Examining News Coverage and Framing: The Case Study of Sea Lion Management at the Bonneville Dam

Tess McBride
Portland State University, TessMcBride19@gmail.com

Cynthia-Lou Coleman
Portland State University, ccoleman@pdx.edu

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TESS MCBRIDE & CYNTHIA-LOU COLEMAN

Department of Communications
Portland State University
1600 Southwest 4th Avenue Portland, OR 97201
USA
TessMcBride19@gmail.com
CColeman@pdx.edu

ABSTRACT: This study examines how the construction of news stories reveals relationships among groups of stakeholders and how their views unfold within environmental conflict coverage. We look at framing of news stories to assess which voices are heard, how blame is leveraged, which solutions are proposed and how failures are framed.

KEYWORDS: American Indian, authority sources, blame, Bonneville Dam, environmental conflicts, framing, news bias, salmon, sea lions, solutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hard news coverage, particularly issues that fall under the rubric of environmental journalism, often stems from conflicts, accidents and disasters—what some critics refer to as event-driven or episodic coverage. The current study is concerned with a case that engendered such coverage: the encroachment of sea lions on the Pacific Northwest landscape and their impact on salmon populations and stakeholder groups.

The conflict regarding how to manage the sea lions reveals, on the surface, the divide between groups of stakeholders with competing, disparate agendas and the vagaries of laws and policies, while revealing fissures in the construction of objective and balanced information from news writers. But the conflict also reveals deeper divides that emerge from the values and ideological perspectives of those who are granted the authority to speak in the public arenas of debate and those responsible for deciding whose voices are heard and whose are silenced.

At its core, the current study examines how coverage of an environmental, political, legal, and moral conflict illuminates qualities of news construction by examining how arguments are framed, whose voices are heard, how blame, successes and failures are attributed, and which solutions gain traction. We demonstrate that, despite journalistic goals to provide information that is balanced and objective, some perspectives are given a wider berth than others and some solutions gain greater legitimacy in news coverage.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Environmental News Reporting

We situate our study in the arena of environmental coverage, arguing that such coverage frequently follows accidents and disasters. Reporting in a conflict mode often results in less thoughtful and less rich coverage (Bendix & Liebler, 1999; Friedman, 2004; McPherson & Shaw, 1994; Nisbet, 2009; Schoenfeld, Meier, & Griffin, 1979). Conflicting moral views feed into the staple of news reporting where two sides are pitted against each other. Such dramatic coverage has been described as “episodic” by Shanto Iyengar (1991), who argued news narratives report on issues as concrete, single events, resulting in simplistic coverage. Deeper, more thoughtful coverage, which he labeled “thematic,” is much less likely to occur, particularly in television news. Iyengar argued the result is that readers and viewers become less informed, and simplified coverage (episodic framing) results in more superficial thinking by publics.

Environmental reporting often suffers from episodic coverage, as noted by Boykoff and Boykoff (2007), who wrote, “dramatized news tends to eschew significant and more comprehensive analysis of the enduring problems, in favor of covering the spectacular machinations that sit at the surface of events” (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007, p. 1192). Critics insist that important issues often receive superficial treatment, including climate change (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Gordon, Deines, & Havice, 2010; Jones, 2006; Takahashi, 2010) and endangered species issues (Bendix & Liebler, 1999; Carolan, 2008; McPherson & Shaw, 1994; Peterson, Peterson, Peterson, Lopez, & Silvy, 2002).

2.1.1 Reliance on authority

The literature has clearly established dependence of reporters on government sources, particularly during environmental crisis (Bendix & Liebler, 1999; Bennett, 1997; Lacy & Coulson, 2000; McPherson & Shaw, 1994; Molotch & Lester, 1975). Grassroots groups and protest organizations receive fewer opportunities to voice their opinions and are often delegitimized for their perspectives (Coleman, 1996; Lacy & Coulson, 2000). For example, McPherson and Shaw’s 1994 study of coverage of the Yellowstone fires and Endangered Species Act showed that elected officials and local merchants were favored sources, rather than ecologists and scientists. The researchers argued that coverage was overly simplified and lopsided because “reporters misled the public through reliance upon people and organizations with vested interests rather than upon scientific researchers investigating long-term policies” (p. 337).

2.2 Framing

Many framing studies examine how media organizations and individuals select and then report on events, while trying to unpack how information is presented and where we derive our knowledge. Frames live a double-life in that they also refer to the ways in which messages are constructed—cognitively and in texts (Coleman, Ritchie & Hartley, 2008; Dardis, 2007; Druckman, 2001; Entman, 1993; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Iyengar, 1991; Semetke & Valkenburg, 2000). Gamson and Modigliani considered a frame “a central organizing idea or
story that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them” (1987, p. 143). The assumption is that the act of framing serves to bundle certain definitions and perspectives, and that frames themselves are infused with meanings that are bounded and thus limited.

When Robert Entman noted that frames present a story “in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation,” his implication was that frames and framing actions reduce the scope of meanings and interpretations (1993, p. 52). As a result, news discourse has the potential to limit critical interpretation because framing casts meaning within the more narrow bounds of journalistic practices.

2.2.1 Blame Frames

Scholars who have studied frame construction note that, in addition to presenting information as episodic or thematic, frames often assign blame. Blame frames construct an issue by assigning responsibility to an individual, or group, or rarely, to a social structure or macro-social cause. In its simplest form, blame is considered a behavioral reflex when something goes wrong—a negative event (Anderson, 1991). Shaver’s 1985 model divides blame attributions into stages of causal attribution, responsibility and blameworthiness. Blame shapes our views on the world, including issues surrounding public policy, politics and international relations (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) examined how individuals’ perceptions of political responsibility and accountability were affected by television news framing. They argued attributions of blame affect formation of political opinions and evaluations of public policy and thus provide a link to understanding the formation of social knowledge. News media also attribute responsibility, which can play a powerful role in influencing opinions and policies (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). Blame has been attributed to shifts in public thought (Knoblotch-Westerwick & Taylor, 2008), political decision-making (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Gomez & Wilson, 2001), and policy changes (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001).

Environmental disasters, unlike natural disasters, rarely occur on their own, and blame is laid on someone or something (Luke, 1987). When an oil tanker spills, companies, manufacturers, governments and sometimes individuals are blamed. In his examination of Eastern and Western media coverage of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Luke (1987) noted that U.S. news packaged the event by claiming the Soviets had “no one to blame but themselves,” while the Soviets shifted blame for the accident to delays, inefficiencies and to “the Brezhnev appointees in the local and regional party apparatus” (p. 359). Blame frames may obviate the need for deeper discussions about the role of social structures in environmental disasters by securing a villain, thus ending speculation about causal effects.

2.2.2 Solution Frames

News stories often weave together blame with solutions (Coleman & Corbitt, 2003). Benford and Snow (2000) argued that such frames have the potential to serve as a call to arms for social change within communities and governments. Gamson (1992) suggested frames identify, evaluate and seek solutions relating to a particular issue, while Entman (1993) noted that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. This
suggests solution frames are an essential aspect of media framing, and may arrive on the heels of blame frames, which define a problem, identify the cause, and make moral judgments, according to Shaver’s (1985) model of responsibility and causality evaluations.

Because of the preponderance of episodic news coverage, solution frames provide the opportunity for balance to be achieved within topical, episodic coverage. In his analysis of communication campaigns, Dardis (2007) found that messages are most effective when they present a public concern and then offer credible solutions, thus providing audiences with the total frame package of problem, cause and solution. Dardis invoked Gleicher and Petty’s (1992) claim that offering a solution provides individuals an opportunity to accept solutions, whether they agree or not.

Yet solutions presented in coverage may be vague, as researchers have discovered in analyses of climate change reporting (Gordon et al., 2010; Jones, 2006; Pellow, 1999; Takahashi, 2010). The lack of specific and clear methods to solve problems may instill uncertainty on the part of publics, resulting in confusion and mistrust, often aimed at government officials. News coverage has the ability to fuse problems with solutions, thus reassuring audiences, while simultaneously presenting puzzling problems with indeterminate solutions.

2.3 Summary

In the last 40 years the growth of the environmental news has proven its place as a bona fide news beat, but critiques of coverage remain. Journalistic routines, hegemonic structures and profit motives continue to unfold in the newsroom, influencing how information is framed and passed on to readers. By deconstructing how information is framed, we can gain insight into shifts in public thought (Knoblotch-Westerwick & Taylor, 2008) and influences on political decisions (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Gomez & Wilson, 2001), policy making (Medler & Medler, 1993) and public opinion about the environment (Molotch & Lester, 1975).

3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE SEA LION AND SALMON CONFLICT

The Columbia River has long been central to the livelihood of indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. The construction of dams along the Columbia River indelibly changed local ecosystems and economies. The Bonneville Dam, completed in 1938, diminished salmon populations dramatically. Adding insult to injury, groups of adult male sea lions are annually swimming from California to the Columbia River to hunt threatened or endangered salmon.

The current controversy regarding sea lions at the Dam has embroiled stakeholders in a struggle regarding how to manage these non-native pinniped populations. After the failure of non-lethal hazing efforts (e.g., physical barriers, underwater firecrackers, rubber bullets and buckshot), state agencies in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, with the blessing from local Native American tribes, asked for permission to use lethal means to remove sea lions. Permission for the request was granted and then rescinded multiple times over the last several years.

To complicate the story, some sea lion populations receive federal protection. California sea lions are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which makes killing or lethally harassing them illegal. While California sea lion populations dwindled to about 1,000 in the 1930s, they have since rebounded with a record number of 238,000
(NMFW, 2008). Most scientists consider this number to be stable, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act does not have a process for de-listing animals. Several agencies have been involved in the effort to assess the sea lion presence at Bonneville Dam, including the Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Between 2002 and 2007, a total of 267 identified sea lions were present at the Dam (NMFW, 2008). The amount of California sea lions spotted at the Dam rose to 89 in 2010.

Officials have also tried to quantify how much of an impact the pinnipeds have on fish populations. Looking at the total catch in 2010, scientists estimated that between two and three percent of the total salmonid run was consumed annually by pinnipeds (Stansell, Gibbons, & Naggy, 2010, p. iii).

Removal measures can only be sanctioned if sea lions are having a significant negative impact on the protected salmonid populations. The U.S. Humane Society seized on the language of the act and protested plans to lethally remove sea lions in 2007. The judge ruled that the states could begin killing as many as 85 California sea lions annually for five years—as a last resort—if animals could not be relocated to zoos, aquariums or wildlife parks. This permitted the National Marine Fisheries Service and the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho to trap and relocate “repeat offenders,” and, if necessary, kill them.

4. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Bearing in mind the literature concerning source use and framing in environmental news coverage, we expected sea lion coverage in the Pacific Northwest would demonstrate a heavy reliance on authority sources, particularly governmental officials. With this in mind, we predicted that:

_Hypothesis 1:_ Looking at the mainstream news stories concerning the sea lion and salmon conflict at the Bonneville Dam, the coverage, on average, will reflect a statistically greater number of governmental sources than advocacy and tribal sources

Our quest was to ascertain whether frames expressed in stakeholder platforms were reflected in news coverage. Moreover, we were interested in the frequency of blame frames in comparison to successful solution frames. We proposed:

_Hypothesis 2:_ When blame frames and successful solution frames appear in the news coverage of the sea lion/salmon controversy, the coverage, on average, will reflect a statistically significant greater number of blame frames than successful solution frames

Due to the lack of previous research examining failed solutions, we wanted to know how often failed solutions occurred in comparison to blame frames. We asked:

_Research Question 1:_ When looking at the blame frames and failed solution frames that appear in the news coverage of the sea lion/salmon controversy, will news stories, on average, include more instances of blame frames or failed solution frames?

To dig deeper into the characteristics of frames, we asked:

_Research Question 2:_ Among the blame frames, who or what is the focus of blame?
_Research Question 3:_ Which stakeholder groups are associated with discussing blame?
In addition, the literature demonstrated that offering solutions is typical in news coverage of environmental conflicts, and we therefore asked two descriptive questions:

Research Question 4: In news coverage of the sea lion and salmon conflict at the Bonneville Dam, which successful and failed solution frames occur?
Research Question 5: Which stakeholder groups are associated with solutions?

5. METHODOLOGY

Timeline for the study was January 1, 2003, to June 21, 2010. The beginning date marked the second season of sea lion monitoring at Bonneville Dam, which allowed officials to compare sea lion presence from the prior year. The study’s end date marked the conclusion of the sea lion season at Bonneville Dam in 2010. For the pool of news articles we searched the Lexis-Nexis database, limiting the search to the six states in the Pacific Northwest with government, tribal or commercial ties to the salmon and sea lion issue (Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington). We searched using key words “sea lion” and “Bonneville” during the six and one-half year timeframe. The search yielded a total of 451 articles from 15 newspapers (333 stories) and wire services (118 stories). In total, 67 articles were duplicates, so we randomly selected only one of any duplicates for the study. This reduced the sample to 384 articles.

Because the theoretical underpinnings for the study emerge from news studies, we omitted editorials, opinions and letters to the editor, leaving a sample size of 161 articles published in nine newspapers from five states. Oregon had the most articles with 88, followed by Washington with 56, Idaho with ten, California with six, and Montana with one.

5.1 Coding

In order to address the hypotheses and research questions, we developed both quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques to assess newspaper coverage (Coleman, Hartley, & Kennamer, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990). A codebook was created to identify obvious (manifest) information, borrowing heavily from prior research on content analysis and framing (Benoit, Brazeal, & Airne, 2007; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Semetke & Valkenburg, 2000; Tankard, 2001).

For sources, coders were asked to identify all sources mentioned in the publication and their organizational affiliation. In addition to recording the source name, title and organization, we determined whether the organization was government (local, state, federal, international or tribal), a non-governmental agency, a for-profit organization, an advocacy organization, or unknown.

To assess frames, we attended to stakeholder platforms and the environmental framing literature to establish a priori the types of frames. We defined frames from a social constructionist perspective, which conceptualizes frames as “central organizing ideas” that promote “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Coders were instructed that frames must be independent from one another. In cases where frames overlapped or could not be determined, coders met to decide how to determine a frame’s prominence.

A team of two graduate students, one undergraduate student and an instructor created the codebook over a six-month period in 2010. Following Weber (1990), we created and tested
a coding scheme, where researchers must define the frames they are attempting to code and then test the codes with group members presenting, evaluating and discussing frames or topics that should be included in the codebook.

5.2 Operationalizations

The majority of the coding required a manifest reading of the content. Determining frames, however, required both manifest and latent readings. Coders were instructed to code conservatively, relying on manifest words, rather than latent meanings. We established the following frames in advance: blame, war, solution, intrinsic values (ethics), extrinsic values (economy), balance, harmony, laws and policies, and politics, based on environmental reporting and framing literatures. Coders also noted frames that were emergent.

5.3 Intercoder reliability

In order to determine intercoder reliability, 10 percent of the sample was extracted randomly (Benoit et al., 2007; Lacy & Riffe, 1996; Neuendorf, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). We used Cohen’s Kappa to calculate intercoder reliability for the manifest content. We found 99 percent agreement on variables such as article date, newspaper name, etc. Turning to frames, the unweighted Kappa was determined for frame type and the weighted Kappa was calculated for number of frames because it accounts for differences between the responses in disagreement. High agreement was found with type of blame \( (k = .96) \) and the lowest level of agreement was found when coders were asked which organization was linked to the blame frame \( (k = .69) \). Based on Landis and Koch’s (1977) interpretation of Kappa agreement, half of the calculated Kappas were considered to be in almost perfect agreement (.81-1.00), and the others were considered to have substantial agreement (.61-.80).

6. RESULTS

6.1 Sources

Across all stories 244 sources were mentioned, with the majority (75%) from government organizations, followed by advocacy/non-profit and then tribal organizations. Governmental sources (both state and federal) appeared far more frequently than others, with a total of 182 \( (M=1.13, SD=1.19) \). Advocacy/non-profit sources appeared less frequently with 43 source mentions \( (M=.27, SD=.48) \). Tribal sources appeared a total of 19 times \( (M=.19, SD=.34) \). Governmental sources were significantly more likely to be quoted than other sources, as hypothesized. Paired sample t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference between federal sources and advocacy sources \( [(t(384)=6.097, p<.000)] \), and between local government sources and advocacy sources \( [(t(384)=4.816, p<.000)] \), thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

6.2 Frames

Blame frames were presented the most frequently in the data, with a total of 279 mentions \( (M=1.73, SD=1.36) \) in the 161 articles. Successful solution frames occurred 211 times
(M=1.31, SD=.69) while failed solution frames were presented 96 times (M=.60, SD=.71). Turning to Hypothesis 2, which predicted that the coverage would reflect a greater number of blame frames than successful solution frames, we found a statistically significant difference between blame frames and successful solution frames \([t(160)=3.92, p<.000]\).

Because we found little in the literature regarding failed solutions, we asked whether the coverage would reflect more instances of blame frames or failed solution frames. Failed solution frames appeared a total of 96 times (M=.60, SD=.71). When compared with blame, we discovered a statistically significant difference between blame frames and failed solution frames \([t(160)=10.96, p<.000]\), in response to Research Question 1.

The next task was to look more deeply at the types of blame frames that appeared in the news coverage and address Research Question 2. Most of the 279 blame frames centered on the decline in salmon: 261 of the total (94%). The most common blame was directed towards sea lions, which is not surprising as “sea lions” was among the two search terms used to select news stories. Sea lions were blamed for killing salmon in nearly half of all blame mentions (N=133; 47%). Dams were blamed for killing salmon with much less frequency: 39 mentions out of the set of 279 blame frames (14%). Fishing was blamed for salmon decline in 9 percent of the blame frames (N=25). Environmental factors, such as habitat loss, were noted in 8 percent of blame frames while birds were blamed in 5 percent of stories (N=14). Miscellaneous attributions of blame occurred in the remaining 4 percent of stories (N=12).

We also asked coders to note whether the attributions of blame were linked to a particular source and, if mentioned, his or her organization, to address Research Question 3. Recall the organizational categories included local or state government; federal or international government; tribal government; non-governmental agency; for-profit organization; advocacy or non-profit group; and other. Overall, the data showed that not every instance of blame had an organization linked to the discussion. Of the 279 instances of blame, organizations were linked to blame 147 times (53% of all blame frames); 132 discussions of blame were not presented by an organization (47%). Advocacy and non-profit groups were linked to the discussion of blame with the greatest frequency, for a total of 109 mentions (74%). Federal and international governmental organizations presented 18 (12%) discussions of blame, followed by state and local governments with nine (6%), and tribal governments with seven (5%). The “other” category yielded three instances of blame and the non-governmental/for-profit organizational category was linked to two instances of blame.

We also asked what type of solution frames were constructed in the news coverage (Research Question 4). Recall that we created two categories for solution frames: a successful solution and a failed solution, which occurred 211 times. We found six categories best describe successful solutions: Trapping, relocating, or lethal removal of sea lions was the most common category, accounting for more than three-quarters of the solution frames (N=163). Other solutions included hazing and other non-lethal methods (N=26, 12%), physical and electronic/sonar barrier solutions (N=6, 3%) and tracking, monitoring, and branding (N=6, 3%). The remaining solution frames (N=10, 5%) varied from using electrical shocks in the water to drive away sea lions to removing dams altogether.

We also tracked failed solutions. Most of 96 mentions of failures described either the failure of hazing and non-lethal methods (N=51) or trapping, relocating or lethal methods (N=41), representing 96% of the failed solutions. Remaining frames included unsuccessful attempts at electronic or sonar barriers, and branding, monitoring and tracking of sea lions.
In addition to looking at the types of successful solutions that appeared in the coverage, we examined which organizations were linked to solutions (Research Question 5). Note that not all solutions were tied to an organization if the coder could not determine the organization through a manifest reading. Of the 211 successful solutions presented, we could identify only 78 organizations linked to the solutions. When they were mentioned, government stakeholders were mentioned in most of the cases (N=61, or 78%). For-profit organizations were associated with seven solutions (9%) while advocacy/non-profit agencies were linked to five solutions (6%). Tribal governments presented four solutions (5%) and non-governmental organizations presented one solution (1%).

In a similar vein we looked at the sources associated with failed solutions. We were able to identify 49 organizations associated with the 96 failed solution frames. In contrast to the solution frames—where government sources dominated—advocacy and non-profit groups were linked to about half (N=24, 49%) of the frames. Governmental organizations represented 39% (N=19) of the organizations that were mentioned with failed solutions. The remaining six frames linked for-profit organizations with failures (N=3, 6%), tribal governments (N=2, 4%) and non-governmental agencies (N=1). We also noted that the difference between advocacy and non-profit groups as sources differed significantly from the linkage of government sources \[ (t(160) = 2.45, p< .015) \].

7. DISCUSSION

Our results align with prior empirical work on environmental communication and framing while offering some insights into what constitutes “balanced” coverage, source use and stakeholder message framing—specifically blame frames and their attendant solutions.

The overreliance on government sources had the effect of framing the sea lion issue from the vantage point that favored lethal removal of the invading pinnipeds as a solution to sustaining salmon populations. Criticism of lethal removal—voiced predominately by the Humane Society—meant re-framing the focus of blame away from the sea lions and onto other culprits, such as the dams, over-fishing and poor science. We argue that coverage shows that government officials stuck to a common message: lethal removal was the best method for solving the current crisis of salmon depletion. As a result, blame was more likely to focus on sea lions, and sources most readily available to speak to the issue—government workers—favored sea lion removal.

Yet critics of the government solution (lethal removal) countered solutions with a “failed solution” frame that also had currency in coverage. Advocacy groups such as the Humane Society employed two types of frames: they blamed other causes and described current solutions as failures. Such techniques provided something of a counter-weight to lethal removal of sea lions. Rather than blaming sea lions for salmon depletion, such groups argued that dams, overfishing, habitat loss, birds and human actions were to blame. Moreover, they noted that solutions advocated by government sources—trapping, relocating and lethal removal—failed to solve the problem. One spokesperson noted: “My frustration is there is no point in killing them if it isn’t going to make a difference, and it isn’t going to make a difference” (McCall, 2007).

The coverage suffered from a heavy dose of blame, regardless of the source of the disparagement. As a result, environmental coverage of this issue continues to be plagued with stakeholders pointing fingers at others more often than offering solutions. Our findings also
reinforce the literature on source reliance in environmental reporting, and show the need for news reporters to branch out from dependence on authority sources in order to seek the opinions of non-mainstream and alternative viewpoints that provide readers with a fuller range of perspectives. With governmental sources appearing more than four times as often as advocacy or nonprofit sources, and nearly ten times more often than tribal sources, there is clearly a reliance on official sources. Perhaps reporters felt governmental representatives were a neutral authority on the matter. We contend, however, that for the current conflict, governmental sources were heavily invested in solutions to the sea lion encroachment. Government organizations were responsible for monitoring, hazing, trapping, relocating and lethally removing sea lions, in addition to being involved in salmon production and protection. While their involvement in sea lion management was often front and center in the news articles, their connection and responsibilities relating to sustaining salmon populations were not as prominently recorded.

7.1 Limitations and Future Directions

While our findings provide insight into framing of the sea lion management issue, we recognize that our choice of mainstream print media limits the generalizability of our findings to one dimension of news production. Because our study was designed to examine message frames rather than public opinion, we are hopeful that future studies will embark on gauging the effects of such frames on judgment. Do lay publics endorse the decision to kill sea lions at Bonneville Dam? Are publics likely to blame sea lions rather than dams for the depletion of salmon runs? How does public judgment align with the Humane Society’s contention that humans, rather than mammals, are to blame for salmon loss? Attending to such questions will help us better understand the effects of message framing on audience framing, thus adding to the body of literature on framing.

8. CONCLUSION

Reporting on environmental conflicts was called one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century (Peterson et. al, 2002). Yet, the roles and functions of the news media have undergone dramatic changes in the last decade, cutting a deep swath through print news organizations and thus limiting their reach and impact. Can mainstream reporters provide an arena of rich, balanced and nuanced coverage for reading publics? Such an approach demands pluralistic actions, which eschew privileging of some sources over others, and thus some perspectives over others (Christians, Fackler, Rotzoll, & McKee, 2001). Pluralism, McQuail noted, offers a “complex of groups and interests, none of them predominant all the time” (1987, p. 85). With shrinking news budgets, we can’t help but wonder how contemporary news organizations can continue covering information in a pluralistic vein.

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