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Media Frames

Disentangling what is actually meant by the word ‘frame’ is not as easy as one might think. The term frame has been problematized by a history of multiple uses (Tankard Jr *et al.* 1991: 163) and varying conceptualizations, ranging from schema or script to refer to audience perception and processing (Entman 1993; Severin & Tankard 1997). Gitlin (1980) has defined frames as ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse’ (Gitlin 1980: 7). Echoing the work of Gitlin, Hertog and McLeod (1995) state that ‘the frame used [for interpretation] determines what available information is relevant’ (Gitlin *et al.* 1995: 4). Thus, the frames of a story determine the relevant pieces of descriptive information that attach to that concept. Reese (2001) states that ‘frames are the organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’. According to Binder (1993), this structure inevitably becomes common sense and these ‘referent images’ become the ‘beliefs and values the larger culture takes for granted’ (Binder 1993: 756).

Thus, a frame essentially ‘suggests what the issue is’ (Tankard Jr *et al.* 1991: 3). This understanding of an issue’s relevance does not happen immediately. Research has shown that readers often forget specific elements of media stories but retain general impressions (Graber 1988) that later become integrated into their own perceptions of the world (Potter 1993). News, in particular, can function as an authoritative version of reality (Barker-Plummer 1995) but performs this function over time. Framing is not a static event but a process of meaning construction that changes gradually ‘in response to the political and social climate’ (Mazzarella & Pecora 2007: 10). This process evolves from overall ‘interpretive packages’ (Gamson & Modigliani 1989: 2) constructed through the narratives of a text. Analysing frames and the narrative within media content implicitly ‘recognizes that stories have the power to link the personal and the cultural: that within the mundane, minute details of a specific event, relationship, or interaction, the reader/researcher can identify cultural beliefs, practices, and trends’ (Foster 2005: 58). These repeated cultural artefacts enter into ‘that precise field of the distribution of the dominant ways in which a society makes sense of what is going on around it or what is happening to it’ (Hall 1984: 7–8). Through such a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) it is possible to unpack the interconnected network of shared assumptions, beliefs and myths that drive media representations.

Framing derives from the very real need to categorize news and information so that meaningful comprehension and communication can take place. News, like any other communication system, can be understood as a narrative that has implied meanings (Kensicki 2004). Otherwise stated, 'news and information has no intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful context which organizes and lends it coherence' (London 1993). The 'meaningful context' is the frame that shapes a news story (Entman 1993). These frames serve to construct 'the culture of an issue' (Gamson & Lasch 1983: 397) and are the result of three processes combining: cultural resonance, sponsor activity and media practice (Gamson & Modigliani 1989). Cultural resonance is built upon our shared 'referent images' (Binder 1993: 756) that society accepts as common sense. Sponsor activity refers to the attempts from those with a particular agenda, such as politicians or movement representatives, to influence news content. Media practices are the 'norms and routines of news gathering' (Mazzarella & Pecora 2007: 11). These three processes coalesce to create the media frames that re-produce current events and subsequently influence the process of social change.

Scheufele (1999) intuitively points out that framing research, characterized by 'social constructivism', is defined by both strong and limited effects. On the one hand, mass media construct powerful images of reality for the public, and on the other hand, the public draws upon these frames only to contextualize them against their own pre-existing schemas. This results in a process whereby audiences depend on 'a version of reality built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from the mass media' (Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992). As journalists, editors and reporters select (or frame) the news, they are also emphasizing certain aspects of a story, which then cues corresponding specific thoughts within the audience (Iyengar 1991). The audience then applies these specific thoughts, conjured up from media frames associated with a particular story, when considering the broader issues at hand (Price & Tewksbury 1997). This process, called the 'accessibility bias' (Iyengar 1990a) or the 'availability heuristic' (Shrum & O'Guinn 1993), enables for automatic, subconscious judgments to be made and is the basis for understanding the impact media frames can have on society.

The relationship between media content and social change is aptly highlighted by Entman (1993), who states that frames increase the salience of particular aspects of a story by promoting a specific 'problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. The news is indeed 'a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality' (Gurevitch & Levy 1985: 18), but some groups have historically had more power than others in that contest. As Tuchman (1978) argued years ago, journalistic routines work to generally reinforce capitalistic distributions of power rather than challenge them. This is not to say that traditionally

marginalized groups, such as social movements, never gain access to successful frame sponsorship (Gamson *et al.* 1992). However, mainstream media in particular have transcribed elite sources to such a degree that frames have been taken as common sense or as ‘transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations’ (Gamson *et al.* 1992: 382). Social movements serve as an excellent framework to examine mainstream and alternative media frames because they have been created specifically to oppose the status quo and are typically in direct opposition to hegemonic social and political structures.

Social movements and media frames

Media coverage is absolutely central to the very existence of social movements (Kielbowicz & Sherer 1986). News provides information, which then plays a fundamental structural role in each individual’s decision-making (Gandy Jr 1982) and how we later think about political issues. News becomes an ‘authoritative version of reality, a way of knowing associated with high levels of cultural legitimacy’ (Barker-Plummer 1995: 309). Thus, news offers a type of membership of knowledge that participants engage in as we negotiate our social and political world. As audiences, we receive an edited version of events (Worth 1981) that then defines what we generally come to believe to be a reality.

The success of social movements depends in large part on their ability to access and to use political allies, media coverage, money and public awareness (Heath 1997). For the most part, social movements are, or begin as, marginal or powerless groups (Berry 1984). Certainly, there are exceptions, such as the lobbying powerhouses of the American National Rifle Association or the Sierra Club. However, the overwhelming majority of social movement organizations remain largely powerless in society (Greenwald 1977) given that they fall outside of mainstream media’s norms of inclusion (Wolfsfeld 1997), and they are faced with tight budgetary constraints that hamper their ability for promotion otherwise. Social movements have traditionally been shut out of mainstream media as they ‘challenge a major aspect of society, either its authorities or cultural codes, from outside the political process, often employing unconventional actions’ (Lester 2006: 909). It is because of that exclusion that social movements have historically forged alliances with the alternative press.

In his seminal book examining the group Students for a Democratic Society, Gitlin (1980) wrote that ‘of all the institutions of daily life, the media specialize in orchestrating everyday consciousness – by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralized symbolic capacity’ (Gitlin 1980: 2). Since then, media have continued to evolve into a highly skilled system of networks that distribute ideology throughout the world. Social movements must understand media structures and work within these confines if they hope to disseminate their

beliefs because without media coverage, many members of the public would be unaware of a movement's existence. The public receives its information concerning social groups primarily from the media. Relatively few in our society form their opinions of social movements through personal contact. The media image 'tends to become "the movement" for wider publics and institutions who have few alternative sources of information, or none at all, about it' (Gitlin 1980: 3).

If a movement does not attract media attention, the possibility of it remaining a viable force for change drops considerably. Gitlin (1980) states, 'media define the public significance of movement events or, by blanking them out, actively deprive them of larger significance' (Gitlin 1980: 3). Media are so essentially important to social movements because it is also where they can influence potential recruits into their movement. Favourable coverage confers legitimization upon the movement and attracts new members, while unfavourable media coverage can often discourage movement participation. Social movements are already fighting the almost insurmountable task of presenting the principles of an organization or group in an appealing way for the potential recruit (Olson 1965). Media coverage also provides psychological support to those already active in the movement (Molotch 1979). Anything difficult, which surely the process of social change would qualify as such, takes an enormous amount of tenacity and strength. This strength can be bolstered with the occasional reaffirmation that may result from positive media coverage.

Since social movements so desperately depend upon media, they often find themselves in a perplexing position. On the one hand, they need media to disseminate their meanings to a larger audience, but on the other hand, they have minimal control on the quality or quantity of how reporters will frame their organization and their cause. The result is somewhat of a barter arrangement (Gamson 1989), whereby protesters provide good visual imagery and action for the media and in return they receive coverage. They must face this dichotomy with a full awareness of the benefits and the shortcomings media coverage can bring. As Perlmutter and Wagner (2004) have said, groups are 'faced with the practical, political, psychological and existential quandary that might be summed up by the Hamletian paraphrase, "To be a media spectacle or not to be a media spectacle?"' (Perlmutter & Wagner 2004: 95). In the past, the answer to this question was much more obvious. However, contemporary social movements may now have a wider range of representational options across the media spectrum.

Negative mainstream coverage

Historically, there have been repeated cases of slanting, trivialization and outright omission of those who deviate from the norms of an elite media

and form a political movement to combat injustice. For example, negative mainstream media frames have been discovered in the anti-nuclear movement (Entman & Rojecki 1993), the women's movement (Barker-Plummer 1995), and the gay and lesbian movement (Jenness 1995). These frames are at times obvious and at other times strikingly subtle. Tuchman (1978) argued that quotation marks are a common method of inserting a level of commentary without breaking the journalistic code of objectivity. Quotes can be used to question what is stated as fact on the part of social movement actors without directly questioning their integrity. For example, Gitlin (1980) argued that those protesting against the Vietnam War were often described in quotation marks as participating in a 'peace march', suggesting that this protest was labelled as such only by those participating within the movement and not as seen by the wider population. The use of stance adverbs can also advance a preferred reading. Words such as obviously or allegedly direct readers to possible conclusions without specifically stating that outcome. These literary techniques 'contribute to the delegitimization of challenging groups' (McLeod & Detenber 1999: 6).

Violence within movements has often been used as framing technique. Violent frames cause protesters to be conceptualised as far more counter-social or deviant. These frames avoid 'the philosophical issues under debate' (Dardis 2006: 120) and focus on the violent spectacle. McFarlane and Hay (2003) drew heavily from the work of McLeod and Hertog (1999) to create two general media representations of violence as it pertains to social movements: general lawlessness or disruption and police confrontation. These negative frames have been seen repeatedly in coverage of protest movements around the world and effectively reduce the purpose and mission of the social movement to nothing more than a violent act.

Another often used frame in social movement coverage is marginalization. For example, protesters against the Gulf War were found to be represented as a 'marginal oddity' (Hackett & Zhao 1994: 518). Such an emphasis on protesters being categorically different from the mainstream was replicated in other studies looking at social movements. These differences can manifest themselves through both physical and emotional characteristics. Physical variations, such as long hair, body piercings or abnormal clothing, have long been emphasized in protest content (McLeod & Hertog 1999). Media can often suggest that those within a movement are also marginal in sheer numbers (McLeod & Hertog 1992) and therefore not representative of the general population. This frame is generally invoked through generalizations about the public response, an emphasis on counter-protests that might be present or a reliance on public opinion polls that negate the activity of protesters.

The immaturity of protesters, as seen through silly play and childish acts, has also been highlighted in media coverage (McLeod & Hertog 1999). In other instances, protesters have been framed purely as 'idiots at large'

(McFarlane & Hay 2003: 223), who simply have no clue as to the complexity of the social or political problem that they are protesting. A carnivalesque (McLeod & Hertog 1999) atmosphere or 'protest as performance' (McFarlane & Hay 2003: 218) is often highlighted in coverage. In each case, the media remove any serious political voice from the protesters (Dow 1999). All of these frames detract from the issue at hand, but paradoxically, fractions of these social movements often rely on these tactics to gain movement coverage.

Historical references to previous, and more likely unsuccessful (McFarlane & Hay 2003), social movements can also be a common framing technique used by the media (Hackett & Zhao 1994). This offers a context for the reader or viewer that can instantaneously be juxtaposed with a collective negative experience or a positive one. In the case of American anti-war protests, many modern social movements are compared to the historical protests against the Vietnam War (Beamish, Molotch & Flacks 1995). For many within America, these protests conjure up historical media images of violence and unpatriotic behaviour on the part of some who did not respect returning soldiers.

Research has also found that official sources are often invoked in opposition to the protesters, specifically through commentary on normative behaviour or societal rules (Smith *et al.* 2001). In some instances, protesters are almost never asked to describe events. Instead, there can be an almost exclusive reliance on official voices, such as police officers, to narrate movement activity (Reese & Buckalew 1995). The US anti-nuclear movement, which was broadly middle class and moderate in their political approach, enjoyed a majority of public support in the polls. However, elite views that were opposed to the freeze were still found on the front pages of newspapers while movement opinions which supported the freeze were buried on interior pages (Entman & Rojecki 1993). *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine continued to focus on eccentricities within the movement, and overall content suggested that 'the nuclear weapons policies of the nation should not be dictated by the anxieties of an amorphous movement, one purportedly riven by discord' (Entman & Rojecki 1993: 170). When mainstream journalists repeatedly emphasize the same specific aspects of protest events, they are concomitantly not emphasizing other salient aspects of protest events – aspects that might more likely be associated with a more positive tone in coverage.

Positive mainstream coverage

While there is an overwhelming amount of negative coverage of social movements in mainstream media, there have been examples of successful movements that have created narrative structures and visual symbols which 'activate the schemas' (Perlmutter & Wagner 2004) of mainstream audiences.

If one examines the representation of social movements in the mainstream media throughout recent history, there are important instances of positive framing that refute a binary mainstream media in opposition to social movement activity. This is not to say that many social movements don't continue to struggle in their attempts to gain positive attention from the mainstream press. However, the instances where social movements have received positive coverage warrant closer inspection to better understand the pathways of acceptance within the mainstream press and potential areas of similarities between the alternative and mainstream media.

In America, the conservative Promise Keepers received extensive positive coverage (Claussen 1998) surrounding its march in Washington DC. The group is a Christian organization that aims to introduce men to the faith through seven promises that centre on worshipping Jesus Christ. Given that the organization is conservative, one might argue that it therefore does not challenge mainstream traditions in the same way as more liberal political organizations. However, the organization itself would likely argue that society is in a critical state of crisis and that organizations, such as Promise Keepers, are challenging the very core of contemporary society. Perhaps more important to its media coverage than its ideological position, Promise Keepers had a succinct and well-connected public relations strategy that attracted mainstream journalists without positioning the organization as spokespeople for the Christian Right (Waters 1998). It is interesting to note that even though academic scholarship found an overwhelmingly positive slant on coverage of Promise Keepers, members of the group perceived mainstream media coverage as unfavourable (Allen II 1998). This reaction may be due to preconceived beliefs from those who identify as conservative, that the mainstream media are liberal (Lee 2005).

These preconceived ideas may also fuel those on the left who believe that the mainstream media covered the 1999 Seattle demonstrations in a superficial manner. Rojecki (2002) found that while this may have been the case initially, coverage quickly moved to more substantive issues concerning the protest even though the 'costumes, methods for gaining attention, or civil disobedience and mass arrests could easily have become the focus of coverage' (Rojecki 2002: 163). One of the reasons for this focus on more manifest issues concerning the protesters was the power of the Internet to counterbalance early reports and 'provide extraordinary leverage for mobilization and organization' (Rojecki 2002: 157 cited in Cottle 2008: 861). Protesters were able to provide contrasting information through horizontal communication networks that negated initial coverage and may have forced mainstream outlets to consider contradicting accounts of the events in Seattle. Whatever the reason, there was undoubtedly widespread positive coverage of those involved in the Seattle protests.

As was mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, another remarkable example of positive coverage comes from Belgium where more than 300,000 people gathered in 1996 to form the White March, which was the largest protest rally

that the country had ever seen. Protesters argued for stronger protection of Belgian children and an improved justice system to prosecute child abusers. This protest not only received almost exclusively positive coverage in the press, but the mainstream media actually acted as organizers for the march. In this case, the media 'undertook large-scale and unconcealed motivational framing efforts' (Walgrave & Manssens 2005: 132) to mobilize the public in support of the protest. There was a 'total absence of any mobilization machinery' (Walgrave & Manssens 2005: 113). The five mainstream newspapers in Belgium acted as an 'adequate alternative to intermediary organizations' (Walgrave & Manssens 2005: 113) and actually 'co-produced' the successful march through their positive, motivational framing of the upcoming protest and their negative portrayals of the justice system. While such active mobilization on the part of mainstream media are relatively rare, Walgrave and Manssens (2005) argue that media can take such an active role when there is a manifest disagreement between the general population and elites, the issues are emotional and symbolic, there is not already a movement in place, the issue is simple, the controversy does not have a political position, the media are depoliticized and commercial, the presence of a turbulent social atmosphere and society has confidence in the media.

Mainstream and alternative media around the world have challenged oppressive governmental regimes and have helped to force social change. Some researchers have gone so far to argue that many mainstream publications in Britain actually actively promote specific causes, although they argue that it is in an effort to manufacture dissent and consequently increase circulations (Milne 2005). The underlying reasons for the behaviour of anyone within the media are difficult to disentangle without honest reflection on the part of media workers. Yet it is indisputable that there have been several instances throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century where mainstream media have led the charge to overthrow oppressive governmental regimes around the world. The mainstream, independent media in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan 'played an important role in catalysing public participation in mass protests, which led to success of each of the revolutions' (Barker 2008). The information dissemination and calls to action from some of the most popular media outlets in these countries were all overtly political. In Georgia, there was 'almost non-stop' (Khudlyev 2005: 60) protest coverage that informed local citizens about protest locations. The local mainstream media, often with American financing, acted as mobilizers for citizens eager to challenge their government (Barker 2008). In Ukraine, media even participated in the protest as local stations broadcasted information on public screens during political rallies (Dyczok 2006).

Some of the factors for an activist mainstream media highlighted by Walgrave and Manssens (2005) were present in the Australian Rally for Justice protest spearheaded by Howard Sattler, a talkback radio host. In 1991, he argued

persuasively against juvenile car thieves and rallied 30,000 to protest outside of West Australia Parliament. Sattler was able to cajole a loyal following through his radio broadcasts and a successful public relations campaign that succeeded even though there was no concomitant rise in this type of crime during that period (Mickler 1998). Sattler focused his broadcasts at the time on a select few cases of juveniles driving stolen cars that were later involved in fatal accidents. Through this emphasis, he was able to mobilize protesters who later persuaded lawmakers to introduce legislation that actually curtailed international human rights legislation (Stockwell 1992), which Sattler and his followers believed to be too permissive. There was a personal reward as well for the talkback host: Sattler's ratings rose from 14.6 per cent of listeners to an impressive 19.4 per cent in the build-up to the rally (Centre for Research in Culture & Communication 1998). This individual, with the backing of mainstream media, created a successful protest that changed national legislation.

Nearly 20 years later in America, Glenn Beck utilized his own platform as a media personality to create the Restoring Honor rally, which attracted between 300,000 and 500,000 people. The event was held in 2010 on the same day and in the same location as the March on Washington, which is best known for Dr Martin Luther King Jr's 1963 'I Have a Dream' speech. While inevitably drawing reference from the original March on Washington, the Beck rally was focused on a return to God and 'traditional' American values. Beck ran frequent, and quite melodramatic, video promotion of the rally on FoxNews, his home broadcasting channel. Beck also gave exclusive interviews to FoxNews after the rally. This was not the first time that this media personality used his mediated pulpit to highlight social movements. Beck also dedicated a special broadcast of his television show that was timed to coincide with a FreedomWorks Tea Party Patriots movement march in September 2009.

While these examples suggest a level of activism on the part of mainstream media, the intersection between journalism and political engagement remains by no means commonplace or widely supported. In fact, the Restore Honor rally was marketed as explicitly apolitical on Fox, and Glenn Beck personally asked his supporters not to bring political signs to the rally (Restoring Honor Rally FAQ 2010). Yet the political overtones were hard to miss, given that one featured speaker was the previous Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, the rally was partially funded by the National Rifle Association and conservative groups held planned political events before and after the rally. The rally may have been purposefully distanced from overt political messaging and situated as apolitical after Rupert Murdoch commented that FoxNews 'shouldn't be supporting the Tea Party or any other party' (Media Matters 2010). One week after Mr Murdoch's comments, a fellow FoxNews broadcaster, Sean Hannity, was pulled from his commitment to headline a Cincinnati Tea Party rally and then broadcast his participation as part of his television show (Gold 2010). The political activism seen in these examples

from around the world highlight how mainstream media can and actually have become the instigator in social change.

Forty-seven years before Glenn Beck's Restoring Honour rally, Dr Martin Luther King sponsored the frame of civil rights struggle in America as an affront to mainstream society's understanding of Judaeo-Christian teachings on equality (Selby 2001). This frame was positively represented throughout the mainstream media, perhaps because it drew upon a shared cultural myth in America. However, other social movements, such as the anti-sweatshop activist groups, have also gained positive coverage in the mainstream media, despite what appears to be anti-capitalistic rhetoric. During the 1990s, after several sweatshop investigations in the mainstream press, the American mainstream media gave anti-sweatshop activists 'a position of definitional prominence' (Greenberg & Knight 2004: 169) over corporate interests. Greenberg and Knight (2004) argue that while this was a notable achievement for activists, coverage was also focused on individual sweatshops rather than systemic issues and placed the blame of the issue on Western consumption rather than business profiteering. However, it should be noted that much of this coverage may have been due to the tactics of the movement itself rather than an institutional response from mainstream media, and it is not known how, or if, alternative media might have covered the issue differently. The main point to be raised, however, is that positive coverage in the mainstream is certainly possible and does occur in ways that are similar to an alternative press.

The mainstream media recently bestowed positive frames to environmental protests (Allan, Adam & Carter 2000) and public demonstrations against the Iraq War (Murray *et al.* 2008). In fact, 'many specific messages about corporate abuses, sweatshop labour, genetically modified organisms, rainforest destruction, and the rise of small resistance movements, from East Timor to southern Mexico, have made it into the mass media on their own terms' (Bennett 2003: 19). The reasons for positive coverage are many. For example, a closer inspection of a case study examining the positive coverage of Deaf President Now! (DPN) illustrates how, and why, social movements can and sometimes do receive positive coverage from the mainstream media (Kensicki 2000).

In its 124-year history, Gallaudet University – the pre-eminent deaf university in the United States and quite possibly the world – had never appointed a deaf individual as president. In 1988, the presidential position became vacant and the search for a new president was undertaken. Despite growing opposition on campus, the majority of the hearing Board of Trustees for Gallaudet University selected a hearing president, Dr Elisabeth Zinser. After learning the news, DPN protesters blocked off all entrances to the campus, shut down a federally funded university, garnered support from labour and union leaders, sparked national debate on ABC's 'Nightline', organized several marches to the US Capitol, received the blessings of various powerful political figures, achieved

every goal the movement set out to meet *and* enjoyed positive portrayals in the mass media. After enjoying pronounced popularity in the media with less than a week of protest, the movement also successfully achieved all four of their demands: the removal of Zinser and the placement of a deaf president; the removal of Spilman, chairperson of the board that elected Zinser; a 51 per cent deaf majority on the board of trustees; and no reprisals against any faculty, staff or students involved in the protest.

Research examining the protest (Kensicki 2001a) argued that this long list of successes was due to the intended availability of protest sources, the lack of expedience on the part of elite sources, the peaceful means of protest organized into events by the students, the assimilation of 'elites' within the protest movement, the frame extension of the movements' causes, sponsorship from corporations, liaisons with journalists, the narrow focus of the movement and perhaps the ideological assumptions of disability in society (Kensicki 2001a). When images of disability have been introduced in mass media, it has typically been cast in terms of tragedy and charity or struggle and accomplishment (Yoshida, Wasilewski & Friedman 1990). When viewed through this lens, DPN fit the stereotypical constructions of disability representation. Thus, the media may have bestowed positive framing upon the movement, not as an example of successful political upheaval but as a story of struggle and subsequent accomplishment within the disability stereotype. Yet it is important to reiterate that DPN also had a strong understanding of how modern newsrooms operate, and they quickly adapted to meet media expectations. They were readily available for interviews, solicited corporate sponsorship, marched peacefully so as to not shift the media focus to disorder or violence, brought in 'elites' to their movement and also uniformly spoke of their complaints in terms of fundamental civil rights. All of these factors led to positive coverage in the mainstream press.

When positive representations, such as these, are replicated over time, they work to slowly shift shared perceptions. Mainstream and alternative media are constantly evolving as they gradually amalgamate frames into a broader, narrative arc. This is perhaps best exemplified by the evolutionary coverage of the restorative justice protests surrounding the murder of Stephen Lawrence in the United Kingdom. Five suspects were found but never convicted for his murder, and there were many lingering questions as to whether the murder was racially motivated. Cottle (2004) thoughtfully argues that coverage of the murdered 18-year-old black student developed over a period of 10 years in Britain, moved through five developmental phases and created a 'mediatized public crisis'. This protracted and evolutionary process led an entire country to reconsider essential questions of racism and injustice. In this case, the mainstream media actually initiated a multifaceted and introspective examination of cultural identity in England and 'performed' the case over the 10 years of coverage to bring about important social reforms

(Cottle 2004). The mainstream media instigated 'processes of institutional reflexivity including government policies targeting institutionalized racism within Britain's most powerful organizations of state and civil society' (Cottle 2005: 49). As a result, the Criminal Justice Act of 2003 was passed. This is an important illustration of how mainstream media can develop and encourage social change in ways that might not be immediately apparent but are often facilitated by the interconnected communication strategies between social movements and entrenched mainstream media institutions.

The success of certain organizations and groups to attain positive coverage is a complex, interconnected process. Rucht (2004) argues that contemporary social movements increasingly rely upon 'adaptation strategies' that align with mainstream media practices. Social movements now focus their energies on developing mainstream media alliances through professionalized public relations tactics and have moved away from 'maintaining their inwardly focused alternative media' (Barker 2007). These are the same tactics and strategies that are used by those within corporate institutions to gain media attention. Public relations techniques have enabled an increasing number of British activist groups, for example, to gain positive media coverage (Davis 2002). Activist organizations may also discover that if they highlight legal activity, rather than protest action, media often respond much more positively (Leachman 2009). It should be noted that the success of public relations tactics and legal activity could serve to homogenize organizations that might otherwise have a much more activist approach. However, 'repertoires of contention' (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001) have always changed in response to shifting media practices. Protesters are continually modifying their approaches based on previous mediated successes or failures (Vanderford 2003). However, these contemporary changes on the part of social movements might also be matched by recent 'variable, shifting and sometimes more progressive alignments of the news media's reporting of demonstrations and protests than in the past' (Cottle 2008: 858).

As the introduction of public relations and legal action suggests, one of the reasons for this possible shift in mainstream media's coverage of social movements may be that social protest and political marches have moved from the radical fringes of society to mainstream culture (Pippa Norris 2002; Whiteley 2003). In 2002, more than 1 million people from across the political spectrum demonstrated against the Iraq War (Tumber & Palmer 2004). Five years later, coordinated demonstrations in more than 35 counties pleaded for an end of the genocide in Darfur (Cottle 2008). It is impossible to categorize a contemporary social protester based on religious affiliation or political persuasion. Whereas protesters from previous generations might have been exclusively left of centre and relatively young, contemporary protesters come from an entire range of the human experience. This plurality in perspectives suggests that, in theory, there should be an increasing opportunity for a plurality of media responses

(Cottle 2008). Recent surveys found that 33 per cent of respondents stated that they would attend a protest rally (Citizens Audit Survey in Whiteley 2003), and 47 per cent see anti-capitalism demonstrations as justified (ICM Research in Doherty, Plows & Wall 2003).

Even though there is a widespread acceptance of protest, positive coverage might still be due to a perceived level of deviance from the mainstream. It may be that reformist movements are much more likely to be successful in the mainstream press than revolutionary organizations agitating for drastic change (Gamson 1995). Organizations that directly challenge government's foreign policies, for example, remain less likely to receive positive coverage in mainstream media (Smith *et al.* 2001). It may also be that, as social movements are adapting their policies to engage with the mainstream press, these activist groups may lose their ability to effectively agitate for more radical issues (Barker-Plummer 1995; Tuchman 1978). However, as more and more social movements engage with the mainstream press, and as more citizen journalists make important inroads into mainstream media, more social movements across the political spectrum are seeing an increasing level of positive representations in the mainstream press.

The globalized transnational media corporation has also led to the globalization of protest coverage and the internationalization of many movements (Bennett 2003; Dahlberg & Siapera 2007). Citizens of the world are increasingly interconnected in the globalized world, made possible by mediated communication on the Internet (Cottle 2008). Media users often simultaneously consider their local condition as well as that of those in distant countries. This ability to transcend locality (Robertson 1990) allows readers to 'engage in protests involving nature and morality across the whole planet' (Macnaghten & Urry 1998: 248). Contemporary social movements and political pressure groups are also utilizing media technologies in completely new ways that circumvent traditional hierarchies of access and historic paths of influence (Grant 2004). 'The fluid, non-hierarchical structure of the Internet and that of the international protest coalition prove to be a good match' (Van Aelst & Walgrave 2004: 121). As Grant (2004) argues, these new, networked approaches remove the binary 'insider/outsider' conceptualizations that have long defined who can create and influence media content. The organic, horizontal communication networks cultivated online destabilize traditional vertical flows of information.

The traditionally conceived alternative press can help facilitate this positive mainstream coverage of social movements (Brinson 2004). If there are, indeed, growing areas of convergence between the mainstream and alternative press, there might also be increased opportunities for positive coverage in the mainstream press, whether through a mutually engaged mainstream and alternative media or through activities of a movement itself. 'Wider shifts in the surrounding political culture as well as the efficacy of strategic communications

and the symbolic cachet of some protest organizations and their issues can help to win news media interest and even support through time' (Cottle 2008: 858).

Again, this should not imply that mainstream media now cover social movements with the same attention and detail as the alternative press. For example, Barker (2008) rightly points out how the people's revolution in Bolivia against the American privatization of water was almost completely ignored by the American mainstream press. That being said, however, there was not a multitude of coverage in what would be considered the alternative press either. Social movements face a constant struggle to gain coverage from mainstream media institutions. Their efforts are not made easier by the litany of influences on mainstream media: the continually expanding transnational media conglomerate environment, a declining emphasis on public service in journalism or the intensification of commercialization throughout the media (Herman & McChesney 1997). The reasons that social movements do gain access to positive media frames may be relatively infrequent and somewhat idiosyncratic, but there is a basis here to problematize a monolithic mainstream media paradigm. The complexity of re-presentations through mainstream media frames appears to negate the possibility of a reductive media model that does not allow for any reflexivity in mediated representation. This review of social movement frames attempts to highlight some of the thematic differences and similarities in coverage across the media spectrum. While there are certainly many obvious differences between the mainstream and alternative press, examinations of actual coverage is the most useful determinant of difference between these two fore-destined types of media. This initial examination of social movements was helpful to illustrate the furthest potentialities of coverage received from those on the political and social margins. However, important variances may or may not exist between alternative and mainstream media across a range of political issues that the media re-present daily. With that in mind, this chapter will now explore a specific study that compares media frames of climate change, a topic that can be viewed very differently from those on the political left and right.

A study of climate change coverage in New Zealand and America

Aotearoa/New Zealand is useful as a case study of climate change coverage, given that it is considered to be more mindful of environmental issues than many other countries in the world. New Zealand is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol; the Ministry of the Environment has advocated the settlement of a 100 per cent renewable or carbon neutral energy goal and immediately reforesting unstable lands as well as making biofuels available to all citizens

(Parker 2007). Roughly 75 per cent of New Zealand's total electricity generation comes from renewable hydro, thermal, geothermal or wind sources (Ministry of Economic Development 2010). The United States, in contrast, is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. The United States did not sign the Kyoto Protocol and instead set a voluntary domestic greenhouse gas intensity target that would 'allow U.S. emissions to actually increase by 12 percent by 2012, and established no mechanism for ensuring that even that target would be met' (Pew Center on Global Climate Change 2004: 3). It has only been in the past few years that the White House ceased to officially refuse any link between human activity and global warming (Elliott 2005).

In 2007, British Sustainability Commissioner Tim O'Riordan gave a public speech in New Zealand titled, 'Not Just Communicating: How to Share Hard Policy Choices about Climate Change with the Public'. O'Riordan suggested that New Zealand was poised to lead the global community regarding climate change, given its historical roots in progressive social change and its international image as clean and green. In his role as a British Sustainability Commissioner and an advisor to the previous British Prime Minister Tony Blair on environmental issues, O'Riordan has had a unique perspective on the relationship between media, government and social change in relation to global warming. He argued that climate change must be framed as an opportunity to benefit the future (O'Riordan 2007). He suggested that these 'reward' frames have already begun to be used in newspaper coverage of global warming around the world. Other researchers from *Science* magazine (Nisbet & Mooney 2007) have also argued that scientific reporting must move towards moralistic frames if society is to begin making fundamental changes.

Given New Zealand's mindfulness on environmental issues, one could assume it might be more progressive in its environmental reporting, particularly from the alternative press, than other countries. This study aimed to test that assumption by comparing climate change frames – particularly those with a moral component – across the selected media spectrum of New Zealand and the United States (Kenix 2008b): *New Zealand Herald*, *The New York Times*, Scoop, and AlterNet were all analysed.

New Zealand's Scoop ascribes to basic tenets that define alternative media. On their website, Scoop is defined as specializing in 'aggregating raw, unedited material from national sources and international commentators while also producing its own in-depth editorial content on important issues – often giving voice to perspectives not being addressed through "traditional media" sources' ('Scoop's Mission' 2007). It is independently owned and was started in 1999 by three individuals who had a goal of delivering unprocessed news under the banner of 'freedom, expression, ideas, information, empowerment, transformation' ('Scoop's Mission' 2007). AlterNet states that its purpose is to 'inspire citizen action and advocacy on the environment, human rights and civil liberties, social justice, media, and health care issues' ('Our Mission' 2007).

Much like Scoop, AlterNet serves as a filter for news in that the site amalgamates news from across the progressive news spectrum, helping readers 'navigate a culture of information overload and providing an alternative to the commercial media onslaught' ('Our Mission' 2007).

Although these alternative outlets have been essential in informing the public, mainstream media have actually been found to be an integral source of knowledge about climate change (Wilson 1995). The public has depended upon the mainstream media for information in relation to environmental risks (Hannigan 1995). Environmental issues, like most social issues, tend to go through a cyclical pattern of media coverage (Brossard, Shanahan & McComas 2004; Downs 1972; McComas & Shanahan 1999; Trumbo & Shanahan 2000). However, news about science has steadily increased globally over the past century (Lester 1995). Some have argued that much of this science coverage is often confusing (Bell 1994) or outright inaccurate (Reed 2002). This is not to say that all coverage fits this description as there are certainly outlets providing excellent coverage. The lack of quality in science journalism could be due to a number of factors: inadequate science education among journalists (Wilson 2000), a lack of communication between journalists and scientists (Bell 1994; Reed 2001), a presumed scientific illiteracy among the public that leads to simpler scientific reporting, a bias within corporate media against science that may be harmful to 'big business' (Nissani 1999) and the simple fact that science stories tend to be outside of standard journalistic norms dictating what makes the news (Hansen 1994).

While most science stories are episodic and focus on specific events or breakthroughs (Hansen 1994), climate change has had a steady presence in mainstream media. Yet public knowledge about climate change is often inaccurate or confused (Kempton, Boster & Hartley 1995). Adding to the confusion is the continued news reliance on sensationalism, conflict and controversy. The overwhelming majority of news reports about climate change continue to report on a supposed scientific debate surrounding the causes of climate change. One 'side' inevitably argues that climate change has been brought about by human activity, while the other 'side' maintains that this is a natural phenomenon (Helvarg 1994; Wilson 2000). This conflict frame persists in the media even though there is almost complete agreement among the scientific community that climate change is caused by humans (*Climate Change* 2007 2007; Oreskes 2004).

This research drew upon the challenges of O'Riordan, Nisbet and Mooney as a platform to examine science frames of climate change in 200 articles from the alternative New Zealand news site of Scoop and the mainstream newspaper *New Zealand Herald* as well as the American alternative outlet AlterNet and the mainstream *The New York Times*. This study found remarkable similarity between the alternative and mainstream representations of climate change and almost no deviation at all based on source of publication. This surprising overall finding suggests a strong homogenizing force across the media spectrum.

An overwhelming 87 per cent of all news articles never used morality in framing the issue of climate change. Only 2 out of 200 articles emphasized morality as the outstanding focus, and just 2.1 per cent of variance in morality was explained by publication source. The morality frame was found in reports such as the following from Ariana Emery, the Youth MP for Te Tai Hauaauru, who said, 'If we love our country, why are we destroying it?' ('Climate Change – Ariana Emery Youth MP' 2007). The MP is quoted further saying that 'in the old days they did not need to be reminded, they lived it ... you cared for the land and in return the land cared for you ... showing respect today will pay generous dividends for tomorrow'. This emotional appeal is threaded throughout the entire article. She draws from the supposed actions of those in 'the old days' to illustrate how modern-day citizens of New Zealand are losing moral ground. In connecting the behaviour of our ancestors with the future for our children, Emery makes a definitive moral statement that was rarely seen in this sample.

Sensationalism was more likely to be found than any moral stance, but when the sensationalism frame was found, it was more likely in the alternative press and in New Zealand rather than in the mainstream press or in America. For example, many of the weather events were described as 'extreme'. Such an approach is sensationalistic not just in its discursive usage of the word 'extreme' but also in the absence of any historical evidence to support that statement. It is these gaps in coverage that make such dire predictions and extreme cautions have that much more impact. Without corollary information, the reader is left to surmise the situation with only limited knowledge.

Such a limited range of information inevitably leads to rash, uninformed decision-making and understanding. A Scoop article states that 'our generation is witnessing the early stirrings of extreme weather events, melting ice and other climatic manifestations' ('Global Campaign Tackling Climate Change' 2007). However, the article never states what those events are or how much ice has melted or what specific climatic manifestations are occurring. The reader is left to anxiously piece together these sensationalistic nodes of information that exponentially increase in their notoriety with each unexplained assertion. This model of reporting is replicated in an 18 September article titled 'The Death of "Green" Satellites' in AlterNet. In this article, a source is quoted as saying, 'if we want to prevent the entire world from becoming like Sumjayit we need the very kinds of data that CCSP scientists worry we can no longer get' (Newitz 2007). All the reader learns about Sumjayit in this article is that it is an 'industrial manufacturing city in Azerbaijan' that made the Blacksmith Institute's top 10 list of most polluted places on Earth. The reader does not know what that translates to in terms of quality of life, species survival or human lifespan, but the choices have been made clear. Either continue on the same path or suffer the fate of the most miserable place on earth – Sumjayit.

Generally, half of all media coverage emphasized the consequences of climate change. Consequences were relied on slightly less in the mainstream

press than in alternative outlets. This high usage of the consequence frame was relatively equal across publications. This appears counter to what would be expected from previous research. This finding suggests that the United States, the major greenhouse-gas emitter in the world, may have scaled back its use of sensationalism as the consequences of climate change become clear. Consequences, whether they be portrayed sensationalistically or not, were coupled with a lack of attention to values and moral decision-making in both the mainstream and alternative press. This lack of any cognitive connection would presumably leave readers with the uneasy fear of future consequences and little in the way of modelling for personal changes. Finding a lack of consequences across the media spectrum problematizes the notion that alternative content is situated as distinctly different from the type of frames so widely eschewed by those outside of the mainstream.

It can be argued that such tales of potential consequences are necessary to inform readers of climate change's effects. But these consequences were only rarely coupled with morality frames. This important omission could potentially leave readers frustrated, confused and afraid of the future without any perceived ability to enact change or the moral imperative to begin. There were little differences in sources across mainstream and alternative outlets. Academic, unnamed, business, industry, environmental groups, resident citizens, economists, independent/unaffiliated and government sources all were found to have a small magnitude of difference in the means between the mainstream and alternative press. Governmental sources were, by far, the most sourced group.

Both the alternative and mainstream press relied on the framework of domestic politics and new scientific evidence relatively evenly. Indeed, the difference between the two types of publications was almost non-existent. When scientific evidence or background was given, it was brief. One article read, 'aerial gridlock contributes a whopping 10% of the world's global warming, poisons the atmosphere and destroys the ozone layer' (Scoop, 1 August 2006). The reader does not know what causes the additional 90 per cent of global warming and also is left wondering what effect this global warming will have on his or her own life. Another example from Scoop states, 'transport is a major contributor to our national increase in greenhouse emissions. 40% of New Zealand's CO₂ emissions are transport related' (Scoop, 17 February 2005). What makes the remaining 60 per cent of CO₂ emissions remains unknown.

Thus, the alternative press relied on governmental sources as much as those in the mainstream, scientific debate was emphasized equally across publications and domestic and international politics was dealt with similarly between the alternative and mainstream media. One possible conclusion is that journalistic norms have become so pervasive that alternative media are quick to follow the same patterns of coverage. One of the principal points of opposition against the present media merger frenzy is the fear that a monolithic media will create

content that is one dimensional. This is based on the precept that a multiplicity of outlets will offer a multiplicity of voices (Bagdikian 2000; Shoemaker, Danielian & Brendlinger 1991). Yet this research found almost no difference between the independent media outlets and those corporately owned. In this case, media ownership and organization-specific routines and values did not dictate coverage. This suggests that diversification of media outlets could prove irrelevant unless fundamental changes occur within the journalism industry as a whole. Organizational values that previously were thought to have a purposeful force in the newsroom may not be as powerful for global issues. It may also be that universal, global issues have dictated a universal, global response in terms of journalism norms, signalling a convergence across the media spectrum.

These findings also suggest that the political position of a nation may have very little impact on newspaper coverage – at least as it pertains to climate change. It was hypothesized here that if moralistic coverage were to be found, it would be more likely in a country such as New Zealand that has a stated goal of carbon neutrality. This was not the case. The US press was more likely to emphasize business sources, as would be expected given the historical entrenchment of capitalism in the American economy. However, the United States was also more likely to use academic and independent or unaffiliated research sources than New Zealand. Therefore, this suggests that the country of origin may not play a strong role in dictating coverage of an important global issue, such as climate change.

This sample supports the notion that the content of commercially minded alternative and mainstream media are converging on some level in ways that are very meaningful for citizens as participants in social change. As Chapter 4 will show, the relationship between media coverage and social change is complex. Previous work (i.e. Pan & Kosicki 1993), which has examined media frames as independent variables, has correctly argued that no meaningful, direct connection can be made between audience frames and media representations. Yet it is important to recognize that any examination of media frames cannot divorce the frames themselves from the social and cultural scripts from which they are drawn. The direction of influence in this complex process remains perpetually unclear. Journalists depend upon shared cultural narratives to build stories (Bird & Dardenne 1997; Hanson 2001; Kitch 2002; Lule 2002); the reliance on these narratives helps readers disentangle potentially complicated issues (Kitch 2002; Tuchman 1978) and also provides the readers with a sense of comfort based on a familiarity of the topic (Bird & Dardenne 1997) from which to build their own understandings of the world. Because of this continuous and interchanging process, it is impossible to make any definitive claims as to whether media frames are based upon social and cultural narratives or whether these frames originated in the media. However, this book aims to further investigate the potential power of such representations in society throughout Chapter 4.