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NATIONAL VS. PERSONAL IMPORTANCE IN AGENDA-SETTING

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IN SEARCH OF ALTERNATIVE AGENDAS:
NATIONAL VS. PERSONAL IMPORTANCE IN AGENDA-SETTING

By

Michael F. Burke

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ABSTRACT

IN SEARCH OF ALTERNATIVE AGENDAS:
NATIONAL VS. PERSONAL IMPORTANCE IN AGENDA-SETTING

By

Michael F. Burke

Gallup Poll-type "most important problem facing the nation" (MIP) questions are the most common way to measure the public agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). It is unclear, however, whether or not issues of national importance are also personally important to the respondents. To investigate this question, this study compared ratings of national importance to ratings of personal importance for a variety of issue categories. Data collected from existing groups (n = 30) was compared to data from first-time groupings (n = 33), as well as to a no discussion comparison group (n = 48 individuals). Examination of the data revealed that the variance within each type of public agenda was not significantly different for the three groupings. Also non-significant were the relationships between the media agenda and the national public agenda and the media agenda and the personal public agenda. Ratings for national importance were significantly higher than the ratings for personal importance (F = 5.89, p = 0.02) across the three public agendas. Significant correlations between the national public agenda and the personal public agenda were found in each of the study groupings(r_s = 0.84m p < 0.001 for the new groupings, r_s = 0.67, p < 0.01 for the existing groups, and r_s = 0.50, p < 0.05 for the no discussion group). The

average relationship between national and personal importance was $r_s = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$. There is a positive relationship between ratings of national importance and personal importance. The issue categories important for the nation are also personally important.

For Caesar

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC -- American Broadcast Company

CBS -- Columbia Broadcasting System

CNN -- Cable News Network

H -- Hypothesis

K -- Cohen's Kappa

MIP -- Most Important Problem

NBC -- National Broadcast Company

R -- Research Question

r_s -- Spearman Rank Order Correlation

INTRODUCTION

Despite more than 25 years of agenda-setting research, several basic questions about agenda-setting remain largely unanswered. This research seeks to answer one of those basic questions, specifically: "Are the issues that people say are important for the nation, important to them personally?"

At almost the same time McCombs and Shaw (1972) published their research on the 1968 presidential campaign and first coined the term "agenda-setting", Funkhouser published work exploring how the mass media is related to pubic opinion (Funkhouser, 1973a, 1973b). Funkhouser's work linked national data from Gallup Polls which asked, "What is the most important problem facing America[1]," to articles in *Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News.* While Funkhouser's work, like that of McCombs and Shaw, also showed a strong relationship between media content and salience of news issues, Funkhouser was more cautious in his interpretation of the results. Funkhouser raised concerns about the measurement of public opinion, or the public agenda, that are still of issue today. One concern was, and still is, whether or not current measures of the public agenda are really what the public thinks is important or merely a reflection of media coverage.

Quick answers often given to telephone opinion polls contribute to concerns about how a lack of thoughtful engagement, a lack of in-depth processing, and/or a lack of comparisons between a wide variety of alternatives may limit the range of issues suggested as the most important problem facing the nation. Moreover, quick answers and insufficient cognitive mental processing

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increase the likelihood that what is measured is not a deep seated attitude, belief, or opinion. In other words, responses to "most important problem facing the nation" (MIP) survey questions may be honest answers, but may not be what people truly think are important issues. To set an agenda that will result in changes in policy and beyond, it is important to know how much people personally care about the issues. Will they change their vote for a candidate? Will they make phone calls or write letters? Will they make sacrifices to see that an issue is resolved? If issue salience is akin to importance, and agenda setting is thus the transfer of issue importance, then people should report that the issues the media cover are not only important to the nation, but also personally important.

The present study examines personal versus national importance of several issue categories widely covered by the media. In other words, the study asks for answers to the questions, "how important is this issue for the nation," and "how important is this issue to you personally" for a series of issue categories that have often been of media and public interest. For both national and personal importance, ranked lists of issue categories were constructed by examining ratings of issue importance. These ranked lists will be compared to a ranked list of issues that have received national media coverage. As public opinion and knowledge in general are formed through both mediated and interpersonal interaction, group discussions are used to facilitate information and opinion sharing in existing and newly formed groups prior to obtaining ratings of issue category importance.

Chapter 1 of this document deals with agenda-setting, concentrating on the media agenda—public agenda relationship. Definitions of concepts are provided and problems with the agenda-setting model are discussed. Chapter 2 concerns the social origins of knowledge and public opinion and the effects of group discussion. Chapter 3 brings the first two chapters together by suggesting hypotheses and research questions for investigation. The method is examined in Chapter 4, followed by the presentation of results in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the results with reference to the hypotheses and research questions examined. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings and suggests avenues for future research. Following the references, there are several appendices that expand upon the information presented in Chapter 4. Included in the appendices are the survey instrument, the discussion guide for the group discussions, and the coding protocol for content analysis of media broadcasts. After the appendices, tables and figures referred to in the document can be found.

Chapter 1

AGENDA-SETTING

The heart of agenda-setting is the transfer of salience. As typically construed, agenda-setting is the mass media telling people what to think *about*, which is not to be confused with the similar, yet more provocative idea that the media tells people what to think. This "telling people what to think about" is obtained through the transfer of "salience" as opposed to the transfer of affect or attitude. *Salience* is the importance or relevance of an object; how prominent that object is in comparison to other issues. The salience of an issue, meaning the importance of some idea, belief, practice, or proposition that is in contention, is at the heart of agenda-setting research.

Agenda-setting studies originate with the work of McCombs and Shaw (1972) who examined the rank-order correlation between news and editorial comment in the media and interview data from undecided voters. The issues that voters reported as important were strongly correlated with the amount of news coverage granted to issues by the media. This finding not only supported the belief of many researchers that media did indeed have a strong effect on audiences, at a time when media effects on were considered to be limited at best (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Rogers, Dearing, & Bregman, 1993), but also heralded the beginning of a new branch of media effect research, that of agenda-setting.

Agenda-setting is perhaps best thought of as a model or theory of media effects which has two levels, that of issues and that of attributes. The first level of agenda-setting deals with public issues (e.g. the economy, crime, etc.) and the transfer of issue salience. Within the context of this study, *issues* are considered to be social events or problems that have received media coverage (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), and an *agenda* is considered to be "a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point in time" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; pg. 2). *Issue categories* are broad content areas that more specific issues can be grouped into; for example, cancer, health maintenance organizations, and vaccinations may all be grouped under the issue category of health.

Any given social problem may result in a series of events or objects that, with media coverage, may be considered a public issue. For example, the problem of unemployment may generate protests, conferences, and welfare payments. These objects or events may be grouped into abstract issue categories such as the economy or poverty. As only so many issues can be considered important at one time, agenda-setting is considered to be a zero-sum game where attention paid to one issue is attention taken away from another (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, Wanta & Wu, 1992; Zhu, 1992). Issue proponents, those who advocate that their issue is important, must always be in competition with proponents of other issues in order to get their ideas on the agenda.

The second level of agenda-setting deals with the attributes of issues (e.g. strength/weakness, ideological stance, feasibility, etc.) and the transfer of attribute salience. An *attribute*, as currently used, may be either a manifest or

latent aspect of an issue (see McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997 for an overview of attributes and the second-level of agenda-setting research). For example, a story about cancer may have manifest attributes relating to hospitals and the expense of treatment, and latent or sub-manifest attributes relating to sympathy or victimization. Research into the number of possible attributes a given issue may possess has not been conducted, but it is fairly safe to say that at any given point in time only a few attributes are salient. Moreover, it is likely that only a few of the many attributes portrayed by the media are stored in memory for later recall.

The agenda-setting *process* is how important issues and or attributes in the media become important for members of the public and then important for policy makers (see Figure 1, Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The agenda-setting process indicates that if issue proponents can achieve a certain level of relative importance for their issue on any one of the agendas, their issue is more likely to become important on other agendas as well.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Considerable empirical support for the first level of agenda-setting, meaning the transfer of issue salience, has been found, especially for the media agenda—public agenda relationship. Wanta and Ghanem, for example, found an average correlation of r_s = +.53 between the two agendas in a meta-analytic

study (Wanta & Ghanem, not yet published, as communicated by M. McCombs, September 7, 2000) . Support for the media agenda—public agenda relationship has predominantly relied on telephone survey research conducted with members of the public. The second level of agenda-setting research, meaning the transfer of attribute salience, has not yet gathered as much empirical support as the first level, largely due to the relative newness of this line of research, but what support it does have has also been gathered through the use of surveys. Currently, research on both levels of agenda-setting have focused in on issues, issue categories, and or attributes of those issues, important to the either the nation or a given local area. Research has not addressed the question of whether or not those issues that people say are important for the nation are also important to them personally.

At this point, two concerns about the components of agenda setting are important to mention. These concerns are beyond the scope of this research, but should be considered in evaluating this research and planning future research. First, it is an assumption of this and many other agenda-setting studies that important issues are salient issues and vice versa. Agenda-setting research almost universally treats salience as synonymous with importance, or rather that all salient issues must also be important. The definition of salience provided earlier reflects the equivalence between the two terms as typically found in the agenda-setting literature. It is noted here, however, that salience may not necessarily be the same as importance (Edelstein, 1993). A salient issue may be the most prominent issue, but another issue may, when called to mind, may be

considered more important. For example, almost anyone would say that child abuse is a more important issue than gasoline prices, but when not asked to compare problems, may report that gasoline prices are the most important problem facing the nation because they do not think about child abuse but have recently paid a substantial amount of money to fill up their gas tank. The distinction noted here is between the prominence, and thus easier recall, of an issue (salience), as opposed to the consequence, significance, or great meaning of an issue (importance). If salience and importance are equivalent, research should find that the relationship between ratings of importance and media coverage should parallel the relationship between prominent, thought about issues and media coverage. The distinction between the two terms is not truly examined in this study; only ratings of importance are used. Future research should, as discussed later, examine what if any practical differences exist between salience and importance.

A second concern involves the nature and measurement of the public agenda. This study focuses on the relationship between a hierarchy of issue categories, an aggregate measure created from individual surveys, and media coverage of those issue categories. The importance hierarchies, meaning the public agenda(s), are similar in nature to the most common conception of public opinion, meaning an aggregation of individual opinions on an issue. This reductionist idea of public opinion has been criticized by researchers (see Blumer, 1948 or Lemert, 1981 for a good example) as not reflecting the true nature of the beast. One criticism is, for example, that the reductionist model

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does not take into account that certain individuals clearly have more power to influence decision-makers perceptions of public opinion. As Blumer put it, "public opinion does not occur through an interaction of disparate individuals who share equally in the process" (1948, p. 544). Thus, the public agenda, as an aggregate of individual survey responses, may not adequately fit what some scholars consider to be the true nature of public opinion. As a full discussion of public opinion and what relationship it might have to a public agenda is beyond the scope of this research, the question of what the best way to measure either a public opinion or public agenda is only noted here.

Despite concerns over common facets of agenda-setting research, the field has strong following which has led to numerous links to other streams of research. Agenda-setting has been linked to priming, framing, cultivation, and a wide variety of social psychological, journalistic, and political concepts (see McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver, 1997 for examples). The link between national and personal importance examined in this study is an effort to both expand upon and confirm the agenda-setting hypothesis.

Chapter 2

OPINION FORMATION AND CHANGE

While researchers may debate specific nature versus nurture effects in child rearing, there has been very little, if any, doubt that social factors affect one's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. Since Asch's classic experiments in the early 1950s, there has been considerable experimental data to support the idea that group interactions affect how we respond to stimuli. The work of Deutsch and Gerard (1955) has provided grounds to divide group influence into normative and informational influences, while the work of Moscovici and others (Moscovici, Lage, & Naffrechoux, 1969; Moscovici & Faucheux, 1972) has illuminated how minorities can affect change in a majority. Group interaction that results in the polarization of attitudes and judgments, increased risk taking, or other outcome, has been examined by a large number of researchers (see Myers & Lamm, 1976 for a review). Moreover, several classic theories of social psychology, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980) and Social Cognitive Theory (a.k.a. Social Learning Theory) (Bandura, 1977, 1986), and newer theories, such as the Social Influence Model (Tanford & Penrod, 1984) and Dynamic Social Impact Theory (Latané, 1996), specifically include social influence components. Agenda-setting, however, does not typically examine the social context of the media agenda—public agenda relationship.

When Funkhouser first used Gallup Poll data in his 1973 study, he cautioned that perhaps the only way someone could estimate what was the most important problem facing the country was through media coverage. In other words, someone's experiences with national level problems may require media input to know that the problem is national in scope and not an individual or local occurrence. Even in the Internet age, the mass media lends credence and contribute to the belief that problems faced by ourselves or persons we know, even if across the country from us, are national in scope and not just similar individual-level problems. As such, measurement of the public agenda through the aggregation of responses to Gallup Poll-type MIP questions may only be the public regurgitating issues covered by the news media, and may not reflect what he or she truly thinks is an important problem. The idea that responses to MIP questions may only be the public reciting news issues is supported by findings which show that responses to questions addressing important problems change with the exact wording of the question (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Funkhouser, 1972a, 1973b; Rogers, Dearing, & Bregman, 1993). In other words, an issue's salience or importance may have mass media attention as its engine, not someone's own priorities and concerns.

While Dearing and Rogers (1996) recognize feedback and direct interactions between the media and policy agendas, they merely indicate that personal experiences, interpersonal communication, and real-world indicators of issues have an affect on the agenda-setting process. It is possible that interpersonal interactions do not only affect the agenda-setting process, but may

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even be the primary mechanism by which the agenda-setting effect occurs. For example, Shaw (1977) reported that for six of seven issues investigated, interpersonal discussion had a greater impact than newspaper coverage of the same issues; and Hong and Shemer (1976 as cited in Atwater, Salwen, & Anderson, 1985) found that interpersonal contacts had a greater impact on respondents' perceptions of personal importance than the media agenda. Similarly, Wanta and Wu (1992) found that the frequency of discussion was the strongest predictor of issue salience, not media coverage; and Weaver, Zhu, and Willnat (1992) found that interpersonal communication, and not the media, was the greatest predictor of perceptions of drug abuse.

Social interaction may play a key role in opinion formation. Hong and Shemer (1976, as cited in Wanta & Wu, 1992), propose that interpersonal communication may be an intervening variable that may facilitate or reduce the perceived importance of an issue and or issue category. This perspective is consistent with the mediating role Ebring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) advocate by saying that interpersonal communication is essential to help people make sense of the news, and is also consistent with the "two-step" flow of communication, wherein the media influences opinion leaders and opinion leaders, in turn, influence the mass public (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). It is likely that when someone with an average level of knowledge about the nation at large is asked what they think is the most important problem facing the nation, they rely on the media as a heuristic cue. When these same people, however, are asked the same question in a more social context, or are given time to seek the

advice of others, they may engage in more central processing and carefully consider what they think is important. Interpersonal interaction mediating the agenda-setting effect may explain, in part, the time lag between media coverage and changes in public opinion found by Zucker (1978), Stone and McCombs (1981), and Eyal, Winter, and DeGeorge (1981, and as cited in Dearing & Rogers 1996). For this study, interpersonal interaction is taken to be the same as interpersonal communication, and includes discussion of issue categories between three or more people.

Personal experience, including interpersonal communication, with any problem or issue covered by the media increases the salience of that issue, and thus the issue category, for individuals and groups. Personal experience may also lead someone to rate a problem as important without media coverage or despite media emphasis on other problems (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Recently, McCombs (1999) has begun looking at personal involvement with issues on the public agenda, but his measures do not explicitly include communication processes. As it is often impossible to know whether or not subjects have discussed an issue, especially if the issue was neither salient nor important, this study incorporates group discussions into its examination of agenda-setting. Group discussion should facilitate the sharing of information and attitudes about important issues in each issue category and serve to inform subjects about the issues while assuring that each issue category has been, at least once, been addressed in an interpersonal social context. Group discussion thus allows comparisons between what may be a "media only" condition with a "media plus

interpersonal communication" condition. Of course it is not reasonable to expect that all of the issues examined have not been discussed elsewhere, but it is safe to say that the issues may have been less discussed. Thus, the conditions may be "media plus non-structured discussion" and "media plus structured discussion." Those issues discussed should all be more salient after a discussion, thus better allowing individuals to make judgments of importance between several salient issue categories.

Any significant discussion of issues prior to this research was likely done within each person's existing social network. *Extant communication networks or extant groups*, are groups of people who regularly engage in interpersonal interaction with each other in settings outside of, and prior to, the research being conducted. These people should have interacted with each other in the past and anticipate future interaction with each other. By examining the public agenda in an extant communication network, by using people who often talk to each other, it may be possible to better capture the effects of any prior discussion as well as parallel any social dynamics that might occur outside of the research setting. The inclusion of *novel networks*, networks or groups composed of individuals who have not interacted with each other prior to the research setting, should assist in the teasing out of any differences between pre-existing opinions and those formed through group discussion. Furthermore, individuals using the same survey instrument without any discussion will allow for an examination of group effects in general. Individuals taking the same survey, but without participating in a discussion, should most closely parallel traditional agenda-setting research

wherein subjects are given a questionnaire over the phone. Discussion in both types of groups, extant and novel, will allow normative social influences and informational social influences to be examined in relation to the public agenda-media agenda relationship.

Chapter 3

HYPOTHESES AND QUESTIONS

In order to examine whether or not issues important to the nation are also personally important, this study consists of subjects rating a series of issue categories for both national importance and personal importance. In other words, the study asks the research participants for answers to the questions, "how important is this issue for the nation", and "how important is it to you personally?" Answers to these questions, meaning ratings of importance for a list of issue categories, will be used to construct national and personal public agendas. Group discussions of extant and novel groups just prior to the implementation of surveys will serve to assure that subjects have not only been exposed to the issue categories, but also to any normative pressures that may be generated while discussing issues in those categories. This interaction will not only simulate possible real life discussions and information sharing about a variety of issues, but also prime each issue category for salience, thus allowing for a better comparison of salient issue categories in terms of importance.

As the primary focus of any agenda-setting study is whether or not there is a relationship between the various agendas, there should be, for this study, a positive relationship between the media agenda and subsequent measures of the public agenda. The actual effect of group discussion, however, cannot be determined in advance, but it is likely that personal importance will not be exactly the same as national importance. National importance is likely to be cued by the

mass media and ideas of civic duty and altruism (McCombs, 1999). Personal importance, on the other hand, may be augmented by the media, but is less likely to be the result of it. Personal experience and interpersonal communication are more likely to affect personal importance and a personal agenda than the media. If an agenda is a zero-sum game wherein only a limited number of issues may be considered important at one time, issues of personal importance are likely to lose importance as greater amounts of media coverage addresses issues that are not personally important. When considering the basic nature of national and personal agendas and how they are likely to be related to the mass media, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H1: The media agenda will be positively related to the national agenda.

H1a: The media agenda will be positively related to the control group national agenda.

H1b: The media agenda will be positively related to the novel group national agenda.

H1c: The media agenda will be positively related to the extant group national agenda.

H2: The media agenda will be less strongly correlated with the personal public agenda than the national public agenda.

H2a: The media agenda will be less strongly correlated with the control group personal agenda than the control group national agenda.

H2b: The media agenda will be less strongly correlated with the novel group personal agenda than the control group national agenda.

H2c: The media agenda will be less strongly correlated with the extant group personal agenda than the control group national agenda.

Group discussion facilitates information sharing and may exert normative pressure to conform to or even exceed other's statements regarding the importance of an issue. Because of this, opinion polarization is likely to result from the group discussions, and polarization, together with information sharing and normative pressure, is likely to result in more uniform ratings of importance. It is unclear, however, if and how extant groups will differ from novel groups. Extant groups may have more normative pressure since the members have expectations that they will have to interact with each other after the study is completed. These expectations are likely increase the homogeneity of the responses and lead to less variance. However, it is important to note that an extant group may not be cohesive and there may even be predispositions amongst the members to disagree with each other. If these conditions exist, there would be less homogeneity and more variance in the group's agenda. As no clear prediction can be made, it is reasonable to ask the following research question:

R1: How does the variability in the public agenda from the extant groups compare to that from novel groups and the control condition?

In addition to examining the relationship of the various public agendas with the media agenda, it is important to examine the relationship between those agendas. Of special importance is the relationship between the national agendas and personal agendas for the control and discussion groups. If there is a significant relationship between the two agendas, the idea that issues of national importance are also of personal importance will be supported. The following questions are put forward:

R2: Is there a significant relationship between the personal and national public agendas?

R2a: Is there a significant relationship between the control group national agenda and personal agenda?

R2b: Is there a significant relationship between the novel group national agenda and personal agenda?

R2c: Is there a significant relationship between the extant group national agenda and personal agenda?

A significant link between the national and personal agendas reduces the likelihood that people answering MIP questions merely repeat what the news tells them is important. Moreover, a strong, positive correlation between the national agenda and personal agenda indicates, if both are related to the media agenda, that the media has a strong effect on the public's perceptions of importance at both the societal or national level of cognition and the individual or personal level of cognition. As personal importance is a far better predictor of individual behaviors, a link between the media and individual behavior is of key interest to

most communication researchers. A positive relationship between the two

agendas provides an initial answer to the question of whether or not people

personally care about the "most important problem facing the nation" and begins

to put Funkhouser's concerns to rest.

Chapter 4

METHOD

The hypotheses and research questions were examined through a slight variation in traditional agenda-setting research. The media agenda was established though content analysis of abstracted national news broadcasts, and the public agenda was determined though ratings of importance for a set of issue categories. These ratings of importance, both national importance and personal importance, were used to create two public agendas, a national agenda and a personal agenda.

The Media Agenda

The current body of agenda-setting literature does not indicate any special time frame for assessing media coverage. However, almost all agenda-setting scholars would agree there is a time lag between the media's broadcast and or publication of news and the appearance of an agenda-setting effect in the public, thus necessitating some form of time component in the research. Some researchers have analyzed as little as two weeks (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, in press) others have used years (Funkhouser, 1973a, 1973b). In order to make sure that enough time passed by for an effect to be found, a 14 week time period, beginning the first full week of July 2000 and ending on October 3, 2000 just before the initiation of public agenda sampling, was chosen as the time frame for media content analysis. This three month, approximately, time frame has been used by other researchers (e.g. Adler, 1993 as cited in Dearing

&Rogers, 1996) and should allow for enough time to find an agenda setting effect. As randomly selecting 2 days for each month, for a total of 24 days, was found to be the most efficient method of sampling a year's worth of a given station's news coverage (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998), it seemed reasonable that each of the four networks major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN) should be sampled 5.5 times during the 14 week media content analysis time frame, for a total of 22 broadcasts. As the variance between broadcasts would likely increase with a smaller time frame, the sample size was increased to 48 broadcasts in all.

Sampling for the media content analysis was done in stages. First, 48 dates were selected at random from the total 14-week period (see Appendix A). Next, news broadcasts were randomly selected from a list of possible dates in the content analysis time frame using SPSS software. The dates were randomly assigned one of the four networks via random assignment to obtain 48 different news broadcasts for analysis: 15 for NBC (31%), 12 for ABC (25%), 11 for CBS (23%), and 10 for CNN (21%). These numbers reflect a change of one CNN broadcast to an ABC broadcast due to CNN being preempted for coverage of one of the 2000 U.S. presidential debates. The selected broadcasts were downloaded in abstracted form from the Vanderbilt University news archive (http://www.tvnews.vanderbilt.edu).

In regard to the content analysis protocol, early coding schemes with large numbers of categories made achieving inter-coder reliability extremely difficult, so the first set of coded data was discarded and a condensed list of issue categories created. The final coding protocol included the twelve issue

categories used in the survey (meaning the environment, economy, crime/violence, government spending, foreign policy, natural disasters, education, accidents/safety, entertainment, politics, military preparedness, and health) and two additional categories, international other and domestic other (see Appendix E). These categories were chosen because they allowed easy comparison with the survey data and because they addressed the manifest content of the news stories. Coding schemes that might necessitate in-depth analysis of non-manifest or ancillary issues or attributes were avoided. For example, morals and ethics are rarely dealt with in an overt fashion by the news media, but are often an underlying subtext or, in agenda-setting terms, an attribute of news stories. Because attributes are difficult to determine from abstracted news, especially those where the content is limited to a few words or sentences and no images, issue codes that did not seem likely to address manifest content were avoided.

Prior to coding the media content selected, two training sessions, approximately 2 hours each, were held at separate times for the undergraduate research assistants who coded the news broadcasts. The unit of analysis for the media content analysis was the news segments or news stories that composed the news broadcasts. To analyze the news broadcasts, each news story was recorded on a recording sheet (see Appendix F) and coded by two independent coders using the fourteen codes in the coding protocol. Only one code was allowed per story. Commercials during the news broadcasts were ignored. From the 48 news broadcasts sampled, a total of 506 news stories were analyzed.

Intercoder reliability for the entire set of news stories was Cohen's Kappa = 0.927.

After establishing reliability, frequencies for each issue code were calculated and a simple summed hierarchy of issue categories was calculated. The most frequently used code, the issue category with the most number of news stories, was ranked as number 1, the second most frequent code was ranked 2, and so forth, through 12. The issues categories, from highest to lowest rank were: politics, economy, crime/violence, natural disasters, accidents/safety, entertainment, health, foreign policy, environment, military, and education. The category issue of government spending was added last because it was rated for importance in the survey, but was not the primary issue of any news story.

<u>The Public Agenda</u>

Given the need to find a large number of extant groups, existing class divisions ($\underline{n}$=30) within a large introductory communication class were sampled. The weekly recitation section for the class entails students interacting with each other and giving speeches in front of each other. By the time sampling had begun, the students should have given several impromptu speeches and one formal graded speech in front of their individual sections. Students signed up to participate in the research based on what class division they were in. All groups, whether extant or novel, had a minimum of three people and a maximum of eight people. Novel discussion groups were made up of students from different existing sections, extant groups were composed of students who were all from the same division. No more than two students from the same existing division

were allowed per novel group with a minimum group size of four. In other words, if there were three students from different class divisions, or the same class division, the group was allowed. If there were two people from the same class section, but only one person from another division, the group was not allowed.

In total, 30 existing groups were sampled and 33 novel groups were formed and sampled. All data from subjects was collected in the month of October, just prior to the November presidential elections. Group size was, on average, slightly larger for the novel groups (mean sizes 3.93 and 4.73 respectively). Each of these discussion groups participated in a discussion facilitated by the researcher or a trained assistant. All of the discussions used the same discussion protocol (see Appendix B). Following the discussion, participants completed a short survey which covered the twelve media agenda topics (politics, economy, crime/violence, natural disasters, accidents/safety, entertainment, health, foreign policy, environment, military, education, and government spending), questions about media exposure, questions to assess opinion leadership[3], demographic questions, and questions designed to evaluate how subjects felt about the discussion and research (Appendix C is the survey taken by the group participants). Prior to participating in the research, subjects signed a consent form (Appendix D) and after completing the survey, subjects signed a form so they could obtain a slip for class research participation.

The control group, $\underline{n}=48$, was created by randomly selecting out people who arrived to participate in a group discussion. Included in this control group were about 10 individuals who arrived too late to participate in a group discussion

(Note, however, that those arriving more than 15 minutes late were not allowed to take the survey, but were instead told they could sign-up for a different research session if one was available). Control group members did not participate in a discussion, but instead took a survey identical in content to the post-discussion survey save that it did not include measures designed to evaluate the discussion. Control group members received the same amount of class credit as those who participated in a discussion.

In total, 324 subjects completed the study. One participant, however, seemed to have misunderstood the directions and not only rated only 10 issue categories for national importance, but also failed to rate any of the categories for personal importance. This individual was removed from all analyses. Eighteen individuals who reported media consumption or news discussions greater than three standard deviations above the mean were reassigned with the cut off value, the value three standard deviations above the mean, for those variables. The typical research participant was an 18 to 20 year old, white, female underclassman (mean age = 19.55; see Table 1 for more information about the participants' characteristics).

Insert Table 1 about here

Public agendas were constructed from the data from the two discussion groups and the control group. Ratings of importance for each issue category

were averaged within each group and then the group averages were summed within each group-type to create national and personal hierarchies for the control, novel, and extant group types. To create each agenda, the issue category with the highest ratings of importance was ranked first, the second most important issue ranked second, and so on. As the control group was not divided into discussion groups, each individual's survey was added together and a mean rating of importance was calculated for each issue category. The average ratings of importance were used to create yet two more national and personal agendas. These control group public agendas were also ranked with the most important issue category as number one, the second most important as number two, and so on. In the one case of a tie, average ranks were assigned for the two tied values. Two issue categories in the extant national agenda were tied for 3rd place. They were both assigned a rank of 3.5, and the next lowest ranked issue category was ranked 5th.

Chapter 5

RESULTS

After agendas were constructed from the data, Spearman's rank order correlation was calculated between the media agenda and the various national and public agendas. As can be seen in Table 2, none of the public agendas are significantly related to the media agenda. Further analysis involved deleting two issue categories, government spending and education from the agendas to determine if the results would improve. The deletion government spending can be justified because there were no media stories explicitly dealing with government spending. The deletion of education can be justified because the study subjects were college students, and thus there is a much greater chance that they are biased toward education as an important category. Elimination of government spending and education from the agendas, however, failed to produce significant rank order correlations, but did produce positive correlations for each agenda, the highest being the correlation with the control group's personal agenda (r_s =0.33, p=0.1779). Without eliminating specific issues from the media agenda, a questionable procedure discussed in the following chapter, each of the first set of hypotheses, H1a though H1c, which posit the media will be positively related to the national agenda in each of the three groupings, cannot be supported by the data. There is no significant relationship between the 12 issue categories composing media agenda and either a national or personal public agenda constructed from the same categories.

_____

Insert Table 2 about here

_____

Other analyses examined whether media exposure was related to the lack of relationship between the media and public agendas. Separate agendas were computed for groups who were below the 50th percentile for media exposure and above the 50th percentile for media exposure. All rank order correlations with the media, whether national or personal, extant, novel, or control were non-significant (the highest correlation was r_s = 0.09, ns, for the novel grouping personal agenda). Next, because NBC was the most viewed national and local network (see Table 5, pg 33) , an NBC only agenda was created and compared to the various national and personal public agendas. The correlations obtained were similar to those obtained from the full media agenda, mostly small, non-significant negative correlations. Deleting both government spending and education from the NBC agenda (neither had any news stories and were both ranked 11.5) obtained positive but non-significant correlations (the highest being r_s = 0.31, ns, between the novel grouping national agenda and the reduced NBC agenda).

Examination of the variance within each hierarchy allows for an answer to research question one, which asks how the variability in the agendas from the extant groups compares to the variability in the agendas from the novel groups and the control condition. A one-way analysis of variance was calculated for

both the national and personal public agendas. As can be seen in Table 3, the differences between the three groupings are non-significant (F = 0.10, ns, and F = 0.98, ns respectively). Next, examination of the variance between the national and personal agendas within each type of grouping reveals non-significance (F = 1.57, F = 1.57, and F = 1.79, for the control, novel, and extant groupings, all ns). Averaging the ranks of each issue category across the three groupings created an average national agenda. This was compared to the average rankings for a similarly constructed personal agenda through a one-way ANOVA. The average ratings of personal importance were significantly lower than the ratings of national importance (F = 5.89, p = 0.02). The personal public agendas produced from the discussion groups do not have less variability than the control group agendas. The aggregate variance between the two types of public agendas non-significant (F = 1.63, ns), but the pattern of differences between each agenda indicates that the three personal agendas have a little more variability than the national agendas.

Insert Table 3 about here

To further examine research question one, the variance for each small group discussion was calculated for the environment issue. The average variance was then calculated for both the novel groups and extant groups. These average variances were compared to an average environment issue variance obtained by taking the mean of 33 groups of n=3 created via random

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selection from the total pool of participant data. The variance in the novel and extant groups was not significantly different from the variance obtained from the randomly selected groups (F = 1.20, ns).

The relationship between national importance and personal importance, meaning the national agenda-personal agenda relationship, was the heart of research question number two. Research question two asks, for each type of grouping, is there a significant relationship between the national and personal public agendas. This question was examined by calculating Spearman's rank order correlation between the two agendas for each type of grouping. As can be seen in Table 4, the correlations for the novel and extant groups are significant above the 0.05 level for both directional and non-directional tests, thus there is a clear "yes" for research questions R2b and R2c. The control group correlation is significant with a one-tailed test, which is appropriate when expecting a positive correlation between the two agendas, thus R2a may also be answered with a "yes." Next an average correlation was computed. This correlation (r_s = 0.6963, p = 0.0059) indicates that, overall, there is a substantive and significant correlation between ratings of personal importance and ratings of national importance for a variety issue categories.

Insert Table 4 about here

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

The agenda-setting model of media effects is not supported by the data collected in this study. There are several possible reasons why the media agenda-public agenda correlations are not significant, including: the study population of students being substantially different from typical agenda-setting research participants; ranks of importance not relating to the media in the same manner as aggregated responses to open-ended MIP questions; and simply that the media agenda is not properly constructed or not truly reflective of the news that people perceive.

Support for this last reason, a flawed operationalization of the media agenda, can be found by examining Gallup Poll data from just before and just after the media sampling frame. The Gallup Organization (http://www.gallup.com) asked respondents the MIP question in June, 2000 the week prior to the beginning of the media sampling frame and then again in October, 2000 during the same week that data collection started, 3 days after the end of the of the media sampling frame. At both times, the top four issues mentioned were ethics/morality, crime/violence, education, and health care. While the survey used in this research did not include an ethics issue, the other three issues were in the top five slots of every public agenda of the present study. Thus there is external support for the ratings of importance given by subjects, leading one to believe that there are problems with the media agenda

rather than the public agendas. This finding also indicates that there is likely a relationship between ranks of importance (depending of course on the categories or issues to be rated) and answers to open-ended MIP questions.

The media agenda, as constructed, may not have reflected what viewers might have watched or perceived. As can be seen in Table 5, the research participants viewed more local television than national television. Moreover, the participants reported reading newspapers 3.35 times a week, with more than 60% of them reading the local college newspaper[4], and news magazines on average 1.4 times a week, with higher numbers for the two discussion groups. The media agenda used in this study would have addressed some of that content, but have missed a considerable amount as well. The abstracts obtained from Vanderbilt University's archive do not give complete information about what a news story involves. Thus a story about a political candidate speaking about health care reform at a labor rally in Philadelphia may have only had enough information to code it as politics. Additionally, as the media agenda used in this study was constructed from national news broadcasts, any controversial local issue would be under represented. For example, many local issues, such as the widespread movement to institute public school voucher programs, may have received a lot of local coverage, but, because the actual initiative was state or local specific, the issue may have received comparatively little national coverage.

Insert Table 5 about here

The media agenda, as constructed in this study, does not take possible priming effects into account. Priming is the effects of prior context on the interpretation and retrieval of information (Fisk & Taylor, 1991 as cited in Willnat, 1997). Or, put another way, priming is the activation of schemas (Ghanem, 1997) and those schemas, in turn, effect how one evaluates information, objects, and events. Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) found that when they altered news broadcasts to artificially inflate the number of news stories relating to pollution, inflation, and defense, they increased not only the perceived importance of those issues, but also increased the salience of those issues in evaluating the president's job performance. In this study, individual news stories may have primed more than one issue category, for example, a story overtly about politics may have also primed education, the economy, and military preparedness issues categories. Any issue category that is not the primary manifest issue would be underrepresented in estimates of news coverage. As the content analysis protocol used in this study allowed only one issue code per news story, the problem of under representation may be one reason for a non-significant relationship between the media and public agendas in this study.

Priming may have occurred not only when the respondents were watching or reading the news, but when exposed to any media. This is problematic when considering the possible history effects due to the month-long sampling time frame and period of history when the study was conducted. It is well known that political advertisements increase in the month of October, especially in a presidential election year. This study was conducted in October in a "swing"

state with a large number of electoral votes, during an election year that set records for the amount of money spent on political campaigning. Although not examined, the number of political advertisements the research participants were exposed is unlikely to have had no effect. Some issues such as education and health care that were the focus of many political advertisements undoubtedly primed people to rate those issues as more important.

Another reason for a poor media agenda-public agenda relationship was that several issues that received a lot of media attention may have had little, if any, actual relevance to subjects living in the study area. Media coverage of these issues may have resulted a higher rank on the media agenda, but not have influenced issue salience or importance amongst the study population. The media sampling frame included 11 stories about Ford Explorers/Firestone tires, 8 stories about the Concorde plane crash (both in the accidents/safety issue category), and 21 stories about wildfires in the western United States (natural disasters category). Each of these stories may have reduced the media agenda-public agenda relationship by inflating the rank of their issue category on the media agenda.

In addition to the media's attention, it is possible the attention given to each issue category in the discussions may have played a role in making some issues more salient than others. Natural disasters and accident/safety were not explicitly discussed in the group discussions (i.e. not in the protocol). However, the bottom 5 categories for national importance were the same across the three groupings (environment, foreign policy, accidents/safety, natural disasters, and

entertainment) and the bottom 4 categories for personal importance were the same (foreign policy, natural disasters, military preparedness, and entertainment). As such, it appear that the discussions, and whether or not a given issue category was explicitly discussed, may not have made a great impact on the relative importance of some topics.

Measures designed to evaluate the discussions held revealed that the subjects generally liked the discussions and felt that could voice their opinions. As the subjects were actively encouraged to give their opinions and were also assured that there were no right or wrong answers, this finding is useful. Because no dissatisfaction was detected, one can assume that survey responses were probably honest and straight forward, but a social desirability bias cannot be completely ruled out. As no specific questions about either group cohesion, the amount of pressure subjects felt to conform with other group members, or checks on social desirability were asked, it is not possible to tell how biased or influenced respondents' answers were. Normative pressure, although not measured, is likely to have played some sort of roll, perhaps a non-significant roll, in the group discussions. Unfortunately the lack of measurement means that any conclusions about the effects of normative pressure, be they on discussion evaluations or group variance, must be mostly speculative in nature.

It is somewhat surprising that the data from the group discussions did not have less variance than the data from the control group. Although no set prediction could be made between the extant and novel groups, the literature on group decision making and group polarization suggests that the novel group

variance should be less than that of the control group. It may be that the short nature of the discussion, one-half hour to 45 minutes for 12 issues, was not sufficient to induce group polarization. Also, the individual and anonymous nature of the surveys, each person rather than each group rated the importance of the issues, may have contributed to less polarization. Research has shown that judgments that are open to others are more affected by normative pressure than those that are private or confidential in nature (see Myers & Lamm, 1976).

The significant relationship between the national and personal public agendas addresses one of the basic concerns underlying agenda-setting, namely do people personally care about "the most important problem facing the nation" or are they merely responding to media cues. Ray Funkhouser's concerns, while not being completely put to rest, are addressed and allayed. People report that issues they think are important for the nation are also personally important. If the issues are personally important, the likelihood that people are merely regurgitating media information and not providing issues that they truly feel are important is lessened. The strong correlation between the two agendas indicates that people are personally concerned about issues of importance to the nation, yet it is not clear how much ratings of personal importance have to do with media attention. It is also not clear whether this link between the national agendas and personal agendas is because of feelings of civic duty and emotional involvement, as was found by McCombs' (1999) study of national issues in Texas, or what role interpersonal communication, as opposed to the mass media, might have played.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to link media coverage to ratings of national and personal importance. Two sets of groups, extant and novel ($\underline{n}$ = 30 and $\underline{n}$ = 33 respectively), discussed a series of issues and then took a short survey. Individuals who made up the control condition ($\underline{n}$ = 48) completed an almost identical survey, but did not discuss the issues prior to taking the survey. The results of the survey were used to create ranked lists or hierarchies of importance called the national and personal public agendas. These ranked lists, these agendas, were compared, by type of group and type of agenda, to a media agenda created from abstracts of evening news broadcasts.

While the data obtained do not support a media agenda relationship with ratings of either national and personal importance, further analysis with a more expansive media agenda may reveal a significant relationship. Of the possible reasons why the data failed to perform as expected, problems with the media agenda seem the most justifiable. External data from Gallup Polls which ask the MIP question provide support for the national and public agendas obtained. Alternative media agendas should be investigated, including ones that incorporate the Internet. A 1997 poll by Roper found that 69% of adults usually get their news from television, and only 2% of the general public mentioned the Internet as a source of news or product information. Of those households with Internet access, but television was still their top source of information (59%)

(http://www.roper.com). These numbers are likely to have changed in the past few years, and it would not be surprising to find that students, the population used in this study, have higher rates of internet news consumption than the general public.

No differences in variance between the groups may be indicative of a lack of group cohesion, but it may also mean that judgments of issue importance are durable in nature. Future research should investigate how public agendas change as a result of group discussion. It is possible that national importance, because it is more distant and less likely to be based on personal experience, will change more as a result of discussion. It is also possible, however, that personal importance, because new information important to a group may be shared, may change more as a result of discussion. Measures of group cohesion and felt pressure should better illuminate the effect discussion brings to the media agenda-public agenda relationship as well as the national agenda-personal agenda relationship. Measures of apathy or involvement may also add light to how someone may be swayed by group discussion or be willing to accept what the media indicates is important without engaging in in-depth processing to decide if they agree that an issue is important.

The significant correlation between the national and personal public agendas is important in expanding the agenda-setting model (average correlation (r_s = 0.6963, p = 0.0059). Audiences may not only adopt the attributes used by the media, but also may internalize an issue's importance as a function of media coverage. In fact, importance may be an abstract attribute of national issues. As

the media primes the public to evaluate information or objects based on salient criteria, so to may the media prime an audience to consider some issues or issue categories as personally important rather than just important for the nation. Current research (McCombs, 1999) examining personal involvement with issues given in response to MIP questions may be extended to investigate why people assign high levels of either national or personal importance to some issues but not to others, and why some issues generate more interpersonal communication than others. Future research should confirm the findings here, and, using a different approach to construct the media agenda, seek to empirically establish a link between the media and the personal importance people place on issues of national importance. Future research should also investigate how important some salient issues are in comparison to other salient and non-salient issues, and whether salience (prominence) is equivalent to importance (consequence) as discussed in Chapter 2. Modifying variables such as a need for orientation, group cohesion, and self-monitoring may also provide useful information about how we process media information and assess the importance of issues.

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FOOTNOTES

1. The Gallup Organization currently phrases this question as "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?" (http://www.gallup.com).

2. Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) found that news media primed subjects to give more weight to certain issues when evaluating the president's job performance. This finding indicates that there may be a link between the frequency of issues reported by the news media and importance, but it is unclear whether or not that link is the result of cognitive processing or is an unconscious side effect. Ratings of importance necessitate the active processing of thoughts and, in effect, some form of active, conscious commitment. Thus this study seeks to examine a link between the media and cognitive evaluations resulting from active processing, not unconscious effects relating to the evaluation of issues, objects, or events not directly related to the issue category being evaluated.

3. Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the 5 opinion leadership items form a unidimensional construct; Cronbach's alpha was 0.7397.

4. The high rate of newspaper readership must, in part, be attributed to the easy accessibility afforded by a free campus newspaper distributed in most

buildings on campus. The campus newspaper publishes an issue every

weekday during the regular school year.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NEWS BROADCASTS SAMPLED

Date	Network		Date	Network
July 6, 2000	NBC		August 27, 2000	NBC
July 8, 2000	CBS		August 31, 2000	CNN
July 11, 2000	CBS		September 1, 2000	ABC
July 12, 2000	NBC		September 2, 2000	CNN
July 15, 2000	CBS		September 3, 2000	ABC
July 17, 2000	NBC		September 5, 2000	CBS
July 22, 2000	CBS		September 6, 2000	CNN
July 23, 2000	NBC		September 7, 2000	NBC
July 24, 2000	NBC		September 10, 2000	ABC
July 26, 2000	NBC		September 11, 2000	CNN
July 28, 2000	ABC		September 13, 2000	CBS
July 29, 2000	NBC		September 14, 2000	CBS
July 30, 2000	CBS		September 16, 2000	CNN
July 31, 2000	NBC		September 20, 2000	CNN
August 4, 2000	ABC		September 22, 2000	ABC
August 5, 2000	NBC		September 23, 2000	NBC
August 6, 2000	NBC		September 24, 2000	CNN
August 8, 2000	CNN		September 25, 2000	CNN
August 9, 2000	ABC		September 26, 2000	ABC
August 12, 2000	NBC		September 27, 2000	CBS
August 15, 2000	ABC		September 29, 2000	NBC
August 18, 2000	ABC		September 30, 2000	CNN
August 22, 2000	CBS		October 2, 2000	ABC
August 24, 2000	CBS		October 3, 2000	ABC

APPENDIX B

GROUP QUESTIONING ROUTE

Hi, my name is _____ , We are going to be tossing around ideas and discussing the problems facing the nation for around a half an hour, and then when we've finished, I have a very short, survey for you to fill out. Before we begin, I'd like to thank all of you for agreeing to participate in this study. All of your answers are confidential so feel free to say whatever you like.

One last thing before we begin, let me say that there are no right or wrong answers and that I would really like it if everyone here participates in the discussion. If you have any questions or if you want to say something you don't need to raise your hand, you can just jump right in and say what you want.

1. So to begin, I would like everyone to tell me their first name and how you feel things are currently going in the United States? *round-robin*

2. What do you like or dislike?

3. What issues do you think we, as a nation, need to address? *(key question)*

   a. What about crime? (drugs, prisons, etc.)

   b. What about military issues? (defense spending, foreign wars)

   c. What about economic issues? (interest rates, stock market, unemployment)

   d. What about foreign affairs? (international relations, what other countries are doing)

   e. What about health (health care, exercise, dieting, health insurance)?

   f. What about the environment and issues such as conservation and pollution?

   g. How about education?

   h. How does entertainment rate in terms of importance?

4. What would you say is the MOST important issue facing the nation?

   a. As opposed to the nation in general, what about the most important issue in the Lansing area?

   b. How important are these kinds of things to you personally?

5. What issues would you like the media to pay more attention to?

6. Now, have we missed anything in our discussion?

Well, that's about all the time we have for discussion, I want to thank you all for your cooperation and participation and remind you that I still have the short survey for you to fill out. Before we get to the survey, were there any questions about the group discussion?

APPENDIX C

SURVEY (G # ___)

Your answers are completely <u>anonymous</u>.

For each of the issues below, please indicate how important each issue is for the nation and for you personally. **Give each issue a score between 1 and 10.** (The number 1 indicates very low importance and a 10 indicates very high importance). To help you think about each issue, please consider the following questions: 1) What are the important issues facing the <u>nation</u>?

2) What are the important issues <u>in my life</u>?

Issue	National Importance	Personal Importance
1. Environment (conservation, pollution, etc.)		
2. Economy (stock market, inflation, unemployment, etc.)		
3. Crime / Violence		
4. Government Spending		
5. Foreign Policy (international relations, etc.)		
6. Natural Disasters		
7. Education		
8. Accidents / Safety		
9. Entertainment (celebrities, movies, etc.)		
10. Politics (elections, political parties, etc.)		
11. Military Preparedness (war, military spending, etc.)		
12. Health (diseases, health care, health insurance, etc)		
13. (Fill in with any issue not listed above)		
14. (Fill in with any issue not listed above)		
15. (Fill in with any issue not listed above)		

********** The next few questions ask about your use of news media. **********

5. In an average week, how many LOCAL TV news broadcasts do you watch?

_____ **per week** (please give your best estimate if you don't know)

Note some people watch news twice a day, such as at 6 and at 11. Each time is considered a separate broadcast.

6. What channel do you usually watch?

Ch 6 (CBS)   **Ch 53 (ABC)**   **Ch. 10 (NBC)**   **Ch. 47 (Fox)**

7. In an average week, how many times do you watch NATIONAL TV news?

_____ **per week**

8. What channel do you usually watch?

Ch 6 (CBS)   **Ch 53 (ABC)**   **Ch. 10 (NBC)**   **CNN Headline**

9. Do you watch any other TV news program on a regular basis?

no   **yes** (specify: _____)

10. In an average week, how often do you read the newspaper?

_____ **per week** (If only once, is that the Sunday paper?   no   yes)

11. Which newspaper do you usually read?

Detroit Free Press   **Lansing State Journal**   **State News**

Other (specify: _____).

12a. In an average month, how many times do you read a national news magazine such as Time, Newsweek, or US News & World Report?

_____ **per month**

if any - 12b. Which magazine(s) do you read? _____

13a. In an average week, how many times do you listen to a RADIO NEWS

broadcast? _____ **per week**

If any - What radio program do you listen to? _____

14. In an average week, how many times do you discuss news issues with other

people? _____ **per week**

*******Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following

statements by circling the response that you think is best.*******

15. People often ask me for my opinion about news issues.

    agree   neutral   disagree

16. In the past 6 months I have talked to a lot of people about news issues.

    agree   neutral   disagree

17. Compared to my friends, I am more likely to be asked about news issues.

    agree   neutral   disagree

18. When talking about news issues I usually do not have much to say.

    agree   neutral   disagree

19. I know more about current issues than most of my friends.

    agree   neutral   disagree

Background Questions

20. What is your age? _____

21. What is your sex : male   female

22. What is the highest grade of schooling that you have completed?

12th grade(high sch)   freshman   sophomore   junior   senior   grad

23. What is your racial background?

Caucasian/White   African-American/Black   Asian-American   Hispanic/Latino

Other (please specify) _____

24. Are you a citizen or permanent resident of the United States?   **yes   no**

25. What best describes your personal household income bracket?

less than 15,000 per year	**between 50 and 70 thousand**
between 15 and 30 thousand	**over 70 thousand dollars per year**
between 30 and 50 thousand	**would rather not say**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree to the following statements by placing a mark (X) in one of the boxes following the statement.

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
1. The moderator asked too many questions.					
2. The moderator did not let me say what I wanted to.					
3. The moderator should have stopped some people from talking too much.					
4. I felt comfortable enough to say what I wanted.					
5. The other group members made me feel nervous.					
6. The moderator made me feel nervous.					
7. The discussion location was uncomfortable					
8. I enjoyed the group discussion.					
9. I did not get to contribute as much as I wanted.					
10. I would participate in another focus group like this.					
11. The discussion time was too long.					
12. More time for discussion should be allotted.					

Please write any comments you may have about the discussion and or the research being conducted here.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

You are asked to participate in a study investigating what issues you think are important. The answers people give will be compared with past media coverage of various issues. You may participate in a group discussion about issues or problems you think are important. There are no correct or incorrect answers. We want your opinion. This discussion is being conducted as part of a graduate student research project (dissertation) required by Michigan State University. The entire research procedure should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary; you may discontinue at any time without penalty. The surveys are anonymous. We do not associate your name with the data in any way. All data is kept strictly confidential. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No monetary compensation is provided to individuals who participate in this study.

If you have questions about the study or would like to find out about the study results, please contact: Michael Burke, 456 Communication Arts Bldg., Michigan State University, 48824. Phone: 355-7569. E-mail: burkemic@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about participating in the study or about your right to confidentiality, you may also contact David E. Wright, chair of the MSU human subjects committee, at 355-2180.

We greatly appreciate your assistance in participating in this research.

Please indicate your willingness to participate by signing your name below.

_____ signature

_____ printed name

_____ date

APPENDIX E

CONTENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Introduction: This news content protocol is designed to assess what news issues are covered by the media. Examine each broadcast abstract. Assign only one code to each news segment/story, ignore commercials and other breaks where it is unclear what the subject matter is about. Note, "revisit" or "recap" of the main story should be coded as a news story with the same issue code that the main/first story was given. The following definitions are important in selecting and analyzing the content under study.

News Segment: A news segment is a portion of a news broadcast, a news story. In the case of national news broadcasts downloaded from the Vanderbilt University archive, news segments are those sections the broadcast is already broken down into.

Issue Code: An issue code is the code or label that you assign a news segment. It is the topic that seems to best describe what the news segment was about.

Issue Codes

Please Read each category closely: Assign only one code to each news story.

1. Entertainment
Description: The entertainment category includes all stories that relate to leisure activities not specifically designed to promote health.

Includes: the Olympics, actors/actresses, famous musicians, and other celebrities, movies, television, television violence/ratings, music, theater, professional sports teams and players, sports competitions.	Does NOT include: exercise sports such as aerobics or jogging, sports that are not part of a competition.

2. Environment
Description: The environment category includes all stories that relate to nature (the natural environment) and its preservation and or destruction.

Includes: parks, conservation, recycling, pollution, global warming, oil spills	Does NOT include: urban environments except in relation to parks or pollution, floods or other natural disasters.

3. Health
Description: The health category includes all stories that relate to health and health care, but not about health institution finances.

Includes: diet, exercise, HIV/AIDS, cancer, nutrition, doctors, nurses, physical therapists, health care, cost of health care, cost of drug, vaccinations/immunizations,	Does NOT include: HMO mergers or stocks, drug company mergers or stocks (unless the focus is on the health effects of them)

4. Foreign Policy
Description: The foreign policy category includes all stories that relate to diplomatic actions of the US and foreign activities that the US has or is reacting to; how the executive and legislative branches of the government respond to foreign issues or domestic issues directly involving a foreign country.

Includes: The US president, vice-president or congress responding to foreign events that do not involve trade or the military. Events happening overseas where there are clear US interests (e.g. the middle east)	Does NOT include: the US military (unless they are part of a UN peacekeeping mission and not directly under US control). Trade issues.

5. Military Preparedness	
Description: The military preparedness category includes all stories about US actions to build up or deploy military equipment or personnel.	
Includes: US direct peacekeeping actions (i.e. not under United Nations actions); actions in the Persian Gulf and Bosnia; the building of military jets, tanks, etc.; includes debates by politicians about the military's abilities	Does NOT include: US soldiers in Indonesia, non-US military activities

6. Education	
Description: The education category includes all stories about education in the US, including primary/elementary school, jr. high, high school, technical schools, and college.	
Includes: comparisons of US schools/school systems with other countries, cost of tuition, standardized test scores, teacher salaries, teacher strikes	Does NOT include: high school or college sports, violence in schools

7. Politics	
Description: The politics category includes stories about US domestic politics	
Includes: the 2000 presidential election where the topic is not focused on another category (e.g. an exchange by the candidates specifically about the military would be military preparedness); laws that are introduced, activities not specific to another category; the debates, polling results not specific to one of the other topics, other US political races/elections.	Does NOT include: activities of foreign politicians; stories that may be coded as one of the other codes.

8. Government Spending	
Description: The government spending category includes stories about government spending on programs that are non-military; stories in which government spending is the focus of the story, not what the money is being spent on.	
Includes: stories about Medicaid or Medicare where the focus is on funding the program, not on ensuring care; social security; the federal budget, the deficit, welfare	Does NOT include: military spending, taxes, tax cuts, stocks and bonds.

9. Economy	
Description: The economy category includes stories about the financial aspects and production capabilities/activities of the US.	
Includes: trade relations with other countries, taxes, tax cuts, interest rates, stocks, bonds, unemployment, the rate of manufacturing, the rate of home buying, the World Trade Organization	Does NOT include:

10. Crime / Violence	
Description: The crime/violence category includes all stories about crime (violent and non-violent, except for traffic violations such as speeding and drunk driving) and non-military related violence.	
Includes: crime statistics, embezzlement, school violence, violence in the middle east (where the focus in on the violence, not the US working on the peace process), illegal drugs	Does NOT include: military actions, traffic violations such as speeding or drunk driving.

11. Natural Disasters	
Description: The natural disaster code includes all stories about natural disasters, domestic and foreign, except where the main focus of the story is on US military or political reaction to the disaster.	
Includes: floods, tornadoes, and droughts, forest fires, earthquakes, declarations of a state of disaster by governors/president.	Does NOT include: pollution

12. Accidents / Safety	
Description: The accident/safety category includes stories about the safety of products and or accidents relating to products.	
Includes: includes speeding tickets, drunk driving, plane crashes, traffic accidents, recall of items/materials, accidental gun injuries, bike or scooter accidents, helmet laws	Does NOT include: illegal or prescription drugs.

13. Other International	
Description: This category is for all stories that cannot be fit in the other categories, but is international in scope – use sparingly	
Includes: Russian sub sinking, cultural celebrations in other countries (e.g. running of the bulls in Spain).	Does NOT include:

14. Other Domestic	
Description: This category is for all stories that cannot be fit in the other categories, but is for only stories dealing with the US – use sparingly	
Includes: parenting, race relations, poverty, religious or cultural celebrations.	Does NOT include:

APPENDIX F

BROADCAST NEWS RECORDING SHEET

<u>USE A SEPARATE SHEET FOR EACH BROADCAST</u>

Coder _____ Coding Date _____

Network _____ Broadcast Date & Time _____

Story #	Issue Code	Start Time	Finish Time	Summary/Notes

TABLES

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Control n = 48	Novel n = 33[a]	Extant n = 30[b]	Total n = 322
Age (years)				
oldest/youngest	18 / 43	18 / 27	17 / 26	17 / 43
median	19	19	19	19
Sex (% female)	69	59	62	61
Ethnicity (%)				
White	71	81	90	82
Black	21	10	8	12
Other	8	9	2	6
Education (%)				
Freshman	33	35	23	30
Sophomore	33	30	31	30
Junior	13	16	31	21
Senior	13	14	12	13
Above	8	5	3	6
Opinion Leadership (range 5-15)				
Mean of Individuals	11.08	11.06	11.18	11.08
Mean of Groups	na	11.06	10.84	10.99

Note. Sample size for the control and total columns refers to the number of individuals; sample size for the novel and extant columns refers to the number of groups. [a] n = 156 participants. [b] = 118 participants.

Table 2

Correlation of the Media Agenda to the National and Personal Public Agendas

National Agenda	Media-Public Correlation (r_s)	1-tailed p-value	2-tailed p-value
Control	0.08	0.40	0.80
Novel	-0.17	0.29	0.59
Extant	-0.17	0.30	0.60
Personal Agenda			
Control	0.02	0.48	0.95
Novel	-0.06	0.42	0.85
Extant	-0.01	0.49	0.98

Table 3

Comparison of Variability Within the Public Agendas

National Agenda	Mean	Variance	F Statistic	p-value
Control	7.92	1.18		
Novel	7.82	0.96	0.10	0.91
Extant	8.02	1.06		
Personal Agenda				
Control	6.81	1.85		
Novel	6.77	1.51	0.02	0.98
Extant	6.70	1.90		

Table 4

Correlations Between the National and Personal Public Agendas

Group	National-Personal Correlation (r_s)	1-tailed p-value	2-tailed p-value
Control	0.50	0.0486	0.0972
Novel	0.84	0.0003	0.0006
Extant	0.67	0.0086	0.0173
Average	0.70[a]	0.0059	0.0119

[a] Actual correlation r_s = 0.6963. t = 3.068, df = 10.

Table 5

Distribution of Respondent Media Consumption

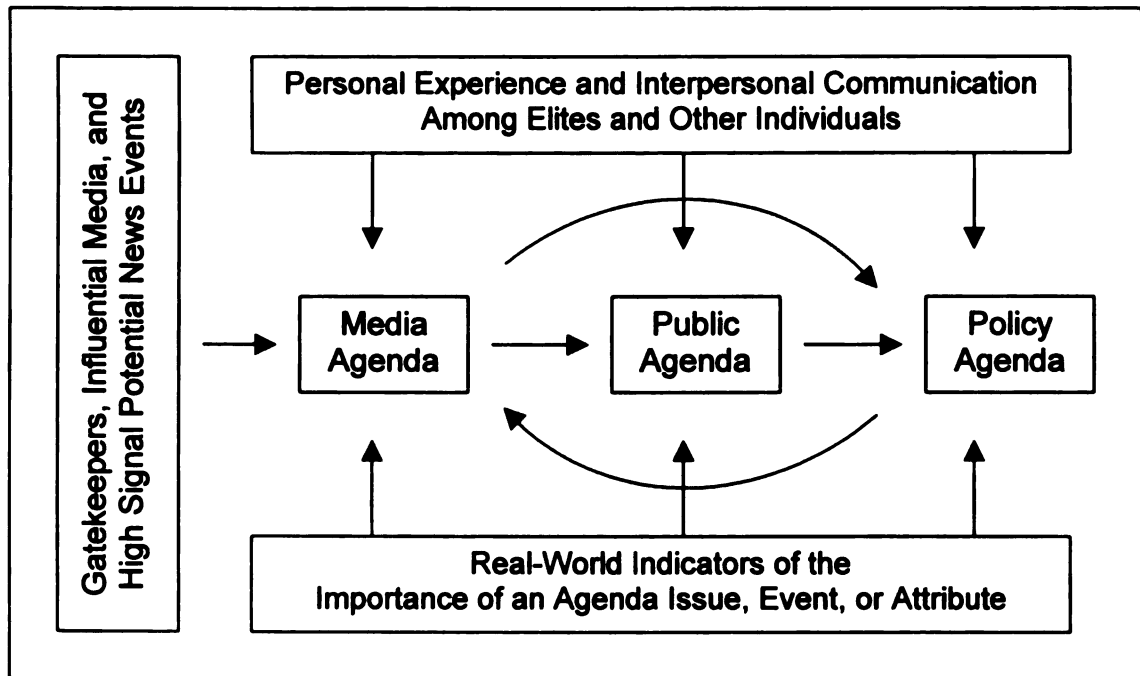| Media	Control n = 48	Novel n = 33	Extant n = 30	Total n = 322
National TV News per week	2.11	2.27	2.23	2.25
% NBC	24	36	34	33
% CNN	32	33	35	33
% ABC	34	18	17	20
% CBS	5	6	8	7
% other / more than one	5	7	6	7
Local TV News per week	319	3.12	3.33	3.17
% NBC	31	38	36	37
% FOX	24	24	29	25
% ABC	27	18	18	19
% CBS	7	9	13	10
% other / more than one	11	11	7	9
Newspapers per week	3.19	3.48	3.32	3.35
% State News	60	67	70	67
% Detroit Free Press	17	10	17	14
% Lansing State Journal	2	5	4	4
% other / more than one	21	18	9	15
Magazines per month	1.13	3.48	3.32	1.43
%Time	44	37	45	41
%Newsweek	28	26	24	26
%US News & World Report	12	4	3	5
% other / more than one	16	33	28	28
Radio News per week	0.94	0.89	0.71	0.77
Total Media Exposure per month[a]	38.63	40.49	39.24	39.75

Note. Sample size for the control and total columns refers to the number of individuals; sample size for the novel and extant columns refers to the number of groups. [a] Total media exposure refers to the sum of local TV news, national TV news, newspapers, radio, and (multiplied by four) magazines.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. The agenda-setting process (adapted from Dearing and Rogers, 1996).

FIGURES