### John Hannigan <u>Environmental Sociology</u>

Chapter 5:

Media and environmental communication



### Why do we care about the media when studying Environmental Sociology?

- Without the media's attention environmental issues would not come to the <u>attention</u> of the general public
- The media "<u>socially constructs</u>" the issues
- The media <u>educates</u> the public

What are some types of media that do these things?

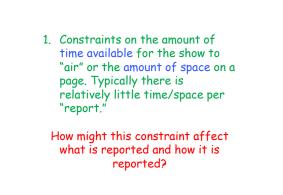


Prior to the 1970s, media topics were simply a reporting of apparent facts having a "<u>certifiable existence</u>"

Since that time, less focus has been on the "objective characteristics" and more on "news making" (the manufacturing of news)—a negotiation between journalists and their sources.

Any idea what factors influence the manufacturing of news stores?

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- Short <u>action clips</u> that fit into reporting formats
- Ignore a story's underlying causes and conditions or ignore the story due to its complexity
- "decontextualizing or removing an event from the context in which it occurs"
- <u>Putting a "spin</u>" on a story so only a particular "angle" of the news story is presented

Do journalist develop their own angle for a story or rely on others? Why?

- Journalist often lack knowledge of the complex issues so must rely on sources
- Powerful figures and organizations (e.g., high ranking federal officials, company representatives) can provide them with <u>easy to use info</u> on the issue
- These figures can also make the lives of journalists difficult (e.g., holding back info)

(factors influencing the manufacturing of news stories)

- Journalists present "<u>frames</u>" that don't cover the whole story but answer "<u>What is it that is</u> going on here?"
- Over time "<u>storylines</u>" can be added to the "frame"

Can you think of an example where a particular event is framed a particular way either positively or negatively?

- Fracking vs non-fracking
- Alternative energy vs nuclear energy
- Framing nuclear power as the answer to the climate crisis or as the future destruction of all

As frames are developed, would you guess journalists prefer to develop their own frames or rely on those provided by others?



While "claims-makers" attempt to promote their frames of the story and make it easy for journalists, journalists prefer to evaluate the situation and determine what should and shouldn't be included in the story.

Why might this be?

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- Journalist, in general, have a desire to be <u>objective</u>
- The <u>constraints of reporting</u> require journalist to be <u>efficient</u> while claims-makers want an elaborate story told
- Journalists want stories that are suitable and fit into the "<u>dominant mainstream</u> frames" to gain viewer support

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When journalists create their own stories, sometimes they may twist the facts to get attention. Can you think of ways they might twist the facts?

- Since journalists need to gain attention, they might create a story where <u>one doesn't exist</u>
- Journalists might be encouraged to <u>create conflict</u> to gain more public attention
  Journalists might inflate or
- misconstrue scientific evidence

So, what do journalist look for in a "source" for an environmental report?

- 1. People with no obvious selfserving economic purpose
- 2. Scientific experts
- 3. People who have ready-made stories

What <u>production constraints</u> are there on journalists that affect the stories they produce (beyond the constraints of choosing the story)?

- 1. There may be limited sources of info
- Short-term <u>logistical and</u> <u>technological constraints</u> created by a lack of time to pull story together --Makes it difficult to cover the bigger environmental issues
- 3. Long-term <u>occupational constraints</u> embedded in the news process (e.g., getting future access to sources).

Coverage of environmental events (e.g., flooding, a climate summit) have been organized into three types. Any ideas what these might be?

> Catastrophes (event centered coverage)

Milestones (e.g., Earth Day, climate conference)

Legal/administrative happenings (e.g., 2005 summit of G8 leaders)

Which would you guess Hannigan considers the "bread and butter of environmental coverage? Can you name some catastrophes/hazards that journalists have focused on that have brought the environment to the attention of the public?

Quick on-set\_disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards

<u>Slow on-set</u> hazards such as ozone depletion, acid rain, climate change

# What would you guess is the <u>disadvantage</u> of focusing on discrete (specific) events?

Leaves the impression that the environmental problems are isolated events rather than recognizing that there are multiple events caused by social developments/institutions

Typically results in ignoring background explanations and input from "non-official" sources

Frames the event as "monocausal"

## Why don't reporters go into detail about environmental issues?

The details about the environment are <u>very complex</u> making it difficult to frame the story within the constraints faced

They <u>don't feel qualified</u> to sort out the scientific and political claims

Sometimes <u>other social events</u> "drown out" attention on environmental issues, e.g., economic recession

Beyond reporting on specific environmental events, what types of environmental stories (discourses) are reported (sort of a summary of previous discussions)?

- 1. <u>Objective scientific</u> discourse where the journalist attempts to be impartial
- 2. <u>Human interest</u> stories or dramatic events—relies on common sense vs science

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4. <u>Excessive conflict by</u> <u>environmentalists</u>—chastise protesters for disrupting commerce (e.g., Greenpeace boards a fishing vessel to stop "netting" fish)

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- <u>Apocalyptic narrative</u> debilitating, e.g., biodiversity, global warming
- 6. Focus on how public institutions are responding to env. issues much like they would with health care, education, etc.—can lead to debates between political and scientific groups

Considering what we are learning about the media and its reporting of the environment, why has climate change gotten increasing attention?

- 1. <u>Geophysical</u> events such as hurricanes, wild fires
- <u>Political leaders</u> expressing their views (e.g., Al Gore's film "An inconvenient truth"
- 3. <u>Scientific reports</u> from various organizations

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#### In conclusion, what do we mean by: environmental news is "socially constructed?"

Multiple competing claims are considered and we try to come to conclusions based on them

What can be done to keep the public focused on environmental issues?

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- Treat environmental "news" as we treat economic/business issues with its own segment in the news (e.g., business section of newspaper)
- 2. Don't roll environmental stories in with other issues, rather keep it distinct
- 3. Present emotional environmental stories and include an education component and possible policy reforms to be followed-up

The influence of Artificial Intelligence on the media

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiUPD-z9DTg

Creating a News Report https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8 NmVtnEEA8

The truth about hydrogen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGTjKJHu99c