

Mass Media and Alternative Coverage
of
The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

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ABSTRACT

Mass media and Alternative Coverage of The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

Margaret B. Beresford

The present study examines the issue of news content and coverage of an environmental disaster in the mass and the alternative media. With the use of content analysis, 132 articles on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill were selected and analyzed in four alternative magazines and one American newspaper. It was hypothesized that content varied according to the differences in media type. Results suggested that differences in media do have impact on coverage of environmental events.

Dedication

To Guy and Jean-François

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Public concern over environmental issues and the effectiveness of the actions taken or considered have been colored by the messages of various sectors of society. The scientific community assessments are given in detached and highly technical terms while largely negating the more human aspects of environmental problems (Fitchen, 1989: 321). In contrast, the environmental movement, while voicing the human dimensions, is hampered by some criticism of extremism and the constant reevaluation as to the degree of their influence. More important is the degree to which various media sources attempt to conceptualize each environmental problem as a packaged item without the time or awareness of how balanced their presentations are in content (Gamson, 1988: 226-227). Despite the various official attempts to give explanation and understanding to the complexities of environmental issues, the stark reality of how little is found to be known or prepared for can be measured by the ever present reminders of past disasters. No matter the degree of symbolic or official packaging given to environmental problems, the reality of future Three-Mile Island and Tchernobyl accidents and the myriad of other pollution disasters, have an left indelible imprint on the public's perception of potential danger.

This imprint from previous disasters has led to a constant and ever widening gap between the people who live with governmental policy and the elite (insiders) who set or influence policy. A Canadian report by Ekos Research found this massive gap positions the two groups on opposite extremes of the spectrum after ranking a list of 22 values. Ordinary people define and rank these values within a moral context which is

based and measured in their concern for the human dimensions. For them, these human dimensions translate into policies which foster first a clean environment, second a healthy population, followed by protection for individual rights and security for all regions. In contrast, everything is attenuated for the elite. Their desire to reduce government includes a purging of its moral content in setting and deciding policy. Their need to have "others" recognize the importance of individual self-reliance is translated into a ranking of character traits. Therefore, moral content is demonstrated by ranking adjectives which describe a particular behavior expected in "others". From this perspective, the traits most valued are competitiveness followed by integrity, minimal government, and thriftiness etc. A clean environment is ranked much lower since the elite focus almost entirely on economics, especially in the area of deficit cutting (The Gazette, 1995 : July 21). The magnitude of their differences in values may explain the public's cynicism towards people in power who speak to public concerns for the environment but appear not to put these values into practice.

It is within this context of confusing discourse that the public forms ongoing opinions. Environmental debates are also mired by two additional factors. First, governments is seen as the only institution having the financial and legal means to deal with environmental problems despite having a reputation of being polluters themselves. Second, the various demands on governmental spending far outstrip the debt ridden economies of nearly every country. Thus the issue also becomes one of trust in governmental efficacy and the degree of economic viability of environmental expenditures (spending to prevent and correct, or waiting until a crisis occurs).

The public is faced with limited options. Individuals can either continue to support (with reservations) environmental policies or, if seen as ineffective because of competing agendas, utilize the varying influence of the environmental movement. Both choices in this environmental conflict expend time but more importantly, they underline the minority status the public has in effecting changes. Since the 1960's and 70's, the latter option has had uneven success. Certain conflicting coverage of environmental issues garnered public opinion toward mobilization with the environmental movement. These have been mainly individual responses to their minority power status and growing awareness of particular environmental emergencies not properly dealt with by governmental or business actions. For example, the lingering opposition by various individuals and groups in Alaska has had in eliciting public support in seeking a more comprehensive response to the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill where 11 million gallons of crude oil was released when the tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef. The measurement of their influence and success rests in the amount of focus and in-depth coverage they can sustain through the various media sources.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This paper will first examine the differences in the coverage between alternative publications versus those classified as mainstream publications. It is believed there are distinct differences in text and context that differentiate the alternative media from the mass media that go beyond simple political labels of left versus status quo. In particular, this paper will look at the amount and context of editorializing each classified type of publication utilizes. As well, the text will be examined to discover if in this specific

case the environmental news presented adequately address environmental issues of concern in its content and can be understood to demonstrate the two distinct roles in journalistic newsgathering their classification implies. This will especially apply to the factual content of the alternative media which view their coverage as unique not only from a more human point of view but also in their goal of reporting facts not found in the mass media. Therefore it is believed that such uncovered facts are ignored by the mass media because they do not easily fit within the explanatory parameters of the ideology which supports the status quo.

Despite the many valid theoretical offerings seen as necessary to facilitate participation in social movements, consideration for prior individual perceptions and current reactions remain a strong determining factor in activism. Confirmation can be found in Walsh and Warland's (1983) research on the possible factors which effected people's decision to participate actively against the Three Mile Island accident. Noting the expected variances from one collective action to another, they found that background variables, such as pre-incident solidarity networks, ideology and issue specific discontent have a significant influence in an individual's choice to become actively involved (Walsh, Warland, 1983 : 778-779).

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill was chosen as an example of an ideal environmental incident as a case study for several reasons. This environmental incident made international news headlines assuring its presence in the alternative press media. The extent and expected longevity of damage gave it the significance of Tchernobyl or Three Mile Island thus facilitating research into the variations in media coverage that has gone through a full cycle from growing to the point of gaining international recogni-

tion in the media and to being reduced slowly, losing both impact and media concentration. The Valdez incident clearly represents a political as well as an economic event that challenged both the State and corporate world. This event similar to Thchernobyl, highlighted and galvanized individual communities' positions on the need of efficiency against the governmental and corporate need for expediency. It also brought into question the efficacy of technology (specifically tanker and cleanup methods) had on sensitive environments. This led to long-term questions concerning the feasibility of tanker shipping and the ability and preparedness of existing cleanup strategies touted by corporate owners and some governmental officials. Given the complexity of the various issues and interests surrounding this environmental incident, it will be interesting to examine whether the differences in coverage vary distinctly between the alternative and mass publications.

LITERATURE VIEW

The alternative press is believed to represent an important source of information within the social movement process. Opinions of supporters and non supporters as to the relevancy of particular issues or conflicts become key to successful mobilization. This does not include people with attitudes that reject social movements. Attitudes in this instance include a willingness to identify with certain "objective" interests of a group of people whose ultimate action may or may not challenge constituted authority (Klandermans, Tarrow, 1988: 11).

Initially, people validate information and opinions through interpersonal relations with others in their social network and/or group. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) substantiated the importance of such social networks, in influencing an individual's opinion or attitude. Their examination of several studies showed individuals make up their minds and thus conform closely to the climate of opinion within their own social environment. As the process of social comparison matures, collective definitions of the situation are formulated. The implication is that personal influence of particular interpersonal relations can play an intervening role in formulating or modifying the effects of mass media campaigns (Katz, Lazarsfeld, 1955: 73).

Recognition of this process has been taken into account by social movements especially in their attempts to garner consensus mobilization (e.g. efforts to spread particular views and beliefs on social issues among parts of the population). Unlike consensus formation that concerns the unorchestrated convergence of meaning in social networking, consensus mobilization refers to a deliberate attempt by a social actor to spread views to create consensus among a segment of the population. In the case of social movement organizations, an ideology is sponsored and packaged to targeted individuals who are then faced with the decision of whether or not to adopt the social movement's definition of events. This attempted persuasion does not happen in a vacuum, both movement organizations and individuals operate in an atmosphere of competing sources of information, where views and definitions are continually challenged. As must be expected then, social movements are just one group among many more resource based agents, such as mass media, vying to have their information validated by individuals in networks of social reality.

Thus consensus mobilization by social movements targets individual beliefs and attitudes and the collective definitions formed in social networks. Although individuals, as part of networks and subcultures, may often engage in collective action, individually each must decide whether they will conform to or defect from the collectivity. The complexity of social reality allows differing interpretations of what is happening.

According to Marshall and Orum (1987, quoted in Klandermans, 1988 : 175):

in the case of social conflicts, actors try to persuade individuals to take their sides. In that way, various media, governmental agencies, competing challenges, movements and counter movements organizations are struggling for the hearts and minds of the people (Klandermans, 1988: 175).

Klandermans (1988) focuses on consensus mobilization of a single actor and its target; in this case, social movement organizations that sponsor a particular ideological package for the individuals who decide whether to agree with the government's definition and conclusions of the situation. In order to conceptualize movements as agents of consensus mobilization, they must be related to other agents who are also attempting to influence public opinion. To this end, Freemans (1983) views the need to spread the message of a particular issue as a defining characteristic of social movements. Although speculative, in general the message of a social movement attempts to redefine a situation that breaks with the discourse justifying the status quo (Skelly, 1986, Klandermans, 1988: 177).

In this context Gamson (1982) agrees and refers to

the process of replacing a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action for change (Klandermans, 1988: 177).

The importance of mobilization, for these authors, is to stress the definition of a situation as unjust as a precondition for possible resistance (Gamson 1982, Taylor

1986, Klandermans 1988). Piven and Cloward (1979) agree but caution that simply tying grievances to situational factors is insufficient because people who normally accept the authority of these institutions must come to believe such institutions are themselves unjust and wrong. Thus the focus becomes one that demands critical assessment and subsequent view of the institutions of authority, a rather difficult task given the common acceptance of meeting the congruency requirements viewed as the integral basis for the ideology of social movements. According to Wilson (1973), these congruency factors must contain the following: a diagnosis that outlines the causes of discontent and the agents responsible for a prognosis that indicates what must be done; a rationale or arguments which convince the individuals that actions are necessary and justified; a description of the movements' goals. For most movement theorists, these are the essential criteria in consensus mobilization which are dependent on the degree of discrepancy between the individual's belief systems and the movements ideologies (Klandermans, 1988: 179). In addition, others who feel change is impossible must begin to see the possibilities of demanding change. Thus powerlessness must be replaced with effectiveness where people become convinced of their capability to change existing conditions. McAdams (1982) refers to these processes of individual change as "cognitive liberation". In many instance such radical changes that can lead to the formation of mobilization do not take place as expected. This is because simply having these changed feelings does not necessarily translate into participation. Even if the movement appears to represent their dissatisfaction and aspirations, its concrete goals may not relate. This also applies to their belief that simply participating in the movements' activities will be effective. Here, effectiveness may not be enough, the decision to participate may require legitimizing the actions contemplated by the movement. Therefore movements must demonstrate that the costs of the actions chosen are rea-

sonably proportional to the expected benefits. This includes for most individuals a guarantee others will also participate (Klandermans, 1988: 177-178).

All of the above discussion deals with the overall necessity of credibility or as Klandermans (1988) refers to the "diversion of credibility" where positions taken by social movements are meant to be so identified with the social issues or conflicts that other organizations including the media and government leaders will adopt and incorporate their messages in order to appear in touch themselves. The result is that, here, movements may be the recipients of unexpected sources of credibility as leaders on these issues (Klandermans, 1988: 189-193).

The theoretical premise not addressed here are Piven and Cloward's (1979) arguments that question these previous observations as insufficient, since the people's belief in these institutions of authority are not directly called to account for their continued legitimacy and efficiency. The main means of swaying such an entrenched belief remains the dissemination of information that not only challenges the assertions and positions of the status quo, but also offers viable alternatives. Thus although speculative, in general, the alternative message of a social movement attempts to redefine a situation that breaks with the discourse justifying the status quo (Skelly, 1986:13-14).

In this context, Gamson (1982) agrees and refers to "the process of replacing a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilization belief that supports collective action for change" (Klandermans, 1988: 177). The importance of mobilization, for these authors, is to stress the definition of a situation as unjust and a precondition for possible resistance (Gamson, 1982; Taylor, 1986; Klander-

mans, 1988). These theorists view the role of an alternative press which not only attempts to offer a different belief system but views their coverage of a particular situation as unique. In other words, from the perspective offered, an environmental disaster will not only have a more humane view that questions the status quo but will include purported facts not found in the mass media. They argue that such uncovered facts are ignored by the mass media because their controversial content cannot easily be explained within the parameters of the ideology that supports the status quo.

In Manufacturing Consent, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) argue that the position taken by the mass media can be explained through their propaganda model, that posits a contradictory performance by the mass media. The common view of the mass media is one of active competition to critically investigate and expose governmental and corporate wrongdoing, as well as portraying themselves as champions for free speech and the general public interest. This common view is more a myth than reality since what is missed is the limited degree of such critiques, given the huge inequality overseeing resources, and the effects such imbalance has on both access to private media and its behavior. Thus Herman and Chomsky's model asserts a reality contrary to the accepted professional view of mass media as a watchdog or "Fourth Estate" that maintains the citizen's need and right to know, by taking a critical view on the actions of government and big business. This norm assumes the mantle of the "democratic postulate" which requires an informed and participating citizenry to function properly. Thus the general news media are believed to be our means of checking the abuses of power, through a continuous adversarial relationship between the governed "little guy", government and big business. These powerful institutions include schools,

universities, popular culture industries, think tanks and government (in other words the Ideological State Apparatus).

The focus of their propaganda model is on the various routes by which money and power are utilized to filter and shape the news fit to print and to skewer and marginalize dissent, which allows the more dominant messages of government and private interests to be presented to the public. The main ingredients of the propaganda model or set of news "filters" include the following: (1) the size, the concentration of ownership, the owner's wealth, and the profit focus of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary source of income; (3) the reliance on information provided by government, business and "expert" sources chosen and funded by these primary sources; (4) "flak" as a method of disciplining the media; and (5) "anti-communism" as a national religious control mechanism. As these elements interact and reinforce each other, they fix the premises and interpretation of discourse defining what is newsworthy. Thus they explain the basis and method of operations of what is essentially a system to orchestrate propaganda campaigns. (Herman, Chomsky, 1988: 1-2).

This process of filtering the news occurs so naturally that news people, operating with the best of intentions, still believe that they choose and objectively interpret the news based on professional news standards. The built-in filter constraints are so powerful and fundamental to the system that alternative assessments of news choices are imagined. In Herman and Chomsky's (1988) opinion, the pattern of manipulation and systematic bias can only be revealed through a comparative story by story review of media operations. (Herman, Chomsky 1988: 2-3).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggest that the information disseminated by mainstream media is to varying degrees created and manufactured to ensure the consent of the ordinary citizen. In this process the media act in the interests of the powerful which include the media institutions themselves.

Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right thinking people internalized, preconceptions and the constraints of ownership, organization market and political power. Censorship is largely self censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of sources and media organizational requirements and by people at high levels within the media organization who are chosen to implement and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centers of power (Lester, E., 1992, 46, Herman and Chomsky, 1988, xii).

A summation of their propaganda model is succinctly described as a "systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests". (Lester, 1992: 46; Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 35). Lester (1992) underlines two important points found in this statement. First, the recognition this statement brings to the concept of "domestic power interests", a phrase that avoids the commonly held dichotomy of the public and private arenas. Second, the appropriate use of the word "serviceability" that avoids the pitfall of making undue claims and yet highlights the real utility of the media to those powerful interests in ownership, advertising and public relations. Thus casting the media as having a vital role in the political process, a role that Herman and Chomsky's model (1988: 298) describes as a sophisticated means of thought control.

(a) propaganda model suggests that the "societal purpose" of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and state.

Chomsky further elaborates in Necessary Illusions (quoted in Lester, 1992: 476; 189: 19-20):

(In the United States)... subtle means are required: the manufactured consent deceiving the stupid masses with "necessary illusions", covert operations that the media and Congress pretend not to see until it all becomes too obvious to be suppressed. We see... shift to the phase of damage control... but not to the institutional factors that determine the persistent and substantive content of these commitments. The task of the Free Press... is to take the proceedings seriously and to describe them as a tribute to the soundness of our self correcting institutions that they carefully protect from public scrutiny.

According to Lester (1990), only scant attention has been paid by mainstream media researchers to Herman and Chomsky's long standing media studies. Some of the critical comments imply that these authors see the media as a monolithic system and cite such publications as *The Nation*, and *The Guardian*, as proof of a vigorous and competing alternative press to the mass media. Lester (1992) suggests this criticism should be viewed as a simple misrepresentation and cites Herman and Chomsky's (Quoted in Lester, 1992: 47; 1988: 302) comments from their book:

The mass media are not a solid monolith"(xii) and "media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity... are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively"" (2) and furthermore there is an active but "*marginalized*" (italics added) press that preserves the "naturalness" of the processes of propaganda (xiv).

As well, Herman and Chomsky (1988) point out that the media "encourage... spirited debate within well understood ideological parameters previously mentioned" (Lester 1992, 48, 1988, 302).

EMPIRICAL STATEMENTS

According to the literature reviewed, sustainable social movements require information: which (1) stresses the definition of a situation as unjust; (2) factually questions the institutions of authority as unjust and wrong; (3) offers a comprehensive outline of the problem with a clear substantiated assessment that challenges the belief system in the assertions and positions of the status quo and then indicates viable alternatives.

In the case of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, one could find supporting facts of a situation that was and may (according to ongoing legal inquiries and lawsuits) be qualified as unjust. This can be seen by examining what and who was/is affected after this environmental incident. To question the position taken by the institutions of authority, examination of the media coverage to see if the political/economical factors and actions taken or not taken actually point to whether the overriding necessity was for efficiency or expediency on the part of governmental and corporations involved, will be examined. As for the case of whether the theoretical argument of challenging the status quo and offering a valid alternative goal was concretely addressed, it will be confirmed only if the coverage demonstrates a clear challenge to the belief in the corporations and governments as capable institutions and offers a valid alternative.

This paper, then, will focus on some of the hypothesis advanced by the theoretical works on the various information factors necessary to establish sustainable social movements. The most frequent hypothesis is that news media in general, when covering particularly controversial events, do so with the dual aim of offering news that

is sensational and dramatic. This is accomplished by focusing on personalities rather than issues, on surface happenings rather than substantive matters and that it above all preserves the status quo. (Parenti, 1993 : 6) To this end there must be a directed coverage that focuses on the credibility that human error was the primary causal factor in creating an environmental disaster. To test this, one could compare mass media and alternative media coverage to see to what degree this approach was taken. For example one would expect extensive coverage of this approach by the mass media to the exclusion of any other factor of concern. In contrast the alternative media would be expected to present the institutional factors that put into question the validity of such institutional control and effectiveness.

A second hypothesis advanced is that the general news organizations will utilize more institutional sources and editorial comments to a greater degree than the alternative press. One way to narrow the focus and direction of a news story is by making the descriptive facts of an event agree with official interpretations. This common practice of seeking official sources that ensures institutional interests are safeguarded from unwanted disclosure and broader analysis. A more subtle variation, less likely to be detected, is the use of editorial comment. In this case, a political perspective is mixed with selected facts and opinions to directly persuade the public. For both types of journalism, a vital method of detecting bias and agenda setting is to identify the sources and their connection to the event being reported or given commentary. A third hypothesis will examine the coverage to see to what degree both media offered an analytical view on the primary motives of the governments and corporations involved, and more specifically as to whether governmental and corporate actions taken or not taken were based on the need for efficiency or expediency. Such analysis would then challenge or

validate the capability of such institutional control. In other words, to what degree did either media specifically question the actions taken or not taken by either institution responsible. If the questions continue to remain limited and repetitive as more facts are disclosed and the same standardized responses become common then themes are being cultivated not in-depth analysis. The fourth hypothesis will look at the levels of consensus or similarity between the mass media and the alternative media coverage. The fifth and sixth hypothesis will focus on indications of censorship and ideology. Controversial incidents that have extreme levels of political and economical effects, usually require damage control. By confusing important issues through the divisive politics of ideology, the focus becomes, as Herman and Chomsky's model describes, a "means of defending the economic, social and political agenda." The final hypothesis of censorship refers to the degree in which either media's coverage relies on information of "expert" sources chosen and provided by the institutions of government and business. A comparison will be made between the coverage of both types of presses. If the secondary function of the alternative press is to educate rather than to entertain the public is true, then their coverage is expected to give more information on the event than the mass media. Their approach should incorporate a variety of sources independent and official, comparative background information, various scientific opinions, expert examination of policy adherence, an understanding of the short and long term risks and costs involved and finally offer some alternative solutions. In contrast, general commentary has over time painted a rather dubious picture of the mass media as a commercialized group which no longer recognizes the distinctions between entertainment and news reporting; both are "businesses". Therefore the New York Times (NYT) would then emphasize the more personalized and sensational aspects in their coverage than The Nation or the environmental magazines chosen. Variations of sources

and themes of both types of media coverage over time will also be explained. Such a comparison would allow the element of time to possibly show its effects on the themes and the quality of coverage. A specific formulation of these six hypothesis with supporting theoretical arguments will be given in detail in Chapter 5.

DATA AND METHODS

This study seeks to examine and compare the coverage on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill published in a selection of mass news publications and alternative publications. The method used will consist of a content analysis of the differing media attention the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill received in both types of publications.

A number of news publications will be selected from the mass media and the alternative press. For the purposes of distinguishing the alternative press from mass media, two major functions must be present. First, the publication must be recognized as a vehicle from which the public has been presented a forum of ideas generally excluded by the conventional or mass media press. The views offered seek to mainly challenge the prevailing message. Therefore, the alternative press chosen must be known to provide an occasion to test accepted beliefs, to offer information not reported by the mainstream media and dominant belief system. The criteria in choosing each publication will be their reputation based on standing from years of publication.

To examine differences among alternative publications, an environmental magazine will be selected from the Alternative Press Journal. The coverage by the en-

environment press should present a more emotive perspective, given their goal of increasing circulation and membership in the environmental movement.

To evaluate the news magazine coverage on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, a coding procedure based principally on Holsti (1969) and Gamson' codebook (1975) was used as guide to formulate questions and answers to examine the news magazine articles. Within the parameters of this codebook, the research systematically depicts the contents of the chosen news and magazine articles used for this study. Specifically, articles from The New York Times will represent the mass media, whereas articles with an alternative environmental perspective will be taken from Amicus and Earth First and Earth Island. The three environmental magazines were chosen arbitrarily based on the largest number of articles containing "Exxon Oil Spill" subject matter. Articles from The Nation will be used to give a comparative middle ground between the mainstream and alternative press. In addition a coding manual will be formulated to ascertain the various aspects of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill that were being emphasized and others that may have been excluded.

News Content

A section of the Codebook "News Content" reveals what information was or was not included on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. It is significant since it is an attempt to uncover the possible agenda setting function of both media. As well it reveals the possible differences in focus and coverage between the general versus the alternative publica-

tions. It will therefore be interesting to see how varied the subject matter is from the first fully developed story to that of the final definitive slant taken.

Sources of Information

In media research that examines international news events, sources of information and authorship become primary factors in assuring in-depth and independent coverage. This section, then, was formulated to give consideration to the type of sources used in covering events which directly effect the type and quality of the information gathered. For example, if the source of information principally relied on was garnered from governmental policy or inside corporate experts, then not only is the point of view biased but also is controllable and narrowed in its investigation. The relationship between the number or type of sources and information content will only be possible at the point of analysis. It is therefore necessary to examine the degree of relevance and difference between the mass and alternative media processes of information offered to the public. A more detailed description of the methodology involved appears in Chapter 5.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This study seeks to examine the comparative coverage of mass and alternative media on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. One important element in covering such catastrophic events is the setting which is outside the normal news routine. Such unusual

settings become characterized by rumors and logistical problems which make news-gathering an unusual and difficult experience. Another important element is the cultural myth that such events can readily be controlled and managed by existing technology and labor. Most of the thesis deals with the comparative coverage of the Exxon catastrophe by both media to see if there are identifiable differences in focusing on particular facts and emphasizing certain issues as opposed to others.

The following thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 2 covers the background and contextual view from a local perspective and a descriptive overview of the Exxon Valdez incident itself. Chapter 3 will focus on the role of the media in reporting environmental incidents. Chapter 4 deals with the discussion of various hypotheses to be examined in this study. The research design will be outlined in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will describe the general findings in the media coverage of the Exxon Valdez incident. Chapter 7 will discuss the comparative differences and findings in coverage between the mass media and the alternative press. The impact of authorship and expert sources on news content, will be reviewed in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 will contain the conclusion and closing remarks.

CHAPTER 2
SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT
OF THE EXXON VALDEZ'S OIL SPILL

The main purpose of this chapter is to outline in detail the overall context and circumstances that surround the EXXON VALDEZ incident in PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND. The information in this chapter attempts to give a basic understanding of the social, political and economic context before the oil spill incident.

Prince William Sound is approximately 30 by 75 miles (48 by 121 km) in area and located between the Gulf of Alaska and Valdez resembling the shape of a trapezoid. In the upper north eastern corner of this trapezoid on the eastward side of the Valdez Arm is the Port Valdez. The mean temperature in this area is 38 degrees Fahrenheit (3.3 C°) with an annual precipitation of nearly 60 inches (152.4 cm), much of that in the form of snow. Despite such weather condition, Valdez was chosen for settlement in 1898 because of the elongated, protected and ice-free oval of water, later named Port Valdez. The Town of Valdez is partially encircled by the Chugach Mountains. These peaks begin five miles (8 km) from the edge of the town and rise to an elevation of 5000 feet (1524 m). Valdez has been historically transformed from forces both natural and commercial; beginning with the Canadian Klondike strike of 1897, the subsequent Alaskan gold strikes (for which the Port of Valdez served as a main gateway) and the completion of the Richardson's Road to Fairbanks in 1919. In 1964, as a result of the Alaskan earthquake, the town was destroyed by a tsunami, or seismic wave, which swept up Valdez Arm to the Port of Valdez. This natural disaster led to the rebuilding of the town to what was referred to as more "stable" ground (at a somewhat

higher habitat), considered by the town planners as a more secure site from such destructive natural forces. Viewed as a natural gateway to Alaska, Valdez became the focus of the commercial forces of oil, when Alyeska, a consortium of seven oil companies, known as the "Seven Sisters", that owned the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline, chose it as its base port for shipping North Shore oil (Davidson, 1990, :4).

THE TERMINAL - VALDEZ

By 1973, eighteen storage tanks were erected each holding approximately half a million barrels of crude oil (one barrel equals 42 USgallons). When added to the smaller storage facilities, the total capacity of the terminal reaches 9.2 million barrels. On average the oil flow from the North Slope drilling sites into these tanks at the terminal is 1.8 million barrels per day. This comes to a total yearly rate of 650 million barrels of oil. From 1969 to 1987, the State averaged US\$1.5 billion a year in taxes and close to US\$2 billion in federal taxes. Within the same time frame, the oil industries averaged US\$2.4 billion in profit from Alaskan oil production and transportation. These facts when coupled with the establishment of a congressional sponsored permanent fund (valued in 1991 at US\$10 billion) from which every Alaskan resident has received annual dividend cheques of between US\$800 and US\$1,000 in part explains the pressure to keep the oil flowing. Oil revenues that comprise about 80% of the State treasury have also afforded extensive construction within Valdez, such as an elaborate community center, a US\$11 million high school and a grain elevator (now empty). It appears that the continuous production of oil has become just as important to individual Alaskans, economically and politically, as it has to the oil interests (Keeble, 1991: 6-16).

At a cost of US\$8 billion, the pipeline and terminal at Valdez were considered at the time to be the largest construction project in the United States. The Prudhoe Bay Oil Field, one of several of the North Slope fields that feeds into the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline System, accounts for 25% of the total domestic US production and one-eighth of US consumption. With over 700 wells drilled, about 9.4 billion barrels are expected to be recovered from an estimated 23.5 billion barrels that remain. This estimate of oil reserves is seen as contingent on advances in recovery technology and possible oil price increases. Since the reserves are declining, there is strong economic and political pressure from the industry to focus on the exploration of new fields such as those in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that could be tied into the existing pipeline system (Keeble, 1991: 17).

The primary purpose of the Valdez terminal is to function simply as a large bladder at the end of the pipeline. The storage tanks are reservoirs that hold crude oil for incoming tankers to transport the oil to the lower West Coast. The management of the terminal and pipeline was conditionally given to Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. The consortium of oil companies that owns Alyeska are BP Exploration Incorporated (50.01%), Arco Pipeline Company (21.5%), Exxon Pipeline Company (20.34%), Mobil Alaska pipeline company, (40.8%), Amerada Hess Pipeline Company (1.6%) and Union Alaska Pipeline Company (1.36%). The consortium's approval by Congress in 1971, was formulated to centralize the initial construction of the pipeline and terminal and later was expected to oversee the overall operations and cleanup capabilities. This conditional approval by Congress had certain requirements attached to it. These included a specified number of incinerators to burn off oil sludge and toxic vapors, meas-

uring the amount of oil and other toxins in ballast dumped into the harbor and a continually updated oil spill contingency plan (Keeble, 1991:17).

Over the years preceding 1974, certain problems at the terminal gave rise to criticisms of Alyeska's handling of these obligations. In particular its use of less expensive carbon steel rather than stainless steel on the miles of pipe in the vapor recovery system for the purpose of drawing off the poisonous crude oil gases collected at the top of the storage tanks. Incinerators at the end of the vapor recovery system are intended to destroy the hydrocarbons in the vapor by burning them at temperatures of 1400° Fahrenheit (760 C°). The problems, cited between 1980 and 1985, were numerous leaks from the pipes in the vapor recovery system and incinerators operating at lower than required temperatures. The result was complaints of continual release of vapors into the atmosphere and an alleged substandard incineration system causing on average a shutdown of the vapor recovery system at least once every five days (Keeble, 1991:17).

In addition to the above complaints, the State of Alaska has reported an estimated 1000 tons of hydrocarbons a week have been released into the air through the vents on the decks of tankers. In response Alyeska has argued that such tanker emissions were not its responsibility. Alyeska had also promised that all tankers coming into the Port of Valdez, would be double-hulled. This apparently was not the case, as nearly every ship given entry was single-hulled (including the Exxon Valdez). Assertions were also made by Alyeska that as the traffic volume of crude oil increased, the terminal would also be enlarged. Despite a fourfold increase in the volume of tanker traffic, the

terminal remained at its original size when constructed in 1977. During the 1980's, as oil prices began to fall, the owners of Alyeska also ordered the Coast Guard Commander to cut their overall budget by a third (Keeble, 1991:18).

THE OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN

Alyeska's contingency plan for dealing with oil spills as testified to at the hearings for pipeline approval by a senior specialist for British Petroleum, L. R. Beyon would:

“detail methods for dealing promptly and effectively with any oil spill which may occur, so that its effect on the environment will be nominal. We have adequate knowledge for dealing with oil spills and improvements in technology and equipment are continuing to become available through worldwide research. The best equipment, materials and expertise, which will be made available as part of the oil spill contingency plan, will make operations in Port Of Valdez and Prince William Sound the safest in the world” (Keeble, 1991:19).

Over the preceding eighteen years the oil spill contingency plan was also cited for numerous deficiencies. Practice drills to maintain readiness were viewed as sporadic and disorganized. In 1982, budgetary concerns again prompted Alyeska to either reassign or lay off many of the workers of the oil response crew. As a result the oil response equipment was not maintained and allowed to fall into disrepair. A State inspector, Lorn McCarthy, reported to his superior in 1984, that Alyeska's spill response capabilities had "regressed to a dangerous level.". In 1985, an Alyeska official was reported to have declined to practice deploying a hose during a drill run because "it would be too much trouble to roll it up again". During an inventory of cleanup equipment in

March of 1985, it was discovered that only half of the emergency lights were available because the rest were being used in Valdez's winter carnival. Also missing, were half the required length of six inches (15 cm) hoses, some 3,700 feet (1127 m) of boom and eight of the ten blinking barricades listed as necessary equipment for the contingency plan. From 1985 to 1989, members of the cleanup crew reported taking mostly verbal tests to prepare for spills and due to varying shifts in personnel, very few people on duty knew how to run the equipment. Duane Thompson, a crew member of Earthmovers (a company that had a maintenance contract with Alyeska), described the oil spill drills as follows, "State drills would be announced as long as three months ahead of time. And then, they'd drop oranges in the water because an orange has about the same buoyancy as a tar ball. We'd get out there on the day of the drill, sit around and eat oranges" (Keeble, 1991:20).

Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation, the agency responsible for primary regulatory duties was subject to similar reduction in funding and staff. Proposed bills to increase the budget of the DEC to enable more effective monitoring capabilities were voted down. Subsequently, by 1989, there was only one part-time inspector, Dan Lawn. The DEC Commissioner, Dennis Kelso, had yet to read the oil spill contingency plan, and of the few fines levied against Alyeska, the largest was US\$710,000 for a 1986 air pollution conviction (Keeble, 1991: 21).

Agreement with such views on under-funding of marine oil spill countermeasures, can be found in the Canadian final report of September 1990 by the Public Review Panel on Tanker Safety and Marine Spills Response Capability. This report cites an even more dramatic decrease of research and development in the US into oil spill

preparedness plans than in Canada. Federal agencies in the United States, received only US\$350, 000 for 1989 as compared to more than US\$20 million a year throughout the seventies. There is also agreement as to the decisive causes of this reduction; in both countries, the industry reacted to the drop in oil prices by reducing staff and maintenance expenditures (Government of Canada, Final Report, 1990:19).

As far as the panel members of this Canadian report were concerned, the tanker traffic from Valdez, Alaska posed the greatest threat of oil spills to the coastline of B.C. Over the 15 years of crude oil shipments from Valdez to Port Angeles and Cherry Point in Washington State, more than 9,000 super tankers had passed off Vancouver Island. Added to the heavy volume of traffic were the risk factors of narrow channels, strong tidal currents and severe weather conditions. One of the safety recommendations to reduce these risks, came from the US Coast Guard who had promised that all Valdez tankers would be double-hulled. This decision was later dropped, a decision that along with many other safety lapses was seen to have "contributed to the catastrophic" event in Prince William Sound (Government of Canada, Final Report, 1990: 186-190).

Questions concerning the condition of the Valdez tanker fleet offer further context to the Exxon Valdez grounding. In the 1970's, tankers were routinely replaced, but again because of declining oil prices in the 1980's, the tanker upgrading practice was curtailed. The average age of the ships in the Alaskan fleet is 15 years greater than that of the US fleet. The Gulf of Alaska has the reputation for having the roughest water any US tanker will travel. Due to their size and weight, the tankers are designed to flex in such heavy seas in order to avoid breaking apart. The result of such extreme twisting

and heaving of hulls when negotiating the Gulf of Alaska, is metal fatigue and cracking. An analysis by the US Coast Guard, the Marine Structural Casualty Study released in 1988, found an unusual high rate of structural failures among tankers crossing Alaskan waters. Commander Tom Purtell of the Coast Guard's Marine Investigation Division observed that all of the ships with multiple fractures were from the Alaskan fleet. "It seemed relevant to us, Purtell said, that thirteen percent of the population suffered fifty-two percent of the casualties" (Keeble, 1991:23).

The condition of the tanker fleet and the state cited deficiencies in Alyeska's waste water treatment were not the only problematic factors. It is important to mention that two prior tanker incidents had already occurred. In 1980, a fully loaded tanker, the "Prince William Sound", lost power in 70 knots winds and remained out of control for seventeen hours. Adrift, it came close to grounding on Naked Island and then on a glacier. Fortunately, the captain was able to restart the engines in time (Davidson, 1990:9).

On two separate occasions in 1987, the hull of the tanker "Stuyvesant" split open while in transit from Prince William Sound, each time spilling 14,000 barrels of oil into the Gulf of Alaska. In between these incidents, in July 1987, the tanker "Glacier Bay" ran aground west of Prince William Sound on a submerged rock in Alaska's Cook Inlet (Smith, 1992 : 82).

As well, in January 1989, a British Petroleum tanker, "The Thompson Pass", already leaking oil, was sent on to Alaska for one more load before repairs were done. While in the Port of Valdez, a boom placed around the tanker was alleged to have

been left unattended, allowing the leaking oil to overwhelm the boom. The result was a "72,000 gallon oil spill in Prince William Sound. It took 15 days for Alyeska cleanup crew to recover the oil. Two weeks later another tanker, "The Cove Leader", spilled 2,500 gallons into Port Valdez" (Keeble, 1991: 23).

THE OPPOSITION

Past disasters similar to the Exxon Oil Spill are a source for awareness as to the ever present risk in living isolated from the normal protections common to the lower forty-eight states. Although such risks foster individual independence and community self-reliance, a cumulative series of man-made disasters also has the potential to become a focal point for mobilization. The problem with collective action in these cases is one of weighing the costs versus the benefits. A study of community conflict published in 1929 emphasized this crucial problem (The Inquiry, 1929 : 25-81). The cost for understanding and dealing with the causal factors in a series of similar events can be prohibitive, especially if the benefactor and the target of the crisis are one and the same. This "pragmatic dilemma" affects every aspect of the series of oil spills, from resident at the community level to the State and executive officials at the federal level.

"All human events belong of course to cumulative series and it is not always profitable to go through the process of unraveling each sequence in relation to a given event. On the other hand, failure to see the relation between an immediate conflict and its preceding causal factors frequently prevents understanding and consequently rational treatment of the current conflict" (The Inquiry, 1929 : 68-69).

Those who seek potential success in conflict situations must also have the means to gain supportive information and thus influence in order to alter the unwilling-

ness of the targeted authorities who also stand to pay costs at every level. In a real and direct sense, the efforts and costs are different for the community's residence.

"Collective action is often undertaken against the constitutional authorities or privileged social strata protected by the authorities. Even if the collective action is legal and nonviolent, it does involve , some effort and cost (risk or arrest, injury and perhaps even death) to participants. There is no assurance that collective action will be successful; the authorities may not be persuaded to change, yield to demands, enter into negotiations, or to make unilateral concessions" (Oberschall, 1993 : 68).

Coleman (1957) outlined a variety of different kinds of events which have a varying degree of risk for developing into a crisis. The type of event will usually determine whether a crisis will generate community, or cause ongoing controversy. The nature of the pending crisis for the residents of Valdez has the potential for producing divided loyalty over this dependency for different resources all of which rely on external authority (e.g. government and corporate institutions).

"This then, is one important difference in the origin of community conflicts. Some need no external issue or incident to set them off, but are generated by processes internal to the community itself. In other cases, the community is more or less at the mercy of the world outside when the problem arises from external sources, it is in a sense, dumped on the community's doorstep" (Coleman, 1957 : 5).

These oil spills and one near accident as well as Alyeska's long-term management record were known or suspected by the residents working on less profitable resources in the towns and villages in Prince Williams Sound. The relationship over time, between the Native and Non-Native peoples, is viewed as complex and filled with overlapping ironies, especially on commercial matters. The passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971, reversed the expected positions taken by the two groups. The ANSCA established the boards of Native Regional and Village

Corporations to allow resource development on their lands. Members among the non-native groups attempted to delay native development. In many instances the opposing reasons speak of environmental concerns or the loss of security in maintaining their own commercial positions. The sometimes divided present relationship is sharpened by the familiar pattern of over-fishing and over-hunting by the British and Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the forced relocation of native communities during the Russian fur trade. Other Native people in some villages and towns follow a more traditional way of life where hunting and fishing remain the main source of wealth and a means of subsistence. For a majority of the Non-Native people, natural resources were simply the means of trade. Timber, ore and fish have been overwhelmingly out-valued by the North Slope petroleum shipped to the West Coast (Keeble, 1991: 10).

The natural forces of the traditional lifestyle have faded, now the people depend on the economic power of oil to purchase the latest products and equipment especially for many of the people of Valdez, whose economic lives, since the seventies, have been directly connected to the continuing flow and consistent pricing of crude oil.

Another significant group of people working a more renewable resource in Valdez, are the fishermen. The main catch, salmon, is marketed to Japan. In order to ensure that the staple fish of the industry flourished, a cooperative effort was started by the State, the fish processors and the politically active fishermen. By the eighties, the hatchery system had accomplished two goals. First it restored the salmon runs to their previous numbers in "the tens of millions" and second, it strengthened the economic niche of the independent fishermen. The lessons learnt from over-fishing, instilled a special awareness on the frailty of resources. This awareness led to the formation of a

fishing lobby group represented by the Cordova District Fishermen United (CDFU). The headquarters for the CDFU are based in Cordova, a small fishing community 70 miles (113 km) east of Valdez. CDFU's 600 members represent two-thirds of the fishing permit holders in Prince William Sound. With a reputation for political action, the CDFU initially fought to have the pipeline construction redirected through Canada. At the same time that the salmon hatchery was beginning to operate, the CDFU filed suit against the Secretary of the Interior's approval of the pipeline and terminal construction. In 1973, their suit was combined into a class action with a suit from environmental and native groups. Their favorable ruling received by a Federal District Court, was later upheld by the Supreme Court. The pipeline proponents reacted quickly by lobbying Congress to legislate an end to all court challenges to pipeline construction based on environmental concerns. The legislation was passed by one vote late in 1973. Since the completion of the pipeline and terminal, CDFU has believed that the fisheries in general have been threatened by the discharge of toxic pollutants into the Port of Valdez. Added to this threat, is the belief that Alyeska has mismanaged the ballast water treatment plant at the terminal in Valdez. In 1985, CDFU in conjunction with Charles Hamel, an oil broker, filed a notice of intent to sue again. Along with this notice came a joint compliance order issued by the EPA and the DEC, in which Alyeska was advised to build a monitoring system for the removal and disposal of toxic sludge. Alyeska's record of monitoring was viewed as sporadic due to allegations of inadequate inspections. For CDFU, such allegations posed a constant threat to the hatchery system and the Prince William Sound fisheries in general. By 1987, CDFU's opposition to Alyeska entered a new phase of political action. Utilizing the hearings and the media debate over Alyeska's proposed oil exploration in the Arctic National Wilderness Refuge, CDFU campaigned to gain national attention to the pollution problems caused by an oil industry's

poor maintenance record under self-regulations. For CDFU and their supporters, it became a simple question of influencing public opinion so as to force government and industry to reverse its budgetary policies of the 1980's (Keeble, 1991: 14-20); in other words, increase maintenance expenditures to prevent and correct pollution problems. or wait until a crisis occurs.

Thomas Haas (1990) gives a detailed description of this pending crisis:

"On the morning of March 24, 1989, the tanker EXXON VALDEZ ran aground on Bligh Reef in Alaska's Prince William Sound. The vessel was carrying over 53 million gallons of North Slope crude oil of which almost 11 million gallons were spilled into the water. The immediately impacted area included most of the western part of the Sound, but eventually, the area expanded to include parts of Seward, Homer and Kodiak" (Spaulding, M., Reed, M., 1990 : 408).

Chapter 3

ALTERNATIVE AND MASS MEDIA

This chapter will examine the role the mass and alternative media have in defining news events. News accounts have the unique power to define events even for the people who experience the direct effects of such events. It is therefore important to examine how facts are reported and underscored by journalists covering an event.

News has sometimes been described as an ideal form or as a mirror of events reflecting an impartial view of reality. A more measured view of the real world of news-gathering has come to realize that all but the most elementary news accounts are simply interpretations of reality. A developed reality in which events and facts are rearranged to form and tell a particular story (Smith, C., 1992 : 25).

NEWS GATHERING PRACTICES

Media scholar Gaye Tuchman agrees that journalists in general create news by transforming real events into a socially constructed form of reality that fits the organizational and structural requirements of the news business. She observed that journalists have a shared concept of what constitutes news. Where some facts and sources do not fit well with this concept, they are discounted or ignored.

"Thus it is inevitably a product of news workers drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices. Those practices necessarily include association with institutions whose news is routinely reported. Accordingly, news is the product of social institution, and it is embedded in relationships with other institutions. It is a pro-

duct of professionalism and it claims the right to interpret everyday occurrences to citizens and other professionals alike" (Tuchman, G., 1978 : 4-5.).

Stories on crime, scandals and the actions of public figures fit well as predictable kinds of events. However fires, spills and earthquakes are not predictable events which can easily be adapted to routine processing and dissemination. Major unexpected events are routinely dealt with as exciting events in which drama dominates at the expense of information (Smith, 1992 : 156-157).

Another media scholar, David L. Altheide, came to similar conclusions but found more disturbing news gathering practices based on evolving theories which views events through the perspective of commercialism, entertainment, story lines and narrative form. From this perspective the selections of facts and view of events are handled in peculiar ways. Altheide argues, " this orientation is a more troublesome bias than values and ideology because fellow journalists, like most of the audience, take the perspective for granted; it is unchallenged because it is not seen as a source of distortion" (Altheide, 1976 : 177). This perspective does not allow for effective checks on bias. Agreement on the facts aside, by pursuing one angle the event is removed from the context in which it occurred, thus reducing a full understanding and relevance of the event. Questions of factual accuracy although important pale to the necessity that a report be relevant to disclose aspects which fully represent the event (Altheide, 1976 : 177).

Todd Gitlin's study of the media coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society, a campus based political movement in the 1960's, identified a similar type of news framing in which traditional assumptions in news treatment show that "news con-

cerns the *event* not the underlying condition; the *person*, not the group; *conflict*, not the consensus; the fact that *advances the story*, not the one that explains it" (Gitlin, 1980 : 28).

Some journalists counter that expectations which demand not only all of the news but also in-depth coverage and relevant analysis are asking too much. In a survey of reporters (1970, quoted in Smith's 1992 : 25-26), a reporter said:

"[The critics] seem to display a fundamental misunderstanding of what the mass media *are* and what they *try* to be. They aren't *trying* to provide deep analysis ... so while it may be true that we don't, should we be criticized for it? People who want that sort of analysis can get it from - *Harpers, Atlantic*, and any other number of more specialized publications. That's the niche those publications fill. If more people are not reading those publications, then I take it as a statement that they are not interested in such analysis. So should the critics not redirect their frustrations toward disinterest amongst the citizenry in reading in-depth discussions of underlying cause? I think so".

Stephan Klaidman and Tom Beauchamp (1987) argue a certain level of expectation where standards of ethics demand a level of information to ensure a well reported story that reasonable readers would understand not only the circumstances of the event but also the implications of what happened. Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) suggest this is a simple and basic requirement for any news coverage is *substantial completeness* that a news account "satisfy the needs of an intelligent non specialist who wants to evaluate the situation" (Klaidman, Beauchamp, 1987 : 35).

In the Molotch and Lester model (1974) news is framed by the degree sources have access to journalists and who then offer a particular socially constructed interpre-

tation of an event which allows for a more acceptable story structure. The exercise of social and political power by these sources directs coverage toward one particular self-serving way of framing or defining the event. Molotch and Lester (1974) also caution that events are different in nature and intention. For example, accidents differ from routine (e.g. press conferences) or habitual (e.g. scheduled or official) events in that the underlying happening is not intentional and those who promote them as public events are not the same as those whose activities caused the happening to occur. Thus accidents such as the Santa Barbara oil spill become separated from their consequence.

According to Molotch and Lester:

"In the case of accidents people engage in purposive activity which leads to unenvisioned happenings which are promoted by others into events. Accidents thus rest upon miscalculations which lead to a breakdown in the customary order" (Molotch, Lester, 1974 : 109).

Due to the immediacy and unanticipated nature of accidents, journalists and event makers are unprepared, causing powerful sources to possibly give uncoordinated, mutually confusing, accounts. The united process of accidental description is quickly followed by orchestrated attempts to restore acceptable and thus traditional meanings to the unexpected event. For Molotch and Lester (1974) this unique feature of accidents "*constitute a crucial resource for the empirical study of event structuring processes*" (Molotch, Lester, 1974 : 109). In most cases the uncontrollable aspects of accidents as events, do not fit easily into the transmission of news as a process or the needs of the powerful institutions normally involved or affected by the that process. The choice by editors to cover this type of event and the extent of coverage can become problematic. If ignored, or the published accounts differ from what occurred as determined by their own event needs, the legitimacy of objective news making is compro-

mised. Of course, not all accidents appear to warrant becoming public events. The significance of the principle parties involved or affected and the location and degree of damage can factor into the coverage given. These facts support the contention that all events are socially constructed and their degree of news importance is not contained in their objective features. Molotch and Lester (1974) describe accidental description as public events in the following way:

“When accidents surface as public events they do so in "error" we can expect that, unless the needs of powerful people differ routine event-making procedures subsequently and increasingly come into play to define the accident out of public politics. But the suddenness of the accident and its unanticipated nature means that event makers are initially not ready and thus the powerful could give uncoordinated mutually contradictory accounts” (Molotch, Lester, 1974 : 109).

FUNCTION MASS MEDIA - NEWS EVENTS IN CONTEXT

As previously mentioned news is supposed to reflect or mirror societal concerns and interests which effect its social, political and historical understanding of events. This view limits the definition of news by excluding the more active role of media personnel, that of defining the norms they invoke or apply to a story. The notion of news worthiness as outlined by Tuchman (1978) is defined from moment to moment through the negotiation with newspaper editors as to which story will be carried and where it will be placed in the paper. Thus as Tuchman (1974) describes:

“News does not mirror society. It helps to constitute it as a social phenomenon, for in the process of describing an event, news defines and shapes that event, much as news stories construed and constructed the early period of modern women's movement as the activity of ridiculous bra burners” (Tuchman, 1979 : 184).

Stories that cast social groups as deviant movements such as the women's movement do so by simply transforming the approach to one of soft news by redefining them as trivial bra burners. Similarly, the same treatment may be given to when carried as hard news, "they are described as people gathered in inappropriate places at inappropriate times for inappropriate purposes" (Molotch, Lester, 1975). and thus are redefined as a possible threats to the social order. Such alternation in meanings, perpetuates a role for the news as defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena (Tuchman, 1978 : 184).

Additionally as part of the news process, facts are identified and gleaned through the journalists interaction with sources. The necessity for facts, sources and various methods of reporting are also part of the self-constituting phenomenon, a phenomenon in which methods of identifying facts and appropriate sources, allow social life to be objectified and in some instances reify social phenomena. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain (quoted in Tuckman 1978 : 213):

"Reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectification, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable inert facticity ... Man [sic] the producer of the world is apprehended as its product, and human activity as an epiphenomenon of non-human processes" (Tuchman, 1978 : 213).

As well, this representation of reality for Tuchman (1978) may sometimes have or use symbols which can be presented as the product of forces outside human control. Typically such presentations can include economic activity and political and civil disor-

der. These facets of social life are offered as a natural phenomenon of fluctuations constituted by alien reified forces such as riots and hurricanes.

"The reification of economic activity and civil disorders also reaffirm the status quo. First, reification affirms that the individual is powerless to battle either the forces of nature or the forces of the economy. The individual as symbol is presented as a representation of a common plight. The news consumer is encouraged to sympathize or to rejoice, but not to organize politically" (Tuchman, 1978 : 215-216).

Similarly Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model suggests that the "societal purpose" of mass media is to teach by frequent repetition the defense of the economic, social and political agenda as set by the dominant groups and the state. This end is accomplished in many ways: "through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises" (Chomsky, 1988 : 298). The propaganda model for Chomsky (1988) is not particularly controversial since the guiding principles of the media are based and guided on free market assumptions. Basically, the private media are major corporations selling a particular product (readers and audiences) to other corporations (advertisers). The national media typically serves as the medium for elite opinion, by providing an optional "profile" for advertising as well as a venue for playing a role in decision-making in the private and public spheres. The media would fail in this endeavor if they did not present a somewhat realistic view of the world. Their view must incorporate the media's "societal purpose" that of reflecting the interests and concerns of the sellers, the buyers, and the governmental and private institutions which are dominated by these groups (Chomsky, 1988 : 303). As noted by media analysts W. Lance Bennett and Ben Bagdikian:

"The public is exposed to powerful persuasive messages from above and is unable to communicate meaningfully through the media in response to these messages ...

Leaders have usurped enormous amounts of political power and reduced popular control over the political system by using the media to generate support, compliance, and just plain confusion among public" (Bennett, L., quoted in Chomsky, 1988 : 303).

"The institutional bias of the private mass media does not merely protect the corporate system. It robs the public of a chance to understand the real world" (Bagdikian, B. quoted in Chomsky, 1988 : 303).

These comments appear contrary to Molotch and Lester's (1974) description of the typically understood role of the mass media in democratic systems. In their ideal model, the formally uncensored media functions as reporter - reflector indicator's consisting of knowable reality of important world-wide events. Any variance from this ideal can expect to be treated as "bias" or some other type of pathology.

A more common phenomenon in covering important events is the assumption that good reporting skills are enough for general assignment reporters to be knowledgeable on a vast array of subject matters. For general interest stories and most political coverage having a generalized background or covering a specific area already familiar to the public may achieved their purpose. To go beyond routine reporting to cover specialized subjects such as the environment requires either formal training with experience or a willingness to consult knowledgeable sources. Another important factor is familiarity. Journalists who pursue a story longer or who are more knowledgeable and thoughtful in their choice of experts are able to gain a more comprehensive perspective to counter tendencies towards bias or unidimensional views of unfamiliar territory. This approach is particularly relevant when events such as catastrophes or accidents demand scientific inquiries for assessment on environmental impact. (Smith, 1992 : 158-160).

"I think too many reporters - again dropped into this corner of the world with no points of reference to reality - were like citizens. They were appalled at the horribleness of the whole thing and tended to lash out at Exxon for being technologically incapable of cleaning oil, at Alyeska Pipeline for being asleep at the wheel, and at Joe Hazelwood for thinking his third mate would actually turn ... when he was supposed to. Again they did this without asking why. Is this a bad way to cover a story? I don't know really. We are citizens and we often must rely on ordinary common sense in covering a story. But it seems like there comes a time when you'd expect reporters to get beyond the initial reaction stage and use their experience and training to better advantage" (a reporter for the Anchorage Daily News quoted in Smith, 1992 : 160).

ALTERNATIVE PRESS FUNCTIONS

According to La May and Dennis (1991), communication studies commonly ignore the comparative coverage reported by the alternative press. Media analysis may refer to such publications for information on certain subjects, but generally they are labeled as an advocacy press having self-serving ways. Such advocacy reporting whether representative of a social movement or a particular point of view is criticized for not adhering to the traditional canons of journalistic practices. The accepted argument is that any medium of public communication should separate fact from opinion and maintain impartiality when reporting. The journalistic rule of objectivity claims recognition to the importance of emotional detachment and a sense of balance where "both sides" should be given a level playing field. Mainstream advocacy coverage of sensitive subjects such as the civil rights struggle or the "war on drugs" have for obvious reasons defied objectivity and impartiality for societal benefits. Despite issue worthiness, the shaping of public opinion through advocacy is felt to compromise the independence and integrity of the press (La May, Dennis, 1991 : 60-61).

In addition to the debate over advocacy and objectivity, the size and nature of the alternative media has impeded its marketing potential. This is due to sporadic financial support and a comparatively small readership of mainly supporters and sympathizers. Whether their circulation is large or small alternative publications are rarely read by those in institutional power to effect change (Kessler, 1984 : 158).

Despite circulation problems, Kessler (1984) believes the alternative press still sees its role as external communicators providing some essential functions for people dissatisfied with the status quo. First they serve as a means for intra-group communication, giving activists involved a sense of unity and purpose. These links are important when sensitive issues produce active opposition. For example, group actions taken on environmental issues such as clear cutting, can produce these types of confrontations (Kessler, 1984 : 158-159). The alternative press believes its second role is to educate the public in presenting information not generally found in the mainstream media. Here the primary goal is to elicit public support for particular causes or points of view. A rather difficult task given the tendency of some people to look for publications which mirror the messages they already believe and feel associated with. Circulation and financial problems further undermine attempts to mount promotional campaigns to increase readership necessary for competition with mainstream media (Kessler, 1984 : 158-159).

David Armstrong's (1981) social historical review of alternative media emphasizes the importance these media outlets have in conveying politically sensitive information. He confirmed that critical news reported in alternative publications surfaced

sometimes years later in the mainstream media. He also found that ideas and trends initially developed by these media outlets were over time adapted and passed on by the mass media for general consumption. Alternative media have also realized that the influence and centrality of media to modern life has made gaining access to mass media an imperative for social and political activists.

“The relationship of alternative media to the dominant society is of course, two-way. Not only do ideas introduced by alternative media modify society, they are also themselves modified in the course of being absorbed by mainstream culture. In effect, the mass media, through which the public is introduced directly to those ideas, use the alternative media for research and development” (Armstrong, 1981 : 25).

For the alternative media (such as "Mother Jones" and "In These Times") to expand their influence, they must first enlarge their readership; a readership which is mainly white, well educated, and under forty. Recognizing their limited appeal many editors have made expanding their journalistic and political base a future priority. The current forms of alternative media courting broader constituencies include activist newspapers and magazines, small press publishers, independent film and video, community access to cable TV, comics, news services and user controlled computer networks (Armstrong, 1984 : 21). Despite chronic survival problems of low circulation and therefore a limited stage for public persuasion; the alternative media maintain they have a purpose and appeal as the only venue to offer information that challenges mainstream coverage. Information which makes their coverage of a particular situation or events as unique. In other words, their coverage of an environmental disaster such as the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill should not only offer a more human view which questions the prevailing media perspective but should also include contextual facts not found in the mass media coverage.

At this point it is important to recall Molotch and Lester's (1974) observation that accidents offer an unique and crucial resource when studying media coverage. Analysis of the event structuring process of accidents such as oil spills initially preclude simple social and political construction as public events. Any apparent failure of technology threatens the collective sense of social order. It is this incorrect assumption that the world is an orderly place in which government and corporate institutions can utilize technology to control and protect us from harm. When disasters like the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill do occur many journalists and other observers appear to be surprised and unaware. Many people ask, "How could such a thing come to happen?" This question focuses the interest on the causes of disasters. A sociological model of disasters by Barry Turner (1976) assists in outlining theoretically how the Exxon Valdez accident was culturally viewed by many as inconceivable (Smith, 1992 : 169). Such disasters put in doubt our state of knowledge as well as our belief in the everyday conception of the way things are, especially for those affected. Interest for these concerns prompted Barry Turner (1976) to define a limited disaster "as an event, concentrated in time and space which threatens a society or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society with major unwanted consequences as a result of the collapse of precautions which had hitherto been culturally accepted as adequate" (Turner, 1976 : 755-756). This definition underlines an important gap in the adequacy of defenses which had previously been seen as secure.

In stage 1 of Turner's (1976) model culturally held beliefs about hazards are seen to be sufficiently accurate for an individual or communities to cope when accidents do occur. This understanding suggests that individuals can adjust "with the true situation presented to him". The level of coping is formulated by a set of normative pre-

scriptions embodied in laws or codes of practices which outline culturally accepted precautions to be taken if hazards are to be avoided with an acceptable level of risk. When these safe practices are violated or when accidents do occur, there is no need for cultural readjustment. At this initial stage, it is important to point out that knowledge about hazards, risk and appropriate safety precautions is differentially distributed within society. This unequal distribution of knowledge also applies to the ability to assess the level of one's exposure to hazards (Turner, 1976 : 757-759).

Stage 2 is indicated by an accumulation of a chain of discrepant events over time which are at odds with common sense knowledge of the world and its hazards. During this incubation period, several events occur, some of them of unknown danger which remain undiscovered until the disaster actually happens (Turner, 1976 : 757-759).

In order for discrepant events to continue to build up undetected, they must all be part of two categories: either the events are not known to anyone; or are known but their full implications are not understood until after the disaster. For events to go unnoticed or be misunderstood means that erroneous assumptions were made and left unquestioned. These assumptions may also have continued because one known problem acted as a decoy in drawing attention away from a more serious problem. Another reason for neglecting events may be the source of complaints. Warnings of danger from non experts outside institutional organizations usually are readily discounted as negative comments from uninformed alarmists. As well, erroneous assumptions become common place when handling an excess of information in complex situations. Those dealing with such messages become reluctant to act for fear of the worst so that the

danger goes unheeded (Turner, 1976 : 759). Finally, there is the situation where formal precautions are not followed or updated, allowing violations of policy rules and regulations to become the norm. It is important to differentiate between an infinite number of prior causes and the incubation network. Prior causes are sets of infinite causal chains which can be traced back for any accident whereas the incubation networks refer only to those chains of events which are discrepant, but are not understood, or are misunderstood.

In stage 3, the incubation period begins when the discrepant (but unnoticed) event occurs. It produces a transformation by a "precipitating incident" revealing the hidden structure of the events of the incubation period. A situation, presumed to have one set of properties, has now changed, revealing different and additional properties requiring different interpretations. Its immediate characteristics and consequences such as an oil spill, or an explosion, must be attenuated with the inevitable result of changing all of the discrepant events in the incubation period (Turner, 1976 : 760-761).

The incidence of the precipitating event from the most powerful cultural view may be characterized as unpredictable, even though it may have been predicted by dissidents or fringe groups. The unexpectedness and immediate physical properties of the event force a more general recognition of its occurrence along with a demand for a new interpretation of the situation. In order to achieve a complete transformation of cultural expectations, there must be a realization of the linkage between the chain of erroneous acts and decisions and the precipitating event or disaster (Turner, 1976 : 761-762).

In stage 4, the degree of failure demonstrated by the precipitating event is felt immediately by the full impact of the direct and unanticipated consequences which vary in rate, intensity and scope.

In stage 5, following the physical disaster is the stage of rescue and salvage. During this period quick assessments and live redefinition of situation are made which allow a recognition of the major feature of the failure. The recognition of the changed circumstances remains minimal due to the difficult problems of rescue and cleanup following the disaster. This then is the initial stage of cultural readjustment to the precipitating event (Turner, 1976 : 764).

In stage 6, as the immediate effects subside, a more concentrated assessment of the incident is possible where an attempt is made to find out how culturally approved precautions could have been so misjudged and therefore so inadequate. Such tracing, now reveals the existing patterns of events which had developed in the incubation period which further contributes to an examination of the necessary adjustments to be made to beliefs and assumptions and therefore to laws and regulations. If the phrase that "this must never happen again" is to have meaning, then existing knowledge about hazards now transformed by the catastrophe, must be reviewed and revised. This revised set of meanings and interpretations commonly involves a public inquiry as part of this cultural readjustment process. However the process is limited by the amount of disagreement among groups as to the effectiveness of any new established precautions (Turner, 1976 : 770-771).

One important point not included in Turner's (1976) sequence model, is the investigation of "near miss" disasters as a source of comparative data. The more knowledge we have about the conditions which allow events to accumulate unnoticed, the less likely such dangerous conditions will progress to future large scale disasters. Turner (1976) further notes that events where erroneous assumptions were made may be the result of institutional rigidities in certain beliefs and perceptions. They may also be the outcome of misplaced concern for one problem instead of a more serious problem. Preliminary events should serve as warning signs for those responsible for discovering the kinds of changes necessary to ensure such dangerous situations are less likely to reoccur (Turner, 1976 : 771). The degree to which media investigates and reports the more complex circumstances associated with disasters becomes crucial. The amount of information and detailed knowledge of the social conditions within which linked errors having potentially serious consequences are observed but not fully analyzed further, lowers the legitimacy of media coverage in general.

It is thus necessary to examine the relevance between the journalistic process of news gathering and the quality of information offered in order to evaluate the coverage of both types of media (Smith, 1992 : 169-170). This research serves this purpose.

TABLE 3.1

Events associated with the development of a disaster

STAGE	DESCRIPTION
1: Predisaster starting point	
a)	Initial culturally accepted beliefs about the world and its hazards. People take for granted that oil companies are prepared for spills.
b)	Precautionary norms set out by laws, codes, folkways, Coast Guard rules that regulate shipping safety.
2: Incubation period	Accumulation of an unnoticed set of events that are at odds with accepted beliefs about hazards and the norms for their avoidance. Cutbacks in maritime safety, precautions in Prince William Sound and similar cuts in the Alaska oil industry's spill preparedness.
3: Precipitating event	Forces itself to public attention and reveals the implications of the events described in STAGE 2. The wreck of the Exxon Valdez and the slow pace of efforts to reclaim the spilled oil.
4: Onset	The immediate consequences of the collapse of cultural precautions become apparent. Initial efforts to contain the spill are ineffective. Clean beaches become coated with oil and animals begin to die. There are political consequences as well. Cabinet level delegations are dispatched to Prince William Sound.
5: Rescue and salvage: first stage readjustment	The immediate post-collapse situation is recognized in ad hoc adjustments that permit rescue and salvage to begin. Exxon says it will return the oiled beaches to their original condition, but it is unable to do so.
6: Full cultural readjustment	An inquiry or assessment is carried out and beliefs and precautionary norms are adjusted to fit the newly gained understanding of the world. A commission is appointed in Alaska to investigate the spill. Tough new oil spill legislation is passed by Congress.

Chapter 4
HYPOTHESES

After examining the literature on social movements and both media, several hypotheses can be formulated. News coverage on environmental disasters such as the Exxon Valdez is affected by many factors. The independent variable under study is the coverage of the alternative and mass media. For the purpose of this study the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill was used in this content analysis as a representative example of an environmental disaster.

In general, concrete details like place names, names of public figures and firms are elements which automatically occupy the foreground of what people remember, whereas the initiating causes of the event and what might be the resulting consequence remain in the background. The overall result produced is fragmentary recall, with readers relating isolated details but missing the context. Simply monitoring the causes of an event and its (likely) consequences is insufficient. These crucial elements must be emphasized with supporting information if the event is to be remembered in a clear and comprehensive manner (Rosengren, 1981 : 116).

With this in mind, we begin by offering the most frequent hypothesis found in both the theoretical works on social movements and media, that news media in general covering particularly controversial events do so with the dual aim of offering news that is sensational and dramatic. The focus then is centered on personalities not issues, on surface happenings not context and that it above all must preserve the status quo (Parenti, 1993 : 6). To test this hypothesis, a comparison could be made between The

NewYork Times (mainstream) and the more radical coverage of environmental magazine such as Amicus. For example one would expect the emphasis in the mainstream newspaper to be on the sensational and emotional aspects, detailing the individuals directly involved in an environmental disaster to the exclusion of any other factors in question whereas the alternative media would redirect the focus more to factors relating to risk and previous warning signs known but ignored by institutional agencies' officials.

The second hypothesis taken from the literature is that mass media will cite more government and official sources and use editorial comments to a greater degree than the alternative press. The focus then is centered on the actions and personalities involved not issues and possible causes. Unpredictable occurrences such as fires, spills and earthquakes defy routine adaptation (Smith, 1992 : 156-157). Without easy explanations, major unexpected events are depicted through dramatic licence to reify surface happenings not context, thus ensuring the preservation of the status quo (Parenti, 1993 : 6).

In a previous reference to the Molotch and Lester model (1974) news is framed and directed to the degree official sources who have access or make themselves available as experts to journalists. These officials specialize in offering singular themes of a particular socially constructed interpretation of the event which affords them acceptable control over the story structure. This type of coverage allows opinions and discrete assurances to define and take precedence over informing the public. The degree to which the alternative press questions and raises issues about such assurances could be seen as an attempt to be more informative.

The absence of supplemental information may be a case in point in demonstrating the distance to which many journalists are prepared to go in supplying readers with information that goes beyond an actual story. In recent research, Smith (1992) offers the example of a December 31, 1991 article in The New York Times concerning James A. Estes' criticisms of the efforts to rescue sea otters oiled by the Exxon Valdez spill. Estes quoted additional information he had written in a recent issue of the journal "Science" without mentioning which issue. For Smith (1992), the prior assumption here is that none of the readers of The New York Times would be curious enough to want to read this article in "Science" and therefore why supply the information that would help them find it (Smith, 1992 : 128). As well the choice and variety of sources may have more to do with verifying stories which may be figuratively or literally already written. This habit common to some journalists limits the purpose and number of useful sources to those needed not for information but for simple corroboration.

In another article by USA Today, Smith (1992) confirms this practice by offering in one of several quotes by a fire information officer who said "All too often reporters write their story and then try to find a source to verify it (Smith, 1992 : 187). It is, of course, natural for journalists to find understanding of new and unusual experiences by drawing on and comparing these to the old ones. This process simply allows a reporter to have some initial idea what the story is about in order to correctly identify the appropriate sources. The problem with preconceptualized stories is when the preconceptions become inflexible and remain so even when contradictory evidence has surfaced (Smith, 1992 : 187).

A third hypothesis offered by the literature is that the mass media will avoid analyzing the primary motives and actions taken by governments and corporations involved. This type of analysis would either challenge or validate the capability of existing technology and institutional control. As well it would indicate whether the primary motives for both institutions were based on the need for efficiency or expediency. To avoid direct questioning on such issues, as causal factors and institutional efficiency, officials hamper and confuse the issues by blaming each other and other agencies involved. Inquiries as to high expectations and over reliance on current technologies that failed or were not scrutinized, are ignored. Instead accusations and personalities take center stage on a institutional level. This leads to the measurement of the fourth hypotheses where we would expect to find less consensus between the mass media and the alternative media's coverage of the oil spill. This hypothesis underlines the general belief that there is more than a perceived difference in coverage and approach by both media. Whenever expectations of in-depth coverage are criticized, the common response by news journalists is to counter that deep analysis is not a fundamental function of the general media. If relevant analysis is wanted, the public should look to "other" publications (e.g. the alternative press). The validity of this argument can be tested by the content of the alternative environmental magazines chosen for this study. However if the focus, sources, questions, information and conclusions are discernibly similar in content then there must be consensus between their coverage and views on the Exxon Oil Spill as an event. As well, the functional aspects outlined in the media section of this study should be demonstrable. These include unreported information on the oil spill which was offered to inform and educate the public in supporting environmental action against future oil spills.

Controversial incidents such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill have extreme levels of political and economical effects on both governmental and corporate institutions. These effects are countered initially by various strategic attempts to exert damage control. In order to succeed, institutional reaction in the form of press conferences and control over access to the disaster site must be swift. Various strategies in controlling media coverage could be examined. For example what agenda setting and issue framing were used in the articles after the Exxon Valdez oil spill? The fifth and sixth hypothesis advanced would be that immediately after the crisis, important issues appeared confused and misdirected having little or no in-depth coverage of the institutions responsible for the safe transportation of oil. This particular method of framing indicates the use of ideology and censorship. By offering confusing and often unrelated issues through the divisive politics of ideology, the press conferences become an instrument for damage control. The focus changes, as Herman and Chomsky's model demonstrates, to a "means of defending the economic, social and political agenda." In many case the ideological values presented echo the traditional maxims which uphold the extremes of economic progress of the system in place despite the apparent costs (such as oils spills). These blanket value arguments are formulated to ensure that any debate remains framed in the "either or" postulate. Either we continue this existing form of economic expansion or we can no longer maintain our current standard of living. This defense of the system is further packaged by choosing a spokesperson to lend the appropriate air of political symbolism. Few, if any, can counter the package presented at this level of defense or position. The sixth and final hypothesis of censorship refers to the degree in which either media's coverage relies on information of "expert" sources chosen and provided by the institutions of government and business. Mass media coverage would be expected to offer more of an unidimensional view of the oil spill disaster

due to their acceptance of such experts and their institutional affiliation. In contrast, the alternative media would be expected to elicit expert opinions from independent sources who may question reliance and validity of such information.

Several other hypotheses could have been examined but the expense and limited data narrowed the scope of inquiry. The two main hypotheses will be tested in Chapters 7 and 8. It is generally believed that the coverage of mass media and alternative news media will differ in degree of in-depth analysis and information. This perception of difference is based on political needs which postulate that freedom of speech as being a real and demonstrable phenomenon, regardless of its limited reach or effect.

Chapter 5
RESEARCH AND DESIGN

This study seeks to examine the coverage of news and environmental articles on the Exxon Valdez oil spill published in The New York Times, The Nation, and selected environmental magazines. Content analysis is the method used to research and compare the media coverage the Exxon Valdez oil spill received in the mass and alternative press.

SAMPLE AND DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

The New York Times newspaper was chosen to represent mass media coverage, The Nation was chosen for a more liberal approach and Amicus, Earth First and Earth Island were chosen to represent the alternative media. The sample is composed of 132 articles. All news items from The New York Times were taken from the date of the Exxon Valdez oil spill (March 24, 1989) to September 30, 1989. These articles covered the six months between the tanker accident in March 1989 and the end of the first seasonal cleanup effort. All articles written in The Nation for a five year period were included. Alternative items were generally chosen by related subject matter from the Alternative Press Index. The period under study includes the year of the oil spill (1989) to 1994. Table 5.1 offers a breakdown of the sample distribution for examination. The sample is not exhaustive for mass media coverage. The New York Times had a considerable number of articles over the initial six months to give sufficient coverage on the

Exxon Valdez incident. All other alternative articles in the Alternative Press Index were taken into account. The selection was made by scrutinizing related subject headings for article titles which directly indicated a story line on the Exxon Valdez oil spill. All such articles were then listed under their corresponding magazine title. Magazines having the greatest number of articles were then chosen for the alternative press sample.

CODING PROCEDURE

A coding manual has been formulated to examine various aspects of the oil spill which were either being stressed or dismissed, the articles' symbolic pictorial element document pictorial or verbal themes in the coverage. The analysis is primarily qualitative, although the number of sources were counted and the number of symbolic images referred to, such as whales and oiled birds were also totaled from the stories on the oil spill. The placement setting of the articles was not examined. Such a comparison would not have been congruent, given the broad subject coverage of The New York Times versus the specific but limited subject coverage of the environmental magazines. The coding procedure was designed as a questionnaire. The responses to these questions were expected to be found within the news and article items. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: 1) setting; 2) content; 3) sources and composition of media content. The hypotheses derived from the literature review were the basis for the selection of variables and categorizing of the codebook found in Appendix B. The reason for doing this study was first to compare the mass and alternative media coverage of this event and second to see if the perceived differences confirmed the perceptions of both media.

NEWS' CONTENT

This section examines the concepts created by the dominant role of the media. Unlike most news' stories, the Exxon Valdez oil spill was given prominent coverage for several months. Overall it was covered by journalists who in most cases were unfamiliar with this kind of news. In Media and Apocalypse, Conrad Smith's (1992) research found that "many of the journalists from outside Alaska were general assignment reporters who had no special knowledge of Alaska, the history of the Trans-Alaska pipeline, marine safety, aquatic ecology or any of the other issues that would have provided a context in which to interpret the spill as an economic or political or environmental event." (Smith, 1992 : 86). The oil spill was characterized by rumors and logistical problems due to its isolated location and the lack of access to the spill site. It had symbolic visual elements such as dying oil soaked birds which garnered emotional responses. Since the spill occurred in an isolated location, people had to rely on the media to learn what happened, how it happened and why it happened (Smith, 1992: xiii). Decisions dealing with focus, central concepts and portrayals became the sole prerogative of the media. This section then examines the possible use of information gathered. In doing so, it attempts to see if the coverage serves the information needs of the public.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The degree of diversity and types of expertise sources of information have, are of primary importance to quality coverage. This is especially true when covering disasters stories where scientific knowledge is needed in order to understand the environ-

ment and the use of varying technologies. The specialized knowledge needed to explain the environmental impact of the oil spill is not a staple of news coverage. Not having the technical expertise to thoroughly understand scientific reporting is likely to lead to the avoidance of substantive issues. Taking this into consideration, this section was premised on the belief that the use of particular sources in covering events relates directly to the level and type of information collected. For example, if reporters rely more on public officials to deliver their expected reliable sound bites instead of their standing and "genuine" knowledge on environmental events then the coverage will remain sketchy and divisive. This section is also interested in whether a richer conceptual approach was taken by reporters. In other words, did the reporting seek answers to questions like: "Could the impact of the catastrophe have been reduced further?" "What are government, industry, etc. plans for minimizing or reducing the impact of future events?" Verification of the approach taken and a possible relationship to the number and type of sources may be found at the level of analysis.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Through the utilization of the SPSS-X program, bivariate tables were produced and used to explore the trends and potential differing relationships between a prime example of American mass media (The New York Times), a liberal publication (The Nation) and three Alternative environmental publications (Amicus, Earth First and Earth Island). The units of analysis for this research were the articles. One can examine the comparative coverage of the mass and alternative media chosen in the following chapters. Particular relationships such as sensationalism versus content or press con-

ferences versus content are examined to see if one can show and thus infer differences in themes and the quality of coverage between both media based on content analysis.

In the tables presented, characteristics of the text and general differences are shown at the level of frequency counts. Although it remains at a descriptive level, the information presents a clear picture of variations in coverage by the media examined with respect to the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

The contingency tables enable one to explore the possible causes or antecedents of certain messages contained within varying depiction of the event. This phase of the study also allowed relationships to be tested in order to discover the links and the effects between particular sources of information (e.g. experts, officials, residents, environmentalists, etc.) and resulting source/kind of information and the initiating type of media (news, liberal, or alternative).

In this research, the test of significance for the various bivariate relationships explored was based on chi-square. Whereas percentages indicated a clear idea of the relationships, the Tau and the uncertainty coefficient were used to show measures of association. Furthermore percentage differences will be used in order to gain greater detail. The selection of uncertainty coefficient was based on its calculation of the whole distribution not on the mode. The uncertainty coefficient and chi-square figures measure the strength and nature of the relationships between the variables and can be found at the bottom of each significant bivariate relationship.

TABLE 5.1

Sample distribution of the articles

Newspaper/Magazine	Numbers	Percent
NYT	110	83.3
The Nation	5	3.8
Amicus	10	7.6
Earth First	4	3.0
Earth Island	3	2.3
TOTAL	132	100.0

Chapter 6
GENERAL THEMES

The purpose of this research is to verify the content of news stories on the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the mass media and the alternative press. It is therefore important to outline the general themes in relation to the hypotheses previously mentioned. In serving this purpose this chapter will be divided in to three distinct sections according to the coding manual.

THEMES IN THE MASS MEDIA

After the Exxon incident on March 24, 1989, particular themes emerged from the evolving story. The first theme offered by the mass media was the assertion that "alcohol was the culprit". This consensus changed the story after Exxon's president Iarossi announced on Sunday March 26, in the NYT, that Captain Hazelwood had been in an alcohol treatment program. Without tangible evidence that Hazelwood had in fact been drinking when he was in control of the tanker before crashing, rumors and his stated history of alcohol problems, provided a simple and dramatic explanation for the crash (Smith,1992: 89).

A storm on Monday March 27 created a second theme for the media. The bad weather grounded two vital aircraft, the company had brought in to treat the spill with chemical dispersant. The storm blew the oil onto the beaches and spread further out into Prince William Sound , ending any realistic hope of containment. Exxon's Iarossi

was then forced to acknowledge the cleanup effort was no longer under control and would take months (Smith, 1992: 89).

Further controversy ensued when Exxon's Chief Executive Officer, Lawrence Rawls, blamed this last cleanup opportunity on the US Coast Guard and the State of Alaska for not granting permission for large scale dispersant use until 6:45 PM Sunday. This third theme persisted to the point of creating an ongoing controversy of charges and counter-charges as to which party had oversight responsibility for the wrecked tanker and the spreading pollution from the oil spill. This controversy was further heightened by news coverage that began to focus on biological damage to the sensitive balance of wildlife in general and the fishing industry in particular. The NYT quoted unnamed biologists and fishermen who said that "the oil spill could decimate fish runs in one of the world's most bountiful bodies of water, well into the next decade" (Smith, 1992: 90).

These themes of alcohol abuse, delays from bad weather, necessary authority and subsequent responsibility for initial cleanup and the threats to fish and wildlife, continued and strengthened to the level of myths.

The choice to cover such themes relates directly to our first hypothesis: that news media in general, reporting particularly controversial events, will do so with the dual aim of offering news that is sensational and dramatic. The chosen focus becomes a contest of personalities and possible human error, between the captain and his crew and the officials from Exxon and the government agencies involved.

For example, by March 30, an Exxon official fired Captain Hazelwood during the last press conference open to the public. The same day, Coast Guard Commandant, Paul Yost, said at a White House news conference, that the area in which the tanker was wrecked, required such simple navigation skills that "your children could drive a tanker through it" (Smith, 1992: 91). The combination of Hazelwood's firing and Yost's remarks served the interests of both parties by diverting attention from corporate and government inefficiencies and budget cuts by providing a human interest angle for stories by placing the cause of accident on the crew's ineptitude (Smith, 1992: 91). This type of reporting underlines the view of Molotch and Lester (1974), where news is the result of a battle among sources with vested interests ensuring an event is depicted in a particular structure which makes the journalists' jobs easier while also serving the special interests of the source (Smith, 1992: 91). It also gives support to our second hypothesis, in which the chosen focus of the news, becomes framed and directed by offering singular themes of a particular socially constructed interpretation of the event, thus ensuring an acceptable control over the story structure by allowing opinions and discrete assurance to define and take precedence over concrete information and analysis. Choosing this type of coverage helps the media to avoid analyzing the primary motives and actions taken by governmental and corporate officials involved and therefore supports the third hypothesis, where officials hamper and confuse the issues by blaming each other.

In subsequent stories, themes continue to reiterate the drama of the drunken sea captain, the ongoing spread of the oil spill, the impact of the oil spill on Alaska's fishing industry, the effects of the pollution on wildlife and pristine beaches, criticism by Alaskans and their public officials of the Exxon cleanup effort, the impact on gasoline

prices and the resulting anger from outside Alaska directed towards Exxon, and the influence the Exxon Valdez oil spill had in temporarily halting future oil drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (Smith, 1992: 103). These themes offer further support to the fifth and sixth hypotheses in which issues appear confused or misdirected leaving little or no in-depth coverage of the institutional responsibilities.

In contrast, the Pulitzer winning coverage by the Seattle Times was distinctly different. The coverage chosen focused more attention on oil transportation safety, as well as scrutinizing the public policies in effect when the oil spill occurred. Half of the Pulitzer stories examined the social and regulatory contexts of oil tanker safety, while others explained historical and character aspects of Alaska and its connection to its oil industry (Smith, 1992: 103-104).

One such quote illustrates the sensational aspects these themes could produce.

“The federal government never declared the spills a national disaster, and in fact ignored federal law. Under the Clean Water Act, the government is required to take over a clean up operation if the polluter is not doing a satisfactory job. The governments’ defense was that Exxon had the technical ability and the expertise (such as drunkards for tanker captains and boom materials frozen under 6 feet of snow). In reality, Bush and his legislative cohorts didn’t want to spend the money and didn’t want to make a big deal of the spill by declaring it a national disaster or taking over the clean up, which would be admitting industry failure. To admit industry incompetence would be to risk the loss of drilling in Bristol Bay and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge” “One Year after the Spill”. Earth First. 1990: 9-10

In general the spill was reported as an environmental catastrophe, the impact of which was usually portrayed in fairly simplistic terms as a threat to birds and specific

mammals. As victims, sea otters were given media attention out of proportion to their actual affected members. This maybe due to the fact that oiled sea otters were more than sixty times as likely as oiled birds to be treated at the animal rescue center in Valdez. The complex ways in which oil pollution affected the aquatic ecosystem in Prince William Sound, was in most cases thinly covered. In part this may have been due to the legal gag orders which prohibited scientists from publicizing their findings until pending lawsuits were settled (Smith, 1992: 109).

For many journalists the spill became a fable about a suspected drunken sea captain and a multinational oil company that couldn't deliver on its promised cleanup, provides great drama but little understanding. The direct cause of the accident was an unexperienced crew member who did not follow timely instructions,. A less apparent, but more important cause was a substantial deterioration of the maritime precautions overseen by the Coast Guard. As well, the existing state of technology and equipment does not exist to contain or cleanup such large spills. Inevitably, the oil industry was certain to fail to meet public expectations no matter what contingency strategies were devised. Those expectations were in part created by the oil industry to garner public support for the development of the North Slope oil.

One such quote is offered to illustrate the sensational aspects these themes could produce.

"The official rationale for allowing Exxon to remain in charge is that the industry has the technical expertise (read, money) to do the job ... Two other explanations of the fed's reluctance to take over deserve consideration. First, given Exxon's obvious negligence in having allowed a known drunkard to captain one of its supertankers, and the technical inability to clean up a spill of this size, it is safer to let Exxon play out the tragedy to the final curtain.

Second, the administration, like the oil industry, maybe more concerned about the facts of oil development in Bristol Bay and the Artic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) than bailing out Exxon” “Troubled Waters” Amicus . 1989: 12-20.

Media consumers did not often get and therefore were not privy to the kind of information they needed to measure the relevancy of certain policy issues (Smith, 1992: 109-110). Such policy issues include four safety measures not considered or enforced which might have prevented the spill: 1) a sophisticated radar system for tracking tankers, never built because of cost; 2) enforcement of the rule requiring government pilots to accompany tankers until they were on the open sea; 3) adherence to separate shipping lanes, abandoned, so tankers could negotiate faster through the icebergs from nearby glaciers; and 4) implementing the Coast Guard procedures of continually plotting the position of each tanker, which would have warned the Exxon Valdez of the impending collision (Smith, 1992: 104).

As well, three additional policy decisions undermined the effectiveness of the initial response to the spill: 1) the reduction in funding for the State’s oil safety watchdog agency, the Alaska DEC, following the reduction of world crude oil prices; 2) the approval of increasingly smaller crews for oil tankers, thus reducing the margin of safety; 3) the acceptance by the State of Alaska of an oil spill contingency plan specifying that the most likely oil spill would involve 1,000 - 2000 barrels, an amount which reflected only 1 percent of what actually leaked from the Exxon Valdez (Smith, 1992: 104).

ITEMS RARELY OR NOT MENTIONED

Given the various themes chosen by the media, it is therefore understandable that many important issue oriented items would not be reported in the articles examined in this research. Table 6.1 lists all of the items not mentioned in 80% to 100% of the articles. Both types of media neglected to focus on the current state of oil transportation safety. As well, both types of media ignored the historical and organizational aspects of Alaska and the oil industry. Of particular importance, for comparison purposes, would have been items which offered a comparative analysis of the history of other oil spills internationally. In summary, both types of media, for the most part, preferred to cover a variety of themes centering on villains, heroes and victims, thus making the disaster more of a melodrama. As a reporter for The Anchorage Daily News wrote; "It was based on assumptions created with an interest in convincing us that the villain could be reformed, restitution paid, damage repaired, and the curtain dropped without our having to go beyond the confines of the stage. And that reassuring assumption was wrong" (Smith, 1992: 94).

TABLE 6.1

Items not mentioned between 80% - 100% of the articles

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Question number	Name of variable
V117	Exxon organization partner in consortium
V118	Exxon safety record
V119	Tanker fleet
V120	Exxon number of lawsuits
V121	Exxon operations
V123	Profile Exxon President
V124	Approximate yearly profit
V125	Outlay on safety equipment
V126	Number of refineries
V127	Average age of tankers
V128	Access to wildlife refuge
V129	Update tanker fleet
V130	Expand Valdez oil production
V131	Update safety procedures
V141	History of other spills

B. GOALS ESTABLISHED BY EXXON

Question number	Name of variable
V133	Exxon compensating residents
V134	Exxon goal - access to refuge
V135	Update tanker fleet
V136	Expand oil production
V137	Update safety procedures
V139	Exxon initiating compensation
V140	Exxon consult Valdez residents
V209	Exxon taking responsibility

(Cont.)

TABLE 6.1(cont.)

C. GOALS OF US COAST GUARD

Question number	Name of variable
V147	Increase radar surveillance
V148	Update safety procedures
V150	US Coast Guard goal of charging the captain
V205	Increase port and tanker crew
V206	Increase pilot boat escort
V207	Reported cooperation between Exxon & US Coast Guard
V212	Responsability taken by government agency
V216	Continued blame of Captain Hazelwood
V217	If yes - who blames him

D. FOCUS

Question number	Name of variable
V219	Groups benefiting from spill
V249	Article creates tone
V309	focus - oil soaked birds
V315	propose solutions
V316	invite action
V319	changes in policy = reduction

E. INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARTICLE

Question number	Name of variable
V225	Sources mentioned
V226	Author of news indicated
V247	Article - editorial
V305	Article repeat details
V306	Analysis in article
V318	Overall view

NEWS CONTENT

As previously mentioned , the history or background of the oil industry and State of Alaska generally did not emerge as an important element in the news stories. Instead the coverage began with the accident which remained the central catalyst for all other aspects and perspectives.

As well, the international structure and background of Exxon was not outlined in a majority of the NYT's articles. Most of the information given in 42.7% of the articles dealt with the executives involved with the oil spill or the comparative economic effects on stock prices (see Table 6.2B). A more detailed overview of the Exxon organization was reported in a majority of the articles in the alternative press. Included was Exxon's formative history as part of an oil consortium.

Institutional Responsibility

The original rules and precautionary measures covered in the oil spill contingency plan gave institutional representation of the responsibilities promised by both the State of Alaska under the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Alyeska oil consortium. As the only agreement mandating spill preparedness for effective oil spill cleanup, it becomes essential in understanding the Exxon incident. In Table 6.2D, 31.8% of the NYT's new stories outlined the oil spill contingency plan, compared to the alternative media which detailed the agreement in a majority of their articles.

One of the important components necessary in making the oil spill contingency plan effective, centered on how prepared and responsive the Port of Valdez's crew was in

containing an oil spill. As there was no organized attempt to do this in the initial forty-eight hours after the shipwreck, the spill was able to maximize and spread unchecked. At this point the plan and the officials responsible became key factors in reporting the story. Yet, as shown in Table 6.2A, only 26.4% of the NYT's articles chose to mention these facts in contrast to a coverage of 40% to 100% in the few alternative media articles. Overall reporting on the institutions involved and the degree of responsibility taken, appears more newsworthy to the alternative media, especially with regards to the environmental magazine Earth First, in which 100% of its articles chose to cover these various facets of institutional responsibility. In contrast, The Nation was more conservative in its approach to such issues.

Deficiencies and Criticism

This theme further elaborates on the amount of information known and understood with regards to the oil spill contingency plan. As this plan was the only organized procedure expected to operate effectively in the event of a disaster, its implementation and any subsequent deficiencies should have been reported if the quality of the information was to be relevant to the readers' understanding of any precaution in place. Only 30.9% of the NYT's articles as shown in Table 6.3A mentioned aspects or deficiencies of the plan. A majority of the alternative media's articles addressed this issue.

TABLE 6.2

Contrast between the NYT and the Alternative Press concerning the theme of institutional responsibility corporate and governmental mentioned and not mentioned in the articles

A. QUESTION V-115: WAS THE PORT OF VALDEZ CREW PREPARED?

	NO MENTION	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	73.6	26.4	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	40.0	60.0	
Earth First	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(89)	(43)	(N=132)
PERCENT	67.4	32.6	100.0
Tau	=.11		

(cont.)

TABLE 6.2 (cont.)

B. QUESTION V-116: EXXON ORGANIZATION

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	42.7	57.3	
The Nation	100.0		
Amicus	70.0	30.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(65)	(63)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	50.8	100.0
Tau	= .10		

(cont.)

TABLE 6.2 (cont.)

C. QUESTION V-122: CORPORATE SAFETY RECORD

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	36.4	63.6	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	90.0	10.0	
Earth First	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(58)	(74)	(N=132)
PERCENT	43.9	56.1	100.0
Tau	= .14		

(cont.)

TABLE 6.2 (cont.)

D. QUESTION V-143: OUTLINE OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	31.8	68.2	
The Nation	40.0	60.0	
Amicus	80.0	20.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(52)	(80)	(N=132)
PERCENT	39.4	60.6	100.0
Tau	=.13		

(cont.)

TABLE 6.2 (cont.)

E. QUESTION V-145: RESPONSIBILITY OF THE OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	40.9	59.1	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	100.0	00.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(64)	(68)	(N=132)
PERCENT	48.5	51.5	100.0
Tau	= .13		

As problems and delays with the oil spill cleanup procedure increased, so did criticism of Exxon's failure to act effectively. To counter, Exxon officials used various media methods to limit criticism and avoid scrutiny. The two primary methods of media control were prepared statements and deferring responsibility to others as indicated by 50% of the NYT's articles as shown in Table 6.3D. Such control methods were expected, it is however curious that a majority of the alternative media did not chose to mention this phenomenon. Instead, their focus remained centered on policy issues such as the problems with the implementation of the oil spill contingency plan. In gen

eral, the State's methods of dealing with criticism were reported in the NYT's as shown in Table 6.3E. The rest of their articles indicate the use of all standard techniques in dealing with the media. The degree of controversy and difficulty in managing the growing perception that this oil spill would defy the normal technological measures is reflected in the small number of articles, 4.5%, which offered examples of actions expected to be effective. Only one method, that of deferring to others for comments, was mentioned by the alternative media. It appears that the method of communication used by key sources was not considered an important analytical aspect in the coverage of the alternative media.

Focus

Articles in both media focused on a large variety of related subjects. The NYT's articles concentrated on the economic context (54.5%), official confusion (47.3%), and general details of the event (34.5%). More coverage was made by the alternative press on these subjects with a particular focus on the effects and risks caused by the officials' confusion and the economic effects on local resources, residents and shoreline animal populations.

TABLE 6.3

Contrast between the NYT and the Alternative Press concerning the theme of deficiencies and criticism mentioned and not mentioned in the articles.

A. QUESTION V-144: DISCREPENCIES OF OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN

	YES	NO	DOES NOT APPLY*	
	%	%		
NYT	30.9	6.4	62.7	
The Nation	60.0	20.0	20.0	
Amicus	80.0	00.0	20.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	00.0	33.3	
TOTAL	(51)	(8)	(73)	(N=132)
PERCENT	38.6	6.1	55.3	100.0
Tau	=.11			

(cont.)

* No answer for B-10 (previous question): Does the article outline the oil spill contingency plan?

B. QUESTION V-210: CRITICISM OF CAPTAIN AND CREW - NO BLAME

	NO BLAME	EXXON	US COAST GUARD	OTHERS/ GOVERNMENT	JOURNALISTS	ENVIRONMENT REPRESENTATIVES
	%	%	%	%	%	%
NYT	60.9	6.4	3.6	4.5	3.6	20.9
The Nation	80.0	20.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0
Amicus	80.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	10.0	10.0
Earth First	75.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	25.0	00.0
Earth Island	100.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0
TOTAL	(85)	(8)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(24)
						(N=132)
PERCENT	64.4	6.1	3.0	3.8	4.5	18.2
Tau	=.02					100.0

(cont.)

TABLE 6.3 (cont.)

C. QUESTION V-213: CRITICISM OF OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	44.5	55.5	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	60.0	40.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(65)	(67)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	50.8	100.0
Tau	=.05		

(cont.)

TABLE 6.3 (cont.)

D. QUESTION V-239: EXXON'S DEALING WITH CRITICISM

	NO MENTION	OFFER EXAMPLES	DEFER TO OTHERS	PREPARED STATEMENTS	
	%	%	%	%	
NYT	50.0	4.5	19.1	26.4	
The Nation	00.0	00.0	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	60.0	00.0	20.0	20.0	
Earth First	75.0	00.0	25.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	00.0	66.7	00.0	
TOTAL	(65)	(5)	(29)	(33)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	3.8	22.0	25.0	100.0
Tau	=.04				

(cont.)

TABLE 6.3 (cont.)

E. QUESTION V-241: DEALING WITH CRITICISM BY STATE'S OFFICIALS

	NO MENTION	OPEN	OFFER EXAMPLES	DEFER TO OTHERS	PREPARED STATEMENTS	
	%	%	%	%	%	
NYT	57.3	10.9	4.5	17.3	10.0	
The Nation	60.0	00.0	00.0	40.0	00.0	
Amicus	60.0	00.0	00.0	40.0	00.0	
Earth First	75.0	00.0	00.0	25.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	00.0	33.3	33.3	00.0	
TOTAL	(76)	(12)	(6)	(27)	(11)	(N=132)
PERCENT	57.6	9.1	4.5	20.5	8.3	100.0
Tau	=.02					

AUTHORSHIP

Authorship was usually indicated in both media (90%). Significantly, 64.5% of the NYT's news stories based their news on sources from officials of various institutions. In contrast, most of the alternative media utilized institutional and environmental sources.

Most articles were classified as news items (90%). Only 26.7% of the NYT's articles offered commentary on the Exxon oil spill. Almost all of the articles of the alternative media were commentary. This difference is expected given the environmental nature of the event and the type of alternative magazines under review. Analysts' comments or scholarly information was offered in 46.4% of the NYT's articles and in 50% to 100% of the alternative media articles.

Within the content of the articles, the sources of information did include written documentation and scientific knowledge. Only 15.5% of the NYT's articles made use of such documentary material. Sixty-six to ninety percent of this type of documentary support was found in the alternative articles. In general the alternative media was found to offer more articles which identified scientific sources. Less than 18% of the NYT's articles cited scientists from various institutions, industry or environmental groups.

Most articles relied heavily on comments to enhance news. Sixty-two percent of the NYT's articles were from a combination of institutions and oil officials. In the alternative press, the opinions given were evenly spread among government officials, journalists and villagers.

Generally, the opinions of scientists and officials from the oil industry were overstated in the NYT's articles and in a majority of the articles of the alternative press. These opinions reflected exaggerated claims in dealing with the oil pollution, the effects on the local fishing industry and oil transportation in particular. These opinions were qualified as long-term predictions without supporting analysis. Thirty-one percent of the NYT's articles questioned the level of existing technology as compared to 60 % of the alternative press articles. Both media offered a similar number of articles which found the actions taken in dealing with the causes and results of the Exxon incident as negative overall.

SUMMARY

To summarize the findings reviewed in this chapter, we can say that most of the articles published in the NYT and the alternative magazines, gave a comparable general overview in reporting the details surrounding the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

In general news stories in both media centered on the Exxon Valdez accident and the consequences that followed. Of secondary importance to the NYT was the reaction of government and corporate officials. The alternative media offered more in-depth coverage on the background of oil transport action and the subsequent environmental effects with particular focus on institutional responsibility for implementing policy and any possible deficiencies which surfaced during the clean-up operation.

Nonetheless a great deal of information on policy decisions and safety measures was lacking. None of the effects which followed budgetary cuts were included as part of the main news stories. Official strategies and motives for long-term preventive changes also did not filter into news content. The use of press conferences and comments was extensive but few articles can be considered as truly informative.

This chapter served mainly to draw a general picture of the mass and alternative media news content on the Exxon Valdez oil spill. To some degree it has highlighted certain gaps in information by identifying where the news media focused their attention and where they did not. In the following chapters this research will attempt to explore further the differences in coverage while considering the various hypotheses advanced earlier.

Chapter 7

THE DIFFERENCES IN NEWS COVERAGE

This chapter will examine the differences in coverage given by mass media (NYT) and the alternative media. Difference in coverage here is based on the hypothesized view that we would expect to find a low consensus between the mass media and the alternative media's coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. In the context of media it is presumed that coverage by the alternative media have a purpose and would appeal as the only venue to offer information and therefore analysis that challenges mainstream coverage (Armstrong, 1984: 21). In other words, their coverage of an environmental disaster such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill should not only question the prevailing media perspectives but should also include contextual facts leading to in-depth analysis not found in the coverage of mass media. This study selected one quality newspaper and four alternative magazines considered to be environmental in their subject matter. Of the 132 articles used in this thesis, 110 were written by the NYT and 22 by the alternative magazines. The Exxon Valdez oil spill was covered extensively. The setting or placement and length of articles is usually considered a standard part of content analysis. This aspect of media analysis was not examined because of the unique differences in style, structure and composition found in newspapers versus environmental magazines.

FINDINGS

As shown in Table 7.1, a high percentage (65.5%) of the NYT's articles may have covered the events but their primary focus was on the actors rather than the technical and policy factors involved. Coverage centered on the accusations and personalities of these key official actors rather than causal factors and institutional ineffi-

ciency. More alternative media items focused not only on the events but gave more details surrounding the oil spill.

TABLE 7.1

Distribution of mention of focus on events
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	65.5	34.5	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	10.0	90.0	
Earth First	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(77)	(55)	(N=132)
PERCENT	58.3	41.7	100.0
Tau	=.13		

One of the main differences between the two types of media is illustrated by the degree to which the coverage emphasized the sensational aspects of particularly controversial events. Throughout the NYT's coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, specific attention was given to the latest accusations made by the various key officials. The certainty of future lawsuits and of eventual litigation expected with disaster of this kind, prompted officials generally to use the media as a forum to cast doubts or to blame others. Items as shown in Table 7.2 on official confusion were reported in 47.3% of the

NYT's articles. Official confusion refers to the initial reaction by officials from Exxon and the US Coast Guard. Both offered reassuring promises of containing and cleaning up a spill that was beyond their control within the first twenty-four hours. Faced with the realized failure of their own impossible expectations, they allowed the situation to regress into a confused public battle between themselves. The resulting impression was that no official was in-charge because no one was assuming responsibility. In the alternative magazines, more items mentioned the effects and risks caused by official confusion in containing and cleaning-up the oil spill.

This gives support to the first, and fifth hypotheses; that news media, in general, covering particular controversial events do so with the dual aim of offering the sensational and emotional aspects in order to confuse or misdirect the focus away from the issues in question and therefore avoid analyzing the motives and actions of the responsible principals in charge.

TABLE 7.2

Distribution of mention of official confusion
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	47.3	52.7	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	90.0	10.0	
Earth First	75.0	25.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(69)	(63)	(N=132)
PERCENT	52.3	47.7	100.0
Tau	=.06		

Organization and Finance

As seen in Table 7.3, only 42,7% of the NYT's news stories informed the public about the Exxon organization. A higher percentage of the alternative media mentioned elements of their organization and when it was done, most dealt with Exxon's stock value, corporate changes and reputation among other oil producers. However, they never mentioned the breakdown of international holdings, safety equipment and obligations, or the number and type of lawsuits brought against Exxon. The alternative media focused principally on a more detailed overview of the organization including Exxon's formation history, but also neglected the more analytical items above.

Institutional Responsibility

As previously mentioned the original policies and precautionary measures outlined in the oil spill contingency plan delineated clearly the responsibilities promised by both government and oil industry officials. As shown in Table 7.4, a pattern emerges illustrating the difference in coverage on this item between the mass and alternative media. Sixty to one hundred percent of the alternative news stories gave details outlining the oil spill plan resulting in some support for the fourth hypothesis where a low consensus is expected between the mass and alternative media. This pattern of differing coverage remains fairly consistent in articles mentioning various responsibilities be they corporate or governmental. (see Table 7.5 and 7.6)

TABLE 7.3

Distribution of mention of
Exxon's organizational structure
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	42.7	57.3	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	
Amicus	70.0	30.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(65)	(67)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	50.8	100.0
Tau	=.10		

TABLE 7.4

Distribution of mention of the oil spill
contingency plan
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	31.8	68.2	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	80.0	20.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(52)	(80)	(N=132)
PERCENT	39.4	60.6	100.0
Tau	=.13		

TABLE 7.5

Distribution of mention of the
responsibility for the oil spill plan
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	40.9	59.1	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	100.0	00.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(64)	(68)	(N=132)
PERCENT	48.5	51.5	100.0
Tau	= .13		

TABLE 7.6

Distribution of mention of the
corporate responsibility
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	36.4	63.6	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	90.0	10.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(58)	(74)	(N=132)
PERCENT	43.9	56.1	100.0
Tau	=.14		

One of the key factors in demonstrating responsibility was dependent on how prepared and responsive the Port of Valdez's crew was in dealing with an oil spill. The crew was unable to respond for the first forty-eight hours after the oil spill, which should have produced serious questions as to why the written policy did not mirror the actual actions taken. Again Table 7.7 shows a distinctive pattern in which only 26.4% of the NYT's articles mentioned the crew was not prepared as compared to the alternative media. Institutional responsibility as a news item appeared to be more of an issue in the alternative magazines.

Deficiencies and criticism

The alternative media elaborated 60 to 100% more on the deficiencies of the oil spill contingency plan. (see Table 7.8) They also mentioned the possible effects and gave more details to support their criticism. The NYT focused primarily on the principal official involved and the problems announced in numerous press statements. These results offer some support for the first hypothesis, where in the alternative media, focus is related to risk or deficiencies within the oil spill plan itself.

The more Exxon officials offered press statements detailing particular problems and aspects not anticipated in the clean-up process the more items were reported criticizing Exxon and the US Coast Guard. As shown in Table 7.9, Exxon's clean-up tactics were challenged in greater number by the alternative media than the NYT. The alternative press chose to link their criticism more to the oil spill plan. This difference is understandable given the visible environmental consequences of such an event and the type of alternative magazine under review. Environmental pollution, especially if man-made, is the central focus for such magazines advocating changes in current resource use practices.

TABLE 7.7

Distribution of mention of
the preparedness of the Port of Valdez
by the type of media *

	NOT MENTIONED	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	73.6	26.4	
The Nation	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	40.0	60.0	
Earth First	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(89)	(43)	(N=132)
PERCENT	67.4	32.6	100.0
Tau	=.11		

* The answer YES did not receive any response to the question: Was the Port of Valdez's crew prepared for the oil spill?

TABLE 7.8

Distribution of mention of
the oil spill contingency plan deficiencies
by the type of media

	YES	NO	DOES NOT APPLY*	
	%	%	%	
NYT	30.9	6.4	62.7	
The Nation	60.0	20.0	20.0	
Amicus	80.0	00.0	20.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	0.0	
Earth Island	66.7	00.0	33.3	
TOTAL	(51)	(8)	(73)	(N=132)
PERCENT	38.6	6.1	55.3	100.0
Tau	=.11			

* No answer for question B-10 (previous question): Does the article outline the oil spill contingency plan?

TABLE 7.9

Distribution of mention of the plan
linked to problems with clean-up
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	43.6	56.4	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	40.0	60.0	
Earth First	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(64)	(68)	(N=132)
PERCENT	48.5	51.5	100.0
Tau	=.06		

As shown in Table 7.10, in 72.7% of the articles of the NYT, there was "no mention" of actions taken or acknowledgement by Exxon in cleaning up the polluted beaches. Articles advising of various measures to be taken by Exxon are given coverage by all the media in varying but smaller numbers. A slight exception must be noted, as Amicus had 50% of its articles offering "no mention" on this issue.

As shown in Table 7.11, both media in general did not mention the type of media methods used by Exxon in controlling criticism of the oil spill. Of the common media methods used, deferring responsibility to others and prepared statements were the two main methods used by Exxon officials in their attempt to avoid media, and public scru-

tiny. As expected only 4.5% of the articles offered examples of concrete actions taken by Exxon in dealing with the oil spill. Surprisingly, the only media to report these examples, was the NYT. None of the alternative media made mention of Exxon's efforts to respond to the oil spill.

Similar coverage was offered by the NYT, as shown in Table 7.12 and 7.13, where Exxon and the State's method of dealing with criticism were reported. The alternative media did not report anything on Exxon's reported clean-up actions, instead, the alternative press focused only on Exxon's technique of deferring to others for comments.

TABLE 7.10

Distribution of mention of cleaning polluted beaches by the type of media

	NOT MENTIONED	ACTION	NO ACTION ACKNOWLEDGED	
	%	%	%	
NYT	72.7	12.7	14.5	
The Nation	40.0	20.0	40.0	
Amicus	50.0	40.0	10.0	
Earth First	00.0	50.0	50.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	00.0	
TOTAL	(88)	(23)	(21)	(N=132)
PERCENT	66.7	17.4	15.9	100.0
Tau	=.09			

TABLE 7.11

Distribution of mention of Exxon's dealings
with media criticism by the type of media

	NO MEN- TION	OFFER EX- AMPLES	DEFER TO OTHERS	PREPARED STATEMENTS	
	%	%	%	%	
NYT	50.0	4.5	19.1	26.4	
The Nation	00.0	00.0	60.0	40.0	
Amicus	60.0	00.0	20.0	20.0	
Earth First	75.0	00.0	25.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	00.0	66.7	00.0	
TOTAL	(65)	(5)	(29)	(33)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	3.8	22.0	25.0	100.0
Tau	=.04				

TABLE 7.12

Distribution of mention of criticism of the oil spill plan directed at Exxon by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	44.5	55.5	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	60.0	40.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(65)	(67)	(N=132)
PERCENT	49.2	50.8	100.0
Tau	=.05		

TABLE 7.13

Distribution of mention of
State officials' (US Coast Guard)
dealings with media criticism
by the type of media

	NO MEN- TION	OPEN	OFFER EXAMPLES	DEFER TO OTHERS	PREPARED STATEMENTS	
	%	%	%	%	%	
NYT	57.3	10.9	4.5	17.3	10.0	
The Nation	60.0	00.0	00.0	40.0	00.0	
Amicus	60.0	00.0	00.0	40.0	00.0	
Earth First	75.0	00.0	00.0	25.0	00.0	
Earth Island	33.3	00.0	33.3	33.3	00.0	
TOTAL	(76)	(12)	(6)	(27)	(11)	(N=132)
PERCENT	57.6	9.1	4.5	20.5	8.3	100.0
Tau	=.02					

Context: Social and economic

As mentioned previously, historical or contextual setting is most useful in gaining an understanding of an international event having economic connotations. As shown in Table 7.14, 54.5% of the NYT's articles reported on the economic costs as a major consequence of the oil spill. Their focus dealt more with the impact on oil prices nationally and the possible effects of their dependence on foreign oil internationally. The local economics impact was reported in the context of Exxon's growing cost in remov-

ing oil pollution from the surrounding beaches. The alternative media included more articles ranging from 66.7% to 100% dealing mostly with economic effects on local Valdez resources, the residents and the animal population affected by several polluted shorelines.

Was the social context of the oil spill taken into account when the media covered the Exxon Valdez oil spill? As shown in Table 7.15 fifty to one hundred percent of the alternative media articles did mention Valdez residents' social situation after the incident. Less coverage was given in the NYT. The social upheaval due to the media onslaught coupled with the many rumors and assertions of devastated livelihoods from pollution, caused psychological stress most residents had never experienced before. Usually, what was reported in the news, were the negative reactions of the people against Exxon and other officials claiming to represent their interests and concerns. This focus on initial feelings, combined with an overwhelming sense of outrage, was most often referred to in the alternative media. Never did any article mention the importance of waiting for confirmation of possible long-term effects from oil pollution. Both types of media also showed a low understanding of the possible ways nature has in offsetting long-term environmental damage, and thus omitted to give several known comparisons of the effects of wave action, and evaporation effects on similar polluted sites. Thus the news context remained descriptive and sensational offering little analysis which would reflect the conclusions found in subsequent years.

TABLE 7.14

Distribution of mention of
the focus on economic context
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	54.5	45.5	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	
Amicus	80.0	20.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(79)	(53)	(N=132)
PERCENT	59.8	40.2	100.0
Tau	=.06		

TABLE 7.15

Distribution of mention of
negative effect on villagers
by the type of media

	YES	NO	SOMEWHAT	
	%	%	%	
NYT	23.6	61.8		
The Nation	60.0	00.0	40.0	
Amicus	50.0	10.0	40.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	00.0	
TOTAL	(40)	(70)	(22)	(N=132)
PERCENT	30.3	53.0	16.7	100.0
Tau	=.12			

CONCLUSION

Within the alternative media, The Nation appears to offer a pattern of coverage similar to the NYT. This pattern emerges on particular aspects of content such as The Nation's coverage of events, official confusion, the spill contingency plan, the responsibility for the oil spill, and on the Port of Valdez preparedness. As shown in Tables 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5 and 7.9, The Nation chose to report less aggressively than the other alternative media on such subjects.

An example of this type of coverage is taken from The nation's June 1989 issue; here the focus was on general comments given at the annual Shareholders Meeting of the Exxon Corporation. Included were Lawrence Rawl's remarks on "Exxon's pledge to do all in its power to clean up the mess caused by what he insisted was human error." No further analysis was given to support the questions raised in this article on issues such as energy and development, corporate power and accountability.

A more obvious contrast was found between the NYT and the alternative media in the media treatment of institutional structure and responsibility. The NYT chose to give less coverage on Exxon's organizational structure and their corporate responsibilities for the oil spill. This subject area was also found to have the greatest consensus among the alternative press. In conclusion there are identifiable differences in general regarding the chosen approach taken by the mass media (NYT) and the alternative media. While both media focus more on opinions than fact, the results of this coverage and the gathering process differed in the perspective view sought for each. More importance was given to the personalities and polluted settings by the NYT, but a similar focus was also adopted by the alternative media. The important difference in the alternative media coverage was the degree and effects of the oil pollution had on people and animals expected to be directly affected for years to come. Since both types of media adopted similar themes to the exclusion of more issue or policy oriented approaches, these differences cannot be considered as an important and significant in determining news coverage of the Exxon Valdez incident.

Chapter 8

THE IMPACT OF SOURCES ON CONTENT

NEWS GATHERING PRACTICES

This chapter examines the impact of sources and their opinions as covered by the media on the Exxon Valdez oil spill. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, a crucial part of the news process is the uncovering of identifiable facts through the interaction of journalists with sources. These facts are coloured by the choice of sources and therefore demand further scrutiny and intensive data searches in order to maintain a recognizable journalistic standard (Tuchman, 1978: 213). The choice of sources was hypothesised as having a direct impact upon the extent and depth of coverage. A variation in content is thus expected to be contingent on the type of sources used. The governmental sources utilized, included federal and the State of Alaska officials. The oil industry was represented by various executive officers and oil industry analysts. One can also find in both media, journalists and correspondents assigned especially to cover the oil spill.

In Media and Apocalypse, Smith (1992) cites Leon Signal's findings that more than three-quarters of the sources named in national and international stories of the New York Times and the Washington Post were government officials, which, in his opinion, gave public officials the power to define what was newsworthy in ways that served their interests. This opinion also held true for Smith(1992) in his research of the mass media coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Such reliance on official information sources robs journalists of autonomy and thus independence to know and define the

important issues of an event. For different reasons, this problem appears to apply equally in this study to the coverage of the alternative media (Smith, 1992: 184).

FINDINGS

In Table 8.1, which examines the standard press methods used by official sources, 53.6% to 100.0% of the news items did not mention any type of press method. Source methods were cited to some extent by the NYT as follows: press conferences (5.5%), interviews (10%), press releases (30%) and tours of the oil spill (0.9%). Amicus was the only alternative magazine to attribute their sources to press releases (20%). Press releases are a good example of one of the more effective strategies often used by the government and corporate institutions to control information by limiting questions. A press release becomes an ideal form in which to use specific people to represent abstractions and institutions, thus allowing the creation of personalized themes about the oil spill, told in terms of an Exxon official who couldn't clean-up the oil, and an Alaska commissioner who represented the innocent victims of the oil. The result is a tendency for journalists to use mismanagement as an explanation for a wide variety of events. The question changes as they tend to ask who was responsible instead of what caused the event (Smith, 1992: 184-185).

TABLE 8.1

Distribution of press methods
by the type of media

	NO MEN- TION	PRESS CON- FERENCE	INTERVIEW	PRESS RELEASE	TOUR OF SPILL	
	%	%	%	%	%	
NYT	53.6	5.5	10.0	30.0	00.9	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	
Amicus	80.0	00.0	00.0	20.0	00.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	
Earth Island	100.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	
TOTAL	(79)	(6)	(11)	(35)	(1)	(N=132)
PERCENT	59.8	4.5	8.3	26.5	.8	100.0
Tau	=.05					

Sources

Some articles were found to use only government sources while others cited corporate and oil experts (American Petroleum Association) as sources. As shown in Table 8.2, the majority of sources, 64.55%, used by the NYT's articles came from officials of various government institutions. As well, 19.1% of its articles used institutions with environmental experts. In contrast, 33.3% to 100.0% of the alternative media util-

ized institutional and/or environmental sources. Overall the NYT's articles relied more on governmental sources than the alternative media.

TABLE 8.2

Distribution of main sources used
by the type of media

	NO MENTION	GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS	OTHER INSTITU- TIONS	ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTIONS	
	%	%	%	%	
NYT	4.5%	64.5	11.8	19.1	
The Nation	00.0	20.0	20.0	60.0	
Amicus	10.0	50.0	00.0	40.0	
Earth First	00.0	00.0	00.0	100.0	
Earth Island	00.0	33.3	33.3	33.3	
TOTAL	(6)	(78)	(15)	(33)	(N=132)
PERCENT	4.5	59.1	11.4	25.0	100.0
Tau	=.08				

The validity of the news content depends largely on the type of information collected to write an article. It is therefore important to see to what degree supporting documentary sources were sought to advance the media's coverage and if and when they were based on the information and opinions of "experts". As shown in Table 8.3, only 15.5% of the articles from the NYT were found to have supporting documentation

in the form of reports and/or special publications. As for the alternative media, the opposite appears to be the case. Three of the magazines used documentary sources in 66.7% to 90.0% of their articles. The fourth magazine, Earth First, offered similar coverage to the NYT in not electing to seek more independent sources for confirmation purposes.

TABLE 8.3

Distribution of documentary sources
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	15.5	84.5	
The Nation	80.0	20.0	
Amicus	90.0	10.0	
Earth First	25.0	75.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	
TOTAL	(33)	(99)	(N=132)
PERCENT	25.0	75.0	100.0
Tau	=.29		

As this oil spill was a man-made environmental event, it posed a direct challenge to the efficacy of existing technology. It was therefore expected that the media would be used by competing groups and agency sources as a medium to assert or avoid legal culpability for the cause and clean-up of the oil spill. Sometimes, repeated

accusations are used and succeed in gaining public support through the media. Eventually, our reliance on scientific knowledge demands that such opinions or accusations have support from various scientific sources. Where such sources were used by the NYT, less than 18%, as shown in Table 8.4 cited scientists from institutions, industry or environmental groups. As expected, given the environmental nature of this event, the alternative media offered more articles which utilized identified scientific sources.

TABLE 8.4

Distribution of mention of scientific sources
by the type of media

	NO MENTION	OIL INSTITU- TIONS	ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTIONS	
	%	%	%	
NYT	82.7	13.6	3.6	
The Nation	60.0	20.0	20.0	
Amicus	10.0	50.0	40.0	
Earth First	75.0	00.0	25.0	
Earth Island	33.3	33.3	33.3	
TOTAL	(99)	(22)	(11)	(N=132)
PERCENT	75.0	16.7	8.3	100.0
Tau				

Sources opinions

For comparison purposes, the number of opinions of various sources were also examined. It is generally acceptable for journalists to use unverified information and opinions from public and private officials. This mainly happens because journalists have found it increasingly difficult to circumvent the following obstacles: constraints in gaining access to information and in defying cost and schedule pressures. These obstacles have led to a simplistic reduction of complex concepts into easily grasped stories having symbolic undertones. As shown in Table 8.5, both types of media engaged in this practice to varying degrees. The source's official opinions were either not mentioned or cited from one to five times in most of their articles. Similarly, Table 8.6 shows that governmental opinions were reported in a majority of items.

This pattern of unverified opinions diminished, as shown in Table 8.7 Preferences seem to have determined the opinions reported in a majority of items. For the NYT, 61.8% of the expert opinions were solicited from institutions related to the oil industry. In keeping with environmental concerns, the alternative media detailed the opinions of state and local government, journalists, and individual villagers.

The validity of news content depends largely on the type of information. Incisive and interesting news stories are contingent not only on asking good questions but on the degree the media can challenge sources of predictions and opinions which appear self-serving and overstated. Prior to the full scale cleaning process of the polluted shoreline, Exxon was claiming to be able to restore the beaches to their original state

without any long-term effects. If it was wrong to picture Exxon as the villain of the story, it was also wrong not to question and challenge such exaggerated claims.

TABLE 8.5

Distribution of mention of official opinion
by the type of media

	NO MENTION	1 TO 5 TIMES	11 OR MORE	
	%	%	%	
NYT	45.5	52.7	1.8	
The Nation	40.0	60.0	00.0	
Amicus	60.0	40.0	00.0	
Earth First	50.0	50.0	00.0	
Earth Island	66.7	33.3	00.0	
TOTAL	(62)	(68)	(2)	(N=132)
PERCENT	47.0	51.5	1.5	100.0
Tau	=.009			

TABLE 8.6

Distribution of government opinions
by the type of media

	NO MENTION	1 TO 5 TIMES	6 TO 10 TIMES	
	%	%	%	
NYT	28.2	64.5	7.3	
The Nation	40.0	40.0	20.0	
Amicus	10.0	90.0	00.0	
Earth first	50.0	50.0	00.0	
Eart Island	33.3	66.7	00.0	
TOTAL	(37)	(86)	(9)	(N=132)
PERCENT	28.0	65.2	6.8	100.0
Tau	=.02			

TABLE 8.7

Distribution of mention of whose opinion
cited by the type of media

	NO MENTION	OIL INSTITUTIONS	JOURNALISTS' INSTITUTIONS	VILLAGERS' INSTITUTIONS	ALL	
	%	%	%	%	%	
NYT	1.8	61.8	10.9	23.6	1.8	
The Nation	00.0	00.0	80.0	00.0	20.0	
Amicus	00.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	20.0	
Earth First	00.0	00.0	75.0	25.0	00.0	
Eart Island	33.3	00.0	00.0	00.0	66.7	
TOTAL	(3)	(70)	(23)	(29)	(7)	(N=132)
PERCENT	2.3	53.0	17.4	22.0	5.3	100.0
Tau	=.14					

In table 8.8, one can see that the oil industry and related sources were most likely to make use of the media in this way. Unrealistic assertions were also made by angry residents of Valdez and environmental groups.

In the same way, many official assurances were made extolling the capabilities of the existing technology and the institutions' control. Table 8.9 shows that articles questioning existing technology remained in a majority of cases the sole venue that the various alternative media examined. Overall 30.9% of the NYT's articles dealt with this

question as compared to the alternative press which offered 60% to 100% of their articles with this type of analysis.

Form of writing

Analysts' comments or scholarly information allow a broader understanding of some of the issues than simple details. As shown in Table 8.10, the NYT offered this type of deeper analysis in 46.4% of its articles. Most of the alternative media included these insights as part of their content. The results add some support to the differences in coverage of possible issues and causes, versus personalities and responding accusations.

As expected, the alternative magazines gave more commentary on events than did the NYT. Looking at Table 8.11, 70% to 100% of the alternative media dedicated articles to commentaries. Many of these articles were commentaries on the possible negative effects on local industry and individual residents in Valdez. Entire stories centered on this particular angle to the exclusion of more fully developed analysis.

TABLE 8.8

Distribution of mention of
whose opinions are overstated
by the type of media

	NO MENTION	ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS/RESIDENTS	SCIENTIFICS OIL INDUSTRY	FEDERAL OFFICIALS	A FEW	
	%	%	%	%	%	
NYT	8.2	5.5	60.0	16.4	10.0	
The Nation	00.0	00.0	80.0	00.0	20.0	
Amicus	00.0	10.0	60.0	00.0	30.0	
Earth First	00.0	50.0	00.0	00.0	50.0	
Earth Is- land	00.0	33.3	66.7	00.0	00.0	
TOTAL	(9)	(10)	(78)	(18)	(17)	(N=132)
PERCENT	6.8	7.6	59.1	13.6	12.9	100.0
Tau	=.05					

TABLE 8.9

Distribution of mention of
questioning the technology
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	30.9	69.1	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	
Amicus	60.0	40.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	100.0	00.0	
TOTAL	(52)	(80)	(N=132)
PERCENT	39.4	60.6	100.0
Tau	=.17		

TABLE 8.10

Distribution of mention of analysts' comments of scholarly information by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	46.4	53.6	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	
Amicus	90.0	10.0	
Earth First	50.0	50.0	
Earth Island	33.3	66.7	
TOTAL	(69)	(63)	(N=132)
PERCENT	52.3	47.7	100.0
Tau	=.09		

TABLE 8.11

Distribution of mention of commentary
by the type of media

	YES	NO	
	%	%	
NYT	26.4	73.6	
The Nation	100.0	00.0	
Amicus	70.0	30.0	
Earth First	100.0	00.0	
Earth Island	100.0	00.0	
TOTAL	(48)	(84)	(N=132)
PERCENT	36.4	63.6	100.0
Tau	=.23		

Although both types of media gave detailed accounts of the Exxon event, covering all the "five W's" and "H" (the H for HOW), they only reported the obvious stories. As Barbra Holian, a public affairs officer for the Alaska DEC, said: "in Valdez, the five W's didn't cut it." After three months, she said that the environmental issues were very complicated. An administrator for the Federal Highway Administration said: "the traditional who, what, where, when and why questions and answers are well reported, but reporting is deficient in seeking answers to questions like: What precautions reduced the greater loss of life and property? Could the impact of the catastrophe have been reduced further? What are government, industry etc. plans for minimizing or reducing

the impact of future events? These questions were not part of the news stories covered by either media." (Smith, 1992: 186-187).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen that when journalists were assigned to cover international news, in this case the Exxon Valdez incident, news stories were in varying degrees, informative but also more subjective. The use of documentary and independent sources which could have made the articles more informative, were found mainly in the alternative media. This finding gave support to the sixth hypothesis, in which the alternative media would be expected to seek expert opinions from independent sources (see Tables 8.3 and 8.4). The degree to which the NYT chose to use more governmental sources, allowed it to avoid analyzing motives and actions taken by principal officials giving further support to the second, third and fourth hypotheses (see Tables 8.2 and 8.4). among the alternative media, Earth First has consistently shown a definite pattern of advocacy by choosing to offer a more radical environmental perspective in its coverage of the spill. Curiously, its coverage did not rely on documentary or scientific sources. This may be due to its more personalized type of advocacy of centering on particular aspects of the spill which affected certain individuals and local communities.

The most contrasting aspects of the content between the NYT and the alternative media news stories, were in the use of documentary sources, the willingness to question technology and the choice of whose opinion was most often cited. Among the alternative press, the greatest consensus was found in the articles which questioned the current state of oil transportation technology. The media in general, tended toward descrip-

tion in the hope of appearing objective but remained at the surface and did not explore the depth of the complex issues brought out by the Exxon event. The news stories although useful became focused on an evergrowing coverage of present events. Consequently both media, despite differences in coverage, should strive towards the type of analytical reporting which uses as many different and independent sources as can be found in the reporting of a few of their acknowledged peers.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

The data shows that the mass and alternative media reported little on the actual causes and policy problems which led to the Exxon Valdez oil spill. We have seen that journalists from both media were far more engaged in either sensational themes or advocacy reporting, supporting the hypothesis that in general controversial incidents are covered as dramatic events or are related to risk and previous warning signs ignored by institutional agencies.

Chapter 1 and 2 served principally to outline the contextual settings of both the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the theoretical bases of the use of information which can challenge the status quo. Subsequent sections of this thesis served to further confirm conclusions offered in the literature on news coverage; that mass media will generally focus on personalities and surface happenings which produce ongoing themes and consequently inform the reading public inadequately. In contrast, the alternative media was expected to present the institutional factors which produced risk that put into question the validity of such institutional control. Although the risks were outlined by the alternative media the focus remained centered on the effects to individuals and the environment not on the institutional factors which explained and gave understanding as to why and how these types of incidents continue to happen.

The mass media generally remained objective by covering events as they happened but this consequently left readers with insufficient elements to understand that such man-made events are not inevitable. Mass media functional purpose was shown

to be reporting present day events, from which one gets little sense of history for comparison purposes or insight. Since these events continue to simply be reported as natural phenomenon outside human control, the reader is left to feel powerless and angry. At this point the promised expectations of institutional control have little meaning and most will reluctantly choose to forget until the next incident.

The subjective coverage of the oil spill meant journalists simply outlined events through the comments and conclusions offered by the officials who made themselves available for that primary purpose. This type of coverage contrasts greatly with the Pulitzer winning stories which were ten times more likely to name experts not employed by the oil industry or representatives of environmental organizations, or sources involved in the oil-animal rescue effort. Instead, in the Pulitzer stories, the sources cited were Coast Guard experts on tanker safety or crew members working on oil tankers. More than two-third of the sources used in *The Seattle Times* were unique to that newspaper (Smith, 1992: 100-101). Without such investigative techniques and use of independence sources, journalists were less engaged in analyzing the public policies agreed to and scrutinizing the process which led to a breakdown of oil transportation safety.

A second hypothesis in this research was tested and proved. The mass media relied more on government sources as compared to the alternative media. As well the alternative media used more independent and documentary sources supporting the sixth hypothesis. However, the use of such sources did not result in more in-depth analysis of the motives and actions of the principle officials involved. Therefore the third hypothesis was disproved as far as the alternative media's coverage was concerned.

Principally, there are identifiable differences between the mass media (NYT) and the alternative media in their chosen approach and coverage of the oil spill. The alternative media gave particular coverage to the various aspects of the oil spill plan and the subsequent effects when the plan became inoperative because of neglect. Unlike the NYT, the alternative media ignored the daily game of reporting the latest accusation made by opposing officials. Instead they remained focused on the environmental effects and risks of the oil spill. These differences in coverage give some support to the fourth hypothesis where a lower consensus is expected between the media.

A fifth hypothesis in this research was tested and to some degree proved. Although more critical articles were found in the alternative media, their criticism remained limited to reporting the predicted devastation caused by an inept oil company that could not cleanup the spreading oil pollution, thus missing the opportunity to examine the social and regulatory context in which events occurred.

In Chapter 3 the reasons why disasters similar to the Exxon Valdez oil spill continue to happen, were outlined in Barry Turner's (1976) sociological model. As long as the amount of information and detailed knowledge of the social conditions within which linked errors are observed but not fully analyzed further, these disasters will be repeated. The resulting collapse of precautions reported by only a few journalists, underlines an important gap in media coverage in general. Erroneous assumptions were made and left unquestioned. Warnings of danger from non experts were readily discounted as negative comments. Finally a situation developed where formal precautions were not followed or updated, allowing violations of policy rules and regulations to become the norm. Reporting warning signs and regulatory lapses are essential if those responsible for discovering the kind of changes necessary to ensure such dangerous

situations are less likely to reoccur. The degree to which media investigates and reports the more complex circumstances associated with disasters becomes crucial. Regardless of the type of disaster whether it is an oil spill or the collision between two commuter trains, the more knowledge we have about the conditions which allow events to accumulate unnoticed the less likely such dangerous conditions will progress to future large-scale disasters.

There appear to be two different kinds of journalism. One entails the kind of high standard that keeps the public informed about important issues and wins journalistic awards. The other, more common, form of reporting pursues dramatic and conflict driven themes to titillate or shock us. The majority of what is published has little to do with an informed public. Some journalists argue that the public can eventually become well informed by pursuing first the daily news accounts, then the magazine stories for more detail and finally the books which provide more depth. Since the majority of these various types of media focused on failed efforts to clean up the oil instead of the fact that the necessary technology may have never existed to deal with large spills, then the media gave a very misleading impression. The public is left with a false sense of security not knowing the risks inherent in all major policy decision (Smith, 1992: 110-169).

The comparative coverage, reported by the alternative press, examined in this thesis did not challenge mainstream news stories. Although a more human view which questions the prevailing media perspective was offered by the environmental magazines, their coverage did not include contextual facts not found in the mass media coverage. Instead, their primary goal of eliciting public support for a particular cause appeared to be of greater importance. The problem here may have been with the envi-

ronmental magazines selected for examination in this thesis. I would like to add that content analysis as a method to test the hypotheses outlined above was chosen to be ideal. It allowed me to examine in some detail what had and had not been reported in both types of media. Yet content analysis alone limited the identification and more in-depth understanding of the agenda setting process. In this research I chose to study news items; maybe interviews with journalists and editors would have been useful in gaining more understanding in the agenda setting function of the mass and alternative media.

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APPENDIX A

DETAILS OF THE CODING PROCESS

In order to understand the rules and procedures involved in the coding process, this appendix is offered to define the criteria and reasoning that went into the selection of data for specific variables chosen. The coding manual in Appendix B can be consulted for further reference.

In accordance with the coding manual, Appendix B has been divided into three sections. The first section addresses the presentation of the articles, the second with the content of the articles, and the third with the news gathering process.

FIRST SECTION

V-109 (A-1)

How would you define the title of the article?

The three categories created for this variable are: factual / neutral, moderate / some sensationalism, and sensational / dramatic.

The titles were categorized based on the underlying intention apparent is the choice and use of words. The degree of emotionalism is inherent in the particular words used to convey a message. Therefore the selection of this data has semantic implications and meaning.

When a title conveys direct and simple collection of facts with no judgmental interpretation or emotive tone, the category is classified as "factual/neutral".

Some examples of the first category are:

- 1) "Exxon Gives Plan On Cleaning Coast"
- 2) "Administration Proposes Creating Oil Spill Fund"
- 3) "Sale of Oil Leases Off Alaska Is Postponed"

When a title offers some judgment or interpretation but does not label consequences or events with overly positive or negative connotations, then the category chosen is "moderate/some sensationalism". Some examples of the second category are:

- 1) "A Rollback in Gasoline Prices is sought - Oil"
- 2) "Oil Companies Never Wanted Canadian Pipeline"
- 3) "Exxon's new cleanup plans are being criticized"

When a title directly projects extremely judgmental positions on the issue (s) covered, the category chosen is "sensational/dramatic". Some examples:

- 1) "If Radiation Were the Color and Fixture of Oil"
- 2) "A relationship may have gone on the rocks with the tankers"
- 3) "Valdez Do-Gooders Feeding Frenzy"

V-110 (A-5)

Where is the article situated in relation to other articles in the newspaper or magazine?

This variable was given three categories "Place of importance" which includes the front page of a newspaper, the editorial page, or a special report section of a magazine. The next category "Place of some importance" includes the first and international news sections and the middle section of a magazine. The final category of "Place of non-importance" is represented by all the articles placed in the back sections of the newspapers and magazines. This placement denotes passage of time and/or lack of any active change in the event.

SECOND SECTION

V-116-123 (B2-9) and V-124-127 (B10-13)

Does the article describe aspects of the Exxon organization?

What is mentioned about the organization?

What are the financial resources of the organization?

Each category of this variable can be directly related to some aspect or institutional structure of Exxon as a transnational corporate organization. Only the characteristics generally found to be common with international corporation were considered. Financial resources as part of the supporting infra-structure were also included to give a broader profile.

V-128 (B14)

What are Exxon's stated goals?

The goals selected, fit three criteria. First, goals seen as central to Exxon's public relations problem as the main culprit in causing the environmental damage. Second, the measures expected to be taken for preventive purposes to ensure ongoing oil production. Third, a demonstration of goodwill towards the Alaskan residents in the form of compensation with a view to gain local support in obtaining future access to new sites, having oil reserves.

V-134-139 (B20-24)

To what extent has Exxon established these goals?

Each category for this variable attempts to measure whether Exxon had taken steps to actually establish these goals. The categories range from "initiated action" to "somewhat succeeded" to "succeeded" and "no action". This breakdown would show if future reports distinguish between simple promises and concrete actions implemented.

V-146-206 (B33-38)

Does the article mention the previous responsibilities of the US Coast Guard?

What are the US Coast Guard's stated goals?

This variable focuses on the agency representing the government's responsibility and role in this environmental event. The goals presented are an array of obligations found lacking after the incident. This questioning process refers to Stage 3 of Turner's (1976) disaster model (see Chapter 3 for details) where recognition is given to previous warnings of a potential disaster due to the collapse of precautions which were accepted as adequate (Turner, 1976: 755-756).

V-210 (B-42)

Who blames Captain Hazzlewood and crew for the accident?

This variable attempts to explore the time element and the sources who accused Captain Hazzlewood and his crew, etc. The time element refers to the timing of the accusation and the various sources who might benefit by focusing the individuals directly involved in the environmental disaster.

V-213-215 (B-44-46)

Is any criticism of the oil spill contingency plan directed at Exxon and/or Alyeska Pipeline Service Company?

Is any criticism of the oil spill contingency plan directed at the US Coast Guard?

Does the article link the oil spill contingency plan with the oil spill clean-up progress?

These variables focus on the media reporting on the preventive and regulative duties expected by the US Coast Guard and the efficacy of the oil spill contingency plan. The type of coverage should be extensive and direct if the analysis of the motives and actions taken by governments and corporations is to be understood.

V-218 (B-49)

Does the article mention any groups benefiting from the oil spill?

The groups benefiting from the oil spill refer to those individuals or groups who were hired by Exxon to clean-up the oil damaged beaches and water areas.

V-220-221 (B-51-52)

Does the article premise the oil spill in the context of "the cost economic progress"?
If yes, is this the opinion of one of the following representatives?

This assertion is commonly offered as a political defense for deferring or discontinuing any negative consequences of economic activity. The principles citing such explanations are usually those directly involved and benefiting.

THIRD SECTION

V-225 (C-1)

Are the sources of information mentioned in the article?

The sources of information means the sources used within the articles' content.

V-245 (C-15)

Does the article offer an understanding of the short and long-term overall risks of the oil spill?

This variable attempts to find if the coverage given by the media went beyond simple description of the damage and affecting consequences to include analysis of the varying and long-term effects.

V-246-248-79 (C-16-18)

Would you call this article a news item?
Would you call this article an editorial?
Would you call this article a commentary?

In the context of the debate over advocacy and objectivity, these questions attempt to differentiate between articles which offer simple news reporting and those

which give a particular point of view. Articles that imply opinions or arguments regarding the issue should be classified as "editorials". these opinions and arguments may be considered some form of analysis. A commentary has similarities to an editorial but remains an individual opinion on events with no direct connection to the newspaper.

V-249 (C-19)

Does the article create an atmosphere or tone at the beginning or end of the article?

When reporting a descriptive news event which incorporate a certain tone whether negative or positive about the event, a particular atmosphere is created. In this case, an environmental disaster which has caused extensive and widespread consequences not easily rationalized. For example, a news story, three days after the Exxon oil spill, offers this following scenario. "The huge oil spill that has fouled Prince William Sound could decimate fish runs in one of the world's most bountiful bodies of water well into the next decade, biologists and fishermen say ... " or "The preparation for this kind of oil spill was pathetic. All along it was pathetic." would definitely be coded as having reported a certain emotional and negative tone which was not challenged.

V-306 (C-22)

Is there some analysis in the article?

Analysis can be seen to exist when a news item presents the underlining reasons to explain why and how such an event happens. The news item must address the causes and effects of oil spills within the context of policy efficacy and include to some degree the social, historical and global implications.

V-319 (C-34)

In general would changes in industry and governmental policies reduce the likelihood of a similar oil spill?

This question is directed at the contents of the article. In particular it attempts to see if the author of the news item has conveyed a positive or negative impression on such policy changes.

V-320 (C-35)

Overall whose opinions or views were overstated?

When controversial events are reported, various groups and representatives attempt to control or direct the focus of the debate on such events. To this end, many opinions offered can be extreme and inciting. This condition is especially prevalent with events where legal responsibility will inevitably become an issue. If unsupported views or accusations are given, then the group or person is identified.

APPENDIX B

CODING MANUAL

A. SETTING

(A-1) What is the title of the newspaper or magazine?

1. New York Times
2. Nation
3. Amicus
4. Earth First
5. Earth Island

(A-2) Date of the issue (month)?

- | | | | |
|----|------|-----|------|
| 1. | Jan. | 7. | July |
| 2. | Feb. | 8. | Aug. |
| 3. | Mar. | 9. | Sep. |
| 4. | Apr. | 10. | Oct. |
| 5. | May | 11. | Nov. |
| 6. | June | 12. | Dec. |

(A-3) Date of issue (year)?

- | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|
| 1. | 89 | 4. | 92 |
| 2. | 90 | 5. | 93 |
| 3. | 91 | 6. | 94 |

(A-4) How would you define the title of the article?

1. Factual / neutral
2. Moderate / some sensationalism
3. Sensational / dramatic

(A-5) Where is the article situated in relation to other articles in the newspaper or magazine?

1. Place of great importance
2. Place of some importance
3. Place of non-importance

(A-6) What is the length of the article?

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|----|----------------------|
| 1. | 5% or 1/20 | 6. | 50% or 1/2 |
| 2. | 10% or 1/10 | 7. | 66% or 2/3 |
| 3. | 20% or 1/5 | 8. | 75% or 3/4 |
| 4. | 25% or 1/4 | 9. | more than 75% or 3/4 |

(A-7) If there is any visual supplement with the written text of what type is it?

1. photograph
2. caricature
3. map
4. both caricature and map
5. none

(A-8) How much space does the picture occupy in relation to the written text?

1. 25% or $\frac{1}{4}$
2. 50% or $\frac{1}{2}$
3. 75% or $\frac{3}{4}$
- 0 none / not relevant

B. CONTENT

(B-1) Was the Port of Valdez's crew prepared for the oil spill?

1. Yes
2. No
0. Not mentioned

(B-2) Does the article describe aspects of the Exxon organization?

1. Yes
0. No

What is mentioned about the organization?

(B-3) Partner in consortium

1. Yes
0. No

(B-4) Safety record

1. Yes
0. No

(B-5) tanker fleet — single or double bottom

1. Yes

0. No

(B-6) number of lawsuits (won, outstanding, lost)

1. Yes

0. No

(B-7) operations — domestic / international

1. Yes

0. No

(B-8) corporate safety obligations

1. Yes

0. No

(B-9) profile on Exxon president

1. Yes

0. No

Is there any mention of the financial resources of the organization?

(B-10) approximate yearly profit

1. Yes

0. No

(B-11) financial outlay on safety equipment

1. Yes

0. No

(B-12) number of refineries

1. Yes

0. No

(B-13) average age of tankers

1. Yes

0. No

What are Exxon's stated goals?

(B-14) gain access to Alaska's wildlife refuge

1. Yes

0. No

(B-15) update its tanker fleet

1. Yes

0. No

(B-16) expand the Valdez oil production

1. Yes

0. No

(B-17) update the safety procedures

1. Yes

0. No

(B-18) return the polluted beaches to their original state

1. Yes

0. No

(B-19) compensate the residents

1. Yes

0. No

To what extent has Exxon established these goals?

(B-20) gain access to Alaska's Wildlife refuge

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-21) update its tanker fleet

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-22) expand the Valdez oil production

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-23) update the safety procedures

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-24) return the polluted beaches to their original states

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-25) compensate the residents

1. initiated action
2. succeeded
3. somewhat succeeded
4. no action / only acknowledge
0. not mentioned

(B-26) Has Exxon stated they have or will consult the residents or leaders of the Town of Valdez?

1. Yes
2. No
0. Not mentioned

(B-27) Does the article give a history of other spills?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-28) Does the article mention any similarities or differences between the Exxon Oil Spill and others?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-29) Does the article outline the oil spill contingency plan?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-30) If yes, are any deficiencies of the oil spill contingency plan cited?

1. Yes
0. No
6. "No" at B-10

(B-31) Does the article mention who is responsible for the oil spill contingency?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-32) Does the article mention the previous responsibilities of the US Coast Guard?

1. Yes

0. No

What are the US Coast Guard's stated goals?

(B-33) increase the channel radar surveillance

1. Yes

0. No

(B-34) update the safety procedures

1. Yes

0. No

(B-35) assist in the beach cleanup

1. Yes

0. No

(B-36) charge Captain Hazelwood

1. Yes

0. No

(B-37) demand increased Port and tanker crew

1. Yes

0. 0

(B-38) increase pilot boat escort

1. Yes

0. No

(B-39) Does the article report cooperation or coordination between Exxon and the US Coast Guard?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-40) Does the article mention who is in-charge of the oil spill clean-up?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-41) Does Exxon take any responsibility for the accident?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(B-42) Who blames Captain Hazzlewood and crew for the accident?

- 01. Exxon
- 02. US Coast Guard
- 03. Other governmental agencies
- 04. Journalists(editorialists, columnists)
- 05. "Ordinary people"
- 06. Environmental representatives
- 00. Not mentioned

(B-43) Does any governmental agency take any responsibility for the accident?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(B-44) Is any criticism of the oil spill contingency plan directed at Exxon?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(B-45) Is any criticism of the oil spill contingency plan directed at the US Coast Guard?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-46) Does the article link the oil spill contingency plan to problems with the oil spill clean-up progress?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-47) Does Captain Hazzlewood continue to be blamed for the accident?

1. Yes
0. No

(B-48) If yes, who is mentioned to offer this opinion?

1. Exxon
2. The US Coast Guard
3. other agencies
6. if no at the previous question

(B-49) Does the article mention the negative effects of the oil spill on the groups within the Valdez community?

1. Yes
2. Somewhat
0. No

(B-50) Does the article mention any groups benefiting from the oil spill?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-51) Does the article premise the oil spill in the context of “the cost of economic progress”?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-52) If yes, is this the opinion of one of the following representatives?

01. Oil industry (Exxon)

02. State (Alaska)

03. Federal

04. President

05. Experts (economists)

00. Not mentioned

(B-53) Does the article present the views of any environmental group?

1. Yes

0. No

(B-54) If yes, is the name of the environmental group mentioned?

1. Yes

0. No

6. if no at the previous question

**C. SOURCE AND COMPOSITION
OF MEDIA CONTENT**

(C-1) Are the sources of information mentioned in the article?

- 1. Yes
- 2. Anonymous official
- 3. Anonymous non-official
- 0. No

(C-2) Is a correspondent or journalist, the author of the news article?

- 1. Yes signed
- 0. No not-signed

(C-3) How many sources are used in the article?

- 01. Federal government
- 02. State official
- 03. Local
- 04. Environmental representative
- 05. Other oil representative
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-4) What are the press methods used by Exxon?

- 01. Press conference
- 02. Interview
- 03. Press release
- 04. Tour of oil spill site
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-5) How many times an official of Exxon opinions presented in the article?

- 1. 1-5
- 2. 6-10
- 3. 11 or more
- 0. not mentioned

(C-6) How many times are the opinions of the governmental officials mentioned in the article?

- 1. 1-5
- 2. 6-10
- 3. 11 or more
- 0. not mentioned

(C-7) Are documentary sources (reports, special scientific publications) used?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(C-8) Are interviews or comments included as part of the article?

1. Yes
0. No

(C-9) Are analysts' comments or scholarly information used?

1. Yes
0. No

(C-10) How many times are the opinions of relevant scientific sources mentioned in the article?

1. 1-5
2. 6-10
3. 11 or more
0. not mentioned

(C-11) Who do these scientific sources represent?

01. Exxon / oil industry
02. State agency
03. Federal agency
04. Environmental group
00. Not mentioned

(C-12) How does Exxon deal with criticism of the oils spill?

- 01. Open and candid answers
- 02. Offers examples of concrete actions
- 03. Defers responsibility to others
- 04. Defers to negativity of the Press
- 05. Prepared statement only
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-13) How do the State officials (e.g. US Coast Guard) deal with criticism of the oil spill?

- 01. Open and candid answers
- 02. Offers examples of concrete actions
- 03. Defers responsibility to others
- 04. Defers to negativity of the Press
- 05. Prepared statement only
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-14) When opinions, attitudes on the oil spill are offered who gives them?

- 01. Oil industry representatives
- 02. Governmental representatives
- 03. Victims
- 04. Journalists
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-15) Does the article offer an understanding of the short and long-term overall risks of the oil spill?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-16) Would you call this article a news item?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-17) Would you call this article an editorial?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-18) Would you call this article a commentary?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-19) Does the article create an atmosphere or tone at the beginning or end of the article?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-20) Were there plenty of details and description of the events in the article?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-21) Does the article simply repeat details already covered in previous articles?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-22) Is there some analysis in the article?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-23) Does the article focus on people (residents, oil representatives, government representatives, political leaders)?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-24) Does the article focus on events (date, time)?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-25) Does the article focus on oil soaked animals?

1. Yes

0. No

(C-26) Does the article focus on official confusion created by the oil spill?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(C-27) Does the article focus on political context?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

(C-28) Does the article focus on economic context?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No

(C-29) What does the article focus on?

- 01. Causes of oil spills
- 02. incompetent / criminal events
- 03. pollution / environmental event
- 04. cleanup problems / political events
- 05. economic cost / economic events
- 06. officials reactions (ex: US Coast Guard)
- 07. people's reaction (ex: residents)
- 08. other
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-30) Does the article propose various solutions or ways to prevent future oil spills?

1. Yes
0. No

(C-31) Does the article invite the reader to act or support an action against future oil spills?

1. Yes
0. No

(C-32) Does the reader understand how oil spills continue to occur (process motives, ineffective policies etc.) after reading the article?

1. Yes
0. No

(C-33) Overall how would you define the actions taken in dealing with the causes and results of the Exxon incident?

1. Positive / effective - efficient
2. Neutral / expedient
3. Negative / ineffective

(C-34) In general would changes in industry and governmental policies reduce the likelihood of a similar oil spill?

1. Yes
2. Somewhat
0. No

(C-35) Overall whose opinions or views were overstated?

- 01. Environmental groups
- 02. Residents
- 03. Scientists
- 04. Oil industry officials
- 05. Federal officials
- 00. Not mentioned

(C-36) Does the article question the level of technology as far as oil cleanup equipment and the safe transportation of oil via tankers?

- 1. Yes
- 0. No