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This study analyses the relationship between international news references and disaster news references in the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. The American media receive frequent criticism for inadequate coverage of news from other nations. Both formal and informal critics charge the United States media with bias, incompetence, inaccuracy, and distortion when reporting foreign news. Using a computerized content analysis model to analyze print journalism coverage, the author examines the characteristics of foreign news going out to readers of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. The research suggests that there is a demonstrable relationship between the loss of human life in a foreign nation and the power and politics of that nation and its portrayal in the American media.

Mass media; newspapers; public relations; public affairs; journalism; press; propaganda

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DECIDING WHO'S NEWS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISASTER, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN TWO ELITE NEWSPAPERS FROM 1885 THROUGH 1989

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To Rick and Sandra
DECIDING WHO'S NEWS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISASTER, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN TWO ELITE NEWSPAPERS FROM 1885 THROUGH 1989

by

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings — nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;

—from IE-- by Rudyard Kipling

We Americans like to think of ourselves as “people people,”
supporting human rights around the world, promoting democracy,
defeating tyranny. This national self-image has been written into our
history since this great country’s inception over 200 years ago.

But is that self-image reflected in our media coverage? Or does the
way we cover and consume news of other nations present a very different
image of the American people? Is our real image more a reflection of the
infamous “Ugly American” image? Do we value the lives of others as
highly as we value our own, and is this attitude reflected in our media
coverage of foreign news?

The American media receives frequent criticism for inadequate
coverage of news from other nations. Both formal and informal critics
charge the United States media with bias, incompetence, inaccuracy, and
distortion when reporting foreign news (Rosenblum, 1981).
Other nations, especially developing nations, consider the powerful and pervasive American media as 1) a vehicle for getting their special interest message out to the rich American public and/or 2) a threat to their image and continued foreign aid (Graber, 1984). The New World Information Order seeks, among other things, to correct this imbalance of media power (Stevenson and Shaw, 1984).

Several media critics (Rosenblum, 1981), (Adams, 1986), (Gans, 1980), (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) demonstrate how the U.S. media limit and distort the coverage of foreign news. Such critics examine and evaluate the type, quality, quantity and imagery of foreign news coverage.

Often the gist of the criticism is that foreign nations are only mentioned in relation to disasters (Rosenblum, 1981). Studies such as Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson (1983) and Potter (1987) have shown that disaster news makes up the bulk of the foreign news portrayed in the American media message. For these analysts, disaster news means news of loss of human life through disasters, accidents, crimes and, rarely, war.

As will be seen in Chapter 2, the literature search, researchers ascribe a variety of motives and meanings to the perceived phenomenon of inadequate or imbalanced foreign news reporting. Stevenson and Gaddy (1984) consider the issue of fairness versus accuracy, in an attempt to demonstrate how coverage of foreign news could be improved. Graber (1988) applies schema theory to account for reader interest related to foreign news.
Adams (1986) demonstrates that 61% of variation in coverage of foreign disaster news is accounted for by cultural factors relating to the United States. Herman and Chomsky (1988) indicate that a nation's political relationship with the United States determines the quality and quantity of news coverage regarding that nation.

With this mass of research, the question becomes one of effect. Is all this criticism justified and does it work toward a realistic change in American media coverage of other nations?

This study deals with the first question: is this criticism justified? In Schramm's classic model of the communication relationship, one must consider the source, the sender, the message, the medium and the receiver to understand the entire communicative experience. This study seeks to remove the extraneous participants and their motives from the message, to see if the criticism of foreign news coverage is clearly reflected in the actual message which the media audience receives.

Using a computerized content analysis to maximize coding reliability, I have sought to determine what foreign news message is going out to the readers of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times for the last 105 years. The vocabularies for this analysis reflect the evidence of earlier studies, in hopes of replicating and verifying those works.

What I have attempted to do is to remove the predisposed bias of the researcher from the content analysis. What I seek to determine is whether the evidence of the previous studies holds true in a direct and exclusive examination of the message. Is foreign news coverage
commensurate with national news coverage? Is disaster news the predominant information we receive from less powerful/developing nations? Does political allegiance correlate with media coverage of a nation? Has media coverage of foreign news changed over the last great century, through two world wars, the atomic age, the cold war and the technological revolution of rapid, mass communication?

OUTLINE

In Chapter Two, the literature review, I discuss in greater depth the studies cited above and other research related to the development of this study and the discussion of the results.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used in the implementation of this research, including the sampling procedure, the computer analysis and the statistical examination.

Chapter Four provides in detail the results of the content analysis.

Chapter Five concerns the discussion of the results and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue which led me in the direction of this study is the value of
human life as reflected in the news message. A variety of researchers
have examined this issue either directly or tangentially.

The reporting of loss of human life is often defined under the topic of
disaster reporting. The media are often criticized for the limited scope of
foreign news reporting. It is widely believed that reporting of news from
developing or Third World nations is limited to disaster reporting (Larson,
1984).

The reporting of disasters, however, is very important to the victims.

As Rogers and Sood (1980) note:

Because the general public does not have access to many
sources of news information other than the news media, the
media also can virtually determine the public's response to a
disaster— Influencing, for example, the amount of private
contributions the public will make to relief efforts.¹

This effect was seen with the U.S. media’s cyclic coverage of the African
drought. When attention is drawn to a disaster, contributions come in.

Furthermore, as Rogers and Sood (1980) indicate:

Partly through the media's agenda-setting function and partly
through their presentation of persuasive information, the
media can highlight a disaster in such a way as to create the
public opinion necessary to prod authorities into dealing with
the problem.²

² Ibid.
In Schramm’s classic model of communication, the researcher considers the sender/source, the medium, the message and the receiver in order to understand the complete communicative relationship. In evaluating the quality and quantity of foreign news reporting by the American media and indirectly the value of human life, researchers have considered foreign news coverage from each perspective.

I will review the literature in relation to each element of the communicative relationship, except the medium itself, since many of the pertinent studies utilize data from both print and broadcast news.

THE SENDER/SOURCE

A host of media critics have laid blame for flawed foreign news coverage on the reporters, editors and cultural context of the news. Rosenblum (1981) considers the source in his examination of foreign news coverage. He places the blame for misrepresentative reporting of Third World news on foreign correspondents and their editors.

Rosenblum states that the Third World gets relatively little coverage because a First World country:

is easier to cover...and more reporters are immediately available. When last counted, 72 percent of all U.S. correspondents were based in 10 capitals: London, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bonn, Rome, Moscow, Beirut, Ottawa, and Tel Aviv/Jerusalem.3

Stevenson and Gaddy (1984) are less critical in their explanation of imbalanced foreign news reporting. They consider fairness as separate

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3 Rosenblum (1981)
from accuracy in examining real world occurrences versus reported occurrences. They propose that more conflict is reported from the Third World because more conflict exists in the Third World. As they put it:

One of the problems of dealing with accuracy as a criterion of journalistic performance is that it requires some standard against which the journalistic output can be measured. In this case—unless we adopt a random model that everyone, every place, and everything are equally newsworthy—we need some independent criterion of what happens in various parts of the world to see if discrepancies noted here are reflections of events.4

From their perspective, the source and sender are doing an adequate job of reporting reality.

By comparing what local editors select from the available foreign news to what is made available to them from major Western news agencies, Stevenson and Gaddy emphasized that the problem of balance in Western news coverage of foreign (especially Third World) countries, is not simply a reporting issue. According to their research, a diverse range of foreign news is available, but the editors do not take advantage of it. Using Western First World countries as one category and Third World countries as another, these gentlemen found that:

On the whole, there is a remarkable similarity in the way the news media of diverse countries treat these two parts of the world.5

In a similar context, Gerbner and Marvanyi (1984) reflected on the reality of foreign news reporting. They state:

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4 Stevenson and Gaddy (1984), p. 95.
5 Ibid.
When the subject is foreign news, the process of news reporting is even more variable; there is no effective reality check. Many different versions of the day's "world news" can be equally true and significant when judged by different standards of relevance.\(^6\)

Gerbner and Marvanyi examined foreign news reporting in 60 daily papers published in nine different countries, including capitalist, socialist and developing nations. Their examination of U.S. news attention to foreign news indicates that major events (such as the war in Vietnam) cause the news to focus on those areas. The result is that other areas, like Northern Africa, are virtually ignored.

Graber (1984) indicates that political influences have a profound impact on the foreign correspondent's development of foreign news stories. As she states:

> Overt and covert political pressures play a greater role in foreign news production than on the domestic scene. Pressures are negative—to refrain from covering certain stories—as well as positive—to give publicity that otherwise might be denied. Foreign correspondents, are more or less welcome guests in the countries from which they are reporting and often must do their hosts' bidding.\(^7\)

Gans (1980) also refers to political pressure and social reality in his examination of broadcast and print media. He focuses on the type of individual covered, categorizing them as "Knowns" and "Unknowns".

Gans reflects that order in the news is a result of whose values determine news selection. In referring to disaster news, he states:

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\(^7\) Graber (1984), p. 315.
order is defined as the preservation of life and property...Among technological disasters, plane crashes are usually more newsworthy than the winter breakdowns of tenement furnaces, even if they result in the same number of deaths.⁸

Furthermore as Gans notes that:

the news reflects a white male social order.⁹

This perspective enlightens us to the editorial decision process which ultimately results in the media message to consumers. What, and especially who, is of interest to the American white male social order is reflected in what appears in the news.

Along similar lines, Herman and Chomsky (1988) discuss the coverage of "worthy" and "unworthy" victims in the news. In their analysis and application of the propaganda model, Herman and Chomsky perceive a relationship between the political position of the persecuting government relative to the United States and the quality and quantity of news coverage the victims of the persecution receive in the American media. That is, when the state is an enemy of the United States, its victims receive sympathetic, in-depth coverage. At the same time, when the state is a client state of the United States, its victims receive little or no attention in the American media. Herman and Chomsky consider this worthiness or newsworthiness evaluation as an integral reason for the poor quality of foreign news reporting in the American media.¹⁰

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⁹ Ibid., p. 61.
THE RECEIVER

The consideration of audience behavior is a crucial element in the study of media and mass communication, especially in capitalist countries. If the news is not suited to the consumer, eventually there is no audience and with no audience there is no revenue, and with no revenue eventually there is no media.

Graber's later study (1988) concentrates on the receiver of the news as an element of the communication relationship.

Through use of a panel of media users, Graber found that consumers:

- tune out stories about domestic and international situations that disturb them greatly or seem beyond their control or the control of their political leaders.\(^{11}\)

Graber categorizes this rejection under the "no interest" heading, which her research revealed was the most common reason for rejecting a story.

The second most common reason for story rejection, according to Graber is:

- information was either too remote or too complicated.\(^{12}\)

She notes that many of the foreign news stories fell into both of these categories.

She also notes that people use limiting perspectives through their:


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
desire to absorb only information that is of special interest to them.\textsuperscript{13}

Graber's research is the other side of the coin from that of Gans or Herman and Chomsky. She notes that the relationship of the news topic to the reader is essential, while they recognize the relationship of the news staff to the news topic.

The criticism of foreign news coverage then is a criticism of the entire media system. These studies indicate that the source/sender has its own agenda and motivation which affects the coverage; the message is distorted by audience-related factors, the media system and the subject; and that the audience rejects stories based on intrinsic dissonance and effect issues.

This examination of the entire communicative relationship is globally interesting. For the purposes of research, however, it is often too large an undertaking. So, in examining foreign news, the researcher must decide what is of the most interest to him/her.

For this study, I chose to look exclusively at the message in order to take the first step toward the interesting consideration of effect. In order to determine if there can be an effect, one must ascertain whether there is any systemic pattern of foreign news coverage which results in biased or disproportionate coverage.

The following studies utilize the message as the research focus. Elements of each contributed to my interest in this topic and the operationalization of the variables.

THE MESSAGE

Many studies have examined the media message in a manner which relates directly to my research hypotheses. The studies analyze content which is related to 1) disaster or sensational news references, 2) international or foreign news references, or both.

SENSATIONAL OR DISASTER NEWS

The measurement of disaster news references relates to the contention that the majority of news from the developing countries of the world is event- or tragedy-related. The intent of this study is to examine whether disaster news references covary with references to countries.

Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson (1983) studied reader interest and developed news categories which led to further research. The category which they label Sensational News includes natural disasters, tragedies, accidents and crime. Their work is a stepping-stone for the research into disaster news references. Reader interest was highest for this category. When further divided, news of natural disasters and tragedies was the most commonly read of news element.\(^{(14)}\)

Adams (1986) looked at news of only natural disasters resulting in the loss of human life. His research sought to examine the news coverage devoted to various real life occurrences of natural disasters, in order to work from a framework of actual events.

This limitation is very valuable in examining news coverage, but not always appropriate in wide-scope studies like this one. In order to develop a workable data language for this content analysis, I have defined disaster news as any reference to the loss of human life, be it through natural disasters, accidents, crime or war. In this way, there is no need to contextualize loss of life references to sort out the cause of the human death or deaths.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

International news references will also be examined to sort out the type of country and the relative relationship or foreign news to political affiliation and stature.

Semmel examined the total editorial content of four prestige newspapers (the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Miami Herald, and the Los Angeles Times). He discovered that:

each pays far greater attention to countries which are economically affluent, politically powerful, and culturally similar to the United States.15

Using Semmel's research as a stepping-stone, Potter (1987) analyzed eight of the nation's most prestigious newspapers. He used front page stories as his unit of analysis and focused on the level of news (national/international, with international further divided into East, West or Third World, or local/state or neither) and the type of news story.

Using the categories developed by Burgoon, Burgoon and Wilkinson, Potter determined the relationship between the type of story and country. He found that 43.7% of the stories were international in focus. Of the international stories, he determined that 72.6% were exclusively about the West, 2.8% were exclusively about the East and 7.5% were exclusively about the Third World.

Furthermore, Potter found that the percentage of sensational news stories varied greatly by type of country. Sensational news accounted for 54.7% in the Third World, 33.5% of news from the West was sensational news and 51.9% of the news from the East recounted sensational events.

Larson (1984) looked at type of news and type of country in a content analysis of U.S. television news. He found that Third World (developing) countries...

...received less coverage than did developed nations. Developed nations received more coverage both overall and within each major story type...Coverage of Third World countries contained a higher proportion of crisis stories than did coverage of developed nations.17

In his study of foreign news coverage, Adams (1986) considers the message's relative importance to the receiver as his research focus. He found that social factors such as cultural proximity, social interest, actual distance and numbers of deaths accounted for 61% of the variation in foreign news reporting in the broadcast media reporting of disaster news.18

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18 Adams, (1986), p. 113
These last two studies and the contentions of Herman and Chomsky (1988) form the theoretical framework for this study. It is my intention to replicate parts of Larson's and Adams' studies and to test what I see as dichotomous contention by Adams and Herman and Chomsky.

Adams (1986) indicates that countries which have the: "sympathies of the U.S. government and power elites"\(^1\) receive greater attention in disaster reporting. Herman and Chomsky (1988), however, indicate that enemy states receive greater attention in the U.S. media, because the media are more likely to portray their vile acts. By using a reference vocabulary which includes words regarding loss of life by either natural disaster or by man, it should be possible to assess these two contentions.

First, this study analyzes the relationship between disaster/tragedy news references and national or international news references. International news references will be further divided into four categories based on the country's diplomatic relationship with the United States, and the world-wide power of the country. The relationships examined by this data should in some measure support or fail to support the findings of Larson (1984), Adams (1988) and Herman and Chomsky (1988).

**CONCLUSION**

Amid this great mass of research into foreign news reporting and especially disaster news reporting, certain questions come to mind. Does

the American media only cover foreign nations in when loss of life brings those nations to America's collective attention? Does the political influence or diplomatic policy of a country influence the amount of news coverage that nation gets in the American media? To paraphrase Kipling: Do all men count with us but none too much?

These are the questions this study seeks to examine.

HYPOTHESES

This research suggests that there is a relationship between the loss of human life in a foreign nation and the power and politics of that nation and its portrayal in the American media.

The specific hypotheses for this study are:

1. I expect that the number of references to foreign nations will covary with the references to disasters, wars and crimes. This hypothesis supports the contention that the news we receive from foreign nations is most often disaster news.

2. In order to narrow the contention that disaster news is the dominant news from Third World countries, I expect that more powerful nations (generally, First World nations) will dominate the news from foreign countries. Therefore, I expect to find a closer relationship to disaster references and less powerful countries than to more powerful countries.
3. At the same time, because Americans are interested in a greater variety of news from our own country, I expect that the references to disaster news would not covary with the references to national news.

4. As noted earlier, Adams (1986) found that cultural proximity to the United States increased foreign news coverage, while Herman and Chomsky (1988) determined that the tyranny of enemy states increased coverage of those nations in certain instances. This dichotomy leads me to consider allegiance to the United States as a variable in foreign news reporting. Research constraints forced me to operationalize the category of allegiance as one of non-allegiance, reflected in suspension or termination of diplomatic relations with the United States. Having reversed this category and considering the previously mentioned research, I anticipate that those countries with whom the United States has suspended or terminated relations will be in the news more frequently than the nations with whom we have open diplomatic relations. This would support the findings of Herman and Chomsky, while casting a certain amount of doubt on the generalizability of Adams' findings.

5. Finally, I expect that, as our world and our technological capabilities have expanded, so has the coverage of all foreign nations. That is, while the critics may be unhappy with the type and quality of coverage, in fact I expect we are doing a much greater job of covering foreign countries than we did a hundred years ago. In a longitudinal look at
references to foreign countries, I expect the total number of references
to increase over the period examined.

As a result of this research, I plan to present a ratio of foreign news
coverage by type of country, which can be used to further research this
element of news coverage and predict the relative frequency of news
coverage for a given type of country. This ratio will reflect the relative
news value of the foreign nations in the American media.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of two methodological stages, a computerized content analysis using the GENCA program developed by Dr. Wayne Danielson (University of Texas at Austin), and a statistical analysis of the resulting data, using the SPSSX statistical program package.

GENCA

The GENCA (General Content Analysis) program is a BASIC program designed to search text for key words.

The user designs the key word vocabulary to represent the concept to be tested. He or she then enters the vocabulary into the GENCA program, where it is sorted by category. The program reads the assigned text and looks for the words listed in the vocabulary.

When a word is found which is contained in the vocabulary, the program records a “hit.” At the end of the text, the total number of hits per category is computed, and the program determines the percentage of words of the entire text found in each category. This percentage score was used for the raw data in the statistical analysis.

Since any given text has a large percentage of articles, connecting words, prepositions and verb tense qualifiers, the percentage of noun or verb vocabulary words is often quite low. But also as a result of the large
number of grammar-related words, the frequent use of nouns listed in a
general vocabulary can represent a predominant trend.

For an example of how GENCA works in analyzing text, see the
sample text in Figure 1. This text is ten sentences taken from the front
page of the New York Times for August 24, 1985. This was analyzed by
GENCA, using the vocabularies in Appendix 1. The results are found in
Figure 2.

THE VOCABULARIES

Krippendorf (1980) discusses the importance and limitations of data
language in content analysis. By his definition,

The descriptive apparatus into which terms an analyst casts
his data is called a data language... Data languages must be
free of syntactical ambiguities and inconsistencies. Data
languages must satisfy the formal demands made by an
analytical technique to be applicable. Data languages must
possess the descriptive capacity to provide enough
information about the phenomena of interest to be
conclusive.19

In order to test the various hypotheses of this study, I designed six separate
vocabularies.20

20 The actual vocabularies used are listed at Appendix 1.
But no one moved to correct the failures, and the significance of those errors was not recognized until the toxic leak occurred, the officials added. In 1965, reservoir levels dropped to 25 percent, their lowest level ever. Software can translate the text appearing on a computer screen into printed Braille. If you can't see, don't worry; the machine does. The officials said they expected the reservoir levels to reach their low point in November, but a spokesman for the city’s Department of Environmental Protection said there was no way to predict when the refilling of the reservoirs would begin. If rain and snow fall in only normal amounts, he said, the city will face a second summer of drought. Mr. McCarthy said the city was relying on restrictions already in effect and on increased voluntary conservation to cut water consumption to 1.1 billion gallons a day, from its present level of 1.25 billion. The Council President said she did not think she had made a mistake in pursuing the court case. A statement released by the East German press agency A.D.N. reported that Mr. Tiedge, a 19-year veteran of the Federal Office for the Defense of the Constitution, had "crossed to" East Germany and asked for asylum. British Airways said today that it had not been told of the results of an American investigation into the reliability of aircraft engines of the type implicated in an airliner fire in northern England.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>Disaster</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>Diplomatic Relations/Power (1985-1989)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
<td>Diplomatic Relations/Non-power</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 5</td>
<td>No Diplomatic Relations/Power</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 6</td>
<td>No Diplomatic Relations/Non-Power</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This text dealt mainly with Diplomatic Relations/Power
Total words = 242
The first vocabulary includes words which represent the disaster/tragedy category. Burgoon, Burgoon, and Wilkinson (1983) included "natural disasters, tragedies, accidents and crime" in the category which they label as "sensational news." Since media coverage of the loss of human life is one focus of this study, I expanded this category by adding war terms. In this way, it was not necessary to sort out the type of event which caused the loss of life reflected in the disaster terms. Examples of disaster key words are kill, killed, killing, earthquake, terrorist, and bomb.

Vocabulary 2 consists of words such as America, American and various United States city names indicated to give a thumbnail sketch of references to the United States. Clearly, these words alone will not sort out all national news references, but they give some indication of national news references while not going into more depth than the international news vocabularies do.

Vocabularies 3 through 6 are the international news vocabularies. Taken together, they list all countries with whom the United States has had diplomatic relations. Collectively, they represent all international news reference key words. Apart, they indicate the country's diplomatic position relative to the United States and the level of influence or power which the country evinces. Taken separately, each category reflects the various countries' power and diplomatic position by year. The categories are:

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Category 3: Diplomatic relations/Power
Category 4: Diplomatic relations/Non-power
Category 5: No diplomatic relations/Power
Category 6: No diplomatic relations/Non-power

In the category titles, "diplomatic relations" includes countries which had open diplomatic relations with the United States for the year or years included in the vocabulary. "No diplomatic relations" indicates that the countries in that list were in a hostile relationship with the United States, serious enough that diplomatic relations between that nation and the United States had been suspended or terminated. For example, in 1943 England would be in the “Diplomatic Relations” category and Japan would be in the “No diplomatic Relations” category.

The information on diplomatic relations comes from Appendix C of Findling’s *Dictionary of American Diplomatic History*, which consists of a by-country list of “Initiation, Suspension and Termination of Diplomatic Relations”22 with the United States.

The level of power of each country is defined loosely as the worldwide influence of that nation, regardless of whether is is economically, politically or socially influential. Usually, a country is powerful in all three ways, if at all. The decision to categorize a nation as a power or a non-power was somewhat arbitrary. Nations considered to be “First World” nations were all listed as powers. Nations considered developing or “Third World” nations were all listed as non-powers. For example, England and

---

Russia or the Soviet Union were considered powerful countries throughout this period. Colombia, Cuba and other small, developing countries were categorized as non-powers. Those nations that are "Second World" nations were considered on a case-by-case basis and the category determined by that country's past or present ability to affect world affairs.

The resulting four vocabularies were mutually exclusive listings combining the two variables of diplomatic relationship to the United States and world-wide power. England would be in the Diplomatic Relations/Power category, while (depending on the year) Germany would be in the No Diplomatic Relations/Power category or the Diplomatic Relations/Power category. Likewise, depending on the year, Cuba could be in the Diplomatic Relations/Non-power category or the No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power category.

The analysis for these vocabularies was done by year over the entire 105-year text sample, with the vocabularies reflecting by year the changes in diplomatic relations with the United States. The result was 73 slightly different vocabularies, one for each year in which any nation changed diplomatic relations with the United States. As a means of saving space, only the 1985-1989 vocabulary is listed in the appendix.

THE SAMPLE

The text sample for this content analysis consists of a random sample of sentences from the front pages of two elite American newspapers, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Thirty
sentences were selected per year from each newspaper for the period from 1885 through 1989.

The sample was collected by a variety of students and classes at the University of Texas. The sampling technique used was a random sampling computer program developed by Edmund G. Elfers. Three samples consisting of ten sentences per year were collected. Sample “A” was the result of work by students in Dr. Wayne Danielson’s J381 Content Analysis class at the University of Texas at Austin for spring semester 1988. Sample “B” was developed by Bernadette Barker-Plummer and Candace Beaver, using the same sampling method. And Sample “C” was drawn by students in Dr. Dominic Lasorsa’s J363 Mass Communication Theory class and his J381 Graduate Introduction to Research Methods class (again, using the same method). The final sample was completed by Susan Hightower and Dae S. Im.

The resultant sample includes a total of 6,300 sentences, 60 per year or 30 per newspaper per year for 105 years. The average sentence length is 26 words per sentence for a total of approximately 164,000 words.

THE ANALYSIS

The methods of this study are similar to the methods used by Barker-Plummer (1989) in her trend analysis of attribution sources. The four samples used by Barker-Plummer are the same as the “A” and “B”

samples noted above. The statistical analysis follows the same pattern where appropriate.

Pearson product-moment correlations were done for each category. The sample was split by newspaper and by year.

Statistically significant positive relationships between any category and time were interpreted to indicate that the number of references to that category increased over time.

A statistically significant positive relationship between disaster/tragedy references and the appropriate country category (national, international, diplomatic relations/power, diplomatic relations/non-power, no diplomatic relations/power, no diplomatic relations/non-power) was taken to mean that the news coverage of that country covaried with the disaster/tragedy news occurrences.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was then performed on the data from each country category to determine the mean differences between categories. The resulting means are interpreted to indicate the relative amount of coverage for each country type. The purpose of this analysis was to determine a ratio of international news coverage similar to the one reported by Adams.²⁴

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CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

The results of the content analysis and subsequent statistical analyses are presented in the following order:

A. Correlations between disaster news and national, international and country-type categories.
B. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) used to demonstrate relative amounts of coverage by country-type.
C. Longitudinal trend analysis using correlations between time and other variables.

The yearly samples were combined into 21 five year aggregates. With three samples of each of two newspapers, the number of cases became 126. Separate analysis of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times revealed no differences in coverage, so the two samples were combined.

How Disaster News Relates to National and International News

To review, the first three hypotheses of this study anticipate that a) international news references would covary with disaster news references, b) that the covariation with disaster news would be stronger with powerful countries than with less powerful countries, and c) that there would be no significant correlation between national news references and disaster references.
The results of this study support all three of these hypotheses. The results of the Pearson's product-moment correlations for disaster news and national, international and country-type categories are listed in Table 1.

As Table 1 indicates, there are significant relationships between disaster news references and international news references. Furthermore, when the international news references are divided by country type, the significant relationship with disaster news references holds true for three of the four country types.

The relationship between disaster news and the two categories of powerful countries is significant at the .001 level in both cases. The relationship between disaster news and the Diplomatic Relations/Non-power category is significant at the .05 level, while there is no significant relationship between disaster news references and references to countries in the No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power category. Powerful countries clearly receive more disaster news coverage which supports the second hypothesis.

There is no significant relationship between national news references and disaster news references, supporting the third hypothesis that since our national interests are broader, national news coverage is not limited to disaster news.

Figure 3 graphically represents the number of hits per 10,000 words within the five year aggregates. This demonstrates the strong relationship
between international news references and disaster news references and the comparable lack of covariation of national news.

The spikes in Figure 3 are event driven, as indicated. The disaster references are often war references, especially around the time of the two World Wars and the Korean War. The upturn at the end reflects both the Vietnam War and the Iranian hostage situation. Clearly, we refer to other nations in the news more often when we are in major conflicts.

Two interesting and unexpected developments arose from the results of this correlation. First, one may wonder at the fact that the No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power country references do not covary consistently with the disaster references, but do appear to have a significant positive relationship with the national news references.

First, it should be noted that the data in this country-type category were skewed. Of the 126 cases, 103 had no references to any country in this category. In the remaining 23 cases, the entire range was merely from 5 to 53 (references per 10,000 words).

However, the data for the No Diplomatic Relations/Power category were almost equally shallow while the correlation of that category to disaster news references was significant at the .001 level. This category is often the countries at war with the United States. This may account for lack of reporting of loss of life in those nations, and the resultant lack of covariance.

It may be, therefore, that the lack of covariation between disaster news and No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power country references is
explained at least in part by the relationship between national news references and references to that country type.

Since there is a significant ($p < .05$) relationship between these two categories, I returned to that original text to look for a pattern in the reference usages. It appears that in the sample text, references to countries in the No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power category are often made in relation to their hostile status to the United States. This was common in text referring to Cuba during and after the Bay of Pigs incident, and with Vietnam and Iran after the United States' conflicts with those countries. I refer to this phenomenon as "ethnocentric contextualization" and discuss it further in the final chapter.

The other interesting wrinkle in the analysis of the results is the discovery of a significant negative relationship between references to Diplomatic Relations/Non-power country references and No Diplomatic Relations/Power country references. On the surface, this implies that those two country types tend to push each other out of the news in what Adams (1986) calls "a zero-sum game."25 However, these are the only two country-types with this sort of a relationship. One would expect that, if Adams' contention is true, the four country types would all interact in the same manner. Again, this will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

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25 Ibid.
Relative Amount of References Among Country Types in International News References

The fourth hypothesis of the study was assessed by comparing the descriptive statistics of the four country-type categories. Taken together, these four categories make up the international news category. The relative size of these components is shown through the mean and median scores listed in Table 2.

As I stated in Hypothesis Four, I expected that the American media would pay more attention (make more frequent references to) our enemies than to our allies. Proving this hypothesis would support Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) contention that we give more media attention to our enemies “worthy” victims that we give to our client states’ “unworthy” victims.

The data clearly did not support this hypothesis. Quite the opposite, we clearly make far more references to the countries with whom we have diplomatic relations than those with whom we do not. This may indirectly support Adams (1986) results which indicate that countries with whom we have certain ties (heritage, tourism, cultural proximity factors) are the countries which get the most media coverage. Issues which may have contributed to the outcome of this analysis will be further discussed in the next chapter.
Changes in International News References Over Time

Finally, to test the fifth hypothesis, I did another Pearson product-moment correlation on the data, this time using the year as the independent variable to assess the longitudinal trend in international news coverage. This is similar to Barker-Plummer’s (1989) trend analysis of attribution changes over time.

I anticipated a positive correlation between the year and the number of international news references. As indicated in Table 1, this did not hold true for all four country-type categories of international news.

The hypothesis did hold true for the international news category as a whole. Neither the Diplomatic Relations/Power category which had the greatest number of references overall, nor the No Diplomatic Relations/Power category had a significant increase over time. Both of the Non-power categories (Diplomatic Relations and No Diplomatic Relations) had a significant increase over time.

These results indicate that while the American media have always covered the powerful counties of the world, there is a trend toward more coverage from the not-so-powerful or developing countries. Certainly, at least some of this can be attributed to improved technology which provides better access to remote parts of the world. These results partially support the fifth hypothesis.
Table 1
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Indicating Relations Between Disaster and Country References

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>D/P</th>
<th>D/NP</th>
<th>ND/P</th>
<th>ND/NP</th>
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<td>.43***</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.20</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.52***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>.27**</td>
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<td>.38***</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>-.20*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Diplomatic Relations/ Power (ND/P)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients
n=126
* = p < .05,  ** = p < .01,  *** = p < .001

1 No diplomatic relations/non-power
Table 2
Mean, Median, Minimum and Maximum Descriptive Statistics by Country Type
(References per 10,000 words)

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<tr>
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<th>MEAN</th>
<th>MEDIAN</th>
<th>MINIMUM</th>
<th>MAXIMUM</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>44.00</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>141.00</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic Relations/Non-Power</td>
<td>19.79</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>102.00</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Diplomatic Relations/Power</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Diplomatic Relations/Non-power</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Indicating The Longitudinal Analysis
Relations Between Time and International References

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<th>D/NP</th>
<th>ND/P</th>
<th>ND/NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>.12</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.36***</td>
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</table>

(Other cross-correlations listed in Table 1)

Cell entries are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients
n=126
* = p < .05,  ** = p < .01,  *** = p < .001
Figure 3

Disaster, National and International News References, 1885 – 1985
Figure 4

International News References by Country Type 1885 – 1985

DP = Diplomatic Relations/Power
DNP = Diplomatic Relations/Non-Power
NDP = No Diplomatic Relations/Power
NDNP = No Diplomatic Relations/Non-Power

References per 10,000 words

1880 1900 1920 1940 1960 1980 2000

Korean War
Vietnam
Iran
Hostage
Crisis
 CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The results of this content analysis demonstrate a strong relationship between international news references and disaster news references. To repeat, these two types of references covary directly and their relationship is consistent at the .001 level ($f=.51$). This relationship holds true especially during the war years, when the greatest number of references to other nations and to disaster are made.

In this study, the strong relationship between foreign news and disaster reporting supports the earlier findings of Adams (1986) and Potter (1987). The results indicate that a large amount of foreign news on the front pages of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times fits the disaster category and four subcategories of natural disaster, accident, crime and military/war coverage.

The division of the foreign news into the four categories of diplomatic relations/power, diplomatic relations/non-power, no diplomatic relations/power and no diplomatic relations/non-power further indicates that there is proportionately a much larger share of news devoted to countries with whom the United States has diplomatic relations and powerful countries. This supports Rosenblum's contentions on the methods and convenience of First World coverage versus Third World coverage.

38
On the surface, the absence of a relationship between references to countries in the no diplomatic relations/non-power category and disaster news implies that foreign correspondents may, in fact, cover news from those countries which is not disaster related.

However, the infinitesimal amount of Third World reporting detected has probably skewed the results by not being strong enough to affect the total. Additionally, in the time period where more frequent references were made to those nations (1960-1985), the countries cited were most often those at war with the United States. It must be considered that those stories do not reflect the country cited as much as that country's relationship to the United States.

By applying this latter idea to the data on the powerful countries, a similar result is apparent. During the years preceding the United States' entry into the World Wars, there is less coverage of foreign news than during the years when U.S. involvement peaked. That is, foreign news coverage increased when the foreigners in the news are in a dramatic relationship with the United States, be they enemy or ally.

This relationship is seen consistently throughout disaster reporting. One rarely hears news of a hijacking or plane crash without the first statistic quoted being the number of Americans on board.

Should professional news organizations realistically attempt to change this ethnocentric contextualization of foreign news? It is very human to respond with more interest about people and issues with which we identify. It is also a deeply rooted survival trait to be more concerned
with the entities which have the most power over our own lives. So it is to
be expected that the media audience and the media themselves would be
most interested in news (and, in this case, disasters) which involve similar
and proximal nations.

Based on Adams' research, the larger number of references to
those countries with whom the United States has diplomatic relations and
especially those with power commensurate to the United States is to be
expected because those countries are the most similar to the United
States and have the most political, economic, and social impact on the
United States.

The "ideal" of equal treatment for all nations may not be the ideal
after all, in this age of information overload. Graber (1988) found this to be
true in the news consumer's selection or rejection of foreign news.

It is interesting to note the relative amount of coverage for each of
the four country-types. If one equates number of references with the
graphic of the country or its people, as did Gerbner and Maranyi (1984),
this research finds that 1 person from a no diplomatic relations/non-power
country equals 1.25 persons from a no diplomatic relations/power country
or 5 persons from a diplomatic relations/non-power country or 12 persons
from a diplomatic relations/power country.

While this ratio of news coverage is an average across more than a
century, coverage for less powerful nations appears to be improving over
time. This is a hopeful sign which bodes well for the future of foreign news
reporting. Since coverage of less powerful nations appears to be
significantly increasing while coverage of powerful nations remains unchanged, perhaps the disparity in coverage will diminish.

Recommendations for Future Research

As interesting as these data are, there are limitations to their usefulness.

Computerized content analysis has major advantages and disadvantages. Once the computer is programmed, the test is highly reliable, always coding words the same way, never making "human" error. In order to have such reliability, however, you sacrifice a measure of validity.

One word may have a variety of meanings, which the computer is not programmed to recognize. "Mine" is an example of a word that can not be included in the computer's vocabulary list, because it has such a wide range of meanings.

Another validity problem can arise in this type of research. A thirty-sentence text may contain several disaster reference words and several country names which belong in the international news reference categories. But those words may not come from the same sentence, which casts doubt on the validity of a correlation of those variables.

There are other methods of content analysis which are revealing in other ways. Adams (1986) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) both use outside sources to make up a referent real-life framework with which to compare news coverage. Adams used actual disaster occurrences to
compare news reporting to. Herman and Chomsky examined news coverage of victims of persecution by comparing coverage of deaths of victims. This method increases the validity of the study, but it does not have the advantage of computer coding.

Unfortunately, that method uses huge amounts of data and is unwieldy for longitudinal research. Further investigations into the character of foreign news coverage may seek to incorporate both forms of content analysis to maximize the effectiveness of the research.

Another weakness of this research is that it examines only two newspapers and no broadcast news. This shortcoming could be overcome by future researchers into this area, by using the same methods but adding text samples form the broadcast media.

I also hope that future research will further examine the relationship of country-type to foreign news coverage. In attempting to strengthen reliability in development of the vocabularies, I limited the country types. Another validity problem arises here. For example, I think most Americans living in the latter part of the 20th century would agree with the contention that the Soviet Union has been one or our major adversaries since the end of World War II. However, at no time since before World War II has our relationship with the Soviet Union deteriorated to the point where we terminated or suspended diplomatic relations. So, the diplomatic relations/no diplomatic relations categories do not tell the whole picture of relationships with the United States.
Conclusion

Foreign news reporting is a difficult, complex task. Providing the American public with understandable, interesting information about remote countries and people is a formidable undertaking. I hesitate to be so smug as to criticize the professional journalists and editors who are doing their best to provide news of global events to their diverse audience.

It is my hope that this research has provided some facts about the foreign news picture that is presented to the readers of the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Perhaps this information will at least give journalists and editors something to think about when they make the news decisions which affect our image of the world.

As Kipling put it:

“If all men count with you, but none too much...”
APPENDIX 1
DISASTER AND NATIONAL VOCABULARIES

2
disaster
national
adversaries, 1
adversary, 1
america, 2
american, 2
americans, 2
ammo, 1
ammunition, 1
armed, 1
armor, 1
armored, 1
arms, 1
army, 1
assailant, 1
assault, 1
assaulted, 1
assaulting, 1
assaults, 1
atomic, 1
attack, 1
attacked, 1
attacking, 1
attacks, 1
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battles, 1
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bombardment, 1
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bombing, 1
bombins, 1
bombs, 1
boston, 2
casualties, 1
casualty, 1
ceasefire, 1
chicago, 2
clash, 1
clashed, 1
clashes, 1
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combatant, 1
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commandos, 1
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guerilla, 1
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nuclear, 1
ordnance, 1
ottawa, 1
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APPENDIX 2

INTERNATIONAL VOCABULARIES BY COUNTRY TYPE

| 4 | diplomatic relations/power (1985-1989) |
|   | diplomatic relations/nonpower         |
|   | suspended or terminated/power         |
|   | suspended or terminated/nonpower      |
| afghan,2 |
| afghani,2 |
| afghans,2 |
| afghanistan,2 |
| africaaner,2 |
| africanners,2 |
| algeria,2 |
| algerian,2 |
| algerians,2 |
| antigua,2 |
| argentina,2 |
| argentiniyan,2 |
| argentinians,2 |
| assie,2 |
| aussies,2 |
| australia,2 |
| australian,2 |
| australians,2 |
| austria,2 |
| austrian,2 |
| australians,2 |
| bahaman,2 |
bahamans, 2
bahamas, 2
bahrain, 2
bangladesh, 2
barbados, 2
barbuda, 2
belgium, 2
belgian, 2
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bolivians, 2
botswana, 2
botswanan, 2
botswanans, 2
brazil, 2
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britain, 1
british, 1
brunei, 1
bulgaria, 2
bulgarian, 2
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<td>Cape Verde Islands</td>
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</tr>
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REFERENCES


VITA

Cindy Lou Sito was born in Ithaca, New York, on October 7, 1958, the daughter of Jean Elizabeth Bailey Dean and Clifford James Dean, Sr. After graduating from Dryden Central High School in Dryden, New York, in 1976, she attended Saint Lawrence University, in Canton, New York. While there, she majored in Psychology, and received the degree of Bachelor of Science from Saint Lawrence University in May, 1980. At the same time, she was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Regular Army of the United States in May, 1980. She has served as an officer in the regular Army for the past ten years, having attained the current rank of captain and having been selected for promotion to major. In September, 1988 she entered The Graduate School of the University of Texas, under provisions of the Army Fully Funded Advanced Civil Schooling Program.

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