

John Hannigan
Environmental Sociology

Chapter 5:

Media and environmental
 communication

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

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

What are some types of media that
 do these things?

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- documentaries
- Motion pictures
- News outlets (TV, newspapers)
- Internet
- Social media

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

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 stories?

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1. Constraints on the amount of time available for the show to "air" or the amount of space on a page. Typically there is relatively little time/space per "report."

How might these constraints affect
 what is reported and how it is
 reported?

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- Short action clips 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"
- Putting a "spin" on a story so only a particular "angle" of the news story is presented

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How do the constraints of time and space affect the journalist's "angle" for a story?

- Journalist often lacks 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 easy to use info on the issue
- These figures can also make the lives of journalists difficult (e.g., holding back info)

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(other factors, in addition to constraints, that influence the manufacturing of news stories)

2. Journalists present "frames" that don't cover the whole story but answer "What is it that is going on here?"
3. Over time "storylines" 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?

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- 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

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As frames are developed, would you guess journalists prefer to:

develop their own frames
or
rely on those provided by others?

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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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- Professionalism, journalist, in general, have a desire to be objective
- The constraints of reporting require journalist to be efficient while claims-makers want an elaborate story told
- Journalists want stories that are suitable and fit into the "dominant mainstream 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?

1. Since journalists need to gain attention, they might create a story where one doesn't exist
2. Journalists might be encouraged to create conflict to gain more public attention
3. Journalists might inflate or misconstrue scientific evidence

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

1. People with no obvious self-serving economic purpose
2. Scientific experts
3. People who have ready-made stories
4. People who others listen too

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What production constraints are there on journalists that affect the stories they produce (beyond the constraints of time, space, and choosing the story)?

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

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

Which would you guess Hannigan considers the "bread and butter of environmental coverage?"

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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

Slow on-set hazards such as ozone depletion, acid rain, climate change

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What would you guess is the disadvantage 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 providing input from "non-official" sources

Frames the event as "monocausal"

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

The details about the environment are very complex making it difficult to frame the story within the time/space constraints faced

They don't feel qualified to sort out the scientific and political claims

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

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What types of environmental topics/stories (discourses) are reported (sort of a break down of previous discussion of catastrophes, milestones, and political)?

1. Objective scientific discourse where the journalist attempts to be impartial
2. Subjective human interest stories or dramatic events—relies on common sense vs science

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3. Economic opportunities through the producing of "green" products—focus on entrepreneurial spirit

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

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5. Apocalyptic narrative—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

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

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1. Geophysical events such as hurricanes, wild fires
2. Political leaders, celebrities expressing their views (e.g., Al Gore's film "An inconvenient truth;" performer Taylor Swift pledged to offset her carbon emissions)
3. Scientific reports 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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1. 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 (a) emotional environmental stories, (b) include an education component, and (c) possible policy reforms to be followed-up

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Nuclear micro reactors to hit the market
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z8btEIDwBs>

Bill Gates on How we're doing on the path to zero emissions, 2022 (3 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipkPcrNsCv8>

Out of Thin Air (Start at 26:30) (13 mins)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZeJZxjvFng>

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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>

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Why most Americans support the EPA (4:07)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2Nmhcxf2k>

Sackett v. EPA: How One Couple's Battle Against the Feds Might Protect Your Land (7:38)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40iHXAOiJ3U>

The Reasoning and Impact of the Supreme Court's Ruling in Sackett v. EPA (first 3 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMOSEoUy1pI>

Supreme Court decision weakens EPA authority, scales back scope of Clean Water Act
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-ZBkxeCvEO>

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How Obama's EPA Nearly Bankrupted John Quarty's Farm (5:16)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlBX6UoBfx8>

War on the EPA (3:00)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJ1P9IcTGvY>

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The Future Of Nuclear Power - Holtec SMR 160 (8 min)
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=The+Future+Of+Nuclear+Power+-+Holtec+SMR+160

Nuclear micro reactors to hit the market (2:40)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z8btEIDwBs>

The tiny reactors carry some of the same challenges as large-scale nuclear, such as how to dispose of radioactive waste and how to make sure they are secure. Supporters say those issues can be managed and the benefits outweigh any risks.

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What Is the Most Sustainable City in the World?(2020: 7:48)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsWrOLfM_uQ

5 Most Polluted Cities on Earth (start at 5:00; goes until 11:05—6 minutes total)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69jwIw4JeVK>

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Innovating to zero! | Bill Gates, 2010 (18:00/29:32)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaF-fq2Zn7I>

The Future Of Nuclear Power - Holtec SMR 160 (8 min)
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=The+Future+Of+Nuclear+Power+-+Holtec+SMR+160

Bill Gates' Terrapower and the Sodium Reactor | Rock Logic | 2022 (start at 1 min - 6 mins)
https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-l-e&q=rocklogic+and+terra#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:d6a53627_vid:3mZIP060zw

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