REHASHING THE GATE:
NEWS VALUES, NON-NEWS SPACES, AND THE FUTURE OF GATEKEEPING

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

by

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January 2009

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1950s, both scholars and practitioners examining the gatekeeper function of the news media have sought to explain why some issues and events become newsworthy while others remain obscure. Since 1965, when Galtung and Ruge published a seminal paper on the subject, such discussions have turned upon their notion of "news values"—aspects of events that make them more likely to receive coverage. This thisis is an exploration of "news values" (sometimes called "news criteria"), their place in the academic literature, and ultimately some of their limitations as an intellectual project. I have divided my case for overhauling news values as a conceptual framework into four parts. Chapter One outlines the literature on news values and details the myriad difficulties scholars have had applying them to real-world situations. Many of these troubles stem from widespread disagreements over the nature of news values and how best to operationalize them. I argue that these squabbles result from the fact that many scholarly lists of news values, including Galtung and Ruge's, have long been promulgated absent or divorced of any theoretical framework that would make them useful from a descriptive standpoint. Before such a theoretical framework can be proposed, however, it is important to know whether "news values" are grappling with a phenomenon that is in fact unique to the news, or whether the tendency to treat journalism as a special case has, in fact, masked similarities between the press and other forms of communication, unnecessarily balkanizing the academic literature.

Whether news values are unique to the news is ultimately an empirical matter. So, in Chapter Two, I attempt to assemble a testable contemporary set of news values, which synthesizes over 40 years' worth of competing lists of news criteria. In doing

so, I uncover and reflect on a number of coherence problems within the literature, which further underscore the need for an underlying theoretical framework.

Chapter Three is a content analysis in which I test my aggregate list of news values in a non-news environment, the self-described "gate-crashing" liberal blog, Daily Kos, to examine whether they are in fact unique to the news, or whether at least some of them might better be attributed to more general features of human communication. For all the conceptual reasons outlined in the first two chapters, the news values in my list prove difficult to operationalize. Nonetheless, as expected, many news values do appear, and I follow this pilot study with a concluding chapter, pointing to various literatures that may eventually usurp news values as a conceptual framework, or at least provide theoretical underpinnings for them that extend beyond the relative silo of journalism studies. In pointing to these other literatures, I am by no means attempting a full explication or synthesis of them, as my data are as yet too limited to warrant the selection of any one framework over another. Instead, I close out the thesis by suggesting areas for further research.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joshua Braun holds a masters degree in bioethics from the University of Pennsylvania, and a bachelors degree in "science in the media" from UC Santa Barbara's individual studies program. He is a former graduate fellow of the National Academy of Sciences. Joshua is currently interested in the intersections between journalism, new media, and digital culture. His previous studies have focused on the effective communication of science and health information in both the mass media and interpersonal settings. He has also worked as a science journalist for NPR, *Scientific American* Online, and *Seed* Magazine, where he covered diverse topics ranging from nuclear security to deep-sea oceanography to prison reform.

This thesis is dedicated to my late friend and colleague John Alexander, who believed that “curiosity is the beginning of progress, that education happens outside the classroom, and that media can transform our social landscape.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my advisor Tarleton Gillespie—a first-rate mentor and collaborator—as well as to the other members of my thesis committee, Katherine McComas and Bruce Lewenstein. They have provided me with unceasing understanding and support, both intellectual and otherwise, throughout this project.

Thanks are also in order to Dmitry Epstein, who has collaborated with me on other research over the past two years, but also got an earful on multiple occasions concerning my thesis; to my mentors at the Koshland Museum in Washington, D.C., who were very understanding of my thesis-related commitments during my time as a fellow at the National Academies; and to Charles Bosk, who served as my thesis advisor during my time at the University of Pennsylvania, and who helped me to lay much of the intellectual groundwork that eventually spawned this project.

I would also like to thank the users of Daily Kos, who contributed a great deal to this research and the analysis that follows. I am truly grateful for their thoughtful commentary. Special thanks go to users pico, Fasaha, InsultComicDog, David Kroning, JPax, A Mad Mad World, newyorknewyork, and ArtSchmart who stuck around to converse at length; "rescue rangers" Larsstephens and jlms qkw who were generous enough to include my blog entries among those featured in diary rescues; as well as cardinal, opendna, and Meteor Blades for taking the time to email their thoughts and appreciation.

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In Chapter Three, I test my aggregate list of news values in a non-news environment, the self-described "gate-crashing" liberal blog, Daily Kos, to examine whether they are in fact unique to the news, or whether at least some of them might better be attributed to more general features of human communication. For all the conceptual reasons outlined in the first two chapters, the news values in my list prove difficult to operationalize. Nonetheless, as expected, many news values do appear, and I follow this pilot study with a concluding chapter, pointing to various literatures that may eventually usurp news values as a conceptual framework, or at least provide theoretical underpinnings for them that extend beyond the relative silo of journalism studies. In pointing to these other literatures, I am by no means attempting a full explication or synthesis of them, as my data are as yet too limited to warrant the selection of any one framework over another. Instead, I close out the thesis by suggesting areas for further research.

Chapter One

A Key Role in the Public's Understanding

Scholars who study the news invariably think of it as important—often more than other mass media forms, which may reach larger audiences. For instance, writing in 1996 about media images of health care, Joseph Turow observed that

> Policy makers, academic observers, and journalists in the USA have long accepted the idea that journalism has a key role in the public's understanding of health care. … [They] treat the vivid health-care rhetoric as weapons in a hot debate, yet they virtually ignore the relation of that rhetoric to popular images of medicine in television entertainment. (p. 1240)

His observation holds more generally—many prominent scholars have taken the news to be the most important source of information in public life. For instance, Herbert Gans (1979) describes the news media as the "prime regular suppliers of information about America for most Americans" (p. xi). Gaye Tuchman, slightly more reflexive, states, "I cannot prove my early supposition that the news media set the context in which citizens discuss public issues, but I continue to believe that they do so" (p. x). While on the opposite end of the reflexivity spectrum, Todd Gitlin's 1980 book, *The Whole World is Watching*, on 1960s media coverage of the New Left, frequently uses the term "mass media" as shorthand for the news media, as though news were the sum total of what people read and watch on television.

As both Scheufele (2000) and Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have noted, more studies have focused on the audience effects of mass media content than on "what sets the media agenda," but since the 1950s, when the news media were identified by Lewin (1951) and White (1950) as gatekeepers, there has been a growing interest in how journalists and news organizations "decide what's news." Research on this question has been conducted using a wide variety of methods, including interviews, surveys of journalists, case studies, newsroom ethnographies, content analyses, and simple introspection by journalists-cum-academics. While these varied approaches

have yielded many responses, a surprisingly common feature of the various treatments has been the delineation of lists of "news values"—aspects of events or issues that purportedly make them more likely to be covered in the news media.

News Values

News values, sometimes called "news criteria," are commonly held to be active at several stages in the gatekeeping process. First, as mentioned above, they supposedly make a story or event more likely to be chosen as news (the "selection" hypothesis). Second, they're said to be underscored, or even exaggerated when a news story is written (the "distortion" hypothesis), and finally, they are purportedly further emphasized as a news item passes through each stage of the production process (the "replication" hypothesis; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Sande, 1971; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Moreover, it is commonly suggested that the more news values a given event possesses, the more likely it is to become news (the "additivity" hypothesis), and that an event that is lacking in one news value must make up for this absence by being particularly strong in one or more others (the "complementarity" hypothesis; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Sande, 1971). Readers of the literature hoping for a common, agreed-upon list of news values, however, will be sorely disappointed. As Charlotte Ryan (1991) puts it, "There is no end to lists of news criteria" (p. 31). This embarrassment of lists is a topic I'll return to in Chapter Two. Presently, for the sake of illustration, we'll stick to one set of news criteria.

Far and away, the most commonly cited list of news values is also the (arguably) first-ever list, that of Galtung and Ruge (1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Watson (1998) concludes that

> The names of [the] two Norwegian scholars, Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, have become as associated with news value analysis as Hoover with the vacuum cleaner. Their model of selective gatekeeping of 1965, while not carrying quite the romance of the apple that fell on Newton's head, is nevertheless a landmark in the scholarship of media. (p. 117)

Galtung and Ruge's twelve criteria were originally intended to help explain why the news media in a given country might choose to cover some international events and not others. Since its original publication, however, their set of news values has been applied far more broadly to many types of news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Tumber, 1999, p. 4). The criteria are as follows:

1. FREQUENCY—Events that unfold conveniently within the production cycle of a news outlet are more likely to be reported.
2. THRESHOLD—The larger the event, the more people it affects, the more likely it is to be reported. Events can meet the threshold criterion either by being large in absolute terms, or by marking an increase in the intensity of an ongoing issue.
3. UNAMBIGUITY—The fewer ways there are of interpreting an event, the more likely it is to be reported.
4. MEANINGFULNESS—The more culturally proximate and/or relevant an event is, the more likely it is to be reported.
5. CONSONANCE—If a journalist has a mental pre-image of an event, if it's expected to happen, then it is more likely to be reported. This is even more true if the event is something the journalist desires to happen.
6. UNEXPECTEDNESS—If an event is unexpected, it is more likely to be considered newsworthy and to be reported.
7. CONTINUITY—Once an issue has made the news once, future events related to it are more likely to be reported.
8. COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE—News editors will attempt to present their audience with a "balanced diet" of news. An event that contributes to the diversity of topics reported is more likely to be covered than one that adds to a pile of similar news items.

9. ELITE NATIONS—Events that involve elite nations are more likely to be reported than those that do not.
10. ELITE PEOPLE—Events that involve elite people are more likely to be reported than those that do not.
11. PERSONIFICATION—Events that can be discussed in terms of the actions of individual actors are more likely to be reported than those that are the outcome of abstract social forces. By the same token, social forces are more likely to be discussed in the news if they can be illustrated by way of reference to individuals.
12. NEGATIVITY—An event with a negative outcome is more likely to be reported than one with a positive outcome.

Galtung and Ruge's news values have received some—often mixed—empirical support where they have been tested (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Sande, 1971; Peterson, 1979, 1981; Bell, 1991, pp. 155-156), however they are more often deemed axiomatic, endlessly anthologized, and taken for granted in reviews of the literature (Harcup & O'Neil, 2001). This does not, however, mean that their list, or news values as a conceptual framework, have escaped criticism.

Some Critiques of News Values

Gatekeeping vs. News Gathering

One criticism of news values as a way of understanding news decisions is that they are sharply limited in their explanatory value. A number of authors have commented that news values, as a construct, ignore the news gathering process, portraying events as though they presented themselves in reportable fashion to journalists, who in turn gave each a simple up or down vote based on how well they fit a predetermined list of criteria (Tunstall, 1971; McQuail, 2000). This may be true of, say, an editor's choice of Associated Press stories, or selective coverage of so-called

"diary events," which are scheduled in advance—and studies which have supported news values have tended to focus on exactly these sorts of settings and situations, a potential research bias which Tunstall (1971) roundly criticizes as placing "researchers at the mercy of those very journalism news values which their research reports subsequently decry" (pp. 264-265).

Reliance on Simple, Discreet Events

McQuail (2000) points out that real-world events are generally complex and are likely to score high or low, not simply on one or two news values, but a whole host of them. As such, it becomes particularly difficult to isolate any given news value well enough to determine its validity or predictive value, especially when one considers that such stories are competing with, and often eclipsed by, a constantly changing flow of equally complicated news items (p. 341). Moreover, Hartley (1982) notes that events and issues often become news without scoring highly on *any* news value (p. 79). Harcup and O'Neill (2001) further critique Galtung and Ruge's list of news criteria for focusing strictly on events in the news, when many news items are not, in fact, about discreet events but about trends, speculation, issues, and so forth. Other authors make the point that many reported events are not natural happenings with a life of their own, per se, but are staged and exist solely for the benefit of the news media, implying a level of reflexivity in news decisions not appreciated by news values (Curran and Seaton, 1997, pp. 277-278; McQuail, 2000).

Values vs. Value Judgments

More convicting, though, than the notion that news values don't explain all that they set out to, is the claim that they in fact disguise important aspects of journalism as an enterprise—namely, the ideological assumptions under which news workers labor. According to Hall (1973), "News values appear as a set of neutral, routine practices, but we need, also to see formal news values as an ideological

structure—to examine these rules as the formalization and operationalization of an ideology of news" (p. 182).

This is not to say that Galtung and Ruge (1965), or other progenitors of lists of news values entirely ignored the question of journalists' values. Galtung and Ruge's original list was published with the explicit suggestion that journalists use it to recognize which types of events they favored in their coverage, in the hope that they would attempt to counteract these tendencies. But the lists do often assume that the event-qualities journalists favor or exaggerate in their stories exist independently of the judgment of the reporter or news organization (McQuail, 2000, p. 279). Hall asserts this masks the "cultural map" that underlies journalists' decisions (Hall et al., 1978, p. 54). Hartley (1982) follows journalistic critic Anna Coote in suggesting that news values enforce cultural biases, marginalizing—to give one example—the culturally feminine or excluding it altogether, and instead focusing news coverage on issues predominantly of interest to white, middle-class men.

As Chapter Two of this paper will explore, the question of ideology in the news, while valid, has at times eclipsed other important aspects of the way in which the news media operate (Palmer, 1998, pp. 388-389). All the same, inquiries about ideology are useful in that they raise questions about where news values come from and whether they are unique to the journalism at all.

(How) Do Journalists Use News Values?

McQuail (1992) rightly points out content analysis is incapable of determining "what journalists and editors really think about relevance" (p. 216). This complicates attempts to examine the decisions of news workers from the perspective of finished texts, and as such, researchers have attempted to triangulate using other methods. Unfortunately, while a number of non-content analysis studies, such as those conducted by Peterson (1979, 1981), provide at least mixed support for Galtung and

Ruge's list of factors, these results fall amid a larger disagreement among newsroom ethnographers as to whether news values are used by journalists at all, and if so, consciously or unconsciously, and in what capacity.

Hetherington (1985) says "most journalists, in my experience, will resist formalised 'news values,' lest these cramp their freedom of decision. … Obviously journalists working at speed against edition times or programme 'on-air' times do not go through any mental checklist of factors such as Galtung and Ruge have listed" (p. 7). That said, he does leave open the possibility that news values may describe in broad terms the trends in journalists' output, if not their decision-making process.

Other authors have suggested, somewhat awkwardly, that news values still operate in journalists' decision-making, but on a subconscious level. According to Bell (1991), news values "approximate to the—often unconscious—criteria by which newsworkers make their professional judgements as they process stories." Warner (1970) also suggests that news values are a largely unconscious phenomenon, saying that they are indeed present, but that "personnel in…newsrooms have difficulty articulating them" (p. 163). Similarly, Hall (1978) writes, "Although they are nowhere written down, formally transmitted, or codified, news values seem to be widely shared as between the different news media,…and form a core element in the professional socialisation, practice and ideology" (p. 54). Elsewhere, he continues:

> "News values" are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. … We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it. (Hall, 1973, p. 181)

Tunstall (1971), on the other hand, suggests that journalists readily cop to using a set of news values, and may even be able to articulate them, but that these criteria are highly contextual, specific to a given journalist's work environment, and further are

open to discretion on many organizational levels from that of the individual reporter all the way up to the corporate owners of news outlets (pp. 263-264).

Still other authors, like Golding and Elliott (1999) view news values as well-defined, and readily available to journalists on a conscious basis, but suggest that they have little to do with "deciding what's news" and far more to do with rationalizing news decisions that are made for far more mundane reasons:

> Discussions of news values usually suggest they are surrounded by a mystique, an impenetrable cloud of verbal imprecision and conceptual obscurity. Many academic reports concentrate on this nebulous aspect of news values and imbue them with far greater importance and allure than they merit. … News values exist and are, of course, significant. But they are as much the resultant explanation or justification of necessary procedures as their source. … News values are thus working rules, comprising a corpus of occupational lore which implicitly and often expressly explains and guides newsroom practice. It is not true as is often suggested that they are beyond the ken of the newsman, himself unable and unwilling to articulate them. Indeed, they pepper the daily exchanges between journalists in collaborative production procedures. (pp. 118-119)

What's clearly needed is a sorting out of all these conceptual disagreements. Unfortunately, says Tunstall (1971), the problem appears intractable, due to the nature of the news business and the difficulty of gaining access to journalists at the moment of decision:

> [T]he number of variables, the time pressures, and the problems presented by confidentiality, the telephone, and by other basic characteristics of news gathering would constitute formidable difficulties for such studies; certainly established 'participant observation' techniques would be quite inadequate. (p. 263)

Moreover, he says, even an effective list of news values, were it to be generated, would "never do more than show broad probabilities," having little explanatory value on the order of individual cases (Tunstall, 1971, p. 23).

Whose Values are News Values?

If for the moment we buy the notion that journalists employ news criteria in some capacity, and we acknowledge that these news values correspond to value

judgments, as their name indeed implies, of whose preferences specifically are they reflective? The response, "white, middle-class men" risks being a truism, and not a terribly valuable one. "Journalists" would be far too simple, as well.

Herbert Gans (1979) tells us "the values in the news are not necessarily those of journalists" (p. 39). This turns out to be a far-reaching problem for news values as a concept. McQuail (2000) elaborates:

> There have been numerous attempts to distil the essence of [newsworthy] qualities of events, although there are some fundamental reasons why it is impossible to reach any definitive account of 'news values' that has great predictive or explanatory value in accounting for any particular example of news selection. One problem lies in the fact that value has to be attributed and there are competing sources of perception. Although by definition, journalists and editors are the most influential judges of value (since they decide on relative value), the actual perceptions of diverse audiences cannot be ignored, nor can the views of powerful sources and others affected by the news. (p. 341)

Tunstall (1971) expands the above enumeration of "sources of perception" to include publishers, publication owners and proprietors, business executives, and advertisers, along with journalists (p. 23). In making a similar point, Hetherington (1985) further grows this list to a full-page catalog of the various actors who touch news content on its way to publication (pp. 20-21). Matters become even more complex when we realize that, not only does each one of these people and groups have a hand in what gets published, their opinions are constantly influenced by what it is they perceive all the other parties as desiring.

So, whose values *are* news values? It is possible, as the authors above loosely suggest, that they are simply a probabilistic value judgment resulting from the aggregate decisions of myriad news workers. Then again, it is also possible that they are not unique to the news at all. Tunstall (1971) frames the question in such a way that it bursts the confines of journalism altogether:

> Are the 'news values' in relation to which correspondents shape their stories merely a projection of the suburban values and neuroses of the journalists themselves? Are news values completely arbitrary and unpatterned (as some

> journalists sometimes contend)? Or are news stories socially patterned (as sociologists would claim)? Or are news values simply a mass media version of social values held by millions of audience members? (p. 261)

This quandary, put forward by Tunstall, is the question on which I focus in Chapters Two and Three of this paper.

Chapter Two

It should be clear by this point that news values, as an intellectual enterprise, are riddled with difficulties, both at the theoretical level, and in their application. Some of these difficulties may be repairable, while others appear not to be. But it's still unclear as yet what type of theoretical framework we might use to fix or replace news values. This picture will remain murky, however, until we've made some progress in answering Tunstall's query as to whether the process by which journalists decide what's newsworthy is in fact unique to journalism. If the logic of news selection is indeed unique to news work, then perhaps a solid account of the process from media sociology, like Gaye Tuchman's (1978) *Making News*, or Herbert Gans' (1979) *Deciding What's News*, produced in collaboration with newsroom actors, is adequate to the task. If, however, it turns out that journalists' decisions about newsworthiness are akin to the decisions the rest of us make about what events to discuss in public, or share in conversation, then we'll likely need a theoretical framework to replace "news values" that extends beyond the relative silo of journalism studies. In this, Chapter Two, I proceed to lay the groundwork for a pilot study that begins to examine this question.

Is Newsworthiness Unique to the News?

An examination of the existing literature suggests it may not be. Gans (1979) says that the "preference statements" embodied in news stories are not "necessarily distinctive to journalists," but that they in fact frequently begin with the institutional sources on whom journalists rely (p. 39). Bell (1991) also concedes that news values are not unique to journalism, but attributes them more broadly as "ideologies and priorities held in society" (p. 156), a view pioneered most influentially by Hall (1973, 1978). Tunstall (1970), while deeming Galtung and Ruge's original article on news values an "instant classic," encourages readers to consider

> the broad question of whether 'news values' differ from 'dramatic values,' 'cultural values' or perhaps merely human values? Personalization and conflict are to be found not only in factual and fictional crime, but in humour, sport, art, and politics. Many of the factors which Galtung and Ruge find as predisposing foreign events to become news—elite persons, negative events, unexpectedness-within-predictability, cultural proximity—are also to be found in Shakespeare's plays. 'News' indeed existed before either newspapers or the earlier newsbooks. The word 'news' occurs frequently in Shakespeare meaning information. This usually word-of-mouth 'news' already had the familiar negative connotations. A contemporary of Shakespeare, William Drayton, wrote: 'Ill news has wings, and with the wind doth go, Comfort's a cripple and comes ever slow.' (pp. 20-21).

All of this is unsurprising, if we examine the nature of the claims Galtung and Ruge (1965) originally made about news values. The authors did *not*, in fact, consider their first eight values—FREQUENCY, THRESHOLD, UNAMBIGUITY, MEANINGFULNESS, CONSONANCE, UNEXPECTEDNESS, CONTINUITY, and COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE—to be specific to the news media, but instead claimed they were general aspects of human perception in a mediated world, basing them on principles from human-behavior research. Using the example of a person tuning a radio dial, they hypothesize that, absent the ability to listen to everything at once, the listener will tend to pause on strong signals (THRESHOLD), clear (UNAMBIGUOUS) signals, stations they find culturally MEANINGFUL, stations playing what they were hoping to find (CONSONANCE), and stations playing something unusual (UNEXPECTEDNESS). Moreover, once the listener has found a station, they'll likely stick with it for awhile (CONTINUITY), though they may seek variety next time they turn on the radio (COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE). By analogy Galtung and Ruge expected that journalists use the same logic in tuning into events (as opposed to stations), and that they are likely to employ the same selective behaviors in their reporting, simply by virtue of their human nature.

While, as we've already begun to see, this system of news values comes with some inherent difficulties, Galtung and Ruge's original logic that journalists-are-

people-too is unimpeachable. And it's an important point to underscore here. Scholarly discussions of the news media frequently revolve around the technologies employed in publishing, or the structural, organizational, ideological and commercial environments in which journalists operate (Herbert, 2000, pp. 60-64). Certainly these are valuable areas to consider, but not to the exclusion of the role of individual actors. As Tunstall (1971) puts it, "The recurrent weakness of so much 'academic' discussion of the news media is a preference for over-sophisticated explanations in general and conspiracy theories in particular; conspiracy theories are all the more damaging, a weakness in much academic writing, for usually being implicit rather than explicitly stated" (p. 264).

As his quote—written a scant six years after Galtung and Ruge's original publication—suggests, discussion of news values quickly moved away from the logic that newsworthiness may be part of a phenomenon that extends beyond journalism. Gans' (1979), for instance, asserted that the role of the individual in news production is effectively insignificant, in that news workers are all socialized to think in identical patterns. This overly deterministic framework has recently become less popular. Herbert, writing in 2000, argues for a balanced view of the situation, which appreciates the role of the individual without ignoring the influence of the social structures in which she operates: "What is news to one journalist or editor is not news to another. … [W]hat is worth reporting to one editor may be of no interest to another. … News selection, though, is a group activity. No one person actually exercises inordinate control over the news, because all the way back along the news chain the checks and balances of those involved work very successfully. … Out of this constant stream of argument comes a finished product that is in no sense the wishes of an individual" (pp. 63-64).

Testing the Uniqueness Question

Despite claims like Herbert's, the proposition that newsworthiness is tied to human perception—that journalists and non-journalists may make decisions in a similar fashion regarding how to converse about their world—has gone largely unexplored in the news values literature since Galtung and Ruge's original publication. As such, it's a problem that requires empirical attention.

Following Herbert (2000), it stands to reason that some aspects of news decisions may indeed be unique to the professional culture, economics, and political situation of mainstream journalism, while—as Galtung and Ruge originally suggested—others may be far less specific to the news. Given the conceptual difficulties we've seen with news values, however, it stands to reason that whatever theoretical framework replaces them may not look like a list at all. Nonetheless, in testing the assertion that news values are not unique to the news, a reasonable empirical point of departure is to attempt to apply them in situations outside of mainstream journalism. In Chapter Three of this paper, I will share the results of just such a pilot study—a content analysis putting news values to the test in a non-news environment. But, as Ryan (1991) points out, there is no end to lists of news values. So the immediate question becomes, "Which ones should be included in this study?"

Assembling a Contemporary List of News Values

To simply test Galtung and Ruge's 1965 list of news values would be to ignore over 40 years' worth of additional literature. Landmark or not, the popularity of the authors' original paper has yet to stop scholars and journalists from generating list upon list of alternative and supernumerary criteria. Some of these additional lists, such as Herbert Gans' (1979) have been informed by and incorporated into substantial bodies of research and scholarship. Others are far more prosaic, terse, and off-the-cuff—a few even stand alone without explanation. All are reasonably well-informed

by one source or another, whether that be fieldwork, survey research, content analysis, professional expertise, or some combination of these. As such, there is often little to recommend one list over another, or to suggest whether a given list is "complete"—a difficulty chronicled by O'Sullivan as early as 1983:

> Numerous attempts have been made over the years to pin down news values more specifically. But it is hard to collate these into a hard and fast list of values, because different studies have approached the idea from different standpoints, using different assumptions and terminology. (p. 154)

Despite the lack of agreement thus far among scholars and journalists on any single set of news values, in sorting through their respective lists it becomes clear that many of the same concerns crop up repeatedly, regardless of whose analysis we're following. As such, for the purpose of my study, in the section that follows I've attempted to group similar news values, from a number of the many existing sets, into a single list, with supporting references, which will ultimately serve as my coding scheme.

In proceeding with this project, I acknowledge that it is a sensitive exercise, in that it risks exacerbating a malignancy in the news values literature—indeed the tendency to remix, regroup, redefine, and summarize preceding criteria is one of the very mechanisms by which we have arrived at a tangled mess of lists in the first place—but it is nonetheless necessary if we are to proceed with a coherent discussion and test of what could otherwise be literally hundreds of news criteria.

Forty Years of News Values

ACTION

ACTION (Herbert, 2000); VISUALS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Ryan, 1991); VISUAL ATTRACTIVENESS (Hetherington, 1985); SUDDENNESS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); VIOLENCE (Hall, 1973).

This value suggests the news media tend to prefer action over discussion and abstract concepts. While Herbert does not elaborate, television producer Vin Liota (2005) suggests that this news value is related to the tendency of the (network) news media to avoid "think pieces:"

> One of the tenets of network television journalism is not to explain too much. So if you're watching a segment about the politics of stem cells, for instance, the critical science is explained only just enough to make the story clear.

According to numerous authors, a great deal of news media content is selected on the basis of the availability of compelling visuals. This is especially true for visual media, like television, though some authors point out that photographs compete for print space in newspapers and magazines, just as any textual document would. This aspect of story selection also tends to favor action, as it relies heavily on stories that can be told with a camera. Network television producer Av Westin:

> Local news is picture-oriented, and further, it goes for the sensational angle….Local news is more like the Sunday magazine insert of the daily tabloid than a newspaper of record….A visitor from Mars watching local television news would have to believe that every city in America is burning down and that the light of the flames combined with amber flashes of ambulances and police cars provides the primary illumination for rescue squads to find the victims of endless automobile accidents or murders….There seems to be little judgement about the importance of one story over another as long as the pictures are good. A spectacular one-alarm fire with a lot of flame may get more air time than a smoldering lumberyard blaze which, although less dramatic, could mean the loss of a dozen jobs. Air time will be spent on fires and crashes half a world away because of their picture value. Left out, as a result, will be the local school board's debate over library budgets because the pictures are non-existent and because it takes too much time to dig out the facts and explain the more intricate maneuvering. (Ryan, 1991, p. 42)

CLARITY

UNAMBIGUITY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), CLARITY (Bell, 1991), BREVITY (Bell, 1991), CLARITY (McQuail, 2000)

Most events are subject to multiple framings and interpretations. According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), however, some stories are more difficult to interpret multiple ways than others. The more monolithic the potential interpretations of a story, the more clearly the who, what, when, where and why of an event seem to "present themselves," the more likely a story is to be covered. It's tempting to take a social constructivist stance, point out that everything in the world is subject to multiple interpretations, and write this value off altogether, or suggest that it's worthless without further examination of the belief system that makes some interpretations "obvious." These are valid critiques. A more fruitful compromise is to point out that the facts of some potential stories are more difficult to uncover than those of others. Covering a school science fair is easy. Getting a powerful person's private financial records is hard. In other words, we can at least say that the more accessible the information necessary to a particular story is, the more likely that story is to be covered. Tuchman (1978) suggests that the ease with which institutions can provide these sorts of details in the form of police reports, press conferences, meeting minutes, and so on, has drawn the news media to focus on institutions and privilege institutional sources in their reporting.

COMPETITION WITH OTHER MEDIA

COMPETITION (Bell, 1991; Gregory & Miller, 1998).

News outlets are in competition with one another. While traditionally, this has meant that each news organization is on the lookout for scoops and stories that their competition don't have, it's also true that each outlet wants to make sure they have all the stories covered by their competition. While this is a time-worn issue, Pablo

Boczkowski (2008) has suggested that as newspapers have moved online and become increasingly able to monitor their competition, the tendency of these organizations toward reproduction and similarity seems to have outstripped their desire to scoop the competition or cover alternative stories. In a recent talk, Boczkowski conjectured that this trend cut across national media. However, other observers, like Reuters fellow John Kelly (2008) have noted differences between newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. in this regard, and it seems highly likely that differences in cultures and media markets manifest themselves in the way this balance is played out in different countries and regions.

COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE

COMPOSITION (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); POLITICAL BALANCE (Warner, 1970).

Importantly, this is not necessarily balance in the sense of "presenting both sides of the story," though that's certainly one aspect of "compositional balance." In a broader sense, though, Galtung and Ruge (1965) suggest that news editors attempt to present a balanced mix of news topics and types of news. Thus, if a newspaper edition has an overabundance of one type of news—election news, foreign news, hard news, etc.—other types of stories may be sought to restore this balance.

CONFLICT

GOOD STORY (Ryan, 1991); POWER (Ryan, 1991); CONFLICT AND CONTROVERSY (Herbert, 2000); GOVERNMENT CONFLICTS AND DISAGREEMENTS (Gans, 1979); PROTESTS, VIOLENT AND NONVIOLENT (Gans, 1979); PROTESTERS, RIOTERS, AND STRIKERS (Gans, 1979); POLITICAL CONFLICT AND PROTEST ABROAD (Gans, 1979); NEGATIVITY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); BAD NEWS (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); CONFLICT (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); VIOLENCE (Hall, 1973); POLITICAL BALANCE (Warner, 1970).

The news media like to cover conflicts, and to emphasize conflict in stories where it exists. Gamson and Modigliani (1989), and more recently, Chris Mooney

(2004) and Matt Nisbett (Mooney & Nisbet, 2005), have even suggested that the media's desire for "both sides of a story" is so strong that reporters and editors covering a consensus issue will sometimes allege an opposing viewpoint where one doesn't exist, or elevate a fringe opposition group in status for the sake of providing balance. Ryan (1991) suggests the news media focus on conflict because conflict and confrontation are essentials of drama, and that the press believes that drama is necessary to incite audience interest. At the same time, she says that to be dramatic, conflict must be accessible and succinct. Drawn out bickering between parties, especially over inside-baseball sorts of topics, is less likely to draw news media attention. Galtung and Ruge (1965) on the other hand discuss the fact that the press traditionally over-reports bad news, and it stands to reason that this may be the underlying value that drives the news media's focus on conflict.

Both Gans (1979) and Ryan (1991) point out that much of the attention of the national media is directed at conflicts within the government—particularly, says Gans, those between the President and Congress. Corporations and businesspeople, while generally under-covered in comparison with the federal government and leading federal officials, do receive attention from the media when they come into conflict with the government. Insofar as the national news media pay attention to "unknowns," however, Gans (1979) found that they often focus on social unrest in the form of conflicts between authorities and protesters, rioters, and strikers. Similarly, he found the news media are attentive to political conflict and protest abroad, though "foreign conflicts must be more dramatic and usually more violent than their domestic equivalents to break into the news" (p. 35). Thus, as with Ryan (1991), Gans (1979) associates conflict and DRAMA, suggesting these two news values are closely linked.

CONSONANCE

CONSONANCE (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); CULTURAL RESONANCE (Ryan, 1991); NATIONAL CEREMONIES (Gans, 1979); EXCESSES OF DICTATORSHIP (Gans, 1979); DISASTERS ABROAD (Gans, 1979), COMMUNIST-BLOC COUNTRY ACTIVITIES (Gans, 1979); ELECTIONS AND PEACEFUL CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL ABROAD (Gans, 1979); PREDICTABILITY (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Bell, 1991); COMMON-SENSICAL (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); COMPATIBLE WITH INSTITUTIONAL ROUTINES (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); NATURALIZATION (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); CONSENSUS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); RACISM (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); PATRIARCHY (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); METROPOLITANISM (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); PRE-FABRICATION (Bell, 1991); PREDICTABILITY AND ROUTINE (McQuail, 2000).

According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), the news media like to cover events that accord with the pre-existing prejudices and expectations of journalists and audiences. Tuchman (1978) suggests that this is because stories that are predictable in this manner allow for a more efficient allocation of newsroom resources, and other authors, like Bell (1991) have extended this notion to demonstrating journalistic preference for "diary events" and even "pre-fabricated" news, a category embodied by the press release. Ryan (1991), on the other hand, says that these stories attract interest from reporters and audiences because they have cultural resonance—they confirm our views of the world. In Hilgartner and Bosk's (1988) terms, these stories conform to "deep mythic themes" within a culture, and according to O'Sullivan et al. (1983) and others, the news may serve in turn to reify and perpetuate them. O'Sullivan also asserts that prejudices like racism and patriarchy are among the cultural forces that are served by the media's tendency to report the consonant.

For his part, Gans (1979) suggests that the news media cover, and offer special coverage of, "national ceremonies"—elections, the moon landing, the death of

Presidents, etc.—because they encapsulate and reify our idea of the nation. Gans (1979) in his discussion of foreign news, also points out that much of our news from abroad focuses on activities in foreign countries that embody American cultural values, make American social problems seem less unique, or allow us to see our country as culturally superior. Such stories are consonant with American audiences' expectations in Galtung and Ruge's original sense of term.

Continuity and Cooption

Continuity (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); follow-up (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); co-option (Bell, 1991; Gregory & Miller, 1998); state and local officials in reference to national stories (Gans, 1979).

Galtung and Ruge (1965) suggest that past coverage of a topic is likely to inspire continued coverage. This is not simply because the story is ongoing or unresolved—coverage of a story often continues after the issue or event in question has ceased to meet other criteria for newsworthiness. Rather, the authors suggest that once a news organization carries a story to begin with, it must continue its coverage in order to justify its initial judgment of the story's newsworthiness. In light of the inertia that stories carry, Bell (1991), Ryan (1991), Best (1990), and Gregory and Miller (1998) have all noted that it is often easier and more economical for new events and issues to be folded into ongoing stories than to be covered independently, and that the news media often select stories that can be co-opted in this way. Similarly, Gans (1979) notes that, while the national news media focus on many elite politicians in the federal government and their activities because of the offices those persons hold, the same media seldom focus on state or local politicians unless their election and/or activities become part of an ongoing or bigger story.

DRAMA

DRAMA (Hetherington, 1985); GOOD STORY (Ryan, 1991); MEMORABLE EMOTIONS (Ryan, 1991); ENTERTAINMENT (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); ENTERTAINING (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); DRAMATIC (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); PATHOS (Herbert, 2000); CRISIS (Raboy and Dagenais in Watson, 1998); DRAMA AND ACTION (McQuail, 2000); DRAMATIC QUALITY (Warner, 1970).

Drama is often considered its own news value. Ryan (1991), in explaining this notion, quotes a portion of the famous memo from NBC executive Reuven Frank, originally addressed to the staff of the news documentary, *The Tunnel*:

> Every news story should, without sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising and falling action, a beginning, a middle, and an end. These are not only the essentials of drama; they are the essentials of narrative. (p. 34)

Ryan suggests that dramatic structure, which includes other news values like cultural resonance and conflict, is important to news organizations because it generates audience interest.

Some journalists, however, contest the notion that drama and news are part and parcel. Kevin Marsh (2008), for instance, recently suggested that drama is a journalistic trope that allows a news article to look complete, despite its having only partial information—a closed narrative structure suggests that the "story" has been told in full. He says, much like Tuchman (1978), that this may at one time have been a necessity borne of limited journalistic resources for information gathering, but he adds that as technology allows for more and more information to become readily available to both journalists and audiences, this illusion of completeness is falling away, and along with it, the need for dramatic structure in news. Howard Owens (2008) added a normative bent to this notion, writing that for journalists, "storytelling, whether written or visual, then becomes something that is more about serving your

own ego than serving your readers." Another journalist, Patrick Thornton (2008) has written in agreement that the web is in the process of—or failing that, should be in the business of—killing the dramatic news narrative:

> If you're in the business of providing facts, figures, information—news—you'll find blogging and Web journalism to be amazing. The Web (and its mobile cousin) provide a great deal of immediacy and depth that print never could. The Internet is an awesome vehicle for information. Too many journalists think of themselves as storytellers and not as journalists. People ultimately want journalism so they can be informed. I think if we concentrate on making journalism that people want, we'll find ourselves and our industry in much better shape.

ELITE PEOPLE

ELITE PEOPLE (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); CELEBRITY (Ruehlmann, 1979); PERSONALITIES (Hetherington, 1985); ELITISM (Gregory & Miller, 1998); IMPORTANCE (Ryan, 1991); PROMINENCE (MacDougall in Palmer, 1998; Herbert, 2000); FAMOUS FACES (Ryan, 1991); RANK IN GOVERNMENT AND OTHER HIERARCHIES (Gans, 1979); INCUMBENT PRESIDENTS (Gans, 1979); PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES (Gans, 1979); LEADING FEDERAL OFFICIALS (Gans, 1979); POWER ELITE (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); CELEBRITY (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); GLAMOROUS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); POWER AND FAME OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN EVENTS (McQuail, 2000).

Nearly every list of news values takes note of the fact that famous people and their activities are one of the major subjects of the news. Some lists of news values, such as those put forward by Gans (1979) and Ryan (1991), note that the actions of famous politicians are particularly well-covered, while other list-makers note that the media have been, or are becoming, equally fascinated by other sorts of celebrities. Ryan (1991) echoes Tuchman (1978) in citing an allocation-of-resources argument for this focus on celebrity:

> [Reporting on] famous faces proves cost-effective for assignment editors since it is easier to anticipate who will be involved than what is going to happen. It also reduces costs by limiting who has to be observed; national news programs

> regularly follow the actions of less than 50 people, most of whom are high-ranking federal officials. (p. 33)

ELITE REGIONS

ELITE REGIONS (Galtung and Ruge); ELITISM (Gregory & Miller, 1998); PROMINENCE (MacDougall in Palmer, 1998; Herbert, 2000); LOCATION OF EVENTS (McQuail, 2000).

Galtung and Ruge (1965) note the news media's tendency to focus on elite nations. This news value has since been applied domestically, as the national media also tend to focus on elite regions within the country, as well as outside it. Shoemaker and Reese (1991), for instance, in a review of the media influence literature, note that the coastal regions of the U.S., and particularly the economic, governmental, and cultural hubs of New York City, Washington DC, and Los Angeles, receive disproportionately large amounts of national news coverage, even controlling for the population density of the American seaboards. Gaye Tuchman (1978) notes that news generally comes from places where there are news bureaus—and that bureaus have largely been placed in institutional and geographical power centers. Thus, for Tuchman, this focus on elites is closely related to the news value of PROXIMITY, discussed below.

FACTS, STATISTICS, AND AGGREGATES

FACTICITY (Bell, 1991; Gregory & Miller, 1998); NUMBERS (Hetherington, 1985); VOTERS, SURVEY RESPONDENTS, AND OTHER AGGREGATES (Gans, 1979).

News stories in their traditional form cannot exist without facts—a who, what, when, where, why, and how. These individual facts reinforce and sustain one another, and when woven together, give journalists and readers confidence in the accuracy of a story—a notion Tuchman (1978) originally referred to as the "web of facticity." Events and issues for which all of the essential facts are easily available are more likely to be covered. This relates to the value of CLARITY above. Looming large

among "facts" are statistics—election results, survey numbers, figures from studies, and so on. Gans (1979) alleges that, given the preoccupation of the news with the unusual, the scandalous, the elite, and so on, statistical aggregates are the primary way in which the news grapples with what is happening to "ordinary" Americans. Interestingly, Gusfield (1980) has pointed to some of the ways in which statistics often serve the ends of the powerful—by his analysis, studies are rarely, if ever, produced or reported in a neutral fashion, but often serve to prop up cultural norms and myths. Following his interpretation would relate this news value closely with that of CONSONANCE.

REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT

POWER (Ryan, 1991); GOVERNMENT CONFLICTS AND DISAGREEMENTS (Gans, 1979); INCUMBENT PRESIDENTS (Gans, 1979); PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES (Gans, 1979); LEADING FEDERAL OFFICIALS (Gans, 1979); STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS IN REFERENCE TO NATIONAL STORIES (Gans, 1979); GOVERNMENT DECISIONS, PROPOSALS, AND CEREMONIES (Gans, 1979); GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL CHANGES (Gans, 1979); POWER ELITE (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); GOVERNMENTAL POLITICS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF STATE (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); POLITICAL IMPORTANCE (Herbert, 2000), ATTRIBUTION (Bell, 1991); LOCATION OF POWER (McQuail, 2000); PUBLIC AFFAIRS (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985); POLITICAL BALANCE (Warner, 1970).

As mentioned above, both Gans (1979) and Ryan (1991) point out the preoccupation of the news media with government. While Ryan suggests that the focus, if not the scrutiny, of the news media is aimed at institutions with power, Gans points out that the subset of the powerful on which the media focuses is rather narrow. He found that the media focuses on the federal government, and that it predominantly pays attention to one person—the President. Much of the attention it gives to the rest

of the federal government is aimed at a small cadre of elite "leading federal officials," and/or regards the manner in which the activities of the rest of the federal government relate to the actions of the President. The amount of attention paid to other centers of power, such as the behavior of corporations and their officials, for instance, pales in comparison to the attention given to the federal government.

As mentioned earlier, according to Gans, state and local government officials generally appear in the news only when they become part of an existing national story, or when they are elected as nontraditional candidates—i.e. when they meet other news criteria such as NOVELTY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS (see below). Tuchman (1978), for her part, suggests that media presence at public institutions, including government, streamlines the allocation of journalistic resources.

HUMOR

HUMOR (Herbert, 2000); MEMORABLE EMOTIONS (Ryan, 1991); ENTERTAINMENT (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); ENTERTAINING (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); COLOUR (Bell, 1991).

Ryan (1991) says an important news criterion is that a story must "transmit feelings, not just ideas." She suggests that the news media look for stories with good emotional hooks that will interest an audience. Herbert (2000) is more specific in proposing that humor, specifically, is a news value unto itself. Humor is often based on UNEXPECTEDNESS and SEXUALITY, so this value may be closely related to these others.

NOVELTY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS

UNEXPECTEDNESS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); THE UNUSUAL (Herbert, 2000), SURPRISE (Hetherington, 1985; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), NOVELTY (Herbert, 2000), ODDITY (Ruehlmann, 1979; Herbert, 2000); PARTICIPANTS IN UNUSUAL ACTIVITIES (Gans, 1979); INNOVATION AND TRADITION (Gans, 1979); FRENCH TWIST (Ryan, 1991),

ROLE REVERSALS (Gans, 1979), "GEE WHIZ" STORIES (Gans, 1979), SUDDENNESS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983), INCONGRUITY (Herbert, 2000), COLOUR (Bell, 1991), STRANGE OR AMUSING ADVENTURES (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985).

This news criterion describes the news media's tendency to focus on events and people that are out of the ordinary. Events may be unexpected because they happen suddenly, because they violate predictions or conventional wisdom, or because they are rare or otherwise unusual occurrences. Role reversals—"man bites dog"—are a frequently mentioned example of the unusual and newsworthy. As this would suggest, people participating in unusual or unexpected events, issues, and activities are often deemed odd or exceptional as well, and therefore newsworthy—indeed, Gans (1979) cites this as one way in which unknowns make their way into the national news, and Ryan (1991) suggests that activists intentionally play on this value to generate news publicity. New inventions, events, and other breaks with tradition are often considered newsworthy for their novelty. Gans notes that the national media tend to welcome innovation, while simultaneously mourning the tradition it disrupts.

REFERENCE TO AN ORGANIZED PUBLIC

ISSUE RECOGNITION (Ryan, 1991); INTEREST (Herbert, 2000); ATTRIBUTION (Bell, 1991); PUBLIC AFFAIRS (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985).

According to Ryan (1991), for a variety of reasons, an issue is more likely to be covered if there is some public organization dedicated to it. The existence of such an organization is evidence to a news outlet that at least some portion of the public cares about the problem. Perhaps more importantly, an organization means, among other things, that there is someone actively promoting an issue, and that there are identifiable sources on an issue for the news media to contact—an idea also put forward by Bell (1991) in his value of ATTRIBUTION. Once a story has been covered initially, however, Ryan's value of ISSUE RECOGNITION may become more closely

related to, if distinct from, the value of CONTINUITY. The fact that a story has been covered in the past may be taken by the media as evidence in itself that the public has recognized the issue, and that sources are available for comment.

PERSONIFICATION

PERSONS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); HUMAN INTEREST (Gans, 1979; O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Ryan, 1991; MacDougall in Palmer, 1998; Herbert, 2000); PERSONALIZATION (Gregory & Miller, 1998); ENTERTAINMENT (Harcup and O'Neill); PEOPLE STORIES (Gans, 1979); ROLE REVERSALS (Gans, 1979); HERO STORIES (Gans, 1979); PERSONAL CONTACTS OF REPORTERS (McQuail, 2000); NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985).

Gans (1979) points out that the news media seldom refer to social forces behind issues and events, but predominantly to people. Galtung and Ruge (1965) observed the same in coining the news value REFERENCE TO PERSONS. As mentioned above, the news media avoid stories about abstract ideas—they like ACTION, and a focus on action implies a focus on actors. Even if an event or issue that involves abstract concepts is important for other reasons, one way of covering it is to transform it into a story about a person—the scientist, rather than the science, the life of a patient, rather than the biochemistry of the disease being researched, the person in foreclosure, as opposed to economic indicators of the housing market. A focus on people may make a story possible to tell in DRAMATIC or narrative terms. But attention to persons isn't merely a way of getting at (or avoiding, as the case might be) abstract topics and discussions of social forces. It's also an aid in reporting event-centered news, as people are more permanently available than events (McQuail, 2000, p. 280). The same logic, of course, applies to non-news settings. For the vast majority of events you don't witness, you must rely on the word of others. The most trusted "others," of course, are friends—a notion that is manifested in the news world as well.

As McQuail (2000) notes in his list of news values, the PERSONAL CONTACTS OF REPORTERS are frequently a source of news. Apart from this logic, as Gans (1979) points out, one commonly held view in the news media is that audiences like stories about people for their own sake, and thus an entire genre of news, the HUMAN INTEREST story, involves a focus on people. Often these are people engaged in unusual activities or role reversals, linking this news value to that of NOVELTY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS.

PROXIMITY

PROXIMITY (Ruehlmann, 1979; Hetherington, 1985; Ryan, 1991; MacDougall in Palmer, 1998; Herbert, 2000); CLOSENESS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; McQuail, 2000); DOMESTIC AFFAIRS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); LOCATION OF EVENTS (McQuail, 2000); PROXIMITY TO THE AUDIENCE OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE NEWS (McQuail, 2000).

Proximity refers to, for lack of a better word, the "local angle." As Ryan (1991) and others suggest, news organizations focus on events and issues that impact their regional audience. An earthquake in Japan is newsworthy, but not nearly to the extent that an earthquake in a paper's hometown is. Of course, to say the "local angle" implies that this criterion exists only for local news media. But the national news media also apply the PROXIMITY criterion, or most of our news would come from abroad. Moreover, as Gans (1979) points out, the news media often focus on those events abroad that impact their domestic audience. If the above description encapsulated the PROXIMITY criterion, however, it would be easily reduced to another principle below of RELEVANCE AND MEANINGFULNESS TO THE AUDIENCE. But, as Gaye Tuchman (1978) discusses, PROXIMITY is also a criterion that owes its existence to the production constraints of the traditional news media. In short, the farther afield an

event is, the harder it is to cover. A news outlet's resources are anchored in time and space, such that events closer to its newsroom or news bureau receive privileged treatment.

RELEVANCE AND MEANINGFULNESS TO THE AUDIENCE

RELEVANCE (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Bell, 1991; Gregory & Miller, 1998; McQuail, 2000; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); MEANINGFULNESS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); SIGNIFICANCE FOR PAST AND FUTURE (Gans, 1979); AMERICAN ACTIVITIES IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY (Gans, 1979); FOREIGN ACTIVITIES THAT AFFECT AMERICANS AND AMERICAN POLICY (Gans, 1979); COMMUNIST-BLOC COUNTRY ACTIVITIES (Gans, 1979); ELECTIONS AND PEACEFUL CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL ABROAD (Gans, 1979); TRENDINESS (Ryan, 1991); CULTURAL RESONANCE (Ryan, 1991); PUBLIC INTEREST (Herbert, 2000); IMPORTANCE (Herbert, 2000); IMPORTANCE TO THE DOMESTIC PUBLIC (Warner, 1970); AUDIENCE INTEREST (Warner, 1970).

To grasp the full nature of the MEANINGFULNESS value, it helps to refer back to the manner in which Galtung and Ruge (1965) used it initially. Recall that they were originally concerned with how the news media in a given country decided which foreign events were newsworthy. The stories that were selected, they suggested, would be those that continued to have a valid (if not identical) meaning outside of their original cultural context. As Galtung and Ruge's news values have been applied across a broader variety of news environments, the concept of meaningfulness has often been reduced to RELEVANCE or perceived IMPORTANCE TO THE AUDIENCE. These concepts are closely related to, but obviously distinct from, Galtung and Ruge's original definition of MEANINGFULNESS.

Gans' (1979) treatment of news criteria contains a different discussion of foreign news, albeit one that arrives at similar conclusions. He points out that foreign news generally contains domestic themes. The American national news media tend to

focus on stories about Americans abroad, events abroad that affect Americans, and happenings that either embody American values (e.g., a foreign country holding democratic elections) or suggest that American problems are not unique (e.g., race riots or healthcare difficulties abroad). This leads us to the more traditional notion of RELEVANCE TO THE AUDIENCE that makes it onto many lists of news values and is generally posed as some version of the question, "How does this affect me?" or "Why should I care?" As such, RELEVANCE is a value that is linked closely with others that address these same questions, like PROXIMITY and TIMELINESS.

SCALE, IMPACT, AND CONSEQUENCES

IMPACT (Ryan, 1991); POWER (Ryan, 1991); IMPACT (Ruehlmann, 1979); IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES (Herbert, 2000); SIGNIFICANCE (Hetherington, 1985); MAGNITUDE (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); IMPACT ON NATION AND NATIONAL INTEREST (Gans, 1979); IMPACT ON LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE (Gans, 1979); SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PAST AND FUTURE (Gans, 1979); THRESHOLD (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); DISASTERS, ACTUAL AND AVERTED (Gans, 1979); DISASTERS ABROAD (Gans, 1979); NEGATIVITY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); BAD NEWS (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); DISASTERS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); GOOD OR BAD SOCIAL EFFECTS (Herbert, 2000); CRISIS (Raboy & Dagenais in Watson, 1998); CONSEQUENCE (MacDougall in Palmer, 1998); SCALE OF EVENTS (McQuail, 2000); SIGNIFICANCE (McQuail, 2000); TRAGEDIES AND ACCIDENTS (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985); NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED (Warner, 1970).

Galtung and Ruge proposed THRESHOLD as a news value. In other words they suggested that a story must affect a large number of people to be considered newsworthy. Many lists of news values similarly suggest that the SIZE, SCALE or IMPACT of an issue or event is a dominant criterion for newsworthiness. Unfortunately, these metrics are all rather vague. As Harcup and O'Neill (2001) point

out, this loose definition doesn't distinguish between the news value of five car crashes, on the one hand, and one train wreck, on the other, that kill the same number of people. An easy retort is that IMPACT must be considered in combination with other news values—that train wrecks are UNEXPECTED, while car crashes are common. Nonetheless, it's still defensible to say that definitions of this value in terms of SCALE or SIZE are somewhat vague, if not tautological. This, of course, opens a different can of worms. That such a frequently summoned news value is in fact self-referential is a reminder of the fact that in its agenda-setting capacity, the news often helps to shape our publicly held conceptions of what events and issues are of consequence. As Todd Gitlin (2003) puts it,

> [P]lainly journalism—especially television, with all its vividness—was not merely "holding a mirror up to reality," to use journalism's own favorite metaphor. It was at least in part *composing* reality, and the composition was entering into our own deliberations—and more, our understandings of who we are and what we were about. (p. xiv, italics original)

Gans (1979) for his part, identifies several variations on the IMPACT value: IMPACT ON LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE; IMPACT ON THE NATION AND NATIONAL INTEREST and SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PAST AND FUTURE. Among the events that are often selected by the IMPACT news value, he points to social unrest and DISASTERS, ACTUAL AND AVERTED, which make both domestic and foreign news. Many other authors also focus on disasters and tragedies as being a particularly well-covered type of impact-news. Where the valence of events is negative, as in these cases, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) NEGATIVITY criterion provides an accompanying explanation.

SCANDALS AND CRIME

SCANDALS AND CRIME (Hetherington, 1985); SENSATIONALISM (Herbert, 2000); NEGATIVITY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); BAD NEWS (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); ALLEGED AND ACTUAL VIOLATORS OF LAWS AND MORES (Gans, 1979); VICTIMS (Gans, 1979);

CRIMES, SCANDALS AND INVESTIGATIONS (Gans, 1979); EXPOSÉ ANECDOTES (Gans, 1979); CRIME (Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985); VIOLENCE (Hall, 1973).

Scandals, crime, and violations of social mores are frequently deemed newsworthy, and make most lists of news values. Gans (1979) points out that while scandals and crimes featuring both known and unknown individuals are newsworthy, prominent individuals are generally discussed in relation to white collar crimes and transgressions, while unknowns tend to be associated by the media with base and violent crime. Moreover, according to Gans, while the national news media normally focus heavily on an elite cadre of celebrity politicians in the federal government to the exclusion of other types of powerful individuals and institutions, the news will frequently cover corporations and powerful businesspersons when they are embroiled in a crime or scandal. Galtung and Ruge (1965) suggest that the media focuses on bad news more generally—an alternate explanation for the extent to which it covers crime and scandal. Ryan (1991), Gitlin (2003), Tuchman (1978) and Shoemaker and Reese (1991) all note the distorting effect of this news value on the public's perception of activist causes, as the news media may cover only the violent or corrupt episodes in an activist group's existence.

REFERENCE TO SEX

SEX (Hetherington, 1985; Herbert, 2000); ENTERTAINMENT (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001); ENTERTAINING (O'Sullivan et al., 1983).

Numerous lists of news values mention sex, and several, like Herbert's and Hetherington's include it as its own predictor of whether the news media are likely to cover a story. There does not seem to be any major scholarly underpinning here, beyond the fact that "sex sells." This value is also likely linked at various times to others, such as HUMOR, SCANDAL, PERSONIFICATION, DRAMA, and NOVELTY.

TIMELINESS

TIMELINESS (MacDougall in Palmer, 1998; Herbert, 2000); CURRENCY (Ruehlmann, 1979; Ryan, 1991); FREQUENCY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965); TRENDINESS (Ryan, 1991); RECENCY (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Bell, 1991); SUDDENNESS (O'Sullivan et al., 1983); IMMEDIACY (Schlessinger in Watson, 1998); RECENCY AND TIMELINESS OF EVENTS (McQuail, 2000); TIMING IN RELATION TO THE NEWS CYCLE (McQuail, 2000); SHORT TIME SCALE (McQuail, 2000)

Nearly every scholar referenced in this paper acknowledges that news is a depletable good. A story on an event must be reported soon after it occurs, or it's not worth reporting at all. There are numerous reasons for this. News audiences certainly expect the most current news and may be disappointed at "stale" stories. Moreover, if space is limited and a story doesn't run one day, there is no shortage of newer stories in the pipeline, which must run immediately in its place or risk becoming stale themselves. Some news is truly irrelevant if it's published too late—a story admonishing you to vote yesterday won't do anyone much good. Lastly, Clay Shirky (2008), among others, suggests that if a news organization and its competition miss an important story, picking it up later may amount to an admission of guilt—an acknowledgement that it dropped the ball earlier. Another value related to timeliness is Galtung and Ruge's (1965) concept of FREQUENCY, which suggests that news media are more likely to pick up stories that match their production cycle. An event that takes a month to unfold or occurs when the newsroom isn't fully staffed may be ignored by a daily newspaper or a nightly news program. Gaye Tuchman (1978) emphasizes this as well, detailing the manner in which newsrooms are synched to the schedules of institutional sources, effectively barring all but the biggest events occurring in the off hours from becoming news.

A Note on Omissions

Though I included Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) set of contemporary news criteria in the above compilation, I omitted two values from their list. One of these was GOOD NEWS. This I dropped because the authors had intended it as a foil to Galtung and Ruge's (1965) value, NEGATIVITY. Since I had already decided that the latter was too broad a value for inclusion, I made the same choice regarding the former. I did not, however, find that it folded as neatly into the other categories as NEGATIVITY did, so it does not appear anywhere as a constitutive element. The second of Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) news values that I omitted from this list was NEWSPAPER AGENDA, as I saw this criterion's descriptive value as being far more publication-specific than any of the other values on the list above. I also omitted several news values that frequently double as sections of news magazines and newspapers, as these had particularly little in the way of explanatory value. Specifically, the values omitted for this reason were ECONOMY (O'Sullivan et al., 1983) and SPORT (O'Sullivan et al., 1983; Ross Commission in Hetherington, 1985).

Coherence Problems in the News Values Literature

The aggregation above hints at the vast propagation of lists of news criteria, while the act of constructing it has at the same time given us first-hand access to some of the difficulties inherent in this sort of proliferation. As such, before moving on to test our new list empirically in Chapter Three, it's worth taking a moment to discuss some additional difficulties with news values that are brought out by such an exercise (lest our new list merely contribute unreflectively to the tangle at hand).

The following difficulties I identify are distinct from those enumerated in Chapter One, which primarily concern the limited explanatory power of news values, and difficulties with their operationalization. The present critiques instead revolve

around the internal coherence within and among lists of news criteria. I label these coherence issues the binary problem, collapsibility, and false typification.

The Binary Problem

Many news values, when taken together, appear as oppositional binaries. For example, take the two Galtung and Ruge (1965) news values, CONSONANCE and UNEXPECTEDNESS. Consonance suggests that events are more likely to be reported if they conform to a journalist's mental pre-image of what's likely to happen, or better yet, if the event is something the journalist wants to happen. The UNEXPECTEDNESS value, on the other hand, says an event is more likely to be reported if it's surprising. Together, though, these values appear to cancel one another. After all, if an event isn't consonant with a journalist's beliefs, then it's safe to say it's unexpected. Galtung and Ruge (1965) realized this, and suggested that UNEXPECTEDNESS was only a value insofar as it occurred within the subset of those events that were also CONSONANT. An example of this might be the Milwaukee Brewers winning the World Series. It's never happened before, and it is, perhaps, unlikely. But a journalist at the *Journal Sentinel* would no doubt view it as within the realm of possibility, even want it to happen. This solution to the paradox—UNEXPECTEDNESS within CONSONANCE—predates news values themselves, having been remarked upon by Park as early as 1940 (McQuail, 2000, p. 338). It has not, however, has not gone uncontested. Tuchman (1978), Hetherington (1985), and McQuail (2000) for instance, have all pointed out that truly unexpected (i.e. not consonant) events are often prominent news items, while other authors, like Watson (1998), simply state that CONSONANCE and UNEXPECTEDNESS coexist in unresolved opposition.

Other binaries go unresolved as well. For instance, if an article isn't part of CONTINUING story, then it's likely to contribute to COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE—another value proposed by Galtung and Ruge. And the situation only becomes more complex

when their factors are considered alongside additional and alternative news values that have since been added into the mix.

If something isn't NEGATIVE, in Galtung and Ruge's terms, then it may be GOOD NEWS (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), or perhaps HUMOROUS (Herbert, 2000). If a news segment contains few references to individual persons, as Galtung and Ruge's PERSONIFICATION factor would prescribe, it often describes its subjects with NUMBERS (Hetherington, 1985) or STATISTICAL AGGREGATES (Gans, 1979). Bell (1991), in building off of Galtung and Ruge's original list, proposes the value PREDICTABILITY and even goes so far as to say that it exists in paradox with their value of UNEXPECTEDNESS.

The existence of oppositional binaries among news criteria implies that rather than a system in which news criteria are met or not met by a given event, we instead have one in which virtually any event meets one criterion or the other of a given pair. Because such a scheme deems all events newsworthy in one way or another, it effectively renders binary news values unfalsifiable, sharply curbing their explanatory value.

Moreover, beyond tensions between specific pairs of values, there are also broader oppositions between entire groups of news values. McQuail (1992, 2000), for instance, points out that some news values are oriented toward producing news stories about events and issues that have consequences for people's lives, while others lend themselves to stories primarily aimed at interesting the audience—feature writing, gossip, and human interest stories, which draw audiences for other reasons. Hetherington (1985) broadly agrees with this notion, though he points out that what interests people and what is of consequence for their lives are just as often in concert as in tension with one another—a point McQuail (1992) concedes. Hetherington also

suggests that where such values are at odds, hard news wins out over human interest, though McQuail (1992) contests this.

It is entirely fair to argue that news production is full of competing tensions, and that news workers must sometimes worry about not only what is newsworthy, but also what is salable. Unfortunately, neither the root of these conflicting impulses, nor the manner in which they are negotiated is adequately addressed or encapsulated by simple lists of news values.

Collapsibility

Not all news values are positioned in opposing binaries, however. In fact, in many cases the problem is quite the opposite. As we've already begun to see in aggregating our contemporary list of news values, more often than not news criteria are not operationally distinct, but instead appear to be different formulations of the same value, or to contain heavy overlap. This was first noted by Galtung and Ruge themselves in their original 1965 article. While their first eight news values were intended to be operationally distinct, and to operate worldwide, the last four—ELITE NATIONS, ELITE PEOPLE, PERSONALITY, and NEGATIVITY—were said to be culturally determined and aimed at describing the press of Western nations. As such, they are in fact intended as shorthand for some common ways in which the other eight factors are utilized in combination by Western journalists. NEGATIVITY, for instance, is ostensibly a value in the American and European press because progress is the norm in wealthy nations, and negative events are UNEXPECTED. The authors also considered negative events to be LESS AMBIGUOUS than positive ones, and to be more CONSONANT with expectations (a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy—people expect news to be negative; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hartley, 1982).

Other authors have picked out additional overlaps in Galtung and Ruge's values. Palmer (1998) suggests that news values like CONTINUITY and CONSEQUENCES

are related, in that the consequences of an event may play out over time, keeping a story alive in the news. McQuail (2000) offers several examples: Events that affect ELITE PERSONS or ELITE NATIONS are also likely to rate higher on Galtung and Ruge's THRESHOLD factor, referring to the size of an event's impact. The actions of individual people meet the PERSONIFICATION criterion, but individual actions are also generally reportable within a single news cycle (FREQUENCY), and are less ambiguous (UNAMBIGUITY) than the actions of a multitude. Negative events (NEGATIVITY), such as natural disasters, often happen quickly (FREQUENCY), lack ambiguity (UNAMBIGUITY), and tend to produce many personal stories (PERSONIFICATION; p. 341).

Once again, the situation becomes yet more complicated when we begin to consider the additional and alternative news values added by authors after Galtung and Ruge. The use of NUMBERS and STATISTICS (Hetherington, 1985; Gans, 1979), for instance, is often a way at getting at an event's IMPACT (Ryan, 1991; Ruehlmann, 1979; Herbert, 2000; Gans, 1979), and hard numbers often make a story more clear cut and LESS AMBIGUOUS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Herbert, 2000). The NOVEL (Herbert, 2000; Ruehlmann, 1979; Ryan, 1991) and UNEXPECTED (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Hetherington, 1985) are often HUMOROUS (Herbert, 2000). ORGANIZED PUBLICS (Ryan, 1991) and GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (Gans, 1979) are frequently positioned in CONFLICT (Herbert, 2000; Gans, 1979) among and between one another. A CONTINUING STORY (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001) is often described by the media as a DRAMA (Hetherington, 1985; Ryan, 1991) building to an expected (e.g., CONSONANT; Galtung & Ruge, 1965) outcome. ELITE PEOPLE (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Ruehlmann, 1979; Ryan, 1991) are often part of the GOVERNMENT (Gans, 1979; Ryan, 1991), and tend to live and work in ELITE REGIONS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Moreover, a reference to ELITE PEOPLE is most certainly a REFERENCE TO

PERSONS (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979). An event that happens in close PROXIMITY (Herbert, 2000; Ruehlmann, 1979; Hetherington, 1985; Ryan, 1991) to a paper's readership is often more RELEVANT to that audience (Herbert, 2000; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Ryan, 1991). CONFLICT and ACTION (Herbert, 2000) are often related. And so on and so forth.

Some, but not all such reductions (as well as some binaries) may be alleviated by drawing from a single set of news criteria, rather than from a composite list as I have generated here—and perhaps the quality of individual lists might be judged in part by the coherence of their constituent parts. However, as I have already begun to argue, the search for a better list is, in the end, unlikely to be the best solution to the conceptual difficulties posed by news values.

False Typification

It should be clear by now that news values do not work well as distinct, coherent categories, of the sort that can be discerned with a dichotomous key. Nor, according to authors like McQuail (2000) and Tunstall (1971) is there much hope of deriving a set of news values that operates in this way. That said, there may be another way to look at the enterprise. Channeling Schutz, Tuchman (1978) has suggested, quite helpfully, that news decisions have more to do with typification than categorization—a distinction that seems sensible to apply to news values. In other words, instead of applying hard and fast categories to decide whether a story is newsworthy, news workers are more likely to use a process resembling casuistry, comparing an issue or event with those that have gone before in order that they may decide how to rate it against various news criteria. Questions of threshold or situations calling for compositional balance are identified and decided by appeals to their rough resemblance to a jumble of news items that have gone before. Typifications are not categories, but families of related concepts, a la Wittgenstein.

Conceptualizing news values in this manner alleviates some of the definitional difficulties I've touched upon so far. But it also raises additional problems. Typifications are usually valuable insofar as they are actor-categories (or actor-typifications, as it were), imprecise, but allowing us a useful peek inside the social world of our research subjects. Some lists—Gans' for instance—were formed in conversation with journalists and may represent true actor-typifications. But many lists of news values were devised by academics, and while some of them include typifications that may carry over to the world of the working journalist, for the most part we're left with a set of items that tell us more about the people studying and critiquing journalism than about journalists themselves: researcher-typifications, not actor-typifications. Such typifications run a high risk of proving specious when applied to journalists themselves. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, propping up the apparent conceit that these researcher-typifications are employed in the newsroom has required several rather awkward assertions on the part of scholars, such as the notion that journalists use news values, but don't know they're using them, or that journalists' use of news values is so context-specific as to preclude the possibility of a valid general list.

Having assembled a list and dealt now with a host of problems related to news values, including their limited explanatory power, the difficulties inherent in operationalizing them, as well as their occasional internal incoherence, we now proceed to Chapter Three and an empirical examination of the outstanding uniqueness problem.

Chapter Three

Chapters One and Two of this paper discuss the myriad difficulties with news values as a conceptual framework. In order to repair or replace this framework, however, we first need to know whether news values are specific to the news, or whether they are describing—however maladroitly—a phenomenon that extends beyond news and news work. This, Chapter Three, is a pilot study aimed at exploring this question.

Method

In order to examine the relative importance of different news criteria in a non-news environment, I conducted a content analysis of an online forum dedicated to the discussion of U.S. politics. The reasoning behind this decision was two-fold. First, it's commonly held that self-organizing online communities get around the gatekeeping function of traditional media, which news values are explicitly intended to describe. If people are free to discuss anything, it would be interesting to see whether their choices of what to discuss mimic or emphasize those things we think of as traditional news criteria.

Second, political blogs are among the most popular venues on the Internet for the discussion of current events and issues. At the time of this writing, the weblog I selected, Daily Kos, is number 13 on Technorati's list of the 100 most popular blogs, and the second-most popular current event-centered blog after the Huffington Post, the other 11 ahead of it being technology-oriented communities.

I selected Daily Kos over the Huffington Post for several reasons. First, the Huffington Post is run by Ariana Huffington, a professional journalist herself. Moreover, the Huffington Post overtly aspires to journalism, meaning that it models itself on journalistic norms and would therefore be difficult to consider as a venue that was "not journalism." At the same time, Daily Kos explicitly spurns the notion of

gatekeeping. Its founder, Markos Moulitsas (a.k.a. Kos), has co-authored a book entitled *Crashing the Gate*, and more recently had this to say in a new book:

> I started [Daily Kos] for a simple reason—I felt ill-served by the undemocratic gatekeeping mentality so prevalent in our society. And, at that time, we seemed to be on an inexorable march toward war with no avenue for dissent. There was an assumption by the powers that be that the rest of the citizen body couldn't think for ourselves. That we needed self-appointed and so-called experts to tell us what to think, what to do, and what we should—or should not—know. For far too long, these gatekeepers controlled the national conversation. (Moulitsas, 2008, para. 6)

Moulitsas goes on to pinpoint the news media as a gatekeeper with which he's particularly frustrated. Other authors on the site have suggested that the rise in popularity of Daily Kos marks a "descent into irrelevance of the gatekeeper model" (Jaikumar, 2008, para. 3). Since news values are explicitly intended to describe the gatekeeping process, any recurrence of them in a community explicitly opposed to gatekeeping will be of interest.

That said, Daily Kos is certainly not the only venue in which a study like this might be conducted—and in fact, as will be discussed later, there are some complications that come with having chosen it as a case study. Given the rather incredible number of active event-centered and non-event-centered discussion sites online, running on myriad architectures, embodying different norms, and the prodigious amount of user activity that many of them see, a paper of this scope is best viewed as a pilot study.

I selected a 15-day sample of posts from Daily Kos' front page[1]—the portion of the site where staff members, appropriately called "front pagers," post their entries—and examined them to see whether they fit the summary-list of news values.

[1] Daily Kos runs on a "community blogging platform," meaning that while its front page is reserved for posts by the site's proprietors, users may also keep their own blogs on the site.

The sample I selected was published between January 29 and February 13—one week before and after Super Tuesday in the 2008 presidential election. It is possible that results from this time period are atypical of activity on Daily Kos, for the same reason election cycles disrupt normal news cycles. As such, I also examined the frequency of the various tags (one-word descriptors applied by users to posts to describe and index their content) used on the site, before and after the presidential primaries to determine whether and how the site's main topics of conversation might have changed during this period. As discussed in Part One, content analysis—while appropriate for a pilot study—does not allow an observer direct access to the gatekeeping process. As such, I attempted to partially alleviate this limitation by creating a user blog on the site to discuss my research project with members of the Daily Kos community, soliciting their thoughts and feedback. I say *partially alleviate* because the users who commented on my blog entries were not front pagers themselves. As such, they were not the gatekeepers for the front page. Many did, however, have a history of interaction with the site's front pagers, as well as an encyclopedic knowledge of the site itself—both reasons to take their opinions into consideration.

Study Sample

The complete sample consisted of 430 posts, all of which I read carefully and coded for level of comment activity. Comment activity was coded as Low if there were between 0 and 200 responses to a post (198 posts; 46.0% of the complete sample), Medium for 201 to 400 responses (137 posts; 31.9% of the complete sample), High for 401 to 600 responses (66 posts; 15.3% of the complete sample), and Extreme for above 600 responses (29 posts; 6.7% of the complete sample).

After this initial read-through, it was apparent that posts to the front page of Daily Kos were not monolithic in their style, but instead fell into a variety of different

genres, each of which served a different purpose in the community. It seemed plausible that the news values or other values a given post might involve would be linked to the purpose with which it was written and the audience it intended to serve. As such, different genres of post on the Daily Kos front page might well be based on different values.

With this in mind, I divided all of the posts into categories by the function they served in the community. A brief list of these community functions follows, along with their representation in the complete sample. Importantly—lest I be accused of introducing a new set of "researcher typifications"—I should say I do not intend these as scholarly categories or any sort of theoretical framework. Rather, I employed them for pragmatic purposes only, to ensure that I did not overlook any important aspect of front-page activity during my sample.

Community Functions

Activism (30 posts; 7% of the complete sample). Many posts were in fact "action alerts," asking users to call or write their Senator, donate to a progressive candidate's campaign, volunteer at the polls, and so on.

Analysis (84 posts; 19.5% of the complete sample). Analysis posts were analytical essays and opinion pieces, pertaining to a wide range of issues and current events, from the state of the Democratic primary to the influence of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on American politics.

Community Alerts (6 posts; 1.4% of the complete sample). Where activism posts primarily sought to get Kossacks (a.k.a. community members) to intervene in the offline world, community alerts were posts that were very much for or about the Daily Kos community, such as discussions of the amount of recent traffic to the site, an announcement informing users of the appointment of a new managing editor, straw

polls aimed at determining how many users were in support of various primary candidates, etc.

Diary Rescue (15 posts; 3.5% of the complete sample). User blogs, called diaries, tend to have a limited shelf life. By default (users can change this setting), the twenty most recent diary entries written by users are listed on the front page under a "Recent Diaries" section in the sidebar, where they siphon traffic from the front page. A few of these diaries receive enough user recommendations via the site's voting mechanism to be vaulted into the "Recommended Diaries" list, where they sit safely for awhile, attracting yet more attention and comments. But most aren't so lucky. They get pushed off the front page quickly by a flood of other user-generated entries and once that happens, traffic to them slows to a trickle. Since Daily Kos' community "lives" in the comment threads, and comment threads there are about live conversations, more than asynchronous posting, the incentive to visit these entries later, sans user activity, is normally very limited—and in fact, after enough time elapses the comment threads for old posts become locked. In order to drive traffic to posts that may not have received ample attention, Susan Gardner (a.k.a. SusanG), now the site's managing editor, created a recurring post on the front page called the "diary rescue," which appears each evening. This is put together by an established group of users from the community, and consists of a compilation of links to less-visited diaries published that day, along with short descriptions and accolades pertaining to each. Diary rescue posts always list the users responsible for assembling them, but are posted under the generic byline, "Diary Rescue."

Headlines (33 posts; 7.7% of the complete sample). Front pagers frequently announce breaking news on the front page, such as John Edwards' or Rudy Giuliani's departure from the presidential primary races, or the death of congressman Tom Lantos. The style of these posts varies widely. Sometimes they contain jokes about

the news item. Other times they are accompanied by analysis. Or they may be terse, containing a link and a small bit of basic information.

Liveblogging (103 posts; 24.0% of the complete sample). Liveblogging refers to posts that are written about an event as it unfolds. Sometimes these are local or even firsthand accounts. For instance, a few years ago, several users on the West Coast liveblogged the California wildfires. Often, however, liveblogging is much more mundane. During the two-week sample, for instance, front pagers liveblogged the California presidential debates, and election returns from various primary races. These "liveblogs" were generally little more than short synopses recounting bits of live television, or reposting of exit poll figures from CNN.

Newsletter (14 posts; 3.3% of the complete sample). The front page of Daily Kos is home to several recurring features reminiscent of weekly bulletins or community newsletters. The most prominent of these is "Cheers and Jeers," a daily joke column discussing items from the news, which invites user participation and is highly popular. Others include "Media Notes," which generally critiques news coverage of a topic or picks apart press materials put out by conservative groups, and "Sunday Talk," a weekly summary of who is scheduled to appear on television's various Sunday morning political talk shows. "Sunday Talk" generally includes humorous photographs akin to editorial cartoons referencing the news of the week.

Open Thread (80 posts; 18.6% of the complete sample). Open threads are posts to the front page that are published for the sole purpose of having an additional comment thread. Whereas users are generally expected to limit their discussion in a given comment thread to the topic raised by the author, open threads are posts which invite users to talk about anything they please. Some open threads are posted under the generic byline, "Open Thread," while others are explicitly attributed to various front pagers. Some open threads contain one or a list of suggested topics for

discussion, while others contain little text at all, and still others include an embedded video, which may or may not have anything to do with politics (one front pager seemed to enjoy posting random clips from the Muppet Show for a time). Some open threads do have an explicit topic. For instance, one contributing editor, DarkSyde, who writes about science and science policy, publishes a regular "Open Science Thread," in which users are invited to talk about anything science-related.

Pointers (56 posts; 13.0% of the complete sample). Pointers are posts whose primary purpose is to direct users' attention to content outside of Daily Kos, either because the author thinks highly of it, or because she considers it particularly outrageous. Occasionally, the author may embed the material in the post itself, such as a video of John Edwards' campaign-ending farewell address, or a particular set of poll numbers, while other times posts invite users to click through to another site altogether.

Testimonial (9 posts; 2.1% of the complete sample). Testimonials are posts written about an author's personal experiences, generally relating them to some broader issue. These ranged from personal stories about voting to one front pager's remembrances of working with civil rights groups in the Jim Crow South.

Creating a Subsample for Closer Analysis

Having grouped the posts by their community functions, I then selected ten posts from each category to examine more closely for news values. Exceptions to this rule included the Testimonial and Community Alert categories, which each contained fewer than ten posts. I also oversampled Diary Rescue posts, coding all 15 posts from this category, as these were a window into user activity extending beyond the front page. This subsampling method yielded a subsample of 100 total posts, or just under a quarter of the total sample. In selecting out these hundred pieces, I grouped posts by the number of comments they received, and within each community-function

category, I attempted to choose an equal number of posts from the various comment-activity levels, Low, Medium, High, and Extreme. Not all categories, however, contained posts from every activity level, and when this was the case I attempted to choose a roughly equal number of posts from each of the activity levels present. As a result of this breakdown, there was an oversample of Low comment-activity posts in the overall subsample. As with the inclusion of posts with various community functions, I considered different activity levels not as a theoretical construct, but simply as a way of ensuring that I did not overlook any particular type of activity on the site in assembling my subsample for close analysis. After all of the above considerations, where possible I attempted also to include a diversity of post authors within each category.

Analyzing and Coding the Subsample

In analyzing this subsample of posts for news values, I chose to code them for each value using the following five-point numerical scale:

1~ The post disrupts this news criterion, i.e. does the opposite of what one would expect if the criterion were in play.

2~ The news criterion is absent from the post.

3~ The news criterion is met in an implicit manner, e.g., a post is timely, but no mention of its immediacy is made.

4~ The news criterion is explicitly mentioned in the post.

5~ The post embodies or heavily emphasizes the criterion.

In coding on this scale, however, my end goal was not to conduct a quantitative study, but to identify a set of exemplars, either supporting or disrupting my main thesis, while engaging in qualitative analysis of the posts. Indeed, my subsample was too small to produce statistically significant results and moreover, given the limitations of

traditional quantitative content analysis in validating news values, expounded by McQuail (2000) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001), the best approach to analyzing the data at hand is an informed reading, rather than a statistical analysis. Nonetheless, in laying out my results I will provide descriptive statistics where they prove useful for illustrative purposes.

I refrained from coding comment threads. In the two-week sample I examined, there were over 116,000 individual comments. And while I read through a substantial number of threads, both within and outside of the sample for this study, I did not make an attempt to group them or code them systematically for this paper. This is not because I believe this task is unimportant, but because it is worthy of a study in its own right—one that would likely require somewhat different methods than I've employed here. This is something I discuss in more detail in the conclusion to this chapter.

Results

In this section, I discuss the support (or occasionally lack thereof) I found for each news value in the aggregate list from Chapter Two. I describe how each value was operationalized in the context of the study, and also attempt to provide typical examples of the sorts of posts in which different values were prevalent. I also note when values appeared predominantly in relation to a particular community function. A table of results appears on the following page for ease of reference.

Table 1 Table of Results

Value	**Result**
Action	Supported
Clarity	Mixed Support
Competition With Other Media	Unsupported
Compositional Balance	Supported
Conflict	Supported
Consonance	Mixed Support
Continuity and Cooption	Supported
Drama	Supported
Elite People	Inconclusive
Elite Regions	Inconclusive
Facts, Statistics, and Aggregates	Supported
Reference to Government	Supported
Humor	Supported
Novelty and Unexpectedness	Mixed Support
Reference to an Organized Public	Supported
Personification	Supported
Proximity	Supported
Relevance and Meaningfulness to the Audience	Supported
Scale, Impact, and Consequences	Supported
Scandals and Crime	Inconclusive
Reference to Sex	Unsupported
Timeliness	Mixed Support

ACTION

This value was strongly supported. Despite operationalizing the concept in a conservative fashion, the ACTION value was present with high frequency on Daily Kos. Roughly 44 percent of posts contained a strong action component, while an additional 16 percent contained at least some mention of action. There were no examples of posts that disrupted the action criterion.

Applying the concept. ACTION is a difficult concept to apply, since strictly speaking, action in its colloquial sense requires little more than the presence of a verb. To avoid such confusion, I was conservative in the way I operationalized the criterion. I limited support for it to mentions of specific acts on the part of one or a group of persons, which precipitated the main event or issue involved in the post, or directly affected its outcome, as in the case of, say, someone responding to a disaster:

> Justin Callahan's life changed forever in one violent instant on a cold, bleak January morning in 2004. The then 21 year-old army sergeant was on routine patrol in Afghanistan when a hockey-puck sized land mine called a PMN2, a Soviet relic from the cold war, detonated a mere yard away. He never even heard the explosion: 'All I remember is dirt falling on top of me. My first thought was that I was dreaming, I closed and opened my eyes—then realized it was real. There was no pain at first, just a dead cold feeling all over, like my body was submerged in ice. My buddy was driving a humvee 10 yards ahead of me. I'll never forget the look on his face when he opened the door and saw me on the ground. Everything after that is hard to remember ...' Callahan's fellow soldier not only saved his life but also his knee, by getting him in the humvee and to a field hospital in record time.

Moreover, I further limited my operational definition of action to acts that were potentially photographable, as opposed to mere speech or conversation. The exception to this rule was if a post author actively reframed such a minor act by suggesting that the non-photographable action in question was "more than just talk." For instance, in a post titled, "Clinton Calls Out MSNBC," front pager, MissLaura writes:

> On a conference call today, the Clinton campaign called out MSNBC for this remark and the larger pattern of offensive remarks from the network's employees. In fact, they went a step beyond saying it was unacceptable to

> doing something about it. Howard Wolfson said Hillary Clinton would not debate on MSNBC…

Finally, because of the traditional linkages between the action criterion and the presence of compelling visuals, I also regarded posts that relied heavily on photographs, video, or other similar supporting visuals as embodying the action criterion. The bulk of the weekly "Sunday Talk" newsletter, for instance, consists of a montage of amusing photographs—many Photoshopped for effect—which serve as editorial cartoons recapping the week's events. Other posts contained embedded YouTube videos—the viral Will.i.am "Yes, We Can" clip, for instance—and campaign ads, which were often their raison d'être.

Illustrations. Posts generally included action in one of several forms—narrative recountings, calls to action, event commentary, visual artifacts, and photo montages.

Narrative recountings were action-oriented stories, occasionally about the acts of others, such as in the Justin Callahan story above, but often centered around the authors' own experiences, as in this post from the testimonial category:

> I just came home from a trip that should take five minutes but tonight took fifteen...and that's walking. There's a glaze of ice on most of the concrete, and walking is treacherous. Around 6:45 I was at a major intersection and could see emergency vehicles in three different directions attending to either car accidents or people who has [sic] slipped on the ice.

Calls to action, almost invariably falling into the activism category, were often prescriptive examples, indicating to members of the community what actions they should take to aid in a cause, and/or thanking users who had already acted. This excerpt from a post on FISA, for instance, thanks users and also frames their activism as more than simple talk:

> Your voices and the voices of every American who called, faxed, and e-mailed their opposition to being illegally spied upon have been instrumental in making this happen. We helped derail the rush to push through the bill before the December recess, and we helped in the victory yesterday. We are sustaining the fight, as Senator Dodd noted in a recent floor statement.

Event commentaries were simple references to or commentaries on acts committed by others, which stopped short of full narrative recountings, such as this passage from "Cheers and Jeers," a regular newsletter/digest published on Daily Kos by front pager Bill in Portland Maine:

> CHEERS to a pleasant afternoon stroll. Over 100,000 people marched Saturday in D.C. (and many other cities) to protest the Iraq quagmire and call for a withdrawal.

Visual artifacts, already referenced above, refer to photographs, campaign ads, viral videos, and other supporting visual content on which posts relied, while photo montages were posts that were seemingly assembled for the sole purpose of displaying a series of images.

CLARITY

Support for the CLARITY value was extremely mixed. While 13 percent of posts included strong examples of the value, and an additional four percent included minor examples, there were 16 instances in which the value was disrupted and a further seven mixed examples. Much as with the SCANDALS/CRIME criterion below, the pattern of results was heavily affected by the partisan nature of the site.

Applying the concept. As with many of the other values discussed in this study, CLARITY is perhaps partially related to an event itself, but is largely in the mind of the person relating it. As such, it was impossible to know whether an author believed the facts of the events or issues she was relating were clear or complicated—unless she said so explicitly. Thus, I judged the value to be supported only when an author explicitly signaled that a set of facts was transparent, through the use of phrases such as, "it's clear that;" "it's obvious that;" or "everybody knows that…" Similarly, I considered the value disrupted when an author explicitly stated that the facts of an issue were complex or unclear.

Illustrations. As I say above, what is clear and what is complex is often in the eye of the beholder. What's perhaps less obvious, but becomes highly apparent in examining a partisan blog like Daily Kos is that what is declared to be obvious or complex is also frequently a matter of rhetorical strategy. If you're, say, a liberal blogger, it may be "obvious to everyone" that Republican policies are backward, while building a working system of social services is "a complex task." Whether such statements are true or not does not belie the fact that they are clearly deployed in a strategic way, or at least in a manner that is CONSONANT with the political beliefs of the poster. For example, in arguing against the need for a third party, front pager Kagro X explains that the "correct" position is complicated, while the "erroneous" one is simple:

> If the issue is governmental dysfunction, it's definitionally impossible to lay the blame equally on both parties when one has actually adopted as its philosophy of governance that their president may authorize any policy he wishes, that questioning such policies is impermissible, that no effective oversight of them may be exercised, and that if you insist on trying, you are yourself a threat to national security and the power of the federal government may legitimately be used to stop you. But that's a complex thought. Much easier is the one that goes: the government is dysfunctional; there are both Republicans and Democrats in the government; therefore, both Republicans and Democrats are to blame.

In another example, an author takes aim at a Democratic Senator who has sided with the Republicans on a series of FISA amendments by saying that he is an obvious problem:

> Anyone who has observed this process over the last few months knows that the weak link in holding the Democratic caucus together on this issue is Rockefeller.

In the following exemplar—a diary rescue—the supposed stupidity of Republicans is championed with a clarity claim:

> As if we needed additional proof that stupidity flows freely from Republican state legislators, bl968 offers a brief, but frightening, reminder of this truism in

> Campfield: Quixotic attempt to mandate curricular limitations shows anti-gay bias.

But complexity and clarity were also deployed in other ways. For example, here mastery of complexity indicates expertise and accomplishment:

> Most jobs in today's modern military not only require training on some of the most highly sophisticated technology, they train service members to perform in extremely dangerous and stressful situations. Anyone who can calmly keep an IT network operating while mortars fall, can probably deal with a stubborn server in an office-cube farm. But as any handicapped person can attest, too many employers see only the disability, even when the applicant before them has completed a regimen worthy of an Olympian.

Notice also an example *within* the example above: the implied backward perspective employer who does not recognize the complexity of the applicant's life and experience.

At other times, complexity claims were leveled at legislation or policies penned by political opponents, who were implicitly accused of intentionally obfuscating their sinister motives, such as in this diary rescue entry:

> The Cunctator asks and answers the question Is Lieberman-Warner a "Strong" Climate Bill? A great summary of a complex piece of legislation and one that will open your eyes to what Senate Democrats think a good piece of legislation might be.

These patterns of deployment may explain why both complexity and clarity claims appeared to be used in roughly equal measure on the site—both sorts of claims have strategic value.

COMPETITION WITH OTHER MEDIA

Despite the existence of a scattered number of strong examples, this value was not supported. It was, in fact, heavily disrupted. Not only did 77 percent of posts show no explicit evidence of competition, a further 14 percent proved antithetical to the competition criterion, offering collegial praise and links to writing on other liberal blogs and websites.

The frequency of such disruption is attributable to the fact that many liberal blogs, Daily Kos included, envision themselves as partners in a progressive social movement, frequently referred to as the "netroots." In fact, the annual convention of the Daily Kos community, YearlyKos, was recently rebranded as Netroots Nation to reflect the increasing involvement of the larger liberal blogging community. As such, there's relatively little sense of competition between liberal blogs, and a great deal of collaboration. Moreover, Daily Kos etiquette requires that facts be supported with sources, similar to academic citation. The result is a hyperlink culture that relies heavily on outside sources, including news outlets and other blogs. As user Fasaha put it in one conversation,

> How many times have you seen "Link?" This is a direct appeal to the value of sourcing information (i.e. the denigration of "data-free analysis"). There is a strong emphasis on providing evidence for opinions. In fact, this is one of the things I value most about Dkos.

Applying the concept. Competition was one of the easier news values to operationalize, but one of the more difficult ones to detect. By way of illustration, consider how this value ostensibly operates in the traditional media world. Newspapers and network newscasts seek exclusive content, while at the same time attempting to cover all the same stories as their competitors. This value may be obvious to the reader when a paper trumpets an exclusive, but it is far less apparent when papers are copying story ideas from one another, as individual news outlets take great care not to make this explicit. It's equally impossible to prove a negative in the case of new media like Daily Kos. However unlikely, I have to concede the possibility that any given post to Daily Kos could be an attempt to copy or scoop another medium. The situation is made somewhat murkier by the fact that it's not always obvious whom Daily Kos writers view as their competition. At times, they

appeared to define their role as distinct from that of, say, the mainstream news media, while at other times they touted the apparent superiority of Daily Kos as a news outlet.

As such, I took a conservative view and only considered competition to be supported (a) when a front pager reprinted wholesale the content of a politician's message to a different political blog—as was the case when Barack Obama released a statement to the liberal blog Firedoglake; or (b) when the nature of a competitive claim was made relatively explicit, such as when an author made derogatory comments about other political forums on the Internet. Here's an example, in which Kos painted other forums as rumor mills after they began sharing far-fetched explanations for minor polling discrepancies in the New Hampshire primary:

> Of course, this launched the Mother of All Whines, with morons across the internet charging fraud without knowing what the hell they were talking about. But it was Clinton! And she won! And of course, that meant that her victory couldn't have been legitimate. … [These] cries of fraud in New Hampshire had little to do with actual concerns about electoral integrity, and everything to do with irrational Clinton hatred and the pathological need to see dark conspiracies even were none exist.

Explicit competitive claims, such as the following, were also directed on several occasions at the mainstream media:

> In tonight's group of news and views not to be found on the traditional media we include six first-hand reports from first-time caucus goers across America.

Despite the general lack of support for this value in my subsample (possibly owing to the non-explicit nature of the COMPETITION value), it's possible that something akin to COMPETITION does operate on the site in ways that are too subtle to be detected in a content analysis. As one user, A Mad Mad World, put it,

> One overlooked influence is the conformist inclination of news organizations. When something gets covered by one major news organizations [sic] the others feel the need to worry it to death also so that they don't get left in the dust by the crowd. This tendency leaves the corporate media open to manipulation by those such as Fox, a major news organization with an agenda of its own, who can elevate the newsworthiness of a story by pimping it constantly. dKos is a

> variation on this theme: people come here in part for the lack of conformity, but via constant feedback do influence one another to a great extent.

Illustrations. The few examples in which the competition value was exercised might be roughly characterized as reprinting, exclusivity claims, and superiority claims.

There was only one example of reprinting—that of the Obama statement—in which a Daily Kos front pager took content wholesale from another political blog. Exclusivity claims were statements to the effect that the blog contained content not to be found elsewhere:

> Daily Kos continues to provide great writing, unconventional insight and news not found in the traditional media, but some wonder how to find diaries when hundreds are posted each day.

Superiority claims involved a front pager explicitly stating that some feature of the Daily Kos site, whether a specific piece of writing or a more general aspect of the community, was to be preferred over that found elsewhere. For instance, in the following example, Bill in Portland Maine argues that his analysis of the 2008 State of the Union Address was superior to that of *The New York Times*:

> Shame on you, *The New York Times*, Shaaaaame on you. In their dissection of the State of the Union address, they lament what a divided country we are. And then they use the perfect example. If by perfect you mean perfectly wrong…As I said in the comments yesterday, the nation is not "splintered over the war in Iraq." The overwhelming majority believe it wasn't worth doing, and the overwhelming majority want to get the hell out. Iraq may be the one issue that unites us most. Please try to do better, Times. I imagine its embarrassing getting your clock cleaned by a blogger with underwear on his head.

Disruptive comments generally praised the perspective or writing of an off-site blogger, often taking an inclusive tone that complimented Daily Kos by association:

> The incredible A.J. Rossmiller over at Americablog has a terrific post up about "Why Books Matter" in a world of blogs and blog readers. His own book, *Still Broken: A Recruit's Inside Account of Intelligence Failures, from Baghdad to the Pentagon* has gone on sale this week, another testimony to the success of our medium in the penetration of another.

COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE

Despite limiting instances of this value to explicit mentions, it was well-supported, with strong examples amid 30 percent of the subsample, and mentions occurring in an additional nine percent. This is likely attributable to the non-neutral nature of political blogging, in which authors take sides on issues and hash out their differences, each claiming to be out to balance the views of the other. Support for this value also reflects the wide variety of concerns represented on the site. Users maintain groups and keep diaries pertaining to a wide variety of topics, from marine biology to organic cooking—a diversity of interests that often spills over onto the front page of the site.

Applying the concept. This value refers to the desire of an outlet to provide a "balanced diet" of information. Much like the COMPETITION value, this one was difficult to operationalize, in that nearly any piece could, in theory, be written with compositional balance in mind. Unfortunately, there was rarely any way to discern whether this was the case. As such, I again operationalized this value conservatively, judging it supported only when an author explicitly suggested she was writing a piece for the sake of balancing an excess of a different sort of content, or to provide an alternative point of view.

Front pagers made compositional balance claims on a variety of different levels, in response to the topics and/or points of view appearing in comment threads, user diaries, front page content, and other internet sources, as well as campaign materials and mass media coverage. Some of these claims were obviously directed at internal activity on the site, while others sought to balance coverage and viewpoints hosted elsewhere. I ultimately decided to extend the definition of balance to include balancing off-site activity because the nature of the balance claims in response to internal and external content was otherwise very similar.

*Illustration*s. Balance claims might be roughly classed as rebuttals, critiques, changes of topic, and self-balance. Rebuttals took the form of retorts to criticism, such as this response to user comments by Kos:

> People accused me of playing the expectations game before Super Tuesday by lowering the bar to Obama. Hogwash, I'm calling them as I see them. And that last paragraph is proof—do you think the Obama spin is that he needs to sweep the rest of the month by 20% margins to knock Clinton out? Obviously not.

Critiques involved criticism of specific arguments made by others:

> It's a bit pathetic seeing Hillary Clinton's campaign desperately trying to attach significance to her Florida "victory," and she's pinned those efforts on the claim that Obama broke a pledge to campaign in the state by running a national ad that just so happened run in Florida, given that the state is part of our nation.

Changes of topic were attempts to diversify the number of issues under discussion, like this introduction to an edition of the diary rescue:

> Tonight's diaries should provide a respite from the PrezCandiddily hoopla of Super Tuesday and the depressingly disengenuous debate over FISA today in the Senate.

In examples of self-balance, Authors sought explicitly to balance the topics and views found in their own writing, such as in this entry by "Cheers and Jeers" newsletter author, Bill in Portland Maine:

> CHEERS to Iraq's first elections. Look, [Cheers and Jeers] is as guilty as anyone for busting Iraq's balls over the imperfect conditions for their election. But we hope it goes smoothly for y'all, with a minimum of violence (and ballot fraud).

Nor was such introspection only present from post to post. Some authors even applied the BALANCE value to different sections of the same piece, as in this example by Scout Finch, who complained about the lack of organization at her local primary caucus, only to continue:

> I don't want to only gripe and moan about the process, so let me throw out some of the positives…

There were also two cases in which the COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE criterion was disrupted. These involved authors making overt statements to the effect that their

posts concerned topics that were already heavily discussed, such as when DHinMI, while liveblogging the Democratic primary debate in California, made a point of the fact that he had posted an unusually high number of open threads during the course of the broadcast. The other disruptive example came when front pager, brownsox, wrote a note saying,

> The GOP retirements in the House just keep coming, it seems, though in this case, it's more that the retiree is looking to move up: Missouri Republican Kenny Hulshof will retire to run for Governor.

CONFLICT

The conflict criterion was strongly supported, with 39 percent of posts displaying strong examples, and a further 18 percent containing mentions or minor examples.

Applying the concept. CONFLICT was one of the easier values to operationalize. I considered this criterion supported whenever a post (a) referred to a situation in which people or entities were in direct, explicit opposition to one another over an issue; (b) described a situation involving war or physical violence; or (c) employed war metaphors in discussing other events, issues, or situations.

Obviously, given that Daily Kos is a political discussion site, the Presidential primaries and other races received a great deal of attention during the time of the sample. While candidates for office are ostensibly in conflict with one another, it's worth noting that I did not consider just any discussion of elections to be an example of conflict. This is because there are alternative ways of conceiving of elections that downplay conflict, using frames such as community organizing or a "contest of ideas," for example. As such, I avoided labeling election-related posts as involving conflict unless they explicitly met the criteria above.

It was a bit more difficult to decide when the CONFLICT value had been disrupted. Ostensibly a disruptive post would foreground harmony and cooperation.

Frequently, however, posts that underscored cooperation actually did so in the context of war metaphors or larger conflicts, describing alliances in the face of a common enemy. One example comes from this post, titled "Not Goodbye:"

> John Edwards is a politician, the leader of an election campaign that went sadly awry, not the leader of a reform movement. But he is the welcome ally of all us rabble in the struggle against the two Americas, against the greedheads and those who claim to despise the idea of class warfare but practice it—from the top-down—every day. The alliance did not end Wednesday, as John proved by returning to the place where he started his campaign, New Orleans.

In the end, there were very few clear-cut examples of disruption.

Illustrations. Examples of conflict might be roughly divided into election conflict, issue conflict, violence, general enmity, legislative conflict, ad hominem conflict, and mock conflict. Election conflict included those instances in which discussion of elections was couched in conflict terms, as in this example:

> In terms of the White House, I think any of our candidates have the potential to wallop any Republican candidate, provided they make the distinction between the parties crystal clear for the voters and call the GOP out on their lies every step of the way.

Issue conflict was present when a post described conflict over issues in non-legislative situations:

> For seven years now, if you've asked questions about al Qaeda or Osama bin Laden, you were told it was because you were a traitor. If you questioned Iraq policy, you were objectively pro-Saddam. Asked about education, you were a secret racist; healthcare, a socialist. If you thought courts should review this president's security policies, you were hit with the state secrets privilege. If you sought to circumscribe the president's powers, you were hit with a signing statement. If you had questions about his execution of the law, your subpoenas would be defied, and if you tried to enforce them, you'd be told to go Cheney yourself.

Violence, largely self-explanatory, referred to posts that dealt with war and physical conflict—often the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but sometimes other eruptions of violence, such as in this diary rescue:

> Robert Ullmann calls our attention to news of another country in Second Kenyan MP murdered this week.

General enmity describes posts that did not refer to a specific episode of conflict, but nonetheless cast a person or group as being in opposition to Daily Kos readers, such as when Bill in Portland Maine, in a printed Q&A with another front pager asked the question, "What kind of music makes you feel invincible to the GOP horde?"

Legislative conflict refers to posts that painted debates over bills, budgets, or other legislative matters in terms of conflict. The primary examples of legislative conflict during the time of the two-week sample referred to the ongoing Senate votes on various amendments to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, all of which were titled, appropriately, "FISA Fight."

Ad hominem conflict describes posts or passages that discuss personal attacks being traded by persons or entities, such as this commentary discussing Hillary Clinton's refusal to debate on MSNBC:

> Hillary Clinton is absolutely right to call them on this. There's just one thing: Apparently, she's still willing to debate on Fox, a network that rose to prominence bashing her and her husband. So, good start, but keep on going.

Mock conflict referred to the use of conflict frames and metaphors in humorous or satirical ways, such as in this parody of the history of Super Bowl Sunday, written by the Daily Kos system administrator, ct:

> The saint whose career proved to be the best match for Super Bowl Sunday was Vincentius of Langobardia, commonly known in English as St. Vincent Lombardi. … On account of Grimoald's illness, Vincentius was charged with defending Lombardy from Chieftain depredations. On a January afternoon in 667, the armies met in battle. The first half of the battle, according to contemporary accounts, was fierce, with the Chiefs almost gaining the upper hand. During the second half, though, a series of successes led to Vincentius defeating the Chiefs and forcing their King to accept baptism. Chastened, the Chiefs retreated.

CONSONANCE

Support for this value was mixed. Twenty-four percent of the subsample contained strong examples, while an additional six percent contained minor examples. At the same time, there were 17 instances in which the value was disrupted. Many of

these disruptive posts, however, fell into Galtung and Ruge's scheme of unexpectedness-within-predictability—describing, for instance, the outcome of Senate votes, or statements by Democratic politicians that were incongruous with the wishes of the community, but nonetheless entirely comprehensible within its conceptual framework. There were few instances of genuine surprise. Many supporting examples of CONSONANCE were also disruptive to the NOVELTY/UNEXPECTEDNESS criterion, an issue I discuss later on.

Applying the concept. CONSONANCE is another value, like COMPETITION and COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE, that depends less on actual printed content than on the mental state of the person authoring it. As with other criteria of this type, I considered consonance to be supported only when it was explicitly underscored in the text of a post, such as when an author stated that a particular occurrence was to be expected, or that a piece of new information vindicated an opinion she had stated earlier.

Because CONSONANCE, in Galtung and Ruge's (1965) original formulation included the possibility that an author wished an event to happen, I considered the value to be disrupted when a front pager expressed disappointment in the information she relayed. I also judged the criterion disrupted when an author expressed genuine surprise at an occurrence, or explicitly stated that she was writing with the purpose of challenging readers' assumptions.

Illustrations. Examples of consonance might be roughly classed as pattern observation, vindication, and mantras. Pattern observation occurred whenever a front pager, in recounting an event, suggested that it was typical of the group involved or that an occurrence was to be expected for other reasons:

> As if we needed additional proof that stupidity flows freely from Republican state legislators, bl968 offers a brief, but frightening, reminder of this truism in Campfield: Quixotic attempt to mandate curricular limitations shows anti-gay bias.

Often this involved an explicit reference to some pattern of events, as in this excerpt regarding Hillary Clinton's decision not to debate on MSNBC after an anchor accused the Clintons of "pimping out" their daughter during the Democratic primaries:

> On a conference call today, the Clinton campaign called out MSNBC for this remark and the larger pattern of offensive remarks from the network's employees.

Moreover, front pagers were quick to point out when information became available confirming opinions they had stated earlier, as Kos does in this example of vindication:

> As I've said before, the best endorsements are mayors with patronage machines. SoCal is going HUGE for Hillary, and that's because of the L.A. machine working on her behalf. … Update II: A friend seconds my thing about mayors, saying he saw it in action in New Haven all day. Those mayors are the key. For real.

Lastly, authors recounted and openly expressed approval of mantras they felt encapsulated their personal beliefs or the mission of the Daily Kos community:

> I like John Edwards. I like him for reminding us that populism, like liberalism, is a badge that we should proudly reclaim. It's not wrong to fight for those who have no voice.

As discussed above, disruptive posts generally fit Galtung and Ruge's mold of unexpectedness-within-predictability, and generally referred to political actions, political outcomes, reader assumptions, and retractions.

Disruptive posts that dealt with political actions expressed disappointment with decisions made by lawmakers or other groups participating in the political process. For example, the site's managing editor, SusanG, wrote this post expressing frustration with the New York chapter of the National Organization of Women, which put out what was arguably a poorly worded press release in response to Ted Kennedy's endorsement of Barack Obama's Presidential candidacy:

> I could've sworn we'd dumped the notion of sticking up for men when we didn't think they deserved it. Or shutting our mouths when we disagreed with them. Or "burying our anger" if they compromised on issues important to us. If

> New York NOW members kept quiet about Kennedy's stands—until yesterday—and were "always waiting in the wings," I think they've missed an important stop or two on the Equality Express.

Other disruptive posts voiced disappointment with political outcomes, such as the defeat of an amendment to the FISA bill that was broadly supported by the Daily Kos community, but voted down in the Senate:

> In rejecting the Feinstein "exclusivity" amendment to the FISA revision considered on the Senate floor today—an amendment that failed by a vote of 57 Ayes to 41 Noes, thanks to another "painless filibuster" of precisely the type we were promised would not be tolerated on this bill—the Senate has voted to say that although they were passing a law governing surveillance, it was OK if the President decided that he really didn't like the law very much and wished to make up his own instead.

A number of disruptive posts set out to challenge readers' assumptions. Kos, for instance, posted this note to readers in the wake of the February 5th primaries:

> A quick question: After Super Tuesday, will you continue cherry picking the polls that look best for your candidate, even if they are crappy pollsters like Zogby and ARG, or not? Look, even the good polls are oftentimes wrong, so no poll is perfect. Even the near-perfect Field Poll flubbed its California numbers. But the embracing of the execrable Zogby while pissing on the generally solid SUSA the past couple of weeks was ridiculous.

Finally, there were also examples of retractions, in which authors corrected earlier statements that had proved erroneous. The alternative, of course, could be a libel suit for the site, but such posts were nonetheless instances of sharing information that flew in the face of author expectations.

CONTINUITY AND COOPTION

CONTINUITY/COOPTION proved to be one of the best supported values in this study, with strong examples present in 65 percent of posts, and minor examples in a further 21 percent. There were no disruptive examples. The likely reasons for this are numerous. The synchronous nature of the site privileges short posts that users can easily digest and move on from. Authors who had a great deal to say on a single topic often broke their posts into series, which continued for hours, days, or weeks. Some

authors took on specialist roles, covering a certain topic in perpetuity, or turning their areas of interest into recurring features. Many front page authors were previously popular diarists, who may have accumulated their readership precisely by following certain issues continuously. Some genres of front page blogging, such as liveblogging, also require posting regular updates on the same topic. Moreover, the site's dual existence as a social movement means that it will inevitably be concerned with the same issues over time. Lastly, any medium with a regular user base, whether a newspaper or a blog, must keep within some defined range of topics if it is to satisfy the needs and expectations of its audience. This tendency is discussed again with regard to the TIMELINESS criterion.

Applying the concept. In any publication, it is possible to print multiple pieces on the same topic without exemplifying the CONTINUITY/COOPTION value. After all, a common complaint about the mass media, dating back to Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) is that the media decontextualize events, stripping them of any sense of history. As such, I considered the CONTINUITY/COOPTION value to be present only when a post made references to one or more previous entries on Daily Kos, referenced events in the community's history, or explicitly introduced its subject in terms of an ongoing concern.

Illustrations. Instances of CONTINUITY AND COOPTION might by roughly described as updates, posts in a series, appeals to history, appeals to shared knowledge, vindication, background information, retrospectives, and comments "on a related note."

Often, especially when liveblogging, authors would append updates to their posts, such as this one from the Florida primaries:

> Update (smintheus): With 41% of precincts reporting the Republican race now stands at: McCain 372,643 (34%); Romney 344,539 (32%); Giuliani 166,138 (15%); Huckabee 145,532 (13%)

Oftentimes, posts were demarcated as being part of a series, usually by way of giving them a common title. A prominent example consisted of the continual updates on the progress of amendments to the FISA bill as they wound their way through Congress. As mentioned previously, all were titled, "FISA Fight," with various subtitles indicating their specific content.

Some posts made appeals to history, referring for instance, to the candidacy of Barack Obama as the latest chapter in the civil rights movement, or to a particular policy stance as a revival of the Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. These are nice examples of the ability of front pagers to fold additional topics into current issues.

More local to the site were appeals to shared knowledge, often coming in the form of calls to action (which, at times, were also part of series of posts as the FISA Fight example demonstrates). For example, in addition to providing a hyperlink to previous instructions, the following excerpt paints an entreaty to users as a continuing aspect of community life on Daily Kos:

> You know the drill. This time, call all of your Senators, including the Republicans, including Smith, Coleman, Sununu, and Snowe.

As mentioned in the above section on CONSONANCE, authors frequently posted information they felt vindicated opinions they had espoused previously. This was also a form of continuity, not only giving continued life to a particular issue, but frequently bending new information to fit prior concerns.

Authors also frequently linked to previous posts as a way of providing background information on a current post, or to avoid rehashing arguments they had made elsewhere:

> As I have written about in numerous essays (here, here, here, and here), I think we are on the verge of a possibly transforming election akin to the 1932 election. In 1930 Democrats posted big gains in the House and Senate, and eked out narrow majorities in both chambers for the first time in a generation.

Retrospectives were posts that explicitly looked back at how an issue had played out over time. For instance, during the two-week subsample, Kos posted a table compiling several months' worth of results from the site's weekly election straw poll, illustrating how the community's support had shifted across the candidates in the time leading up to and during the primaries.

Lastly, there were many classic examples of co-option, in which a new issue was explicitly linked to another that was receiving attention on the site, such as this diary rescue:

> We are familiar with the deleterious telecom immunity and civil liberties issues with warrantless wiretapping. Now, Dr Colossus walks us through some of the inherent security risks to the US communications networks in FISA-PAA: Engineering Our Own (In)Security.

DRAMA

Despite sharply limiting the operational definition of the DRAMA criterion in my analysis, it was still well-supported, with strong examples appearing amid 24 percent of the sample and minor examples appearing in an additional 14 percent. There were two examples in which the criterion was disrupted, both highly reflexive references to "media narratives" and to frames employed by interest groups and the mainstream news media. It's worth mentioning that in my informal observation of the site since the sample was taken, such references to and deconstructions of media narratives are far more common than they appear in this subsample. Thus, were the sample taken over a longer time period, or perhaps from a different time in the election cycle, the results for this value might prove far more mixed. Additionally, the level of reflexivity with which Kossacks approach drama—discussing media narratives, proposing counter-narratives, and so on—markedly complicates this value. The same might be said, however, for the mainstream news media, which today appears to engage in a great deal of introspection and self-reporting.

Applying the concept. The DRAMA criterion was a somewhat difficult one to operationalize. Even if we ignore the issues of reflexivity discussed in the preceding section, deciding whether a post or a piece of writing is dramatic, or has dramatic qualities, risks being a highly subjective exercise, especially given that some theorists, like Walter Fisher (1987), believe that all communication is narrative in nature. To avoid opening the floodgates, I again took a conservative view of what constituted drama. I judged the value to be supported only when (a) an author made use of an overtly dramatic trope, such as when front pager, mcjoan, referred to the possibility of voting a candidate out of office as "plotting our electoral revenge;" or (b) when a post recounted an event in a blow-by-blow narrative style like that used in a novel, as in this voting story by Scout Finch:

> We got in line, which was already 3 blocks long. Temperatures were falling fast and everyone was sniffling and shivering from the ice cold breeze that steadily pounded us.… Eventually, my group made it into the building. Sweet success! As we entered the building, the line was split—registered Democrats to one side and Independents/Republicans who wanted to switch parties on the other. We continued to wait patiently and we could see the line outside still snaking along for several blocks.

I considered the value disrupted when a post explicitly deconstructed, or proved reflexive about, the use of narrative in discussing an issue, as in this example, in which Kos critiques the Clinton campaign's attack on the Obama campaign's early use of a national advertising campaign, which resulted in advertisements that ran in states where the candidates had pledged not to campaign:

> It's obvious that Hillary needed something—anything!—to change the storyline from the good ol' fashioned whooping she got in South Carolina. But like the "party of ideas" bit, the "national ad buy in Florida" bit is simply and substantively a dishonest gambit on the part of the Clinton campaign.

Illustrations. There was little pattern to the manner in which the drama criterion appeared, and it is therefore difficult to broadly characterize its usage. There were several contexts, however, in which it came up with relative frequency. One of these

was in diary rescues, which frequently employed the sort of dramatic language common to old movie trailers in summarizing user diaries:

> ShawnGBR will terrify you with a diary about how easy it is to be spied upon on the internets in You've got a file on you.

The blow-by-blow narrative form of the DRAMA criterion, unsurprisingly, appeared frequently in testimonials written by front pagers, much like the voting story penned by Scout Finch above (though that particular example was actually part of a post I classed as an action alert). Many of the user diaries recommended in diary rescue posts also employed this style.

Lastly, the twists and turns of the primary elections frequently invited dramatic, and often humorous, metaphors:

> And last night I saw Glenn Beck and Mary Matalin ("My eyes! They burn!") absolutely savaging John McCain as the Republican candidate who would make Ted Kennedy look like Barry Goldwater. I always said that when evil robots developed feelings things would get interesting, but this is too good.

ELITE PEOPLE

The outcome of this criterion is rather complex, which the numbers will show. Because of numerous potential confounds, there is not enough evidence to support or disconfirm this value.[2] On the one hand there was a particularly high number of strong examples, which appeared amid 40 percent of the subsample. Minor examples appeared in a further two percent. Despite this strong showing, however, there was also a rather high number of disruptive examples, which occurred in 6 percent of the subsample. In addition—and here's where things become unusual—the largest number of posts, 45 percent of the sample, contained a mixed result for this value. In other words, 45 posts contained references to *both* elite and non-elite people.

[2] Although there was not enough evidence in the subsample to confirm this value, an examination of tags on the site does provide some evidence that the criterion is in play. Nine of the 25 most popular tags on the blog in May of 2007 and eight in August 2008 are names of elite politicians.

Applying the concept. ELITE PEOPLE was, in principle, an easily operationalized concept—it simply refers to the tendency of the media to focus on "famous faces." Complications set in, however, when one tries to locate the bright line demarcating elite persons from non-elites. I attempted, in part, to emulate Herbert Gans (1979), who pointed out the national news media's tendency to focus on the President, Vice President, Presidential candidates, and a small cadre of "leading federal officials." Thus, when it came to government officials, I limited my definition of elite people to members of these groups. As we've seen, however, many scholars extend this category to include celebrities, which I did also, regarding Hollywood personalities and national news anchors, for instance, as elites. Finally, I also included CEOs and other high-ranking officers within large corporations as exemplars of this value.

Illustrations. It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to uncover reasons for the large numbers of posts discussing elite people. A substantial one has to do with the site's main topic of discussion and raison d'être: U.S. politics. As a political discussion site, Daily Kos, unsurprisingly, pays a great deal of attention to the actions of the White House, leading federal officials, and Presidential candidates. It's worth noting that this is not inevitable, as there are other ways of conceiving of politics that focus on highly local community organizing, as opposed to big federal government. Caveats apply, of course, and help to explain the mixed nature of the results here.

First, alongside discussion of federal politics there *is* a substantial focus on local, grassroots organizing on Daily Kos. For instance, most disruptive posts focused on non-elite (by Gans' definition) politicians in primary races for seats in the House of Representatives. And there were other disruptive entries, both in diary rescues and posts by front pagers that dealt with the political efforts of modest non-profit groups, as well as various types of community organizing. All of these posts contained

references to non-elite persons. At the same time, given that Daily Kos invites participation from users across the United States and the world, it stands to reason that federal politics serves as a common coin upon which such a dispersed community functions, news and knowledge of it being relatively accessible from anywhere. There are other potential reasons, of course, for the large number of references to elite persons in this study. The sample was taken from a high point in the primary election cycle, during which Presidential candidates were stumping constantly, and the returns from primaries and caucuses were flowing freely. All of these things were obviously going to receive prominent attention on a site dedicated to U.S. politics. It was also a time during which large corporations were announcing their quarterly earnings, which put the national media spotlight on corporate officers, and may in turn have had an agenda-setting effect on the discussion at Daily Kos.

Given all these potential confounds, which cropped up in my attempt to study this news value—some stemming from the decision to examine a site that dealt primarily with national politics, and others from the timing of my sample—what's remarkable is not the extent to which elite persons appeared on Daily Kos. What's impressive is the number of posts that contained mixed results, or focused altogether on non-elites. As mentioned previously, some of these mixed results and disruptions came in the form of entries focusing on primary elections featuring non-elite candidates. Many others came from diary rescues, which were oversampled in the study, and which invariably contained a mixture of entries relating to local happenings, non-political interests, and non-elite news on the one hand, and diaries discussing national politics and elite politicians on the other. Similarly, digest newsletters, like "Cheers and Jeers," contained a mixture of oddly-enough style entries featuring local stories about non-elites, and references to national politicians. Additionally, amid the first-hand testimonials by front pagers and rescued diary entries

by users, there were many attempts to relate personal experiences to the policies espoused by elite politicians, resulting in a number of entries that mixed references to elite and non-elite people.

ELITE REGIONS

The results for ELITE REGIONS were even more complicated than those for ELITE PEOPLE, and again were inconclusive, in large part due to potential confounds related to the timing of the sample. Forty-three percent of posts contained mixed results, meaning they referenced both elite and non-elite regions. Another six percent of posts disrupted this value altogether. However, 13 percent did prove to be strong examples of the elite region value, and a further five percent contained minor examples.

Applying the concept. As with ELITE PEOPLE, the value of ELITE REGIONS is easily defined, but difficult to delimit. Because Shoemaker and Reese (1991) have documented a tendency in the mainstream media to focus on the East and West Coast power centers, I deemed references to coastal states and to Washington, D.C. as supporting the elite regions value. I did, however, make a couple of exceptions to this rule. First, I did not regard references dealing explicitly with rural or underdeveloped areas in coastal states as supporting elite regions. I also excluded the state of Maine from the list of elite regions, as it is sparsely populated and, by most measures, economically depressed. Along with coastal states, I included the city of Chicago as an elite region, as it is a major power center, both financially and politically, within the U.S. As for international regions, I identified references to Western European countries and cities as supporting the elite regions value. I considered the value to be disrupted whenever a post discussed a non-elite region.

Illustrations. Many of the same factors that complicated analysis of ELITE PEOPLE also apply here. Diary rescues and newsletter digests like "Cheers and Jeers"

frequently contained mixtures of local items about non-elite regions alongside discussions of beltway politics. A number of testimonial posts contained disruptive first-hand accounts of happenings in non-elite regions of the country.

Moreover, frequent discussions of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provided myriad examples of references non-elite regions—just as they do in the mainstream news media. As Gans (1979) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) before him noted, non-elite nations frequently become news insofar as they are tied to the interests of elite ones, such as the U.S.

Perhaps the largest driver behind the mixed results for this value, however, was the constant flow of election returns and other election-related announcements, many of which came from non-elite regions. This was, of course, a time when the mainstream news media was also focused on these same regions, which usually receive far less attention—thus even a study of the mainstream media, which news values explicitly intend to describe, would hit problematic territory applying the ELITE REGIONS value in the time period surrounding Super Tuesday. As such, it's difficult to say anything conclusive about the ELITE REGIONS criterion when looking only at the present sample. It's worth noting, however, that the focus on non-elite regions during an election cycle centers around what impact the electorates of these places will have on Washington, D.C. and the (elite) country as a whole. So, though there's little conclusive we can say about the ELITE REGIONS value during this atypical time on the site, the results obtained in this sample do not necessarily contradict the findings of scholars who have studied news values in relation to the traditional news media.

In this vein, it's also worth noting that many elite cities and regions have large Democratic constituencies, and thus may receive additional attention from a liberal political discussion site like Daily Kos. Several of the non-elite politicians discussed on the site were running for office in elite regions: a Washington, D.C. suburb, and

two districts in the Chicago area. The reason is most likely because these are highly competitive districts for liberal Democrats, giving candidates there a good chance at office, whereas races in largely conservative districts, where progressive candidates' chances were slimmer, would arguably have been less appealing as targets for the site's activism and campaign donations.

Facts, Statistics, and Aggregates

Despite excising parts of the operational definition of this value that proved impossible to apply, it was nonetheless overwhelmingly supported, with 45 percent of posts containing strong examples, and a further 19 displaying minor examples. There was only one example of disruption, in which the statistics on numbers of people voting for Hillary Clinton in the Florida Democratic primary were said to be irrelevant owing to the state's violation of party rules governing the primary process.

Applying the concept. Again, here was a value that was difficult to operationalize without opening the floodgates to every post on the site. One news value upon which this criterion is based is FACTICITY, which refers to the easy availability of a web of mutually supporting facts about an event. While in principle, FACTICITY seems like a reasonable news value, it's ultimately near-impossible to operationalize. Surely every post contains "facts." At what point should we say it contains enough facts to meet this criterion? And how do we even know how easily obtained those facts were? One could conjecture, and attempt to distinguish based on whether the facts of a post came from mainstream sources like the *Washington Post* website, from less obvious Internet sources, or required additional investigation on the part of the author. But such a scheme ultimately left far too much gray area for comfort. As such, I limited my operationalization of this value to the use by authors of statistics and aggregates. I decided that a strong example would involve a post that relied heavily on numbers and/or statistical analysis, while minor examples would

simply reflect the use of statistics in a post that would still make sense without supporting figures.

As with some other news criteria, this one likely hits on a phenomenon that operates in ways too nuanced to be captured in a crude content analysis. One user, pico, had this to say about the way in which facts are handled on Daily Kos:

> One of the really interesting dynamics I've noticed here is the way appeal to authority is handled when users are unwilling to give too much information about themselves. I once had a user dismiss a diary I wrote on the grounds that s/he had a degree in that area (little did that user know, so did I!). Common criteria for authority seem even less convincing in this kind of space, which is why links and specific information become even more of a necessity. To compare: if I were watching a program about ancient history (not my field), and it included an interview with such-and-such an expert, I'd be inclined to take whatever that expert says seriously. If I were reading a comment here that repeated the same claims, I'd expect sourcing that I could research for myself. So in a way, the deflating of authority has some benefits!

Illustrations. The number of strong examples of this value was undoubtedly boosted by the timing of the sample, which as already mentioned, included a large number of posts discussing the fundraising totals of Presidential candidates or various primary results. Many of the site's liveblogging efforts involved simply displaying the raw numbers from election returns. Even disregarding these, however, there were many strong examples relating to non-election topics, including, for example, an examination of site traffic numbers, posts on spending in Iraq, as well as discussions on the relative merits, in quantitative terms, of different forms of alternative energy, and a sizable essay on the country's pandemic preparedness efforts, which was replete with charts, graphs, and statistics.

And, of course, most posts made use of numbers in passing, ranging from dollar amounts and survey numbers to casual estimates of various figures employed in first-hand accounts, such as this recounting by front pager Scout Finch of the lines of voters attending her local caucus in Kansas:

> The line did not end. As I was leaving, some 2.5 hours after I arrived, the line was still a solid 4+ blocks long—in the freezing rain. Given that the law says that you had to be in line by 7pm, that meant those folks had already been on line—in the freezing rain—for an hour and a half and they still had a long wait ahead.

For the most part, the everyday use of numbers on display here isn't unique to Daily Kos, though the citation culture of the blog discussed previously, in which statements must usually be backed up with sources, certainly supports and encourages the use of figures.

REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT

From a strictly statistical standpoint, the news value REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT was—of course—heavily supported. However, given that the site's very focus is politics, this study cannot be considered a real test of this value. While it might be possible to make an argument that the popularity of a site dedicated to politics is in itself proof that this value extends beyond the news room, such a claim goes beyond the scope of this study. Given that I looked at a site dedicated to discussing U.S. politics, the fact that many references to government occurred—with strong examples among 85 percent of the sample, and no instances of disruption—ultimately says very little about the value's universality.

Applying the concept. I considered the REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT value supported whenever I saw discussion of government officials, government agencies, or elections and candidates for government office. While there were no examples of outright disruption, there were three instances of mixed results, in which a post contained both supportive and disruptive examples. The disruptive passages were instances in which the author downplayed the importance of government with regard to an event or issue. This excerpt by Meteor Blades provides a good example:

> For me, as a Popular Front Democrat, a radical democrat—small and capital "d"—politics have always been about far more than elections and legislation. Political parties are only a means to ends, one of which is implementing

> reforms that originate and are fought over, sometimes for decades, outside the electoral process.

However, aside from this passage and two others, very similar in tone, there were no challenges to the GOVERNMENT value. Due to the ubiquity of this value, and the size of the confound discussed above, I do not attempt a further list of illustrations.

HUMOR

While HUMOR was far from the most well-supported value in this study, there were numerous strong examples among 14 percent of the sample, and minor examples amid an additional five percent. Most examples came from newsletters, like "Cheers and Jeers," which were explicitly geared toward humor and satire. There were no examples of disruption.

Applying the concept. Strictly speaking, news values are defined as originating with an event and not in the discussion of it, though, as we have seen, many authors have regarded this as a specious or problematic division. However, in doing my best to apply the news values in this study as they were originally intended, I felt it important to attempt to maintain the distinction where possible. The HUMOR value was one instance in which I felt this was particularly important. There were many posts in the subsample that were full of scathing satire and sarcasm, but which dealt with issues and occurrences that the authors clearly regarded as deadly serious. As such, I limited my operational definition of the humor criterion to include only (a) instances in which an author explicitly suggested that an occurrence was funny, and (b) posts obviously written with the intent of amusing their audience. Were a post to have explicitly stated that its subject was not funny or not a laughing matter, I would have regarded this as disruptive. However, there were no examples of disruption in the subsample.

Illustrations. By far the majority of humorous posts came in the form of newsletters like "Sunday Talk" and "Cheers and Jeers" that were overtly intended to

entertain. Several such items appeared in diary rescues as well. There was also a tongue-in-cheek post poking fun at Super Bowl Sunday by recounting a fictitious history of the event:

> Most people are aware of the pre-Christian origins of many of our holidays, like Christmas, Easter, and Halloween. Many have forgotten, though, that one of our most important holidays also has its origins deep in the mists of history, long before Jesus of Nazareth began preaching in Judea. I refer, of course, to Super Bowl Sunday.

NOVELTY AND UNEXPECTEDNESS

This value received mixed support. The pattern of results for the NOVELTY/UNEXPECTEDNESS value was very similar to that for CLARITY, with numerous strong and minor examples (15 and 13 respectively), along with numerous (six) instances of disruption. The reasons for this are also similar, as unexpectedness and predictability were frequently deployed in a partisan fashion.

Applying the concept. As with CONSONANCE, UNEXPECTEDNESS has far more to do with the mindset of an author than an event itself. Given that I could not discern the mindset of the authors, I once again operationalized the value conservatively, considering it supported only when an author explicitly stated that something was novel, unusual, or unexpected. Given our previous discussion of the manner in which CONSONANCE and UNEXPECTEDNESS form an oppositional binary, it is unsurprising that all of the posts which disrupted the UNEXPECTEDNESS value were also examples of CONSONANCE—in which the author claimed that an occurrence was to be expected, or was part of a larger pattern:

> Like seemingly every Republican in DC, Hulshof has been looking to get out of Washington for a while; last year he placed his name in contention for a position as President of the University of Missouri.

Illustrations. Most supporting examples of NOVELTY/UNEXPECTEDNESS came in the form of first-person testimonials, in which an author described an experience as being

unusual or unexpected, as in this example where Scout Finch discusses the large Democratic turnout in her generally conservative district:

> Folks were "fired up!" No, they weren't chanting or singing songs on line, but they were sticking it out and the vast majority of those voters were wearing Obama stickers. Young, old, all racial lines.....they were standing in the freezing rain for Obama. In Kansas. That was inspiring.

Another example comes from Kos, who posted a liveblog concerning Maria Shriver's endorsement of Barack Obama:

> Holy shit, that was unexpected. At the big rally at UCLA with Michelle Obama, Oprah, and Caroline Kennedy, Maria Shriver just unexpectedly showed up to endorse Obama.

A good number of other supporting examples came from diary rescues, which often billed the diaries they advertised as containing new or startling information:

> dogemperor continues to keep us informed about dominionism in this alarming update: G.W. Bush and Ken Blackwell Gothard cultists, too.

As mentioned previously, disruptive examples of the UNEXPECTEDNESS criterion tended to fit the CONSONANCE criterion, supporting the notion that the two exist in an oppositional binary. As I indicate in the discussion of CONSONANCE, it seems probable that what really exists here is "unexpectedness-within-predictability," however without some first-hand familiarity with the authors' decision-making process, of the sort this study does not afford, it is impossible to say whether the unexpected and novel events recorded here were in fact part of a larger consonant framework. What can be said is that the pattern of results is similar to that for CLARITY, indicating that NOVELTY/UNEXPECTEDNESS may also be a value that is deployed in a partisan fashion, with Republican actions fitting a pattern, while the actions of others are considered less predictable.

REFERENCE TO AN ORGANIZED PUBLIC

The ORGANIZED PUBLIC value was heavily supported, with 47 percent of posts displaying strong examples and a further 18 percent including minor examples. Only two posts disrupted this criterion.

Applying the concept. I considered the ORGANIZED PUBLIC criterion supported whenever a post referenced a religious organization, professional society, activist group, advocacy organization, or other organized non-profit group. I also regarded descriptions of a political candidate's mobilized supporters and references to organized political movements as supporting this value, along with posts that overtly identified Daily Kos itself as an organized movement.

Disruptive posts, though few and far between, were ones that challenged the notion that there was any public interested in a given issue, such as in this example in which front pager, Kagro X takes *U.S. News* columnist Doug Schoen to task for suggesting that Americans would be supportive of a new third political party:

> Schoen isn't just a regular person, whose excuse for an attraction to a third party could be anything from pure principle to pure boredom. Schoen's interest in it is that as a political consultant now likely widely distrusted in both major parties, a third party bid increases his chances of getting paid by someone, just as Woody Allen observed that bisexuality immediately doubled your chances of getting a date on Saturday night. And as luck would have it, Schoen has scientifically determined that Americans are clamoring specifically for the candidacies of people with enormous personal wealth, who can easily pay the costs of the huge consulting fees that go along with a presidential bid. What an amazing coincidence!

Illustrations. The publics to which the blog referred were extremely diverse, and most would be difficult to break into even rough categories. There were a few types of references that did occur with some regularity, however. For instance, occasionally, a post referred to the Daily Kos itself as an organized social movement, referencing its annual conventions, its nominal membership in the larger "netroots" movement, or its

support of various bills, campaigns, and politicians. This post, part of a donation drive for Chicago-area Democrat Mark Pera's House campaign, provides an example:

> We're at 3,920 contributions for Pera, trying to hit 4,000 by the end of the day. Don't let the night shift have all the fun! Let's close out today's goal before the night crew arrives!

Many references were made to organized political and social movements, both past and present:

> I avidly followed the Freedom Riders, marveling that these few hundred men and women willingly put themselves at the mercy of racists who had no qualms about killing them if that's what it took to stop their actions. It was their courage that spurred me, three years later, to join Freedom Summer to register voters in Mississippi.

Candidates' supporters were frequently referred to in a manner that suggested they were themselves parts of organized social movements:

> Five long years ago, on March 15, 2003, Howard Dean began a list of those questions when he galvanized the Democratic base and ignited a movement with a speech at the California State Democratic Convention. The "What I want to know" speech is the one thing I constantly hear fellow Democrats reference when they tell me about gaining or regaining their passion for politics.

PERSONIFICATION

This value was supported. From the standpoint of descriptive statistics, the pattern of results for the PERSONIFICATION criterion was similar to that for SCALE/IMPACT/CONSEQUENCES, discussed below. There were a large number of strong examples, which appeared in 64 percent of posts, with another four percent exhibiting minor examples. At the same time there were a small, but noteworthy number of disruptions amid four percent of the subsample.

Applying the concept. Many authors suggest that the news media's tendency toward personification effectively overwrites discussion of abstract social forces. In operationalizing the criterion I considered that the truth may not be quite so simple. In fact, personification can cut both ways, masking social forces on some occasions, but

bringing them to light on others. In examining the sample, when an author described a person in relation to an abstract trend, it proved important to ask: Was she simply using the person to embody the trend? Or was she using the trend to deconstruct the notion that an individual's actions are isolated?

Although the answer was sometimes unclear, I decided on this as a litmus test for identifying instances of personification. If a post relating a person and a trend foregrounded the person, I judged it to support personification. If it was highly reflexive, starting with an individual example, but ultimately aiming to unpack an abstract concept, I considered it not to be supportive of PERSONIFICATION. And on those occasions when an author explicitly denied the importance of individuals, I considered the value disrupted.

I also regarded posts or passages that dealt strictly with personal stories, without discussing larger social issues, as supportive of the PERSONIFICATION criterion.

Illustrations. Numerous examples of PERSONIFICATION revolved around politicians' legislative votes. A FISA Fight post, for instance, listed by name the Senators who voted to give telecommunications companies legal immunity for their participation in the Whitehouse's warrantless wiretapping program. It also singled out Howard Dean as a leading light of the progressive movement:

> This group bought the "keep us safe" canard hook, line, and sinker. Bush, his Republicans, and their telco buddies were a stronger force than us on this one. On days like this, it's hard to remember that this is, as Howard Dean told us at Yearly Kos last summer, a long term project.

Other supporting examples of PERSONIFICATION involved the attaching of symbolic significance to a person's candidacy for office:

> If Mark Pera defeats Dan Lipinski in Illinois' 3rd congressional district, we'll be sending a message to Democrats in Congress that they no longer have a free pass, that they can no longer ignore the will of their base back home.

Similarly, the complex activity of large campaign staffs and organizations was frequently masked by the tendency to refer to their efforts as the actions of the single individual running for office. For instance, take the title of the post, "Obama Raises Stunning $32 Million in January."

Other posts discussed the impact of individuals on history and policy. This tribute to Horace Greeley, for instance, prefaced a diary rescue posted on his birthday:

> In 1811 Horace Greeley was born. A mover and shaker in both news and political circles, he towed a hard line for the early Republican party (which bears more resemblance to the modern Democratic party than the current corporate carpetbaggers we have in the Republican party now). He is famously noted for extolling the intrepid settlers of the time to "Go West, young man," although the quote did not originate from him. As a man of influence, he tried to use the bully pulpit provided him to better the lives of all Americans, not just a chosen few.

Not all examples of personification involved politicians, of course. Many trends were discussed in terms of the actions of individuals, such as this post on the rise of the wind-power industry in Texas:

> Outstanding in the Field: Winds of Change in West Texas was Eddie C's outstanding Diary about Cliff Etheredge, a one-armed cotton farmer from Roscoe, Texas. Etheredge says: "We used to cuss the wind. Killed our crops, carried our moisture away, dried out our land. But because of the advent of the wind farms, we've had a complete 180-degree attitude change. Now, we love the wind."

And, of course, there were personal stories written on the site that had little to do with larger societal trends:

> agnostic lost his dog, and shares his feelings in An ode to a family member. Give him a little love.

PROXIMITY

The PROXIMITY value was moderately supported, with strong examples among 16 percent of posts, and an additional four posts containing minor examples. There were also four instances of disruption, and 16 posts containing mixed results.

Applying the concept. In a sense, the vast majority of content on Daily Kos fits the proximity value, in that so much of it is about the United States, as opposed to other countries. However, I attempted to operationalize the value in a stricter sense, to mean reference to events local to an author. I considered the value supported when a poster explicitly stated that the events she was describing were occurring in her region, or I was able to surmise that this was the case (for instance, when the author Bill in Portland Maine discussed Portland-area happenings). Thus, I did not consider events the author watched on national television and blogged about to support the proximity value, unless the poster explicitly stated that the event was going on nearby.

I considered the value disrupted when a poster chose to analyze an event occurring far away. However, in doing so, I distinguished between discussing a far-away event and discussing media coverage of a far-away event. As such, references to CNN's reporting of election returns or critiques of a story on the national news, both of which are locally available to anyone with a television and cable, did not count as disruptive to the PROXIMITY value, despite the fact that they might sometimes refer to faraway states.

In several instances I was faced with the task of deciding whether a first-hand event should count as proximal, despite the fact that the author was recounting something seen while traveling. On the one hand, a post can't get much more proximal than a first-hand account. And on the other hand, when a newspaper sends a reporter on a trip, the journalist's correspondence does not count as local news. I decided, in the end, that if the author was traveling in her capacity as a Daily Kos writer, that her posts could be disruptive, whereas if the poster was on vacation or traveling on other business and blogged a first-hand account, I would regard their post as supporting the PROXIMITY value.

Illustrations. Unsurprisingly, many posts supporting the PROXIMITY value came in the form of diary rescues, which touted various diaries describing users' local activities. Nearly all of the remaining supporting examples were testimonials and first hand accounts of post authors.

The large number of mixed examples, containing both supporting and disruptive examples of the PROXIMITY criterion came largely from diary rescues, along with newsletter digests like "Cheers and Jeers." Both these types of posts frequently contained mixes of local first-hand accounts and thoughts on far-away events. There was no discernable pattern to the disruptive examples—authors chose to discuss far-off events in a wide variety of contexts. There was only one example of an author traveling on behalf of the blog, which came from Moulitsas himself, who described discussions he'd had with Democratic politicians in states with Republican majorities, many of which took place on his Daily Kos-related speaking tour.

RELEVANCE AND MEANINGFULNESS TO THE AUDIENCE

The RELEVANCE/MEANINGFULNESS value was also heavily supported, with strong examples occurring in 42 percent of posts, and minor examples amid a further 26 percent. There was only one example of disruption.

Applying the concept. I gauged THE RELEVANCE/MEANINGFULNESS criterion to be supported when a post either (a) explicitly discussed how a topic would affect its reading audience, or why they should care about it; or (b) bottom-lined an issue, stating what a complicated proceeding or event would mean in practical terms (i.e. made it meaningful), even if it made no explicit reference to the audience. I also considered any post that addressed the audience directly through the use of second person "You know that…" etc. as a minor example of the relevance criterion.

There was only one example of disruption, in which Kos wrote that readers were likely to ignore his advice that they lower their expectations for Barack Obama's Super Tuesday performance at the polls:

> Not that my cautions will have much of an effect. Irrational exuberance is running rampant, just like before New Hampshire. You'd think people would learn their lessons...

Illustrations. This criterion is best illustrated in just the way it was operationalized. Some posts explained to readers why they should care about an issue and how it would affect them. For instance, this post by DarkSyde describes the unemployment problem among wounded soldiers returning from Iraq, and encourages readers help by contacting Hire Heroes USA (HHUSA), an employment agency that assists veterans:

> A few employers have done more than sit and applaud. But with a recession looming and so many wounded veterans returning home, our vets need more, lots more. Whether you are a small business or a large corporation, conservative or progressive, if you're looking for trained, quality employees, that have the ability and desire to succeed, contact HHUSA. And if simply doing the right thing doesn't motivate you, let's talk cold hard dollars: Unlike traditional agencies, this non-profit, non-partisan group provides job placement services at no charge to veterans and employers. They're supported solely by employer and private contributions.

Other posts put complicated events or issues into terms that were meaningful to the audience:

> Iraq permeates every single issue. How can we talk about balancing the budget when we have hundreds of billions funneled into that disaster? How can we talk about health care without talking about the fact that 1 out of every 5 soldiers come home with a traumatic brain injury? How can we debate reducing our dependence on foreign oil when we're spending more on an occupation than on innovation?

Still others simply addressed the audience without reference to a particular issue, such as this example from Bill in Portland Maine, who jokingly told readers where he would be voting in the Maine caucuses:

> We'll be knocking heads together at Portland High School, so if you want to say hi, I'll be wearing the bright orange baseball hat and my Daily Kos T-shirt. Plus I'll have a Taser. One way or another I'll make my presence known.

SCALE, IMPACT, AND CONSEQUENCES

Overall, the SCALE/IMPACT/CONSEQUENCES value was well supported, with strong examples appearing in 58 percent of posts, and minor examples appearing in a further 12 percent. At the same time, there were an abundance of counter-examples in 12 mixed and five disruptive posts.

Applying the concept. The SCALE/IMPACT/CONSEQUENCES value was one of the easier ones to operationalize. I judged it to be supported whenever a post explicitly (a) underscored the size, scope or degree of the phenomenon it was discussing; (b) explicitly stated that something was urgent or important; or (c) detailed the consequences related to an issue or occurrence in a cause-and-effect fashion.

Illustrations. Many strong examples were contained in activism-related posts, which generally attempted to convince users to participate in a call to action by describing both the importance of the issue at stake, and the positive impact users' responses would have. This post by Kos entreating the community to donate to Mark Pera's primary campaign for a House seat provides a good example:

> Guys, we're one week away from Super Tuesday. Yet as most people focus on the presidential, we'll have one of the most important elections for the people-powered movement. If Mark Pera defeats Dan Lipinski in Illinois' 3rd congressional district, we'll be sending a message to Democrats in Congress that they no longer have a free pass, that they can no longer ignore the will of their base back home. They'll learn—like Joe Lieberman learned in 2006—that the Democratic Party isn't a home for the corrupt, cynical, and out-of-touch. They'll learn that if they refuse the will of their constituents, that there will be a prize to pay.

Other examples of the SCALE/IMPACT/CONSEQUENCES value were tributes, describing the accomplishments of individuals and their impact on society:

> [On this day] Coretta Scott King passed away and Samual Alito (Scalito) was sworn in as the latest rightwing nutjob Supreme Court justice. Last year, one of the lights of our movement, Molly Ivins, passed away. Pause for a moment and realize we're on the cusp of making history and the debt that everybody from the snarkiest lefty blogger to a candidate for president owes to these two women.

Scope was often discussed by identifying trends, such as this post, titled "Huge night for Obama," which discussed the impact of recent primaries by examining which way voters were trending. It's also a good example of an instance in which STATISTICS are used to convey SCALE:

> Obama has, at this point, won 11 states, of 22 in play. Worst-case scenario, he's already won half. If he picks up Alaska, which I suspect he will, he wins the battle of the states. California is looking like it might head SUSA's way, so that'll be good news for Hillary. But the rest of the night is bleak. She didn't exceed expectations anywhere. She lost states she led big in just a few weeks ago. She's hurting for money. The calendar up ahead is tailor made for Obama. The momentum is there.

Other examples revolved around personal impact:

> I've been a Greenpeace "webbie" (blogger/cyberactivist), volunteer, and activist for about a year and a half. It's difficult to put into words what it's been like without sounding totally corny. It has been an incredible, life-changing experience; it's something I've dreamed of doing since I was a teenager.

Lastly, it's worth mentioning that many posts expressed size and impact through the use of superlative language, like this example, which discusses conflicting poll results published the night before the California primary:

> Only hours before the polls open, two of the biggest polling operations have turned in their final verdict on today's vote in California. And the verdict is: someone is really, really, really wrong.

SCANDALS AND CRIME

As I note in the following section on the value's operationalization, this criterion was somewhat difficult to apply, and the results are therefore somewhat inconclusive. From a strictly numerical standpoint, however, the SCANDALS/CRIME value was heavily supported, with strong examples present in 33 percent of the subsample and minor examples present in an additional 16 percent. There were also three examples of disruption.

Applying the concept. The SCANDALS/CRIME value was somewhat difficult to operationalize. It's true that the presence or absence of crime may be somewhat

straightforward—putting aside questions of alleged versus actual guilt. What is or is not a scandal, however, is often in the eye of the beholder. Thus, for this value, there was no good way to distinguish between events and authors' framing of the events in the manner suggested by the news values literature. This is likely one reason for this value's broad support. Of course, this difficulty would be no different in a study examining the traditional news media.

I considered the value supported whenever an author referenced a crime, an instance of unseemly behavior on the part of a person or group, or the defaulting of people or groups on their official responsibilities. I considered the value disrupted when an author explicitly reframed an issue viewed elsewhere as a scandal, by saying the event did not meet these criteria, such as in the following example:

> There will probably be some squawking about Maryland keeping the polls open later because of the weather. Let people squawk. I live in DC, and the weather is horrendous. I just came home from a trip that should take five minutes but tonight took fifteen...and that's walking.

Illustrations. As I allude above, the writers on Daily Kos took a broad view of what constituted a scandal or unseemly behavior. In addition to discussing many events deemed scandals by the mainstream news media at the time, Kossacks also frequently wrote indictments of policy decisions, including unpopular votes by Democratic Senators:

> Here's the bunch of Democrats who were willing to sell out your Constitutional rights to protect the telcos.

The series of "FISA Fight" posts went on to say that the voting down of various FISA amendments amounted to "nothing but a massive and complicated cover up for Bush's lawbreaking, and an attempt to make that lawbreaking legal."

The FISA votes were, of course, covered by the mainstream news media, but not treated there as a scandal. Front pagers also frequently scored hits off of the mainstream news media, in many cases framing their coverage as scandalous. Take,

for example, this post in which DemFromCT responds to a published piece by *Wall Street Journal* columnist, Dan Gerstein, who suggested that Daily Kos' popularity was waning:

> In truth, it appears that Daily Kos site decline, despite the data, will continue to be greatly exaggerated by those who have an interest in doing so, and Gerstein clearly has an agenda that doesn't include objectivity. Oh, and for the record, that's true for the *Wall Street Journal*, too.

In short, the authors on Daily Kos took a partisan view of what constituted scandal, deeming many occurrences that cut against the progressive agenda as scandalous.

REFERENCE TO SEX

Despite the presence of a scattered number of strong examples (amid 5 percent of the sample), this value was generally not supported. There have, however, been instances outside the subsample in which sex scandals became prominent topics on Daily Kos. Thus, while the study data does not support this criterion, it is possible that a study employing different sample might.

Applying the concept. This was a very easy value to apply and its operationalization does not warrant much discussion. I limited the operational definition of this value to include overt references to sexual behaviors.

Illustrations. There were very few supporting examples of the SEX criterion. They occurred primarily in newsletters like "Cheers and Jeers" and "Sunday Talk," which were frequently peppered with mild, and sometimes crude, sexual humor:

> JEERS to phony cures. Congratulations, Pastor Ted Haggard! You've turned from gay to straight in record time! Here's your prize: an autographed photo of a shirtless Mario Lopez!! We were rootin' for ya the whole ti... Hey, where'd he go? And what happened to my box of Kleenex?

I considered the following reference to MSNBC's gaffe, in which a network anchor accused Hillary Clinton's campaign of "pimping out" Chelsea Clinton, as a mixed example, in that it discussed sexual behavior, but adamantly insisted that such language was not appropriate.

> There is no way to defend a comment applying the language of prostitution to Chelsea Clinton because she does what almost every other adult or nearly-adult child of a presidential candidate does.

It's also worth mentioning that there were no prominent sex scandals reported in the mainstream news media during the sample period. Later on, however, both Eliot Spitzer's and John Edwards' infidelity became prominent topics of conversation on the site. Thus, it is difficult to say conclusively from this sample alone that this value does not hold at all on Daily Kos.

TIMELINESS

The results for this criterion are somewhat complex. From a strictly numerical standpoint, this value was well-supported, with strong examples occurring among 52 percent of posts and minor examples amid an additional 15 percent. There were 16 mixed examples, but only one instance of outright disruption. It's worth noting, however, that outside this sample there have been notable instances in which the timeliness criterion has been complicated by blogs. For instance, in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, Clay Shirky (2008) describes bloggers as having "no operative sense of news cycles" (p. 62). In a poignant example of this point, he recounts the way in which discussion of Trent Lott's praise for Strom Thurmond's presidential campaign, based on a segregationist platform, persisted in the blogosphere for many days, even after the conventional news media had failed entirely to cover it. Eventually, it raised enough buzz that the news media picked up the story and put Lott out of a job. While Daily Kos focuses greatly on present events, and generally appears to prize timeliness, it frequently does so in such a way that it keeps issues alive over time and puts current events in historical context. As one user, pico, put it:

> When a story on X has to go up overnight, the journalist has a limited amount of time to fill in a context for it—whereas we're able to follow up on stories for weeks, exploring even the minutiae.

At the same time, the synchronous nature of the site's comment threads, together with the site's efforts at liveblogging, frequently put the emphasis on what's happening now, in the moment. Thus, a balanced assessment would be that while Daily Kos does not embody TIMELINESS in the sense of the traditional news cycle, nor does it disrupt it.

Applying the concept. I considered the TIMELINESS value supported whenever a post explicitly mentioned the fact that the event it described had happened recently, or was going to happen in the near future. I also considered the value supported whenever a post was a liveblog, intended to describe an event up to the minute. There was only one example of disruption, in which Moulitsas put up a post regarding an old event he'd "not gotten around to" mentioning:

> This happened maybe a month ago, but I never got around to announcing it—Susan Gardner is now the Executive Editor at Daily Kos, officially becoming the #2 person at the Big Orange Satan.

Illustrations. Liveblogging posts obviously emphasized their own timeliness, as they sought to provide up-to-the-minute election returns or snippets of candidates' speeches for users to discuss. Similarly posts that stressed calls to action, imploring users to call their Congressional representatives, generally supported the timeliness criterion in that they sought immediate action. Diary rescues were timely in the sense that they always featured diaries from the last 24 hours—posts on DK are a perishable good, as their comment threads automatically close after a few days. Many other timely posts simply dealt with events of the day, including breaking news.

As with many other criteria, mixed results came largely in the form of diary rescues and digest-style newsletters, which combined numerous items, some timely and some not. Notably, "Cheers and Jeers" made a point of bringing back older issues, featuring a section dedicated to items from previous newsletters:

> Two Years Ago in C&J: February 4, 2006... CHEERS to moneymoneymoneymoneymoney. President Bush wants another $120 billion

> for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Great strategy: spending all our money over there so we don't have to spend it over here. (Wanna buy the U.S. Treasury cheap? Call your local Century 21 agent today!) CHEERS to Plan B. Really, King George? You were going to paint U.S. spy planes with U.N. colors and fly them over Iraq to provoke a war with Saddam?? Oh, that would have been silly. Bullshitting the nation and the world about non-existent WMDs was definitely the way to go.

Other mixed examples took current events and put them in historical context, such as a post by Meteor Blades—too lengthy to quote here—which cast Obama's presidency in the context of 40-year old events from the civil rights movement.

Discussion

News values were invented as a way of conceptualizing the process of gatekeeping as practiced by the mainstream news media. Over half of our aggregate list of news values was supported in this study, despite the fact that Daily Kos is not a news site, and despite its self-application of audacious claims to the effect that its popularity indicates a "descent into irrelevance of the 'gatekeeper model.'"

Further studies are required before we can draw conclusions with any confidence, but if this small pilot study is any indication, clearly not all news values are unique to the news. All that remains presently, then, is to ask why this is the case, and what is unique about those news values that indeed went unsupported or disrupted in this study.

A Few Reasons Daily Kos Might Resemble the News Media

Intermedia agenda setting. Previous research has shown that the news media continue to have an agenda setting affect on other forms of media. Intermedia agenda setting between the mass media and online communities, for instance, has been documented in a number of studies now (Messner & Watson, 2006; Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). The mass media increasingly get story ideas from blogs and other online sources, but more often than not, online communities discuss issues that are covered in the news media. Thus, any analysis

confronts a potential confound, in that it may not always be clear whether participants are discussing a topic because they themselves are selecting issues based on criteria similar to traditional news values, or whether they are discussing that same topic because it appeared in the news—or for that matter, because reporters read and participate in Daily Kos. In any case, the effect would be that the community's choice of topics resembled that of the traditional news media.

Competition with traditional news media. While competition overall was a disrupted value, my analysis did reveal that there were times when Daily Kos was consciously competing with the news, and said as much. To give one of numerous examples, in January, a contributing editor on the site, Kagro X subtitled a post on FISA, "Reason Number 800 Bazillion why it's better to get your news from Daily Kos." The desire of Kossacks to be viewed as legitimate contenders in the mass media world may ultimately result in some imitation of the mainstream news media.

As mentioned earlier, Boczkowski (2008) notes that competition between news outlets sometimes breeds similarity. And while, even among traditional news media new technological platforms frequently provide opportunities for journalists working in alternative mediums to present audiences with different information agendas, Gans (1979) has noted that this seldom comes to pass:

> While print and electronic news media rest on different technologies, every news medium uses its technology primarily to compete against other news media, and it does so selectively. Television could limit itself to tell stories [stories read by the anchor, as opposed to filmed on location] if it did not have to compete against the newspaper or the radio. Besides, the stories which different news media select are sufficiently similar to suggest that technology is not a determining factor. (p. 80)

While Daily Kos and sites like it may attempt to provide different information than the traditional news media, the assertion by contributing editors that readers should "get their news from Daily Kos" implies that there may be a great deal of intentional overlap in the topics of discussion.

Hierarchical structure. According to Shirky's (2008) observations, any ability of online communities to provide a greater diversity of goods than traditional media is, in part, predicated on the notion that such communities are largely self-organizing, allowing users to vote on subjects of interest with their feet—or rather, with their tags and keywords—"like the apocryphal university that lets the students wear useful paths through the grass before it lays any walkways" (p. 235).

Much of the competitive advantage these self-organizing communities might enjoy over news media is owed to the fact that they do not have the managerial overhead that comes with hierarchical structure, and they're not paying for the sort of infrastructure that makes it expensive to publish in the first place. While for the average user, the Daily Kos site is free to read and to publish on, the folks who publish Daily Kos' front page are playing a different ballgame.

The front page of the site is its prime real estate, and the privilege of publishing to it is reserved for "contributing editors," who are overseen by a "managing editor," who in turn works for the site's owner and CEO (in fact, during the time of my sample, Moulitsas announced the appointment of a new managing editor, who had formerly edited newspapers). Though this may be a small and loosely bound organization, it smacks a bit of the sort of hierarchical structure Shirky says online communities are good at avoiding. Furthermore, for front pagers, there is a cost to running the site. The blog's archives are replete with postings by Kos detailing the financial burden and other irksome aspects of maintaining and upgrading the site's web servers, and illustrating the pains he's taken over time in hiring a full-time staff responsible for maintaining the site's hardware and software. All this together means that, while publications to the front page are not constrained by column inches or minutes of airtime, there are a finite number of staff hours that go into producing it and there is a premium involved in publishing it—hence there are limits to the front

page's resources. This means that, by necessity, filtering of information is going on prior to publication. As Gans (1980) put it in describing the traditional news media,

> [Publishers] can learn about only a tiny fraction of actors and activities; and having limited air time and magazine space, they must select an even tinier fraction. More important, they cannot decide anew every day or week how to select the fraction that will appear on the news; instead they must routinize their task in order to make it manageable. (p. 78)

These same conditions pertain, *mutatis mutandis*, to the front page of Daily Kos. According to Shirky, the persistence of an online community relies both on its core value to users—a "plausible promise" in Raymond's (2001) terms—and on the bargain it strikes with those who participate in it—i.e., the norms established both for participation in, and administration of, the community. Thus, the right of users to expect some sort of consistency to the content provided by front pagers means that the latter "cannot decide anew every day or week how to select" the sorts of things they will talk about. The site, by its nature, must develop a set of conventions—it's the same problem that ostensibly generates news criteria in the traditional media.

Conversing vs. broadcasting. Lastly, a final point from Shirky (2008) suggests another reason that the front-page of Daily Kos may be likely to resemble traditional news outlets in some ways. After pointing out some of the ways in which "many-to-many" communication tools, like blogs, have broken media categories, which have long obtained with the telephone (one-to-one) and the television (one-to-many), he goes on to say that "it turns out that the difference between conversational tools and broadcast tools was arbitrary, but the difference between conversing and broadcasting is real" (p. 95).

In other words, while technology may previously have constrained the number of people who could hear a speaker, there are real cognitive limits to the number of people with whom a single speaker can converse. A front page blogger at Daily Kos will receive hundreds or thousands of web responses and many more email responses

to their posts daily. And, according to Shirky, once a website surpasses a certain audience size, it effectively becomes broadcasting all over again in many ways. Thus, the Daily Kos front page may counterintuitively share this structural similarity with the conventional news media. And if so, it may be that the constraints shared by the two types of media also lead to similarities in the values they use in selecting content.

The uniqueness question. All of the above explanations for the appearance of news values in a non-news environment point to ways in which Daily Kos is similar to, or influenced by, the mainstream news media. But as was discussed early in this paper, it is also possible that some news values aren't describing the press at all, but general features of the way people communicate, for which we may already have better, more coherent theories. This possibility is discussed at some length in the conclusion.

Reasons Daily Kos May Diverge From the News Media

Of course, not all of the news values on our aggregate list were supported in this study. This is important because it points to the fact that some news values may describe phenomena that are indeed unique to the news, or at least not universal in their application across media.

COMPETITION WITH OTHER MEDIA is an excellent example of such a value, because it is predicated on the existence of a competitive market structure that does not exist in the blogosphere—at least not in its traditional form. The web has instead been described by figures like Battelle (2005) as a "conversation economy," in which content providers, both amateur and professional, link to one another in conversational patterns that drive traffic from one site to another. The result is that collections of sites form—"web spheres" in Foot and Schneider's (2006) terms—which are not necessarily competing, but interdependent on one another for readership and ad revenue. This model describes fairly accurately the world of liberal blogs—the

"netroots"—which consists of not one site, but many, all of which frequently reference one another and view themselves as a collective movement, rather than a multitude of competing media outlets. At the same time, it is worth noting that my restriction of support for the COMPETITION value to explicit mentions may have affected the outcome of this result. It is likely that competing newspapers, for instance, rarely reference the fact of their competition, despite overtly contending in the marketplace.

Other values such as CLARITY, NOVELTY/UNEXPECTEDNESS, and CONSONANCE received mixed support—a number of disruptive examples appeared in the sample alongside supporting ones. First, it's important to note that, as these values refer to the mindset of a post author, rather than the events she recounts, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about them in a content analysis. That said, as I remark in my results, authors tend to reference these values in strategic ways, suggesting that their deployment may depend in large part on the purpose of the site and the rhetorical standards of the community, both of which are different from what one would find in a traditional news outlet, not generally regarded as a tool for political organizing (by journalists, anyhow).

With regard to the general lack of support for the value, REFERENCE TO SEX, as I mention in the results, this may have been a feature of the sample, as sex scandals later in the election cycle involving public figures like Eliot Spitzer and John Edwards received ample attention. Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's love affair received considerably less attention, however, indicating that REFERENCE TO SEX may not be the driving factor. A more plausible explanation for the lack of support for this value is simply the political focus of the site. Just as this focus resulted in an overwhelming focus on GOVERNMENT, it may also have excluded other topical news values. Although Daily Kos includes articles on a wide range of topics, its front page is

generally dedicated to progressive politics, and unless they intersect with this agenda, items about sex will tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

Other Limitations and Potential Confounds

While adequate as a pilot test, this study is fraught with potential confounds, involving the timing of my sample, my choice of Daily Kos as a study subject, and the specter of intermedia agenda setting in the blogosphere, which limit my ability in this study to say whether news values crop up in non-news environments endogenously, or whether they appear as a result of the influence of the mainstream news media. Before moving on to my conclusions, here are a few potential confounds I was able to examine more closely.

A look at tags. Both diaries and front page posts on Daily Kos are marked with tags—series of terse one or two word descriptors intended to describe the content of a post. To discern the extent to which the election cycle affected the results of this study, I looked at changes in the site's most popular tags before and after the Presidential primaries. Between May 2007 and August 2008, it was indeed the case that there was an exponential rise in the number of mentions across the site (not just the front page) of the names of numerous Presidential candidates, including John McCain, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Mike Huckabee, and Ron Paul. Thus, although it seemed somewhat obvious to begin with, this is concrete proof that the election cycle had a major impact on the site's topics of discussion.

Focus on the front page. I chose to take my sample from the site's front page. However, in talking with different Kossacks on the site, it quickly became apparent that they had different views of the front page's actual importance. One user wrote, "I come here for views from the frontpagers. The diarists provide some nice supplements." Another, in sharp contrast, told me frankly:

> [I]f you ever want to develop this study beyond your thesis, you really will have to go past the front page and into the diary section. I realize you're

> dealing with time constraints (as someone finishing up dissertation revisions, I sympathize!), but of the online communities I've taken part in, dkos is the least defined by its front page. That's not to say that people don't read the FP pretty often and participate there, but that the diaries here are more involved than they are at other blogging sites I've visited. I think I speak for a fairly large chunk of the readership here when I say that the first thing I scan is the Recommended Diaries list (although much less so during primary season).

My participant observation in the community over the course of the following months confirmed this observation. Entire sub-communities exist in the diaries section of the site, discussing not only politics, but everything from nuclear power to marine biology. What front pagers say does matter to the community. The decision of many Clinton supporters to abandon the site during the primaries was in large part due to a perceived bias on the part of front pagers toward the Obama campaign. But to study only the front page is nonetheless to take a very limited view of the activity on the site. Any future studies I conduct of Daily Kos will take this into consideration.

Examining posts and not comments. Although I read many comment threads on the site in examining my sample, I ultimately chose not to include them in the study. This is a decision that warrants further discussion. As I say earlier in this paper, the Daily Kos community lives in its comment threads, where users interact with one another and talk back to the front pagers—frequently influencing what they publish. Examining only posts does not do justice to the interactive nature of this process. Contrary to Shirky's (2008) notion that large blogs effectively operate on a broadcast model, some (not all) front pagers frequently read through and responded to remarks in the comment threads of their posts, and participate at length in discussions. In effect, this produces a communicative environment less analogous to a traditional newspaper article than to a museum, where attendees have cascading levels of informational detail available and ready answers to their queries from the museum staff (Lewenstein, 2008). Users on Daily Kos can take or leave a post itself, but if they

want more information they can read the comment thread, where people frequently carry on more detailed discussions on the topic at hand. If a user then has a question, they're free to ask it and receive immediate attention from the post author, who may give responses ranging from rebuttals to criticisms of her articles to deep explanations of the subject matter.

But more importantly, the front pagers are not the only people answering questions—most conversation is between users who offer their own opinions, explanations, and information on the subject matter, much of which might be only alluded to or unclear in the original post. All this has the effect of making discussion threads frequently far more detailed and nuanced than the original article that accompanies them. Many users in conversation commented that this was one of the things they appreciated most about Daily Kos. Says user InsultComicDog:

> [W]e get experts in very specific areas that can puzzle a big picture together from pieces that most people (including most if not all media people) don't have specialized knowledge in.

Moreover, this suggests that Shirky (2008) was right on another point, in suggesting that digital tools make it easy for communities with common interests to coalesce quickly, without much formal coordination.

In one post, for instance, titled "Your Brain on McCain," which dealt with the pros and cons of nuclear energy, this was true to a striking extent. The majority of the posts in the comment thread were detailed, wonkish responses—a number seemingly written by engineers—on the cost in hazards and resources of various alternative energy sources. Not only did these commenters have a deep knowledge of the issue at hand, they knew each other from previous exchanges, and went so far as to point out regulars who were missing ("[W]here's Nnadir? Gotta have Nnadir around when you're talking about nuclear power."). This was, I suspect, a different mix of users than the ones who contributing to comment threads on, say, feminist ethics or drug laws. There

were also references to discussions that had happened previously over user diaries ("Did you miss the diary about the breakthrough at Stanford…"), which suggests the possibility that this community meets on the site whenever and wherever there is a post—and hence the potential for a discussion—on alternative energy. We might think of this as a "perennial group"—they do not always exist, and there is no one forum on the site that holds them, but they repeatedly coalesce around shared topics of interest. Whereas Gamson and Modigliani (1989), in studying the news, used the concept of a "news peg" to refer to events that make a new article on a familiar subject possible, in studying online communities, we might think of posts like "Your Brain on McCain" as "discussion pegs"—articles or other online objects that make it possible for a familiar latent group to coalesce and hold a discussion.

Unfortunately, fully exploring the existence of perennial communities on a site like Daily Kos would require not only additional tools from discourse analysis not used in this study, but likely some sophisticated network analysis and computation to sift through the hundreds of thousands of comments present on the site and map relationships between groups of users over time. Certainly ignoring the site's comment threads is a limitation of this paper, but to fully explore them will require another study entirely.

Conclusions

News values have been around in the academic literature since 1965, and have always received mixed support. They've proven hard to apply for a variety of reasons. Some of these, discussed in Chapter One, have to do with difficulties in the way news values, as a literature, conceive of the gatekeeping process and the behavior of professional journalists. Others stem from a lack of coherence among and between lists of news criteria themselves—a focus of Chapter Two. Lastly, the news values literature has come to be formulated in such a way that it masks similarities between the news and other forms of communication. As we've seen in Chapter Three, many of the phenomena described by news values are not unique to the news (though, importantly, our study does not control for the influence of the news on other communication venues).

This artificial distinction was not an original feature of the literature, however, but is one that has come into play gradually. As we've seen, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) original list of news values did not conceive of them as unique to the news media. In fact, their first eight values were based on psychological research on human perception and behavior, which they hypothesized would play out in the news media as gatekeeping, but which they also saw as being important in non-news contexts. In order to clean up—or perhaps, dispense with—the news values literature, it is that underlying theoretical framework which must be reclaimed. Their list of values continues to be widely cited in the 21st Century, but the psychological theories drawn on by Galtung and Ruge are over 40 years old—and have surely been supplanted by a great deal of useful research and theory, all of which can be brought to bear on the problem in a way that illuminates journalism, in all its increasingly diverse forms, without treating the news as a unique case.

At the same time, Galtung and Ruge believed that several of their values were attributable to cultural influences on the media. And certainly here, too, the literature can benefit from reclaiming and updating the underlying theoretical assumptions they applied.

Of course, as we saw in Part Two, there have been four decades' worth of additional lists of news criteria, many formed in the absence of any sort of theoretical framework. Some of these may be unique to the news. Others are most certainly not. The various mechanisms of action and theoretical lenses that underpin them must be identified and sifted through. Surely, some are structural in nature, others cultural, still others social or psychological—and many owing to a combination of factors. More studies will be necessary to begin identifying the media contexts in which these values do and do not appear. But as proper theoretical frameworks are identified this work will likely be accelerated, with each theory knocking down and subsuming a host of formerly independent values.

New Literatures

Economics

In searching for new theoretical frameworks, already several literatures appear enticing. Clay Shirky (2008) has offered a number of fruitful analyses from Coasean economics to explain structural differences in media production between large organizations and self-organizing online communities.

Online Communities

Numerous Kossacks, after reading pieces of my research said they thought the biggest influence on what topics were "Kos-worthy" was their sense of Daily Kos as a living community. There is now a large sociological literature focusing *specifically* on online communities in the tradition of Wellman and Gulia (2001). As we saw in the Daily Kos study, the function that a communication has within a community can at

times be predictive of its content. As one user, newyorknewyork put it, "We speak here like we would to a friend. That's something you won't see on the news." The literature on online communities, which has its roots in earlier studies of offline communities could be brought to bear, not only on online prosumer hubs like Daily Kos, but also on journalistic communities like those behind the *Washington Post* or the *NBC Nightly News*, and on the conversations of other offline communities and social clubs that have nothing at all to do with journalism or current events.

Discourse Analysis and Legitimation

Discourse analysis, and specifically the literature on legitimation, might help to illuminate the many ways in which selective communication (to avoid the phrase "gatekeeping" here) is deployed strategically, and why.

Technology Studies

The relationship between technology and discourse has been widely discussed. Many of the scholars cited in this paper have noted that television news, for instance, privileges stories with compelling visuals over those that, in print, might be the news of the day. And certainly the architecture of a site like Daily Kos is related to the manner in which issues are discussed. There is a substantial literature from technology studies on the complex relationship between technology and discourse, which might be fruitfully brought to bear in examining news values across different media.

Framing

As we've seen throughout this paper, there is an ongoing and intimate relationship between the way journalists and ordinary people choose topics for discussion and the way they frame those topics in disseminating them. Thus, the literature on framing from numerous perspectives—social, psychological, and journalistic—will be relevant in moving forward. That said, it's important to

recognize some of the limitations of these perspectives. Much of the literature on framing in journalism, for instance, such as that by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) or Nisbet and Huge (2006), has been highly specific to certain topics—nuclear power, biotechnology, etc.—and is thus difficult to apply when examining, not one topic, but the *breadth* of topics that arise in a given medium. Despite such difficulties, the concepts from this literature are still highly valuable in moving forward.

Agenda Building

The agenda building literature, which began with Cobb and Elder (1971), explores the general processes by which organizations come to prioritize certain topics and issues. Unlike much of the literature in journalism studies, agenda building studies attempt to describe the phenomenon in general terms, with equal relevance for the construction of news agendas, court dockets, legislative schedules and so forth. An interesting caveat, in terms of its relevance, is the fact that many online sites exist outside of the hierarchical organizational structures that agenda building traditionally describes.

Narrative

While in the present study I limited support for the drama criterion to first-person recountings and explicit references to dramatic tropes, it's quite possible that many of the posts adhered to a more general "narrative logic" of the sort described by narrative theorists like Walter Fisher (1987) and Jerome Bruner (1990). Allan Bell (1991) has made a similar case for news stories as narratives, and its quite possible that narrative theory could serve to tie together the reasoning behind topic selection in a wide variety of media.

Social Movements

The manner in which agendas get hashed out and built has been a major topic of discussion in the literature on social movements. It stands to reason that some of

the observations therein would be applicable in examining a site like Daily Kos, which self-identifies as a social movement, and contain lessons to be applied in other media as well.

Sociological and Anthropological Accounts

Sociologists and anthropologists from John Dewey (1927) to Hugh Gusterson (2004) have taken an interest in how issues are discussed in contemporary society. Work in these fields, including that done by media sociologists, can help to provide theoretical underpinnings for the improvement or replacement of the news values literature.

Looking Forward

Pointing to these other literatures may be a start. But it is ultimately an audacious exercise, as there is not, in this study, enough data to begin to suggest which literatures or theories would be most promising. This paper *does* point the way for future studies. Similar pilot studies, looking for news values in non-news environments, will be required to determine which values are structural, which are social, which are psychological, and so forth. As we've seen, though, it is difficult to determine the presence or absence of many news values based solely on examination of finished texts. As such, it may be important to combine future content analyses with interviews and ethnographic methods, Tunstall's (1971) reservations on these methods not withstanding.

Examining a site whose raison d'être is the discussion of U.S. politics during a Presidential election cycle guaranteed to be heavily covered by the mainstream media obviously created a massive potential confound in the form of intermedia agenda setting. Other confounds also exist in the form of the hierarchical structure of the site's front page, the occasional claims of front pagers to compete with the mainstream news media, and the one-to-many nature of blogging on such a popular site. These

problems must be addressed in future studies, both by examining media other than Daily Kos and political blogs, and by refining any future studies of Daily Kos and political blogs to control for potential confounds and better reflect the full range of activity on the site. Despite the need for further piloting, future studies should also move quickly from merely testing problematic lists of news values in non-news environments to testing larger theoretical frameworks in both news and non-news environments, online and off.

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