

“THE NEWS MEDIA, THE PROBLEM FRAME, AND THE PRODUCTION OF FEAR”

David L. Altheide
Arizona State University

The role of the news media in promoting a public discourse of fear is examined. A conceptual model is offered that is based on recent developments in communication formats and frames. The emphasis is on the impact of media forms and frames for guiding the selection and presentation of reports emphasizing fear (e.g., crime, drugs, violence). A “problem frame” compatible with format and entertainment needs is used by the news media as a secular version of a morality play. This promotes messages that resonate fear. The role of the problem frame is described as part of the process for promoting widespread messages stressing fear and danger. Materials from a qualitative content analysis approach, “tracking discourse,” of selected news media illustrate how the focus and content of “fear” shifts over a period of time. Conceptual and methodological implications of this approach are discussed.

The sociological imagination . . . consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and its components.

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*.

Writing nearly forty years ago, C. Wright Mills was concerned that sociologists were blinded by limited theoretical perspectives that prevented them from seeing major social shifts, particularly the much heralded distinction he drew between personal “troubles” and “issues.” For Mills, there was not enough attention to issues. Currently, there are numerous issues presented to citizens. Often cast as “problems,” these issues are produced by entertainment-oriented media machinery. The mass media in general, and especially the electronic news media, are part of a “problem-generating machine” geared to entertainment, voyeurism, and the “quick fix” rather than the understanding and social change envisioned by Mills. Problems are routinely constructed through an ecology of communication, or emerging relationship between information technology, communication formats and social activities (Altheide 1994; 1995). Victims are seemingly everywhere, laying claim to catalogs of abuse and social exploitation. A major theme transcending the specific issues produced by the postjournalism media is fear (Altheide and Snow 1991). I suggest that

*Direct all correspondence to David L. Altheide, School of Justice Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287; e-mail: David.Altheide@Asu.Edu

Some materials in this article were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Seattle, WA: Mar. 20-24, 1996.

The Sociological Quarterly, Volume 38, Number 4, pages 647–668.

Copyright © 1997 by The Midwest Sociological Society.

All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to:

Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720.

ISSN: 0038-0253.

fear is pervasive in American society and that it has been produced through the interaction of commercial media, entertainment formats and programming, and the rise of the "problem frame."

This paper addresses how the "problem frame" emerged and now exists as a generic "fear machine" in news production. Another aim is to clarify the "learning process" involving media logic and the role this plays in linking private and public perceptions and fears. Materials from several research projects will be used to illustrate how the "problem frame" was encouraged by communication formats and in turn has promoted the use of "fear" throughout American society. The problem frame promotes a *discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment*. Following an overview of the relevance of media content and forms for perceptions of fear, an analysis of the "fear production" formats of news will be presented. The impact of this format on the production of fear will be illustrated with an analysis of how various topics have been treated as fear over a period of time.

FEAR IN THE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

The mass media and popular culture influence social life in different ways. Much of the media research has focused on media content (cf. Comstock 1980). Students of the mass media and popular culture agree on two basic social facts: (1) Popular culture includes a relatively large amount of information and images pertaining to fear, including crime and violence, and (2) Audience members perceive social life as very dangerous. It is the relationship between these two "social facts" that remains unclear.

A columnist writing a postmortem on the 1996 presidential election noted the irony of how our materially strong nation is "dying from within":

Fear stalks this nation every day. Fear of making a wrong turn in a neighborhood in Los Angeles, riding the subway or jogging in Central Park in New York, fear symbolized by locks, guns and alarms to protect ourselves. Fear of talking to those who don't look like us. Fear of growing old in a country that does not have the resources to care for us. Fear of the government and civil war. (Devji 1996).

The mass media and public perceptions of issues and problems are inexorably linked, although researchers disagree about the nature of this connection and the direction of its influence. For example, several decades of work have yet to resolve definitively whether television and newspaper reports about crime and fear are a "cause" or "effect" of public concerns about crime and fear (cf. Gerbner and Gross 1976; Hirsch 1980; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Ericson 1995; Gunter 1987; Sparks 1992; Katz 1987; Schlesinger, Tumber, and Murdock 1991; Zillman and Wakshlag 1987). From the standpoint of media content as "cause," researchers ask whether news reports can "cause," or "lead" people to focus on and fear crime, including the extent to which relevant values and perspectives may be "cultivated" (cf. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, and Jackson-Beeck 1978). From this perspective, the mass media play a large role in shaping public agendas by influencing *what* people think about (Shaw and McCombs 1977).

Studies of media violence have suggested that violent content can lead viewers to perceive life as dangerous and fearful (cf. Gerbner and Gross 1976; Signorelli, Gerbner, and

Morgan 1995; Signorelli and Gerbner 1988). In a review of more recent research on mass media relevance to crime, Linda Heath and Kevin Gilbert (1996, p. 371) note: "Because the media often distort crime by overrepresenting more severe, intentional, and gruesome incidents, the public overestimates its frequency and often misperceives reality." Numerous studies suggest that public perceptions of problems and issues (the texts they construct from experience) incorporate definitions, scenarios and language from news reports (cf. Snow 1983; Altheide and Snow 1991; Comstock 1980; Bennett 1988; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1982 p. 244 ff.; Ericson 1995). Gerbner and Gross (1976) and others have noted that fear is pervasive in our symbolic and effective environment. It is perceived as real to a few of us and virtually real to most of us.

One example about crime and fear illustrates one of the consequences:

Tucked inside [Judy's] Gucci bag is a tiny .38-caliber revolver. It eases her mind. "Things are crazy out there," the Scottsdale woman says. "I just want to have options."

Judy is one of the latest Arizonans to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon. And she is fairly typical: Affluent, white, suburban.

Since the law went into effect in July 1994, more than 35,000 Arizonans have obtained concealed-weapons permits . . . A computer analysis of permit holders . . . reveals that the highest rates are not in the parts of the Valley where the need for self-preservation appears greatest: neighborhoods filled with crack houses, gangs and violence.

The highest rates are in such upscale low-crime neighborhoods as Sun City West, north Phoenix, Scottsdale, Ahwatukee and Mesa . . . (The Arizona Republic, March, 17, 1996, p. A1)

For researchers focused on media content the issue becomes whether people's experience of crime in their everyday lives leads them to be more interested and attentive to crime programs, including news reports, as well as providing an impetus for journalists to cover crime.

Despite clear evidence showing that Americans today have a comparative advantage in terms of diseases, accidents, nutrition, medical care, and life expectancy, they perceive themselves to be at great risk and express specific fears about this. According to numerous public opinion polls, American society is a very fearful society—some believe "the most anxious, frightened society in history." Indeed, 78 percent of Americans think they are subjected to more risk today than their parents were twenty years ago, and a large source of this perception is crime news coverage (*Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1994, Page A1).

Why did many Americans suddenly decide last fall, for the first time, to tell national pollsters that crime is 'the most important problem facing the country'? Could it have been because last year, for the first time, ABC, CBS and NBC nightly news programs devoted more time to crime than to any other topic?

Several media critics think so; as a Los Angeles Times Poll showed early this year, people say their "feelings about crime" are based 65% on what they read and see in the media and 21% on experience (*Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1994, Page A1).

Several projects have argued that the media contribute to political agendas as well as to people's perceptions and interests in everyday life (MacKuen and Coombs 1981; Graber

1984). Shanto Iyengar and Donald M. Kinder (1987, p. 113) employed an experimental design to demonstrate “. . . that television news shapes the relative importance Americans attach to various national problems.”

Focusing on energy, inflation, and unemployment, they argued that TV is most powerful at “priming” or providing accessible bits of information that viewers may draw on to help interpret other events. Making it clear that ultimately the viewers’ perceptions and everyday life experiences which help interpret social life, nevertheless, TV contributes: “By priming certain aspects of national life while ignoring others, television news sets the terms by which political judgments are rendered and political choices made” (Iyengar and Kinder 1987 p. 4). In other work Iyengar (1991) suggests that priming and framing of reports as either “episodic” (focusing on individual circumstances and responsibility) or “thematic” (contextual and societal responsibility) influences viewers’ understanding of TV news reports (Ericson 1993). James K. Hertog and David P. Fan (1995) claim that their quantitative “ideodynamic model” shows that news content in selected publications (no TV network material was included) was a viable predictor of public knowledge and beliefs on a number of social issues (e.g., HIV transmission routes). They suggest that their model may be more effective in influencing perceptions and knowledge with issues on which audiences do not already have a clear position.

Notwithstanding varied research agendas and approaches used in addressing the “causal connection” of media and public perceptions, Barry Gunter’s (1987 p. 270) conclusion seems to capture the paradox: “Probably nearest to the truth though may be a notion of circularity in the relationship. Greater fear of potential danger in the social environment may encourage people to stay indoors, where they watch more television, and are exposed to programmes which tell them things which in turn reinforce their anxieties.”

This putative circularity contributed to a conceptual path that led numerous researchers to a process and production model of the mass media’s role in social life. A major assumption is that the communication process and content are inexorably joined, with one always having implications for the other. In this sense, “new knowledge” and information is always connected to a stock of knowledge and symbolic interpretation. I want to suggest that many news reports are produced through a process that reflects entertainment considerations and formats, that in turn have promoted the “problem frame,” and this then helps frame fear as a dominant discourse in news reports.

Formats, Frames, and Fear

Formats and frames shape mass media content (McLuhan 1960; Couch 1984; Altheide and Snow 1991). Communication and “media formats” enable us to recognize various frames that give a general definition of what is before us. Studies of media forms and formats have complemented findings from studies of media content while also giving them a conceptual foundation in the practices of media agents. Seeking to clarify the process by which media messages of violence and fear are presented, this approach essentially asks *how* events and issues are packaged and presented to audience members who may interpret the messages in a variety of ways.

The focus on the processes, practices, and perspectives of newswriters has clarified how an organized production process shapes news reports, as well as other entertainment-oriented programs (Altheide 1976; Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1978; Gitlin 1980). A key part of this process is the development and use of “formats,” or the way in which selecting,

organizing, and presenting information shape audience assumptions and preferences for certain kinds of information (Altheide 1985; Meyrowitz 1985; Schlesinger, Murdock, and Elliott 1983; Altheide and Snow 1991; Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989). The relevance for audiences and social activities turns on the way such formats come to be learned, taken for granted and expected. For example, when people interact with certain formats over a long period of time, they expect and assume that events and issues will have a certain look, a “proper media look” (Altheide and Snow 1991).

Additional work has shown that the media logic underlying the use of formats has been acquired and widely adapted by various organizations and state agencies that serve as major news sources for the news media. As news organizations and the parties they cover share similar views and approaches to what is newsworthy, the line between the journalist and the event has essentially disappeared. In this way, private and public concerns have been joined through information technology and mass media formats. This collapsing of symbolic boundaries has produced a hybrid array of messages and views of social reality that has been delineated as a postjournalism news media (Altheide and Snow 1991). As James H. McDonald (1994, p. 538) provocatively notes:

Formats are complex and multidimensional. They include a constellation of people, activities, and the implements important to them, as well as the kinds of discourses and relations that result . . . The formats of technology and power are intimately connected because formats structure social fields of behavior—the possibilities for human perception and relationships. These techno-formats blur and redefine the boundaries between public and private self in the learning process.

This is especially true when it comes to news. Certain news forms have been developed as packages or “frames” for transforming some experience into reports that will be recognized and accepted by the audience as “news” (Ericson et al. 1989). Tracing the emergence of new forms illuminates how social perspectives and definitions are reflexively joined to news practices.

My use of “framing” incorporates several dimensions (Altheide 1996, pp. 28 ff.). Frame, theme, and discourse are also related to *communication formats*, which in the case of mass media, refer to the selection, organization and presentation of information. Formats pertain to the underlying organization and assumptions of time (temporal flow, rhythm), space (place and visual editing), and manner (style) of experience (Snow 1983). Formats basically are what make our “familiar experiences” “familiar” and recognizable as one thing rather than another, e.g., we can quickly tell the difference between, say, a TV newscast, a sitcom, a talkshow.

Frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed. It is helpful to think about “frames” as very broad thematic emphases or definitions of a report, like the border around a picture, that separates it from the wall, and from other possibilities (Epstein 1973; Altheide 1976; Fishman 1980; Zhondang and Kosicki 1993; Berg 1989). An example is treating illegal drug use as a “public health issue” as opposed to a “criminal justice issue.” These are two different frames that entail a way of discussing the problem, or the kind of discourse that will follow. Themes are more basically tied to the format used by journalists who have a short time to “tell a story” that the audience can “recognize,” “that they have probably heard before,” and moreover, to get

specific information from sources that can be tied to this. That's where sources of information get linked to news media—they not only have the information, but they have learned to put it together in ways that are compatible with the different media formats. The kinds of reports identified by Iyengar (1991) as “episodic” or focusing on individual circumstances—are conceptually part of “themes” if we view such reports as “angles” to illustrate well-established thematic messages.

Our lives are mediated increasingly in “postindustrial” societies where work and play involve symbols and symbolic manipulations. Mass audiences are connected via information technology (IT) (especially TV) to common issues and problems; we learn about these in rather brief periods of time, usually a period of several weeks; issues and problems that we learn about are constantly changing, with an effective life (“agenda”) span of two weeks to six months. As Iyengar and Kinder (1987 p. 4) note, “Our studies show specifically that television news powerfully influences which problems viewers regard as the nation’s most serious.” More of our daily activities are symbolic, often involving access to some electronic media or working to comply with “document requirements” that will be processed electronically (Couch 1984; Carey 1989; Meyrowitz 1985; Altheide and Snow 1991). What we call things, the themes and discourse we employ, and how we “frame” and allude to experience is crucial for what we take for granted and assume to be true. I suggest that fear has become a more pervasive component of American life because of the “problem frame” that dominates many media messages. This frame is tied to the entertainment format that now dominates news production.

THE ENTERTAINMENT PERSPECTIVE

Changes in information technology and communication formats have influenced the way we think about social problems and issues. The entertainment format of news is key to the rise of the “problem” frame. The entertainment emphasis contains elements of action noted by Erving Goffman and others but clarified by Robert P. Snow (1983) in his work on the rise of “media culture.” First, there is an absence of the ordinary; second is the openness of an adventure, outside the boundaries of routine behavior; third, the audience member is willing to suspend disbelief. In addition, while the exact outcome may be in doubt, there is a clear and unambiguous point at which it will be resolved. Packaging such emphases within formats that are visual, brief, action-oriented, and dramatic produces an exciting and familiar tempo to news audiences.

The news media’s use of formats treating complex events as “problems” is quite consistent with entertainment. Figure 1 illustrates how the driving force of commercialism promoted the entertainment format, through which the problem frame has emerged. The point is that the distinction between news and non-news has been bridged by entertainment criteria that characterize our postjournalism era (Altheide and Snow 1991). Previous work suggested that entertainment programs are becoming more like news programs as standard formats mold programming for a culture geared to a media logic that subtly folds TV criteria, discourse, and perspectives into everyday life (Altheide 1995). Indeed, “reality TV” celebrates the stereotypes and images of news reports about crime and fear (Cavender and Bond-Maupin 1993). Not surprisingly, a majority of American viewers thought that an entertainment program, “America’s Most Wanted,” featuring dramatic reenactments of brutal crimes, was a news show! Another example is the way in which news coverage of events foreshadows future TV movies. In this way TV news becomes a kind of preview or

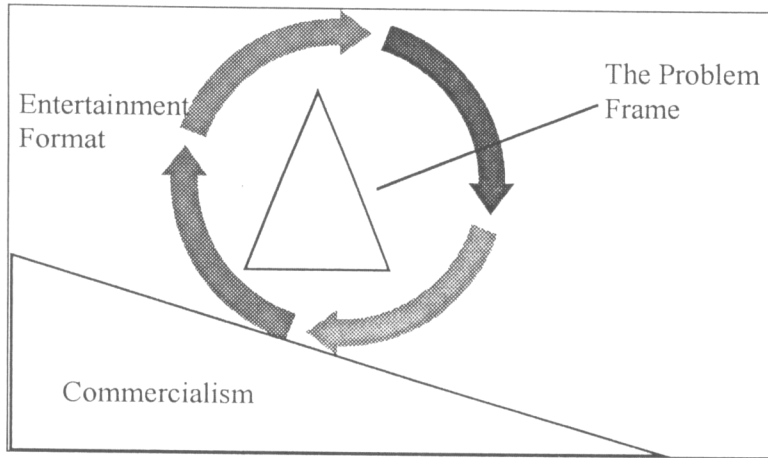


FIGURE 1. THE PROBLEM FRAME IN CONTEXT

advertisement for “coming attractions.” News as a form of knowledge is transformed through news as entertainment into news as advertising. The Waco debacle that ended in April 1993 is a good illustration of “news as advertising,” in which a movie was in production before the events unfolded. Thus, the time period between the “real” event and its prime-time airing as a “TV movie” has been reduced to matter of weeks, or, in some cases, days.

The Problem Frame as Entertainment

The “problem frame” is an important innovation that satisfies the entertainment dimension of news. It is an organizational solution to a practical problem: How can we make real problems seem interesting? Or, more to the practical side of news, how can we produce reports compatible with entertainment formats?

The major impact has been on the way organizations produce news as a commodity to sell. The mass media and especially the news business have contributed to the emergence of a highly rationalized problem frame that in turn generates reports about “fear.” The relationship between everyday life events, the problem frame, and a mass-mediated accumulation of fear experienced by audience members is illustrated in Figure 2. A key strategy to develop audience identification and interaction with the message is to provide “new information.” For example, “here’s what’s happening now,” within a familiar context of meaning (e.g., “another killing in the valley today”).

The problem frame is a secular alternative to the morality play. Its characteristics include:

- Narrative Structure
- Universal moral meanings
- Specific time and place
- Unambiguous
- Focus is on disorder
- Culturally resonant

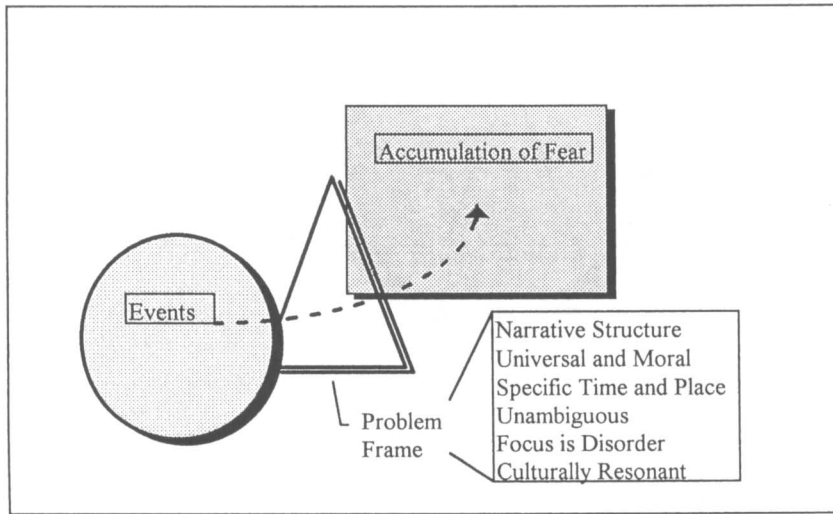


FIGURE 2. THE PROBLEM FRAME

Built on a narrative structure that adds storylike coherence, with a beginning, middle and end, the problem frame is both universal and specific, abstract and real. For entertainment and audience identification purposes, the closer the reader/listener/viewer is to the actual event, the more salient the report. Local news reports stress the problem frame, particularly crime reports, far more than national or network news. Of course, following many local reports constructed on the problem frame, national and network news need only refer to one or two examples in making general points about fear and danger.

The problem frame combines the universal and nonsituational logic and moral meanings of a morality play (Unsworth 1995) with the temporal and spatial parameters of a news report—something happened involving an actual person in an actual location, (e.g., street address). Unlike a morality play in which the characters are abstractions facing death and damnation, news reports focus on “actual” people and events to package the entire narrative as “realistic.” Complex and often ambiguous events and concerns are symbolically mined for moral truths and understandings presumed to be held by the audience, while the repeated presentations of similar scenarios “teaches” the audience about the nature and causes of “disorder” (Ericson et al. 1989). It is immaterial whether the audience has other experiences with crime or related problems; the resulting messages both reinforce certain experiences and perceptions, and provide a meaning about the pervasiveness of fear.

The majority of topics, problem, and issues presented as “news” involve those framed as “problems.” Suffering, misfortune, distress, and inconvenience are the stuff of contemporary news, but they are not “the problem.” The problem characteristics are part of a format organized around a narrative that begins with a general conclusion that “something is wrong” and we know what it is! Those aspects of a complex situation that are presumably familiar and uncontested (e.g., the seven deadly sins, “evil causes evil,” “corrupt officials”) are selected for illustration of the “underlying truth” containing the “correction.” While

historians suggest that medieval morality plays viewed solutions in terms of divine redemption (e.g., mercy, justice, temperance and truth), the “kicker” to most reports framed as problems involves the state/government. Unlike morality plays in which the audience is reminded of eternal threats and truths, the problem frame features everyday life filled with problem generating fear. In sum, the problem frame is reflexive of media formats, especially TV, but is easily adjusted to oral and linear media as well (cf. Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1991). The problem frame incorporates a particular temporal/spatial relationship (here or “close by” and “now”) to make it relevant to the audience. A story about fear is produced and packaged in a process that formulates social complexities as simplistic problems. The cumulative effect is to produce a discourse of fear that then becomes a “resource” for the audience to draw on when interpreting subsequent reports. The problem frame, then, implies the following:

- Something exists that is undesirable;
- Many people are affected by this problem (it is relevant);
- Unambiguous aspects or parts are easily identified;
- It can be changed or “fixed”;
- There is a mechanism or procedure for fixing the problem;
- The change or repair agent and process is known (usually government).

The “problem” frame is a feature of information technology (IT), news media formats, and a pervasive media-source relationship that fuels rocket-like expansion of sources attempting to transform misery, cruelty, brutality, and so on into a particular kind of “problem.” The driving force of the news coverage, however, can actually distort understanding of the issues, leading politicians, funding agencies, academic disciplines, and even agency personnel who actually deal with the alleged problem to make adjustments that are counter-productive and make matters much worse.

The clear narrative structure of an event stressing an unambiguous “problem” may be contrasted with an underlying ambiguity in everyday life, especially complex circumstances that are highly contingent. An awareness of the underlying ambiguity of actual social situations is essential to developing pragmatic awareness of “what can be done,” but ambiguity is not very entertaining. Morality plays are built on the audience’s familiarity with narratives that spell out simple and clear truths.

One example is the way news coverage of child neglect and abuse can systematically distort the situation while providing entertainment. There are several dimensions. From the standpoint of “missing children,” research has now shown that previous reports erroneously claiming that hundreds of thousands of children were abducted and brutalized by “strangers” fundamentally distorted the multiple dimensions of the issue, including parental abductions and runaways (cf. Best and Horiuchi 1985; Altheide 1996, pp. 135–158). Focusing on “stranger kidnappings,” of which there were very few each year (e.g., 67 in 1983), sparked an unprecedented multi-media barrage of “missing child” photos and pleas on milk cartons, billboards, network news, millions of pieces of mail, and of course numerous movies and documentaries. The children of America were reportedly under siege. Such action fueled legislation, policy changes, increased criminal sanctions and budget allocations in the millions of dollars. Ignoring the far more numerous “runaway” and “throwaway” children left most cities with paltry resources to help and protect several hundred thousand children “on the road.”

Another dimension of child mistreatment cast as a coherent “problem” involves child welfare agencies and parental mistreatment of children, particularly those that result in the death of a child. Michael Shapiro (1996 p.46) describes this dimension:

The death of a child provokes rage, a reasonable response . . . Have people paid by the state to protect that child failed? We then publish or air those people’ names, alongside accusations by the mayor or the governor or a legislator . . . The case worker is suspended. The punishment offers some satisfaction to the public, and to the journalist . . . But this approximation of a solution—a solution propelled in good measure by the force of the coverage—sets into motion an entirely new set of problems, and with it a different sort of story . . . The story now becomes one of a ‘system’ that is ‘overburdened’ with all the new children coming in . . . Then comes a final state of coverage: the search for The Answer . . . but in truth the experts haven’t a clue because there is no answer that is applicable to all the children in the care of the state, let alone one that fits into a headline, or a lead, or a quote of manageable length. (my emphasis added)

As this “story,” like many involving problems, moves into a discourse of “blame,” the journalists’ wit and camera frames mash a multiple dimensional concern into convenient entertaining news formats. The difficulty is that most children and parents who need some assistance are not at all typical of parents who kill their children. It is these people Shapiro (1996, p.46) describes as the true story of child welfare, the “screw ups,” the majority of cases. These are parents who lack some basic and consistent competence to provide what is necessary all of the time, but who nevertheless love their children, and in most cases, the children love them. Shapiro (1996, p. 46) continues:

The stories of martyred children have little to do with the everyday grind of parents, their children, and the impossibly malfunctioning bureaucracy that is supposed to make sure those children are safe . . . When the death of a child becomes the context in which all subsequent child welfare stories get reported and written, then all the failing parents become the homicidal parent and all their children are in grave peril.

The problem frame is the staple of news, and especially TV news formats, that exists within its own temporal parameter: it is most compatible with topics and problems that are “new,” “unique” even if they are presented in a very familiar way. Previously, people did not so much “learn” about problems through abstract symbols, as they “experienced” them directly or indirectly through situations or accounts from friends. Problems used to arise—and be recognized through direct experience or from oral communication with intimates or associates. This experience often involved force, or experiencing the “obdurate character” of an event or some action. Life was hard, there were many difficulties; individuals experienced many uncertainties and problems as individuals; and these were discussed as nasty and difficult features of life. But the “problem” discourse and frame, with a structure, organization, cause, and likely solution, was much simpler than today. The secular view of order that accompanied the Enlightenment was much different, but the real significance was not felt until the radical change of Information Technology.

IT collapses, greatly condenses and even reorders the temporal nature of problems and awareness. Problems and issues today carry the “signature” of a highly accelerated “problem process” and particularly the role of symbols and “information” as a key feature of experience and “knowledge” of the effective environment. IT carries experience-as-

information to mass audiences, at once, at the same time, and more recently, in “real time” as an event unfolds, (e.g., the CIA would advise the White House to turn on Cable News network to see reports about SCUD missile launches during the Gulf War).

News formulae emerged with the advent of commercial news, and the adaptation of entertainment formats to the “news business” in order to attract audiences. Such formulae, routines, and techniques were tied to IT and the medium of selecting, organizing and presenting information as news. At first, these were primarily used by newswriters, but the last several decades have seen an awareness and incorporation of such formulae and formats into the activities of news sources, usually associated with formal organizations, but also interest groups who become “organized” on a rational basis (Ericson et al. 1991). These organizations and groups are the sources of information on which news organizations trade. Controversies, problems and issue frames, and discourse are the basis of the entertainment formats underlying many forms of news, especially TV news.

The spokespeople, the news organizations, and increasingly the audience(s) are tied together through a shared discourse contained in the news formats, which in turn is contingent on IT. Figure 3 shows how the world of experience is transformed into non-problems, problems, and solutions.

The “experience frame,” which was not mediated by complex IT and news formats until quite recently, has been relied on for most of human history. But with the rise of mass audiences, mass marketing techniques, and application and refinement of the entertainment formats for sitcoms and news alike, the problem frame has been developed and refined. As the process diagram suggests, the problem is routinely applied to various experiences by claims-makers espousing “problems.” As suggested by the example of the news coverage of child welfare, the problem frame is then incorporated into the news broadcast to mass audiences, that selectively interpret the messages within their own experience frame (back to the start). The impact will be greater the more their “total stock of knowledge” about the particular topic has been derived from other mass media reports that have also incorporated the problem frame.

As suggested in the above account of neglected children, news audiences have become so familiar with the problem frame that the elements noted above do not have to be spelled out by the writer or broadcaster; the audience member applies the perspective to the “story” and in this sense helps complete it. When certain problems can be cast within TV formats as arenas for disputes, disagreements, or conflicts and struggle, and when these can be visually illustrated, one has the formula for good entertainment, good audience ratings, constant awareness of problems, and a sense of a very troubled world. Indeed, so intertwined is the problem frame with social problems in general that media coverage has become part of the process or career for any “concern” to become a “problem” or “social issue” (Surette 1992). The way in which claims-makers promote their concerns within the problem frame is suggested by the media-problem process.

THE MEDIA-PROBLEM PROCESS

1. There is something not liked; people see it as a problem (the claims-making process).
2. The problem orientation is already established for the mass audience, so we fit the concern to that problem orientation.

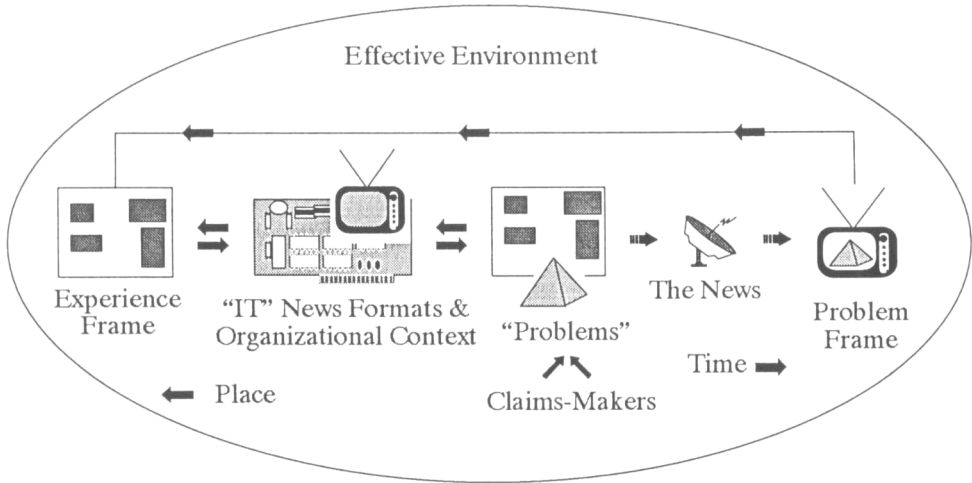


FIGURE 3. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT), NEWS FORMATS, AND THE PROBLEM FRAME

3. It must compete with other problems and their proponents seeking news legitimacy and coverage.
4. It is either a new problem or a different version (angle) on a previously established problem or issue.
5. Communicating or broadcasting the problem-character of the topic is part of the solution but also creates opportunities for those "responsible" for the "solution" to monitor the problem, as well as be monitored, followed-up, and essentially, linked to the problem-character of the topic.
6. Mass media publication via news entertainment formats provides information about the topic, the linkages to those responsible, and similar items of concern or new problems.
7. Return to step 1.

FRAMING FEAR

Entertainment problem formats have contributed to the reporting of and fascination with fear. The explicit use of the word "fear" and its multiple derivatives and meanings pervade public discourse. As noted above, this occurs as part of the routine news process as claims-makers learn to cast their statements in a context of fear relationships; the media-problem perspective is quickly understood; it resonates with audiences steeped in previous media experiences; they know what a media-problem is (Best 1995; Ericson et al., 1989).

The interaction and shared meanings of newswriters who follow the entertainment format and audience members who "experience" the world through these mass media lenses, promotes "sufficient communication" to achieve the news organization's goals of grabbing the audience while also enabling audience members to be "informed" enough to exchange views with peers. Shared knowledge about the social world in a mass-mediated society tends to be about "bad news." Nearly two thirds of a national sample talked with friends and neighbors about crime several times a month (GSS 1994). The nature and

extent of fear has been examined in preliminary work as part of a larger project on "tracking discourse."

METHOD AND DATA

New information technology, when combined with a theoretical and methodological approach to qualitative document analysis, can extend our capacity to study and understand public discourse. The materials to follow are part of this project, focusing on the explicit use of fear. Previous work on news formats and "news codes" (Altheide 1985 pp. 102 ff.) directs our attention away from the "intention" of the journalist who "speaks" about an event to "what does the news message look like," or "what words and powerful cultural symbols are used in discussing the event?" For a media researcher, several questions that come to mind are: What is the frequency and nature of "fear" as it is presented in the news media? With what is fear associated, and has this changed? A related question is, What roles are citizens given in the presentation of such reports?

One way to approach these questions is by "tracking discourse," or following certain issues, words, themes, and frames over a period of time, across different issues, and different news media. Tracking discourse is a qualitative document analysis technique that applies an ethnographic approach to content analysis to new information bases now accessible through computer technology, e.g., NEXIS (Altheide 1996; cf. Wuthnow 1992; Grimshaw and Burke 1994; Weiler and Pearce 1992; Dijk 1988). While there are many different approaches to discourse, all share an assumption that symbolic representations are enmeshed in a context of meaning. My approach blends interpretive, ethnographic, and ethnomethodological approaches with media logic, particularly studies of news organizational culture, information technology and communication formats. The capacity to examine numerous documents with specific conceptually informed search terms and logic provides a new way of "exploring" documents, applying "natural experimental" research designs to the materials, as well as retrieving and analyzing individual documents qualitatively. Moreover, because the technology permits immediate access to an enormous amount of material, comparative exploration, conceptual refinement, data collection, and analysis can cover a longer time period than previous technologies afforded.

This analysis of fear relied on two kinds of data. First, data were collected from a theoretical sample of news reports from approximately 180 articles in the *Los Angeles Times* between 1985–1994, and 31 reports from ABC newscasts (mainly *World News Tonight*) from 1990 to 1994. A protocol was constructed for newspaper reports as well as TV news. Included in the categories of this protocol are date, year, page/section (or with TV news, story number in the newscast), location of "fear" or other synonyms (e.g., afraid, threatened), length of article (if newspaper), length of report—time (if a TV news report), subject matter, and who or what is feared. In addition, another category, "miscellaneous," is added that includes headline, key phrases, specific sources, and most relevant sentences that help identify the report and give it its qualitative signature.

Our qualitative study focused on the meaning, use, and significance of "fear" in news reports, including headlines and "opening" statements, especially in TV (e.g., ABC) newscasts. Once a clear understanding emerged about the varied contexts, uses and meanings of fear, several descriptive and summary statements were grouped, along with examples of coverage. One thing we were interested in was "how closely" and how frequently fear was associated with other words (e.g., crime, violence) in headlines.

Second, the relationship of fear with various topics over time was examined by a broader analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* (LAT) and ABC reports over a several-year period. This permitted us to examine whether and to what extent fear “moved” from one topic to another over time.

AN OVERVIEW OF FEAR

Every society teaches its members many things, including what to worry about (e.g., money, status, sin/salvation, personal relationships, health, crime and cellulite). There are several aspects of this process that should be stressed before further discussion of the data. First, the target of fear is socially constructed—but this does not mean it is not perceived as “real” and does not have consequences. Second, fear is built on a foundation of social interaction and communication. Currently, this includes mass communication as part of our effective environment within an ecology of communication (Altheide 1995). Third, there are many individual fears, of course, but my concern is with those that are reportedly held in common.

I want to trace the “career” of fears, noting their origins and consequences. Table 1 presents data on the frequency of fear in news reports. Data were obtained for the *Los Angeles Times* (LAT) and *ABC World News Tonight* (ABC) for 1985 and 1994 from the LEXIS/NEXIS information base. The entire newspaper and newscast were included.

Two things stand out and can best be illustrated by referring to the LAT coverage. First, fear was used in more news reports in 1994 than in 1985. This is probably an understatement when one considers the dozens of “talk shows” on radio and TV that are devoted to fear and related problems in everyday life. Focusing on the LAT, there was a 64 percent increase in the use of the word “fear.” ABC’s regular evening news program—with an increase of 173 percent—was consistent with this shift. Second, there was an even larger increase in use of the word “fear” in headlines—161 percent. These percentage increases suggest that a qualitative shift occurred in the meaning and use of the word “fear” in news reporting, particularly with headlines. But more information was needed to see how “thick” and “widespread” the shift in discourse may have been. In order to check on this, similar searches were conducted for other newspapers that had been on LEXIS/NEXIS for several years (this is a drawback for long looks “back” in time) as well as ABC News tran-

TABLE 1. “FEAR” IN LOS ANGELES TIMES AND ABC NEWS REPORTS

	“Fear” in text (n)			“Fear” in Headline (n)		
	1985	1994	% change	1985	1994	% change
LAT	4,519	7,415	+64%	271	707	+161%
ABC	1990 142	1994 387	+173%			

The ABC data are from the regular evening newscasts. However, between August 1989 and January 1, 1995, nearly 3,000 references to “fear” appeared in all ABC news shows, which included special reports, *20/20*, *Nightline*, and other similar programs.

scripts. Most important is the disproportionate way in which “fear” has moved into the headlines of newspapers and the “leads” of network news, at least at ABC. In most of the major newspapers examined there was a larger increase in the word “fear” in headlines than in regular reports.

People do not just read and hear fear, but they are more familiar with it as a characteristic attributed to their effective environments. Earlier we discussed how information technology and media formats “collapse” topics, problems, and procedures so that when we are aware of doing one thing, we are often addressing several others. Cultural meanings also change as they become more taken for granted and “folded” or “collapsed” into other symbols and contexts of use. For example, when “violence” collapses into “anger,” then certain emotions are more directly played out in certain behavior. Likewise with fear.

I suggest that the expanded use of fear is collapsing important symbolic meanings and boundaries. More and more topics pass through the problem frame and have “fear in common.” The signifier (a topic) and signified (fear) become joined within a context (Manning 1987). The context here is a news report oriented to the problem frame. Public discourse changes when news reports associate fear with certain issues (e.g., crime and drugs). To illustrate, as fear is more closely connected with specific topics, the topic-becomes-more-fearful as a matter of public discourse. Accordingly, if fear is becoming more closely associated with certain topics, this should be apparent in news media reports, and changes in symbolic (word) proximity should be apparent over time.

There is another dimension of fear in news reports. Fear is usually associated with specific problems that have been processed through the problem frame and entertainment perspective noted above. If the problem frame articulated above is relevant in news coverage, then we might expect that a key symbolic part (e.g., fear) would become associated with topics over time, but also move or “travel” from one topic to another. Tracking discourse by examining the appearance of “fear” within two and ten words in headlines in the LAT illustrates, as shown in Table 2, how “fear” travels over time.

Among the points to draw from research to date: First, this mode of analysis of “discourse” is partially supported by the collapsing of “fear” within the topic of “cancer,” which was included as an intuitive test or “control” topic involving fear. We suggest that fear and cancer are now joined. The disadvantage for cancer patients of painting cancer with the metaphor of “war” and associating it with “fear” was noted by a journalist:

However effective it may be politically, the problem with this approach, then and now, is that it can backfire on individuals. Victims of TB came to be feared as much as the disease itself. And today, people afflicted with cancer, which is not even contagious, often find that their condition elicits fear and anxiety rather than sympathy and understanding among friends, co-workers or employers. Much-needed relationships, not to mention jobs, have been lost as a result. The presence of any life-threatening disease may, of course, cause some to shrink from this reminder of their own vulnerability and mortality. But the relentless depiction of cancer as an insidious “Alien”-like enemy, growing within and conquering its hosts, clearly exacerbates this tendency and affects the emotional responses of even the most rational among us. People are taught to “live with” heart disease and other life-threatening illnesses, but must always “battle against” cancer, even when many cancers have become essentially chronic “conditions.” (Suzanne Gordon, Los Angeles Times December . 29, 1992, Metro, Part B, p. 7.)

Second, except for cancer, each topic became more closely aligned with the word fear

TABLE 2. 'FEAR' IN HEADLINES WITHIN N/WORDS OF AIDS, CANCER, CRIME, DRUGS, ENVIRONMENT, VIOLENCE, LOS ANGELES TIMES 1985, 1992, AND 1994

Topic	Within Two Words			Within Ten Words		
	1985	1992	1994	1985	1992	1994
AIDS	9	2	3	17	4	6
Cancer	0	1	1	1	2	2
Crime	3	5	22	5	18	42
Drugs	0	1	1	2	3	7
Environment	0	0	5	3	8	9
Violence	0	9	12	2	15	25

over time. Third, the discourse of fear has shifted over a several-year period to include certain problems and issues. For example, AIDS was dominant in 1985, but not 1992 or 1994, although the number of reports about AIDS and HIV greatly increased. Fourth, preliminary analysis suggests that fear is merging with "drugs," a topic that has been scoured by official agents of control who have been news sources promoting the isomorphism of drugs/crime/violence/fear/danger. Drugs and fear have been joined in major news media in the United States. Fifth, while the closest association with fear in 1985 was AIDS, this shifted to crime and violence in 1994. Sixth, certain problems and issues are more closely associated with fear than others. In 1994 it was crime and violence. Moreover, examining the materials indicates that the problems/issues included drugs and gangs. An "archetype" headline combines all three: "*Crime Cut by Bikes, Barricades, Law Enforcement: The Neighborhood Was a Drug Haven Until New Tactics Were Implemented. The Two-Wheel Patrols and Barriers Have Made a Dent in the Danger But Some Residents Still Live in Fear*" (LAT, July 5, 1992 emphasis added.) The increasingly common association of several of these terms with another menace, "gang," is illustrated in the headline "*Anaheim Fears Drug Turf Wars Among Gangs*" (LAT, February 6, 1992 emphasis added). Seventh, fear looks more and more like crime when it comes to news media. Crime and fear are good entertainment. Crime rates are down, but public concern with crime is up, way up! While mass audiences are depicted as "fearing" criminals, the communicative logic joining what the "feared" are afraid of is worth examining. Eighth, the majority of reports using fear in headlines *do not* include the topics in this analysis. Examining all these topics when they occur in headlines with fear (and not only if they are within ten words), indicates that they account for 14 percent in 1985 and 16 percent in 1994 (using the number of headlines with fear reported in Table 1 (271 in 1985 and 707 in 1994). This suggests that the use of fear in headlines goes well beyond the six topics in this analysis. It also suggests that it is not the specific content of news reports (e.g., drugs and violence), that fosters fear-laden headlines.

FEARED AND FEARING

News formats, particularly those on television, tend to be "tight" and "closed" rather than "loose" and "open" (Schlesinger et al. 1983; Altheide 1985), so they seldom permit the

context and very significant background information that is essential to understand an event rather than just appreciate a dramatic aspect of it. The problem frame is tied to this narrative structure. Since the major sources of news for crime and most problems are “official agencies” who claim “ownership” of such issues, seldom are journalists provided the breadth of information that would at least make certain events more understandable. The upshot is that news reports tend to treat the “feared” aspects of those accused of crimes, as well as those afflicted with AIDS and other social ills. But it is also true that many of the “feared” are also “fearing” of people and their environments.

TESTIMONIES OF FEAR AND VOCABULARIES OF MOTIVE

Our postjournalism era is characterized by news sources producing events that are quite compatible with news criteria (Altheide and Snow 1991). It should also be stressed that popular conceptions and targets of fear are related to possible solutions of fear (e.g., “what can be done about it”). Since many of the problems are generated through news sources connected to political interests and often bureaucratic organizations, it is not surprising that bureaucratic/state/legal interventions are used to offer not only a solution for the problem, but also to define it. Organizational solutions already at hand are drawn on to define the problem; what organizations offer are solutions in search of problems. Ironically, this is also true of contemporary news organizations, guided primarily by formats that are now widely recognized by news sources as well (Ericson et al. 1991).

The discourse of fear is now incorporated into explanations of “fear” and, in turn, “tales of fear.” There are many stories told today. As the discourse of fear pervades everyday life, more experiences seem to be captured by it. Audiences then become more likely to be included as corroborating witnesses to give testimony compatible with the themes resonating the discourse of fear. I do not know of another social dimension or topical area where citizens are permitted—indeed encouraged—to participate in the public news accounts and dialogue about issues. Citizens participate, sometimes in the role of “victims,” witnesses, and occasionally, critics of agencies (e.g., questionable police shootings). Fear of crime in many ways is about fear for one’s safety, fear of becoming a victim, or fear of kids being victims. This is reflected through miscellaneous comments in the reports: “I fear for my kids. I don’t let them go out of the house.” “. . . the NRA [National Rifle Association] was appealing to people worried about crime and self-protection.”

During a truce between the Crips and the Bloods someone stated, “It means a whole lot to us because that means we can still go back out on the streets and not be in fear of the gangs.” “It makes me feel scared because I don’t know if I’m going to be next or if I’m going to know somebody who’s going to be next.” “We’re afraid for our children.”

In the context of other reports about police surveillance: “I don’t care how they monitor him. I can’t get patrol on my street and I should feel secure with this man right in my backyard.” “These kids in this neighborhood, they can’t walk to the corner. They can’t go to the store. Every night there’s shooting.”

Fear is a *vocabulary of motive*—certain characteristics and identities are attributed to those persons that we associate with fearing acts. Fear promotes responses to crime. It is like a compass that guides us to prefer some accounts and reject others. Often, the persons used to inspire fear are members of the despised and powerless groups in society. Fear of the homeless and their increased presence may lead people to treat them badly, but often

they become victims of crime (e.g., "One fellow threatened to kill me . . . so I went down and got a pistol permit and carry a weapon with me all the time now when I go to work").

CONCLUSION

My modest efforts carry with them some conceptual and methodological interaction. Far more is involved in moving personal problems into news problems than Mills (1959 p. 8 ff.) implied when he urged sociologists to distinguish between *personal troubles* and *social issues*. The great Mills was not wrong. He just lived in a period dominated more by print than electronics. Everyday life is increasingly mediated by information technology as we experience events in an ecology of communication. Information technology and its varied communication formats ("media logic") are part of our "effective environment" which we become accustomed to and take for granted (Pfuhl and Henry 1993). And just as humans in new environments (e.g., high-altitude mountain climbing) "learn" to breathe differently and soon do it routinely, postmodern media users "learn" to adjust to new information technology and communication formats, soon taking them for granted.

Media materials contribute to public perceptions, albeit in less than precise ways, whether as "priming" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), agenda setting, or shaping public discourse through news formats. It is all part of our culture, and the task is to attempt to continue to map conceptually the symbolic connections we are able to make between our everyday lives, popular culture, information technology, and news of the day.

The cultural changes promoting the problem frame and the generation of fear are organizational and informational. They are increasingly electronic. And this makes it a methodological matter. The asymmetry in some resources between those producing information and those of us who study them has been somewhat reduced. Much of what has been examined in this essay is of necessity trend and change oriented. Methodological conceptions like "tracking discourse" and others (Hertog and Fan 1995), follow from an awareness of the shifting symbolic meanings and reconfigurations I have suggested. But this approach would be very difficult without the use of electronic processing to access and analyze electronic information bases. Careful scrutiny of theoretically sampled documents must be combined with additional resources. Media logic cannot be empirically captured without access to research aids compatible with that logic. These changes cannot be understood one document at a time, or even a few hundred documents. Thousands of documents over several years are essential. Resources like LEXIS/NEXIS, for example, are becoming more widely available and used by social scientists in ways that permit questions to be asked that previously could not be answered.

News perspectives and practices, including the organizational context and use of entertainment formats, promote the problem frame that in turn produces narratives of fear. Fear is more visible and routine in public discourse than it was a decade ago. Perceptions of safety, security, and relative "ease" of everyday circumstances are neither uniform throughout American society nor are they similarly perceived. This communication environment is part of our everyday world; it is popular culture and we are it, and we like it; we play with it; we play with the reporters and the institutional news sources who exploit the fear script for their own benefits. The perception of many is that life is very problematic, dangerous, and demanding of extreme measures to protect us. Indeed, one of the few things Americans seem to share is the popular culture that celebrates danger and fear as

entertainment organized with canned formats delivered through an expansive and invasive information technology.

Private life is closer to public concerns and issues than ever before. This is because both wear the look of popular culture. And this looks like fear. Life is problematic and uncertain, but in the postindustrial United States it is the heightened expectations of predictability and order at a time when many institutional arrangements are in flux (some would say “unraveling”) that seems to be the culprit. If Jack Katz (1987, p. 71) is correct that “the experience of reading crime news induces the reader into a perspective useful for taking a stand on existential moral dilemmas,” then personal concerns are being perceived as more frightening. Fear provides a common level for the cascading confluence of reports in certain formats that are “good” for entertaining news, social control agencies, aspiring claims-makers seeking public legitimacy, and the transformation of a putative trouble into an issue.

Indeed, it makes good sociological sense to suggest that we have a “problem machine” in much of the mass media. TV news formats favoring short, dramatic, conflictual, visually exciting reports are ripe for treating events and circumstances as problems. Thus, the problem frame has been developed rather rapidly as a feature of news formats, and we are becoming increasingly familiar with them both. What we take for granted has changed; problems, risks, and even damage or injury are no longer routine, but they are expected nevertheless. It is the anticipated exception and the societal affirmation of this exception that we celebrate through countless news reports that joins us to politicians. Fear provides politicians with agendas, dramatic scripts and news media pronouncements of remedies to “make us safe” (Gusfield 1989). The social landscape is littered with failed programs and reactive public policies proclaiming the litany of deliverance from an effective environment defined by fear.

Carried with the message of fear are images and targets of what and who is to be feared. Attached to these ideal types of villains and threats are formal agents of social control who are associated with the available solutions to these problems. We see them occupying the same “space” in our newspapers and on our TV screens. Claims-makers seeking to promote a trouble into an issue turn to the news media for help, often wrapping their concerns in an attractive fear-package. Thus, the problem frame reproduces itself.

I have suggested that an ecology of communication has contributed to the construction and routine use of a problem frame and expansion of fear in public discourse. Researchers are invited to explore the problem frame as well as clarifying its dimensions, and articulating its relevance in everyday life. As the mass media continue to be a major “window” for shaping, viewing, and addressing concerns, careful work is required to clarify the process, mapping, and career of particular issues and “problems.” Little change is likely without an awareness of the current “meta communication,” including current news formats that celebrate crime and other constructs of the problem frame. Indeed, the modest suggestions offered above could contribute to a renewed interest in journalistic education and reform and hopefully, promote a dialogue that seldom occurs between communication scholars and practitioners. Journalistic education and awareness offers some hope for reflection, particularly if mistakes can be recognized and journalists undertake a fundamental shift to avoid format recycling. As Shapiro (1996, p. 47) noted in his reflections about journalistic distortions of child welfare: “To cover child welfare properly is to set aside your instinct as a journalist, the urge to find an overarching answer, and your instinct as a person, the attempt to save the innocents, and to accept a more realistic goal—that of raising a series

of increasingly difficult questions . . . the right questions can move public debate closer to the messy and individual realities of these families.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Partial support for this project was provided by research awards from the Graduate College and the College of Public Programs at Arizona State University. Research assistance was provided by Dion Dennis, Jennifer Ferguson, and Sam Michalowski. Helpful comments were provided by reviewers and Norman K. Denzin, as well as several conversations with Peter K. Manning about the “looping” effects of media coverage.

REFERENCES

- Altheide, David L. 1976. *Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- . 1985. *Media Power*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- . 1994. “An Ecology of Communication: Toward a Mapping of the Effective Environment.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 35: 645–683
- . 1995. *An Ecology of Communication: Cultural Formats of Control*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- . 1996. *Qualitative Media Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Altheide, David L. and Robert P. Snow. 1979. *Media Logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- . 1991. *Media Worlds in the Postjournalism Era*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Bennett, W. Lance. 1988. *News: The Politics of Illusion* (2nd Edition). New York: Longman.
- Berg, Bruce L. 1989. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Berger, Arthur Asa. 1982. *Media Analysis Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Best, Joel and J. Horiuchi. 1985. “The Razor Blade in the Apple: The Social Construction of Urban Legends.” *Social Problems* 32 (5): 488–499.
- Best, Joel. (ed). 1995. *Images of Issues*. (2nd Edition) Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Carey, James. 1989. *Communication as Culture: Essays on the Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Cavender, Gray, and Lisa Bond-Maupin. 1993. “Fear and Loathing on Reality Television: An Analysis of ‘America’s Most Wanted’ and ‘Unsolved Mysteries.’” *Sociological Inquiry* 63: 305–317.
- Comstock, George. 1980. *Television in America*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Couch, Carl J. 1984. *Constructing Civilization*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- DeFleur, Melvin L. and Sandra Ball-Rokeach. 1982. *Theories of Mass Communication*. (4th Edition). New York: Longman.
- Devji, Mantosh Singh. 1996. “Resurrect Dead Soul of America.” *The Arizona Republic*, November 10, p. H3.
- Dijk, Teun A. 1988. *News as Discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Epstein, Edward J. 1973. *News from Nowhere*. New York: Random House.
- Ericson, Richard V., Patricia M. Baranek and Janet B. L. Chan. 1989. *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ericson, Richard V., Patricia M. Baranek and Janet B. L. Chan. 1991. *Representing Order: Crime, Law and Justice in the News Media*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ericson, Richard V. 1993. “Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues” (Book Review). *The American Journal of Sociology*. May. v 98, no. 6. P. 1459–1463.
- . ed. 1995. *Crime and the Media*. Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth University Press.
- Fishman, Mark. 1980. *Manufacturing the News*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

- General Social Survey (GSS). 1994. Electronic: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>.
- Gerbner, G., and L. Gross. 1976. "The Scary World of TV's Heavy Viewer." *Psychology Today*. April: 89–91.
- , ———, Morgan, M., Signorelli, N. and Jackson-Beeck, M. 1978. "Cultural Indicators: Violence Profile No. 9." *Journal of Communication* 28: 176–207.
- Gitlin, Todd. 1980. *The Whole World Is Watching*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Graber, Doris. 1984. *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*. New York: Longmans.
- Grimshaw, Allen Day, and Peter J. Burke. 1994. *What's Going on Here?: Complementary Studies of Professional Talk*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Gunter, Barry. 1987. *Television and the Fear of Crime*. London: John Libbey.
- Gunter, Barry, and Mallory Wober. 1983. "Television Viewing and Public Trust." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 29: 177–196.
- Gusfield, Joseph R. 1989. "Constructing the Ownership of Social Problems: Fun and Profit in the Welfare State." *Social Problems* 36: 431–441.
- Heath, Linda and Kevin Gilbert. 1996. "Mass Media and Fear of Crime." *American Behavioral Scientist* 39: 379–386.
- Hertog, James K., and David P. Fan. 1995. "The Impact of Press Coverage on Social Beliefs: The Case of HIV Transmission." *Communication Research* 22: 545–575.
- Hirsch, Paul. 1980. "The 'Scary World' of the Non-Viewer and Other Anomalies: A Reanalysis of Gerbner et al. Findings, Part 1." *Communication Research* 7: 403–456.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Donald M. Kinder. 1987. *News that Matters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Katz, Jack. 1987. "What Makes Crime 'News'?" *Media, Culture and Society* 9: 47–75.
- Lewis, D. and Salem, G. 1986. *Fear of Crime*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc.
- MacKuen, M. and S. L. Coombs. 1981. *More than News: Media Power in Public Affairs*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McDonald, James H. 1994. "Te(k)nowledge: Technology, Education, and the New Student Subject." *Science as Culture* 4 (4): 537–564.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1960. *Explorations in Communication*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Manning, Peter K. 1977. *Semiotics and Fieldwork*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Manning, Peter K. and Betsy Cullum-Swan. 1994. "Narrative, Content and Semiotic Analysis," Pp. 463–484 in edited by Norman K. Denzin. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Meyrowitz, Joshua. 1985. *No Sense of Place*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Grove Press.
- Pfuhl, Erdwin H., Jr., and Stuart Henry. 1993. *The Deviance Process*. (3rd. Ed.), Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Schlesinger, Philip, P. G. Murdock, and P. Elliott. 1983. *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture*. London: Comedia.
- Schlesinger, Philip, Howard Tumber, and Graham Murdock. 1991. "The Media Politics of Crime and Criminal Justice." *British Journal of Sociology* 42: 397–420.
- Shapiro, Michael. 1996. "The Lives We Would Like to Set Right: Why Journalistic Outrage Is Not the Best Approach to the Child Welfare Story." *Columbia Journalism Review*. Nov/Dec.: 45–48.
- Shaw, D. L. and M. E. McCombs. 1977. *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press*. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing.
- Signorelli, Nancy and George Gerbner, editors. 1988. *Violence and Terror in the Mass Media: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Greenwood Press.

- Signorelli, Nancy, George Gerbner, and Michael Morgan. 1995. "Violence on Television: The Cultural Indicators Project." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. Spring 39: 278-283.
- Skogan, W. and Maxfield, M. 1981. *Coping with Crime*. London: Sage.
- Snow, Robert P. 1983. *Creating Media Culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Sparks, Richard. 1992. *Television and the Drama of Crime: Moral Tales and the Place of Crime in Public Life*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Surette, Ray. 1992. *Media, Crime and Criminal Justice: Images and Realities*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. *Making News*. New York: Free Press.
- Unsworth, Barry. 1995. *Morality Play*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Weiler, M., and Pearce, W. B. 1992. *Reagan and Public Discourse in America*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert. (ed). 1992. *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure*. New York: Routledge.
- Zhondang, P. and Kosicki, G. 1993. "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse." *Political Communication* 10: 55-69.
- Zillman, D. and Wakshlag, J. 1987. "Fear of Victimization and the Appeal of Crime Drama," in *Selective Exposure to Communication*, edited by D. Zillman and J. Bryant. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.