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Mainstream and Alternative News in Seattle: A Comparative Media Frame Analysis of WTO Protest Coverage

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MAINSTREAM AND ALTERNATIVE NEWS IN SEATTLE:
A COMPARATIVE MEDIA FRAME ANALYSIS
OF WTO PROTEST COVERAGE

Richard S. Feffer

76 Pages

August 2008

This project examines the differences between media frames contained in Seattle-based mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage of the Seattle protests against the WTO in 1999.

APPROVED:

Date Richard Sullivan, Chair

Date Virginia Gill

Date Frank Beck

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This research uses frame analysis as a methodological tool to address the following question: Are there differences in the media frames presented by Seattle's mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests, and if so, what are these differences? The content of media frames in two mainstream newspapers was compared to the content in two alternative newsweeklies. In general, mainstream newspapers tended to display the protesters as more violent, disruptive, outside middle-America, and ignorant than the alternative papers. In addition, both newspapers tended to frame the Seattle protests as a continuous battle between police and protesters. Such research contributes to social movements literature generally and to the development of frame analysis as a methodological tool for the study of social movements.

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MAINSTREAM AND ALTERNATIVE NEWS IN SEATTLE:
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OF WTO PROTEST COVERAGE

RICHARD S. FEFFER

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Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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R.S.F

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE	1
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	3
Frame Analysis	4
The Media Frame	5
Past Media Frame Analyses	7
Gaps in the Literature	10
II. DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS	12
III. FINDINGS	17
Part I: Applying the Boykoff Model	19
The Violence Frame	19
The Disruption Frame	26
The Freak Frame	33
The Ignorance Frame	38
The Amalgam of Grievances Frame	42
Part II: Newly Identified Frames	45
The Battle Frame	45
The Chaos Frame	52
IV. DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS	58

Summary of Findings	58
Journalistic Norms and the Perspective of Alternative News	63
Final Conclusions	65
REFERENCES	69

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Seattle was the site of one of the largest protests in recent American history. In 1999, tens of thousands of demonstrators representing a multitude of causes gathered in downtown Seattle to protest the meetings of the World Trade Organization and the larger issue of globalization. While many of the protest events consisted of peaceful marches and demonstrations with isolated incidents of violence, research on the media coverage of these events found that the mainstream media often minimized the contributions of the protesters, portrayed them as violent and disruptive, and showed support for the ability of the police to maintain order (Boykoff 2006).

But not all media coverage is the same. The events in Seattle were experienced differently by different individuals, and while the portrayal of these events by mainstream media may prove to become the official story of what happened there in 1999, other interpretations have largely been left out of the official public dialogue. Alternative newsweeklies are news sources that often provide different portrayals of newsworthy events. In fact, they intentionally seek to offer “a different perspective” than more traditional newspapers (Association of Alternative Newsweeklies). One way to examine these differences is through *media frames*, or “persistent patterns of cognition,

interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin 1980: 7). Given this information, this project explores the following question:

Are there differences in the media frames presented by Seattle’s mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests, and if so, what are these differences?

A thorough examination of this question reveals differences between mainstream and alternative news coverage of these protest events. The discovery of these differences suggests that news stories are malleable and socially constructed portrayals of events. Understanding the different ways in which stories are constructed and presented gives researchers a window into the meaning of these events shared by journalists and readers. It also helps continue the important discussion of the social construction of reality as it relates to news stories and public dialogue. Since newspapers and news organizations have a significant impact on public discourse (Conrad 1997), recognition that a news story is just one of an infinite number of potential portrayals of protest events has significant implications for consumers of news media, social movement organizations, and social movements themselves.

Answering this question also helps to fill a number of gaps in the related literature. To this point most academic research on the media coverage of these events has focused entirely on mainstream, national news coverage of the WTO protests. This project explores the differences in the characterization of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle by different types of local news sources; particularly, it examines the differences

between two mainstream newspapers – *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *The Seattle Times* – and two “alternative” newspapers: *The Stranger* and *Seattle Weekly*. Other gaps relate to a lack of research involving alternative news coverage of protest events, a focus exclusively on the negative media frames cast on protesters and protest events, and a lack of research on local news coverage of the 1999 WTO protests. The literature review below will discuss these gaps in greater detail. This research is an examination of newspaper coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle generally, and specifically a comparison of media frames presented in mainstream and alternative newspapers.

Review of Literature

There are two sets of literature that are important to this study. The first is the general literature on frame analysis and media frames. The second is the literature in social movements that has examined the relationship between social movements, protest events, and the media. Both bodies of literature are important because frame analysis is often used to study the impact of mass media on social movements as well as the media’s portrayal of social movements. Frame analysis has been utilized method in the social movement field, as evidenced by the increase in the number of articles, papers, and chapters referring to the link between framing and movements in the past two decades (Benford and Snow 2000). Despite its wide use, there is still disagreement over the best definition and use of frames and frame analysis. This literature review provides a brief overview of frame analysis and the methodological concept of the media frame.

Frame Analysis

Though it is a methodological tool that is increasingly used in social movement literature, the definition and use of *frame analysis* is sometimes unclear and varies by researcher and discipline (Oliver and Johnston 2005). Goffman (1974) first defined frames as “schemata of interpretation” that allow individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” their experience with the outside world (21). Since then, researchers have incorporated the frame concept into the field of social movements, particularly when doing content analysis. Applying the framing concept to social movements has proven difficult for researchers (Oliver and Johnston 2005). For the purposes of this study, Benford and Snow (1992) provide an adequate definition: frames are “interpretive schemata that simplify and condense the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (133). Frames are mental constructs located within an observer, used to make sense of what is being perceived.

Frames are conveyed in two primary ways. According to Williams and Benford (2000), (1) frames can be present in “grammar,” the structure in which meaning is contained; or, (2) they can work like the frame around a picture, in which elements of a frame are lumped together in contextually dependent situations. The picture frame analogy is the best way to understand how newspaper stories exist within a “frame” that allows attention to be focused on what is perceived as relevant and to be taken away from what is not perceived as relevant (Noakes and Johnston 2005). Frames are inherently malleable and emergent mental constructs that help us infer “what is going on” (Oliver

and Johnston 2005). They render events meaningful and help organize experience and guide action (Snow and Benford 2000).

It is difficult to define *what a frame is* because the concept of a frame is an abstract methodological idea, but frame analysis allows researchers to examine common understandings of events shared by individual actors (Oliver and Johnston 2005). It does so by enabling researchers to investigate the portrayals of events in a news story. More importantly for this study, when frames are presented through mass media, the way stories are portrayed suggests a mode of understanding to be adopted by the larger population (Oliver and Johnston 2005). This is particularly important, because the way stories are portrayed influences the meaning that consumers derive from a story and may influence behavior. Research involving frames therefore has considerable implications for media consumers. Therefore, researchers have suggested that frames play a key role in guiding behavior, and frame analysis is an important tool in analyzing collective behavior when frames are shared by large groups of individuals (Oliver and Johnston 2005).

The Media Frame

Though frame analysis is an imperfect tool, researchers are able to study newspaper articles by analyzing the words and ideas used and what they tell us about how its author interprets events for the reader (Earl, McCarthy and Soule 2004). The newspaper is not *doing* the framing; rather, the language and ideas used within it create

particular, interpretive portrayals of its stories. How an individual story is portrayed may influence how a reader develops her/his interpretation of that story.

Gitlin (1980) explained that media help to produce and promote certain fields of definition through which ideology can become concrete. He called these fields of definition the *media frame*. *The media frame is the central unit of analysis in this study*. Media frames, according to Gitlin, are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (1980: 7). They are represented by the words and ideas presented in a particular news piece. It is important to note that the media frame is not a window into the definitive cognitive understanding of an event held by its author, but it is an analytic tool used to examine how stories are portrayed by an author to an audience.

This definition of a media frame is similar to how frames are defined in the literature, but it is presented here to make an important point. “Patterns of cognition” are particularly important because members of the media have the power to select, emphasize, and exclude certain details when constructing a story. Gitlin refers to the media as “symbol-handlers,” and the way in which the facts and symbols of events are described in a news piece say an incredible amount about how the author of a story organizes her/his portrayal of an event, and may affect how they are understood by media consumers.

Researchers in media and social movements have specifically addressed media frames and their effect on consumer understanding. Tarrow (1998) suggested that media

actors do as much to control the construction of meaning as the state or other social actors. By presenting and excluding certain details, media select some aspect of a perceived reality and make it more important in a communication text, creating a framework for understanding that reality (Entman 1993). Also, Noakes and Johnston (2005) note, “journalistic norms and practices shape media framing of issues and events” (19). These circumstances lead reporters to create media frames from their own basis of understanding.

Past Media Frame Analyses

This study examines the substance and character of the media frames presented in the newspaper coverage of the 1999 Seattle protests. Numerous studies have examined the way media frames are manifest, particularly in the case of protest events. Gamson (1988) explained that nothing received from news sources is raw information and that facts and details are framed and packaged in some cultural context. To Gamson, the media is a site where various groups struggle over the definition and construction of social reality. Journalists often work to educe controversy for the purpose of an interesting story and attempt to work under the vague norm of journalistic balance, producing stories that present a particular social reality. This situation tends to favor certain media frames and Walgrave and Manssens (2005) claim that because of this, any news media account of protest is inevitably distorted.

Focusing more specifically on literature directly related to the research at hand, numerous studies have used mainstream commercial newspaper data to examine protest

events and their portrayal through media frames (Ashley and Olson 1998; Boykoff 2006; Gamson, 1988; Mastin, Campo and Frazer 2005; Walgrave and Manssens 2005).

Newspaper articles are presented with certain media frames which organize the presentation of opinions and facts (Boykoff 2006). Media frames act as a pre-packaged interpretation of protest events and are the focus of this study.

Ashley and Olson (1998) looked at print media's framing of the women's movement in the 1960s. Their results showed that the media engages in agenda setting by choosing what to emphasize and what to ignore or suppress. This framing activity most often emphasizes the legitimacy of the state and established class institutions, while delegitimizing challenges to the existing social order. Ashley and Olson (1998) suggest that audiences engage in framing when they engage in meaning construction by interpreting what they read, but Mastin, Campo, and Frazer (2005) note that the media's typical practice of providing two sides of each issue can result in the polarization of debate that obscures middle-ground views. Conflicts are covered in a way that compromise is often not presented as an option. Such polarization is a direct result of media framing. In such a case, the way stories are framed creates pre-packaged interpretations of the events being covered by those stories. Structurally then, the reader has less of an opportunity to generate her/his own interpretation of the events being covered, since one interpretation has already been provided.

Research has typically shown that the mainstream media tends to frame protest groups in a negative way. The most common way is by limiting the attention they receive by pushing them towards the back pages (Ashley and Olson 1998). They can also

describe the protestors in a negative way (Parenti 1993), or report the events surrounding a protest rather than the goals or interests of the movement (Paletz and Entman 1981). It is not unusual for mainstream newspapers to trivialize a protest event by making light of the protestors' dress, language, age, style, or goals (Gitlin 1980). Often too, mainstream papers portray protest as clear-cut social deviance (Pan and Kosicki 1993). The focus of most research on the mainstream press ignores the presence of alternative media, a gap this study intends to fill.

Several studies have specifically addressed the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle. William Solomon (2000) discussed how mainstream press coverage of the events often neglected substance in favor of following typical news formulas. Neil deMause (2000) examined how the mainstream media ignored the militarization of the police work during the protests: while the protestors were radicalized, radical police tactics were overlooked. Rachel Coen (2000) looked at how the mainstream press focused largely on the appearance of the protestors during their coverage of the protests, rather than on the movement's goals. John Giuffo (2001) looked briefly at the mainstream press and its focus on the violence rather than on the goals of the global justice movement. The only studies that have examined alternative news coverage of this movement have focused on internet and digital forms of media (Almeida and Lichbach 2003; Owens and Palmer 2003; Tsang 2000). The scope of this study focuses solely on printed newspaper coverage.

Prior to this study, the most recent and thorough examination of the media frames present in the coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle was done by Jules Boykoff (2006).

Boykoff examined mainstream newspaper articles and television reports. He found that the mainstream media often portrayed political dissidents as ridiculous, bizarre, dangerous, and out of step with “middle America.” These characterizations reverberate through the public sphere, and given that the media are crucial sites for reality construction, such characterizations can be crucial elements in determining the success or failure of the global justice movement.

Gaps in the Literature

The primary contribution of this study to social movements and media literature is that it extends previous work regarding media frames, and fills several gaps in social movement literature. First, this study examines alternative newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle. All of the research related to print and television coverage of these particular demonstrations, and most of the literature addressing the coverage of other demonstrations focuses on mainstream news sources. There has been little examination of alternative news sources except those that are internet based, and no direct comparison of alternative and mainstream sources. In addition, all of the literature focusing on the Seattle protests has focused on national press. This study examined local Seattle newspapers, which provide a unique perspective on the events, as they are proximately closer to both the events and many who experienced them first hand. Finally, the current literature has found that most media characterizations of protesters have been negative. An examination into alternative news coverage may find more

positive characterizations, or at the very least provide a basis for comparison by which to judge mainstream accounts.

CHAPTER II

DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a comparative analysis of the WTO protest coverage of two mainstream newspapers and two alternative newspapers in Seattle. For the purposes of this study, *mainstream* newspapers are those that are corporate-owned, widely distributed, produced daily, have a strong public stature, and have significant influence on public officials and the general population (Boykoff 2006). *Alternative* news sources are independently owned, not as widely distributed, produced weekly, and distributed free of charge. Alternative newspapers are distributed in most major North American metropolitan areas, each with a distinct, local identity that sets it apart from mainstream sources in its area (Association of Alternative Newsweeklies). According to AltWeeklies.com, alternative newsweeklies offer “a different perspective from what is generally found on wire-service and daily-newspaper Web sites.”

The two mainstream newspapers examined in this study were *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and *The Seattle Times*. *The Seattle-Post Intelligencer* is owned by The Hearst Corporation, one of the world’s largest diversified communications companies. According to its website, *The Post-Intelligencer* is the oldest morning newspaper in the State of Washington and has a following across the Northwest. It has a circulation of 130,000 on an average weekday, and its website serves about 1.7 million

visitors and 30 million page views each month. *The Seattle Times* is the largest daily newspaper in Washington State circulating on the average weekday in 2007 over 219,700 copies according to media relations company Burrelles Luce. Technically, *The Times* is not corporately owned, but its wide, daily circulation and national and international recognition (7 Pulitzer Prizes) contribute to its “mainstream” status. The Seattle Times Company owns 7 affiliate newspapers in Washington State and Maine. Interestingly, the Seattle Times Company “manages advertising, production, circulation and marketing for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*,” though they remain separately owned and competitive newspapers, with separate news and editorial departments (Seattle Times Company).

The two alternative newsweeklies examined were *The Stranger* and *Seattle Weekly*. *The Stranger* was founded in 1991 by Tim Keck, who still holds ownership over the publication along with Index Publishing. It circulates about 95,000 copies every Thursday, free of charge to newsstands and newspaper boxes in the Seattle area. *The Stranger* offers local news, commentary, and coverage of arts and culture, much of it with a sarcastic twist. *Seattle Weekly* (or *Weekly*) is owned by private corporation Village Voice Media, which specializes in alternative weeklies, managing over 20 alternative weeklies across the United States. *Seattle Weekly* circulates about 98,500 newspapers every Wednesday. Like *The Stranger*, *Seattle Weekly* offers conversational commentary about local news stories, and arts and culture.

Data was collected via online archives on each newspaper’s website. Phone calls were placed to the newspapers to assure that online archives were complete. Due to the weekly publication of the alternative newspapers, all articles relating to the WTO

conference and demonstrations were collected from the two issues most closely following the first day of demonstrations for each newspaper. The first day of major demonstrations was November 30th, 1999; therefore, data was collected from *The Stranger* issues circulated on Thursdays, December 2nd 1999 and December 9th, 1999. Data was collected from Seattle Weekly issues circulated on Wednesday, December 1st 1999 and December 8th 1999.

For mainstream articles, all articles and editorials related to the WTO conference and demonstrations were collected from a similar time period: November 30th 1999 through December 9th 1999. Due to the difference in number of mainstream and alternative articles during this time period because of their difference in circulation frequency (daily vs. weekly), a sample of mainstream newspaper articles collected from that time period was taken so that there would be similar numbers of mainstream and alternative articles. The sample for each mainstream paper included the front page articles from the first 4 days following the protests, and was filled out by a simple random sample of the remaining articles. The total usable sample included 71 articles: 20 from *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 21 from *The Seattle Times*, 14 from *The Stranger*, and 16 from *Seattle Weekly*.

This study used content analysis to examine the differences in media frames between Seattle-based mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage. The data's text was manually coded in the margins of articles copied into Microsoft Word documents. Media frames were identified in an examination of the language used to describe the protest events, protesters, police, and other parties; the tone used to describe those parties;

the perspectives offered in the data via quotations, editorializing, and story construction; the details included or omitted in a story based on the comparison between alternative and mainstream articles; and the types of stories offered by the newspapers. Common themes and occurrences in the coverage were color coded and listed using Microsoft Word. Text that represented certain themes or frames that occurred were copied and grouped into lists. As some lists grew large, others were eliminated, and the emergence of common media frames occurred.

The criteria used to determine the existence of a particular media frame was largely based on Jules Boykoff's (2006) study of national, mainstream news coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle. Boykoff's study identified five prominent frames used by mainstream media sources in their coverage of the Seattle protests. The most prominent is the *violence frame*, in which attention focused on violent protesters or the potential for violent protests. This frame was present even when the protests themselves were non-violent. Often, a "vocabulary of war" was applied to the protesters. Second is the *disruption frame*, which often dovetailed with the *violence frame*. Content in this frame focused on the disruption of the WTO meetings, as well as the disruption of the regular lives of "normal" citizens. Third, content in the *freak frame* focuses on the non-mainstream values, beliefs, and opinions of the protesters. The *freak frame* emphasized the more radical elements of the global justice movement, often portraying them as the norm of the movement. Fourth, content in the *ignorance frame* depicted protesters as ignorant or uninformed, and was prevalent in both op-eds and straight news. Last, the

amalgam of grievances frame depicted the protesters of having no clear goal or message, or as fighting for too many issues.

This study has found that these frames all exist to some extent in both the mainstream and alternative media's coverage of the 1999 Seattle protest. This project uses Boykoff's five prominent frames as its methodological basis, and applies them to the study of Seattle's local mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage, primarily comparing their specific substance and character. More importantly, it extends on Boykoff's model by identifying additional frames found in local Seattle mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage. Finally, it looks closely at the specific content that makes up each frame, revealing significant differences between the mainstream and alternative newspapers studied here.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The findings presented below offer insight into the meaning contained in the portrayals of the Seattle protests by two different types of newspaper. Examining the specific differences between the media frames contained in mainstream and alternative news sources has implications for social movement researchers, as well as social movement organizations, the movements themselves, activists, news agencies, and anyone who reads about the events in the newspaper. This examination provides a window into how portrayals of these events are derived differently by different news sources. Consumers of news media use information contained in stories to build their interpretation of events. Therefore, the news-reading public's interpretations of the protest events in Seattle are largely influenced by how the media portrays those events. The meaning derived from these portrayals is shared among media consumers, and the frames identified in this study provide insight into that shared meaning.

The findings of this study also contribute to the development of the concept of the media frame. As previously noted, the definition and use of *frame analysis* is sometimes unclear and varies by researcher and discipline (Oliver and Johnston 2005); in addition, the literature reviewed in this study demonstrated the difficulty researchers have had in defining and applying the concept. One reason for this is that while a certain frame may

exist in both alternative and mainstream newspapers, the specific content of that frame may differ considerably across both types of news. In other words, while a *violence frame* exists in both mainstream and alternative coverage of the Seattle protests, alternative and mainstream coverage often displayed remarkably different interpretations of the violence that occurred, often noting different violent events, different victims of violence, and different reasons the violence occurred.

This fact is important because it has pushed this study to further examine the specific differences between alternative and mainstream sources within present frames, rather than simply identifying media frames that describe the news coverage too generally. Therefore, the examination of the differences between the media frames contained in alternative and mainstream coverage is the primary focus of this section. Part I of this analysis focuses on frames identified in Boykoff's (2006) study: the *violence frame*, the *disruption frame*, the *freak frame*, the *ignorance frame*, and the *amalgam of grievances frame*. Part II focuses on two media frames that emerged from my analysis that were not identified Boykoff's study. The most prominent and important is the *battle frame*, which portrays the Seattle WTO protests as a protester versus police street battle and allows focus on the issues and events themselves to be blurred. Additionally, a *chaos frame* exhibits a focus on disorganization of the protest events and the lack of order portrayed by the protesters.

Part I: Applying the Boykoff Model

The Violence Frame

Violence and the potential for violence were strongly represented in both mainstream and alternative coverage of the protests in Seattle. Boykoff (2006) found this to be the case as well, but mainly highlighted the coverage of violent and potentially violent protesters. This study finds that the violence and potential for violence of both protesters *and* police was often highlighted as well. Despite the fact that both alternative and mainstream data revealed the violent behavior of both these factions, alternative media tended to focus more heavily on the violent behavior of police while mainstream media tended towards coverage of violent protesters.

Numerous examples of the *violence frame* were found. *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* after the first day of the protests described protesters “withstanding tear gas, rubber pellets, and nightsticks” (Sunde 1999a). The article went on to explain that “protesters raged through the streets, while gangs used the cover of chaos to commit strong-arm robberies and loot some businesses.” *The Seattle Times* highlighted violence from the protesters and police alike, explaining in one article that “police fired paintball guns and pepper spray to disperse groups of unruly protesters who broke windows, sprayed graffiti on buildings and tried to block delegates” (Postman, Broom, and King 1999). The same article also highlighted extensive downtown property damage, and a “small group” of protesters who “pulled out hammers and other small implements and began smashing windows.”

Coverage of violence was extremely common in mainstream papers, and was similarly common in data collected from alternative media. An article in *Seattle Weekly* carried the headline “Inside the Bunker: Delegates Fume as Seattle Burns,” which took note of the potential for violence by explaining that “as demonstrators began to swarm the streets, hotels instituted a security lockdown. TV sets inside [a] theater began broadcasting pictures of the tear gas,” and quoted a WTO volunteer exclaiming “pretty soon there’s going to be a riot in here” (Fefer 1999). Another *Seattle Weekly* article noted protesters “kicking out bank windows while a team scales a building... spraying graffiti” (Anderson 1999a). An article in *The Stranger* entitled “Wild in the Streets” describes police using “crowd- control techniques including tear gas bombs, thrusts with nightsticks, rubber bullets, and stun grenades” (Musselman 1999). Examples like these commonly saturated news articles about the protests among all four newspapers studied.

Despite the overwhelming amount of violence that was covered in both types of sources there was an interesting tendency for each to highlight that while violence and the threat of violence existed, violent protesters were a minority among a much larger group of peaceful protesters. For example, *The Seattle Times* explained that “most remained peaceful” and only “pockets of protesters became violent” (Postman, Broom, and Davila 1999). Another article in the *Times* quoted Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper as saying, “for the most part, demonstrators are very peaceful and we're appreciative of that” (Postman et al. 1999a). The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that “[although] protesters seemed to be everywhere, few took part in violence, broke windows, painted slogans on walls or fought police” (Sunde 1999a). *Seattle Weekly* highlighted “thousands

of non-violent protesters” (Parrish 1999a) and *The Stranger* explained, “under the revolutionary bravado, however, the protesters... are a charming, earnest bunch of teens and twentysomethings who seem more prone to voting ... than throwing a Molotov cocktail at a WTO delegate” (Feit 1999b).

But reporters typically failed to mention this distinction until the end of an article, or it was a small part among coverage saturated with violence. In addition, the distinction fails to diffuse the violent tone of the coverage because it did not halt the news media from focusing almost entirely on violent events. Coverage about the violent events during the protests both preceded and followed any distinction made between the violent and non-violent protesters. It may even have reinforced the *violence frame* by placing violent protesters cognitively alongside non-violent protesters; thus, from the point of the view of the reader, attributing the actions of the violent protesters to the non-violent protesters. In fact, the newspapers readily admit that violence came to the forefront. As *The Seattle Times* explained: “The violence diverted attention from the vast majority of protesters who not only were peaceful but attempted to enforce the peace among fellow demonstrators” (Postman et al. 1999b).

Both mainstream and alternative papers devoted a significant amount of coverage to violent events, despite the noted fact that violent protesters were the minority. While the *violence frame* was present in both types of sources, its character was notably different in each type of source. Mainstream coverage tended to focus on the violent actions of protesters. A good example is *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* which devoted an entire article to a small group of “self-proclaimed” fringe “anarchists,” under the headline

“Fringe Anarchists in Middle of Violent Demonstrations” (Teichroeb 1999). While noting that this particular group was on the “fringe” of protester ideology, their headline indicates that the demonstrations themselves were violent, and that the members of the fringe group were simply caught in the middle of a totally violent demonstration. The same article goes on to describe in detail the “violent tactics” that the anarchists used to “rampage through downtown, smashing store windows with hammers, spray-painting buildings, and slashing tires.” Similar characterizations of protest groups were fairly common in mainstream news and less common among the alternative sources.

That is not to say that the mainstream newspapers never highlighted unjustified police violence, “in one incident, police shot tear gas into a peaceful crowd and at a lone protester at Pine and Fifth who was simply waving a Mexican flag” (Sunde 1999a).

Another article in the *Post-Intelligencer* was critical of the way the police handled certain situations, quoting a State Representative saying he was “appalled by the tactics used in residential neighborhoods” and noting a “litany of complaints ranging from police brutality to indiscriminate tear-gassing that affected a large number of innocent citizens and passers-by” (Murakami and Foster 1999). Such coverage, however, was less common in mainstream media and also held a softer tone in than in the alternative sources, who were less reserved in their criticism of police. Discussion of possible police misconduct was also much more likely to occur in articles printed several days after the protests ended rather than during the events themselves (Bartley et al. 1999; Robin and Hodson 1999).

An example of that softer tone was the tendency of the mainstream sources to accompany their description of violent police action with some sort of justification. In general the mainstream newspapers examined in this study portrayed police violence as a justifiable reaction to protester violence that was necessary to maintain order and safety. Violence undertaken by police was also justified by considering their reaction typical police procedure used to protect WTO delegates. For example, “police used several non-lethal tactics, including shouting through bullhorns, shooting at crowds with gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets *in order to* ensure that delegates could make it safely to opening ceremonies” (Postman and Carter 1999). The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* blamed protesters for “forcing authorities” to call in the National Guard and order a city-wide curfew (Sunde 1999a). In most cases in the mainstream papers, city authorities were quoted more often than protesters; therefore, opportunities existed for the police and other authorities to justify their actions while protesters were not afforded the same opportunity to do so. Quotes from police officials were often presented that justified their actions. *The Seattle Times* quoted Captain Jim Pugel of the Seattle Police saying “our intent is to keep the peace in the entire city of Seattle” (Postman, Broom, and Davila 1999). Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper was quoted in numerous articles in *The Seattle Times* and *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* defending his officer’s tactics and claiming that they acted “very, very effectively” (Postman, Broom, and Davila 1999). Quotes from protesters were less common in general, and those that were offered often condemned protester violence instead of justifying it.

Alternative media on the other hand often suggested that police were the ones who overreacted, tended towards violence, and used brutal tactics. A journalist from the *Seattle Weekly* mentioned his experience, “the police needed tear gas, pepper spray, and hard rubber pellets to dislodge people. I was gassed twice and took cover in a store entryway as pellets ricocheted through the crowd” (Berger 1999). The second part of that statement suggests a perception that police officers were firing at random into the crowd. *Weekly* also stated that “[police were] deployed in military fashion against nonviolent street-blockers, and chased, cuffed, and sprayed passersby on Broadway—while anarchists and other thugs trashed at will behind the lines” (Scigliano 1999a), claiming that police attacked peaceful demonstrators while violent anarchists were left uncontrolled. Another article in *Weekly* made the same claim: “Having failed to stop violent protesters Tuesday, police began arresting nonviolent protesters Wednesday. They assembled peacefully, sitting, then were dragged away. Flex-cuffs were applied as riot-gear cops held them down, sometimes putting a foot on their heads” (Anderson 1999a). An editorial in *The Stranger* stated, “cops started shooting tear gas and firing plastic bullets at peaceful protesters” (Feit 1999a). Another editorial in *The Stranger* directly blamed police for violence saying, “for a brief moment last week, Seattle became a real city full of conflict, dialogue, and people without shopping bags. Then came the police” (Stadler and Rathke 1999). In fact, they blamed police for not being “totally prepared for [the] level of violence” (Savage 1999a), and they called police action against non-violent protesters “the real violence of the week” (Parrish 1999b). From the point of

view of the alternative newspapers then, a violent, unprepared police force was attempting to take control of Seattle and was targeting the wrong groups of protesters.

While they readily condemned violent police tactics alternative papers also were more likely to justify protester violence. *The Stranger* noted that protesters who damaged property “attacked property, not people, after all, and the disruption they caused helped ensure that police could not break up the more peaceable types blocking intersections and hotel doorways in time to salvage any of Tuesday's WTO session” (Perry 1999). An entire article in *The Stranger* focused on why the protesters who committed some degree of property violence were both justified and necessary to the goals of the protests (Feit 1999a) as did one in *Seattle Weekly* (Anderson 1999a). The article in *Weekly* entitled “Violence Works”(Anderson 1999a), stated that “the violent edge kept delegates in their hotel rooms and gave the protests long minutes of airtime in Tokyo and Cairo;” they even compared it to violent tactics used to protest the Vietnam war: “this should surprise no one. In 1970s Seattle, anarchistic bombers and angry freeway marchers helped stop a war.” The suggestion that violent tactics may have helped the cause of the protesters was never mentioned in the sample of mainstream newspapers.

In regards to the *violence frame* as originally depicted by Boykoff (2006), the evidence certainly points to the fact that such a frame exists in both mainstream and alternative newspapers’ coverage of the WTO protests. Such coverage prevented discussion of the *issues* surrounding the WTO meetings and protests in Seattle; this finding will be discussed in greater detail in the section about the *battle frame*. Adding to Boykoff’s findings is the discovery that a difference in the character of violent coverage

existed between mainstream and alternative newspaper sources. The evidence noted above exemplifies the tendency of the mainstream newspapers to depict the protesters as being violent for the sake of being violent while minimizing police aggression and justifying the violence by police. The alternative newspapers tended to do just the opposite by justifying protester violence and condemning violent acts of the police. The discussion of this difference in character between the two types of news sources continues with a discussion of the *disruption frame*.

The Disruption Frame

Boykoff's discussion of the *disruption frame* centered on "dissident disruption [that] operated at two levels: (1) the disruption of the regularly scheduled meetings of the WTO, World Bank, and IMF, and (2) the general disruption of the lives of regular, law-abiding (and non-protesting) citizens." (2006: 14). The current study found both to be evident in mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage; and, in addition, it found that the disruption frame operated on two other levels: displaying the (3) economic disruption of Seattle businesses and, found solely in alternative sources, (4) the disruption of the protests by police. Although more overtly pronounced in the *violence frame*, there was again a difference in character between mainstream and alternative newspapers when it came to the *disruption frame*, the most notable being that the alternative newspapers often implied or explicitly asserted that the police disrupted the ability of protesters to carry out their protest activities where and how they pleased.

Both newspaper types focused heavily on how the protests disrupted the WTO meetings. On the opening day of the meetings, *The Seattle Times* reported that, “the official opening of the conference was delayed past its scheduled 10 a.m. start, and finally canceled about 12:45 p.m.,” and that “a news conference with Charlene Barshefsky, the top U.S. trade minister here, was canceled, and only a fraction of WTO delegates were able to get into the hall for the opening ceremony, which was delayed” (Postman et al. 1999a). The next day the *Times* gave this report:

In their attempt to stop the conference, [protesters] formed human blockades, sat cross-legged in intersections and chained themselves to scaffolding with bicycle locks. They managed to tie up streets around the Washington State Convention and Trade Center, where many WTO meetings are being held, prompting the cancellation of the conference's opening ceremony (Postman et al. 1999b).

A sub-headline in the *Post-Intelligencer* read, “Demonstrators Delay Start of Trade Meeting for Hours” (Sunde 1999a).

The Stranger and *Seattle Weekly* often reported disruption the same way; for example, *The Stranger* reported, “early in the day, they gathered in the blocks around the Convention Center, blocking the entry of many WTO delegates and causing Tuesday's agenda to skid off course” (Musselman 1999). *Weekly* noted that, “the violent edge kept delegates in their hotel rooms” (Parrish 1999a). But alternatives also painted disruption as the *strategy* and the *purpose* of the protests, therefore giving legitimacy to the disruption and also allowing readers to view such disruption as a form of victory for the protesters. A key example comes from an article in *Seattle Weekly*:

The strategy of the Direct Action Network... was relatively simple. Protest organizers targeted the Paramount Theatre—where WTO activities were scheduled to start—and divided the surrounding area into 13 wedges. Different

affinity groups—of 5-15 people, many willing to risk arrest—took responsibility for blocking key intersections and hotels in each wedge. Organizers assumed they would not be able to get near the Paramount itself, and so sought to gridlock downtown, preventing delegates in their limos, cabs, and even motel rooms from getting to their appointed talks (Parrish 1999a).

This is a very clear description of the strategy one of the key protest organizers used to purposefully disrupt the scheduled WTO meetings. Similarly detailed explanations were not offered by the mainstream press. From such text one can infer that the protesters were victorious, given the fact that many of the meetings were delayed and eventually cancelled, fulfilling the expressed purpose of the protests.

Another example of the same thing included a quote from *The Stranger*, “groups like the Direct Action Network were publicly talking about shutting the whole conference down” (Campbell, Feit, and Vogel 1999). Several quotes in *The Stranger* seemed to imply outright that protester disruption was a sign of victory, “in fact, it was the destruction and closing of downtown that garnered international attention for the protesters' cause,” and “what they wanted, and got -- thanks to all the fires, window-smashings, and tear gas lobbing -- was a time-out from the unfettered practices of global corporations” (Feit 1999a). Such discussion of the *reasons* why protesters were purposefully disruptive, and to a lesser extent declarations of protester victory, were largely absent from mainstream coverage.

Boycoff's second form of disruption – disruption of the everyday lives of non-protesting citizens – was present in both newspaper types. *The Seattle Times* reported, “hundreds of [protesters] marched from the SCCC rally to Pike and Boren, where they sat down in the intersection and blocked traffic” (Postman et al. 1999a). Numerous quotes in

both the alternative and mainstream papers depicted citizens having difficulty getting to and from work and carrying out their typical business in downtown Seattle. For example, *The Seattle Times* quoted a local citizen, “I was hoping to get as far as my building. I made it within a block” (Postman et al. 1999a). Such coverage was fairly common in both types of media without remarkable differences. It is also interesting to note that there was again, like in the *violence frame*, a distinction made between those protesters who caused a disturbance of some kind and those who came to be peaceful as WTO head Michael Moore “urged participants not to blame ‘the good people of Seattle’ for the day’s disruption” (Fefer 1999); though, in almost all other instances this type of quote was spared for the end of an article.

In addition to the two types of disruption discussed in Boykoff’s study, this study found two additional types. The first, focused on primarily by the mainstream sources, is economic disruption in downtown Seattle. This included describing business closures due to danger or vandalism as well as the monetary cost to businesses for having to close. Quotations from Seattle business owners whose business either had to close or had been subject to vandalism or violence supplemented those descriptions. Such coverage was not common in alternative papers, but the mainstream *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, for example, covered the issue extensively:

Businesses throughout the downtown core, many with windows still shuttered with plywood, struggled yesterday to recover from an estimated \$1.5 million in damage, the worst vandalism in decades, according to the Downtown Seattle Merchants Association. And the absence of shoppers, already estimated at \$7 million in losses yesterday, was piling up at a rate as high as \$2.5 million a day in what is supposed to be the best time of the year for retailers (Teichroeb and Gorlick 1999).

The *Post-Intelligencer* included quotes from customers and retailers, “Nothing's open. It has to be devastating to the retailers - millions and millions in damage... For many at the store who rely on commissions for their income, it could be a bleak holiday season” (Teichroeb and Gorlick 1999). The *Times* explained that the “protests meant another night of slow business – or no business – downtown” (Clarridge et al. 1999) and reported on costs to businesses, describing “more than \$12 million in lost holiday sales [and] threats of lawsuits to recover the money” (Flores 1999).

If alternative papers addressed the issue of lost holiday sales it was often to declare a victory in the fight against global capitalism, a *clear* bias in the direction of the protesters. As an example I will revisit a quote presented in part in an earlier paragraph:

What they wanted, and got -- thanks to all the fires, window-smashings, and tear gas lobbing -- was a time-out from the unfettered practices of global corporations; corporations that are looking to trump national labor, environmental safety, and market regulations through the WTO (Feit 1999a).

This quote speaks to two points; the first being that protesters disrupted the meetings to begin with and second that the protesters were successful because they provided a break from perceived dominance of global corporations. An editorial in *Seattle Weekly* claimed, “the battle for Seattle was in essence already won” because “for at least a day, downtown was turned into a giant shopping-free zone, and baffled businessmen from all over the world had to take cover” (Berger 1999). *Weekly* also claimed the protests were a “defeat for Slick Willie, United States foreign policy, and multinational capitalism's dogma that unrestrained trade is the ultimate economic good” (Downey 1999a). This type of trumpeting of protester success over corporations and businessmen, which ally

with the WTO, was one way the alternative newspapers characterized the economic disturbances caused by the protests. The issue was certainly discussed in a very different way by mainstream papers, which tended to focus on economic disruption by describing monetary losses.

To this point we have seen how the protests were framed as a disruption of regularly scheduled WTO conference meetings, the daily lives of Seattle citizens, and the Seattle economy. In each instance, content in the *disruption frame* has been structured so that it was the protests that affected some event, person, or thing. Alternative papers often constructed a different story, in which the authorities – usually the Seattle Police or Mayor Paul Schell – caused the disruption of what was supposed to be a series of peaceful protest rallies. Such interpretations were not found in the mainstream newspaper data, although numerous examples are found in alternative coverage. *Weekly* reported, for example, that Mayor Schell’s “notorious” protest-free zone, and not the protests themselves, is what turned “downtown [into] and war zone” (Scigliano 1999b). In fact, several articles noted Mayor Schell’s no-protest zone as one of the key mechanisms authorities use to disrupt protest activities (Feit 1999a; Scigliano 1999b). The Scigliano (1999b) article also blamed the Seattle Police for having “transformed the terms of the protest, unleashing rage and resentment,” and for making “themselves, rather than the WTO, the objects of the protests.” This is especially significant because it notes that the actions taken by the Mayor and the Seattle Police Department were such a disturbance that they transformed the actual purpose of the protests.

There are other examples. *The Stranger* declared that “if not for the effective declaration of martial law throughout the city's downtown core, it's entirely possible that demonstrators would have prevented the huddled masses of World Trade Organization luminaries from convening a single session all week long” (Perry 1999). *Seattle Weekly* highlighted police tactics as a form of disruption. The Seattle Police were “deployed in military fashion against non-violent street blockers, and chased, cuffed, and sprayed passersby on Broadway” (Scigliano 1999a). A faceless “non-discriminating police dragnet... roused or nabbed demonstrators, bystanders, and politicians... along with a half-dozen reporters and photographers” (Anderson 1999b). Much of the overall tone of the alternative news sources seemed to indicate that the authorities interrupted the protests by creating the no-protest zone using violent tactics against non-violent demonstrators and in general by interrupting the non-violent demonstrations that were occurring. In doing so, the authorities kept the protests from accomplishing their goals in full.

Looking back again at Boykoff's understanding of the *disruption frame*, strong evidence exists to support its existence in both the alternative and mainstream newspapers studied here. Both types of newspapers highlighted the disturbance of the WTO meetings and the lives of the citizens of Seattle. It is noted that there seems to be more of a sense in the alternative news coverage that such disruption served a particular purpose and that this purpose may have been noble or valiant. Certainly there is more of a difference between the two sources in the character of this frame when you recognize the third and fourth types of disruption found here. The economic disruption caused by

the protests was framed by mainstream sources in terms of the monetary costs to the Seattle economy and businesses as a whole, while the alternative sources tended to portray economic disruption as a victory for protesters whose reason for protesting was to make a particular statement about capitalism. Lastly, alternative papers alone suggested that tactics used by the authorities, usually Mayor Paul Schell and the Seattle Police, disrupted the protest events to the point that the goals and character of the protests changed permanently.

The Freak Frame

The third frame identified in Boykoff's (2006) study was the *Freak Frame*, which exists when mass media "focus on the non-mainstream values, beliefs, and opinions of the dissidents as well as their age and appearance... with this frame, the more radical elements of the Global Justice Movement... are transformed into a synecdoche for the entire movement" (2006: 216). It is difficult to ascertain specifically *when* a newspaper article goes from simply describing aesthetic details to ascribing them to an entire movement, but this study found that a significant amount of attention was placed on some of the more bizarre elements of the protest marches. The difference in the way in which this frame was depicted by the two media sources was that the alternative newspapers tended to go further to legitimize protesters' unusual actions.

The most common evidence of the *Freak Frame* was a focus on bizarre costumes, clothing, and other aesthetic characteristics such as piercings and hair color. After the first day of protests, the *Post-Intelligencer* reported, "on some street corners, spontaneous

carnivals broke out. People danced. Jugglers juggled, and a woman practiced her Hula-Hoop. A young man strode through the crowd on stilts” (Sunde 1999a). It also described “children costumed as endangered species [wandering] the streets” (Paulson 1999) and people dancing, and playing bongos and tambourines (Ramsey 1999a). *The Seattle Times* noted that “some protesters were dressed... as clowns and butterflies. Others walked on stilts, while others wheeled through the growing throngs on high-riding bicycles modified to look like choppers” (Postman et al. 1999a). The alternatives focused on similar details, as *The Stranger* described protest events featuring “singers, musicians, rappers, dancers, and jugglers [and] protest groups dressed as animals, vegetables, and Superman” (Steed 1999) and a “protest kid with a double pierced nose and mousy brown peach fuzz on his punk-rock buzz cut” (Feit 1999b). *Seattle Weekly* witnessed “giant puppets, turtle costumes, a black-clad marching band called the Infernal Noise Brigade, an inflatable blue whale named Flo, and a Macy's parade-style blimp from the Rainforest Action folk” (Berger 1999).

Less common, though warranting comment, were reports that implied protesters were out of touch with mainstream values and beliefs. Such coverage was certainly more prevalent in the two mainstream newspapers. The *Post-Intelligencer* called “most” of the demonstrators, “young and idealistic and convinced of the purity of their cause” (Horsey 1999). The *Times* quoted a Seattle resident stating that “it's too bad they have to impact everyday folks like this” (Postman et al. 1999a) implying that protesters did not represent everyday people. It was also frequently stated in the mainstream papers that protesters were out of touch with the issue of free trade. The *Times* quoted several WTO delegates,

including one who stated, “[protesters] do not understand the benefits of free trade to the developing nations” (Postman et al. 1999a). A delegate was quoted in the *Post-Intelligencer* saying “the integration of America into the global economy has moved forward so rapidly that people don't understand it and the benefits associated with it” (Paulson 1999). Similar characterizations were found less often in the two alternative sources. *The Stranger*, for example, referred to the “revolutionary bravado” of the protesters (Feit 1999b) and *Weekly* called protesters the “radical left” (Howland Jr. 1999) as well as a group of “radical environmentalists, labor activists, human rights advocates, and social justice workers” (Parrish 1999a).

Once again, there was a significant difference in the character of the *freak frame* between the mainstream and alternative data. There was an inarguable tendency for the alternative newspapers to go further to legitimize and normalize protesters that was not found in any strong fashion in the mainstream data. There were two primary ways in which this was done. The first was to highlight the significant diversity of the protesters so that it would be shown that they were not a uniform entity with fringe points of view, but rather a sundry mosaic of citizens voicing their various concerns about the effects of global free trade. Alternative papers also were likely to connect them to groups widely perceived as legitimate, such as the AFL-CIO. For example, after calling them “a motley collection of protesters ranging from Dyke Action and Raging Grannies to trade unionists and environmentalists,” an article in *The Stranger* added that “the diversity of the protesters was one of the most bracing aspects of Tuesday’s mass action” and that protesters “represented a broad spectrum of causes – greens, lefties, labor, farm groups,

peace groups, consumer advocates, and anti-consumerists (anarchist and otherwise)” (Perry 1999). *Seattle Weekly* described “middle-aged, middle class Joes and Janes” that were part of a “crowd drawing more heavily from middle-America” that came “in numbers that surpassed organizer’s most optimistic predictions” (Howland Jr. 1999). The *Times* and *Post-Intelligencer* were more likely to focus heavily on perceived oddities, such as “a French sheep farmer angry over tariffs on cheese” (Paulson 1999). When the *Times* did devote coverage to protester diversity, it accentuated the bizarre, “environmentalists joined hands with steelworkers, nuns, French cheese-makers, vegans and sea-turtle impersonators. Teenagers in baggy-legged pants and graying hippies walked side-by-side. Social workers and lawyers shared picket lines with body-pierced punks and tattooed grungers” (Postman et al. 1999a).

The other way in which *Seattle Weekly* and *The Stranger* tended to normalize protesters is slightly more complicated. A major story in both newspaper types was the small group of anarchists from Eugene, Oregon, dressed in black, who admittedly and directly participated in much of the property damage that took place in Seattle during the protests. The alternative media went further to justify vandalism, but also went further to separate the anarchists from the other protesters than did the mainstream media. An editorial that carried the headline “Anarchists Go Home,” well represents the vigor that went into separating peaceful protesters from the anarchists when it blames “[protester’s] anarchist enemies” for inciting police violence towards non-violent protesters (Parrish 1999b). In essence, in the context of the *Freak Frame*, the alternative media presented the anarchists as *the freaks of the freaks*. In doing this, the anarchists were not presented

as a synecdoche of the movement but rather a minority of unruly activists undermining the causes of thousands of legitimate protesters.

The mainstream media, on the other hand, in many instances, presented the anarchists not only in the spotlight of their coverage but right alongside the non-violent protesters. As the *Post-Intelligencer* noted, “Anarchists represented a tiny fraction of thousands of mostly peaceful protesters in Seattle yesterday, but their violent tactics put them on center stage as they rampaged through downtown, smashing store windows with hammers, spray-painting buildings and slashing tires” (Teichroeb 1999). Despite the fact that this article notes the anarchists were a tiny fraction of the protesters, the article correctly notes that the anarchists and their actions took “center stage” in a large number of mainstream articles (Foster and Barber 1999; Keene 1999; Postman and Carter 1999; Postman et al. 1999a; Ramsey 1999a; Sunde 1999a; Teichroeb 1999; Trahant 1999) allowing non-violent protesters and anarchists committing vandalism to be discussed directly alongside each other. They did this without going very far to separate the two groups despite their noted difference in number.

Alternative sources, on the other hand, tended to legitimize the violent actions that the anarchists took as having a purpose within the movement (as discussed in the section on the *Violence Frame*); but at the same time, they commonly placed a clear and deliberate distinction between “legitimate,” non-violent protesters and the anarchists who committed vandalism; a distinction that was not as clear in mainstream data. For example, an article in *The Stranger* argued that “disturbances were caused by outside anarchist agitators... not the type of mild-mannered protesters we’ve come to know and

love in Seattle” (Feit 1999a). Another argued that it was “those crazies... those anarchists or whatever” (Savage 1999a) who caused the majority of the issues and stole the media spotlight from legitimate protesters. An editorial espoused that “black-clad vandals with no clear agenda haunted my dreams” (Stadler and Rathke 1999). An editorial in *Weekly* focused entirely on how anarchist vandals significantly hurt the cause of the protests (Parrish 1999b). By going to greater lengths to separate the anarchists from the other protesters, the alternative papers went further to normalize non-violent protesters, allowing the anarchists to be the ones viewed as the *freaks*.

By focusing on aesthetic details such as clothing, costumes, piercings, and hair color, as well as by demonstrating the non-mainstream beliefs of the protesters, the *freak frame* as described by Boykoff (2006) was certainly evident in this study for both mainstream and alternative data. The evidence also supports the finding that although the *freak frame* was evident in both sources, the mainstream newspapers tended to lump more protesters into the *freak frame* than the alternative sources who went further to distinguish the legitimate from the freakish. Alternative sources were demonstratively more likely to legitimize and normalize the protesters in general.

The Ignorance Frame

It has been established that in some mainstream press, protesters have been “frequently depicted as ignorant or uninformed” (Boykoff 2006: 18). This is the central subject of the *ignorance frame*. Interestingly, the *ignorance frame* might be the frame that provides the starkest contrast between the mainstream and alternative newspapers

studied here. While it was certainly evident in the mainstream newspapers, the *ignorance frame* as defined by Boykoff was almost entirely absent from the alternative news in the examined in this study.

The mainstream papers provided numerous examples of the *ignorance frame*. Often, accusations of protester ignorance were provided via direct quotations from WTO delegates, Seattle authorities, or regular citizens. For example, the *Times* quoted a German delegate, “these people do not understand the benefits of free trade to developing nations” (Postman et al. 1999a), and a Seattle attorney, “I’ll bet a lot of those people thought WTO were call letters for a...radio station” (Keene 1999). The *Post-Intelligencer* quoted Jerry Jasinowski, President of the National Association of Manufacturers, implying protesters are not aware of the benefits of free trade and support positions for which there is no evidence:

The integration of America into the global economy has moved forward so rapidly that people don't understand it and the benefits associated with it. . . . They are susceptible to the demagogic arguments that trade is a race to the bottom . . . when there's no evidence for that (Paulson 1999).

They also supplied a quote from an African delegate who stated that the protesters espouse a lot of “half-truths” (Ramsey 1999b).

The other significant way that the mainstream sources framed protesters as ignorant was through editorials. Ramsey’s (1999a) piece in the *Post-Intelligencer* was particularly critical of the Direct Action Network (DAN), one of the primary organizers of the protests, asking, “did the Direct Action Network even know what this conference was about” adding that DAN’s positions were incoherent, especially in relation to the

AFL-CIO's. Ramsey's eventual conclusion was that "there weren't a lot of ideas that day. It was largely an emotional protest."

Another editorial in the *Post-Intelligencer* claimed many protesters were there simply "for the joy of destruction and the thrill of looting" (Horsey 1999) and not for their knowledge of the issues. The *Times* too, ran editorials criticizing the protesters for their ignorance. Keene (1999) wrote that the WTO "has been on everyone's minds even if few understand it" and "although thousands came to protest, few of the most violent could articulate why." Brodeur (1999) stated, "Most of the marchers in the AFL-CIO protest were organized and peaceful. They were clear on their issues, and knew why they were there," implying that others were not and did not. Trahant (1999) claimed that after the violence began, "any exchange of ideas was pushed far away from the downtown corridor and WTO." In almost no instances in mainstream papers were protesters given the opportunity to disprove their ignorance, particularly if they were openly involved in property destruction; so despite the *Times* offering this quotation from one of the Eugene anarchists, "we came here to protest the WTO, and to protest homelessness and the neglect of people... it makes me mad that people think we're ignorant about the issues involved" (Clarridge et al. 1999), protester's opinions on the issues at hand were not often printed in mainstream newspapers.

The alternative papers stood in remarkable contrast to the mainstream papers when it came to protester ignorance. It was frequently implied or explicitly stated that protesters had real issues and concerns and it was almost never implied that they did not.

The following quote by Stadler and Rathke (1999) of *The Stranger* has a tone that infers a direct criticism of those who called the protesters ignorant:

A lot of agony has been wasted over whether these demonstrators knew or cared anything about the WTO. Were they "sincere" or committed in their opposition? This faux question packs the implied criticism that no, they were not, and therefore what they did and said was frivolous.

Different causes that protesters had taken up were duly noted. Stadler and Rathke (1999) noted that people protested because “their communities and economies have become strange to them,” due to the policies of the WTO. Many were protesting “the impact of WTO policies on the poor of the Third World” and “the free-trade policies of the WTO” and the message of the movement to this point has been clear enough to spawn “global opposition” of those policies (Parrish 1999c). George Howland Jr. of the *Times* marveled at “just how broad a coalition has been built around something as arcane and complicated as trade policy” (1999). *The Stranger* even implied that the people who destroyed property knew something about why they did what they were did, writing that “it was certainly no accident” that “activists zoomed in on companies like Nike, Starbucks, and Planet Hollywood”(Feit 1999a). In fact, Feit (1999a) inferred that it was Seattle Mayor Paul Schell who was ignorant, “Schell gloats to the world about how contrite our activists are toward Seattle's downtown businesses. Talk about missing the point.”

This study found only one instance in which the alternative newspapers implied that a majority of protesters were not fully aware of the issues surrounding free-trade: an editorial in *Seattle Weekly* claimed that protesters were not aware that the policies they

support might actually hurt some of the people they were intending to help, that the movement had become over-simplified by “sloganeering over easy-to-hate sweatshops,” and “focuses less on this basic dynamic [of the WTO] than on the specter of Third World "sweatshops" run by greedy, environment-wrecking multinationals” (Shapiro 1999). Though common in the mainstream papers, such rhetoric regarding the Global Justice Movement as a whole was not found anywhere else in the alternative press.

The Amalgam of Grievances Frame

The final frame identified in national mainstream media by Boykoff (2006) was the *amalgam of grievances frame*. Protesters in this frame are accused of having too many different issues for which they are fighting. News articles can describe the diverse array of issues represented by protesters as a positive trait of the Global Justice Movement, a negative trait of the movement, or neither positive or negative (Boykoff 2006). Boykoff found that the amalgam of grievances espoused by protesters was almost always portrayed in a value-neutral or negative way (47.3% and 46.2% of occurrences respectively). When presented as a negative trait of the movement, it is implied or directly stated that when protesters have such an amalgam of grievances, it “leads to the perception that the Global Justice Movement has no clear message” (Boykoff 2006: 220-221). That particular finding was a key part of Boykoff’s study, but the findings here were quite different.

The *amalgam of grievances frame* occurred quite infrequently in the data sample studied here; and when it did, it always appeared to be value-neutral. In fact, the data

sample yielded no concrete examples of clear value-judgments being applied to the description of the wide array of causes represented by the protesters. Of course, the diverse set of causes that fall under the umbrella of the Global Justice movement were certainly noted, but it was never considered a strength of the movement on one hand, and there was no implication that diversity within the Global Justice Movement meant that its positions were unclear on the other. Direct accusations and implications of protester ignorance that were discovered fit more directly into the definition of the *ignorance frame*.

Overall, mainstream newspapers never seemed to accuse protesters of having too many causes to fight for, nor did they commend them for bringing all the different causes together. They simply highlighted the wide array of causes represented by the protesters; for example, “environmentalists joined hands with steelworkers, nuns, French cheese-makers, vegans, and sea turtle impersonators” (Postman et al. 1999a). The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in reporting on the AFL-CIO march, noted that “members of the AFL-CIO, Teamsters, Longshoremen and other unions were joined en route by students, environmentalists, church groups and social justice advocates” (Foster 1999). They also reported about another event where “marchers joined farmers, environmentalists and Teamsters for a rally at the market, where French activist Jose Bove cheered the fight against genetically modified foods” (Sunde 1999b).

The alternative newspapers’ reports of protester diversity were very similar in character and they were similarly value-neutral. For example, *Seattle Weekly* reported “a wide fusion of radical environmentalists, labor activists, human rights advocates, and

social justice workers [that] made the WTO listen when for five years it had adamantly refused” (Parrish 1999a). This example judges the protests to be successful, but it doesn’t attribute that success directly to the solidarity of a wide-variety of groups. It simply states that there was a wide spectrum of protesters and that they were in fact successful in making the WTO listen. Another example comes from *The Stranger*, which quoted a journalist in *The Economist* stating the WTO is “under attack from trade unions, greens and even consumer groups, all of whom say its rules advance big companies’ global ambitions at the expense of jobs and the environment” (Perry 1999). Even though this example notes multiple groups of protesters, it actually states that their grievances regarding jobs and the environment were shared among them. That is antithetical to the definition of the *amalgam of grievances frame*, in which the accusation is made that protesters have too many issues to fight for.

So while Boykoff (2006) presented strong evidence that national mainstream newspapers presented the protester’s *amalgam of grievances* frequently as a negative trait of the movement, the Seattle-based newspapers examined in this study displayed an understanding of the diversity of causes represented by protesters, but never accused protesters of fighting for too many issues and didn’t connect that diversity to an unclear message of the Global Justice Movement. Negative implications about protesters’ messages were more often portrayed in the *ignorance frame*. More interestingly and much more commonly, the data set examined in this study diverted attention from the messages of the protests to the violent events that occurred, and most typically the

messages were lost as newspapers framed the protest events as an ongoing protester vs. police street battle through the *battle frame*.

Part II: Newly Identified Frames

The Battle Frame

This study has found that a *battle frame* existed in both the mainstream and alternative newspapers studied here. The *battle frame* refers, in part, to coverage of the protests that focused on violent altercations between police and protesters. Such coverage has already been presented as part of the *violence frame*, but there is a particular characteristic that is unique to the *battle frame*: many of the violent events that were covered were framed in a way that presented them as part of an ongoing police vs. protester street battle, rather than as individual incidences of violence within an otherwise peaceful and meaningful protest march. The messages of the protests and the issues surrounding the WTO meetings were lost in the continuous coverage of police-protester confrontations. In the newspapers studied here, the story moved away from *protests against the WTO* and became about the battle for control of the streets in Seattle. Coverage related to the WTO itself was overshadowed by the *battle frame*. It is important to remember that the *battle frame* is highly related to the *violence frame*, but its material has a character unique enough to warrant its own consideration. Interestingly, there was little difference in the character of this frame displayed between alternative and mainstream newspapers.

The foremost evidence to support the existence of this frame is the saturation of coverage devoted to direct police-protester confrontations. Such coverage was found in both mainstream and alternative newspapers. The front page article following the first day of protests in *The Seattle Times* provides a representative example:

One of the largest protests in Seattle's history turned confrontational today as police fired paintball guns and pepper spray to disperse groups of unruly demonstrators who broke windows... When police fired pepper spray at protesters, they in turn threw sticks at the officers, prompting police to move an armored truck into the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Union Street and physically throw protesters out of the way (Postman et al. 1999a).

The *Post-Intelligencer* too had their front page article describe the protests in a similar way:

[Police began] shooting flash-bang concussion grenades and tear gas at a crowd of more than 1,000. Two platoons of police in riot gear followed protesters down Pike Street, firing tear gas... At 10 p.m., police set off three concussion grenades, then fired a dozen rounds of tear gas, forcing many protesters to flee (Sunde 1999a).

The alternative papers described similar confrontations. *The Stranger* reported “a standoff between police and protesters at Fourth and Pike, where demonstrators started a bonfire in a trash bin. Police fired off canisters of pepper spray and tear gas, which only escalated tensions... protesters responded by throwing bottles, sticks, and fireworks” (Campbell, Feit, and Vogel 1999). A reporter for *Seattle Weekly* described his own personal experience, “without audible warning, the flash grenades fly. The police fire the gas shells first into the crowd, then in front, leaving nowhere to go but back” (Scigliano 1999b). Another article in *The Stranger* carried the sub headline, “Inside the Ninth and Virginia Squat, Where WTO Protesters Face Off with the Cops” (Feit 1999b). These

examples were representative of many articles and were very common in both types of newspapers.

The coverage of direct protester-police confrontation was not the only evidence of the *battle frame*. Newspapers also used a significant amount of war-related rhetoric. *Seattle Weekly* called the protests “The Trade Wars,” said that “the approach to the Convention Center, looks like a cross between a war zone and a prison yard,” and called downtown Seattle “a war zone” with police “standing in military formation against the walls of protesters” (Scigliano 1999c). A headline for an article in *Weekly* on December 2nd, 1999 read “Inside the Bunker” (Fefer 1999). The *Times* quoted a Chilean trade minister stating that “if you're in a state of war here, you shouldn't have invited us to this country” (Seattle Times Staff 1999) and a medical-team coordinator for the Direct Action Network claiming that “[protesters] that were treated were casualties of war” (Robin and Hodson 1999). The *Post-Intelligencer* described police working “on the front lines of the chaos” (Barber 1999) and stated that Mayor Paul Schell and Police Chief Norm Stamper were “outgunned” (Foster and Barber 1999).

The use of war rhetoric and the continuous coverage describing direct confrontations between protesters and police were supportive of Seattle newspapers openly describing the scenes as street battles. Interestingly, the term “Battle for Seattle” was coined even before the protest marches (Postman et al. 1999c). The term itself was used in numerous alternative (Berger 1999; Perry 1999; Scigliano 1999a; Scigliano 1999b) and mainstream articles (Postman et al. 1999b; Postman et al. 1999c; Foster and Murakami 1999; Horsey 1999).

Even if you ignore the catch phrase “Battle for Seattle,” events were regularly referred to with the term “battle.” The *Times* reported that “some trade ministers were unhappy with the ongoing battle between police and protesters” and “scenes of battling protesters and police will hurt the city's chances of attracting national conventions that could be controversial” (Clarridge et al. 1999). Another article pointed out that “the street battles - with images broadcast around the world of Seattle's downtown shut down and vandalized, then occupied by riot police - left scars and questions” (Postman, Rahner, and Sorensen 1999). The *Post-Intelligencer* claimed that Seattle’s downtown became “a tear-gassed battleground between riot-clad police [and] thousands of anti-WTO protesters” (Wallace 1999) and described “day long street battles [that] prompted Governor Gary Locke to call out the National Guard... continued late into the night” (Sunde 1999a). *Seattle Weekly* explained that “from protesters' riot one day to police riot the next, the city flopped about madly in an attempt to contain this week's World Trade Organization street battles in Seattle” (Anderson 1999b).

Framing the protest events as a battle, war, altercation, or confrontation between police and protesters reorganizes the understanding of the events. The meaning and reasons for the protests became lost in the battle rhetoric. A sub-headline in *Seattle Weekly* pointed out that “The cops replace the WTO as the target of protesters' fear and anger” (Scigliano 1999b). Such an example is telling of the shift in focus from the issues surrounding the WTO to the tension between protesters and police. Text in that editorial further explained the interpretation:

In the process [of duty] the Seattle Police have transformed the terms of the protest, unleashing rage and resentments that I fear will reverberate long after the World Trade Organization disappears from the city and the headlines. They have made themselves, rather than the WTO, the objects of the protest and of the swirling, inchoate grievances that coalesced around the trade conference. They have turned the Battle in Seattle into the Battle of Seattle, a collision of Seattle with itself (Scigliano 1999b).

The fact that the article blames the police for “transforming the terms of the protest” is irrelevant to the point that regardless of who may be responsible for the shift, the newspaper coverage was sharply focused on the protest events as street battle rather than as organized events with meaning and purpose. Another excellent example of this shift in understanding comes from *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, which stated in an article that police had to “quell anti-police protests downtown and on Capitol Hill related to the World Trade Organization meeting” (Murakami and Foster 1999). This quote implies that the protests were directly anti-police and were only indirectly related to the WTO meeting.

There were few instances in which the newspapers themselves demonstrated a conscious understanding of the shift in focus that had taken place; rather, the shift is evident in the heavy saturation of coverage devoted to direct police-protester confrontation, the regular use of war imagery, and the continuous description of the protest events as the *battle for Seattle* and *street battles*, all of which are present in the absence of meaningful discussion of the issues surrounding the WTO meetings and the related protest events. It is unclear whether the messages of the protests were genuinely lost in the course of the protest events that week, or if the media – consciously or unconsciously - overlooked them. This subject is outside the realm of this study but

certainly warrants further research. What is certain though, was that the media coverage contained the *battle frame*.

As it pertains to this study, it is interesting to note that the *battle frame* is one in which there is little difference between the alternative and mainstream data. If anything, there was more evidence from mainstream sources to support the existence of this frame than there were from the alternative sources, but the alternative media sample was also smaller. The alternative media articles were more inclined to blame the police for inciting many of the so-called battles (Scigliano 1999b; Parrish 1999a), but these instances were rare. In general, both the alternative and mainstream articles focused similarly on police-protester confrontations and used terms related to battle- and war-rhetoric to define those confrontations as street battles.

Something worth noting is the fact that the *battle frame* is highly related to the *violence frame*, though they are separate and unique frames. The *battle frame* is distinct from the *violence frame* for three reasons. The first reason is simply that the degree to which police-protester confrontations and related battle imagery appears with consistency across the entire data sample allows the *battle frame* to emerge as a unique frame. The second reason is that content in the *violence frame* refers to violence and violent events more generally. Describing violent imagery does not necessarily imply that protesters have a direct and legitimate conflict with the police, which is the core aspect of the *battle frame*. In addition to conflicts with the police, the *violence frame* contains issues such as looting, vandalism, internal conflicts among protesters (and police), and conflicts between police and/or protesters and lay citizens.

The third reason is even more significant: the *battle frame* is not evident only in the discussion of violence. The *battle frame* literally contains a shift of all attention to direct protester-police conflict, but does not necessarily refer to violent events. To exemplify this it is worth revisiting two quotes. *Seattle Weekly* reported that police had to “quell *anti-police* protests downtown and on Capitol Hill related to the World Trade Organization meeting” (Murakami and Foster 1999). A sub headline in the *Post-Intelligencer* read, “The cops replace the WTO as the target of protesters' fear and anger” (Scigliano 1999b). These examples don't refer to violence at all; rather, they speak directly to the interpretation that the protesters had direct and legitimate conflict with the police instead of the WTO without discussing how that conflict played out violently on the ground.

Another distinction is that the *battle frame* exists in both types of newspaper with a neutrality that does not exist in the other frames studied. The *violence frame*, for example, presented a clear difference between the alternative and mainstream sources, with alternative sources generally tending to describe protesters as more justified in their violent acts and mainstream sources more often defending the police. But neither type of paper depicted either police or protesters as more prone to be involved in battle than the other. In fact, for the “battle” to exist, it must be assumed that both sides are active participants in battle. Only in general were any of the newspapers evidently prone to directly or indirectly favoring one of the two sides of the battles. But any evidence of this is more a culmination of the differences between the two types of sources across a

number of different frames, and the *battle frame* is the frame where such differences were least evident.

This is significant because it seems to be the only frame that really transcends alternative and mainstream coverage. The feeling that the protests in Seattle had more to do with police-protester confrontation than with issues regarding the WTO was espoused by both the mainstream and the alternative papers, speaking to how significant those confrontations were to the collective understanding of the events. In fact, the consistency shown by the *battle frame* across all four sources demonstrates that it is a better interpretation of the total character of this set of newspaper coverage than any of the previous five frames.

The Chaos Frame

This study finds that a *chaos frame* exists in mainstream newspapers and to a lesser extent in alternative papers. The *chaos frame* is built by coverage expressing that the events in Seattle lacked organization and were beyond control of the police, city authorities, and the protesters themselves. Though the *violence* and *battle frames* may imply that the protests and confrontations were highly disorganized, the *chaos frame* is unique because of its particular focus on lack of order and lack of control. In the *chaos frame*, protest events that were peaceful, organized, and deliberate such as the AFL-CIO march on November 30th, 1999 are disregarded. Instead, coverage in the *chaos frame* focuses on similar material as the *violence* and *battle frames*, but with a sharper focus on disorder.

The mainstream newspapers regularly noted that city officials and police had “lost control” of the protests. The *Post-Intelligencer* stated that “city officials lost control of the streets” and noted that television stations were broadcasting under the headline “Seattle Under Siege” (Paulson, Foster, and Barber 1999). The *Seattle Times* reported that police lost “control of downtown Seattle to renegade protesters” (Postman and Carter 1999). The emphasis on a lack of control was often implied in addition to being directly stated. The *Post-Intelligencer* highlighted an international news piece that began, “Anarchy in the Streets of America” (Wallace 1999). An article in *The Times* carrying the headline, “Gas, Broken Glass, and a City in Dismay” quoted an observer talking of the protests as saying “it’s rather un-Seattlelike; we usually don’t see anarchy in the streets” (Keene 1999). These claims were more than references to the group of Eugene anarchists who claimed responsibility for much of the property damage that occurred; they implied that Seattle was in an anarchic state beyond the control of city officials. Other mainstream articles described the “mayhem” in downtown Seattle (Schubert 1999), the “melee” of violent events that occurred (Barber 1999; Flores 1999), and the “havoc” citizens were able to watch from their living rooms (Foster and Murakami 1999).

Mainstream papers also referred to the events as “chaotic.” The front page article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* after the first day of protests declared “Chaos Closes Downtown” and described “streets littered with the refuse of chaos: protest signs, spent tear-gas canisters and broken glass” (Sunde 1999a). The *Post-Intelligencer* also reported on “the chaos of the day” (Paulson, Foster, and Barber 1999), protesters who “never heard [police warnings] in the chaos” (Foster and Barber 1999), police “officers on the

front lines of the chaos” (Barber 1999), the continuous “chaos on the streets” (Foster and Murakami 1999), and the labor movement which had to “emerge from the chaos” in order to hold a successful march (Nyhan 1999). The *Times* even stretched to quote a Major League Baseball general manager trying to understand “why any player would want to play there in that chaos” (Flores 1999), as if Seattle were constantly in a chaotic state.

The mainstream newspapers also regularly described the results of chaos. An article in The *Times* listed such results, “Broken glass and boarded-up buildings. Burning eyes and scratchy throats. More than \$12 million in lost holiday sales. Threats of lawsuits to recover the money” (Flores 1999). One editorialist asked, “Helicopters. Sirens. Smashed windows. It felt like some place in Central America, under siege and unsafe. Could this be Seattle” (Keene 1999)? The *Post-Intelligencer* reported “overturned trash containers [that] littered the intersection... set ablaze as the echo of tear-gas guns sounded in the distance” and “[protesters] running, rubbing their eyes, but other protesters rushed to take their place and the deputies threw more canisters. Some protesters tossed the canisters back” (Sunde 1999a). Despite the fact that all four of the newspapers noted that violent protesters were a minority, chaotic interpretations of the events were regularly brought to the forefront.

The examples presented above from mainstream newspapers were fairly representative of the mainstream articles examined in this study. The *chaos frame* existed in the alternative newspapers as well. An article in *The Stranger* printed nine days after the protests began provided a telling example:

Before the conference even began, the situation was out of control. Large numbers of anti-WTO protesters had started gathering in front of and on the blocks around the Convention Center, in some cases blocking the way of delegates, and some knocked out windows in the downtown shopping district. A bewildered police force wondered what to do. Officers looked for guidance -- especially regarding whether to use tear gas on the growing crowds -- but police leaders, including Joiner (who was supposed to make the call on whether to use tear gas), were nowhere to be found, officers told *The Stranger*. On top of that, officers had been told to show up for duty at 7:00 a.m., when protesters had arrived much earlier. "People say we failed to regain control [on Tuesday, November 30]," says Proudfoot. "We never had control!" (Campbell, Feit, and Vogel 1999).

A headline in *The Stranger* read, "Wild in The Streets" (Musselman 1999). *Seattle Weekly* described protests in which there "were no leaders" (Scigliano 1999c). They also called protesters a "seething mob" (Fefer 1999) that had to endure the "craziness [that] erupted around them" as "affinity groups stood their ground" (Berger 1999). In addition, *Weekly* reported that the "city flopped about madly in an attempt to contain this week's World Trade Organization street battles in Seattle" (Anderson 1999b).

But it is important to note that the evidence for the *chaos frame* was found to a lesser extent in the alternative data. The sample examined for this study yielded few examples of alternative news articles referring directly to the events in Seattle that week as chaos, and all of them came from the same reporter. *Seattle Weekly* described "the real possibility of chaos inside the high-security meeting room as well as in the streets outside" (Downey 1999b) and reported on Bill Clinton's effort "to save the World Trade Organization from paralysis and chaos" (Downey 1999a). The third example was actually stating that the any chaos had a positive effect, "apart from philosophical

anarchists, most people think of chaos as destructive and therefore dangerous. But in this case it has its positive, constructive side” (Downey 1999b).

In addition to being found less often in the alternative newspapers, there was one piece of evidence of the *chaos frame* that was significantly different. Instead of using the word “chaos,” which was peppered throughout the mainstream articles, the alternatives regularly referred to the protests as something the mainstream articles did not: a riot. For example, articles in *The Stranger* used the term particularly when being critical of Police Chief Norm Stamper’s and Mayor Paul Schell for their handling of the protests. One article stated that “even as Stamper resigns and claims to take full responsibility for the riots, he points the finger at rogue protesters” (Campbell, Feit, and Vogel 1999). Another article, entitled “Paul is Dead,” used the term several times when criticizing the Mayor:

Oh, there have been mayors whose political careers survived worse rioting than the WTO riot-lite Seattle experienced last week -- even mayors whose actions made riots incalculably worse, as Schell's did last week, have survived (Savage 1999b).

An editorial in *The Stranger* explained that the author called his “dad to get his perspective on the WTO riots here in Seattle” (Savage 1999a). The *Weekly* quoted a conference volunteer stating “pretty soon there’s going to be a riot in here,” referring to the conference itself (Fefer 1999).

The difference between using the word “chaos” and using the word “riot” which implies a certain level of chaos is interesting. This fact combined with the fact that there was less evidence of the *chaos frame* in the alternative media than in mainstream media is significant. To some extent it shows that the alternative data deemphasized the

violence and police-protester confrontations that have largely characterized the mainstream newspaper coverage of the protests. The word “riot” also implies a certain level of purposeful chaos with political intentions, lending more credibility to the protesters. Rather than simply being out of control, protesters riot *against* the WTO or *against* the police. So from these points one could infer that the alternative sources gave more credit to the protesters for being in control of their actions.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The results of this study demonstrate a substantive difference between the mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle. Listed here are findings related to the five prominent frames identified by Boykoff (2006):

- The *violence frame* existed in both types of media, but mainstream papers covered more extensively the violence perpetrated by a small number of protesters than they did the violence perpetrated by police. Mainstream papers also tended to justify police violence more often than protester violence. Whereas alternative papers tended to highlight violent police actions as much as protester violence. They also tended to justify even the most violent actions of protesters and more readily condemned police violence.
- The *disruption frame* was found to operate on four levels. In both mainstream and alternative media, the protests were said to have (1) disrupted the regularly scheduled WTO meetings and (2) the lives of regular Seattle citizens. The

protests also were said to have (3) disrupted the economic condition of Seattle businesses in both types of paper. Alternative newspapers tended to characterize much of the disruption as a victory for protesters. In addition, the alternative newspapers indicated that (4) organized, peaceful protests were often disrupted by unjustified police behavior.

- The *freak frame* was found in both types of newspapers. Even though alternative coverage sometimes cast protesters as outsiders, it was generally found that alternative coverage went further than the mainstream papers to legitimize and normalize the protesters. They did so by highlighting the diversity of the protesters and also by comparing them to the furthest fringe groups, therefore legitimizing the less “fringe” protesters.
- Content in the *ignorance frame* revealed very stark contrast between mainstream and alternative coverage. Protesters in mainstream coverage were regularly depicted as uninformed and ignorant to the real issues surrounding the WTO meetings. Alternative news rarely depicted the protesters as ignorant; in fact, it often portrayed them as knowledgeable and implied that their concerns were legitimate.
- The *amalgam of grievances frame* was identified less often in this study than in Boykoff’s. In addition, the findings of this study for the *amalgam frame* were not consistent with Boykoff’s findings. The diversity of protest groups present at the events was recognized, but the amalgam of grievances espoused by protesters was

never framed as a particularly positive or negative trait of the Global Justice Movement.

This study also identified two other general frames that can be used to guide a more substantive examination of newspaper texts:

- Content in the *battle frame* turns violent confrontations between protesters and police into an ongoing protester vs. police street battle, shifting the focus of the demonstrations away from issues surrounding the WTO to these altercations. The *battle frame* is related to but not the same as the *violence frame*. Interestingly, unlike the *violence frame*, there was little difference between alternative and mainstream coverage in regards to the *battle frame*. Neither paper depicted either side as more likely to engage in “battle.”
- The *chaos frame* was primarily evident in mainstream news stories and stresses that the demonstrations in Seattle were highly disorganized. Alternative news stories depicted the *chaos frame* much less often than mainstream stories, though they did so occasionally. The alternative’s tendency to call the events “riots” indicates they perceived the demonstrations as chaotic as well, but chaotic with a political purpose.

This examination reveals that significant differences between Seattle’s mainstream and alternative newspapers exist in the substance and character of relevant media frames. In regard to mainstream newspapers, this study supports Boykoff’s (2006) finding that mainstream media often minimized the contributions of the protesters,

portrayed them as violent and disruptive, and expressed appreciation of the police who maintained order. On the other hand, alternative papers portrayed protesters as less violent, less problematically disruptive, causing less chaos, more knowledgeable and more mainstream than the mainstream papers. Alternative papers also portrayed police and Seattle authorities as at least equally violent to protesters, disruptive to protest events, and unprepared. Thus, compared to the mainstream papers, the alternative news media in Seattle generally depicted protesters in a more favorable way, and were more critical of police and city and state authorities.

In addition, this study contributes to research relating to news coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle by identifying two new significant media frames: The *battle frame* and the *chaos frame*. Coverage in the *battle frame* enhanced the focus on protester police confrontations and deflected attention from WTO-related issues. The *battle frame* did not differ significantly from mainstream and alternative sources, though it existed in both. This is an interesting finding considering the *battle frame's* relative similarity to the *violence frame*. Both types of newspaper covered different violent events, perpetrators of violence, and victims of the violence. The fact that the *violence frame* was so remarkably different in mainstream and alternative papers and the *battle frame* was not speaks further to the fact that even though they are related, the *battle frame* is independent from the *violence frame*.

Going more in depth, since frames inform us about an author's understanding of empirical events (Earl, McCarthy and Soule 2004), the evidence shows that the authors' understanding of violence shown in the *violence frame* was different in mainstream

papers than alternatives. However, the understanding in the *battle frame* that the events changed from a protest against the WTO to street-battles between the police and protesters was uniform across the data. Since the news is a product and driving force of public discourse (Conrad 1997), the similar portrayal of the *battle frame* by mainstream and alternative papers shows that that particular interpretation was shared by journalists. It also implies the same about the general population. It would therefore be fair to say that the *battle frame* is a more encompassing description of how journalists portrayed the events in Seattle than the *violence frame*.

Finally, this study identified the *chaos frame*. The *chaos frame* occurred more often in mainstream papers than in the alternatives. It is difficult to assert why this difference exists, but the fact that mainstream papers were more likely to consider the protests and protesters chaotic supports the conclusion noted earlier that the mainstream papers generally had a less favorable view of the protest events and the protesters. Conversely, the fact that alternative papers were less inclined to consider the protesters out of control supports the finding that their view of the protesters was more favorable than that of the mainstream sources. Rather than characterizing them as chaotic and out of control, the alternative papers more often portrayed protesters as purposeful and organized. To be sure, the *chaos frame* was not entirely absent from the alternative media; rather, it occurred less often and its content was softer. A great example is the choice of the word “riot,” rather than chaos, to describe some of the more wild events during the protests. The word riot implies some sort of political intention, lending more

credibility to protesters engaging in chaotic activity. Choosing to use the word “riot” implied that even if protesters were behaving wildly, they were doing so with a purpose.

Journalistic Norms and the Perspective of Alternative News

Two major structural differences between mainstream and alternative newspapers influence the substantive differences between the two. The first is that journalistic norms between them are notably different, and as Noakes and Johnston (2005) noted, “journalistic norms and practices shape media framing of issues and events” (19). Mainstream papers must reflect the interests of their corporate ownership and mainstream journalistic guidelines, while alternative newsweeklies frequently use non-mainstream journalistic tactics such as humor and sarcasm, increased editorializing, and the inclusion of curse words in their coverage (Association of Alternative Newsweeklies). The difference in these journalistic norms makes it more likely that these two forms of media will differ considerably, which was certainly the case in this study.

However, the most significant normative difference between alternative newsweeklies and mainstream newspapers lies in the fact that alternatives intentionally seek to offer a different perspective than what is typically found in mainstream news (Association of Alternative Newsweeklies). Mainstream papers openly attempt to balance the perspective of a story and provide insight into all sides of an issue, though this is not always the case (Walgrave and Manssens 2005). Most alternative newspapers purposely attempt to provide a different perspective than mainstream papers (Association of Alternative Newsweeklies), so the norm of balance is either interpreted differently by

alternatives or disregarded for the purpose of providing another perspective. In alternatives then, stories will purposely carry different interpretations of news, and that leads to the differences in most frames discovered here.

In fact, a generous amount of evidence was found to support the idea that alternative newsweeklies consciously work to debunk and replace the interpretation of mainstream newspapers. To give a representative example from *The Stranger*: “The demonstrations were well-conceived affairs, not the strange, spontaneous madness that most [mainstream] news accounts tacitly wished to make them seem” (Perry 1999). This quote not only attempts to debunk what the mainstream media express as fact, but does so with an implied air of contempt for the journalistic fallacy of perceived biased reporting. Another example from *The Stranger* is a quotation from a local citizen, “I’m really mad at the local media,’ she says into the lens, smiling awkwardly. ‘They focus only on the vandals and gas -- it’s absurd. There’s so much more going on’” (Levine 1999). Openly working to debunk mainstream accounts of the events was common in both *The Stranger* and *Seattle Weekly*.

When one looks at the different journalistic practices of mainstream and alternative papers, one gets a clue about what leads to substantive differences between the two. In addition, the intention of alternative papers to provide a different perspective and to debunk news accounts of the mainstream press leads to significant substantive differences as well. This subject is significant and certainly warrants further study. For the purposes of this study though, these normative and structural differences appear to be a key factor in the material variations found between the media frames in the alternative

and mainstream newspapers examined here. It is these variations in the media frames that have been the subject of this project.

Final Conclusions

The research question addressed in this study was: Are there differences in the media frames presented by Seattle's mainstream and alternative newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests, and if so, what are these differences? This study concludes first that each of Boykoff's (2006) five prominent media frames found in his examination of national news coverage of the Seattle protests were evident in the local newspaper coverage of the same events. All of them were found to some extent in both mainstream and alternative newspapers. In addition, two other media frames were found in both types of sources: the *battle frame* and the *chaos frame*. These newly discovered frames provide more insight into the coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.

Seeking to answer the posed research question directly, a close examination of the seven media frames identified in this study revealed that significant differences existed between them when they were compared across mainstream and alternative newspaper data. The evidence examined here concurs with and strengthens Boykoff's (2006) conclusion that mainstream media often minimized the contributions of the protesters, portrayed them as violent and disruptive, and showed support for the ability of the police to maintain order. This study extends this research by revealing that alternative newspapers in Seattle interpreted the protest events in Seattle in 1999 quite differently than Seattle's mainstream press. Alternative papers were more likely to be generally

supportive of the protesters and to portray the police as equally violent and disruptive. Alternative papers were also more likely to be critical of the police and state authorities.

These results are significant because they demonstrate further that different news sources construct different stories of the same events. Because of the impact that the news media can have on public discourse (Conrad 1997), the results of this study have implications for researchers and the general public alike, who must be aware of the different impact that different news sources can have on reality construction. The results of this study are particularly relevant to any individual or agency seeking to advance or examine a social movement. The frames examined here offer insight into common cultural interpretations of protest events. Media frames become socially and publicly available data that reflects shared meaning. Frames then are a culturally transmitted tool used to tell a story, and because they may be communicated through widely read texts like newspapers, the individuals and groups of individuals who consume them are impacted by them.

In addition to simply deriving the meaning or interpretation of an event through media frames, individuals and groups may use media frames to their advantage. For example, in the context of the material studied here, social movement organizations may work to influence the way their group is framed in order to influence the portrayal of their particular group with the hope of garnering public support. State and local authorities may respond by trying to frame the protest groups in a much different way, with the goal once again being to influence the perception of the media-consuming public. Either way, media frames play an important role both passively, as portrayals that influence the

meaning derived from events, and actively, as a tool that can be used to advance particular versions of events.

This study makes theoretical contributions to social movements literature by helping to fill a number of gaps. It is the first study in the field to directly compare the content of mainstream print news sources' to alternative or independent print news sources' coverage of protest events. The examination of alternative news in this study reveals examples of the protesters being portrayed in a much more positive way than had been discovered in the mainstream media. It is also the first study to specifically focus on local, rather than national coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.

Lastly, this study contributes to the development of frame analysis methodology, and it strengthens the call for further development of frame analysis as a methodological tool. Up to now, the lack of development of frame analysis as a methodological tool, and the difficulty in defining specifically what a frame is has led to inconsistent use of the framing concept (Oliver and Johnston 2005). Boykoff's study (2006) described fairly general frames that were often quite ambiguous. Boykoff's version of the media frame is valuable because such frames help describe general subject matter and overall tone of news coverage; but the relatively vague, general media frames, such as those in Boykoff's study are not always good indicators of the specific content of the newspaper coverage of an event. This fact became quite evident in this study, as the *violence frame*, to name just one example, was portrayed quite differently in mainstream and alternative newspaper articles. Therefore, this study demonstrates a more specific examination of

the media frames contained in the newspaper coverage of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.

An examination at this level of specificity is important to understanding the true essence of a collection of media frames. If they are defined generally, frames present the broad subject matter of a piece of text; but to get a real sense of a certain text, one must carefully examine specific content that can yield different versions of broadly defined frames. Defining frames too specifically, however, may narrow the way researchers describe a text. This study demonstrates a need for a thorough discussion about how frame analysis should continue to be developed as a analytic tool.

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