as 300 days. Previous research, however, has mainly focused on issues rather than countries. Given the nature of international news coverage, we wanted to ensure that countries in our analysis would have ample opportunities to appear in the media agenda. Thus, we extended the content analysis period to include media coverage from the beginning of the year to the starting date of the survey. With the extended time period, the number of news stories per nation ranged from 342 for Russia to two for Haiti.

All coverage of foreign nations on ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN was included in the analysis. Stories were downloaded from the Vanderbilt University television News Archive.

The unit of analysis was the individual news story. Stories were coded first for the nation or nations involved in the story. Stories from the United States involving domestic issues were not coded. The frequency for individual nations mentioned in news stories determined the score they received for the content analysis.

Each country was also coded for valence – whether the country was covered in a positive, neutral or negative manner. If an international newscast reported that a foreign country is involved with activities that threaten the interest of United States (e.g., terrorism) or values that United States want to protect (e.g., human rights or democracy), the story was coded as negative. If a foreign country was involved with activities that are consistent with U.S. interests or values that the U.S. wants to promote, it was coded as positive. Neutral stories or mixed stories were coded as neutral.

About ten percent of the news stories were double coded to determine intercoder reliability. Coder reliability is .92.

Results

Table 1 lists the number of stories aired on the four network newscasts and the percentage of respondents saying "yes" to whether each individual country is of vital interest to the United States. As the table shows, the correlation for the two measures is statistically significant. In other words, the more media coverage a nation received, the more vital to U.S. interests that the respondents felt the country was. Thus, the results support the first level of agenda setting.

While the overall correlation was significant, some notable differences in the two agendas are apparent. Saudi Arabia tied with Russia as the second highest on the public agenda, but received the fourth lowest number of media stories. Kuwait received only 30 media stories, yet ranked ahead of the United Kingdom as a vital nation. Respondents apparently equated "vital interest to the U.S." with oil. India received 173 stories and

Indonesia 140 stories, ranking them in the upper half of the media agenda. Both, however, were ranked near the bottom of the public agenda.

Table 2 shows the media attribute coverage and public "nation thermometer" results. Here, the Pearson correlations for positive and neutral coverage of nations did not correlation with how the public felt about individual nations. Negative coverage of nations, however, did correlate negatively with public views of nations. In other words, the more negative coverage that nations received, the more likely respondents were to rate the nation low on the thermometer scale. Negative affective attributes, then, led to negative views of the nation by respondents, supporting the second level of agenda setting.

As with the results of the first level, the public's ratings of nations and media coverage had a number of large differences. Mexico, for instance, received a relatively high number of negative stories (22) yet was a relatively "warm" nation with a mean of 57 on the respondents' thermometer. Cuba, on the other hand, received only six negative stories, yet was a "cool" 38 on the respondents' thermometer.

Discussion

The present study attempted to examine the first and second levels of agenda setting through an analysis involving international news coverage and public perceptions about foreign nations. The analysis found support for both levels of agenda setting.

The results show a clear relationship between media coverage of nations and how individuals viewed the relative importance of those nations to the United States. Here, the more coverage a nation received, the more likely respondents were to think that the nation was of vital importance to the U.S. Thus, the news media set the public's agenda, influencing the salience of foreign nations.

Although the media and public agendas were highly correlated ($r = .568$, $p = .002$), coverage patterns for certain nations did not appear to match public perceptions. Notably, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait received relatively little media coverage, but both were relatively high on the public's vital interest agenda. Kuwait, of course, was at the center of the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq. Since U.S. armed forces fought to regain Kuwait's independence, respondents may have felt that this nation was still vitally important to the U.S. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is a leader among the oil-rich OPEC nations. One reason for the high public ranking of Saudi Arabia – and Kuwait – could be that since oil is vitally important to the U.S., members of the public may view these nations as vitally important as well. The news media, therefore, did not have to show the importance of the oil-providing nations to the public for the public to understand their significance.

Indonesia and India, meanwhile, ranked very low on the public agenda but in the upper half of the media agenda. Both of the countries faced serious political conflicts during the time frame of the content analysis. In India, violence marked the election of Prime Minister Atal Bihan Vajpayee and the vote by the Congress Party to make Sonia Gandhi its president. In Indonesia, demonstrations against the government of President Suharto turned violent. Suharto eventually stepped down. The main stories from these countries, therefore, dealt with political changes in the countries, which showed very few links to the United States. While political changes are important events for the news media, perhaps the lack of a significant tie to the United States limited the countries' appeal to the U.S. public.

Most of the other nations, however, followed clear trends. Japan and Russia, the top two countries on the public agenda, were among the nations receiving the highest amount of media coverage. The Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Poland and Haiti were at the bottom of the public agenda. They were also at the bottom of the media agenda.

The second level of agenda setting also showed a clear trend. The more negative coverage a nation received, the more likely the nation was viewed negatively by the public. In other words, the negative affective attributes linked to a country in the media led to negative views of the country held by the public. Individuals rated nations as cold on the country "thermometer" based on the amount of negative coverage the nations had received.

The reason for the significant correlation can be clearly seen in Table 2. Here, only one of the six "warmest" nations on the thermometer (Mexico) received any negative coverage. Iraq, the coldest nation on the public agenda at 25, received the most negative media coverage, 329 stories.

As with the tests of the first level, not all nations correlated perfectly. Mexico did receive 22 negative stories, yet was the fourth warmest nation at 57. Turkey received just one negative story, but was relatively cool at 45.

Mexico, as a neighboring country, could have been viewed warmly because of the geographical proximity. It also could have been viewed warmly because of the relatively high number of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.

Geographical location also may have been at the heart of why Turkey was viewed as a cold nation. Because of its proximity to Iraq and Iran, the two nations at the bottom of the nation thermometer, Turkey may have been linked mentally to these other cold nations.

It also should be noted that while the negative affective attributes showed a clear agenda setting influence on respondents, the positive and neutral affective attributes did not. The finding on the neutral attributes is logical. More neutral stories should not have influenced how positive or negative the public views a nation. Neutral coverage would imply neutral reactions from the public. Moreover, the vast majority of stories aired on the four networks were neutral stories, which demonstrates the balanced style of reporting that has been the goal of American journalism.

The lack of an influence of positive affective attributes, however, is more puzzling. Since the more negative news stories a nation received, the more negative it would be view by the public, it is logical to assume that the opposite relationship would be found with positive attributes: The more positive news stories a nation received, the more positive it would be view by the public. This was not the case.

This lack of a significant correlation can be attributed to the fact that several "warm" countries received no positive coverage. Among these countries are Italy, Mexico, Brazil and Germany. Of these four countries, only Mexico received any negative coverage. Thus, many of the nations viewed most positively by the public actually received nothing but neutral coverage in the media. This may have given individuals the impression that while these nations are not overly positive in their relations with the U.S., neither are they negative threats to the U.S.

In addition, Iraq and Pakistan, two countries low on the public agenda, received some positive coverage. This may have been an attempt by the news media to show some balance on these countries, since both had received extensive negative coverage.

It also should be noted that the analysis here involved only two agendas: the media agenda as determined by coverage on four networks newscasts and the public agenda as determined by responses to a national poll. The analysis did not include any potential influence on the media agenda by outside sources, such as U.S. public officials. The U.S. President, for example, could have been the source of the media agenda, influencing coverage through his policy statements. In his role as the nation's number one newsmaker, the President is an important source for foreign affairs stories and could raise or lower nations on the media agenda by publicly announcing his policy priorities. This would appear to be a fruitful area for future research.

Overall, then, the results here show that media coverage of countries may have a powerful influence over how those nations are perceived by the public. The news media exert a great deal of agenda setting influence on the public both at the first and second level. In other words, the news media can show the public both what to think about (first level) and what to think (second level) when it comes to foreign nations.

Table 1. First level agenda setting results comparing media coverage of nations and public views on the U.S. vital interests in nations.

Country	Media stories	Public view as vital U.S. interest
Japan	208	87
Russia	342	77
Saudi Arabia	36	77
China	282	74
Canada	134	69
Israel	195	69
Kuwait	30	68
Mexico	95	66
United Kingdom	296	66
Germany	106	60
Iran	99	61
South Korea	64	54
South Africa	85	52
Bosnia	64	51
Taiwan	27	51
Cuba	152	50
France	132	47
Egypt	26	46
Afghanistan	92	45
India	173	37
Brazil	49	33
Indonesia	140	33
Turkey	25	33
Haiti	2	31
Poland	12	31
Baltic countries	18	27

Pearson's correlation: r = .568, p = .002

Table 2. Second level agenda setting results comparing media coverage of nations and public feelings toward countries.

Country	Media stories Pos.	Neut.	Neg.	Public view: Nation 'Temperature'
Canada	4	130	0	72
United Kingdom	40	256	0	69
Italy	0	146	0	62
Mexico	0	73	22	57
Brazil	0	49	0	56
Germany	0	106	0	56
France	1	128	3	55
Israel	5	185	5	55
South Africa	4	76	5	54
Poland	0	12	0	50
South Korea	4	53	6	50
Russia	1	336	5	49
China	0	245	37	47
India	3	85	85	46
Saudi Arabia	1	22	13	46
Turkey	2	22	1	45
Pakistan	7	41	83	42
Cuba	8	138	6	38
North Korea	0	36	25	36
Iran	0	71	28	28
Iraq	4	169	329	25

Pearson correlations:
Positive coverage/public view: $r = .328$, $p = .146$
Neutral coverage/public view: $r = .210$, $p = .360$
Negative coverage/public view: $r = -.578$, $p = .006$

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Abstract

Public Perceptions of the Phrase "God Bless America"

The phrase "God bless America" has been virtually everywhere Americans are following the events of September 11, 2001. Through random sampling of Tennessee residents in 2002, this study probes the extent to which there is a simultaneous orientation (as embodied in coorientation theory) when people use or hear the phrase. Significant differences were found by political perspective, education, age, gender, income and race. Information from public (conversations with clergy) and media (newspaper readership) sources also appears to have influenced perspectives. Respondents were split over what President Bush means when he says "God bless America."

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Public Perceptions of the Phrase "God Bless America"

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The phrase "God bless America" is heard and seen at almost every turn in the road and flip of the media page or channel. From presidential speech tag line to tabloid headlines in grocery check-out lines, the phrase has been virtually everywhere Americans are following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The phrase "God bless America" has been part of American culture for decades—dating at least to Kate Smith's 1938 rendition of Irving Berlin's song by the same name (Library of Congress, 2003) But something has popularized these words again. "The president says it even more frequently than before, but now so do we, the people," wrote *Denver Post* columnist David Wheat (2001). And when we're not saying it, we're plastering it on the bumpers of our cars. Or writing it on our car windows with white shoe polish. It has replaced the lunch special on the signs outside of some restaurants. 'God Bless America' is back, all right. Way back."

Yet it is unclear what people mean when they use the phrase. Is it a patriotic phrase? Religious? Do the senders and receivers of these advertising messages and political speeches have an agreed upon understanding—a "simultaneous understanding," as embodied in coorientation theory (Singletary & Stone, 1988, p. 108; Chaffee & McCloud, 1968)—as to what the phrase "God bless America" means? If not, advertisers and politicians may be sending messages to ears untuned to receive them. Is it really possible that one of America's most popular phrases in not understood by those who hear it? This study advances and illustrates coorientation theory through an analysis of what people mean when they use or hear the phrase “God bless America.”

While one previous study considered how meaningful the phrase "God bless America" is and the extent to which it prompts purchases (Bodle & Burriss, 2003) no other study has considered such issues related to the phrase—only anecdotal newspaper articles expressing the writer's perspective or that of a news source. Through a random sample of Tennessee residents (weighted to more closely match the latest U.S. Census projections for age, race and gender proportions among people age 18 and older; see Methods section), this study probes what people mean when they use the phrase and coorientationally whether there is a simultaneous orientation of perspectives and perceptions when demographic, social, lifestyle and political variables are considered. Additionally, this study considers media usage and whether the beliefs held by these groups possibly were cultivated by their (hypothesized) differing media selections. Respondents were also asked what they believe President George W. Bush means when he uses the phrase "God bless America."

Review of Literature

Coorientation theory asserts that messages are best understood and accepted when the sender and receiver have a simultaneous orientation to that message. A person’s values are based on a lifetime of experiences that no other person has undergone. But perceptions of another’s values increases as two persons coorient by communicating their values (Chaffee and McCloud, 1968, p. 661-690). Similarly, a news editor must share with his or her audience an understanding of the words sent for there to be elevated levels of coorienation. This study considers whether the meaning of the popular phrase “God bless America” is understood by those receiving it.

After a review of periodicals and journals through a variety of online search engines and databases (including Lexis/Nexis, Infotrac, ERIC, and various Internet search engines) only one quantitative study was located that has previously considered the use of the phrase "God Bless America." It probed the purchasing of items with the phrase written on them. The authors reported that two-thirds of respondents said the phrase "God bless America" was meaningful to them, but less than one-third ever spoke or wrote the words. Just one-fourth of respondents had ever purchased a product specifically because the phrase was written on it (Bodle & Burriss). There have been numerous articles in the popular press, however, that have considered perspectives about the phrase. Some articles note the paradoxical nature of the phrase—on one hand, questioning or even mocking the perceived overuse of it (Wheat, 2001; Silk, 2001); on the other hand, acknowledging the lack of a simultaneous understanding as to what the phrase means. In 2002newspaper columnist Dalton. Roberts wrote:

> What else can you think when you see a sign saying, "Try our double bacon cheeseburger, God bless America." Are we saying it to ourselves, to our enemies (as a reminder that God is on our side), or to God? If we are saying it to ourselves as a commitment to live as good Americans worthy of blessing, it might do us some good. If we are saying it to our enemies, they will not be impressed. They have their own gods and their own shibboleths they repeat to drive back their perceived enemies. If we're saying it to God, does it come off sounding like a command? Maybe we need a more reverential attitude with a comma after God, as in "God, bless America."

Others suggest the phrase reflects the country's hopes and dreams—and fears (Acosta, 2001: Austin, 2002; Pareles, 2001) One poll identified strong feelings of patriotism as well as concerns about terrorism in their neighborhood (Blanton, 2002)—even before the Washington D.C.-area sniper shootings in 2002. The poll found 20 percent of the nationwide respondents poll said they were worried about a terrorist attack in their neighborhood, down from a high of 43 percent in October 2001. Also, 74 percent said in September 2002 they were willing to fight and, if necessary, die to defend America against terrorism, down from a 76 percent level in October 2001.

Said Sut Jhally, founder and executive director of The Media Education Foundation and professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. "I think September 11th was the first global event in history...it was the first time Americans saw themselves as part of the world. And Americans are now terrified. That is what's now linking America to the world." (Advertising Education Foundation, 2001).

Other studies indicate a rise and fall of church attendance following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. For example, Dimock (2002) reports that "self-reported attendance at religious services in both PRC (Pew Research Center)/Pew forum surveys was virtually identical to measures taken before the attack," with 61 percent reporting that religion was very important to them in November 2001 and 63 percent in a February/March 2002 survey. The authors cite a September 21-22, 2001 Gallup survey that found 47 percent saying they had attended church or synagogue within the previous seven days-this only slightly higher than the 41 percent to 43 percent reported in "more typical weeks." Why this conflict with other polls reporting sharp increases in church attendance following Sept. 11, 2001? "The answer to this apparent contradiction," writes Dimock "is that any surge in religious behavior was of short duration, and primarily limited to those who were already highly religious."

A Sept. 27, 2002, Time/CNN poll of 1,055 adults found that seven in 10 respondents said they had sung "God Bless America" since the attack, (Paul, 2001) and 30 members of Congress co-sponsored a bill seeking to make it the "national hymn." (Diemer, 2001) This tune has provided an emotional “safe place” for today, suggests Graeme Boone, associate professor of music at The Ohio State University, similar to what prompted Irving Berlin to write the song more than 60 years ago (Diemer, 2001).

Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, suggests that "'God Bless America', if you parse it, is a prayer; you asking God to bless America" (Diemer, 2001).

A minister, the Rev. Jennifer Reddall (2002) observes that mixing patriotism and religion can cause confusion in determining what the phrase means.

The nation is embracing "God bless America," posits Alan Jabbour, former head of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, as a way of dealing with a "sense of violation--the shocked realization that the homeland has been breached. "People need to say something spiritual, almost, to ward it off"(Diemer, 2001).

This present study will probe such questions of coorientational perception by asking respondents how they view the phrase--perhaps as a message of patriotism, or of protection and safety from terrorism, or religious conviction--and whether they have any idea why they or their neighbors use the phrase.

The phrase is often used by U.S. President George W. Bush; so often that Martin Marty, in a March 2003 *Newsweek* article profiling Bush, began his piece with a three-word sentence: “God Bless America.” Recognizing the enigmatic nature of the phrase, Marty wrote, “For decades, chief executives have acted like priests of the national religion....Never have we historians been busier making sense of presidential God talk than now.” This coorientational conflict between the Sender-in-Chief and those receiving his words also is considered in this study through the respondents’ perspectives as to what the president means when he uses the phrase “God bless America,” bringing a measure of definition and clarity to Marty’s concerns.

Still others have considered the commercial implications. Singer Celine Dion's rendition of "God Bless America" propelled the tune (along with "a collection of songs of hope, freedom and inspiration") to No. 1 on *Billboard* Magazine's chart of top-selling albums in October 2001 (Moody, 2002). Having a No. 1 album suggests a simultaneous desire to buy the product, but it does not explain why people buy it or whether they have a simultaneous orientation with the message, as embodied in coorientation theory.

Businesses should focus "a great deal" or "quite a bit" on contributing to the nation's patriotic spirit through advertising, according to the results from two identical American Demographics/ Ipsos-Reid polls of 1,000 adults. Fifty-two percent of respondents to the first poll (conducted between Oct. 5 and 7, 2001) and 50 percent in the second poll (June 21 and 23, 2002) were in support of the statement (Wellner, 2002). One online poll reported in May 2002 that 7 percent will "always buy American," up from 4 percent in 2000 Wellner, 2002). But is it patriotism, or pricing? "What we're seeing in terms of 'effective' American branding," relates Ira Matathia, director of strategy at Euro RSCG MVMBS Partners, a New York City-based advertising agency whose clients include Intel and Nestle, "has less to do with their overt presentation of patriotism and more to do with other elements, like price" (Wellner, 2002).

Advertisers have been advised to acknowledge and honor the patriotic mood and integrate "an altruistic approach to their marketing that reflects the needs of Americans to help those who've suffered, and their desire to band together as Americans" (McCall, 2003)

Researchers have documented levels of patriotism between demographic groups. Women were more likely to be patriotic than men, older people more patriotic than young, and the retired and less educated were more likely to be influenced by patriotic ads (Wellner, 2002). Two-thirds of respondents in one study reported the phrase "God Bless America" was "very meaningful"—especially for those indicating they were "born again" or "evangelical." Those with household income below $40,000 and holding a high school diploma as the highest education level were more likely to buy items with the phrase "God bless America" written on them. Also, women who have attended or completed college were twice as likely to buy such patriotic items than were their male counterparts (Bodle & Burriss, 2003). This present study will consider whether patriotism is a primary perception of those who use the phrase "God bless America" and whether this orientation differs between demographic, social, lifestyle or political groups.

Media selection varies between demographic groups. Women are more likely (54%) than men (46%) to read regularly; whites (53%) more than blacks (47%) or Hispanics (28%); those with a bachelor's degree or higher (71%) more than those with some college (60%), a high school diploma or equivalent (46%), or those with less than a high school diploma (22%). White males are more likely to read a newspaper daily, as are older readers with a bachelor's degree or higher and those with higher household income ("Condition of Education," 2001). This present study probes for significant correlations between such variables and perceptions of the phrase "God bless America."

This study also considers the influence of information sources on perceptions of the phrase "God bless America." Researchers have considered theories beyond coorientation to probe the extent to which information learned from media and other public sources (clergy, social organizations, political party affiliations, etc.) influences the formation of perspectives on public issues. Cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposures to consistent media portrayals and themes will influence perceptions of these items in the direction of the media portrayals (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). Social learning theory posits that behaviors (or perspectives) observed in the media will be imitated by others (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). Social marketing theory suggests that the sender may be seeking to persuade, and that the message sent may be targeted or directed toward an audience segment (Baran & Davis, 2000). Individuals can coorientationally seek a simultaneous orientation with one's own, personal public source leaders (a pastor or those speaking on behalf of the specific denomination; an elected official or the political party, etc.), or through their particular and selective media choices (talk radio vs. television news, etc.), seeking identification with—as well as imitation or modeling of—messages from these senders. Baran and Davis define imitation as: "The direct reproduction of observed behavior." Identification is defined as: "A special form of imitation that springs from wanting to be and trying to be like an observed model relative to some broader characteristics or qualities." Modeling is defined as "The acquisition of behaviors through observation."

This present study probes the extent to which individuals are influenced by their public sources of information as well as by their media selections as it relates to their understanding of what the phrase God bless America" means.

Hypotheses and Rationale

The review of literature suggests that the phrase "God bless America" often is tied to issues of patriotism, religion and protection and safety. But it offers little guidance coorientationally as to which of these motivations might dominate. Posited as a research question, this study asks:

R_1: What do people mean when they use the phrase, "God bless America"?

Previous literature has determined that demographic groups often have differing perceptions based on their social, lifestyle and political backgrounds and experiences. Media usage also differs by groups based on the same (and additional) variables. However, previous literature related to this study did provide limited direction as to whether demographic groups would differ on the meaning of patriotic messages (Wellner, 2002) and the use of the phrase "God bless America" (Bodle & Burriss, 2003). Posited as hypotheses, this study suggests:

H_1: Perceptions as to the meaning of the phrase "God bless America" will differ between demographic categories within public groups.

H_2: These hypothesized differences in perception between groups as to the meaning of the phrase "God bless America" can be partially explained by their use of differing and selective sources of information—that respondents were each perceptually influenced by their individual public and media source selections.

An additional research question suggests:

R2: There will be broad disagreement—low levels of simultaneous understanding—between respondents as to what President Bush means when he uses the phrase "God bless America.

Methodology

Data for this study came from telephone interviews conducted from Feb. 18 through March 1, 2002 (n=829) and from Oct. 21 through Nov. 2, 2002 (n=615). All respondents were age 18 or over, randomly sampled from among the state population. Respondents were interviewed by trained students under the oversight of faculty from the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University. The two polls each had a margin of error of + or - 4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, indicating that the results likely did not occur by chance. Error margins were greater for sample subgroups.

The twice-annual survey is a tracking poll, asking the same set of demographic questions each time. Six questions regarding perceptions about the phrase "God bless America" were added to the Spring 2002 survey. Following that Spring poll, it was determined that additional questions would add to the depth and texture of the study. Five additional questions were included on the Fall 2002 survey. At no time were the respondent data from the first study commingled with the second. The wording of these 11 survey questions, along with identification of poll date, is found in the text of the Results section.

The two respondent samples varied somewhat from U.S. Census Bureau projections for age, race and gender proportions within the state. Such variation commonly occurs because certain demographic groups are more difficult to contact. The data was thus weighted to more closely match U.S. Census projections for age, race and gender proportions among people age 18 and older in the state of Tennessee. The projections estimate state-level proportions. A single multiplier is calculated that will bring the proportions within the aforementioned demographic variables as close as possible to the Census figures. This multiplier is then applied to the data set using SPSS's "weight cases" procedure.

This study considers what people mean when they say or write "God bless America." Since one motivation is likely related to religious, it should be noted that high indices exist in Tennessee for Bible/Devotional Reading (the DMAs of Chattanooga, 179 index; Knoxville, 165; Nashville, 153; and Memphis 168) ("Lifestyle Market," 2002) With an index of "100" indicating the national average, these higher Tennessee indices suggest that the percentage of respondents in this study choosing a religious explanation for the meaning of the phrase "God bless America" would likely be an over-representation if generalized to the nation.

Findings

Different people mean different things when they use the phrase "God bless America," as probed in the first research question (R_1). Respondents to Spring 2002 poll questions (n=829; see Methods section) were asked, *"Would you say that the meaning of the phrase 'God bless America' is mostly about religion, about patriotism, about economic prosperity, about protection and safety, or about something else?"* With these forced choice categories offered to them, about one-third (38.7%) said the phrase was primarily patriotic, while about one-fourth (28.5%) said it was a religious statement. Nearly another fourth (23.3%) said it meant something else—including protection and safety (12%) and a statement of economic prosperity (1.1%). This low level of coorientation was particularly evident with the nearly one in 10 (9.6%) that reported they didn't know what "God bless America" means.

There was partial support for the first hypothesis (H_1), which suggested that perceptions of the phrase would differ between demographic categories within public groups. Self-described liberals along with those "middle of the road" politically (n=434) were significantly more likely ($P=0.0001$; $X^2=36.6343$, d.f.=6) to say their understanding of the phrase was oriented toward patriotism (43.3%) than those who characterized themselves as conservative or "far right" (34.1%; n=317); conservatives were more likely to call the phrase religious (36.9%) than were liberals (23%). But liberals lost some of this simultaneous orientation when income was considered ($P= .0150$, $X^2= 23.3687$, d.f.=8). Only 12.2 percent of affluent liberals (household income of more than $50,000; n=123) believed the phrase "God bless America" to be religious, while 24.1 percent of middle income liberals (with household income between $40,000 to $50,000; n=54) believed it was, as did 28 percent of lower income liberals ($15,000 to $40,000; n=257).

When asked whether "*God has blessed America in the past,*" this study found strong agreement (90.8%). But significant differences were found based on political perspectives ($P=0.0000$, $X^2=46.7702$, d.f.=4), adding support for H_2. Those describing themselves as far left or liberal (n=145) were less likely to agree (79.3%,) than those "middle of the road" (90.4%; n=303) or those conservative and far right (95.5%, n=376). However, again liberal subsets were in significant disagreement on this ($P=.0228$, $X^2=7.1276$, d.f.=1). Younger liberals and "far left" (ages 18 to 34, n=60) were more inclined to see God's blessings on the nation in the past (90%) than those older than 35 (71.8%, n=85).

Respondents were less optimistic when asked whether "*God is likely to bless America in the future.*" Still, three-fourths (75.4%) agreed that He would, while 22.1% said He would not, with few (2.6%) undecided about divine intervention into the affairs of the nation. Again, significant differences in orientation regarding the meaning of the phrase were found by political perspective ($P=.0002$, $X^2=29.3498$, d.f.=4), in support of H_1. Those calling themselves "middle of the road" politically (n=303) indicated the strongest agreement (82.2%) that God would bless America in the future—not the collapsed category of far left/liberal (64.1%, n=145) or conservative/far right (74.2%, n=376). Education level, however, decreased agreement between conservatives. Those without a college degree (n=251) were significantly more likely ($P=.0133$, $X^2=11.8624$, d.f.=2) to agree (79.7%) about God's future blessings on the country than were those conservatives that had graduated from college or had postgraduate degrees (63.2%, n=125). Gender also influenced perspectives. Liberal women were significantly more likely ($P=.0129$, $X^2=6.1820$, d.f.=1) to agree that God would bless America in the future (74%, n=157) than were liberal men (54.2%, n=94). Among conservatives with less than a college degree, women were significantly more likely ($P=.00037$, $X^2=11.2018$, d.f.=2) to agree (83.4%, n=157) than men (73.4%, n=94).

Respondents were asked, "*In the wake of the September 11th terror attacks, 'God bless America' means, 'God, don't let our economy collapse.'*" Most disagreed (76.9%). Significant differences were correlated to income ($P=.0000$, $X^2=71.5810$, d.f.=6), with those making less than $15,000 in agreement (41.9%) at levels higher than middle income (21.9%) or those with household income greater than $50,000 (12%).

There also were significant differences between racial groups on the question ($P=.0367$, $X^2=8.8075$, d.f.=2). African Americans with household income between $15,000 and $50,000 were more likely to agree (37%, n=54) that "God bless America" has to do with the nation's economy than were white respondents (19.3%, n=311) within the same income category, in partial support of H_1. That hypothesis suggested coorientationally there would be little simultaneous orientation to the phrase "God bless America" when demographic categories within public groups were considered.

As reported earlier (in R_1), when forced to choose between a short selection of options, just 12 percent of respondents said the phrase "God bless America" related to protection and safety concerns. Curiously, when asked to respond to the statement, "*In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, 'God bless America' means, 'God, don't let our enemies destroy us,'*" nearly two-thirds (62.9%) said the phrase was a plea for protection from enemies. This difference of percentage may suggest a perceptual "softness" as to what the phrase means. These somewhat paradoxical findings are considered further in the Discussions section. Females were significantly more likely to agree that the phrase had to do with protection from enemies than were men (P=.0185, X^2=7.9838, d.f.=2), in partial support of H_1. More than two-thirds (67.4%) of women said the phrase related to protection from enemies, as did 59.2% of men. Among men, however, there was a significant difference in this perception based on income (P=.0218, X^2=12.05, d.f.=2). A majority of men (65.3%) with a household income of $50,000 or less (n=242) agreed with the statement, while just 46.6 percent of those with income above $50,000 were in agreement (n=116).

When asked whether "*The terrorist events of Sept. 11 have led to a spiritual revival in America*," three-fourths (75.2%) said they had. Daily readers of newspapers (n=293) were significantly different from those reading a newspaper less frequently (p=.0000, X^2=41.1958, d.f.=6), with additional significance between the ages of these daily newspaper readers (p=.0254, X^2=13.6634, d.f.=4). There was stronger agreement (84.2%) about a post-Sept. 11, 2001 revival among younger daily readers (ages 18-34, n=57) and those over 50 years of age (77.5%, n=182) than among those 35-49 (59.3 %, n=54). This finding adds a measure of support for the second hypothesis (H_2), which posits that levels of simultaneous orientation (as embodied in coorientation theory) can be partially explained by respondents' use of differing and selective sources of information.

President George W. Bush often uses the phrase, "God bless America." In a second but related survey, conducted during the Fall of 2002 (n=615, see Methods section), respondents were asked what they believed the president means when he uses the phrase. The second research question (R_2) had suggested broad disagreement—low levels of simultaneous understanding—as to what the president means when he uses the phrase, and such differences in perception were found. Two-fifths (41.8%) said the president means something patriotic, while one-fifth (18.7%) said his words are religious in nature. Others said the president uses the phrase to refer to protection and safety issues (13.8%) or economic prosperity (2%). Nearly one in 10 (9.1%) indicated they had no idea what he meant. Perceptually, there was a significant difference by political party identification (P=.0001, X^2=36.6396, d.f.=6). Republicans (n=229) were more likely to believe that the president means something religious (27.5%) than were those of other political party affiliations (13.5%, n=386, including Democrats and Independents).

Differing information sources seems to have played a role in the development of perceptions as to what President Bush means when he uses the phrase "God bless America." Republicans who had talked with their clergy about politics (n=134) were, curiously, more likely to believe the president meant something patriotic (50%) than those who had not talked (32.6%, n=95). Additionally, these respondents who had talked with clergy were less inclined to view Bush's use of the phrase as a comment on protection and safety matters (9%) than were those who did not talk to clergy (19%). The difference was significant (P=.0239, X^2=21.3409, d.f.=6). This finding provides additional support for the second hypothesis (H_2), which suggests that perceptional orientation to the phrase "God bless America" is influenced by differing public sources of information.

Discussion

There was no dominant perspective as to what the phrase "God bless America" means, as probed in the first research question (R_1). Nearly two in five (38.7%) said the phrase was primarily patriotic, while one in four 28.5 percent said was a religious statement; 23.3 percent said it meant a variety of other things. Nearly one in 10 (9.6%) said they had no idea what "God bless America" means. The message is not broadly or uniformly being understood because, as embodied in coorientation theory, there is no simultaneous orientation as to what the phrase means.

There were significant differences between self-described liberals and conservatives in each group's orientation to the phrase, in partial support of a hypothesis (H_1). Liberals and those "middle of the road" were more likely to say the phrase was patriotic in nature (43.3%) than conservatives or "far right" (34.1%), while conservatives were more likely to call the phrase religious in nature (36.9%) than were liberals (23%). However, significant differences appeared between liberals based on income. Only 12.2 percent of affluent liberals (more than $50,000 annually) believed the phrase was religious, while 28 percent of liberals earning less than $40,000 believed it was. But statistical significance here was limited to political perspectives and income—no such significance was found between race, education, urban/rural, age, gender or marital state.

However, when asked whether God had blessed America in the past—or would in the future—statistically significant societal differences of perception were found by age, gender, education as well as—again—differing political perspectives, as hypothesized (H_1). Younger liberals and those "far left" (ages 18-34) were more likely to believe that God had blessed America in the past (90%) than were older liberals (71.8%). Conservatives as a whole were more likely to believe this (95.5%) than were liberals (79.3%). Female liberals were more likely to believe that God would bless America in the future (74%) than were male liberals (54.2%). Among conservatives with a college degree, females were more likely to believe that God would bless America in the future (83.4%) than were males (73.4%). As a whole, conservatives were more likely to believe in God's blessings in the future (74.2%) than liberals (64.1%).

When asked whether the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks had lead to a spiritual revival in America, three-fourths said it had. Among daily readers of newspapers, significant differences were evident based on age, in partial support of H_2, which posited in part that differences in perception between groups can be partially explained (as embodied in cultivation, social learning and coorientation theories) by their use of differing and selective sources of information—that respondents were each perceptually influenced by their individual public and media source selections. There was stronger agreement about a Sept. 11 revival among younger (ages 18-34; 84.2%) and older (over 50 years of age; 77.5%) readers of daily newspapers than among those between 35-49 (59.3 %).

Race also was a statistically significant perceptual factor. When asked whether the phrase is a plea for God to save the American economy, lower and middle income ($15,000 to $50,000) blacks were significantly more likely to believe this (37%) than whites (19.3%) in this same income category, adding support for the first hypothesis. Just one in five (20.4%) of all respondents believed this.

When asked whether "God Bless America" was a plea for protection from enemies, two-thirds said it was. However, when answering an initial survey question, only 12 percent of respondents said protection and safety concerns were the primary meaning of the phrase. It appears that the phrase "God bless America" has multiple meanings for many. There were significant differences by gender and income as to whether the phrase relates to protection from enemies. Females were significantly more likely to believe this (67.4%) than males (59.2%). More affluent men (more than $50,000 per year) were more likely to disagree with this perspective (51.7%) than men making less (32.6%).

When President George W. Bush uses the phrase "God bless America" 41.8 percent of respondents said he means something patriotic—a level comparable to the respondents' own perspective of the meaning of the phrase (38.7%). However, just 18.7 percent said Bush used the phrase as a statement of religious conviction, while 28.5 percent of respondents believed it to be a religious reference. This difference in simultaneous orientation suggests that whatever it is the Sender-in-Chief seeks to communicate with his use of the phrase, he is actually experiencing a coorientational conflict with the receivers of his words. In fact, nearly one in 10 (9.1%) had no idea what he meant by the phrase.

There also was a significant difference in understanding of the president's words by party affiliation. While nearly evenly split in their perception that the president means something patriotic when he uses the phrase (Republicans, 42.8%; Democrats 41.2%), other Republicans were significantly more likely to believe Pres. Bush meant something religious (27.5%) than were other Democrats and Independents (13.5%).

Respondents were perceptually influenced in their orientation to the president's use of the phrase "God bless America" by a public (as opposed to media) information source: their clergy. Republicans talking with their clergy were more likely to believe that President Bush meant something patriotic (50%) rather than something religious (32.6%) even though conservatives, when considered collectively, were oriented toward a religious interpretation of the phrase. It is unclear why. Perhaps a person's political orientation (in this case, Republican) is more strongly imprinted into the phrase "God bless America" than one's religious convictions. Or, it is possible that Republicans that speak to their clergy about politics seek to keep faith unadulterated by worldly concerns—by keeping scriptures sacred and slogans secular.

Conclusions

People mean different things when they use the phrase "God bless America." This expression of patriotism or religious hope—or both—has embedded itself into the mass communication landscape of America. From billboards along the highway to bumper music on the radio, from product advertisements to presidential proclamations, the phrase is everywhere. This study provides an analysis of coorientation theory as it applies to this often-used phrase and the use of what Martin Marty calls political and religious "God talk" (Marty, 2003). Levels of simultaneous understanding between public and media groups are measured.

Those seeking to sell products or promote perspectives should note that the phrase "God bless America" is not viewed the same by everyone. The findings of this study, while interesting, also serve to illustrate that just because a slogan or phrase is generally popular it won't necessarily convey the meaning desired to a particular audience. There must be an elevated level of agreement between the sender and receiver as to what the words mean.

Political perspective appears to be the strongest indicator of both meaning of and passion for the phrase, but the variables of education, age, gender, income and race also are significant. The cultivation of information from public (conversations with clergy) and media (newspaper readership) sources also appears to have influenced differing perspectives on patriotic phrases and events as well.

Even those at the White House have been unable to clearly communicate their meaning when using the phrase. Respondents were split over what President Bush means when he says "God bless America."

As with the tree falling in the forest, questions remain about this cute, short, enigmatic phrase, so passionately spoken by those in the highest political offices and so commonly plastered on the back of aging pickup trucks. Three words that have, on one hand, unmistakably created a nationwide simultaneous orientation of passion and energy; but on the other hand, words that have left broad disagreement over what the sender means.

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Quantifying Globality in Hollywood Film

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Quantifying Globality in Hollywood Film

Abstract

This study examines the globalization of Hollywood film content, questioning the existence of a contemporary preference towards increasingly homogenous texts that transcend national/cultural boundaries. A quantitative system was formulated to evaluate the ten highest grossing films domestically in each five-year-period from 1951-2000. The findings show that globality (the ability to transcend boundaries) in Hollywood films has increased over time, but universal qualities in films from each decade assert that Hollywood films have always had global elements.

Quantifying Globality in Hollywood Film

The film *Titanic* (1997) earned $600 million at American and Canadian box offices – the largest domestic gross in Hollywood's history. This figure is quite modest however, compared with the film's box office receipts earned outside of the domestic market – over $1.2 billion[1]. The dominance of international ticket sales is not a new phenomenon. All-time domestic box-office figures reveal that 7 of the top 10 grossing Hollywood films earned significantly more outside of the domestic market (see Table 1). In addition, 4 of these 7 films were created in the past 5 years, allowing speculation that worldwide demand for Hollywood films is increasing.

As international box office revenue has broadened the ability for Hollywood films to profit, producers have increasingly advocated film content with global appeal (Wasser, 1995). Increasing "globality" in film – or creating texts that transcend national and cultural boundaries (During, 1997) – is a shift in strategy. In an attempt to capture international revenue, the approach is to discourage Hollywood filmmakers from creating centric texts targeted at the domestic audience, and encourage them to create more homogenous films targeted at a more decentralized, global audience. In order to evaluate the existence of this approach, and the extent to which it has changed contemporary film-making practices, a longitudinal evaluation of globality in Hollywood films should be performed.

The initial focus of this study will be to create a system for quantifying levels of globality in film. Once a competent system has been formulated, a more accurate evaluation of globality levels in Hollywood film will be possible.

Therefore, the following are provided as general research questions for this study.

RQ1: What is the procedure for quantifying globality levels in film?

RQ2: To what extent has Hollywood increasingly been creating films with higher levels of globality?

Gathering this information is significant in three regards. Hollywood has successfully exported its films internationally for over 90 years (Wasser, 1995). It is arguable that increased international demand has been the result of more effective distribution, improved advertising campaigns, or even the Americanization of international audiences. Discovering whether filmmakers have increased globality in their films and the extent to which they have done so, will allow for a more informed analysis of the aforementioned factors.

Secondly, as film-making strategies change, their ability to improve profits should be evaluated. If globality levels are correlated with increases in worldwide revenue, then information describing the elements of increasingly global films will be important to profit-oriented filmmakers.

Finally, the predominance of qualitative inquiry with regards to the relationship between globalization and popular texts has resulted in a major ambiguity. It is unclear whether Hollywood films were ever purely nationally/culturally centric (for example, "American"), whether they are presently purely nationally/culturally decentralized (i.e. global) or how, when and to what degree a change occurred (or did not occur). By quantifying globality levels, a more focused evaluation concerning the development of Hollywood's film-making strategies will be possible.

Creating Equal Levels of Understanding

Before the formulation of the quantitative system, the purely global film and the purely centric film must be distinguished. An explanation of these two extremes will label the beginning and the end of a spectrum within which films can be placed based upon their level of globality.

A rabbi and a Baptist minister watch a short film that depicts a baptism. The rabbi recognizes the baptism as an infant initiation ritual. He compares it to other infant initiations he has seen before (christenings, brisses). He understands the meaning this event has for the family involved. Had this ritual been a christening however, his level of understanding would have been the same. The Baptist minister also compares the baptism to other infant initiations. In addition, he reflects upon how the Baptist religion has shaped his own identity. He watches closely, evaluating whether the ceremony contains the distinctive religious elements he believes are essential.

The initial purpose of this example is to introduce two terms that describe the construction of understanding: *comprehension* and *interpretation*. Bordwell (1989) describes comprehension as a level of understanding that focuses upon manifest or peripheral meanings. Interpretation is described as a level of understanding that focuses upon inferred, more hidden meanings.

Understanding is a constructive process (Bordwell, 1989). Thus, the evaluation of a text may involve a combination of comprehension and interpretation. In the previous example, the rabbi's understanding of the baptism could be characterized as having a high level of comprehension and a low level of interpretation. He recognized the manifest meanings of the ritual – i.e. the fact that the baptism was an infant initiation -

but his lack of personal identification with the Baptist religion (a cultural boundary), restricted his ability to make distinctive inferences. The cultural reference within the film (the baptism) acted as an obstacle to his understanding.

The minister's understanding however, could be characterized as having a high level of comprehension and a high level of interpretation. He also recognized the manifest meanings, but his religious affiliation allowed him to make more penetrating inferences that were unique to the Baptist ritual; the reference transcended his cultural boundaries.

A purely centric film causes this dichotomy. National/cultural references transcend the boundaries of one group of individuals (resulting in high comprehension/high interpretation), and act as obstacles to another (generally larger and more diverse) group. The latter group's understanding of the film is characterized as having a high level of comprehension and low level of interpretation.

To contrast, the purely global film is void of any national/cultural references acting as obstacles to interpretation. In this instance, those watching the film would still be defined by their variegated boundaries; however, the levels of understanding between the individuals would have more similarity. No group would have an increased ability to make interpretations, and levels of comprehension and interpretation would show a higher correlation between individuals.

It should be noted that a purely centric/global film is as unlikely as the existence of a pure dichotomy/correlation of understanding. All are extremes, and do not take into account individual differences and abilities. Clarification of these extremes however is essential in order to understand how varying levels of globality fall in between.

The Elements of the System

A theoretical framework is required to measure a film's globality level as it falls within the spectrum created by the purely centric film and the purely global film. The framework consists of two sections: a) a separate spectrum for evaluating the significance of national and cultural references, and b) a scale for evaluating spectacle.

The Transparency and the Opacity

For a film to yield equal levels of understanding (or be purely global), it must be void of all references that act as obstacles to understanding. A national/cultural reference that allows equal levels of comprehension and interpretation between individuals of variegated identities is called a *transparency* (Olson, 1999). The transparency is unique because it allows individuals to project proportionate elements of their own national/cultural identities onto it, resulting in diverse readings of the same reference at equal levels of understanding.

To clarify his theory, Olson presents the analogy of an ellipsis. An ellipsis is an entity with an element left out of it (Pearsall, 2002). For our purposes, the "entity" is a generic national/cultural *reference* that is present in many (if not all) cultures/nationalities (for example an infant initiation ritual). The "element" that is left out of the generic reference is a distinctive national/cultural *component* (for example, specifics of a baptism).

This analogy is incomplete because it implies that the generic reference is left empty. In actuality, the component isn't missing, it is interchangeable. Equal levels of understanding result because individuals recognize the generic reference and then create diverse but balanced inferences by interchanging their own national/cultural conceptions of the component.

A fabricated infant initiation ritual performed in a children's cartoon is an apt example. The generic reference would be the infant initiation ritual, while the interchangeable component would be the fabricated national/cultural specifics. Individuals from any group would equally comprehend the ritual and then more moderately (but equally) interpret the transparent component by inferring how the fabricated religious elements are similar to those they are familiar with. The result would be diverse, but equal levels of understanding of the transparency.

For the purely centric film to create the dichotomy of understanding described earlier, its references must all be opaque. An *opacity* is a national/cultural reference that can be comprehended, but whose national/cultural component is not interchangeable. In the rabbi/minister example, the initiation ritual was the reference, and the non-interchangeable component was the Baptist element to that ritual. The opacity is an obstacle to understanding and is the polar opposite of the transparency.

Evaluating the Significance of National and Cultural Components

The transparency and the opacity are nominal extremes. An additional theory is required that evaluates the level of interchangeability of the national/cultural component within a reference. Depending upon interchangeability levels, different references can be placed in various positions on the spectrum created by the transparency and the opacity. Once all of a film's references are evaluated, the film itself can then be given a level of globality within the spectrum created by the purely global film and the purely centric film.

Adorno (1976) presents a theory entitled, *pseudo-individualism* – positing that superficial additions are often added to copies of an entity to create the appearance of a new entity. The superficial additions do not change or hinder the original purpose, meaning or function maintained by the copied entity; however, the additions cause some observers to believe that the copy is all-together different from the original.

Gendron (1986) posits an analogy. In the 1950s, the mechanical make-up of the Cadillac was exactly the same each year. Parts that contributed to the car running (its primary function) never changed. In 1956 the Cadillac Eldorado was sold with an additional "tail fin." This superficial addition caused people to believe that the Eldorado was superior. In actuality, the car was exactly the same, the fin merely created the illusion of difference. The relevance of this example is to clarify the importance of recognizing the primary purpose of an entity first, in order to evaluate certain elements based upon their level of significance.

The same consideration is used to examine the significance (or interchangeability) of national/cultural components within national/cultural references. To evaluate the significance of a component, change its culture/nationality, and imagine the film continuing with this hypothetical modification. Based upon the level of difficulty this change creates for the film to convey its primary purpose, the level of significance of the original component is determined. Once various levels of significance have been determined for different components, each one can be placed on a different part of the spectrum between the transparency and the opacity.

To clarify this test, two examples are presented. The film *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) presents a historical interpretation of the Jewish people as they struggle to maintain their society in repressive Russia. By changing the religion of the main characters, the entire historical accuracy of the story is altered, proving that the religious components are strongly significant. The film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) on the other hand, is a comedic presentation of a Greek family as they enthusiastically ready their daughter for her wedding (a reference). If the nationality of the family was changed to Indian, the film would still be a comedy, and the story wouldn't be entirely ruined. Thus, the religious components in this film are less significant than those in Fiddler on the Roof.

This section of the theoretical framework for evaluating globality will be assigned a corresponding numerical rating system in the method section – allowing for the quantification of significance levels for national/cultural components within different references that are major elements of films.

Evaluating Spectacle

The second section of the theoretical framework focuses on the evaluation of spectacle. Spectacle refers to entertainment value, (sex, violence, music, dance numbers and even cartoons) elements that capitalize on the innate human desire "to be tranquilized and coddled" (Dixon, 1998, p. 5). Adding this element to a film is arguably like injecting pure globality. As noted by Wasser (1995), "Michael Medved and the media scholar; George Gerbner, have linked the rise in irresponsible depictions of violence in films to the need to service a global audience with easy-to-understand action movies." (p. 435) Spectacle is extremely transparent, as it satisfies (arguably) universal human desires; thus, any addition of spectacle raises globality levels. Spectacle will be assigned a corresponding numerical rating system in the method section.

Method

As each film was watched, a standardized coding sheet was used. Film title, year of release and primary purpose were coded. This purpose included genre (historical, epic, social commentary, comedy, drama, etc.) and message (historical interpretation, political statement, "Hollywood ending", etc.) of the film.

All national/cultural references were coded; organized using 4 variables.

Variable 1: Setting. The location where the majority of the film took place. This included country, city and state/province where applicable.

Variable 2: Main characters. The primary protagonist, antagonist and any other characters essential to the conveyance of the primary purpose. The actual or assumed nationality/culture of each character (including accent) was also coded.

Variable 3: Cultural elements. Elements listed by Muensterberger (1969) as common throughout variegated cultures. Included were: ceremonies (weddings, funerals, initiations, etc.), traditions (food, dance, entertainment, art, etc.), viewpoints (social/cultural) and relationships (kinship, other).

Variable 4: Background information. Any information assumed to be understood by the viewer. This included historical references, celebrity jokes, contemporary news, etc.

Assigning Scores

The 4 variables were each allowed a maximum score of 20. Variable scores were allocated by concurrently evaluating the significance of the national/cultural component(s) of the numerous national/cultural references organized within each variable. For example, if a film's Variable 3 (cultural elements) contained the following references: 1 Greek wedding ceremony and 1 traditional Greek dance routine, the significance of the "Greek" component for the two references would be assigned a score out of 20.

The scores for the reference-components were evaluated by combining the theoretical framework established earlier with the following numerical scoring system.

A component that was completely significant to the primary purpose (an opacity), received a score of "0". A component that was completely insignificant (a transparency) received a score of "20". Between the two extremes, scores increased by increments of 2. Scores below "10" were assigned for varied levels of significance, from strongly significant ("2") to barely significant ("8"). Scores above "10" were assigned for varied levels of insignificance, from strongly interchangeable ("18") to barely interchangeable ("12"). A score of "10" signified that the component was as significant as it was insignificant[2].

The scoring process for Variable 1 (the evaluation of setting) in the two films *Cleopatra* (1963) and *Liar, Liar* (1997) will help clarify the scoring system. Components were always initially scored as "10" before their significance was considered (allowing for the initial choice between greater significance or insignificance). The primary purpose of the film *Cleopatra*, was: a) to present a historical interpretation of Queen Cleopatra of Egypt in her attempt to save her country from the Roman Empire, and b) to entertain through romantic drama. The component was ancient Rome and Egypt. The significance was evaluated by changing the setting to the United States. This change completely distorted the historical accuracy of the film, supporting the notion that the original setting was quite significant; thus, scoring moved to the significant side of the scale (between "0" and "8"). A more focused evaluation concluded that changing the setting not only altered the historical accuracy, but clearly hindered the primary purpose of the film. The component was viewed as "strongly significant"; the variable received a score of "2".

Liar, Liar a) depicted the troubles of a money-grubbing, dishonest lawyer as he learned the importance of honesty, and b) used slap-stick comedy to entertain. The component for the setting variable was a major American city. After the setting was changed to a major city in India, the effect upon the primary purpose was regarded as minimal, moving towards the insignificant range (from "12" to "20"). Upon further evaluation, the lawyer stereotype was viewed partially as an American stereotype, resulting in the component being viewed as "moderately transparent", giving the variable a score of "14". Using this system, scores were assigned to all 4 variables in all films coded.

The second section of the quantitative system included one additional variable.

Variable 5: Spectacle. The level of entertainment value present in the film. This included: violence, sex, car chases, dance numbers, songs, cartoons, etc.

Spectacle was rated on a numeric scale out of 40. Increments increased by 5, with "0" representing absence of spectacle, "20" representing moderate levels of spectacle and "40" representing excessive spectacle[3]. Using this system, a spectacle rating was assigned to each film coded.

Globality Index

The 4 national/cultural reference variables (each out of 20) plus the 1 spectacle variable (out of 40) were combined into an aggregate ratio-level total out of 120.

Cronbach's alpha was applied for the five variables comprising the globality index; the result was .81. This was satisfactory, yielding the conclusion that the variables were dimensions of the same concept.

The Quantitative Study

A content analysis in the form of a longitudinal study was conducted that measured levels of globality in a sample of Hollywood films. Levels of globality were measured using the quantitative system formulated earlier. A subsequent test of inter-coder reliability aided in the verification of the system's competency.

Sample

The sample consisted of 100 films; 10 from every five-year-period between 1951 and 2000 (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). All films chosen were produced by Hollywood production companies. To increase validity, in each period, the top ten grossing films in the domestic market (USA and Canada) were chosen based upon total box-office sales. This ranking was obtained from the web-site www.IMDB.com (Internet Movie Database). All figures presented on this site were tabulated through access to copyrighted figures from ACNielsen EDI ©2002.

Due to a web-site restriction, the 10 films for each five-year-period between 1951 and 1970 were chosen based upon their ranking in Steinberg (1980). These figures were tabulated according to total rental fees reported in *Variety*. Rental fees for a film (in this context) are not video-rental earnings, nor are they box-office grosses; rather, they are the total amount paid by theaters to distributors for exhibition rights. Films chosen by this method were likely the same films that would have been chosen based upon total box-office grosses since rental fees reflect demand (Steinberg, 1980).

Inter-Coder Reliability

Two coders viewed 4 films to test the reliability of each of the 5 globality variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient ranged from .32 to .99. The size of the pretest sample did restrain the reliability; however, as the system is clarified for future, more larger samples, reliability will be corrected.

Results

The 100 films coded were organized into ten sections by year of theatrical release[4]. The ten films in each section were ranked in ascending order based upon their aggregate, ratio-level score out of 120 (see Table 5 for the 1951-1955 range.)

Frequencies

Each film received four scores out of 20, one for each of the national/cultural reference variables. An analysis of frequency indicated that moderate scores were chosen most often. The scores showing the highest frequencies were "6" chosen 64 times and "14" chosen 60 times. The extreme scores were chosen the least often. "0" and "18" were chosen only 9 times and "20" received the lowest frequency of 5. Meaning, that strongly transparent or strongly opaque components were uncommon. This data supports the claim made in the theoretical framework, that the purely global film and the purely centric film are rarities.

Each film also received one score out of 40 for the spectacle variable. Frequency analysis indicated that most films had entertainment value as a major component. The two scores with the highest frequency were "30" and "20" each chosen 20 times; "35" and "25" were also chosen quite frequently (respectively, 13 and 14). In addition, extreme scores were also chosen the least often; "0" was chosen 1 time and "40" was chosen 3 times, indicating that although spectacle ratings were high, they were not consistently excessive (arguably) or absent. The lack of films without spectacle posits that Hollywood films are predominantly entertainment-oriented.

Only one spectacle rating higher than "30" was given between 1951 and 1970 (*Goldfinger* (1964) received a "35"). The remaining 15 ratings higher than "30" were given between 1971 and 2000, speaking to the issue of increased sex and violence present in films more recently.

Mean Analysis for Variables

Kruskal-Wallis testing indicated that as time progressed over the 50-year-period, 3 of the 4 national/cultural reference variables showed increases in globality levels that were statistically significant[5]. The three variables (setting, main characters and cultural elements) all had fluctuations in their means across the 10 ranges; however, overall there was an increase in globality levels (see Figure 1).

The fifth variable (spectacle) was also proven to have progressing levels of globality across the year ranges (see Figure 1). This variable was proven statistically significant as well[6].

Mean Analysis for Aggregate Score

Means for the aggregate score (120) were calculated for each of the 10 five-year-periods (see Table 6). The five periods from 1951 to 1975 all reported means under 60. Indicating that globality levels for this period were moderate. The period that reported the lowest mean was the 1951-1955 range (M = 43.1, SD = 14.6), followed closely by the 1956-1960 range (M = 44.9, SD = 17.1). Indicating that earlier periods showed lower levels of globality.

An interesting note, after means for the periods 1961-1965 and 1966-1970 climbed close to 60, the figure dropped significantly in the 1971-1975 period (M = 49.1, SD = 19.1). This indicates that during the 1971-1975 period, films showed similar levels of opacity to the films from the 1950s. This would assume that the national/cultural components in films such as *The Godfather* (1972) and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) were just as significant to the purposes of their films as were the components in *White Christmas* (1954) and *The Robe* (1953).

The remaining five ranges from 1976 to 2000 all reported means above 60. The ranges that reported the highest means of all 10 periods were the two most recent; 1991-1995 (M = 75.2, SD = 17.3) and 1996 to 2000 (M = 80.4, SD = 13.7). This indicates that more recent films tend to have higher levels of globality (see Figure 2).

Kruskal-Wallis testing proved that globality levels did increase for the aggregate scores over the 50-year-period. These scores were proven statistically significant[7].

A final interesting note, mean globality levels were the highest in the 1991-1995 and the 1996-2000 periods (respectively, 75.2 and 80.4); however, there were films in each decade examined that scored in the mid-70s or higher. Mean globality levels were the lowest in the 1951-1955 and the 1956-1960 periods (respectively, 43.1 and 44.9); however, there were films in every decade that scored in the mid-50s or lower. This indicates, that although globality levels steadily increased over time, in each period there were films with high levels of globality and films with low levels of globality.

Discussion

This study had two purposes. First, to develop a quantitative system for evaluating the level of globality in film. A competent system was developed, producing significant results for three of the four national/cultural reference variables and the spectacle variable. The system displayed potential for future use as moderate reliability was displayed by the inter-coder test.

The second purpose of this study was to assess globality levels in monetarily successful Hollywood films over a 50-year-period. Other than a slight fluctuation during the mid-1970s, globality levels displayed a steady increase over time. Increases were evident in national/cultural references and in spectacle. In addition, the aggregate scores and the resulting means from each five-year-period also showed increases in globality over time.

These increases in the globality of film content may represent a conscious change in the audience-targeting strategies of Hollywood film-makers. Per capita, no longer are the members of the domestic audience more important than the members of audiences worldwide (Wasser, 1995). Rising production costs may also play a role in this change; Wasser states, "Sam Kitt, a current Universal executive, confirms that all the major studios consider the global audience, before launching a more expensive than average movie ($27 million - and up)" (p. 433). With international audiences burgeoning and production costs rising, it seems apt to assume that profit-driven producers will be less inclined to support risky centric films targeted domestically, when increasingly global films are more profitable.

Mean globality levels were the highest in the 1991-1995 and the 1996-2000 periods and the lowest in the 1951-1955 and the 1956-1960 periods. There was however, at least one film in each decade whose score was close to the highest mean (80.4) and another film whose score was close to the lowest mean (43.1). This indicates that films with high levels of globality were being made as early as the 1950s, and films with low levels of globality continue to be made today. It is arguable that in the 1950s, filmmakers created increasingly global films involuntarily, as domestic audiences accounted for the majority of ticket sales (Sklar, 1975). This notion speaks to the inherent universal qualities of the film text, if works such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) can involuntarily display globality levels similar to contemporary films such as *Cast Away* (2000).

The primary strength of this study was the development of a quantitative system. The predominance of qualitative research in the area of globalization and popular culture (film especially) has left the origins and progressive path of this area unclear. The quantitative system developed here has already conducted a small analysis of the relationship between globalization and Hollywood films, and in the future, can be used to analyze larger and wider-ranging samples that will allow more detailed and accurate conclusions.

Limitations

Time was the greatest hindrance to this study. Coding only 100 films yielded moderate findings as the sample was restricted to monetarily successful films from the last 50 years. More time would have hopefully led to increased external validity.

All 100 films were coded by one person, with only 4 films being tested for reliability. The time factor contributed to this limitation; however, in the future, as the reliability-testing process grows longer, a greater understanding of a more focused system will likely result.

Lastly, due to the limited access to web-site information, films from the years 1950 to 1971 were chosen based upon their rankings in Steinberg (1980). This may have reduced the validity of the sampling strategy.

Future Research

The intention is to code more films. As less successful films from different decades are coded, more accurate conclusions regarding the possible shift in strategy can be drawn. Proof of the existence of a larger number of box-office flops with high levels of globality in recent years, may support the arguments that, a) increased globality is a contemporary strategy attempted to try and ensure profits, and b) that increased globality does not always correlate with monetary success internationally.

Another intention is to involve a diverse array of coders in the process. By focusing on the variegated boundaries of individuals, their ability to recognize certain transparencies and their inability to make inferences about opacities, stronger conclusions can be drawn in regards to the link between globality and equal levels of understanding.

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Table 1

Ten Highest All-Time Grossing Films Domestically Compared With International Grosses

Film	Year Released	Domestic Gross (millions)	International Gross (millions)	International minus (-) domestic (millions)
Titanic	1997	$601	$1,235	+ $634
Star Wars	1977	$461	$337	- $124
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial	1982	$435	$322	- $113
Star Wars: Episode I – Phantom Menace	1999	$431	$491	+ $60
Spider-Man	2002	$404	$403	- $1
Jurassic Park	1993	$357	$563	+ $206
The Lord of the Rings: Two Towers	2002	$334	$539	+ $205
Forrest Gump	1994	$329	$350	+ $21
The Lion King	1994	$327	$455	+ $128
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	2001	$318	$651	+ $333

Note. "+" Means that the film made more money outside of the domestic market. All grosses were rounded to the closest million. Data was retrieved from www.imdb.com (Internet Movie Database).

Table 2

Film List A: 1951-1970

Year Range	Film	Year Range	Film
1951-1955	The Robe	1961-1965	Cleopatra
1951-1955	A Streetcar Named Desire	1961-1965	My Fair Lady
1951-1955	From Here to Eternity	1961-1965	Spartacus
1951-1955	How to Marry a Millionaire	1961-1965	The Sound of Music
1951-1955	White Christmas	1961-1965	The Music Man
1951-1955	Shane	1961-1965	West Side Story
1951-1955	Ivanhoe	1961-1965	The Guns of Navarone
1951-1955	Rear Window	1961-1965	Mary Poppins
1951-1955	The Caine Mutiny	1961-1965	Goldfinger
1951-1955	20,000 Leagues Under the Sea	1961-1965	It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World
1956-1960	The Ten Commandments	1966-1970	Guess Who's Coming to Dinner
1956-1960	Ben Hur	1966-1970	Valley of the Dolls
1956-1960	Sayonara	1966-1970	Patton
1956-1960	Auntie Mame	1966-1970	MASH
1956-1960	Bridge Over the River Kwai	1966-1970	The Graduate
1956-1960	Around the World in 80 Days	1966-1970	Airport
1956-1960	Guys and Dolls	1966-1970	The Odd Couple
1956-1960	Some Like it Hot	1966-1970	The Dirty Dozen
1956-1960	The King and I	1966-1970	The Love Bug
1956-1960	Psycho	1966-1970	Thunderball

Note. First 40 of 100 films listed here. Refer to Tables 3 and 4 for the remaining 60.

Table 3

Film List B: 1971-1990

Year Range	Film	Year Range	Film
1971-1975	The Godfather	1981-1985	Tootsie
1971-1975	American Graffiti	1981-1985	Back to the Future
1971-1975	Love Story	1981-1985	Rambo II
1971-1975	The Exorcist	1981-1985	Beverly Hills Cop
1971-1975	Blazing Saddles	1981-1985	Raiders of the Lost Ark
1971-1975	The Rocky Horror Picture Show	1981-1985	Indiana Jones & the Temple of Doom
1971-1975	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	1981-1985	Gremlins
1971-1975	The Sting	1981-1985	E.T.
1971-1975	Jaws	1981-1985	Ghostbusters
1971-1975	The Poseidon Adventure	1981-1985	Return of the Jedi
1976-1980	Rocky	1986-1990	Dances With Wolves
1976-1980	Saturday Night Fever	1986-1990	Pretty Woman
1976-1980	Animal House	1986-1990	Rain Man
1976-1980	Grease	1986-1990	3 Men and a Baby
1976-1980	Smokey and the Bandit	1986-1990	Ghost
1976-1980	Superman	1986-1990	Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade
1976-1980	Close Encounters of the Third Kind	1986-1990	Top Gun
1976-1980	Jaws 2	1986-1990	Home Alone
1976-1980	Star Wars	1986-1990	Crocodile Dundee
1976-1980	The Empire Strikes Back	1986-1990	Batman

Note. Second 40 of 100 films listed here. Refer to tables 2 and 4 for the remaining 60.

Table 4

Film List C: 1991-2000

Year Range	Film	Year Range	Film
1991-1995	Forrest Gump	1996-2000	The Sixth Sense
1991-1995	Mrs. Doubtfire	1996-2000	Titanic
1991-1995	Alladin	1996-2000	Cast Away
1991-1995	Liar, Liar	1996-2000	Toy Story 2
1991-1995	The Fugitive	1996-2000	Independence Day
1991-1995	Terminator 2	1996-2000	Twister
1991-1995	Toy Story	1996-2000	How the Grinch Stole Christmas
1991-1995	The Lion King	1996-2000	Men in Black
1991-1995	Jurassic Park	1996-2000	Jurassic Park 2
1991-1995	Batman Forever	1996-2000	Star Wars: Episode I

Note. Last 20 of 100 films listed here. Refer to tables 2 and 3 for the first 80.

Table 5

1951-1955 Year Range Film Scores

Film	Year Range	Setting (20)	Main Chars. (20)	Cultural (20)	Background (20)	Spectacle (40)	Total (120)
The Robe	1951-55	0	6	6	0	10	22
A Streetcar Named Desire	1951-55	6	2	10	8	5	31
From Here to Eternity	1951-55	8	4	6	4	15	37
How to Marry a Millionaire	1951-55	10	6	8	10	5	39
White Christmas	1951-55	10	6	4	6	15	41
Shane	1951-55	2	2	4	8	25	41
Ivanhoe	1951-55	4	6	8	4	20	42
Rear Window	1951-55	8	8	4	14	10	44
The Caine Mutiny	1951-55	12	14	8	10	15	59
20,000 Leagues Under the Sea	1951-55	16	12	14	8	25	75

Note. All 10 films coded from 1951-1955 period are shown here. They are sorted in ascending order based upon their total score.

Table 6

Mean Comparison of Aggregate Scores (120) For Each Five-Year-Period

Number	Year Range	N	Mean
1	1951-1955	10	43.1
2	1956-1960	10	44.9
3	1961-1965	10	57.7
4	1966-1970	10	53.7
5	1971-1975	10	49.1
6	1976-1980	10	68.3
7	1981-1985	10	72.4
8	1986-1990	10	64.1
9	1991-1995	10	75.2
10	1996-2000	10	80.4

Note. Each mean was calculated by taking the sum of the 10 total scores for the corresponding five-year-period and then dividing each sum by 10.

Figure 1

Mean Ranks For Setting, Main Character, Cultural Elements and Spectacle Variables

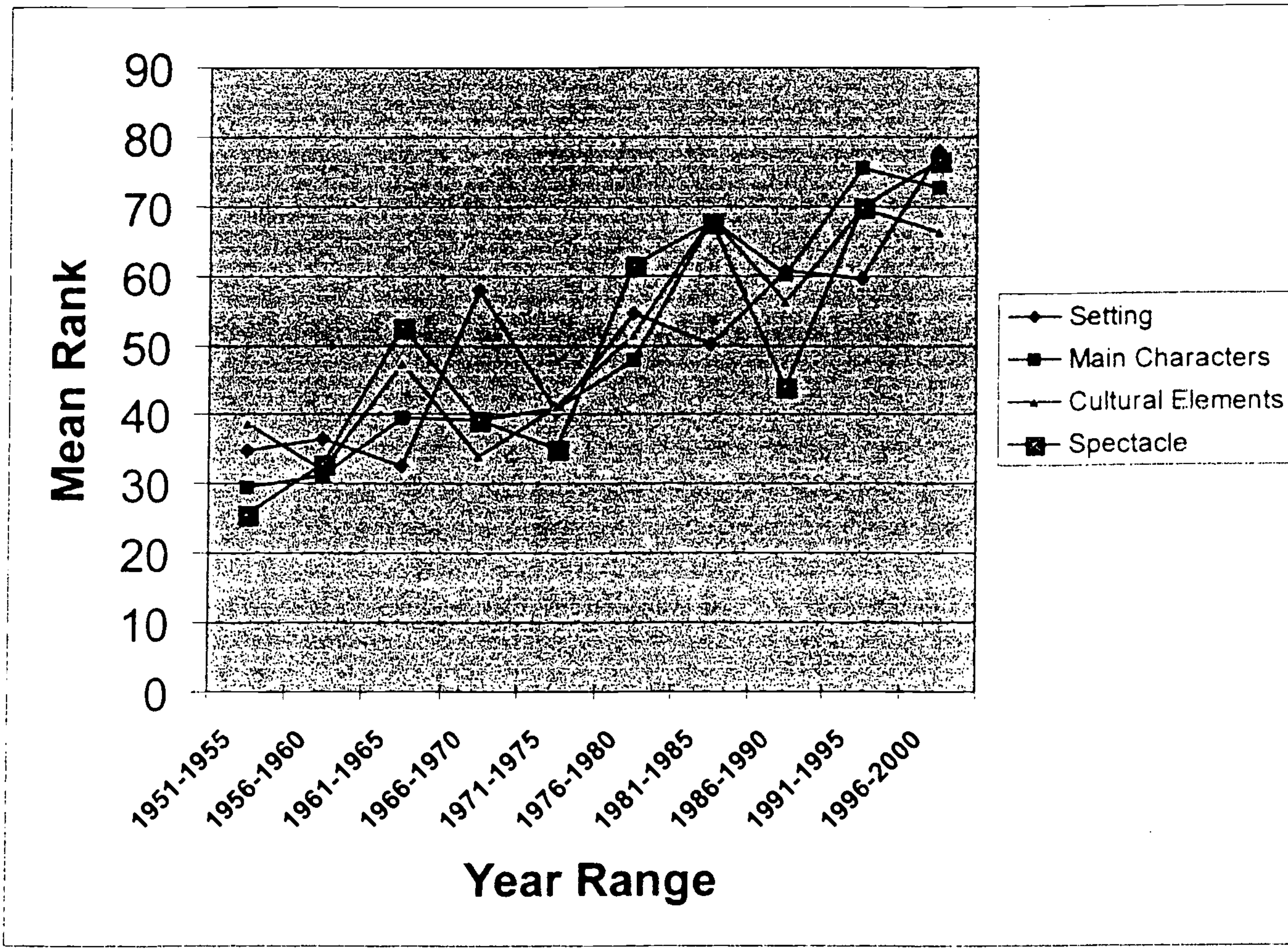
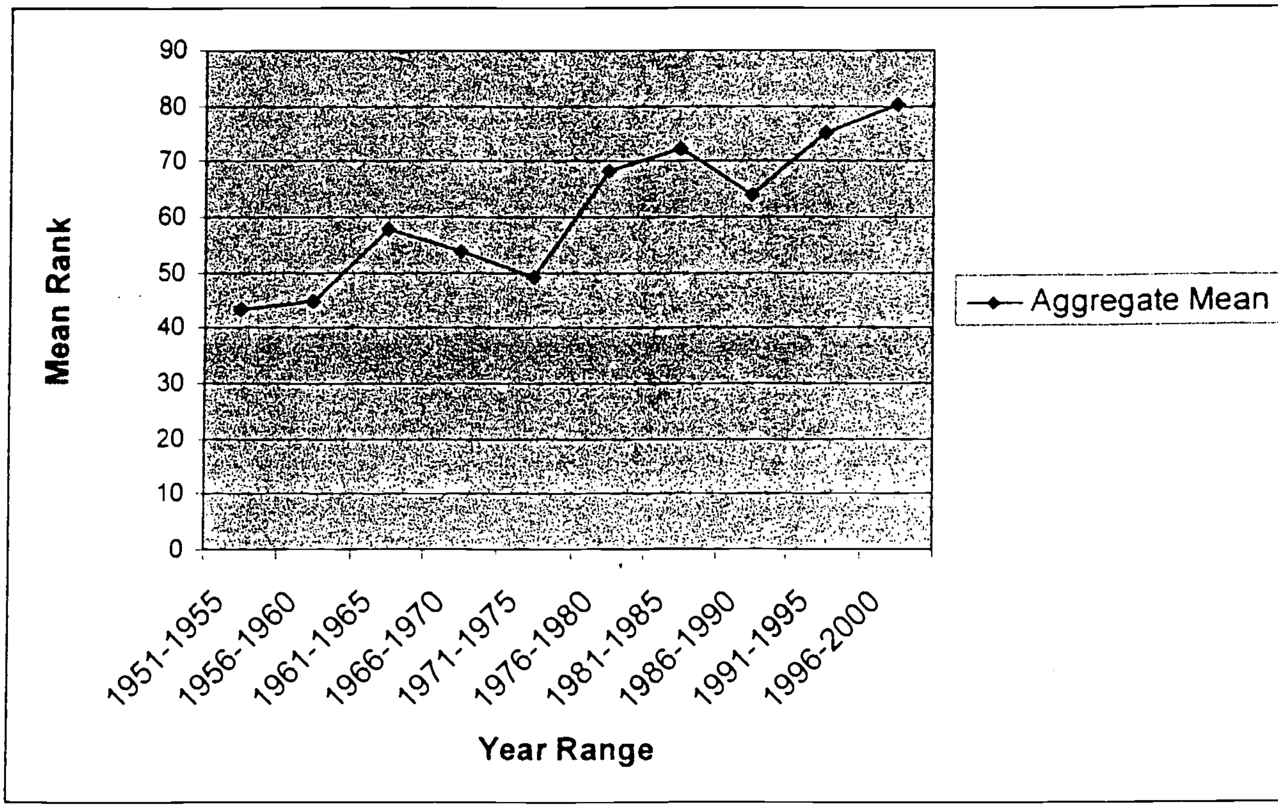


Figure 2

Aggregate Mean (120) For Each of the Five-Year Periods



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Notes

[1] Retrieved from www.imdb.com (Internet Movie Database). IMDB statistics from AC NIELSON EDI.

[2] The scoring range for the four national/cultural reference variables was defined as follows: 0 = purely significant (opaque), 2 = strongly significant, 4 = moderately significant, 6 = slightly significant, 8 = barely significant/minutely interchangeable, 10 = equally significant as insignificant, 12 = barely interchangeable/minutely significant, 14 = slightly interchangeable, 16 = moderately interchangeable, 18 = strongly interchangeable, 20 = purely interchangeable (transparent).

[3] The scoring range for the spectacle variable was defined as follows: 0 = no spectacle, 5 = minute spectacle, 10 = slight spectacle, 15 = almost moderate spectacle, 20 = moderate spectacle, 25 = above-average spectacle, 30 = heavy spectacle, 35 = very heavy spectacle, 40 = extreme spectacle.

[4] The ten five-year-periods were: 1951-1955, 1956-1960, 1961-1965, 1966-1970, 1971-1975, 1976-1980, 1981-1985, 1986-1990, 1991-1995, 1996-2000.

[5] Setting: $p<.01$, Main Characters: $p<.00$ and Cultural Elements: $p<.01$.

[6] Spectacle: $p<.00$.

[7] Aggregate score: $p<.00$.

Mass Communication & Society Division
Session: Political Communication and Society

Mapping deviance: The role of news content in communicating legitimacy

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Mapping deviance:
The role of news content in communicating legitimacy

The news media play a role in the socialization of their audience by mapping a common culture. The news media establish political and cultural orthodoxy by outlining the contours of the mainstream (Carey, 1988; Lull, 1995) and by marginalizing those entities perceived as deviant (Shoemaker, 1984). This raises the question of how does this definition of the mainstream and the deviant occur, i.e., how do news stories mark organizations and groups as deviant? Hall (1989) postulates that boundaries between the mainstream and the marginal are maintained, at least in part, through the news media's power to name, i.e., through the media's ability to label some behaviors or entities as mainstream and some as deviant. Hall sees this as an inherently ideological act. "Ideologies (are) the underlying interpretative frameworks that (generate) meanings through the operation of different codes or sign systems" (Hall, 1989, p. 310).

This paper surveys newspaper journalists to explore journalists' conceptions of the mainstream and marginal. Do journalists see some political, entertainment, or business organizations as more or less deviant than others? This study also involves a content analysis of news stories to explore whether the media's power to name is made manifest in marking the mainstream. Do news stories portray some organizations as more or less legitimate than others? If Hall is correct, then the more journalists see an entity as deviant, the less legitimate that organization will appear in news stories. Thus, this paper empirically examines one relationship—the relationship between journalists' perceptions of deviance and their communication of legitimacy. It does not test the entirety of Hall's theory of ideological dissemination. For example, it does not address influences on journalists' perceptions or how journalists acquire their ideological maps, nor does it address the influence of news content on social thought or behavior (see McLeod, 1995). Nevertheless, this study locates one important way in which legitimacy, and subsequently ideology, is disseminated.

Why is this important? Traditional democratic theory postulates a news media that advances public discourse through a free exchange in a marketplace of ideas. The Jeffersonian ideal holds that when truth and falsehood are allowed to battle in the marketplace of ideas, the truth will rise to the top—the audience will eventually embrace the truth (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963; Nerone, 1995). The Jeffersonian ideal notably dispenses with the office of censor. However, in practice, many gatekeepers have the ability to censor the news (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) by discriminating between truth and falsehood as they see it and giving advantage to their version of the truth. This discrimination divides the orthodox from the unorthodox, the legitimate from the deviant.

Distinguishing between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy or between legitimate and deviant is an essential journalistic, as well as epistemological, act. News judgment requires that journalists distinguish between the usual and the unusual, between the mainstream and the deviant (Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1987; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987). Thus, journalists can be expected to discriminate between the mainstream and the deviant as a matter of journalistic obligation—the news media perform a surveillance role (Lasswell, 1948), warning the community of threats to stability. But what is identified as a threat and what is not derives from a deeply ideological judgment. This study is also important because it maps a crucial part of the process whereby ideology is potentially disseminated. It attempts to identify "ideological structures" that "distort, falsify, or bias our thinking" (Hall, 1989, p. 308).

Journalists no doubt chafe at notions that they distort or bias news content, let alone that they function as ideologues influencing the public mind. But the goal here is not to chastise journalists for being biased, so much as it is to question the American liberal assumption that ideology can be muted by the routines of journalistic objectivity. If ideology guides and shapes the formation of all knowledge as many post-modernists argue (Kirkham, 1997), then journalists cannot be faulted for failing to try hard enough to be objective. However, a continued commitment to objectivity as a professional routine can be called into question.

THEORY

The theoretical starting point of this study is Hall's assumption that the news media's power to name plays a role in differentiating the legitimate from the illegitimate. Hall states that media content can be seen as "securing consent to social order, and the exercise of social and symbolic control by powerful or dominant groups over subordinate, marginal, or so-called deviant social groups" (1989, p. 310). However, Hall does not specify the mechanisms whereby the news media map legitimacy other than to identify the media's power to name. The power to name could be conceptualized in any number of ways. For example, journalists might acknowledge that newspapers serve an ideological function, but would likely identify any labeling of legitimacy as the sole prerogative of columnists and editorial writers.

Scholars have identified at least two paths whereby news content marginalizes deviant groups: 1) through phrases and assertions attributed to sources and 2) through unattributed phrases and assertions, i.e., the journalists' own literary voices (Shoemaker, 1983). The second path, of course, more directly challenges journalistic claims of objectivity—journalists can define the first path as a byproduct of objectively reflecting reality. Some scholars entertain the possibility that marginalization can occur by either path; some only explore one path. For example, Daley and James (1988) conclude that journalists are trapped by objectivity so that they can only defer to the ideology of establishment sources to define deviance. They conclude, "By allowing the entrenched establishment to interpret events with little concern for motives and interests, reporters unwittingly contribute to a dangerous ossification and mean-spiritedness in society" (Daley & James, 1988, p. 44).

Other scholars explore both paths. McLeod and Hertog (1992) show how journalists make their own sweeping statements when reporting on social protests and then use authorities and bystanders to further marginalize social protesters. Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1987, 1989) see the news as "an authoritative vision of social order through what sources are cited as saying" (1989, p. 4). Thus, they argue that attributed statements are likely to be a battlefield for legitimacy. "The news media are an important vehicle for making *claims* in the public culture that one's organizational activities are right and just" (italics in the original) (1987, p. 55). But they do not let journalists off the hook. They insist that, "journalists do not merely reflect others' efforts to designate deviance and effect control, but are actively involved themselves as social control agents" (1987, p. 3). Thus, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1987) hypothesize that journalists marginalize deviant entities via both paths.

Shoemaker (1983) performed a content analysis of both paths, i.e., marginalization of deviant groups via attributed and unattributed sources. She found that, "contrary to what one would expect in objective reporting, the *unattributed* evaluation words and phrases applied to deviant political groups tended to portray the groups in a negative light, while the attributed information was carefully neutral" (italics in the original) (1983, p. 29). Based on Ericson, Baranek, and Chan's (1987) argument and Shoemaker's (1983) research, we would expect that the news media are able to marginalize groups either in the journalists' own voices or in the quotes attributed to others. The research here, while recognizing potential differences in how marginalization may appear in print, will nevertheless treat all news content on an equal footing. Distinctions between attributed and unattributed sources may speak to how actively journalists are engaged in mapping legitimacy, but there is little evidence that the distinction is important to the ultimate reader of the legitimacy map—the news audience.

Shoemaker (1984) provides ample support for media's role in marginalizing deviant groups. Her study of eleven political groups found that the more deviant news editors perceived a group to be, the less favorable "newspaper articles about the group were, and the less legal (or normative) and viable the group was portrayed" (Shoemaker, 1984, pp. 70-71). A prior set of experiments by Shoemaker (1982) came to similar conclusions about deviant political groups. Given the nature of political groups and their potential threat to the public order, one could argue that journalists will be more likely to operate in an ideological way, i.e., their guard is up against deviance given the social stakes.

If this is true, journalists will be less likely to see business or entertainment organizations than political organizations as deviant. However, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1987) hypothesize that this is not the case. They expect to find marginalization "in all aspects and all spheres of organizational life" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 4). However, there is less empirical research to bear out this prediction than there is research on political groups.

This paper does not specifically take up deviance as a predictor of newsworthiness. There is now a small library of research on this topic (Chang, Shoemaker & Brendlinger, 1987; Shoemaker, Chang & Brendlinger, 1987; Shoemaker, 1987; Weimann & Brosius, 1991; Shoemaker, Danielian & Brendlinger, 1991; Prabu, 1996; Breen, 1997; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997). However, this vein of research demonstrates the close connection between the ideological act that is identifying the marginal and a reliance on deviance for the very definition of news. The scholarship underscores the central role that the news media play in mapping orthodoxy and deviance and therein reinforcing the social order.

Hypothesis and Definitions

This study looks for empirical evidence of the media's ideological task of mapping the boundaries between the mainstream and the deviant. The research hypothesis is:

H1: The more deviant that journalists rate certain political, entertainment and business organizations, the less legitimate those organizations will appear in news content.

> H1a: The more statistically deviant that journalists rate certain political, entertainment and business organizations, the less legitimate those organizations will appear in news content.
>
> H1b: The more potential for social change deviance that journalists rate certain political, entertainment and business organizations, the less legitimate those organizations will appear in news content.
>
> H1c: The more normatively deviant that journalists rate certain political, entertainment and business organizations, the less legitimate those organizations will appear in news content.

The independent variable is how deviant journalists rate certain individuals, organizations, and states. The dependent variable is the portrayal of the relative legitimacy of the same political, entertainment and business organizations in news content.

Ericson, Baranek, and Chan define deviance as "the behavior of a thing or person that strays from the normal" (1987, p. 4). However, this still leaves a number of ambiguities. For example, the sports apparel company Nike is loathed by some for its international labor practices; but we could resign ourselves to the fact that Nike's behavior has become fairly normal (i.e., has become common business practice) or we might not question its legitimacy (i.e., Nike's right to do business). Thus, we need to specify what type or types of deviance we are looking for. In one context, Shoemaker (1987) identifies five definitions of deviance: statistical, pathological, normative, labeling, and self-conception deviance. Pritchard and Hughes (1997) find four types of deviance: normative, statistical, status, and cultural. In another context, Shoemaker (1987) identifies three types of deviance: statistical, social change, and normative. This study takes up these last three types of deviance.

Shoemaker refers to statistical deviance as "(a)nything which differs too much from the average" (1987, p. 153). Statistics are a means of establishing an average and identifying observations that are significantly different than the average. Thus, statistical deviance refers to behaviors that are significantly different than average behaviors. In other words, the rare and the unusual are statistically deviant.

Potential for social change deviance refers to a potential threat to the status quo (Shoemaker, 1987). If an organization's behaviors threaten the status quo or are seen as dangerous to the normal ways of doing things, the organization would demonstrate potential for social change deviance. Likewise, satisfaction with the normal way of doing things demonstrates an absence of social change deviance.

Normative deviance is the degree to which a political, entertainment, or business organization is seen as breaking a law or ethical norm. According to Shoemaker, a "normative approach to deviance emphasizes behaviors that violate social norms. Behavior is de facto deviant when compared to some norm external to the individual" (1987, p. 154). Normative deviance is inevitably "entwined with morality. Morality as a process involves the use of evaluative dualisms (e.g., good-evil, brave-timid, free-enslaved) to assess objects" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 6).

An explication of deviance that treats the concept as more than a categorical variable (i.e., deviant, not deviant) typically attempts to conceptualize gradations of deviance, arriving at an opposite pole of deviance. Various opposites emerge: deviance vs. order (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1991), deviance vs. orthodoxy, and deviance vs. the mainstream (McLeod, 1995). These differences relate to different definitions of deviance. Given that the concern here is with three types of deviance, no one opposite pole is best. For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to visualize the opposite pole as 'not deviant,' as long as it is understood that deviance is a continuous variable.

Legitimacy is a complex, multi-faceted concept. In general, it is a matter of being in keeping with laws, rules, principles, and standards. Various scholars have identified a variety of dimensions of the concept. Dimensions include, abiding by rules or principles, rightfulness, validity, agreement, normalcy, regularity, professionalism, properness, justified, sanctioned, and authorized. This paper adopts the legitimacy statements used by Shoemaker (1982). Shoemaker formulated 16 legitimacy statements that were grouped via a factor analysis into four dimensions of legitimacy—evaluation, legality, viability, and stability. This paper uses the same statements, but includes its own factor analysis and thus does not directly replicate Shoemaker's legitimacy index. The new factor analysis yields three dimensions of legitimacy—agreement, stability, and professionalism.

Agreement taps the extent to which an entity is portrayed as being in accord with others. To be agreeable is to be liked and valued. For an entity to be viewed as legitimate it should be seen as liked and in accord with others. Stability refers to consistency, firmness, and steadiness. Thus, stability connotes an adherence to and perpetuation of the status quo. Professionalism refers to an entity that is reputable or governed by approved standards or practices. An organization or group is seen as legitimate when it rises above amateurism and happenstance and reaches a level of professionalism.

Newspaper journalists are those newspaper employees who directly contribute to news content (this includes reporters, columnists, and editors, but excludes photographers and graphics specialists). News content refers to newspaper articles written in narrative form (this includes the inverted pyramid form but excludes tables, lists, and images). Political organizations are those groups that attempt to play some role in the policy and/or legal sphere or attempt to influence public life. Entertainment organizations are those entities that provide performance for amusement and or enrichment. Business organizations are those entities that offer goods or services in the marketplace. While one could argue that entertainment organizations are a type of business organization, the two are treated separately for the purposes of this study.

METHOD

This study represents an organizational level of analysis. It involves a survey of newspaper journalists to ascertain their assessment of the relative deviance of several political, entertainment, and business organizations. The second part of this paper involves a content analysis of newspapers to assess the legitimacy of those same organizations. Deviance is seen as a predictor of legitimacy.

Four journalists from each major U.S. metropolitan newspaper with a minimum circulation of 50,000 received a survey. These are the newspapers most likely to include news coverage of all the organizations included in the study. Newspapers that meet this requirement are listed in the 2001 directory, *Working Press of the Nation*. The names of journalists from each paper were also taken from this directory. This produces a purposive sample of 472 journalists. The survey mailing resulted in a response rate of 23 percent.

The unit of analysis is 15 different organizations—five political organizations (the Christian Coalition of America, the League of Women Voters, the Green Party of the United States, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Rifle Association), five entertainment organizations (the Jerry Springer Show, Napster, the Sesame Workshop, MTV, and Marilyn Manson), and five business organizations (Nike, Inc., Philip Morris Companies, Enron, Microsoft Corporation, and Kmart). There is no reason any specific organization was chosen for the study. In each case, an effort was made to choose organizations that would potentially vary in deviance and legitimacy ratings.

Each journalist was asked to rate the statistical, social change, and normative deviance of each of the 15 organizations. The operational definition of statistical deviance is responses to the following two statements: "I think X's actions represent mainstream America," and "I think X operates like any other political (or entertainment or business) organization in our country." The operational definition of social change deviance is responses to the two statements: "I believe X is happy with the way things are," and "I believe X has potential to change the status quo in America." The operational definition of normative deviance is responses to the following two statements: "I question the legality of some of X's behaviors," and "I question the morality of some of X's actions." (X represents each of the 15 organizations) Journalists are asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. An average of responses for each type of deviance is calculated, as is a total deviance average. Note that responses were recoded so that in each case, the higher the number, the more the deviance (See Appendix A)

The second part of this study involves a content analysis of newspaper articles about the 15 organizations for an assessment of each organization's legitimacy. A Lexis-Nexis search produced a sampling frame for each of the organizations. The sampling frame runs from March 1, 2001 to February 28, 2002. A random sample of 20 stories was selected for each of the 15 groups. The recording unit is the news content's legitimacy assertions for each organization. The context unit is the paragraph that contains the assertions.

A factor analysis of 16 legitimacy statements produced three indices—one index for each of three dimensions of legitimacy. Agreement legitimacy was derived from an index that averaged responses to four statements: "The news content indicates like for the organization," "The news content expresses agreement with the organization's goals," "The news content express the value of the organization to society," and "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships." The index has a Cronbach's alpha of .85. Stability legitimacy was created from an index that averaged responses to six statements: "News content indicates the organization respects the U.S. political and legal system," "News content indicates the organization has the right to exist," "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships," "News content indicates the sameness of the organization's views over time, i.e., consistency," and "News content indicates the organization's unidirectional views." The stability index has a Cronbach's alpha of .64. Professionalism legitimacy was produced from an index that averaged responses to four statements: "The news content expresses confidence in the organization's judgment," "News content indicates the organization has communication skills," "News content indicates the organization is organized and efficient," and "News content indicates the probability of the organization's existence into the future." The index has a Cronbach's alpha of .63.

Insert Table 1 about here

Every assertion could be recorded under only one of the 16 legitimacy statements. Thus, coders had to choose which of the 16 statements best described the news content. Coders agreed on the appropriate legitimacy statement 93-percent of the time. Coders rated the assertion on a five-point Likert scale, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Coders use instructions based on assertion analysis employed by Shoemaker (1982b). (See Appendix B.) Coding was done by the author and a second coder. Seventeen percent of the coding was done by the second coder. Intercoder reliability, calculated using Scott's pi, was .84.

RESULTS

The theory suggests that journalists will judge different organizations as varying in deviance, i.e., some groups or organizations will be seen as more or less deviant than others. This is not a matter of bias, but one of news judgment. Journalists judge that The Jerry Springer Show is more legally and ethically deviant (3.71) than Sesame Workshop (1.99). Table 2 shows the results of the survey of journalists and shows the variance in three types of deviance for the 15 groups. Among the 15 organizations, the greatest variance is in normative deviance (a difference of 2.63 from the lowest deviance to the highest), while there is less variance in statistical deviance (a difference of 1.47) and social change deviance (a difference of 1.24). This, in and of itself, is not necessarily a notable finding—the range of variance and differences in variance for the three types of deviance can be seen as a function of the groups chosen for the study. In other words, the organizations or groups were not randomly chosen. Thus it is conceivable to include an organization that would have a much higher or lower score in statistical or social change deviance. The important thing is that there is adequate variation.

Of the organizations included in the study, Enron had the highest deviance score (normative deviance of 4.62) and the Sesame Workshop had the lowest deviance score (also normative deviance, a score of 1.99). The table shows organizations could be low in one type of deviance (below 3.00) and high in another kind of deviance (above 3.00). For example, Microsoft is low in statistical (2.57) and social change deviance (2.70) but high in normative deviance (3.48). That said, most of the organizations rate consistently high or low in deviance. The disparity in deviance ratings for an organization shows that the different types of deviance are indeed distinct; however, the more consistency in deviance ratings for organizations demonstrates that the distinctions are likely different dimensions of the concept of deviance. Again, this may be a function of the groups chosen.

Insert Table 2 about here

Just as groups vary according to perceived deviance, so organizations vary in how legitimately they are portrayed in news stories. As Table 3 shows, the highest legitimacy rating was an agreement legitimacy rating of 4.45 for Sesame Workshop. News content shows that Sesame Workshop is portrayed as having worthy goals, as being liked, and having value to society. The lowest legitimacy rating of 2.10 was for the Christian Coalition in professionalism. News content indicates that the Christian Coalition is not portrayed as particularly professional, i.e., is not depicted as organized or having good judgment.

As was the case with deviance, the real concern is that there is variance in the news portrayals on different dimensions of legitimacy among the 15 groups. The greatest variance came in the agreement category, where Sesame Workshop had the highest legitimacy (4.45) and Philip Morris had the lowest legitimacy (2.26), for a variance of 2.19. Professionalism had variance of 1.98 from lowest to highest, and stability a variance of 1.30. Again, the actual variances within the different dimensions of legitimacy are not the central concern. The important thing to note is that there was indeed variance.

Insert Table 3 about here

The primary concern of this research is the relationship in the variance of deviance with the variance in legitimacy. As Table 4 shows hypothesis 1a is not supported. Statistical deviance is not a significant predictor of any of the three types of legitimacy. It appears that the more statistically deviant the organization the less legitimate the organization, but none of correlations achieve statistical significance at the .05 level. Likewise, hypothesis 1b is not supported—none of the correlations between social change deviance and types of legitimacy are statistically significant.

Hypothesis 1c is partially supported. Normative deviance is a statistically significant predictor of stability legitimacy. The Pearson's correlation coefficient of normative deviance is correlated with stability legitimacy at -.68. The higher the group rates in normative deviance, the less legitimately it is portrayed in terms of stability, i.e., the less the organization is depicted in news content as respecting the political and legal system, the less it is portrayed as having a right to exist, and the less consistent its views are. Agreement legitimacy is not statistically significant and professionalism legitimacy is not in the direction of the hypothesis.

Insert Table 4 about here

Agreement legitimacy represents an interesting counter-intuitive situation. For example, Napster rates high in agreement legitimacy, but also high in normative deviance—the opposite of what the hypothesis would predict. Napster may be a unique case—liked for its free music, but regrettably illegal and litigated (at the time of the data gathering) to the brink of nonexistence. The removal of Napster from the data set results in a statistically significant Pearson's correlation of -.64 between normative deviance and agreement legitimacy and a statistically significant correlation of -.55 between statistical deviance and agreement legitimacy.

Insert Table 5 about here

While the exclusion of Napster produces more support for the hypothesis, the deletion ultimately works against the overall thrust of the hypothesis, i.e., it shows that the predictive power of deviance on legitimacy is at least partially dependent on the organization or organizations included in the study. A case can be made that several organizations are unique in terms of deviance and legitimacy and thus the hypothesis is always dependent on the groups chosen. The better goal would be to add more groups to the analysis in the future.

DISCUSSION

This study surveyed newspaper journalists to ascertain their map of the mainstream and the marginal. Journalists were asked to rate 15 different organizations on three types of deviance—statistical deviance, social change deviance, and normative deviance. The study also involved a content analysis of 300 news stories to rate how the news content portrayed those 15 organizations in terms of 16 indicators of legitimacy. The study hypothesized that the more deviant that journalists rate certain organizations, the less legitimate those organizations will appear in news content. The study found only limited support for the hypothesis. Only normative deviance proved to be even a partial predictor of legitimacy. Thus the study fails to completely support the research of Shoemaker (1984).

The study attempted to provide greater clarity to the mechanisms that achieve Hall's (1989) assertion that the news media map the social order. The best that can be said is that the perceived normative deviance of organizations play a limited role in how some forms of legitimacy come to expression in news content. Why would normative deviance be a better predictor of legitimacy than social change or statistical deviance? As Ericson, Baranek, and Chan point out, normative deviance is inevitably "entwined with morality" (1987, p. 6). Ettema and Glasser (1988, 1989) argue that journalism plays an inherently moral function—it casts some characters as moral and others as not, therein mapping a moral universe. They conclude, "the development, selection, and assembly of facts into a story serves the moral task at hand" (Ettema & Glasser, 1988, p. 24). While Ettema and Glasser (1988, 1989) make their case about investigative journalism, the results of this study lend some support to the notion that the morality of the figures in a news story plays some role in the tenor of the story.

One journalist who returned a survey marked a neutral response for every indicator of deviance for all 15 organizations. He or she was likely communicating that journalists are not biased toward any organization, that journalists are professional skeptics suspending judgment about anyone or anything. She or he likely saw the survey leading to a pronouncement about bias. There is no evidence the remaining survey participants were any less committed to objectivity than the 'neutral' journalist. They clearly made judgments about the relative deviance of the organizations that many of them have covered in their newspapers. However, their commitment to objectivity could also appear in this study in how the 15 groups were treated in news content. And in fact, the results of this study show that the routines of journalistic objectivity may successfully mute the connection between the perceived deviance of organizations and how legitimately those organizations appear in news content. The study made no distinction between editorials and the news pages of newspapers—articles were randomly selected. Attention to the distinction between editorials and news could either strengthen or weaken the conclusion that journalistic routines may mute the connection between deviance and legitimacy. And attention to attributed versus unattributed assertions could likewise speak to the connection between deviance and legitimacy.

The most significant difference in this study from the research conducted by Shoemaker (1984) is that the study here selected more than political organizations. Based on Ericson, Baranek, and Chan's argument that the mapping of legitimacy should be apparent in "all aspects and all spheres of organizational life" (1987, p. 4), this study also included entertainment and business organizations. While the number of cases is too low to make valid conclusion, an analysis of variance by type of organization shows that deviance is a better predictor of legitimacy for political organizations than for entertainment or business organizations. Deviance is the worst predictor of legitimacy for entertainment groups—perhaps because deviance is all part of the (successful) act for The Jerry Springer Show and music groups like Marilyn Manson. Ericson, Baranek, and Chan's (1987) argument that all organizations will be treated the same deserves further scrutiny.

Another obvious difference between this study and Shoemaker's research is that nearly twenty years have passed. Perhaps the findings point to a disconnect between deviance and legitimacy at the beginning of the century. It is not so long ago that the most legitimate office in the U.S., the presidency, was held by a man, Bill Clinton, who many saw as legally and morally deviant. Such findings may point to a source of cynicism in our culture—or what Purdy (1999) describes as ironic detachment. We conclude that Philip Morris is normatively deviant, but we also accept that it is a highly professional and stable social actor. Thus, we increasingly detach from an inconsistent society.

The limits of this study need to be taken into account. A relatively small number of groups were selected and the organizations cannot be said to be representative of organizations in general or political, entertainment, or business organizations in particular. A larger number of news articles for each organization may contribute some differences to the results. Nevertheless, this study found that normative deviance was a partial predictor of stability legitimacy. In other words, the higher the group rates in normative deviance, the less legitimately it is portrayed in terms of stability, i.e., the less the organization is depicted in news content as respecting the political and legal system, the less it is portrayed as having a right to exist, and the less consistent its views are.

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TABLES

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Legitimacy Items, n= 15

Legitimacy statements:	Agreement	Legitimacy Stability	Professionalism
The news content indicates like for the organization	**.68**	-28	-.02
The news content expresses agreement with the organization's goals	**.92**	.05	.13
The news content express the value of the organization to society	**.89**	.06	.09
News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships	**.70**	**.60**	-.15
News content indicates the organization respects the U.S. political and legal system	.25	**.67**	.13
News content indicates the organization has the right to exist	-.55	**.53**	-.17
News content indicates the sameness of the organization's views over time, i.e., consistency	-.23	**.78**	.04
News content indicates the organization unidirectional views	.06	**.48**	-.07
News content indicates the organization has communication skills	-.48	**.50**	**.57**
The news content expresses confidence in the organization's judgment	.36	-.10	**.82**
News content indicates the organization is organized and efficient	-.36	-.29	**.61**
News content indicates the probability of the organization's existence into the future	-.17	.26	**.53**
News content indicates the organization has the right to hold power	.09	-.23	-.02
News content indicates the organization is financially sound	-.20	-.25	.27

News content indicates the length of time organization has already existed	-.14	.07	-.39
News content indicates the organization observes U.S. laws	.21	-.23	-.42
Eigenvalues	3.65	2.60	2.13
% of total variance accounted for	22.8	16.2	13.3

Coefficients in bold face represent the statements used for each factor, i.e., for the three types of legitimacy

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for statistical, social change, and normative deviance for 15 organizations/groups.

Organization:	Statistical Deviance* Mean (Std. Dev.)	Deviance Social Change Deviance** Mean (Std. Dev.)	Normative Deviance*** Mean (Std. Dev.)
Political Organizations			
Green Party	3.48 (.56)	3.59 (.56)	2.71 (.78)
American Civil Liberties Association	3.45 (.65)	3.11 (.54)	2.34 (.93)
Christian Coalition	3.40 (.70)	3.35 (.53)	3.35 (.79)
National Rifle Association	3.16 (.68)	3.10 (.64)	3.30 (.83)
League of Women Voters	2.75 (.57)	3.10 (.51)	2.09 (.85)
Entertainment Organizations			
Jerry Springer Show	3.94 (.76)	3.28 (.65)	3.71 (.70)
Marilyn Manson	3.65 (.65)	3.49 (.66)	3.30 (.75)
Napster	3.42 (.65)	3.05 (.55)	3.70 (.68)
MTV	2.84 (.72)	2.69 (.56)	2.93 (.70)
Sesame Workshop	2.75 (.66)	2.83 (.51)	1.99 (.79)

Business Organizations			
Enron	3.71 (.83)	3.34 (.65)	4.62 (.60)
Philip Morris Companies	3.01 (.81)	3.06 (.63)	3.92 (.76)
Microsoft Corporation	2.73 (.87)	2.42 (.59)	3.56 (.87)
Nike, Inc.	2.57 (.63)	2.70 (.65)	3.48 (.82)
Kmart	2.47 (.70)	3.66 (.69)	2.47 (.70)

*Statistical deviance – average of responses to "The (organization's) actions represent mainstream America" and "The (organization) operates like any other (political, entertainment, business) organization in our country." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.****
Social change deviance – average of responses to "The (organization) is happy with the way things are" and "The (organization) has potential to change the status quo in America." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.**
Normative deviance – average of responses to "The legality of some of the (organization's) behaviors is questionable" and "The morality of some of the (organization's) actions is questionable." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.**
****Responses coded 5 = strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 2 = agree, and 1 = strongly agree
*****Responses coded 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree

Table 3. Means for evaluation, legality, viability, and stability legitimacy for 15 organizations/groups.

		Legitimacy	
Organizations:	Agreement* Mean	Stability** Mean	Professionalism*** Mean
Political Organizations			
League of Women Voters	3.93	3.89	3.92
National Rifle Association	3.06	2.97	2.93
Green Party	2.65	3.63	3.52
American Civil Liberties Assn.	2.64	3.78	2.97
Christian Coalition	2.36	3.00	2.10
Entertainment Organizations			
Sesame Workshop	4.45	2.84	3.04

Napster	4.11	2.77	2.79
MTV	3.02	2.92	3.21
Jerry Springer Show	2.58	2.77	3.05
Marilyn Manson	2.35	2.76	2.92
Business Organizations			
Kmart	3.57	3.49	3.25
Microsoft Corporation	2.91	2.91	3.94
Enron	2.90	2.59	3.45
Nike, Inc.	2.64	3.12	3.54
Philip Morris Companies	2.26	3.12	4.08

*Agreement – average of responses to the statements: "The news content indicates like for the organization," "The news content expresses agreement with the organization's goals," "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships," and "The news content expresses the value of the organization to society." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.*****
Stability – average of responses to the statements: "News content indicates the organization respects the U.S. political and legal system," "News content indicates the organization has the right to exist," "News content indicates the sameness of the organization's views over time," and "News content indicates the organization's unidirectional views," "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships," "News content indicates the organization has communication skills." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.***
Professionalism – average of responses to the statements: "News content indicates confidence in the organization's judgment," "News content indicates the organization is organized and efficient," "News content indicates the organization has communication skills," "News content indicates the probability of the organization's existence into the future." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.*
****Responses coded 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree

Cronbach's alpha
Agreement legitimacy .85
Stability legitimacy .64
Professionalism legitimacy .63

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficients for deviance and legitimacy

N = 15 Deviance	Agreement*	Legitimacy Stability**	Professionalism***
Statistical Deviance#	-.41	-.32	-.42
Social Change Deviance##	-.18	.21	-.32
Normative Deviance###	-.48	-.68 [b]	.05

[b] $p < .01$

Table 5. Pearson correlation coefficients for deviance and legitimacy without Napster

N = 14 Deviance	Agreement*	Legitimacy Stability**	Professionalism***
Statistical Deviance#	-.55 [a]	-.29	-.39
Social Change Deviance##	-.17	.21	-.34
Normative Deviance###	-.64 [a]	-.66 [b]	.10

[a] $p < .05$
[b] $p < .01$

*Agreement – average of responses to the statements: "The news content indicates like for the organization," "The news content expresses agreement with the organization's goals," "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships," and "The news content expresses the value of the organization to society." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.*****

Stability – average of responses to the statements: "News content indicates the organization respects the U.S. political and legal system," "News content indicates the organization has the right to exist," "News content indicates the sameness of the organization's views over time," and "News content indicates the organization's unidirectional views," "News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships," "News content indicates the organization has communication skills." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.***

Professionalism – average of responses to the statements: "News content indicates confidence in the organization's judgment," "News content indicates the organization is organized and efficient," "News content indicates the organization has communication skills," "News content indicates the probability of the organization's existence into the future." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.*

****Responses coded 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree

#Statistical deviance – average of responses to "The (organization's) actions represent mainstream America" and "The (organization) operates like any other (political, entertainment, business) organization in our country." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.####

##Social change deviance – average of responses to "The (organization) is happy with the way things are" and "The (organization) has potential to change the status quo in America." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.####
###Normative deviance – average of responses to "The legality of some of the (organization's) behaviors is questionable" and "The morality of some of the (organization's) actions is questionable." Responses coded on a 5 point scale.#####
####Responses coded 5 = strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 2 = agree, and 1 = strongly agree
#####Responses coded 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree

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Cronbach's alpha
Agreement legitimacy .85
Stability legitimacy .64
Professionalism legitimacy .63

Appendix A

Survey of journalists

(Cover letter, instructions not included)

Sample for <u>one</u> organization

Have you heard of the **Christian Coalition of America**?	Yes No (circle one)				
	If 'No,' proceed to the next table.				
Circle the corresponding number for the answer that best describes your response to each statement. Circle only one response.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Christian Coalition's actions represent mainstream America.*	5	4	3	2	1
The Christian Coalition is happy with the way things are.*	5	4	3	2	1
The legality of some of the Christian Coalition's behaviors is questionable.	5	4	3	2	1
The Christian Coalition operates like any other political organization in our country.*	5	4	3	2	1
The Christian Coalition has potential to change the status quo in America.*	5	4	3	2	1
The morality of some of the Christian Coalition's actions is questionable.	5	4	3	2	1

* Recoded in analysis/tables 5=1, 4=2, 3=3, 2=4, 1=5, so 5 = most deviance, 1 = least deviance

Appendix B

Content analysis coding sheet (Staple to the article)

Coder Name: ______________________________ Date of Article __________________

Title of article: ____

Response:	How to code response:
(5) Strongly agree	If the text uses words that express intensity (e.g., very, extremely, overwhelming, definitely) in support of legitimacy statement. Or words include a suffix that expresses the fullest sense of the concept (e.g., biggest, richest). The text, regardless of suffix, could also contain words that express the fullest sense of the concept (e.g., "The organization will last *forever*," or "The organization's goals are *perfect*").
(4) Agree	If the text uses words that express support for the legitimacy statement, but does so without perceptible intensity and perhaps even with equivocation (e.g., may, might, somewhat, perhaps).
(3) Neutral	The text seems to address the statement but the meaning or direction is unclear (e.g., the use of irony makes the intention uncertain).
(2) Disagree	If the text uses words that contradict support for the legitimacy statement, but does so without perceptible intensity and perhaps even with equivocation (e.g., may, might, somewhat, perhaps).
(1) Strongly disagree	If the text uses words that express intensity (e.g., very, extremely, overwhelming, definitely) in direct contradiction of legitimacy statement. Or words include a suffix that expresses the least of the concept (e.g., smallest, poorest). The text, regardless of suffix, could also contain words that express the least of the concept (e.g., "the organization is *bankrupt*," or "I *hate* the organization").

Legitimacy Coding Grid					
Circle the assertion in the news content. The first assertion should be circled and labeled "1." "1" should then also be entered in the grid below to indicate the appropriate evaluation of legitimacy. The second assertion should be circled, labeled, and entered in the grid, and so. Separate numbers that fall in the same cell of the grid by a comma.					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	5	4	3	2	1
The news content indicates like for the organization					
The news content expresses agreement with the organization's goals					
The news content expresses confidence in the organization's judgment					
The news content express the value of the organization to society					
	5	4	3	2	1
News content indicates the organization observes U.S. laws					
News content indicates the organization respects the U.S. political and legal system					
News content indicates the organization has the right to exist					
News content indicates the organization has the right to hold power					
	5	4	3	2	1
News content indicates the organization is financially sound					
News content indicates the organization has communication skills					
News content indicates the organization is organized and efficient					
News content indicates the organization has strategic alliances and partnerships					
	5	4	3	2	1
News content indicates the length of time organization has already existed					
News content indicates the probability of the organization's existence into the future					
News content indicates the sameness of the organization's views over time, i.e., consistency					
News content indicates the organization's unidirectional views					

Modeling Internet Current Affairs News Usage from Perceived Credibility of Internet News, Internet Dependency Relations, and Social Locus

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Abstract

Using an attitudinal, relational, and social locus perspective, this study constructed and tested an exploratory model of Internet current affairs news use. It examined causal relationships between Internet credibility, Internet dependency relations, age, education, and Internet usage for current affairs news. Data were collected through an email survey in a university population. Specifically, unidirectional influences of the three sets of variables on Internet current affairs news use were confirmed while no significant predictions from age to credibility, education to credibility, or education to Internet dependency relation were observed. An important additional finding was the significant positive correlation between credibility and Internet dependency relations. Further validation of the refined model needs to be conducted with larger samples drawn from other general or specific Internet user populations.

Modeling Internet Current Affairs News Usage from Perceived Credibility of Internet News, Internet Dependency Relations, and Social Locus

Both political information and political participation are deemed as vital ingredients in the functioning and maintenance of a democratic society. However, these political activities are generally implemented via reliance on the mass media to keep informed of current affair news (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001; Poindexter & McCombs, 2001; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001). Those who rely more on the media for information are generally more likely to get involved in civic activities (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001), or political activities and political self-efficacy (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). They are also more likely to embrace interpersonal trust and have life contentment (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001), and own more political knowledge of presidential election issue stands (Weaver & Drew, 1995). These behavioral consequences of mass media exposure suggest that mass media play an important role in the political dynamics of a society. As the Internet steadily gains ground in the media landscape, optimistic expectations have surfaced about its potential to promote the democratic process (Lax, 2000) through its vast repository of information resources. It is argued that the new information source will provide easy access to government documents and facilitate debate and discussion among the public (Lax, 2000).

Due to the perceived (and potential) importance of the Internet in political participation, this study explores causal relationships between some key variables impacting news behavior in the online environment. It argues that Internet credibility, Internet dependency relations, and social locus of Internet users are likely to exert influence on Internet usage for current affairs news. A wealth of studies on media usage indicates that the perceived credibility of the medium is closely related to the usage of the medium. Such a view of mass media usage aligns with the belief that behaviors are initiated or motivated by attitudes. Explorations of Internet credibility (e.g. Johnson & Kaye, 1998) have found it to be a strong predictor of political participation. Another line of research that attempts to explain media usage from a relational experience with the mass media is media system dependency (MSD) theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). Again, exploratory research on MSD relations in an Internet context has found it to be a significant predictor of several online behaviors, including online news use (Patwardhan & Yang, 2002a, 2002b). Lastly, social locus of individuals has always been considered an important predictor of media usage when a new medium has yet to enter the mainstream. This study attempts to bring together these various streams of media usage exploration in the context of Internet news use to provide a more holistic understanding of online news behavior. Specifically, the study explores the influence of perceived medium credibility, individual dependency relations with the Internet, and social locus on the use of the Internet for current affairs news. Integrating these attitudinal, relational, and social locus perspectives, this study constructs and tests a model of current affairs news use in the online environment.

Motivations for Internet Use

As a result of its content diversity, the Internet has been found to be associated with a variety of motivations: keeping informed, diversion and entertainment, peer identity, good feelings, communication, sights and sounds, career and "coolness" (Charney & Greenberg, 2001). Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) identified five motivations to predict hours spent on the Web: social escape, information, interactive control, socialization and economic concern. It seems difficult to tag the Internet with certain fixed purposes. However, according to a study by Charney & Greenberg (2001), the informational gratification obtained from the Internet was one of the driving forces behind its popularity. Industry reports also find informational Internet use to be widely prevalent. According to IntelliQuest, Internet adoption has reached a critical mass of fifty million users in the U.S., and online news activity is rated as the third most popular online activity among Americans after checking email and online shopping (Pew Internet & American Life, 2000). Seventy-one percent of webmasters of news organizations reported significant access to their web sites, with seventy-nine percent indicating that their sites had more than two thousand "hits" per week in 1996 (Davis, 1999). These academic studies and industry surveys point to the dominance and importance of informational use in the online environment, of which web-based Internet news sites are an indispensable part.

Online News Services

Web-based online news services can be roughly categorized into three groups: online services of traditional news organizations such as the *New York Times* and

CNN, newcomers without any established traditional mass media counterparts such as AllPolitics and apbonline, and Internet portal companies delivering news as part of their services such as Yahoo! Online news services have been in existence for twenty years at most, from the earliest (1980) newspaper industry online trials to the present day online presence of almost every international, national, regional, and local news organization. Online news services have changed the nature of news operation and introduced a new business model by providing free content to news consumers. In addition, online audiences are convenienced by being able to track issues and events in much greater depth than traditional news media consumers. People can visit the news sites any time of the day or night to receive up-to-date information on nearly any topic they choose (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Noack, 1999). Finally, online news offers opportunities for readers to participate in the news process by hosting reader forums (Aikat, 2000). These features of the Internet may play a significant part in driving the web-based online news experience.

Demographics and Online News Usage

Traditionally, demographic variables have always been used as the initial predictors of mass media use. The decline of newspaper readership in the 1970s and 1980s generated a large amount of research on profiling national newspaper readers versus nonreaders (e.g. Burgoon & Burgoon, 1980; Sobal & Jackson-Beeck, 1981, Westley & Severin, 1964). The findings indicated that demographics accounted for a significant amount of newspaper readership. Investigations into online news behavior from a demographic perspective also revealed that people reading news online were younger, better educated and more affluent (Aikat, 2000; Stemple, Hargrove & Bernt, 2000; McLung, 1999). In the light of these findings, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

H1a: Age has a negative effect on online current affairs news use
H1b: Education has a positive effect on online current affairs news use

Demographics and Perceived Credibility of Online News

In addition, Bogart (1989) noted that there was good reason to examine attitudinal variables in the study of news consumption because psychological or attitudinal differences either represent "causes" of differences in reading habits, or the secondary effects of demographic differences. For instance, Robinson and Kohut (1988) found a significant (though weak) relation between standard demographic variables such as age, sex and education and the attitude toward network news. Johnson and Kaye (1998) confirmed that those who were older, male, and of high socioeconomic status were more critical of the Internet and scored lower on the credibility ratings of the Internet (p. 335). Thus the following hypotheses related to the influence of demographics on perceived credibility of Internet news were proposed.

H2a: Age has a negative effect on the perceived credibility of online news
H2b: Education has a negative effect on the perceived credibility of online news

Demographics and Media Dependency Relations

Media system dependency (MSD) theory regards the dependency relationship of individuals with the media system as an important factor driving media usage. The dependency relation originates in the media's power or control over information resources, and individuals, groups and organizations' reliance on these information resources to attain their goals (Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach, 1991; Ball-Rokeach, 1998). At the individual level, the goals-resource dependency relations are defined as:

> ....the extent to which attainment of an individual's goals is contingent upon access to the information resources of the media system, relative to the extent to which attainment of media system goals is contingent upon the resources controlled by individuals. (Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, & Waring, 1990, p. 250)

What should be noted is the *relational* aspect of MSD, which distinguishes it from other commonly used terms of media dependency or media reliance. The definition of MSD relations points to the asymmetric (one-way) nature of the relation because individuals depend upon media more than media depend upon individuals. In fact, the intensity of the relation, one conceptual dimension of MSD, is used to gauge the asymmetry of the relations (Loges, 1994). For individuals, intensity means the "perceived helpfulness" of media in attainment of personal goals (Ball-Rokeach, 1998; Loges, 1994) and is reflected in dependency relations to meet three general life goals of understanding, orientation and play (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). These goals are further conceptualized in individual and social dimensions; understanding as self-understanding and social understanding, orientation as action orientation and interaction orientation and play as solitary play and social play (Loges, 1994).

Social understanding and self-understanding both implicate cognitive dimensions (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984). Social understanding is the knowledge of the social environment and perception of individuals' role in that environment. Self-understanding relates to the development of self-concept including self-esteem, beliefs, values and attitudes (Loges, 1994). Action and interaction orientation are concerned with formulating detailed strategies to act and interact with others (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984). Play dependency implies fantasy, escape, as also sheer enjoyment of recreational activities (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984), with solitary play referring to enjoyment or diversion by oneself, and social play representing enjoyment or diversion in the company of others (Loges, 1994).

Even though empirical findings concerning the association between demographics and media system dependency relations show mixed results, Ball-Rokeach (1985) did point out the existence of a relationship between an individual's social location and media dependencies (p.504). Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach (1991) located a negative relationship between education and television shopping dependency but no relation between age and television shopping dependency, or between income and shopping dependency. Loges and Jung's (2001) study on the digital divide also suggests a link between age, education and Internet dependency.

Therefore the following hypotheses relating age and education with Internet dependency relations were proposed.

H3a: Age has a negative effect on Internet dependency relations

H3b: Education has a positive effect on Internet dependency relations

Perceived Credibility and Online News Usage

For more than five decades, studies using credibility (Mayo & Leshner, 2000) have suggested a strong correlation between perceived credibility of a medium and the usage of the medium (eg. Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Rimmer and Weaver, 1987; Westley & Severin, 1964). Gaziano (1988) studied newspaper credibility and concluded that if people don't trust the medium, they are less likely to pay attention to its contents. In the same vein, researchers found that the preferred medium is generally judged as the more credible medium (Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Westley & Severin, 1964).

As the Internet emerges as a new source of information, the credibility factor becomes an important one. Is Internet news perceived as trustworthy enough to get people to utilize the new platform for news? Johnson and Kaye (1998) surveyed politically interested Web users and found that they relied more on Internet sources for political information and judged them as more credible than traditional sources. Schweiger (2000) conducted a survey on Internet credibility among German web-users and non-users in comparison to television and newspapers and found positive perceptions of Internet credibility even though it was not as high as television and newspapers. In another U.S. industry study by the New York-based ScreamingMedia in 1999, 63% said the Internet provided them the most in-depth information; 57% said the Internet had "the most up-to-date information" and 51% said the Internet had "the most accurate information" (Astor, 2000). Thus the following hypothesis linking perceived Internet credibility with online news use was proposed.

H4: Perceived credibility of the Internet has a positive effect on Internet current affairs news use

Media Dependency Relations and Online News Usage

Based on the six goals that media help to facilitate, a person's dependency relations with the medium can be captured quantitatively. Researchers have demonstrated the usefulness of media system dependency relations in explaining media usage. For instance, Loges and Ball-Rokeach (1993) examined newspaper readership and found that dependency relations for social and self understanding explained a considerable amount of variance in newspaper readership beyond the variance explained by demographic variables. According to Grant (1998), a positive relationship should be expected between media dependency and media exposure. He presented empirical studies that found positive correlations ranging from .22 to .35 between television dependency and television exposure (p. 209).

Considering the diverse activities that can be pursued on the Internet and the Internet's gradual integration into the public's daily lives, it is quite likely that some kind of dependency relations between individuals and the Internet is established. Patwardhan and Yang (2002a) examined intensity of Internet dependency relations (IDR) as defined by MSD theory and concluded that a positive but restrained dependency relationship between individuals and the Internet is in place. Another study noted that IDR was a significant predictor of online shopping and online news reading (Patwardhan & Yang, 2002b). Indeed, many researchers have suggested that media dependency relations may be good predictors in examining media behaviors (e.g. Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993; Loges, 1994; Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998; Yang, 2002). This study thus proposed that:

H5: Internet dependency relations will have a positive effect on online current affairs news use

Perceived Credibility and Internet Dependency Relations

Is a connection between perceived credibility of a medium, and dependency relations with a medium tenable? One may argue that in the Internet environment, an individual who perceives Internet news sources as reliable may tend to develop a closer relationship with the Internet. And stronger dependency relations should lead to a higher rating for the medium on the credibility scale. While constructs such as perceived credibility and media dependency relations have been independently explored in the context of news usage, mass media research is short of an overall conceptualization of the relations among these variables in explaining news use in either traditional or online news environments, and no studies have theoretically and empirically put the relation to test.

On the other hand, it is also possible to argue for an alternative model in which both credibility and media dependency relations influence news use as independent, unrelated variables. Because no matter what attitude individuals hold toward the Internet, either credible or not, they may use it anyway for fun, entertainment or other purposes. Subsequently there may not exist any link between credibility and IDR. Based on this consideration, this study constructs two models integrating all the proposed hypotheses: one correlating perceived credibility and Internet dependency relations (Figure 1), and the other without the correlation (Figure 2). Depending on the model index comparison, a decision will be made as to which model provides a better fit to the data. The following question explores the goodness of fit of the two models.

RQ1: Which proposed model better explains online current affair news usage?

Model 1

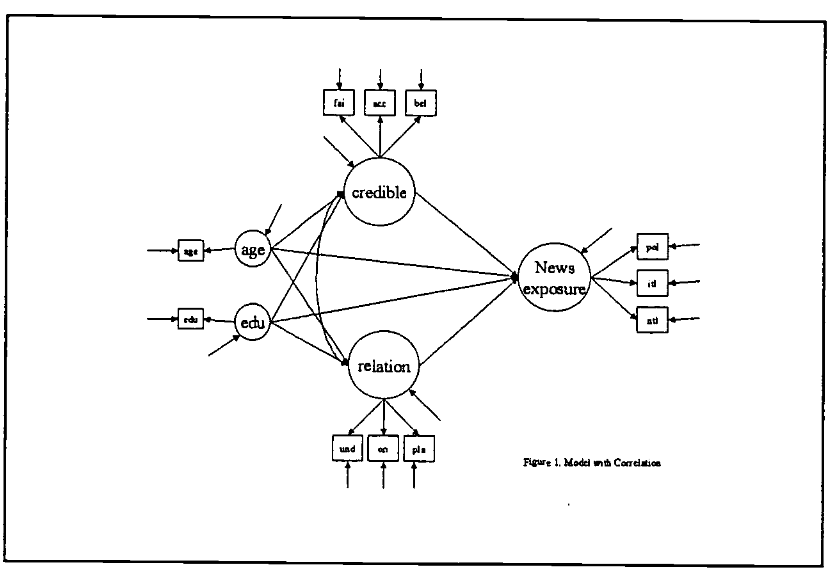

Figure 1. Model with Correlation

Model 2

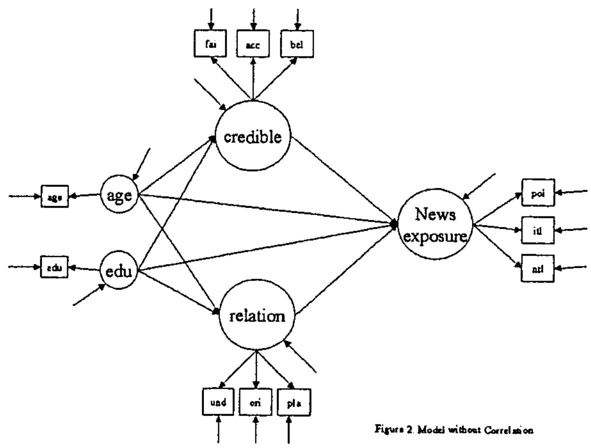

Figure 2 Model without Correlation

Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Online current affair news use was conceptualized as the extent to which respondents read Internet current affair news by browsing web sites including those of well-established news organizations, newcomers in news delivery services, and news services of Internet portal companies. It was operationalized as the frequency of checking Internet current affair news on a weekly basis. The questions asked the respondents to indicate their position on the following scale: never, less than once a week, once a week, a few times a week and at least once a day for three kinds of news: international news, national news and political news.

What should be noted here is that the study only focused on web-based news rather than other types of online news such as email news alert or bulletin board forums or newsgroup postings. While there is no evidence to tell which means of news access is efficiently better in cyber news delivery, web-based Internet news is definitely more popular.

Perceived credibility of Internet news was defined as a global evaluation of the objectivity of the Internet news. What should be pointed out is that perceived credibility in this study does not refer to specific news stories or news sources but to the news channel as a message carrier as a whole. In other words, the perceived credibility of Internet news is the extent to which respondents trust Internet news as a whole. It was operationalized as a three-item index featuring accuracy, believability, and fairness on a semantic differential scale from very believable to not at all believable, which has been used in Johnson and Kaye' 1998 study comparing Internet and traditional sources credibility.

Internet dependency relations (IDR) was conceptualized as the extent to which users depended on the Internet to meet six goals as defined by MSD theory: social understanding, self understanding, action orientation, interaction orientation, social play and solitary play. It was operationalized as the respondents' mean score on the eighteen item MSD scale (each of the six goals was measured by three items) developed by Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach and Grube (1984) and Grant, Guthrie and Ball-Rokeach (1991).

Method

This study used a cross sectional email survey. The population of interest was a large mid-western university in the United States. The university population is hardly representative of the U.S. population, but the study's purpose of testing models may justify sampling from this highly wired community with ubiquitous access to the Internet.

Sampling

Respondents were selected using multi-stage stratified random sampling. The university population was stratified into two groups—students and non-students—to ensure age and education variability. For the student population, 500 email addresses were randomly selected from 11,850 students. The non-student population was stratified into five groups: faculty, staff, faculty and staff, civil service and retired members and a 10% sample was drawn randomly from each group totaling 563. Together the total sample size for this study was 1063 respondents (500 students, 144 faculty, 122 staff, 27 faculty and staff, 219 civil service, 51 retired members).

Measurement

Internet usage for current affairs news was measured using three questions: one for international news, one for political news, and one for national news. The Internet dependency relations scale was borrowed from the previously validated 18-item Individual media dependency scale developed by Grant, Guthrie and Ball-Rokeach (1991). Respondents were asked to indicate how helpful the Internet is for the eighteen statements on a scale from not at all helpful, not very helpful, neutral, somewhat helpful, extremely helpful. A three-item scale was adopted from Johnson and Kaye (1998) to measure perceived credibility of Internet news. Age was measured by asking the year of birth, education by choosing from high school diploma, some college, bachelor degree, some graduate school, master's degree to doctoral degree. Table 1 presents a brief definition of all the manifest variables.

Survey Administration

The survey was distributed via email to respondents' email accounts on Jan. 14, 2002. An e-mail survey offers an efficient way of collecting data within a short period of time and with limited expenses because it eliminates postage, printing, and interviewer costs (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). The purpose of the study legitimizes using an email survey since those who have Internet access and electronic mail are more likely to pursue online news activities.

The cover letter and the questionnaire were sent out as inline text. Respondents were instructed on how to answer the email survey. Two mailings were done within a period of two weeks. The second mailing was delivered on Jan. 21, 2002 and the data were collected within the two-week period. Since there was no dramatic hard news event happening during the two-week period, it was assumed that the respondents' online news behavior was typical as any other two-week period.

Reliability and Validity

A pilot study on 60 undergraduate students to pretest the Internet dependency relations scale on the overall eighteen items indicated a very high Cronbach's alpha (.93). For social understanding dependency relations, Cronbach's alpha was .74; self-understanding .75; action orientation .55; interaction orientation .64; social play .77; and solitary play .89. Inter-item reliability for perceived credibility of the Internet news was also satisfactory (.78).

A preliminary data screening procedure was conducted to check on the normal distribution of the data according to Huck (2000). Three variables had a skewness problem: international news, orientation and play. Five variables had a kurtosis problem: political news, international news, national news, age and education. Even though efforts were made to transform the data, the transformed scores were not as satisfactory as expected in eliminating skewness and kurtosis. In order to keep the findings easier to interpret, it was decided to use the raw data despite its non-normality.

Data Analysis

This study was designed to test two alternative structural models with five latent variables using the correlation matrix. Kelloway (1998) suggested that when one was mainly concerned with the pattern of the relationships among variables, the correlation matrix was a proper choice for SEM testing. Besides, by rescaling all variables to have unit variance, the interpretation of the results was simplified (Kelloway, 1998, p. 19). The study followed a two-step procedure in estimating the parameters in the model. First, the measurement model was estimated to check for the fit to the data with all the latent variables correlated. Second, when a satisfactory fit was obtained for the measurement model, the structural components or paths were estimated. Both the measurement and structural models were estimated with LISREL 8.25 by the iteration technique of unweighted least squares because of the small sample size and possible departure from multivariate normality due to the ordinal nature of the data (Cui, Berg & Jiang, 1996).

Results

A total of 1,063 email questionnaires were sent over a two-week period at the beginning of 2002, January. One hundred fifty two emails were returned as failed deliveries and ten respondents refused to participate. Out of 901 email surveys delivered to the respondents, 147 responses were received, a response rate of 16.3%. Five incomplete surveys (truncated or uncompleted) were eliminated, leaving 142 valid questionnaires for analysis.

Faculty was the only group that was over-represented in the sample, while the student group was somewhat under-represented. Specifically faculty (27%), civil service (25%), and students (23%) were the three major groups of the sample. Staff (19%) and others including retired members (7%) made up the remainder.

There were 84 females and 58 males in the sample, at 59% and 41% respectively. Education wise, more than one third (32%) had high school and college education; 17% had some college but below graduate degree education; one quarter (25%) had master degrees and another quarter (25%) had doctoral degrees. In terms of race, the majority of the sample was Caucasian (85%), with non-Caucasians making up about 13% (including African Americans, American Asians, American Indians, Latinos and Internationals). The rest (2%) did not indicate their racial identity. The minority representation is not far from the university population of 17 percent. Low-income (below $24,999) respondents made up nearly one quarter (23%) of the sample. The middle-income group ($25,000 to &75,999) was about 45% of the sample, while 13% made up the high-income group (above $80,000 but below $99,999). Ten percent of the sample constituted the extreme high-income group (above $100,000). The remaining ten percent provided no information on their income. The age distribution of respondents was very close to a normal distribution. More than 30% were between the ages of 18-34, 50% were between 35-54, and 13% were above 55. The average age of respondents was forty-one.

Measurement Model

Means, standard deviations and correlations among the manifest variables are presented in Table 2. The correlation matrix was used as the input for the measurement and structural model testing. Table 3 presents a summary of model fit indices for the measurement model. In terms of the absolute fit, standardized RMR was .06, not far removed from .05, indicating a good fit to the data. GFI at .98 and AGFI at .96 exceed .90, a value considered to indicate a good fit to the data. In terms of the comparative fit indices, NFI at .96, IFI at 1.00 and RFI at .94 all suggest a good fit to the data. However, the chi-square value of 108.43 indicates a poor fit to the data, but because the data is based on a small sample and the distribution of several variables in the sample is not normal, chi-square may not be a good index to rely on (Hu & Bentler, 1995). Hence, based on other indices, the measurement model can be reasonably accepted as a good fit to the data.

Structural Equation Model

In the second step of the model testing, the structural components of the model were estimated. The full model with the correlated credibility and relation was estimated first and then constrained to zero as an alternative model. Kelloway (1998) noted that the strength of the SEM model fit lies in comparing model fits of "competing and theoretically plausible" models rather than assessing the model fit for one model in isolation (1998, p. 39).

Almost all the indices indicated the full model provided a marginally better fit to the data than the nested model (Table 4). The nested model was found to be a significantly worse fit to the data when the correlation between credibility and dependency relations was constrained to zero because the chi-square difference at 28.91(df=1) was significant at .01 level. In other words, the correlation path between Internet credibility and dependency relations was so important that dropping it out of the model made the fit significantly worse. The standardized RMR, AGFI, NFI, IFI and RFI also indicated the full model fit the data marginally better than the nested model. This suggests that the full model with correlated perceived credibility and Internet dependency relations can explain the Internet current affair news usage in a better way.

Specific Path Estimates

Since the full model provided a much better fit to the data, specific path parameters were assessed on the basis of the full model. Table 5 and Figure 3 provide all the information to confirm or reject the eight hypotheses. As indicated by the chi-square differences, five paths were found to be significant and three not significant. The significant paths include dependency relations to current affairs web use (H5), credibility to current affairs web use (H4), age to current affairs web use (H1a), education to current affairs web use (H1b), and age to dependency relations (H3a). When the individual parameter values of the full model were examined, the two betas (credibility to current affairs web news, dependency relations to current affairs web new) were respectively .15 and .50, indicating H4 and H5 were supported. In the same vein, the three gammas (age to web use, education to web use, age to dependency relations) were respectively .13, .18, and -.46 suggesting H1a, H1b and H3a were all supported as well. However, the other three hypotheses -- H2a, H2b, H3b-- had to be rejected.

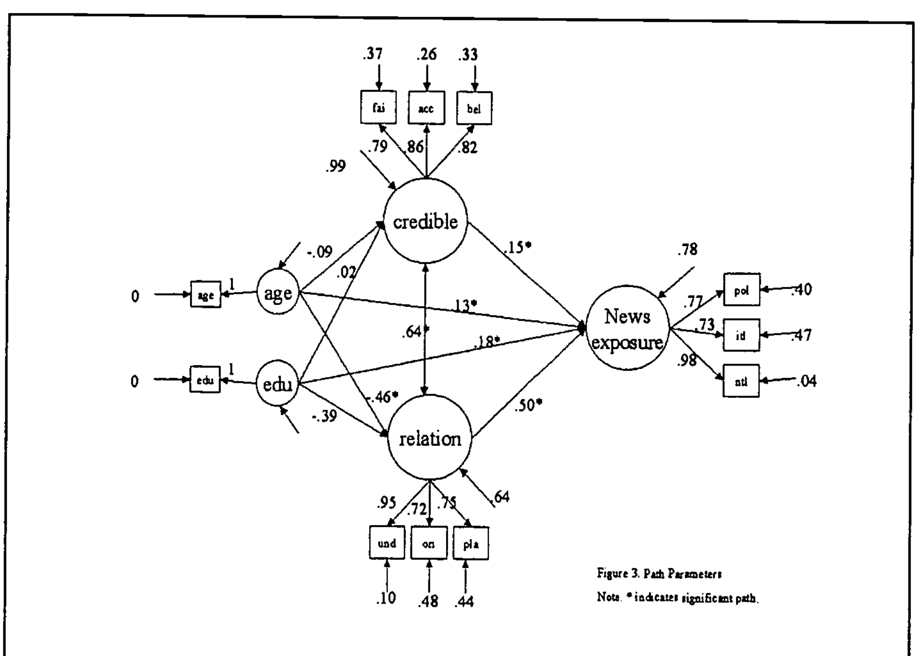

Figure 3. Path Parameters
Note. * indicates significant path.

Discussion

The study provides some meaningful results and also raises some interesting questions. First, the study applied the framework of perceived credibility, Internet dependency relations, age and education in analyzing online current affairs news use. Second, the study proposed a causal model and provided explicit specifications of the relationships among relevant factors. Third, these relationships were put to an empirical test in a rigorous manner that simultaneously examined the correlational and causal relationships.

The main objective of the study was to explain Internet current affairs news usage by integrating perceived credibility of the Internet news, the Internet dependency relation approach and demographic variables. The study furnishes some support for the adequacy of the framework. Internet current affairs news users tend to be those who have a more intense relation with the Internet, rate the Internet news as more credible, and are younger and better educated. It also seems reasonable to favor the argument that the more credible Internet news is perceived to be, the closer the dependency relations are between the individuals and the Internet and vice versa, calling for pursuing further theoretical and empirical exploration in this area. The correlation between attitude (perceived credibility) and experience (Internet dependency relations) in explaining behavior (Internet current affair news use) also offers a different way to examining media use.

The study also confirms most of the hypotheses proposed in the model. First, perceived credibility and Internet dependency relations both facilitated Internet current affairs news use. The findings are consistent with previous studies identifying perceived credibility (e.g. Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Rimmer and Weaver, 1987) and media dependency relations (e.g. Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993; Loges, 1994; Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998) as good predictors of media use. The study also testified to the continuing importance of age and education in influencing web news use even though their effect was not as strong as perceived credibility and Internet dependency relations.

Age and education did not have any significant effect on perceived credibility, suggesting that the perception of the Internet tends to be uniform across age cohorts or education groups. While age plays some role in influencing Internet dependency relations, education has no effect. This may imply that individuals of diverse educational backgrounds may have established a similar relationship with the Internet, or the sample of the campus community did not provide enough diversity in an education background.

Even though this study adopted a theoretically integrative approach to analyze online current affairs news use, and the proposed model achieved a moderately adequate fit to the data, it had several significant limitations. The small sample could make the factor loadings and parameter estimates unstable. Subjective self-reports were used to measure the variables. The non-normal distribution of some variables may make the findings biased and hard to generalize. Future studies should re-examine the conceptual validity of the current affairs news use model or apply the model to other types of news such as local news or presidential election news. More important, future research ought to expand the integrative framework and construct more complex models of current affairs news exposure including other variables, such as political interest, personality, political knowledge, and attitude toward civic duty to get informed. Besides, other consequential variables of online current affairs news use, such as political participation, voting, satisfaction from news use, political knowledge gained from the use, ought to be examined.

Although structural equation modeling explores causal relationships rather than mere empirical association among variables, readers should be cautious in interpreting the implications of the causal effects. These causal effects should not be treated the same as the end products of the experimental design manipulation but rather as a timely association among variables, a necessary but not efficient condition for establishing cause and effect relation.

Finally, this study used *frequency* of visits to current affairs news web sites as the endogenous variable. Future studies may explore using the *amount of time* spent on Internet current affairs news web sites to improve the measurement of the variable.

Research to date has examined the influence of perceived credibility, Internet dependency relations, age and education on Internet current affair news independently. The understanding of Internet current affairs news use improves considerably after integrating these separate approaches into one model because each path can be estimated after controlling for other paths, and because the measurement and the structural equation can be tested at the same time.

The entry of the Internet into the media landscape as a source of news flow provides good reason for the examination of its news usage and predication of that usage. In a democratic society, keeping the public informed is critical to maintaining the well-established political mechanism and making democracy meaningful. Traditionally, mass media have facilitated this process in a significant way. This study provides a snapshot of relationships that impact Internet current affairs news usage from the perspective of individual's relational, attitudinal, and social locus perspectives. Whether the Internet will facilitate the democratic process as the traditional mass media remains to be seen.

Table 1
Measurements of Latent Variables

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Variable Abbreviation
News Exposure	Exposure to political web news Exposure to international web news Exposure to national web news	Pol Itl ntl
Credible	Perceived fairness of the web news Perceived accuracy of the web news Perceived believability of the web news	Fai Acc bel
Internet Relation	Usefulness of the Internet in fulfilling understanding goals Usefulness of the Internet in fulfilling orientation goals Usefulness of the Internet in fulfilling play goals	Und Ori pla
Age	Physical age	age
Education	From high school to doctoral degree on a six-point scale	edu

Table 2
Correlation and Descriptive Statistics for Observed Variables

Variables	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
01pol	1.000										
02itl	.643	1.000									
03ntl	.718	.690	1.000								
04fai	.137	.067	.164	1.000							
05acc	.151	.140	.267	.724	1.000						
06bel	.202	.189	.268	.643	.669	1.000					
07und	.424	.421	.562	.139	.172	.218	1.000				
08ori	.122	.074	.202	.170	.124	.154	.683	1.000			
09pla	.115	.118	.219	.211	.203	.145	.597	.686	1.000		
10age	-.091	-.004	-.156	-.065	-.065	-.096	-.335	-.332	-.465	1.000	
11edu	.015	.078	-.093	-.016	-.017	.081	-.341	-.258	-.351	.520	1.000
Means	2.97	2.59	3.11	3.52	3.52	3.62	2.88	3.04	2.88	41.13	13.21
SD	1.38	1.43	1.47	.64	.61	.64	.83	.73	1.00	13.21	1.65
skewness	-.03	.499	-.062	-.016	.109	.131	-.463	-.281	-.194	-.060	-.101
kurtosis	-1.385	-1.148	-1.422	-.206	-.238	-.328	-.323	-.495	-.880	-.719	-1.657

Table 3.
Summary of Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Measurement Model

Measurement Model		
Absolute Fit Indices	Chi-square	108.43 (df=36)
	Standardized RMR	.06
	GFI	.98
	AGFI	.96
Comparative Fit Indices	NFI	.96
	IFI	1.00
	RFI	.94

Table 4
Assessing and Comparing Full Model & Nested Model Fit Indices

		Full Model	Nested Model	Comparison
	Chi-square	151.60 (df=37)	180.51 (df=38)	28.91 (df=1)
	Standardized RMR	.09	.10	
	GFI	.95	.95	
	AGFI	.92	.91	
	NFI	.92	.91	
	IFI	.96	.94	
	RFI	.88	.86	

Table 5
Testing the Significance of Specific Paths Using the Chi-square Comparisons

Models	chi-square	df	p	vs	Δchi-square	Δdf	Δp
Full	151.60	37	.00				
R->W	239.61	38	.00	full	88.01	1	<.01
C->W	159.30	38	.00	full	7.70	1	<.01
A->W	157.51	38	.00	full	5.91	1	<.05
E->W	159.25	38	.00	full	7.65	1	<.01
A->R	168.99	38	.00	full	17.39	1	<.01
E->R	152.69	38	.00	full	1.09	1	n.s.
A->C	155.29	39	.00	full	2.60	2	n.s.
E->C	153.65	39	.00	full	.96	2	n.s.

Note. The symbol Δ refers to the difference between the full model and specific model.
R represents Internet Dependency Relation.
W represents the exposure to the current affair web news.
C represents the perceived credibility.
E represents education and A represents age.
The arrow represents the causal relation between two latent variables.

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Running head: THE PERCEPTIONS OF ON-LINE NEWS AND WEB ADVERTISING

Exploring the Effects of Web Advertising on Readers' Perceptions of On-line News

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Abstract

This study examines the idea that the commercialization of Internet news sites can have a negative impact on perceptions of news. An experiment (N=260) shows that perceptions of on-line news stories vary as a function of the presence or nature of web advertising and Internet use (light versus heavy). Specifically, findings suggest that among light Internet users, the inclusion of advertisements results in significantly lower perceived news value of hard news stories.

Exploring the Effects of Web Advertising on Readers' Perceptions of On-line News

The web is rapidly growing as a medium that conveys news, but at the same time, it has been criticized for its over-commercialization. Given the explosive increase of advertising on the web, one cannot read on-line news without simultaneously being exposed to commercial messages. What effects might one expect from the combined presentation of news and advertising? Whereas a host of research has explored the effects of programming content on viewers' perceptions of the advertising surrounding it (e.g., Broach, Page, & Wilson, 1995; Norris & Colman, 1993, 1994), an alternative approach has been to consider the impact that advertising has on perceptions of programming content.

With regard to the impact of advertising on perceptions of news, the greatest amount of critical attention has been directed toward television. For example, Postman (1986) argued that the banality of advertising embedded in television news programs undermines the perceived credibility and seriousness of serious social and political news stories being reported. In other words, commercials may make serious matters appear trivial to news viewers. An additional, related effect of advertising on news perceptions discussed by other researchers is that advertising (and particularly humorous or silly ads) may actually make news stories for issues that are of lesser importance (i.e., "soft" news stories) appear more important or newsworthy by comparison. Consistent with these arguments, some studies have reported empirical evidence for the potential problems of television commercials on viewer psychology (Biocca, David, Dion, Goodson, Lashley, & Tan, 1992; Biocca, 1991; Gunther, 1987; Robinson & Levy, 1986). Importantly, Biocca et al. (1992) conducted an experiment to examine Postman's assertions, and whereas these authors reported that the inclusion of advertising in news programming had little effect on perceived importance in general, the inclusion of humorous or silly advertising did result in increased perceived importance of soft news stories.

One interpretation of Biocca et al.'s (1992) findings may simply be that television viewers have become adept at ignoring or discounting advertising interruptions while viewing television news. From this perspective, greater exposure to television news should lead to enhanced skills in this regard and should lead to diminished effects of advertising on news perceptions. On the other hand, an alternative interpretation may be related to the way that programming content and advertising are presented in the television medium. Specifically, news content is typically presented separately from commercial messages, thereby creating a temporal and perhaps psychological distance between news content and advertising. In contrast, the Internet tends to present advertising and news simultaneously, with on-line news stories more intermingled with ads than in other media contexts. As a result, the possibility of potentially adverse effects of advertising effects on viewers' news perceptions may be enhanced due to physical traits of on-line news pages. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of advertising on viewers' perceptions of news stories in the context of an on-line news site.

Context Effects: Relevancy Between News and Advertising

Research exploring the reciprocal influences of news and advertising has primarily centered on the effects of media context (i.e., the programming or editorial environment in which an advertisement is embedded) on processing or evaluations of advertising or advised products (Herr, 1989; Higgins & King, 1981; Puto, 1987; Smith, 1996; Woodside & Singer, 1994). Research has generally found that irrelevant information results in less favorable attitudes (Lee & Mason, 1999) than relevant information, but the consumer's ability to integrate relevant information with ease results in favorable attitude and behavior changes (Haberland & Dacin, 1992).

However, as Stewart and Ward (1994) point out, it is conceivable to expect that context effects, in addition to affecting viewers' attitudes about advertising, also play a similar role in terms of affecting viewers' attitudes about media content that surrounds the ads. That is, a news story surrounded by advertising that is irrelevant or inconsistent in terms of tone and manner should be perceived less favorably than a news story surrounded by advertising that is relevant or that is not associated with advertising at all. For example, exposure to a humorous or silly ad while reading a hard news story dealing with a serious topic may harm perceived news-value or credibility of the news.

Aside from the issue of relevance, other researchers have suggested additional mechanisms that also imply that advertising may have adverse effects on news perceptions. For example, researchers have proposed that ads can prime inappropriate cognitive strategies, moods (affective transference), and schema that interfere with news processing. For example, Chaudhuri and Buck (1995) explored the relationship between various advertising strategies and the affective and analytic-cognitive responses that the advertising strategies evoke, and reported that advertising effects on mood and arousal were negatively related to analytic cognition and positively related to affective cognition. Gunther (1987) also pointed out that viewers who possess or use the wrong schema for processing news, or are not familiar with the appropriate schema, fail to understand information, allocate less attention, and remember less news. In this regard, if advertising primes schemas that are inappropriate for news processing, perceptions of the news content itself may be adversely affected.

Regardless of the mechanisms by which advertising may affect news perceptions, the assumed reciprocal effects of news content and advertising suggest that it is clearly important to consider the physical attributes of the presentation style. For example, television commercials are presented sequentially, not simultaneously, with news stories such that there is essentially no overlap between advertising and news content. In newspapers, while advertising is often presented on the same page (or nearby pages) as news content, advertisements are rarely embedded within the news stories themselves. Consequently, when reading a newspaper, readers could easily (and intentionally) ignore ads in order to pay attention to news stories because advertisements are typically easily distinguishable from and separated from news stories. However, in on-line news, the physical distance between news stories and ads is more intermingled than that typical of traditional media such as newspaper or television. That is, on the Internet, one can hardly expect to read news stories without being interrupted by ads because there are no areas of web sites that predictably devoid of advertising content. As a consequence, the effects of advertising on news perceptions may be particularly likely in an on-line context as compared to within mediums such as television or newspapers.

Given the nature of on-line news sites in term of presentation styles, the main purpose of the present study is to explore the inappropriate priming function of advertising on hard news. Specifically, based on prior research concerning both the issue of relevance and the processing of news information, the following hypothesis was examined:

- H1: On-line news readers exposed to silly ads will tend to evaluate hard news stories more negatively than will on-line news readers exposed to no ads or to serious ads.

If we assume that exposure to a humorous or silly ad during reading a hard news story may harm perceived news-value or credibility of the news, what can we assume with regard to soft news stories? This study sought to replicate Biocca et al.'s (1992) finding that humorous or silly ads can also impact perceptions of soft news stories, leading to perceptions of increased importance. Consequently, the following hypothesis was explored:

- H2: On-line news readers exposed to silly ads will tend to evaluate soft news stories more positively than will on-line news readers exposed to no ads or to serious ads.

Internet User Experience

When we consider the characteristics of the web as a medium, user experience is clearly an important factor to consider. For example, Benway and Lane (1998) suggested that expert users have a tendency to avoid banner ads when they browse the Internet. Similarly, Dreze and Hussherr (1999), by employing an eye-tracking device, also revealed that expert users paid significantly less attention to banner ads and remembered less brands displayed in the banner than did novices. These studies are consistent with additional research reporting a negative relationship between user experience and inclination to click on banner ads (Dahlen, Ekborn, & Morner, 2000).

In sum, research generally suggests that experienced Internet users are more adept than light users at avoiding Internet advertising, and may consequently be less likely to be influenced. Therefore, we may tentatively assume that adverse effects of web advertising on news perceptions may be more pronounced among light than among heavy Internet users. Accordingly, this study examined the following research question:

- RQ1: Will Internet advertising have a stronger effect on news perceptions among light than among heavy Internet users?

Perceptions of Internet Advertising

Although this study centers its attention on the effects of adverting on news perceptions, news and advertising likely have reciprocal effects. That is, the perceptions of web ads could vary as a function of not only aforementioned factors such as the nature of ads and internet use but also story type (hard news versus soft news). Therefore, this study examined the following, final research question:

- RQ2. How do ad perceptions vary as a function of ad type, story type, and internet use?

Method

Participants

Two hundred and sixty-three undergraduate students taking communication courses at a large Northeastern university participated in the study. All participants were juniors or seniors with a median age of 21. Participants were awarded a nominal amount of extra credit in exchange for their participation. Responses from three participants were discarded due to incomplete answers. As a result, responses from 260 participants were analyzed.

Experimental Design and Procedure

A 2 (Story Type: Hard News, Soft News) X 3 (Nature of Ad: No Advertisement, Silly Advertisement, Serious Advertisement) X 2 (Internet Use) between-subjects experiment design was employed in which Internet Use was measured, with all other factors being manipulated. In addition, among the conditions with ads present, half of the participants saw the ads presented in banner format, and half saw the ads presented in pop-up format.

All stimulus presentation and data collection was conducted via the web, with javascript employed to randomly assign participants to experimental conditions. When participants entered the website, they were presented with three news articles to read, each on consecutive pages.

Each news story was accompanied by either no advertisement, a silly advertisement (either pop-up or banner), or a serious advertisement (either pop-up or banner). Subsequently, participants rated their perceptions of the news stories, their perceptions of the advertisements, and their typical Internet use. Participants were divided into groups of high or low Internet use on the basis of their reported years of using the Internet and their frequency of use per day.

To maximize external validity, all procedures were conducted outside of the laboratory. During the course of one week, participants were sent an e-mail explaining the study and providing them with a URL that directed them to the study site where further instructions were provided, the news stories were presented, and the questionnaire data were collected. Consequently, participants were allowed to participate in the study at any time and in any location during the course of a 1-week time period.

Stimulus Materials

News stories. A pretest was conducted to determine which news articles to use for this study. Twelve news articles from various on-line news sites were used in the pretest. Forty-seven undergraduate students rated the news articles using a likert-type 7-point scale anchored between 1 (*Consider as soft news*) and 7 (*Consider as hard news*). To control for the effects of differing articles in each story type condition, three soft and three hard news stories were used for this experiment. A paired t-test of the average score across the three soft news and the three hard news stories selected in the pretest revealed that participants perceived significant differences between soft news stories (M = 1.25, SD = .45) and hard news stories (M = 5.91, SD = .72), $t(46) = 37.97$, $p < .001$. To control for order effects, the order of the news stories were varied within each condition. Thus, three different orders of the soft news stories and three different orders of

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the hard news stories were created such that equivalent numbers of participants read each order. Dates and reporter names were not included in news.

Web ads. To determine which ads to use for this study, 20 banner ads from various on-line news sites were also pretested on two likert-type 7-point scales anchored between 1 (*Silly*) and 7 (*Serious*) and between 1 (*Boring*) and 7 (*Interesting*). Based on the mean scores, two ads were selected to represent "silly advertisements," and two ads were selected to represent "serious advertisements." Paired t-tests between the average seriousness scores of the two silly ads selected versus the two serious ads selected revealed that the silly ads were perceived as significantly less serious ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.07$) than the serious ads ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(44) = 11.49$, $p < .001$. Importantly, there was no significant difference in Boring/Interesting ratings between silly ads ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.47$) and serious ads ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.84$), $t(45) = .84$, $p = .41$, suggesting that any differences obtained between the two ad types reflect differences in seriousness rather than in interest. After choosing banner ads, pop-up ads that were identical to banner ads were developed by the researchers. The size of all the ads was 300 X 250. Although two ads (or brands) were chosen for each condition, the stimulus web pages were designed so that participants, if not in the control condition, are exposed to just one ad while reading three news stories. Two ads (brands) in each condition were counterbalanced to reduce idiosyncratic effects due to a specific ad (brand). The brands used in silly ad condition were an on-line game company and an on-line sweepstake company, and the brands used in serious ad condition were an e-service company and an on-line health (fitness) service company.

Dependent Measures

Twelve news-perception items were employed in this study: Important, Newsworthy, Serious, Valuable, Trustworthy, Credible, Believable, Accurate, Objective, Lively, Entertaining, and Interesting. These items were extracted from Sundar's (1999) news evaluation items and modified to fit the purposes of the present study. Seven items pertaining to ad perceptions were developed by the authors: Professional, Credible, Trustworthy, Distracting, Irritating, Inappropriate, and Worthless. Both news-perception and ad-perception items were measured using 7-point semantic differential scales.

Results

News Perceptions

News perception items were subjected to an exploratory principal components analysis with varimax rotation. An examination of factor loadings, eigenvalues greater than one, and the scree plot suggested three values: news value, news credibility, and news entertainment. News value was composed of four items (important, news worthy, serious, and valuable: Cronbach's alpha = .91), news credibility was composed of five items (trustworthy, credible, believable, accurate, and objective: Cronbach's alpha = .77), and news entertainment was composed of three items (lively, entertaining, and interesting: Cronbach's alpha = .82). Table 1 reports the factor loadings of the news perception items. Scales for each of three factors were computed by averaging the scores of the items that loaded highly on a given factor. Consequently, scores could range from 1 to 7.

To examine how the nature of advertising inclusion (silly versus serious) affected perceptions of the news stories, a 2 (Story Type) X 3 (Nature of Ad) X 2 (Internet Use) general linear multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed. This analysis revealed a significant multivariate main effect for story type, Wilks' $\Lambda = .26$, $F(3, 245) = 231.73$, $p < .001$. An examination of the univariate results showed significant main effects of story type on each of the three perception measures. Participants rated the hard news stories higher on news value (*M*

= 5.15, SE = .08) and credibility (M = 4.93, SE = .08) than the soft news stories (news value: M = 2.56, SE = .08; credibility: M = 4.60, SE = .08), but rated the soft news stories higher on entertainment value (M = 4.66, SE = .11) than the hard news stories (M = 4.24, SE = .11): news value: $F(1, 247) = 562.06, p < .001$; credibility: $F(1, 247) = 8.66, p < .01$; entertainment value: $F(1, 247) = 7.31, p < .01$.

In addition to the aforementioned main effect for story type, this analysis also revealed a Story Type X Nature of Ad X Internet Use interaction, Wilks' $\Lambda = .92$, $F(6, 490) = 3.28, p < .01$. An examination of the univariate results revealed significant interactions for both ratings of news value and credibility: news value: $F(2, 247) = 7.45, p < .001$; credibility: $F(2, 247) = 3.48, p < .05$. Table 2 reports the means associated with these interactions. The effect of Nature of Ad on perceived news value was evident only among light Internet users in the hard news condition. Among these participants, the inclusion of silly ads resulted in the lowest news value scores, with no ads or serious ads receiving equal ratings. Similar patterns were observed for ratings of credibility, though no pairwise differences in means were detected.[1]

To summarize, Hypothesis 1 that explored the effects of silly ads on perceptions of hard news stories obtained partial support, with the expected effects obtained for light Internet users only. However, Hypothesis 2, predicting that silly ads would boost news credibility perceptions of soft news stories received no support in this study.

Ad Perceptions

Ad perception items were subjected to an exploratory principal components analysis with varimax rotation, with this analysis suggesting two factors: professionalism and inappropriateness. Professionalism was composed of three items (professional, credible, and trustworthy: Cronbach's alpha = .87) and inappropriateness was composed of three items (distracting, irritating, and inappropriate: Cronbach's alpha = .75). Table 3 reports the factor loadings for the ad perception items. Scales for both factors were computed by averaging the scores of the items that loaded highly on a given factor. Consequently, scores could range from 1 to 7. A 2 (Story Type) X 2 (Nature of Ad) X 2 (Ad Format) X 2 (Internet Use) general linear multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed to examine viewers' ad perceptions. This analysis revealed significant multivariate main effects for story type, nature of ad, and ad format: story type: Wilks' $\Lambda = .94$, $F(2, 147) = 4.34$, $p < .05$; nature of ad: Wilks' $\Lambda = .85$, $F(2, 147) = 13.46$, $p < .001$; ad format: Wilks' $\Lambda = .87$, $F(2, 147) = 11.44$, $p < .001$. Table 4 reports the results of univariate tests for each main effect, illustrating that participants rated the ads in soft news stories as more professional than the ads in hard news stories, rated the serious ads as more professional than the silly ads, and rated the pop-up ads as more inappropriate than the banner ads.

In addition to the aforementioned main effects, this analysis also revealed a Nature of Ad X Ad Format interaction, Wilks' $\Lambda = .96$, $F(2, 147) = 3.40$, $p < .05$. An examination of the univariate results revealed no significant interaction for inappropriateness, $F(1, 148) = 1.16$, $p = .28$, but a marginally significant interaction for professionalism, $F(1, 148) = 3.63$, $p = .06$. Table 5 reports the means associated with this interaction, illustrating that whereas ad format had no discernable effect on perceptions of the serious ads, silly ads that were pop-ups were rated as significantly less professional than were silly ads that were banners.

Finally, this analysis revealed a Story Type X Nature of Ad X Internet Use interaction, Wilks' $\Lambda = .95$, $F(2, 147) = 3.49$, $p < .05$. An examination of the univariate results revealed no significant interaction for ad inappropriateness, $F(1, 148) = 1.39$, $p = .24$, but a marginally significant interaction for professionalism, $F(1, 148) = 3.48$, $p = .06$. Table 6 reports the means associated with these interactions. As in the news perceptions analysis, the effect of Nature of Ad on perceived professionalism was evident only among light Internet users in the hard news condition. Among these participants, silly ads were rated as significantly less professional than were serious ads.

Discussion

Do perceptions of on-line news stories vary as a function of the presence or nature of web advertising? Do the effects of web advertising on perceptions of news stories vary as a function of Internet use (light versus heavy)? Given the differences in both viewer experience and presentation styles between television news and on-line news, this study tried to explore Postman's (1986) arguments and to extend Biocca et al.'s (1992) research to the context of on-line news. Although Biocca et al. failed to show unambiguous effects of television commercials on news perceptions, this study provided evidence for Postman's arguments in the context of on-line news. In other words, this study found support for the idea that advertising interruptions can have a negative impact on perceptions of news, though only for some users. Specifically, this study revealed that light Internet users exposed to silly ads tended to perceive hard-news stories as less newsworthy or having less news value. Additionally, this study showed that among light Internet users, advertisements embedded in hard news stories were perceived as significantly less professional than were advertisements embedded in soft news stories.

The fact that heavy Internet users did not evidence similar patterns in perceptions suggests that increased experience with the Internet may lead to strategies to avoid or ignore Internet advertising as previous research argues. Alternatively, inability to ignore Internet advertising or aggravation with commercialization may lead individuals to seek alternate means of obtaining news information. Hence, the fact that light Internet users were more strongly affected by advertising inclusion than were heavy Internet users is open to multiple interpretations.

Despite general support for the hypothesized effects of advertising on news perceptions, there are several limitations that deserve consideration. First, this study did not consider source effects, as the same fictitious web news company and masthead were employed across experimental conditions. However, source-related variables (e.g., source credibility, source reputation, etc.) are obviously critical factors in perceived message credibility and persuasion. For example, research has shown that messages from high-credibility sources are more readily accepted by consumers and encourage greater attitude change than do messages from low-credibility sources (Harmon & Coney, 1982; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978; Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia, 1978). Consequently, future research that examines the effects of advertising on news perceptions could incorporate the issue of different sources as either independent or dependent variables. For example, it is quite plausible to expect enhanced or lowered source credibility works as an independent variable that may influence perceptions of ads and news. More importantly, source credibility may also function as a dependent variable, varying as a function of the inclusion of web ads. For example, news readers exposed to unwanted, bothersome pop-up ads in a news site may evaluate the news site or news organization more negatively than news readers who are not distracted by advertising.

Second, this study employed college students as on-line news readers, separating them into high- and low-experience groups. However, college students likely have more expertise in Internet use than does the general population. Consequently, the low-experience group may differ from low-experience groups in the population of Internet users. As a result, future research that employs non-college samples may find more pronounced effects than those obtained here.

Finally, while the procedures used in the data-collection process maximized natural Internet-use settings by allowing users to participate in the setting and the time of their choosing, the use of this procedure clearly runs the risk of loosing some experimental control. That is, because researchers were not present with the participants during their viewing of the stimulus materials and their completion of the questionnaire, there is no way to discern the types of distractions that may or may not have been present. Of course, there are no *a prior* reasons to suspect that such distractions or other variations differed systematically between experimental conditions, such variations do introduce "noise" or additional error variance. Consequently, future research that examines similar effects in a more controlled environment may find stronger effects than those obtained here, though sacrificing the extent to which such effects can be generalized to more natural Internet-use situations.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study have several implications. First, the adverse effects of advertising on perceptions of news value suggest that news providers may want to consider the implications of their marketing strategies. Insofar as advertising may lead to inappropriate characterizations of serious or hard news content, on-line newspapers may be well advised to place their advertisements in separate sections than those that feature important and serious news content. Similarly, insofar as silly ads are perceived as particularly inappropriate when paired with serious news, advertisers of products that may be deemed of lesser importance or that depend on humorous strategies may opt to have their advertisements placed in news sections that feature soft news or other content that is of a less serious tone.

Most importantly, however, the results of this study suggest that the combination of advertising and news content on the Internet may have implications that go beyond just perceptions of news stories themselves, and may ultimately have effects on both viewers' understanding of issues and on how news stories are covered. For example, if viewers perceive news stories as lacking in news value when paired with silly on-line advertising, this may imply that the perceptions of the issues themselves presented in the news stories seem less important among readers. In addition, if advertisers begin to recognize that silly or trivial ads are perceived more negatively when paired with serious or important news, greater pressure may be exerted on news agencies to include a greater amount of soft-news or human interest that is more amenable to advertisers' interests. Of course, both of these scenarios, while speculative at this point, are very problematic in terms of undermining the role of news in creating and sustaining an informed public. Clearly, explorations that examine these scenarios are deserving of further research attention.

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Footnote

[1] It is impossible to analyze both Ad Format and Nature of Ad in the same analysis given that the control condition contained no ads. Given that the purpose of this research was to extend prior studies that have examined the valence of ads (rather than their format), the present study opted to focus attention on Nature of Ad (silly or serious) rather than the Ad Format (banner or pop-up). However, it is possible to explore the effects of Ad Format (banner or pop-up), instead of Nature of Ad (silly or serious), using a 2 (Story Type) X 3 (Ad Format) X 2 (Internet Use) MANOVA. As with the previous analysis focusing on Nature of Ad, this alternative analysis also revealed a significant multivariate Story Type X Ad format X Internet Use interaction, Wilks' $\Lambda = .93$, $F(6, 490) = 2.97$, $p < .01$. An examination of the univariate results revealed significant interactions for both ratings of news value and credibility: news value: $F(2, 247) = 7.51$, $p < .001$; credibility: $F(2, 247) = 3.84$, $p < .05$. As in the previous analysis, for ratings of news value, ad inclusion had no effect on ratings of the soft news stories. In contrast, for the hard news stories, the inclusion of advertising (and particularly banner advertising) resulted in lower news-value ratings, but only among the light Internet users (No Ads: $M = 5.60$, $SE = .18$; Banner: $M = 4.80$, $SE = .23$; Pop-up: $M = 4.96$, $SE = .18$). For heavy internet users, the inclusion of advertising had no appreciable effect on ratings of the hard news stories. Similar patterns were observed for ratings of credibility among light Internet users in the hard news condition users (No Ads: $M = 5.14$, $SE = .18$; Banner: $M = 4.53$, $SE = .24$; Pop-up: $M = 4.83$, $SE = .18$)

Table 1
Factor Loadings of News Perception Items

Items	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3
News value			
Important	**.90**	.05	-.05
Newsworthy	**.90**	.19	.07
Serious	**.89**	.15	-.20
Valuable	**.82**	.17	.20
News credibility			
Trustworthy	.26	**.80**	.09
Credible	.32	**.76**	.15
Believable	.28	**.69**	.11
Accurate	-.11	**.68**	.15
Objective	.00	**.61**	-.20
News entertainment			
Lively	-.13	.02	**.87**
Entertaining	-.08	.08	**.86**
Interesting	.32	.11	**.82**
Eigenvalue	3.47	2.63	2.36
Proportion of Variance	28.88	21.93	19.68

Note: Numbers in boldface type indicate primary loading of a given variable (row) on the corresponding factor (column).

Table 2
Perceived News Value and Credibility: Story Type X Nature of Ad X Internet Use

Perceived News Value

Story Type	Internet Use		Nature of Ad: No Ads	Silly	Serious
Soft news	Light	*M*	2.46	2.78	2.80
		SE	.19	.20	.17
	Heavy	*M*	2.63	2.11	2.55
		SE	.17	.19	.18
Hard news	Light	*M*	5.60_b	4.84_a	4.98_{ab}
		SE	.18	.19	.22
	Heavy	*M*	4.92	5.30	5.25
		SE	.18	.19	.22

Perceived News Credibility

Story Type	Internet Use		Nature of Ad: No Ads	Silly	Serious
Soft news	Light	*M*	4.19	4.62	4.76
		SE	.19	.20	.17
	Heavy	*M*	4.70	4.64	4.71
		SE	.18	.20	.18
Hard news	Light	*M*	5.14	4.63	4.85
		SE	.18	.19	.22
	Heavy	*M*	4.80	4.90	5.26
		SE	.18	.19	.22

Note: Within rows, means with no lower case subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ using Student-Newman-Keuls tests.

Table 3
Factor Loadings of Ad Perception Items

Items	Factor1	Factor2
Professionalism		
Professional	**0.87**	-0.06
Credible	**0.87**	-0.19
Trustworthy	**0.84**	-0.20
Inappropriateness		
Distracting	-0.20	**0.86**
Irritating	0.02	**0.82**
Inappropriate	-0.40	**0.69**
Worthless	-0.57	0.54
Eigenvalue	2.76	2.26
Proportion of Variance	39.38	32.33

Note: Numbers in boldface type indicate primary loading of a given variable (row) on the corresponding factor (column).

Table 4

Main effects for Story Type, Nature of Ad, and Ad Format on Ad Perceptions

IV	DV	Univariate F	*M* (*SE*)	
			Soft	Hard
Story Type	Professionalism	7.52**	3.49 (.13)	2.96 (.15)
	Inappropriateness	3.74	5.08 (.14)	5.49 (.16)
			Silly	Serious
Nature of Ad	Professionalism	25.64***	2.73 (.14)	3.72 (.14)
	Inappropriateness	7.74**	5.58 (.15)	4.99 (.15)
			Banner	Pop-up
Ad Format	Professionalism	2.02	3.36 (.14)	3.09 (.13)
	Inappropriateness	23.02***	4.78 (.15)	5.79 (.14)
			Light	Heavy
Internet Use	Professionalism	.01	3.23 (.14)	3.22 (.14)
	Inappropriateness	1.56	5.41 (.15)	5.15 (.15)

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5
Perceived Professionalism of Ad: Nature of Ad X Ad format

Nature of Ad		Ad Format: Banner	Ad Format: Pop-up
Silly	*M*	3.05 $_b$	2.41 $_a$
	SE	.20	.19
Serious	*M*	3.67	3.76
	SE	.20	.18

Note: Within rows, means with no lower case subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ using Student-Newman-Keuls tests.

Table 6

Perceived Professionalism of Ad: Story Type X Nature of Ad X Internet Use

			Story Type	
Internet Use	Nature of Ad		Soft	Hard
Light	Silly	*M*	3.51_a	2.43_b
		SE	.28	.27
	Serious	*M*	3.59	3.40
		SE	.23	.30
Heavy	Silly	*M*	2.57	2.42
		SE	.27	.29
	Serious	*M*	4.29	3.58
		SE	.25	.30

Note: Within rows, means with no lower case subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ using Student-Newman-Keuls tests.

Patriarchy v. Functional Truth: Assessing the Feminist Critique of Intimate Violence Reporting

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Patriarchy v. Functional Truth: Assessing the Feminist Critique of Intimate Violence Reporting

Abstract

Journalism assumes reporters are able to pursue "functional truth"—an account of issues and events reliably describing social reality. Critical feminist scholars, however, contend that journalists working in male-dominated corporations are constrained by a culture of patriarchal values. The present study is the first in the U.S. to test this critique as it applies to reporting the vast social pathology of intimate partner violence. Contrary to that critique, newspapers very rarely blamed female battering victims or mitigated suspect blame. However, intimate violence was covered much less often and with less depth than other violence.

Patriarchy v. Functional Truth: Assessing the Feminist Critique of Intimate Violence Reporting[1]

In their distillation of the essence of journalism at the beginning of the 21st century, Kovach and Rosenstiel posit the pursuit of truth as the primary principle:

> This is what journalism is after—a practical or functional form of truth. It is not truth in the absolute or philosophical sense. It is not the truth of a chemical equation. But journalism can—and must—pursue truth in a sense by which we can operate day to day. [2]

Criticial feminist scholars aren't buying it, especially when it comes to reporting about issues particularly affecting women, such as violence against intimate partners. Some argue that journalists do not—and others that they cannot—pursue the truth because they are caught up in a culture of patriarchal values that reflect, reinforce and legitimize viewpoints that privilege men over women.[3] In *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, Meyers wrote:

> News scholars ... note that the values, norms and conventions that shape the news support the status quo by representing the interests of a white, middle- and upper-class, male elite.[4]

The result when applied to news of violence against women, she asserted, "positions the *female victim* as deviant and deserving of condemnation if she in any way appears to have disregarded or flouted socially approved gender roles and expectations" [italics in the original].[5]

The present study tests the core assumption of journalism that reporters and editors can discern and provide "functional truth," against the competing idea that journalists are unable, unwilling, or too unaware to provide an account of reality free of patriarchal values.[6] The field of contest is coverage of the most common type of violence against women—intimate partner violence. It's a vast public health problem that in the U.S. is the most frequent cause of non-fatal injury to women[7] and kills an average of three women every day.[8] Given that news is a primary resource citizens use to make sense of important issues of the day,[9] if journalists *are* warping coverage of intimate violence[10] as feminist scholars charge, efforts to develop social solutions to battering may be stymied. How this topic is portrayed matters both as a public health issue and as a challenge to the fundamental professional standard of journalism.

Literature review

Functional truth: By the early 1980s, Hackett observed, the journalistic paradigm of objectivity was spent: "No longer can we simply assume the possibility of unbiased communication, of objective and detached reporting on an allegedly external social and political world."[11] Schudson substituted "mature subjectivity" for the unreachable standard of objectivity. He argued for reporting,

> firmly grounded in the process of screening tips, assembling and weighing evidence, fitting facts, and attempting to disconfirm the resulting story. In the end, these exercises yield a degree of 'moral certainty' about the convergence of facts into a truthful report.[12]

Similarly, Ettema urged a "practical wisdom," an effort to justify fact claims with as much evidence as practicable.[13] Allan described three streams of feminist research about news, the most traditional of which holds that both male and female reporters can be sensitized to sexist stereotypes and learn to exclude or counter them.[14]

For the purposes of this study, "functional truth" means two things, reporting that: 1) avoids or challenges sexist stereotypes about intimate violence against women; and 2) treats intimate violence no differently than other crimes of violence.

Patriarchal biases in reporting about violence against women: Most studies of news accounts of violence against women concern rape rather than the far broader problem of violence between intimate partners.[15] Benedict, for example, reported that a rape victim was likely to be blamed not only if she stepped outside the role of housewife, but if no weapon were used, she knew the assailant, was young, or pretty.[16] Quantitative studies of sexist stereotyping of violence reporting are scarce, contradictory and dated. A 1984 study of sexual assault reporting in three Toronto newspapers found that almost half of these stories carried attributions of fault directed at the female victim. Only one-in-six articles blamed the male perpetrator.[17] The only other study examined assignment of responsibility across all types of crime in 11 Canadian dailies in the early 80s. It identified victim responsibility in about one article in four. But male victims were more likely to be blamed than female for all crimes of violence.[18]

When narrowed to analyses of intimate partner violence, the literature is more recent, but scant. It also turns away from quantitative measures to discourse analysis of individual stories or stories selected purposively, and it employs feminist critiques.[19] To the existing scholarship we've added observations about press coverage from intimate violence experts who work in the counties where we conducted our study. Three primary criticisms emerge:

First, critics accuse the press of failing to take intimate violence as seriously as other violent crimes. For example, Santa Clara County (California) Deputy District Attorney Rolanda Pierre-Dixon who has specialized in domestic violence cases for 20 years said, "You don't see informative [stories] about domestic violence year-long; [reporters] only react to homicides."[20] Billie Weiss, executive director of the Injury and Violence Prevention Program in the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, complained that even intimate homicides don't necessarily rate coverage in the Los Angeles press.[21]

Second, scholars charge that violence against women is the only crime in which the victim is blamed. If a female victim of violence is a child or elderly, she may be described as a true victim, noted Meyers. But in between those ages "chances are she will be represented as somehow responsible for her own suffering because she was on drugs, drunk, not properly cautious, stupid, engaged in questionable activities, or involved in work or exhibiting behavior outside the traditional role of women."[22]

Third, more than in any other crime, reporters mitigate or obscure male perpetrators' guilt. Finn described how some men escape blame: White, middle-class men who batter their wives are "constructed in state and media discourses as the victims of provocation or personal stress, more deserving of mercy and compassion than condemnation and constraint."[23] Lamb and Keon found newspaper reports of domestic violence often used the passive voice. "The words 'they were beaten' or 'they were subjected to abuse' are ambiguous and direct the focus of the reader away from the male perpetrator. They also make the victim the linguistic center of the sentence."[24] Thus the very language used to describe intimate partner violence shields the perpetrator from responsibility.

Research Questions

The literature suggests three research questions highlighting a conflict between "functional truth" and patriarchal values and stereotypes in news:

- RQ1: Is intimate violence covered less frequently, less representatively, and with less depth than other kinds of crime?

- RQ2: How often does intimate violence reporting blame female victims for the violence inflicted on them?

- RQ3: How often does intimate violence reporting mitigate or deflect blame from male suspected perpetrators?

Method

We chose to answer these questions by analyzing how violence is reported at a regionally and a nationally prominent newspaper, respectively the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *Los Angeles Times.*[25] In addition to their influence on journalistic practice, these papers were selected because they are located in counties with domestic violence death review teams, which facilitated our analysis. We concentrated on just two newspapers because in order to detect even rare negative stereotypes we would have to analyze *every* article describing intimate violence over an extended time—in this case one year. Also, to discover whether those stereotypes were challenged when they appeared would require a secondary qualitative analysis. Finally, to determine whether such violence was reported differently than *other kinds of violence*, we needed to analyze a second simultaneous sample from the same papers.

Using computer databases[26] we identified more than 5,200 articles about criminal violence[27] occurring in the U.S. and published in 2000.[28] We printed and analyzed every story about intimate partner violence (488 articles).[29] We also gathered a random 1-in-9 sample of all other violence stories. That sample, comprising 529 articles, was stratified chronologically over the 12 months.[30]

Answering the Research Questions. We answered RQ1 about inferior coverage of intimate violence with three measures. First we determined whether intimate violence gets press attention commensurate with its frequency as a felony arrest.[31] We calculated the number of intimate violence *stories* per felony *arrest* for that crime in Santa Clara County (the primary circulation area of the *Mercury News*) and in Los Angeles County (the primary circulation area of the *Times*) and compared those ratios with the number of stories per felony arrest for other violence. We included all stories about these violent incidents that occurred in the newspapers' home counties as well as any thematic stories originated by the papers' own staffs.

Prior research has established that crime reporting over-represents homicide.[32] So we asked not just whether intimate violence is portrayed as more fatal than it is, but whether coverage is more murder-oriented than reporting on other violence. To compare the "murder-centricity" of intimate with other violence, we calculated the ratio of stories about intimate murders to all articles about violence between intimates and compared it to the ratio of such homicides to all felony arrests for intimate violence.[33] We calculated similar ratios for the other violence sample using non-intimate violence crime data.

Finally, we examined whether intimate violence is covered as often as an issue as other kinds of violence. Researchers have found thematic reporting—stories that look at issues or patterns of events rather than focusing on a particular episode or incident—is often substantially more helpful to readers as a resource for making sense of their environment.[34] Episodic reporting, on the other hand, may lose sight of the forest for the trees. So we counted the percentage of all stories that were thematic for both intimate and other violence samples.

To answer RQs 2 and 3—blaming the victim and deflecting blame from the perpetrator—we analyzed frames. A frame is a theme or sometimes just a cue that activates a scenario in the minds of some readers.[35] Frames are powerful because they aid certain interpretations and hinder others—often without the reader's awareness. Frames create tracks for a train of thought.

In both the intimate violence and other violence samples, we looked for causal content frames—including necessary, sufficient or contributory causes. For the intimate violence articles alone, we conducted a second, more qualitative analysis. The first author re-read the stories in which we found causal frames to determine whether they explicitly or implicitly assigned responsibility.[36] He also examined the gender of the victim and whether the frame was challenged or contradicted—which might lessen its ideological impact.

Most frame analyses avoid implied frames because they are less obvious to coders and thus less likely to meet criteria for reliability.[37] But we included them because the criticisms we tested came from discourse analyses that would be sensitive to implication; we couldn't assess them fairly using only manifest indicators. We also think the decisions—conscious and otherwise—that reporters and editors make to include certain information and exclude other elements sometimes reveal a subtle causal logic. News is a terse and "objective" genre in which extraneous content is stripped away. Why, for example, include a comment about a woman's remaining with a violent man in a story of her battering if journalists don't judge it relevant to the violence?

Counting implied frames also increases the likelihood of accepting the presence of a frame that's not really there in order to avoid missing one that is. In other words, our results are more likely to exaggerate than understate the presence of victim blame and suspect mitigation.[38] Despite these tradeoffs, this research design allows us to generalize beyond a few instances without sacrificing nuance.

Results

Re RQ1: Intimate partner violence coverage was covered less frequently, less representatively, and with less depth than other kinds of crime.

Overall coverage of intimate violence was much less frequent. In 2000, the *Mercury News* reported 17 thematic stories about intimate violence plus 38 episodic articles about such violence in Santa Clara County for a total of 55. There were 2,450 arrests for this crime in the county in 2000,[39] so the story per arrest ratio is .0224. Our sample of stories about other kinds of violence in the *Mercury News* contained 24 thematic stories plus 35 episodic stories describing such violence in the county, for a total of 59. Since each of the other violence stories represents 9 articles in the paper, we estimate that the paper reported 531 stories about other violence that occurred in Santa Clara County. There were 2,952 arrests for other types of violence, which yields a story per arrest ratio of .1799. That's 8 times larger than the ratio for intimate violence stories. Even if you account for the largest margin of error around the ratio for other violence, the gap would only shrink to 6.4 times as many other violence as intimate violence stories.[40]

The *Times* staff wrote 21 thematic stories about intimate violence in 2000 plus 82 episodics describing incidents in the LA County for a total of 103. There were 14,706 intimate violence arrests in the county,[41] so the ratio of story per arrest is .007. For the other violence sample, the *Times* produced 105 thematics and 116 episodics for a sample of 221. Multiplied by 9, the total comes to 1,989 stories. There were 25,734 other violence felony arrests in the county, so the story per arrest ratio is .0773. That's 11 times larger than the intimate violence ratio. The maximum margin of error would only reduce the ratio to 10.2 times as many other as intimate violence stories.

Intimate violence coverage was even more murder-centric than reporting on other violence. While 63% of all *Mercury News* stories about intimate violence in Santa Clara County described murders, the ratio of such murders per felony arrest for intimate violence was just 2.4 for every 1000.[42] Thus for intimate violence, the proportion of murder stories to all intimate violence articles exaggerates the ratio of murders to felony arrests by .63/.0024 or 263 times. The same analysis for other violence stories shows that 37% of all *Mercury News* articles concerned homicide. County records show 24 murders for other violence compared to 2,952 arrests for a ratio of 9.5 homicides per thousand felony arrests.[43] So the proportion of murder stories to all other violence articles overstates the ratio of murders to felony arrests by .37/.0095 or 39 times. Therefore, coverage of IPV emphasizes murder 263/39, or almost 7 times more than coverage of other violence. Even at the greatest margin of error for the other violence sample, coverage of IPV is about 5 times more murder-centric.

Similarly at the *Times,* the 62% of all LA County intimate violence stories concerning murder compares to a ratio of 3.3 murders per thousand felony arrests for intimate violence.[44] Dividing .62 by .0033, we see that murders between intimates were exaggerated over violence short of murder by a factor of 188. For *other violence*, 61% of all stories concerned murder. There were 951 murders not involving intimate partners in the county in 2000 compared to 25,734 felony arrests for such non-intimate violence, a rate of .037. So the portrayal of murder exaggerates its incidence by .61/.037, about 17-fold. Thus, intimate violence coverage is 188/17 or 11 times more murder-oriented than other violence reporting. Even at the greatest margin of error for the other violence sample, intimate violence coverage is 10 times more murder-centric.

Intimate violence is less likely to be covered as an issue. When we counted all violence articles in the papers, including wire service stories, only one-in-eight intimate violence stories rated treatment as an issue, trend or theme rather than as a simple description of a particular violent episode. In contrast, a third of all stories about other violence was thematic.[45]

Re RQ2: Intimate violence reporting rarely blames a female victim. To answer RQ2, we examined intimate violence stories for 11 frames found in the literature or suggested by battered women's advocates. To establish whether victims were also blamed in coverage of other kinds of violence, we also created a set of 9 parallel frames for that sample. Table 1 shows the frames previous research suggested would be most common and the percentage of intimate violence stories in which the frame appeared.

[Table 1 goes about here]

After conducting the secondary qualitative analysis, the pattern of blaming a female victim for intimate violence that we expected from prior research grew fainter still. Almost half of the victims blamed turned out to be male. We also noticed that female victim-blame statements were sometimes contested in the same article, presumably attenuating the strength of the blame frame.

Take the frame of the victim being unfaithful, for example. Of 11 stories in which it was coded, this frame was explicit in just 4. Contrary to previous research, the frame was applied almost as often—in 5 of the 11 articles—to a male victim of a female assailant as to the more usual case of a woman victim of a man's assault.[46] When the context surrounding the frame is considered, women victims were blamed for violence because they saw other men in about 1 story in 100 and usually by implication.

The most frequent particular frame was staying with a violent partner. Although this frame appeared in 24 stories, it was explicit in only 7. In 3 of the 7 explicit uses, the frame was challenged. For example, in a *Times* column in which a student blames her girlfriends who continue to date abusive boys, the columnist then quotes the teacher responding: "I won't accept that anyone likes getting beat up".[47] Rather than becoming a reinforcement of a stereotype, it became an opportunity to undermine its legitimacy.

This frame, in implied form, was more common than any frame blaming the victim for sexual reasons. According to *Mercury News* reporter Michelle Guido, who consulted on this research, blaming the victim for staying has a commonsense ring to it. "People have a hard time sympathizing with victims of domestic violence. Their visceral reaction is 'get out!'" But in reality, the frame is often naïve. Women are at greatest risk when they attempt to leave and just after leaving an abusive relationship.[48] Further, the frame assumes the battered woman and any children have a safe place to go and the resources to live independently. It also takes for granted that she has the self-confidence to get out. Physical abuse is almost always accompanied by belittling psychological abuse.[49]

Overall we turned up little victim blame directed at women. Even if we aggregate such frames and add up all of the articles in which blame was explicit, uncontested and directed against female victims, they constitute fewer than 4% of the 488 analyzed.[50]

In coverage of other kinds of crime, victims are blamed even less. In our parallel analysis of stories describing other kinds of violent crime, we looked for victim blame frames such as victims entering dangerous places, flaunting wealth, failing to heed warning signs of danger, becoming impaired through drinking or drug use, failing to cooperate with police, appearing vulnerable, etc. Only one registered in more than 2% of the articles sampled.[51] The "victim provoked the violence with a physical attack" frame appeared in 8.5% of stories. The relative frequency of this frame, however, may not indicate negative stereotyping in the same way it might in the intimate violence sample. We would expect this situation to be more common in violence *other* than between intimates because of the absence of the strength differential between men and women in

the typical intimate relationship. Though a man who fights back when attached by another man is generally
considered more justified in American culture than one who retaliates against his wife or girlfriend, this frame does not question a violent response in general.

In conclusion, our analysis does not support the implication in the literature that blaming women for domestic violence is common; at these papers it was rare. On the other hand, victim-blame in other kinds of violence reporting was almost non-existent.

Re RQ3: Intimate violence reporting rarely deflects responsibility from the batterer. First we examined the finding in the literature that the suspect's identity was often obscured and the focus shifted to the victim. Second, we looked for frames that let the perpetrator off the hook, either partly or completely. Last, we tested the claim that the *couple* is blamed for the husband's abuse. To be fair to journalists, we also looked for frames that held the suspect's feet to the fire—by attributing the violence to the suspect's jealous, controlling behavior, for instance, or by rejecting blame-shifting, e.g., "there's no excuse for domestic violence."[52]

Batterers' identities are not obscured. We measured whether suspects were identified, and how much vis-a-vis victims. We looked for identifiers such as name, age, residence, occupation, education level, achievements, etc. and computed one total for the suspect and another for the victim. Far from being obscured, we found that reporters consistently named intimate violence suspects and identified them more completely (averaging 3.17 attributes) than victims (averaging 1.93). The practice of reporting more fully on suspects than their victims was not unique to intimate violence, however. Suspects were better identified in reports of other kinds of violence as well.[53]

Perpetrators are rarely excused. Here we looked for frames mitigating the perpetrator's responsibility. Table 2 summarizes our findings.

[Table 2 goes about here]

Again, when we looked more closely at the context of these frames, we saw they were often challenged. Take the "perpetrator snapped" frame, for example. It was usually explicit (in 15 articles of 21). But in all but 3 of the explicit stories, the frame was contested. In addition, 3 articles contained the reverse of the frame. An example of this opposite frame was found in a *Mercury News* book review: "Murray makes it clear that abuse is not a natural reaction; it's deliberate. 'His hand doesn't just jump out of his pocket and slap her in the face. They don't act out of anger, but out of a need for dominance and control.'"[54]

The most common mitigation frame, that both partners bear some responsibility, was usually implied (31 of 47 articles). In the 16 stories with explicit uses, the preponderance of blame was levied on men in 11, on women in 2 and on both parties equally in 3. Blame usually took the shape of criminal charges. For example, although San Diego Padres outfielder Al Martin was described as having "exchanged punches" with a woman who claimed to be his wife, only he was charged with assault.[55] In the two cases where women were blamed, police were investigating them for murders.

If we sum all explicit uses of these four mitigation frames in which the batterer is male, we find the expectation of the research literature met in only 14 articles of 488, about 3%.

In addition to mitigation frames, we also saw outright innocent pleas. As trial coverage comprised a large part of both papers' reporting of intimate violence, this frame was prominent—appearing in 120 stories, or 24.6% of all such articles. Most were connected to a trial. Whether the invocation of this frame represents an attempt to deflect blame from intimate violence suspects depends on whether it occurs more often in these stories than in reporting of other types of violent crime. As we shall see, it doesn't.

Batterers are blamed. We found several counter-stereotypical frames to be about as common as suspect-mitigation themes. The two most frequent were: "The suspect acted violently at least partly because s/he was battered previously" (22 of 488 stories, or 4.5%); and "The suspect may have acted at least partly out of a desire to control/dominate/bully/intimidate a partner" (53 stories or 10.9%). The controlling behavior frame was most often explicit—described as a cause of the violence in 40 of 53 stories—and overwhelmingly directed toward male perpetrators.

Mitigating factors are rarer still in coverage of other kinds of crime. Our analysis of stories describing other kinds of criminal violence turned up four parallel frames of interest. The possible mitigation frame of "impairment" due to alcohol or drug consumption showed up in 4.2% of articles—almost as often in other violence stories as in those describing intimate violence.[56] That squares with research findings showing that alcohol use accompanies both domestic and other kinds of violence.[57] However, the "snapped" or "acting out of character" frame was very rare, appearing in 1.5% of other violence stories. That's much less than in intimate violence stories even when sampling error is accounted for.[58] The difference suggests that the stereotype uniquely attaches to intimate violence. But the frequent challenge of this frame demonstrates that journalists are not merely transcribing it verbatim from sources.

The "bullying/controlling" frame appears in 4% of the other violence stories—less than half as often in other violence stories as in intimate violence articles.[59] But one would expect this frame to be less frequent given the wider range of criminal situations in the other violence sample. The "innocence" claim[60] appears slightly more frequently in other violence stories than in intimate violence articles, even when margin of error is considered.[61] Were reporters using the frame to shield batterers we'd expect it to be more common in intimate violence coverage.

In conclusion, we find little support for the idea that male suspects are often excused or their responsibility diminished in intimate violence stories published in the newspapers studied.

Discussion

Two out of three falls in this contest between the critical feminist critique of patriarchal values in news content and the journalism norm of functional truth go to the latter. Patriarchal stereotypes can be weeded out or challenged by journalists, even those working for large, publicly-traded corporate news media whose boards of directors are dominated by elite white males.[62] In combating these stereotypes, functional truth triumphed over patriarchy. This is a narrow conclusion, however. We found only that the cultures of these two newsrooms allowed reporters to avoid disseminating a particular set of patriarchal cliches.

In fact, the failure to take intimate violence as seriously as other violent felonies, suggests that the locus of patriarchal influence may have shifted from identifiable stereotypes in stories to harder-to-detect *news selection* strategies. A feminist scholar, Nancy Berns, interpreted our data this way:

> Intimate violence is still not readily viewed as crime. More likely journalists may view it as a 'woman's issue' along with topics such as health and child care. These types of issues are covered less than crime.[63]

A content analysis, of course, can't tell us *why* intimate partner violence receives inferior coverage, and other explanations are plausible.[64] But whatever the reason, paying scant attention to so common a crime as intimate violence reinforces the notion that domestic violence is a private rather than public problem. As van Zoonen observed: "The definition of the issue as a matter of the private sphere prevent[s] its recognition as a social problem and [leaves] the women affected without means to talk about and fight against it."[65]

From a public health point of view, the finding that journalists can—and did—avoid sexist stereotypes is hopeful. But the relative lack of thematic coverage of intimate violence indicates that it's rarely the topic of enterprise reporting—stories journalists originate to answer the public's broad questions about current issues and events—or policy/government reporting, which is almost always issue-oriented. Enterprise journalism allows journalists to investigate and explain the news rather than react to events on deadline. The preponderance of episodic reporting signals a passive, low-cost approach to journalism[66] that yields few resources the public can use to make sense of such crimes and construct solutions.[67]

As importantly, if the only newsworthy intimate violence is homicide, journalists are exposing just the tip of an enormous and threatening social pathology. Intimate partner violence ends in murder less frequently than other types of violent crime.[68] Yet in many American cities, police make more arrests and answer more 911 calls about domestic violence than any other kind of violent offense.[69] Beyond the toll on millions of victims' physical and mental health, intimate violence also correlates with child abuse.[70] And because children are often present when spouses are abused, young ones become 7 to 15 times more likely than non-exposed children to abuse partners when they become adults.[71] Treating intimate violence as less worthy of coverage than other kinds of felony violence constitutes a serious failure on the part of journalists to provide a representative picture of the world around us.[72]

While the theoretical finding that large male-dominated corporations *can* avoid transmitting at least some sexist stereotypes may generalize to similar news media, the descriptive finding that they *did* may not. Our data are not drawn from typical newspapers. *Columbia Journalism Review* named the *Times* as the nation's fourth best newspaper and the *Mercury News* eighth best.[73] Further, with their domestic violence death review committees, Santa Clara and Los Angeles counties may be more progressive in coping with intimate violence than other parts of the nation. Research covering a wider sample of media—and across a number of issues—is needed.

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Notes

[1]We thank Michelle Guido, a police reporter at the *San Jose Mercury News,* who consulted on this study, and Visiting Assistant Professor Nancy Berns of Drake University who helped interpret our findings. We thank research assistants Elena O. Lingas, MPH, Jennifer Carlat, Saleena Gupte, MPH and Karen White. We are also grateful to the *Mercury News* for pro bono access to their electronic news archive. This research was funded in part by The California Wellness Foundation.

[2] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect,* (New York: Crown, 2001) p. 42.

[3] Lana Rakow and Kimberlie Kranich, for example, argued that television news discourse constitutes a "masculine narrative form," in which women are not subjects but 'signs' representing femininity or sex, and rarely portrayed in instrumental roles as experts, attorneys, police officers, etc. ("Women as Sign in Television News," *Journal of Communication* 41(1), 1991, 8-23). Others, such as British scholar Paula Skidmore, depicted "a macho culture of newsgathering—aggressive and domineering, but also one of male camaraderie and 'bonding'—which excludes women" ("Gender and the Agenda: News Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse," in Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston and

Stuart Allan, ed. *News, Gender and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 204-218. Liesbet van Zoonen described a linear model of news production in which male senders process information introducing gendered (and other) distortions creating a message containing stereotypes that socializes news consumers thereby inculcating sexist attitudes, in *Feminist Media Studies* London: Sage, 1994).

[4] Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 19.

[5] Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, 24.

[6] Meyers defines patriarchy as "the systematic institutionalization of women's inequality within social, political, economic, and cultural structures," in *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, 3.

[7] Joshua R.. Vest, Tegan K. Catlin, John J. Chen and Ross C. Brownson, "Multistate Analysis of Factors Associated with Intimate Partner Violence," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22(3) (2002) 156-164.

[8] Callie Marie Rennison, "Special Report, Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99," (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, DC, October 2001).

[9] Doris A. Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1984).

[10] For parsimony we will use intimate violence as a synonym of intimate partner violence.

[11] Robert A. Hackett, "Decline of a Paradigm? Bias and Objectivity in News Media Studies" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1(3) (1984), 253.

[12] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 192.

[13] James S. Ettema, "Journalism in the 'Post-Factual Age'" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4(1) (1987): 82-86.

[14] Stuart Allan, "(En)Gendering the Truth: Politics of News Discourse" in *News, Gender and Power*, 121-137. The other two types of feminist critiques would require greater change in the newsroom: the first holds that "only women are justified in speaking for women as a social group," thus newsrooms should be balanced by gender and masculine values counterposed by the feminine in all reports; the second jettisons the notion of journalistic objectivity altogether for "its perceived complicity in legitimizing patriarchal hegemony," p. 122.

[15] Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame.*

[16] Helen Benedict, *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[17] Sophia E. Voumvakis and Richard V. Ericson, *News Accounts of Attacks on Women: A Comparison of Three Toronto Newspapers* (Toronto: Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 1984).
18 Gabriel Weimann and Thomas Gabor, "Placing the Blame for Crime in Press Reports," *Deviant Behavior* 8, (1987): 283-297.

[19] Meyers writes that "only within the past 15 years have researchers combined feminist theory about violence against women with studies of news coverage," in *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame,* 28.

[20] Interview with first author, 4/16/2001

[21] Personal communication to the first author, 9/26/2002.

[22] Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, 61.

[23] Geraldine Finn, "Taking Gender into Account in the 'Theatre of Terror': Violence, Media and the Maintenance of Male Dominance," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 3(2), (1989-1990), 381, cited in Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women.*

[24] Sharon Lamb and Susan Keon, "Blaming the Perpetrator: Language that Distorts Reality in Newspaper Articles on Men Battering Women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 19 (1995), 211.

[25] Our funding source limited us to California newspapers. However, as the largest—and arguably most media-genic—state, California powerfully influences the national culture.

[26] After experimenting and cross checking with microfilmed copies of newspapers, we settled on a combination of keywords and topics: "subject (crime) or subject (violent crime) or subject (justice) or subject (domestic violence) or police or violen* or batter* or gun* or prison*." The asterisk includes any word beginning with the letters supplied, regardless of ending.

[27] We defined such violence as "a deliberate physical attack on a person, including violence to self and self-defense, or a written or verbal threat of bodily harm, or stalking, harassing, or otherwise menacing an individual's physical person." We chose this definition because it parallels the one used by the National Violence Against Women Survey sponsored by the U.S. Justice Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[28] We chose 2000 because more recent state crime statistics were not available.

[29] Conforming to the U.S. Justice Department's National Violence Against Women Survey classification, we defined intimate partner violence as that taking place between current or former romantic/sexual partners, including those on an initial date.

[30] That assured us equal numbers of fat Sunday editions and thin Monday papers and diminished the distortion of a major violent event occurring at one point in time. Researchers have found such constructed week designs provide the best picture of reporting for a given sample size. See Daniel Riffe, Charles F. Aust and Stephen R. Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Sampling in Newspaper Content Analysis," *Journalism Quarterly*, 70(1) (1993): 133-139.

[31] We used arrest data rather than counts of incidents because California measures intimate partner violence only by arrests. In a category called spousal abuse, the state includes physical violence between people who are married, formerly married, cohabiting or had a child together. It is slightly narrower than our definition of intimate partner violence in that it does not include all dating partners.

[32] Lori Dorfman and Vincent Schiraldi, *Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News* (Washington DC: Youth Law Center, 2001); Doris A. Graber, *Crime News and the Public* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Sanford Sherizen, "Social Creation of Crime News: All the News Fitted to Print" in Charles Winick, ed. *Deviance and Mass Media* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978).

[33] While arrests constitute the best available surrogate for incidents, they substantially underestimate incidents of intimate violence because most violence between intimates isn't reported to police. Therefore the actual ratio of homicides to less extreme incidents of spousal abuse is smaller than official figures indicate. See Rosemary Chalk and Patricia A. King, ed. *Violence in Families: Assessing Prevention and Treatment Programs* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998).

[34] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also see Graber, *Processing the News: How people Tame the Information Tide* and Dolf Zillman and Hans-Bernd Brosius, *Exemplification in Communication: The Influence of Case Reports on the Perception of Issues* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum, 2000).

[35] Stephen D. Reese, "Prologue—Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research," in Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr. and August E. Grant, ed. *Framing Public Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum, 2001): 7-31.

[36] *Explicit* frames causally link a prior behavior or motivation with a real or threatened act of violence. B happened *because* of A. *Implicit* frames mention a prior behavior, but don't expressly connect it to the violence: B happened; earlier A occurred.

[37] A second researcher independently coded 20% of the stories in both samples. For manifest or obvious measures, such as whether the suspect was identified by name, we accepted those with chance-corrected reliability statistics of .8 or better using Scott's pi. For latent measures that required coder judgment, such as the presence or absence of a frame, we accepted those with pi's of .7 or better. See Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy and Frederick G. Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum, 1998). To correct for the conservative bias in pi when one response category is chosen disproportionately, we calculated the correction for chance using the normal polynomial distribution when 80% or more of the coding decisions fell in a single category. See W. James Potter and Deborah Levine-Donnerstein, "Rethinking Validity and Reliability in Content Analysis," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 27 (1999): 258-284.

[38] But they will do so equally for both story samples and thus won't affect comparisons between intimate violence reporting and coverage of other kinds of crime.

[39] Data come from the California Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis website (http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc_stats).

[40] All margins of error for the other violence sample are calculated at the standard 95% confidence level. Note that the IPV sample has no margin of error since it contains every story in the population.

[41] Data come from the California Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis website.

[42] Data come from the Santa Clara County Death Review Committee Chair, Rolanda Pierre-Dixon, 7/18/2002 and the California Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis website.

[43] California Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis website.

[44] Data come from the California Bureau of Criminal Information and Analysis website and an interview with Sung Yu, research analyst at the Injury and Violence Prevention Program, Los Angeles County Department of health Services, 10/02/02.

[45] The difference is significant at $p<.001$; chi-square statistic for a test of independence = 77.6 with df=1 and n=1,017.

[46] The frequency of male victims here raises the question of whether the newspapers disproportionately reported cases in which women attacked men. The gender ratio in the papers, however, mirrored state statistics, which showed 83.5% of those arrested for spousal abuse were men. Data from Marie K. Herbert, ed. *Report on Arrests for Domestic Violence in California, 1998* (Sacramento: State of California, Office of the Attorney General, Criminal Justice Statistics Center Report Series 1 (3) August, 1999).

[47] "Sandy Banks: At-Risk Girls, Mentor Get Together and Get Real," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 July 2000, sec. E, p. 1.

[48] Rennison, "Intimate Partner Violence and Age of victim, 1993-99.

[49] Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2000).

[50] We are grateful to Nancy Bern, who has conducted research about similar negative stereotypes in magazines, for the suggestion to consider the aggregate impact of blame-shifting frames lest our break-out of many specific frames dissipate the force of these themes.

[51] The margin of error around the largest of these point estimates is plus or minus 1.2 percentage points.

[52] In forthcoming research we will show that more sophisticated reporting—which recognizes environmental causes rather than assuming crime arises only from the disposition of the criminal—is even scarcer in intimate violence coverage than in reporting of other types of violent crime.

[53] The level of suspect identification, which sums 9 attributes, was marginally reliable in the other violence sample: Intercoder agreement, within 1 attribute, was 85%; Scott's pi was .7.

[54] "Dating's Ugly Little Secret, Psychotherapist Examines Abusive Teen Relationships," *San Jose Mercury News*, 10 October 2000, sec. D, p.5.

[55] "Spring Training Daily Report; Martin Faces Rough Road," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 2000, sec. D, p.3

[56] The intimate violence percentage falls within the margin of error of the OV estimate.

[57] James J. Collins and Pamela M. Messerschmidt, "Epidemiology of Alcohol-Related Violence," *Alcohol Health & Research World* 17, 2 (1993): 93-100.

[58] Plus or minus 1 percentage point in this case because of the large sample and small standard deviation.

[59] The margin of error around this estimate—plus or minus 1.7 percentage points—would not come close to closing the gap.

[60] This frame was marginally reliable in the other violence sample; coders agreed 88% of the time, but Scott's pi was .66.

[61] The margin of error here is plus or minus 4 percentage points, not quite enough to bridge the gap from the estimate of 29.3% of other violence stories with an innocent claim to the 24.6% of intimate violence stories containing this claim.

[62] The *Los Angeles Times* is owned by the Tribune Company whose CEO when this was written was John W. Madigan. Of the 15 members of the Tribune board of directors 12 were male; 11 members were white non-Hispanics. The *San Jose Mercury News* is owned by Knight Ridder whose CEO was P. Anthony Ridder. Of the 11 members of the Knight-Ridder board of directors, 8 are male; 9 members are white non-Hispanics. Both Mr. Madigan and Mr. Ridder are white. Knight Ridder is the second largest publisher of newspapers in the U.S., by daily circulation and the Tribune Company is the eleventh largest, but also owns other media properties including television stations, and the Chicago Cubs baseball team. Information from corporate websites: http://www.tribune.com/about/bios/board_index.html and http://www.kri.com/ on 12/12/2002.

[63] Personal communication to first author, 10/29/2002.

[64] From a business perspective neglecting intimate violence makes sense. The lower ratio of homicides to lesser felonies for intimate violence makes it a less dramatic story than other types of violence. Also, assaults by strangers may excite more fear than attacks within personal relationships. Like drama, fear compels attention, making these crimes more commercially valuable than intimate violence. Since news media revenues are based on the size of the audience they attract, profit-minded publishers may foster a newsroom culture that privileges extreme or random violence over lesser or more predictable attacks. For more on how economics affects news selection see John H. McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

[65] Liesbet van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies* (London: Sage, 1994), 40.

[66] Stories about specific crimes fill space very inexpensively: The who, what, where, when and how—and sometimes the why—are all available at one place and time, or in a press release. It's one-stop reporting.

[67] Doris A. Graber, *Crime News and the Public* (NY: Praeger, 1980).

[68] In Santa Clara County in 2000, 45% of the felony arrests were for spousal abuse, but only 18% of the homicides. In Los Angeles County, 36% of the felony arrests concerned spousal abuse, but only 5% of the homicides. Non-intimate violence accounted for a greater ratio of homicides per felony arrest. Data from the Criminal Justice Statistic Center of the California Department of Justice, available at http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc_stats/prof00/.

[69] In California, police agencies received almost 200,000 calls for help in domestic violence situations and made more than 51,200 felony arrests in 2000, according to the California Department of Justice (http://caag.state.ca.us/cvpc/fs_dv_in_ca.html). Domestic violence was the number one violent felony arrest in the state in 1997, according to the *Mercury News*, "The Face of Abuse," 9 September 1999, sec. A, p.1.

[70] Chalk and King, ed. *Violence in Families: Assessing Prevention and Treatment Programs.*

[71] J. Kaufman and E. Zigler, "Do Abused Children Become Abusive Parents?" *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 57(2), (1987): 186-192, cited in Chalk and King, *Violence in Families: Assessing Prevention and Treatment Programs.*

[72] See Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, esp. ch. 9, "Make the News Comprehensive and Proportional."

[73] "America's Best Newspapers," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov/Dec, 1999, http://www.cjr.org/year/99/6bestchart.asp.

Tables

Table 1: Frequency of Victim-Blame Frames[73]

Frame	Frequency
The victim may have contributed to the violence by wearing sexy/revealing clothing or engaging in flirtatious behavior.	4 of 488 intimate violence stories (<1%)
The victim may have provoked a partner to violence by physically attacking him/er.	8 stories (1.6%)
The victim may have contributed to the problem by being unfaithful/dating others.	11 stories (2.3%)
The victim may have contributed to the problem by becoming impaired by drink, drugs, etc.	12 stories (2.5%)
The victim may have contributed to the problem by staying with a violent partner/failing to cooperate with police/continuing to see a violent partner.	24 stories (4.9%)
The victim may have contributed to the problem in another way, perhaps having been married many times, being argumentative, nagging, flaunting success, etc.	30 stories (6.1%)

Table 2: Frequency of Suspect-Mitigation Frames

Frame	Frequency
The suspect may have "snapped," acting spontaneously and out of character (really a nice guy/good spouse/parent).	21 of 488 intimate violence stories (4.3%)
The suspect may have acted violently at least partly due to drinking or drug use.	24 stories (4.9%)
The suspect may have acted violently at least partly out of love for a spouse or children, including fear of losing children.	24 stories (4.9%)
The violence arose in part from a flawed relationship, with blame on both sides, e.g. they fought a lot or engaged in verbal quarrels.	47 stories (9.6%)

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