PUBLIC CONTROVERSY OVER FUNDING FOR THE ARTS:
MEDIA AGENDA BUILDING, MEDIA FRAMES, AND EFFECTS

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

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ABSTRACT

Given the pervasiveness of the mass media in our society, the study of how the media select, define, and report on issues is an important area for communication research. This thesis investigated the content of mainstream media stories about the arts funding controversy, an issue that erupted during 1989. Focusing on the process by which the media build their news agendas, this study examined story content for information on the ways that the media frame news reports. Data were analyzed to find patterns that emerged in the coverage.

The findings showed that there were patterns in both the content and frequency of coverage of the arts funding controversy. Patterns in content included the continuing focus by the media on controversy and the use of action-oriented words in describing the events. The frequency of stories was also predictable given the chain-of-events that surrounded the arts funding controversy and the media's orientation to cover such topics, especially when they take place in Washington, D.C.

In addition, the media coverage of the arts funding controversy had measurable effects on specific publics. Economic effects were felt by those museums and galleries who were in the center of the controversy, through increased attendance and attendance revenues, and through increased gift shop sales. Art buyers felt economic effects of the controversy
through dramatic increases in the cost of the artwork that had been featured in the controversy. And finally, public policy and social values were touched by the controversy. Public policy was called upon to address issues of the government funding the arts, while social values were called into question when the artwork in question was called to the center of an obscenity trial.

Overall, this study provides evidence that for some issues with some publics, media coverage can have immediate measurable effects.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The mass media are pervasive in American society ranking alongside education and family as a prime means by which information, culture, and values are transmitted. To better understand the role of the media in society, researchers have probed such questions as who and what determine the prominence of certain issues in the media? How are these issues defined and framed by the media? Who wields the real power over media output? (Davison, 1982). Communication research is one means by which we can analyze the media to determine if certain patterns exist in media coverage.

Controversy makes news. An analysis of television news programs and newsmagazines in the 1960s and 1970s revealed that of the eight major non-war domestic activities covered by the news, 35% of the stories featured "government conflicts, disagreements, decisions, proposals, personnel changes, and campaigning," (Gans, 1979, p. 16). Are similar activities still making news more than twenty years later? In Media, Power and Politics, Paletz and Entman (1981) note that national news organizations, often referred to as the mainstream media, focus on what they believe are the big issues and leaders. Two of the most prominent activities these national news organizations highlight are conflict and controversy.
In studying where the media gain information about what's going on in the world, researchers have identified sources as a prime means by which the media access information to fill their daily news schedules. What power, if any, do sources have in their relationship with the media? By understanding and utilizing the fact that controversy is an attractive news angle for the mainstream media, do sources increase their prominence in the news by focusing on topics of controversy and conflict?

Boorstin (1978) suggests that savvy sources can create "pseudo-events," events staged solely for the purpose of gaining media exposure in order to reach a large mass-media audience (p. 5). Through these made-for-media events, sources gain competitive advantage over access to news outlets. They do this by creating activities and events that capture media attention. Yet the overarching question remains, who decides what's news?

**Purpose**

This thesis examines how and why a controversy in Congress over government funding of art became news. It explores how sources influence news agendas, how news is defined and framed by the media, and what effects media coverage can have. Data were collected using a content analysis of mainstream news stories about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding controversy and a grant that was used to finance a Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit. In addition to the content analysis, data were also gathered through personal interviews, letters, and published reports about the controversy. The effects of media exposure were measured by economic factors including a comparison of museum attendance figures
and the price paid for Mapplethorpe's work both before and after the controversy erupted in the news.

It is important to study how issues become part of the daily news agenda because each day we are bombarded with thousands of media messages. By understanding how issues become news, we become better-educated consumers of media messages and develop the evaluative criteria necessary to decide for ourselves if an issue merits attention. This study looks at several aspects of the news-gathering process and examines how issues become part of the news agenda through the interaction of sources and journalists. Do the media quote official Washington, D.C., sources? Do they spotlight certain stories focusing on conflict and controversy? Does this increased media exposure have any public effects?

The media played an active role in spotlighting the political disagreement that erupted in 1989 between supporters of a bill that was designed to eliminate government funding for art defined as "obscene," and those in the arts community who defended National Endowment for the Arts funding practices. For the purposes of this study, it is therefore important to examine when, why, and how the media were drawn into the conflict, and with what results. Scrutiny of how media agendas are influenced by bureaucratic news-gathering techniques allows us to understand how the source-media relationship affects the formation of news issues, the framing of coverage, and ultimately public reaction.
Thesis Statement

This study focuses on how the media interact with others to create news issues by filtering and shaping reality (Weaver and Elliott, 1985). It examines the thesis that the media, by an agenda-building process, define issues through interaction with sources. Through these sources, issues are defined and shaped based on a number of factors. Gans, in his theories of story selection (1979), contends that the information sources bring to the news media is weighed and judged against the journalistic considerations of how available and how suitable a source is perceived to be. While availability is essential for coverage, it is naive to assume that just because a source is available and tries to get coverage, that the media will respond. Suitability, or knowing that the source has credible information, is one of the most important criteria for source consideration. Journalists will often seek out officials as a source because they are known quantities and the question of suitability has already been established. Cobb and Elder contend that suitable sources, or those who are "previously legitimized political forces" will have their interests and salient concerns represented in the media (1971, p. 902).

While source availability and suitability are important considerations for journalists when following a story, they are not the only factors that influence story selection and story angle. Gatekeepers, or the editors and producers who decide on story selection, have more stories to select from than they have air time or column inches to fill. Therefore, they select stories that are the most novel, dramatic, or unusual (Gans, 1979). This thesis examines what elements of a particular story are highlighted by
the news media. It looks at if and how certain news issues such as controversy are sustained over time. And finally, it examines whether an increase in news exposure has economic consequences.

**Scholarly Benefits**

In the past decade, researchers have looked at the agenda-building process by studying the relationship between news agendas and political sources (Weaver and Elliott, 1985), the function of gatekeeping in the selection of news stories (Stempel, 1985; Riffe, et al., 1986), and the media channels and sources from which published news stories emerge (Berkowitz, 1987). This paper's thesis builds upon past research by examining the relationship between the news media and official government sources when another, equally credible and accessible group of sources presents an opposing viewpoint. Building on Gans' theories about story selection in his study of mainstream media, and the Langs' (1981) exploration of the agenda-building process and political controversy during the Watergate scandal, the current study addresses not only why certain issues are defined by the media as news items, but how the media frame these issues.

Like Watergate, the arts funding controversy was the topic of study by the Langs. They presented a paper that looked at the influence that public opinion had on the NEA controversy. They contend that there are "cultural and anti-cultural lobbies" consisting of fundamentalists who see the NEA as promoting "sin" and those who serve to protect the NEA (1991, p. 4). They studied public reaction to and opinion about the NEA controversy but did not attempt to analyze why the controversy became well known.
This thesis examines the emergence of the NEA controversy as a national news issue as it relates to three factors: 1) the media's access to a variety of official sources; 2) the highly political and controversial nature of the issues; and 3) official sources who kept the issues alive by making them a part of the political agenda.

**Political Controversy**

There are several key events that brought the arts funding controversy to a head. Following is a brief recounting of the events surrounding the controversy in both timeline and narrative form.
Table 1.1 1988-1989 Timeline of Arts Funding Controversy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 1988</td>
<td>Mapplethorpe exhibit opens at ICA in Philadelphia with $30,000 in NEA funds to help cover traveling costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1989</td>
<td>Exhibit travels to Chicago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1989</td>
<td>Mapplethorpe dies of AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1989</td>
<td>Rev. Wildmon starts letter writing campaign against Serrano's photograph &quot;Piss Christ&quot; that received NEA funding through a $15,000 grant to SECCA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12, 1989</td>
<td>Corcoran Gallery of Art cancels Mapplethorpe show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 30, 1989</td>
<td>Artists protest cancellation with slide show of Mapplethorpe's work on side wall of Corcoran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 12, 1989</td>
<td>House approves amendment to reduce NEA appropriations equal to the $45,000 for the controversial grants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21, 1989</td>
<td>Exhibit opens at WPA in Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 25, 1989</td>
<td>Senate Appropriations Committee votes for five-year ban on grants to SECCA and ICA in Philadelphia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 26, 1989</td>
<td>Helms amendment with art funding restrictions passes the Senate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1989</td>
<td>Congress adjourns for August recess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 8, 1989</td>
<td>Helms sends copies of controversial Mapplethorpe photos to members of the House-Senate conference committee who will decide the funding issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 30, 1989</td>
<td>Artists boycott Corcoran Gallery by canceling two shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 5, 1989</td>
<td>Artist Lowell Nesbitt cut from will $1 million bequest to Corcoran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 13, 1989</td>
<td>House begins debate on arts funding and votes down a procedural move to adopt the Helms amendment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 28, 1989</td>
<td>Senate defeats Helms' proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 7, 1989</td>
<td>Senate approves bill calling for denial of federal funds for art deemed obscene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 21, 1989</td>
<td>Mapplethorpe work sells for record prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 8, 1989</td>
<td>NEA withholds a grant from a New York Gallery because the exhibit was too political.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 11, 1989</td>
<td>NEA reverses itself and goes forward with the grant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 8, 1989</td>
<td>Corcoran director resigns.</td>
</tr>
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The controversy over funding for the arts began early in 1989 when members of Congress became aware that a $15,000 government grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was used for a traveling art exhibition that featured a photograph by Andres Serrano called "Piss Christ." The photograph was included in an exhibition sponsored by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts, an organization that had received partial funding from the NEA. In the spring, approximately 200 members of Congress wrote to the NEA requesting an explanation for the grant that supported a controversial photograph depicting a crucifix in a jar of urine. A letter of protest penned by Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) and signed by twenty-two senators expressed outrage and called for reformation of the NEA grant procedures.

Traditionally, Congress has taken little part in administering the grants programs. From the start, procedures were designed to relieve government officials from having to make decisions, instead turning over the decision making process to acknowledged experts in the various fields (Banfield, 1984). During 1989, the NEA was coming up for review in Congress. The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act (1965) provided authority for the existence of NEA with a reauthorization deadline of September 30, 1990 (American Association of Museums, 1990, November).

Timing for the NEA couldn't have been worse. In the fall of 1988 an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography was organized by the
Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia using a $30,000 grant from the NEA. The exhibit opened in Philadelphia and was then to have traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (February - April 1989), the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., (June - August 1989), the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford (October - December 1989), the University Art Museum at the University of California, Berkeley (January - March 1990), the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati (April - May 1990), and finally to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (June - August 1990). From the exhibit opening in Philadelphia on December 9, 1988 through the June 12, 1989 decision by the Corcoran Gallery of Art to cancel the show, a search of mainstream media stories reveals that there were six published stories about Robert Mapplethorpe, one of which was his obituary. From that time through the remainder of 1989, the number of press clips increased to 150.

The photographs in the show depicted a wide range of subjects including still lifes and flowers with a section depicting gay male sadomasochism and portraits of nude men. These later subjects reflected the artist's open sexual appreciation of the male body (Samaras, 1989). The exhibit, "The Perfect Moment," opened at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia without political controversy and then traveled to Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art. According to the MCA's public relations staff, though it was well received by museum visitors, no apparent controversy over the homoerotic photographs was reported by the media. What was reported was the artist's death from AIDS on March 9, 1989 at age 42 (Artner, 1989).
Senator Helms became aware of the Mapplethorpe exhibit after seeing the catalog. He began lobbying for a bill to include sanctions against both the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art for "Piss Christ" and the Institute of Contemporary Art for "The Perfect Moment." On June 12, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., stunned the art community by canceling the Mapplethorpe exhibition, breaking a two-year commitment between the Corcoran and the ICA in Philadelphia. Just one week before making the announcement, the Corcoran Gallery said it had no plans to cancel the show. Well aware of the tempest brewing in Congress, Corcoran Director Christina Orr-Cahall stated that the gallery's Board of Trustees did not want the museum embroiled in a political battle over funding of artistic work that may offend people (Allen, 1989).

**Congress Acts**

Coming so soon after the protest over the Serrano work, the Mapplethorpe controversy led members of Congress in late-spring 1989 to reconsider the funding practices for the NEA. The immediate action was the proposal of a reduction in the NEA's funding equal to the amount granted to the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia and a ban on both institutions from seeking funding for five years. Dubbed the "Helms Amendment," it called for eliminating federal funding for "obscene and indecent art and for any work that denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group or class or citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin," (Congressional
On a voice vote to a near-empty Senate, the amendment was adopted.

Reaction to the amendment was swift. Several arts organizations met to protest Congress's actions. The Corcoran was a target for the protests in which hundreds of people marched to the gallery. The made-for-media "pseudo-event" culminated with a slide show of Mapplethorpe's works on a side wall of the building. Soon after, several artists who were scheduled to exhibit at the Corcoran announced they were boycotting the gallery. The Mapplethorpe exhibition, as a result of the Helms amendment in Congress and the protest at the Corcoran, was reported on television news, in mainstream print publications such as The Washington Post and The New York Times, and in art-oriented magazines. By the summer of 1989, the exhibition had become a news issue.

During that summer, another Washington, D.C., gallery, the Washington Project for the Arts, accepted the exhibition. It opened to a new flurry of media hype including newspaper articles and editorials, magazine articles and editorials, and a special segment on the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour report. The gallery reported their highest attendance ever for the run of this particular show.

But the saga was not over. In September, the Corcoran issued an apology and mailed 10,000 letters encouraging the museum community to register opposition to the Helms amendment. Several other museums joined the fray, the Whitney Museum in New York becoming the first with full-page

**Final Vote**

In October 1989, the Senate gave final congressional approval to putting strings on government support for the arts by giving officials the power to deny grant money for works they believe to be obscene. Using part of the Helms amendment and "borrowing language from a Supreme Court decision on obscenity standards in Miller v. California, 1973," the proposed new amendment prohibited the use of NEA or NEH funds to promote materials which in the judgment of the endowments may be considered obscene (and) which do not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value (American Association of Museums, 1989, October, p. 1).

The final version deleted language that would have shifted the decision of what is "obscene" from the NEA chairman to some unspecified authority in the government, presumably the courts (Associated Press, 1989). The agreement also created a twelve-member independent commission to review the grant-making procedures of NEA and NEH and consider whether there should be different standards for publicly and privately funded art. The President, the speaker of the House, and the president of the Senate each appointed four members to the commission. The funding prohibition, while not as strict as the Helms amendment, was considered by constitutional lawyers to be the first restriction on federal art assistance based on content (Associated Press, 1989).
The controversy did not end in 1989, though the scope of this study utilizes content through 1989 only. In 1990, the content restrictions for projects awarded grant money were removed from the funding bill. Also in 1990, a landmark obscenity trial was held in Cincinnati after the photographs were confiscated by the police and the director of the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati was arrested and charged with obscenity. After a lengthy trial, during which the content of seven photographs was called into question, the jury acquitted the defendant of all charges. To this day the controversy is still making news as evidenced by the cover and content of The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine's October 25, 1992 issue (Salisbury). The cover headline asks, "Will the National Endowment for the Arts ever recover from the cultural warfare set off by works like this?" The cover photograph is a male nude by Mapplethorpe.

**Research Questions**

By tracing the evolution of the arts funding controversy in relation to the creation of the issues, the media coverage, and the impact on the public, the following nine research questions will be addressed:


Agenda Building

R1  When did the controversy first become a media issue?
R2  What events prompted media coverage?
R3  Who are cited as sources by the media?

Media Frames

R4  What news frames emerged from the controversy?
R5  What aspects of the story were given most prominence?
R6  Were certain frames grouped together?

Effects

R7  How long did the controversy sustain coverage?
R8  Was there any public reaction to the controversy?
R9  Were there any economic effects of the controversy?
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to understand the dynamics at work in a study of public controversy and the media, several areas of communication research provide an important theoretical background including research on agenda-building, issues, source-media relationships, gatekeeping, media frames, and media effects. The media do not operate in a vacuum and rely on tried-and-true methods for gathering news, interpreting it, and analyzing it. The arts funding controversy and Mapplethorpe exhibit provided a case for examining many of these news-gathering theories.

Agenda Building

Researchers have studied the process by which the media build their news agendas. This paper examines this process to see if issues that the media bring to their agenda are influenced by source-media relationships. Unlike agenda-setting studies, this thesis will not examine public opinion. Instead, it examines how issues are defined, framed, and followed by the media.

Issues

The Langs' study of Watergate (1981) reconceptualizes agenda-setting in terms of the agenda-building process. Their study is relevant to the
arts funding controversy because the basis for both studies are subjects about which few people had direct knowledge. Like Watergate, arts funding was a controversy centered in Washington, D.C. All of the information pertaining to the story, at least initially, came from Washington, D.C., sources, whether they were members of Congress or members of the arts community. The only way that the general public found out about the arts funding controversy, and about Mapplethorpe's photography, was through media channels. The arts funding case provides a fascinating example of the power of the media to make an issue part of the news agenda. The Mapplethorpe exhibit did not initially make the national news agenda. It was not until the story became news involving Washington, D.C., power brokers that it was elevated to the national news agenda. Again like Watergate, the Mapplethorpe case provides a controversy with a definite before and after situation to study.

The Langs' 1981 study is based on the premise that issues have special attributes that make them either relevant to our everyday world, or relevant to a world we know only through the media. They categorize issues according to how much direct knowledge the public has about an issue, with low-threshold issues known on a personal level, and high-threshold issues known only through outside means, such as media stories. For low-threshold issues such as the cost of milk and bread, individuals gain knowledge of them through direct observation. Information on high-threshold items, such as national events and politics, most often comes from the media, since no direct knowledge is usually available. Therefore, it is on high-threshold items
that the media have their greatest potential impact. Perceptions about things that people can't observe for themselves, including most political events, are derived predominantly from mass media reports. In the political realm, interpersonal channels play a supplementary role and operate within a larger symbolic context provided by mass media frames.

From the Langs' study about the threshold levels of certain issues, we get insight into how individuals get information about issues from the media. They state that it is the nature of the topic itself that defines its threshold level of importance. According to the Langs,

Some issues arise out of conditions that directly affect nearly everybody in the same way such as inflation, high taxes, and gasoline shortages. A different type of issue leads to a situation where effects are selectively experienced, such as urban congestion or draft calls. Last, there are conditions whose effects are generally remote. (Lang and Lang, 1981, p. 452)

The categories have very different thresholds of sensitivity. Since low-threshold items are readily identified and understood by the public, media reports about those types of issues are moderated by an individual's experiences. High threshold topics, on the other hand, have to be shaped and interpreted by the media through linkages to cultural symbols. Because few people have direct involvement with high-threshold items, most get their information about the event from the media. Therefore the media are extremely important in shaping our images of high-threshold issues. The Langs' research focused on the premise that people's perceptions of the political environment (a high-threshold area) are derived mostly from mass media reports since few have direct political knowledge. Watergate became
an issue, much the way the arts funding controversy has, because the media got involved in furthering the story, making it "politically relevant" at many levels of society (1981, p. 464).

In studying the agenda-building process, the issues themselves are a primary concern. Issues have been conceptualized as: 1) concerns about which people are worried; 2) perceptions of key problems facing the country; 3) policy alternatives from which people must choose sides; 4) a public controversy; and finally 5) the reasons or underlying determinants of political outcome. (Lang and Lang, 1981, p. 451)

The Langs conclude that Watergate was shaped in the public's mind by the media, much the way Mapplethorpe exhibit was, because it was a high-threshold issue surrounding a political controversy about which most people had no first-hand knowledge. The media's use of official sources reinforced the credibility of the news reports and, even more importantly, by linking the news to symbols in the public's everyday lives, the issues gained credulity. The tendency to disbelieve Watergate was dispelled as more and more media reported the same "facts." Were it not for media accounts of Watergate, the public might never have known there was a problem. As in the Watergate example, media attention was a necessary condition for the Mapplethorpe exhibit to emerge as an issue. But, as the Langs emphasize, the media do not operate in a vacuum and are often prompted by political developments. Agenda building is a collective, continuous process involving feedback loops.

In May 1991, Lang and Lang presented a paper at the annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) that focused on "Obscenity, Censorship, and Public Opinion in the
NEA Controversy." In the paper they cite the first public opinion poll taken in 1989 about the Helms amendment. They note that 20% gave no opinion about the NEA, the rest of the respondents were split 47% to 35% against federal funding, but 58% to 22% in favor of panels of experts rather than federal officials judging projects (the NEA peer-review panel system). A second poll conducted in September 1989 by The Los Angeles Times found that 37% of those polled still did not have an opinion on the controversy, while fundamentalists were actually less aware of the issue than the general population. While the Langs' study recaps the results of public opinion polls, it does not sample the content of the news stories from which those who were sampled had gained information. The study focuses on the public's opinion regarding NEA funding and restrictions but does not delve into the story behind the controversy to answer the question as to "why" the Mapplethorpe story became news.

In "The Politics of Agenda-Building: An Alternative Perspective For Modern Democratic Theory," Cobb and Elder (1971) explore theories of effectively functioning democracies. They look at how issues emerge onto the national agenda, much the way the arts funding controversy did, through hegemonic forces at work in society. They present an alternative perspective to classical democratic theory based on four observations:

1) The distribution of influence and access in any system has inherent biases thereby operating to the favor of some, and to the disadvantage of others.
2) The range of issues and alternative decisions that will be considered by the body politic is restricted. The existing bias of a political system both reflects and legitimizes the prevailing balance of power among
organized groups, reinforcing political hegemony and limiting the emergence of issues.

3) A system's inertia makes it extremely difficult to change the prevailing biases and hegemonic views.

4) What is recognized by the political body is shaped by all that goes on in the pre-political arena. What happens in decision making councils is the result of a continuing struggle of forces in society at large. (Cobb and Elder, 1971, pp. 902-904)

Emerging from these four observations are critical questions on how an issue becomes, or fails to become, the focus of concern within a polity. One important determinant of an issue's status on the national agenda is the source of information. The more powerful the source, the greater the chance that an issue becomes an agenda item. Cobb and Elder's study is relevant to the arts funding controversy because it delves into the relationship between those in power and those whose interests get attention. Does the political agenda influence the news agenda? Both the Cobb and Elder study and the arts funding controversy focus on the political arena as a place where issues are decided and legitimized. Cobb and Elder hypothesize that if the existing bias of a political system "both reflects and legitimizes the prevailing balance of power among organized groups, it follows that the range and type of issues and alternatives considered (by government) will represent the interests and most salient concerns of previously legitimized political forces," (1971, p. 902).

**Source-Media Relationships**

There are several fundamental forces at work in the news gathering process. Gans' landmark study of the *CBS Evening News, NBC*
Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time in the 1970s illuminates the basic news-gathering process that pits journalists against organizational constraints and their desire to get a good story. The news business is redefined in terms of organizational boundaries and the need to "sell" the story to an audience, to make advertising time and space attractive to advertisers (1979, p. 9). The bottom line is profit and news organizations are driven by economic considerations that affect the profit margin, such as audience size, or ratings, weighed against the cost of gathering the news.

Looking at the tug of war from the perspective of sources suggests that their successful access to journalists is shaped by at least four interrelated factors: 1) incentives (eager, agreeable); 2) power (reflecting the hierarchies of nation and society); 3) the ability to supply suitable information; and 4) geographic and social proximity to journalists. (Gans, 1979, p. 117)

Suitable information is one of the most important criteria considered when journalists and gatekeepers decide on the news agenda. If a source is not credible then the information given is not credible. But if a source is credible, because of either political power or social standing, media attention to the story increases. Gans' list of criteria for story importance (though not all have to be present for a story to make news) includes: rank in government, and other hierarchies, of the source; impact on the nation and national interest; impact on large numbers of people; and significance for the past and future. The arts funding controversy provided an interesting case by which to examine Gans' theories of story selection, source suitability, and geographic proximity. The story broke in Washington, D.C. It involved high-ranking members of Congress and well-known individuals in the art world.
Finally, the controversy had the potential for affecting large numbers of people through the use of Federal taxes for funding art.

As Gans has noted, another determinant in the process of deciding what issues become news is the source's access to the media. If a source has easy access to the media, is articulate, and has given credible information in the past, the more influence he/she can exert (1979).

In order to provide further systematic evidence on the source-media relationship, Weaver and Elliott (1985) studied local newspaper coverage of a municipal legislature in a non-election agenda-setting context. They looked at the origin of issues covered by the media and how the press interacts with other institutions to build an agenda of issues. Using content analysis they explored the kinds of relationships existing between the legislature and the media. The Weaver and Elliott study concludes that the press consciously downplayed or emphasized certain issues because of the pre-existing ideas of what constituted a good news story, particularly the amount of conflict and the number of actors involved. They suggest that a prominent news source can have a major influence on the subsequent media agenda, but that journalists also play a role through selectivity and news judgment. Weaver and Elliott present findings that directly support the hypotheses in this thesis contending that the media highlight certain issues based on story-line considerations, and who happens to be arguing with whom. In the arts funding controversy, prominent news sources, such as Helms and Corcoran Gallery officials, became embroiled in a controversy pitting articulate spokespersons against one another. It made news. The
media had pithy quotes, graphic illustrations, and an issue that could be portrayed as affecting every tax-paying American.

In another study, Berkowitz (1987) examines news sources and news channels appearing in local and national television newscasts. He cites three basic philosophies of journalism. The first pictures journalists as mediators of news, basing decisions on professional values. A second portrays journalists as subservient to hegemonic forces. A third sees journalists as too constrained to make professional decisions, with an important distinction—the constraints come from organizational needs rather than from the dominant ideology. Berkowitz also examines the role of sources in relation to journalists, depicting them as savvy manipulators who dominate the news agenda. He expands on Gans' view in saying that sources gain access to journalists by developing characteristics favorable to the news-gathering process. As in the arts funding controversy, sources are a key element in the selection of stories by the media.

The results of the Berkowitz study suggest that officials and executives dominate television news since reporters rely on them routinely as sources of information. The study implies that sources play an important part in building the television news agenda, and ultimately in shaping information from which people "unconsciously build their images of the world," (1987, p. 510). Based on premises set forth by Berkowitz, the arts funding controversy was evaluated to see if officials and executives dominate the news as sources.
In addition to single sources, coalitions or alliances can determine what issues become news. Special-interest groups can exert pressure to gain access to the media through staging events (pseudo-events), staging boycotts, and staging protests (Gans, 1979). Alliances can form on any and all sides of an issue. In the arts funding case, alliances formed that pitted those who favored banning certain art against those who did not want certain types of art banned from receiving grant money. In the arts funding case, because it involved important groups on both sides of the issue, alliances became a major source consideration for the media.

**Mainstream Media**

Millions of Americans each day rely on the mass media for news via daily newspapers, radio, and television. In his study of the media's role in the making and unmaking of the "New Left," Gitlin notes that in our complex world, people get their bearings from the media, sharing the Langs' perception that for high-threshold items, the media are highly influential. The media are invested with the power to "certify reality as reality" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6).

The mass media are broadly defined as "mainstream" media, or those news outlets used by a majority of people. Some examples of the mainstream include *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, the Associated Press, television networks and affiliates, and major daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. The mainstream media covered the arts controversy in news stories, editorials, and special news broadcasts. Examples of mainstream coverage of the arts funding controversy occurred in
Most journalists working for mainstream media work in organizations with a bureaucratic structure that is based on executive hierarchy and delegation of labor with an emphasis on the cost efficiency of the work operation. The necessity for gathering news at the lowest possible cost means the reliance on official sources for information subsidies (Fishman, 1980) and the creation of "packs," or groups of journalists traveling together covering the same story (Paletz and Entman, 1981).

Nimmo wrote in *Newsgathering in Washington* (1964) about newsmen and their sources, focusing on the interaction between news channels and news sources. He cites Washington, D.C., as an "official" town with public officials whose job it is to tell the public what the government is doing. It serves as the geographic source center of available political news. Washington, D.C., is also the town in which the arts funding controversy broke, where the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Washington Project for the Arts are located.

Nimmo's model of the news process illustrates how government officials plan and transmit promotional messages that justify and explain their existence. Also relating to the Langs' theory of thresholds, Nimmo investigates the way that high-threshold issues, such as political activities in Washington, D.C., reach voters through the media. The news media serve as a channel through which voters are reached, providing them with information.
outside the "citizen's immediate experience and required for adjusting to the political environment" (1964, p. 6).

Beats are often assigned to reporters so that they gain expertise and experience in covering a particular story. The operation of beats is important to the news-gathering process since most news gathering in Washington, D.C., is done by beat reporters. Newspaper journalists are usually divided into two areas, general assignment and beat. Beat reporters have specialized areas and territory to cover. Those who cover federal agencies in Washington, D.C., play a central role in national news (Gans, 1979). Beat reporters have a certain autonomy; they are removed from the city editor's direct supervision and often have the responsibility of deciding what to cover and how to cover it (Fishman, 1980). They are perceived to have more autonomy from gatekeeping constraints than general assignment reporters. Often, this is because they are covering breaking news, or news that is being made at the time it is reported. Beat reporting also has economic benefits because the reliable, steady supply of issues and quotes is accessible; a necessity when working under tight budgets and deadlines. The beat system forms a news net organized around bureaucratic structures (Tuchman, 1978). The structure of the beat system provides journalists with "a map of relevant knowers for any topic of newsworthy happenings," (Fishman, 1980, p. 51).

One of the pinpoints on the Washington, D.C., news map is the Senate. From the Senate comes The Congressional Record, "used daily by the media for information," (Boorstin, 1978, p. 18). One outcome of beat
reporting is the formation of "packs" of journalists who travel together covering the same stories and issues. What often happens in Washington, D.C., is that reporters on a beat travel together and get stories, ideas, and information from each other. These "packs" of journalists tend to write similar political stories (Paletz and Entman, 1981, p. 19). Pack journalism exists, as Hodding Carter and Ted Koppel noted on Nightline, because members of the media don't like to be "out there alone" (ABC News, 1989). Journalists are leery of taking risks on reporting a story when no one else is running similar information. They look to other journalists for story confirmation.

Yet, once a story is given validation, such as Watergate or the Mapplethorpe controversy, reporters converge on the news due to a fear of missing a story that the competition captures. Since these reporters are in close physical proximity to one another, they share insight, experiences and information, all of which shape the framing of their news stories. Economically, the emergence of pack journalism is the result of understaffing, tight news budgets, and tight deadlines combined with the need to fill a daily news demand (Paletz and Entman, 1981). Cited as an example of this type of reporting are the reasons surrounding the time-lag between when The Washington Post first reported Watergate and the time when the rest of the media picked up the story. Reporters don't like to take chances. Bernard Kalb coined a rule to that effect: "Get it first, but first, get it second," (ABC News, 1989).

Jeff Greenfield, an ABC news correspondent, sees one outcome of pack journalism as "the press throwing a moving spotlight across the night
sky illuminating one, then another urgent crisis, only to leave it in darkness again a moment later in pursuit of the next urgent crisis" (ABC News, 1989). Greenfield argues that since members of the press are trying to keep pace with one another—to avoid getting scooped—stories are highlighted and then left for the next "big" story. In-depth treatment of issues is rare because of the competition for time and space in the media. "The next time the bell goes off, we'll all be chasing the latest obsession with barely a backward glance. After all, nobody ever got an award for the best job of not covering a story" (ABC News, 1989).

This thesis examines whether news stories about the arts funding controversy were being written by the media with reporters using similar sources and focusing on similar aspects of the event. The arts funding controversy was the urgent issue that faced Congress during the summer of 1989. Did the moving spotlight seek out sources who highlighted the controversy by pointing out the controversial nature of the artist and his art as well? Did the media portray the Mapplethorpe exhibition accurately, or were reports of the controversy, and the number of controversial photographs, misreported in media reports?

**Gatekeeping**

Gatekeeping is the process by which producers and editors decide what stories get covered by the news. Riffe et al. (1986) studied gatekeeping and the network news mix with an emphasis on whether the similarity of the topics covered by the networks represented a generalized, shared news judgment about how news consumers are best served. Their
study focused on the three networks during five weekdays per quarter for nine years, yielding a random sample of 180 dates. They conclude that the news mix of the three networks presents a similar view of the world. There was little difference among network news packages. There was nearly an "identical news judgment on what the newscast should contain based on gatekeepers' mental images of what the ideal news mix is," (1986, p. 320).

Though the arts funding controversy study does not include a content analysis of network news programs about the controversy, the point of similarity between these two studies is that media gatekeepers wield enormous power, but power that conforms to organizational dictates. When the story about the arts funding controversy broke in the news, it was covered in The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Table 2.1 Percentage of Sampled Stories Found in The New York Times and The Washington Post

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 100
Note: The 100 stories were a random sample of the total 150 articles that were found for 1989.
In comparison, Stempel's (1985) study of the standardization of news examined the extent of agreement on both the selection of individual stories and the mix of stories of various types among several news outlets. The findings support the hypothesis that there would be substantial agreement among the media on their mix of topics. He also found that there was substantial disagreement between the press and television news on which stories should be used. While the study confirms the belief that network newscasts are highly similar, it found "a difference between newspapers and the networks in story selection," (p. 815). This study does have current research value when looking at the homogeneity of stories within classes of media, specifically in print and electronic media. Though it is outside the realm of this study, further research could be done to compare the agenda-building process of electronic news versus print news-gathering techniques.

**Media Frames**

Frames are a way of ordering reality in order to negotiate it, manage it, comprehend it, and choose "repertoires of cognition and action," (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Reality, therefore, is "socially constructed," (Altheide, 1985, p. 158). The media, because of their ubiquity, influence the way people frame reality. Often people believe that media accounts are real life occurrences giving them the impression that they have experienced an event or issue first hand. Virtually all of our experiences with the day's important events are mediated by mass media representations. The media choose the
salient topics, choose the parts to relay, and choose how to present them (Davis and Baran, 1981).

Frames are, in effect, "negotiated among sources, reporters, editors, and directors," (Gitlin, 1980, p. 274). For most people, conceptualizing political issues, events, and personalities depends upon "mental images drawn by editors, publishers, columnists, and critics," (Rubin, 1977, p. 3). What are presented as unmediated events are actually representations that have been shaped and defined by various gatekeepers. These gatekeepers mediate events as they pass from the everyday world to the newsroom, and finally to the media story itself (Davis and Baran, 1981). Gatekeepers control the stories that get selected for news.

Political conflict becomes newsworthy only by submitting to the implicit rules of newsmaking and conforming to journalistic notions of what a story, event, or protest should be (Gitlin, 1980). When viewed from a communication perspective, "culture, social change, and stability are produced and affected by the media and their accompanying frames," (Altheide, 1985, p. 232). In political movements, media images become implicated in the movement's self-image. The media certify leaders and are able to convert leadership into celebrity. The media coverage, mediated by institutional gatekeepers, grows into systematic framing. It is this framing that helps determine the "movement's fate," (Gitlin, 1980, p. 3).

The Mapplethorpe and arts funding controversy provided an opportunity to study how the media mediate what they portray based on journalistic decisions and constraints. The media frames that emerge in the
coverage give information about the controversy that goes beyond the basic who, what, where, when, why, and how. The slant that the media take, the sources they cite, and the amount of coverage they give all affect the public's perception of the story or "the movement's fate."

**Effects**

Over the past forty years, communication researchers have vacillated on the nature and degree of media effects. Early theorists shared the belief that mass communication could have a "hypodermic needle" effect on the public, leading to the creation of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in response to the fear of what propaganda could do (Severin & Tankard, 1988). Research in the 1940s and 1950s discredited the hypodermic effects of the media, leading to a limited-effects model. Articles by Klapper (1960), Cooper and Jahoda (1947), and Hovland et al. (1965) all support this position. More recently, Noelle-Neumann (1980) has argued that the media do have powerful effects but that these effects have been underestimated due to several mitigating factors. Her research has lead to the "Spiral of Silence" theory which states that the mass media have three characteristics that combine to produce a powerful effects model: the media are ubiquitous; their message consonant; and their effects cumulative. Other studies that support a powerful-effects position were conducted by Mendelson (1973), Maccoby and Farquhar (1975), and Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984). All three studies produced measurable results that showed that the particular campaigns in each study did affect behavior.
This thesis presents a model which predicts some direct media effects on an audience who selectively attuned to media messages. As Katz and Szecsko (1981) suggested, there are two important determinants for media effects: selectivity and interpersonal relationships. People choose both their media channels and what messages they receive from those channels. Once selective exposure, perception, and retention have been achieved, people then tend to seek out confirmation of their beliefs through their primary groups of friends, family, and colleagues. This two-step flow of communication reinforces certain messages and negates others. As will be illustrated in the following chapter, issues can be brought to the news agenda through the interaction of sources and reporters.
Chapter 3

A MODEL FOR THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical model on which this thesis is based, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between three parts: institutional sources and their selected issues; the media; and the public. The model depicts a direct linkage between issues, sources, events and pseudo-events, the coverage and framing of events and issues by the media, and the resulting effects of media attention on the public.

**Agenda Building**

The model, figure 3.1, for this study identifies several main sources used by the media, including government and arts officials. Together these two main source groups escalated an ongoing issue regarding government funding of controversial art. This larger issue, that of the government using tax payers’ money to fund art that some would call offensive, became part of the national media agenda because of several factors--the nature and timing of the controversy, the political actors involved, events and pseudo-events, and the fact that the controversy focused on a topic that had strong visual appeal and clearly defined opposing forces.
Figure 3.1 Model for Evolution of Public Controversy
As research has shown, a prime consideration for the media when determining the news agenda is the importance of an issue. As outlined by Gans, there are many criteria against which issues are judged for suitability. The first step in making news is having a story about which people want to know. This thesis model identifies the issues that attracted the media to this story. To summarize Gans (1979), story suitability is based on several factors: the rank of the government official; the potential impact on the nation or on a large number of people; and the significance of the event. The more factors that are satisfied, the greater chance the issue will become news (Davison et al., 1982). The controversy over funding for the arts satisfied several factors: the story involved government officials and government actions; affected taxpayers through their tax dollars funding the NEA; and focused on the fact that this controversy was setting precedent for future government involvement in matters of appropriation of funds. In addition, the story had publicly recognized conflict, involved known officials, was timely, and was in proximity to the national seat of power in Washington, D.C.

All of the issues identified in the thesis model are classified as high-threshold issues (Lang and Lang, 1981), and therefore media coverage helped shape audience perceptions of those issues. In the model we see that the issues fall into several broad categories: arts funding, Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Corcoran, and obscenity. The topics are interrelated and have been defined and framed by the media since relatively few people outside Washington, D.C., had direct involvement with the issues.
Sources

The thesis model shows that the role of sources is of key importance to the creation of media issues. Sources are the links that reporters have to news issues and are often eager, powerful, and suitable to provide information (Gans, 1979). According to Walter Karp, very few news stories are the result of a reporter digging. Instead, most are written from "official news releases from members of Congress, presidential aides, and other politicians," (Karp, 1989, p. 56).

The relationship between journalists and their sources resembles a "dance" (Gans, 1979, p. 117). The dance analogy depicts the way sources, who have information, entice journalists to cover a story by feeding them bits of information. The source seems to take two steps forward for every two steps the journalist takes back. When the source pulls back, the reporter steps forward. This back and forth action resembles the action of a dance. It is this give and take between a journalist and his/her source that has movement and rhythm.

To gain media attention, sources contact the media with information they want conveyed (through press releases or media conferences, for example). Next, the media follow up trying to give validation and meaning to the issue. If there is sufficient journalistic reason to bring an issue to the news agenda, the media then frame the information according to prescribed journalistic practices. Gans (1979) notes that sources can gain power in the relationship by offering incentives, having power and authority, having a supply of information, and by being located in proximity to the
media. Within the model's sector of sources there are arts sources, the NEA, Corcoran officials, and government officials, including Senator Helms.

The model predicts that sources can gain prominence in the news by prompting the media through staged and spontaneous events. While spontaneous events often thrust the media spotlight in a certain direction, pseudo-events are also a means of achieving media attention. In the case of the arts funding controversy, pseudo-events included the planned June 30, 1989 protest by artists at the Corcoran. The model illustrates the evolution of how the media cover events in reaction to prompting by sources.

**Media Frames**

Since the media play such an active role in shaping the prevailing view of the world, how the media define, gather, and transmit news is of great importance. In the arts funding controversy, the media were dealing with a high-threshold issue that had all the characteristics to make exciting copy—it involved known institutional sources, there was an ensuing conflict with visible protests, and the subject of the conflict involved sexual images. The official sources were selling the story and the media was buying (Gans, 1979). According to the model, media frames will focus on aspects of conflict and controversy as embodied in the topics of arts funding, controversy, and art. As we have seen in the literature review, the media define a story based on certain criteria. It is these criteria that give way to the media frames, often involving action, conflict, and deviance in the story. Controversy is often the most salient theme of a story and though there may be extremely important sub-issues, the media focus on the controversy angle.
Effects

The thesis examines direct and indirect effects which are related to media coverage of the controversy. The thesis model categorizes three types of effects: economic, public policy, and social values. The economic effects involved attendance patterns at museums exhibiting the Mapplethorpe exhibit, and the price of Mapplethorpe's art. Public policy was effected through changes in the law regarding how the NEA granted money to organizations, and how the NEA, as an organization, was structured. Social values were effected as evidenced by the resulting obscenity trial in 1991 over Mapplethorpe's photographs.

Hypotheses

Based on the information presented in the literature and predicted by the model as it relates to the arts funding controversy, the thesis tests the following nine hypotheses.

Agenda Building Hypotheses

H1 Media coverage about the NEA controversy reacts to prompting from established sources.

H2 When the NEA issue became an agenda item for the government, it became a news issue.

H3 Sources form alliances/coalitions with like-minded people.

Media Frames Hypotheses

H4 Controversy is a central theme for most news stories about the NEA.
H5 When the NEA controversy is described, mention of the Mapplethorpe exhibit is in general terms, with few specifics about the exhibit given.

H6 Certain issues that are part of the NEA controversy will be linked together in media stories.

Effects Hypotheses

H7 Media attention to the NEA controversy increases attendance at the Mapplethorpe exhibit.

H8 Media attention to the NEA controversy increases the selling price of Mapplethorpe's work.

H9 Media attention to the NEA controversy is sustained when the NEA controversy poses a threat to existing public policy.
Chapter 4

METHODS

A major focus of this study is the amount and type of newspaper coverage given to the arts funding controversy. The method used to quantitatively assimilate and analyze this information is content analysis. Frequencies and crosstabulations of the content have been used to detect fluctuations in media coverage.

Effects were measured by examining museum attendance figures before and after the controversy. Attendance figures were tested against a baseline. The baseline measure was determined from attendance at the two Mapplethorpe exhibit venues (Philadelphia and Chicago) before its opening in Washington, D.C. This baseline reflects an accurate picture of the exhibit's popularity prior to the controversy. Media coverage given to the exhibit during those first two stops was included in this sample. A final measure of effects was a comparison of the price of Mapplethorpe's artwork before and after the controversy.

Study Description

The content analysis sample was drawn from publications in the United States for the calendar year 1989. Articles were selected for coding if they mentioned the NEA funding controversy, Robert Mapplethorpe, or both.
Major mainstream media include daily publications from major cities (New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles) and weekly newsmagazines (Time, Newsweek). News stories were collected during an extensive search from a variety of sources at Morris Library at the University of Delaware (including use of interlibrary loan), from Senator Helms' Washington, D.C., office, from the American Association of Museums' government affairs office, and from the Free Library in Philadelphia. As the AAM subscribes to a newspaper clipping service, all major mainstream newspapers were surveyed. At Morris Library a computer search examined the current periodicals listing by topic of all major news stories for major mainstream newspapers and magazines. A general search, by date, was also conducted for major mainstream publications. The American Association of Museums' (AAM) government affairs office kept a clip file (Burrell's Media Service) of all news stories generated by this controversy. This file was cross-matched with the Morris Library search. Finally, Senator Helms' office was called. His assistant sent copies of all articles and editorials that included Helm's position. This final step was taken to ensure that the AAM generated materials were not biased in favor of the arts community.

**Sample**

Of the published stories collected on the arts funding controversy topic, 66% of them were included in the content sample, for a total sample of 100 stories. In selecting the sample, every third story was eliminated. The unit of analysis was defined as each complete story, including headlines and
accompanying photographs. A sample of 100 was chosen because of time constraints—it took thirty minutes to code each article.

**Coding Procedure**

Data coding was conducted over the summer and fall of 1992 by the thesis author and Kathy Jamison, a friend of the author. The second coder was trained to use the categories and definitions as delineated in the recording instrument. There was also a step-by-step procedure for coding the data. Since the original sample left 33% of the total number of news stories available for practice, many hours of preparation went into the preparation of the recording instrument and the training of the coders.

**Reliability**

Reliability analysis for the content analysis was conducted on a random sample of 50% of the total number of news stories coded. The analysis was computed using *A Computer Program for Agreement Analysis of Reliability Data*, version 4B, by Klaus Krippendorff with the user's manual adaptation by Nancy Signorielli. The acceptable agreement coefficient for the variables was .75 and above. Overall, agreement was very strong between observer number one and observer number two. For the listing of agreement coefficients, see Appendix A.

**Variables**

In the recording instrument (see Appendix B), the coding variables, or questions, were grouped into six areas that include information about issues, sources, frames, headlines, the exhibit, and a basic description
of the coding unit. The recording instrument contains sixty-three variables. Nominal variables were coded as either "yes" or "no." Ordinal variables were coded on a scale from zero to three. Following is a description of the coding variables used in the study (with their agreement coefficients and scales).

The variables that relate to issues include: questions that ask what topics were in the story. The topics covered include if Mapplethorpe was mentioned in the story (.87 nominal), if the term "homoerotic" was used (.95 nominal), if the NEA was mentioned (1.00 nominal), and if the term "censor" or "censorship" was used (1.00 nominal).

The variables that relate to sources include: questions that ask how prominent a source was in the story; government source (.97 ordinal), Helms as source (.95 ordinal), Bush as a source (.90 ordinal), artists as a source (.92 ordinal), Corcoran as a source (.90 ordinal), NEA as a source (.95 ordinal), "others" as a source (.95 ordinal), and religious groups as a source (.99 ordinal). "Others" were defined as persons quoted who did not fit into the above groups. There were four questions concerning the role of alliances in the story: alliance mentioned (1.00 nominal), alliances name (1.00 nominal), alliance used as a source (1.00 nominal), and name of alliances members (1.00 nominal).

The variables that relate to the frames in each story include questions that ask what emphasis was given to particular subject matter including obscenity (.99 ordinal), censorship (.96 ordinal), controversy (.80 ordinal), banning art (.99 ordinal), art (.90 ordinal), arts funding (.98 ordinal), NEA (.96 ordinal), politics (.98 ordinal), protest or debate (.96 ordinal), the
Corcoran Gallery of Art (.98 ordinal), Mapplethorpe (.91 ordinal), sex (.80 ordinal), the First Amendment (.81 ordinal), and AIDS (.94 ordinal).

For the headlines of each story, variables measured whether or not a particular topic was mentioned. Key words were grouped and categorized for easy reference. For the controversy headline (.90 nominal), words to look for as cues included indecent, obscenity, controversial, censorship, ban, shocking, immoral, scandal, sexual/sexually explicit, firing lines. For the political funding headline (1.00 nominal), words to look for as cues included funding, NEA, endowment, taxes, politics. For the conflict headline (.75 nominal), words to look for as cues included protest, march, action, activist, conflict, battle, debate, anger. For the Corcoran headline (1.00 nominal), words to look for as cues included Corcoran, gallery, and cancellation. For the Art headline (.89 nominal) words to look for as cues included art, artists, paintings, photographs.

The variables that gathered basic information from each story about the Mapplethorpe exhibit include: if the exhibit was mentioned in the article (.81 interval), if the number of photographs in the exhibit was mentioned in the story (1.00 nominal), if the fact that there were controversial photographs in the exhibit was mentioned (1.00 nominal), if the number of controversial photographs in the exhibit was mentioned (1.00 nominal), if the noncontroversial photographs in the exhibit were mentioned (1.00 nominal), and if details about the noncontroversial photographs were mentioned (1.00 nominal). Other questions asked if the location of the exhibit was given (1.00 nominal), if the dates the exhibit was on display were given (1.00 nominal), if
the story mentioned the attendance at the exhibit (1.00 nominal), or the price of Mapplethorpe's artwork (1.00 nominal).

**Other Data**

Museum attendance figures were gathered from the public relations departments at the institutions where the Mapplethorpe exhibit was shown. A letter was sent to each public relations department requesting information on attendance averages at shows previously held at each museum, and attendance figures for the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Each museum responded to the request.

The price paid for Mapplethorpe's art was based on a comparison of his artwork before and after his death and the controversy. Effects on Mapplethorpe's art were measured by comparing the price paid for similar works both before and after the controversy, as well as the volume of work on the market. This information was gathered from *Photographic Art Market Auction Prices*, (Persky, 1987, 1988, 1989). This publication gives an overview of the art market on an annual basis and lists information about what individual works of photography sold for at auction.

The following three chapters are organized to address the hypotheses on agenda building, media frames, and effects. Each chapter contains the statistical analyses to test the hypotheses as well as discussion of the results. A final summary conclusion follows those chapters.
Chapter 5

AGENDA BUILDING RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter reports the findings of the content analysis as they address the research questions and hypotheses about the process of agenda building. A model has been presented that looks at how public controversies evolve. It has been suggested that there is a symbiotic relationship between issues, sources, the media, and the public who are ultimately reached with media messages. Several hypotheses have been presented to test the thesis premise that through an agenda-building process, the media define issues based on interactions with sources that they have deemed credible and found accessible. Issues are then framed in terms that convey action and drama, often focusing on controversy and conflict in the resulting media coverage. This increase in media exposure for an issue can have economic consequences. The thesis model (Figure 3.1) shows direct linkage between credible sources and issues of concern to them, media access, media exposure, and public effects.

The arts funding controversy erupted during the summer of 1989 when a number of events and pseudo-events occurred that propelled an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs into notoriety. Because of particular details about the case—that it occurred in Washington, D.C., that it involved members of Congress, that it involved issues of obscenity and sex—
it became the target of media attention. The first step in understanding the
texture of the arts funding controversy is to compare the actual chain-of-
events to media coverage. The first research question—R1 When did the
controversy first become a media issue?—can be addressed through a
comparison of events to media coverage. The first hypothesis presented—H1
Media coverage about the NEA controversy reacts to prompting
from established sources—is tested by a comparison of the events to
media coverage.

The media coverage that occurred prior to the controversy gives
an important baseline level against which to compare coverage afterward.
Table 5.1 presents a quick over-view of coverage for the Mapplethorpe
exhibit prior to its scheduled showing in Washington, D.C., compared to the
landmark day, June 12, when the Corcoran canceled the exhibit. Table 5.1
shows that of the 100 stories coded in the sample, 94% were written after
June 10, 1989. The stories contained a total of 1,816 paragraphs, of which
1,726, or 95% were published after June 10, 1989.
Table 5.1  Summary Comparison of Coverage by Date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*1988</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.- June 10, 1989</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 11 - Dec. 1989</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>101*</td>
<td>1,817**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 77.44 \quad **1,474 \]
\[ df = 1 \]
\[ p < .001 \]

N= 101 stories, 1,817 paragraphs

*1988 was not included in the coding sample or \( x^2 \) but was investigated to determine coverage levels.

To address the second research question—**R2 What events prompted media coverage?**—a timeline of events was compiled that lists all events from the time the Mapplethorpe exhibit opened in December 1988 through December 1989, and compares it to media coverage during the same period. As noted in Table 5.1, media coverage of the Mapplethorpe exhibit increased sharply after June 10, 1989. Table 5.2 presents a comparison of the arts funding media coverage from the time that the Mapplethorpe exhibit opened in Philadelphia in December 1988, through June of 1989. From this table we see that the Corcoran's cancellation had an immediate effect on media coverage. A July 2, 1989 article in The Washington Post (Roberts, 1989) reports that the Mapplethorpe show
appeared in Philadelphia and Chicago without incident. But in Washington, D.C., it caused quite a stir. The story relates that 900 people had protested the Corcoran's cancellation by staging a slide show on the outside wall of the gallery. Roberts comment on the protest was, "It may not have been the show, but it certainly was a media event" (Roberts, 1989, p. C1).
Table 5.2 Comparison of Coverage by Dates For December 1988 through June 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>*Media Coverage</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>December 1988</strong></td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>Calendar listing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit opens in Phila.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1989</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit open until January 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1989</td>
<td>1/18</td>
<td>Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit opens in Chicago.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1989</td>
<td>2/41</td>
<td>Obituary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapplethorpe dies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1989</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit closes in Chicago.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1989</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit not showing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helms and D'Amato attack Serrano photograph and NEA funding practices in the Senate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1989</td>
<td>13/230</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House warns NEA about funding (6/6/89).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran cancels exhibit (6/12/89).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>17/290</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 100 stories and 1,816 paragraphs for 1989

*Coverage is measured in stories/paragraphs
**1988 was not included in the coding sample but was investigated to determine coverage levels.

Another way to view the information in Table 5.2 is in graph form, see Figures 5.1 and 5.2.
An analysis of Table 5.2 shows that coverage of the arts funding controversy by the media did not correspond immediately to events, but lagged behind events by several weeks. To understand the reasons for the time difference between when events occurred and when the media first covered them, many factors had to be evaluated. Since media coverage often reacts to institutional prompting (Gans, 1979), the sources that were quoted during the arts funding controversy became a prime area of scrutiny. Past research has shown that the role of sources is a critical part of the process of how issues become matters of public record. This thesis tested whether or not journalists seek out established sources whose credibility has already been established.

Table 5.2 shows that even though members of Congress were made aware of the situation and responded with recommendations to change public policy as early as May 1989, media coverage did not respond until the Corcoran canceled in June 1989. Though in April 1989, Rev. Wildmon had begun a letter writing campaign to conservative members of Congress demanding that they fire whoever was responsible for the NEA's funding of Serrano's "Piss Christ," there was only one article in The Washington Times (Braaten, 1989) about the campaign, with no follow-up article about this issue until early June. Leading up to the Corcoran's decision to cancel the Mapplethorpe exhibit, during the first two weeks of June 1989, both The Washington Times and The Washington Post reported that the NEA was "under fire" by Wildmon over the controversial photographs (Braaten, 1989, p. A5, and Kaster, 1989, p. C1).
Typical of the type of coverage that responded to institutional prompting was a June 7 story in *The Washington Post* headlined, "Funding Art That Offends," (Kaster, 1989, p. C1). The story states that a photograph has entangled the NEA and Congress in "a tense debate over taste, freedom of expression, and the role government should play in supporting potentially controversial art." Sources cited in the story include members of Congress, a NEA spokesperson, the Corcoran, and Serrano (the artist). Once the Corcoran Gallery canceled the Mapplethorpe exhibition, on June 12, the subjects of Mapplethorpe, arts funding, and controversy, were linked--as were the sources used by the media.

To address the second agenda-building hypothesis--H2 When the NEA issue became an agenda item for the government, it became a news issue--we look to see when members of Congress began to take issue with arts funding practices. A June 7 *Washington Post* (Kaster, 1989) story states that since Senators Helms and D'Amato had taken to the Senate floor in May to lambaste the NEA for its funding obscenity, 50 senators and 150 representatives had contacted NEA about its funding procedures. In Table 5.2 we see that media coverage spiked during the end of the second week in June when the Corcoran announced its decision to cancel the Mapplethorpe exhibit as the result of not wanting to get embroiled in the arts funding controversy. In the two-day period following the Corcoran's announcement, there was a marked increase in the number of stories written about the cancellation. Since this was a major story for the art
world, media coverage was not unexpected following the Corcoran's announcement.

An analysis of Table 5.3 addresses the third research question—

**R3 Who are cited as sources by the media?** Based on past research, we would expect to find that those in "official" capacity will be cited as sources. From January through May 1989, there is only one source cited, a religious source. In June, there was a sharp increase in the number of sources cited, an increase to thirty-six, with the majority (64%) of the sources coming from the Arts and Government categories. This corresponds to the listing for June in Table 5.2 ($x^2 = 115.44$, df = 4, p < .001) where we see that the Corcoran had canceled the Mapplethorpe exhibit (accounting for the rise in Arts sources), and that the House of Representatives called for NEA funding restrictions (accounting for the rise in Government sources). In Table 5.3 we also see that most stories had more than one source mentioned (100 stories, 215 sources cited), and that certain sources were cited more than others. Arts sources were mentioned in the most number of stories, President Bush in the least.
Table 5.3  Sources Crosstabulated by Month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Allian.</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Gov.</th>
<th>Relig.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1989</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1989</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1989</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1989</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1989</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1989</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1989</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals by category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Allian.</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Gay</th>
<th>Gov.</th>
<th>Relig.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 115.44 \]

\[ df = 4 \]

\[ p < .001 \]

\[ N = 215 \]

Note: the category for "Other" is not included in the above table. "Other" accounted for 1% of the responses.
Figure 5.3 Number of Sources by Type through 1989
Figure 5.3 charts these sources in graph form illustrating which sources were mentioned during 1989.

In the 100 stories sampled, there were 215 sources cited by the media. There was no significant difference between the top two sources (Arts and Government); both were equally prominent, reinforcing the hypothesis that news coverage reacts to established sources. In Table 5.4 we see the frequency of sources in the sample and find that the arts community and government officials overall are cited with the greatest frequency ($x^2= 132.17$, df$= 7$, p$<.001$). It appears that the frequency of stories and the frequency of sources cited is often directly related to actual events. When the Corcoran canceled in June, the number of arts sources, government sources, alliances, and gay sources all rose. Throughout the summer of 1989 both sides of the conflict lobbied Congress and the media. The number of sources in each category continued to react to events. Examples of coverage during the summer include a July 29 article in *The Washington Post*. Staff writer Elizabeth Kastor asks "Who Would Decide What Art Is Indecent?" She presents both sides of the conflict, citing Helms' motion for an amendment to the Senate appropriations bill to forbid the NEA from funding "indecent" art. She also quotes writer Joyce Carol Oates, who felt that serious art is often "taboo," (Kaster, 1989, p. C1). Many of the stories throughout the summer presented quotes from both sides of the arts funding controversy.

During September 1989, the number of sources cited reached a peak with 58 citations. There were two factors that accounted for this increase. First, Congress was returning after its August recess to continue
debating arts funding procedures. In addition, President Bush had nominated John Frohnmayer as chairman of the NEA. As Frohnmayer made the rounds of Capitol Hill, he lobbied against content restrictions on NEA grants. A typical Frohnmayer story was the September 23 article in *The New York Times*. Writer Barbara Gamarekian, who had been on special assignment to the *Times* on this issue since it unfolded in June, related that Frohnmayer "spoke out today against the Helms Amendment," (Gamarekian, 1989, p. 9). In addition to coverage about Frohnmayer's appointment, media coverage included the continuing saga at the Corcoran. Throughout the summer of 1989, many in the museum world called for the director's resignation. Stories related this debate and publicized several Corcoran staff members' resignations in protest against the cancellation. These events contributed to the increase in the number of arts sources cited in September.

**Table 5.4  Frequency of Stories Mentioning a Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helms</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President Bush</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 = 132.17$  
$df = 7$  
$P < .001$  
$N = 298$
To test hypothesis three—H3 Sources form alliances/coalitions with like-minded people—information was gathered on the number of times there was mention of an alliance, and all times that the alliance was used as a source. Table 5.5 compares the frequency of stories that mention an alliance to the frequency of stories that cite the alliance as a source. We find that in 44% of the stories an alliance is mentioned, and in 43% of the stories an alliance is quoted as a source. With a drop-off of just 1%, we can assume that if an alliance is mentioned in a story, the alliance is also used as a source of information.

Table 5.5  Comparison of Alliance Mention to Alliance Used as a Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Frequency of Mention - Frequency/Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All alliances</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example of an alliance being mentioned and quoted as a source is taken from a Washington Post story (Kaster, 1989, p. D1), from June 17, in which the lead explains that, "More than 60 artists and gay-rights activists gathered outside the Corcoran Gallery of Art yesterday to protest the museum's decision to cancel a controversial show of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe." During the following weeks artists and art supporters
mounted a boycott of the Corcoran Gallery of Art that resulted in several artists canceling shows with the Gallery, and one artist, Lowell Nesbitt, writing the Corcoran out of a million dollar bequest.

Alliances formed with like-minded people. Table 5.6 shows the frequencies for each of the particular alliances mentioned in the stories. We see that while the majority of stories, 55%, did not mention an alliance, 45% of the stories did mention an alliance. The most frequent alliance mentioned was unnamed artists and arts groups who typified those who protested in June at the Corcoran. A typical story that featured an arts alliance was in The Washington Times on June 16. The story calls the proposed slide show protest a "renegade exhibit," being shown by the Coalition of Washington Artists (Gibson, 1989, p. E5). Over the next several months, many more arts organizations would join forces as alliances.

Table 5.6 Frequency of Alliances in Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No alliance</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnamed artists</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Arts Alliance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Wildmon</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay &amp; Lesbian</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition of Artists</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS organizations</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Humanities Alliance</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 220.99 \]
\[ df = 8 \]
\[ p < .001 \]
\[ N = 100 \]
A public controversy over funding for the arts became news during 1989. This thesis hypothesized that such controversies become news because of a number of interrelated mechanisms in our society such as the way power is defined and wielded, how the news media identify and characterize this power, and how the balance of power can shift in response to outside forces. The literature has shown that through an agenda-building process, the media often define issues based on the interrelationship between forces in conflict.

Through the agenda-building process, the media define what are salient public concerns and seek out quotes from official sources, people who have direct knowledge of the issues. Those sources with the most dramatic or novel story are often cited by the media. Agenda items emerge through this interplay between the journalist, his or her source, and the news organization's gatekeeper. The issues become shaped by the people who wield influence and power. As in the arts funding controversy, once an issue becomes a topic of concern by those in power, it has a better chance of receiving status on the official political agenda. The arts funding case provided an example of how a topic can be a non-issue until it is the center of debate by Congress and is deemed a legitimate story by media gatekeepers. Once elevated to the national news agenda, the controversy was thrust into the national spotlight, shaped by the opposing forces who the media sought out as sources.
In the data, we have seen that coverage of the arts funding controversy by the media did not correspond immediately to events, but lagged behind events by weeks. One explanation for the lag may be the fact that the Mapplethorpe exhibit was not yet on display in Washington, D.C., during the early weeks of the arts funding controversy. It was not until the arts community reacted to the Corcoran's cancellation in June, that the media widely recognized the growing controversy.

The data has also shown that news stories about the arts funding controversy were being churned out by the media with reporters using similar sources drawn largely from Congress and the arts establishment. The moving spotlight found sources who highlighted the controversy by pointing out the controversial nature of the artist and his art, including many in the arts community who also referred to Mapplethorpe as a controversial artist. Few news reports contained an accurate representation of the actual exhibit; too often, stories focused on the controversial issues and not on the merit of Mapplethorpe's art. The majority of stories portrayed the Mapplethorpe exhibition inaccurately, focusing on the number of controversial photographs and never mentioning the noncontroversial photographs. By pitting sources against one another in the media, journalists got pithy quotes, action-packed prose, and declarations of offensive and defensive moves. Relating back to the Berkowitz study (1987) we find that in the arts funding controversy, officials and executives do indeed dominate the news as sources.

In evaluating the chain-of-events that led up to the media exposure for the Mapplethorpe exhibit we see that, in fact, the controversy
had been brewing in Congress for several weeks before the media picked up the story on a national level. The principal sources involved began to play-out this conflict in the public arena using the media to bring attention to the events in Congress through the staging of "pseudo-events." Both sides played the game. The arts community staged a slide show of Mapplethorpe's work on the exterior of the Corcoran Gallery on the day that the exhibit was to have opened there, and artists boycotted having their work shown in the gallery. Jesse Helms put on display in the Capital copies of Mapplethorpe's homoerotic photographs and sent copies of the offending work to members of a congressional subcommittee.

Alliances formed as a result of the polarization of the forces, and in 45% of the stories, an alliance was cited. Of the alliances cited, most were from the arts community. The arts community began to mobilize and joined forces with established groups such as the American Arts Alliance and the National Humanities Alliance.

This thesis contends that the issues themselves are also important determinants of whether or not a story gets covered and makes it to the national news agenda. As we have seen, story suitability is a key component of the news. The fact that the issues in the arts funding controversy had relevance to a national audience, involved members of Congress, and focused on issues of obscenity, made this story a topic of heated debate. As the issues unfolded in Congress, the enduring issue to emerge was that of public funding of the arts. Subsequent media coverage questioned the very existence of the NEA and like endowments.
We see that the issues evolved over time, emerging as a grassroots effort to get the photographs of two artists banned, and growing into a national debate over government funding for the arts. From all areas of the country, editorials and news stories in local newspapers called for public debate on the issues. While only 400,000 people in the country had actually seen the exhibit, it became known to millions through the media. This high-threshold issue became known to the public because it had been elevated to the national news agenda. The players, and political actors involved, were also elevated to the national news agenda where images of Jesse Helms, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Mapplethorpe's work became commonplace.
Chapter 6

MEDIA FRAMES RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The next broad category of research examines media frames, and the ways in which the media shape the reporting of events, in effect, shaping reality for those who attune to their messages. This chapter reports findings of the content analysis for the arts funding controversy as it addresses the research questions and tests hypotheses about media frames. As research has shown, the media play an active role in shaping the prevailing view of reality. With high-threshold topics, such as the arts funding controversy, the media are the prime means by which most people gain information about an issue (Lang and Lang, 1981). According to the thesis model, media frames tend to focus on aspects of controversy and conflict as a way of dramatizing a story. As stated in the first page of this thesis, controversy makes news.

The media frames hypotheses are tested by three broad areas of analysis: the number of reviews for the exhibit versus the number of news stories about the controversy; the frequency of controversy and debate frames as opposed to other frames; and a comparison of the frequencies of stories that mention only the controversial photographs, versus those stories that mention both the controversial and the noncontroversial photographs in the exhibit. In Table 6.1 we see a comparison of the types of stories published about the arts funding controversy, of which Mapplethorpe was
mentioned in 91% of the 100 cases. We find that 75% of the stories were straight news stories, 21% were presented under a prescribed news-column format, and 3% of the stories were reviews ($x^2 = 143.04, df = 3, p < .001$). This reinforces hypothesis H2—when the NEA issue became an agenda item for the government, it became a news issue. Reviews, in which the writer gets down to the details of an art exhibit and measures the artistic merit of the work, accounted for a very small percentage (3%) of total types of stories.

Table 6.1 Types of Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of story</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News Story</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obituary</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 = 143.04$
$df = 3$
$p < .001$

$N = 100$

An example of a typical straight news story is a July 26 report in The Washington Post (Kaster, 1989, p. C1) that states, "WPA Show Attracts Thousands, Mapplethorpe Exhibit Controversy Continues." The story does not delve into the exhibit content, it does not even mention how many photographs are in the exhibit. It does, however, mention record attendance
and sales of the catalog, the continuing debate in Congress, and the fact that
the Corcoran feared being drawn into a political battle.

An example of a typical column story is an article in *Time*
magazine for July 3 (Carlson, 1989, p. 21) under the heading "Nation." The
story asks, "Whose Art Is It, Anyway?" It too looks at the Mapplethorpe exhibit
in terms of its controversial nature stating, "Art and politics are often a volatile
mix. Add sex, and the mix becomes combustible." It goes on to mention that
the exhibit includes sadomasochistic and homoerotic photographs that are at
the center of a flap over funding for the arts.

Finally, an example of a review is the July 14 report in *The
Washington Post* (Lewis, 1989, p. D1) under the heading "Art," that actually
describes the exhibit in some detail. It mentions that the sadomasochistic
photographs constitute, "less than 5%" of the exhibit. In comparison to news
stories, the review gives the most details about individual photographs in the
exhibit and the techniques Mapplethorpe used to achieve his results.

To examine the first media-frame research question--R4 What
news frames emerged from the controversy?--we analyze the
frequencies of particular frames. Several news frames emerged from the
controversy over the course of 1989. These frames fall into several broad
categories, with most of the stories having more than one frame per story.
Table 6.2 shows the frequency of certain frames in the media coverage
based on a scale from three to zero, with three designating that an issue was
very important to the story and zero designating that no mention of the issue
was in the story. The frame for controversy is very important to the stories in
90% of them. Art as an important topic is mentioned in 86% of the stories and banning art in 80%.

To examine the second media-frame research question--R5 **What aspects of the story were given most prominence?** and to test the first media-frame hypothesis--H4 **Controversy is a central theme for most news stories about the NEA**--information about each story was coded on a scale to determine which frames were of central importance in each story. Table 6.2 examines media frames and shows which frames were very important to the story (controversy, art, and banning art), which were important but not of central importance (sex and Mapplethorpe), which were of some importance (censorship and free expression), and which were not significant overall (AIDS). Hypothesis H4--controversy is a central theme for most news stories about the NEA--is supported by \( \chi^2 = 225.68 \) (df= 3, \( p < .001 \)). A \( \chi^2 \) was computed for the controversy frame, and not the other frames, since the hypothesis specifically relates that controversy would be a central theme for the stories.
**Table 6.2**  Media Frames Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>very important</th>
<th>important</th>
<th>mention</th>
<th>no mention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banning Art</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts Funding</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapplethorpe</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscenity</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Expression</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 225.68 \]

\( df = 3 \)

\( p < .001 \)

N= 100

All numbers are percentages

As we see from Table 6.2, many of the stories included more than one frame. An example of a story that had a number of frames represented and includes the art, controversy, banning art, Mapplethorpe, arts funding, NEA, and sex frames was an October 3 Associated Press article that related how the House had approved restrictions on Federal aid for "obscene" art, thereby restricting grants approved by NEA for any art that depicts homoeroticism. The article goes on to link the actions in the House to the NEA's funding of the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Both sides of the debate were
quoted including Helms as pro-restrictions, and members of the American Arts Alliance stating that such restrictions were a method of intimidation.

An example of controversy being the most prominent aspect of a story is found in an August 20 story in The Hartford Courant (Rizzo, 1989, p. G1) that states that a "controversial show provokes debate on federal art funding." The article, in the lead two paragraphs, stresses such words as controversy, attack, assault, mobilized forces, and interference. It draws upon the growing schism between the arts and those who want "more of a say in how public money is spent on culture."

To test the second media-frame hypothesis--H5 When the NEA controversy is described, mention of the Mapplethorpe exhibit is in general terms, with few specifics about the exhibit given--we analyze the content of the stories as they relate to the Mapplethorpe exhibit itself. Table 6.3 breaks down the exhibit into three groups: if the existence of the controversial and noncontroversial photographs are mentioned; if the number of controversial and noncontroversial photographs are mentioned; and if details are given about the controversial and noncontroversial photographs. We see that 91\% of all stories mention the Mapplethorpe exhibit, of which a significant number, 74.7\% (x^2 = 48.4, df= 1, p<.001), mention that there are controversial photographs in the exhibit. A disproportionately low number, 23\%, mention that there are noncontroversial photographs. This indicates that when the stories mention the exhibit, they were significantly more likely to mention that there were controversial
photographs in the exhibit than they were to mention that there were noncontroversial photographs in the exhibit.

A very small percentage of stories mention the number of controversial (9.8%) and noncontroversial (1.1%) photographs in the exhibit. Because the expected cell frequency was less than ten for a two by two $x^2$, Yates' continuity correction was used to calculate $x^2$, ($x^2 = 5.2$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). This indicates that when stories mention the exhibit, they were more likely to mention the number of controversial photographs than the number of noncontroversial photographs, but overall, relatively few stories mention the number of photographs in the exhibit.

Stories that mention the details of the controversial and noncontroversial photographs were even in percentage, with 19.7% of the stories mentioning details of the controversial photographs, and 19.7% mentioning the noncontroversial photographs. Since both of these are equal, $x^2 = 0.0$. 
Table 6.3  

Percentage of Stories Discussing the Photo Exhibit That Mentioned the Existence, Number, and Details of the Controversial and Noncontroversial Photos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentioned</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controversial Photos</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncontroversial</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Controversial</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo Details</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncontroversial</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo Details</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 91

* Yates' continuity correction used to calculate $\chi^2$
* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

What Table 6.3 shows is that media coverage emphasized the controversial nature of the exhibit in 74.7% of the stories yet only gave information about the exhibit as a whole 23% of the time, reinforcing the argument that when stories mention the exhibit, they will be significantly more likely to mention the controversial rather than the noncontroversial photographs, and they will be significantly more likely not to give details about the exhibit photographs. Typical of this type of coverage was an early article written soon after the Corcoran canceled the Mapplethorpe exhibit. The June 14 story in *The Washington Post* (Kaster, 1989) states that the Corcoran decision was made in an effort to avoid the brewing debate over potentially offensive art. It goes on to state that Mapplethorpe's work is often
sexual and that the exhibit contained 150 works including a number of homoerotic images as well as nudes of children. Nowhere in the twenty-eight-inch column story does it state that the majority of the 150 photographs were noncontroversial shots of flowers and portraits of clothed individuals. An August 20 story in The Hartford Courant (Schwendienwien, 1989, p. G1) uses the fact that the public has received a distorted view of the Mapplethorpe exhibit through the media. The author states, "Reading about this controversy without seeing the work has given many people a distorted perspective of the artist as being a more fascinating photographer than he ever was."

To examine the third research question and test the final media-frame hypothesis--R6 Were certain frames grouped together? H6 Certain issues that are part of the NEA controversy will be linked together in media stories--data were subjected to factor analysis. In Table 6.4 ten items measuring media frames were subjected to principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The rotated factor matrix grouped the ten frames into three factors. Factor one consists of four frames: funding; NEA; obscenity; and politics. Factor two consists of three frames: debate; controversy; and AIDS. Factor three consists of three frames: Mapplethorpe; Corcoran Gallery; and art. Factor one is now termed, "Funding Frame"; factor two is now termed, "Controversy Frame"; and factor three is now termed, "Art Frame."
Table 6.4  Rotated Factor Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Funding Frame</th>
<th>Controversy Frame</th>
<th>Art Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obscenity</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.77</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapplethorpe</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= > 100

The varimax rotation results were achieved once several frames were removed from the matrix due to crossloading. The frames removed were: censorship; banning art; sex; and freedom of expression.

The results of the factor analysis were used to create factor scores for each story. These factor scores were then recoded so that a factor score greater than .5 was considered as having that general frame. For instance, a story that had a funding frame factor score of .72 was considered a “Funding Frame” story. The frequency of the frames, those frames that had a factor score of .5 or greater, were then crosstabulated by date and the results are shown in Table 6.5 and Figure 6.1.
Table 6.5  Crosstabulation of Date by Frame Grouping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Funding Frame</th>
<th>Controversy Frame</th>
<th>Art Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1-10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 11-20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21-30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 11-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21-31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 11-20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21-31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 11-20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 21-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6.1  Frames by Month for 1989
As expected, during June 1989, the art frame, the funding frame, and the controversy frame all appear for the first time as a result of the Corcoran Gallery cancellation due to the concurrent controversy in Congress over NEA funding. The funding frame, which includes mentions of the NEA, obscenity, and politics, peaks slightly during the first week in August with media reports covering the National Council on Arts support of the NEA and reports of Helms sending Mapplethorpe photos to members of the House-Senate conference committee who were to decide the fate of NEA's funding. For the remainder of August and early-September, the funding frame dropped back to an occasional mention. In mid- to late-September there was a slight increase in this frame when Congress reconvened to debate the arts funding issue.

An example of the funding frame includes the June 13 Washington Post report that the Corcoran Gallery had canceled the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Touting a headline, "Corcoran Cancels Photo Exhibit, Director Cites Fear of Political Uproar Over Mapplethorpe Show," the article's lead states, "In an extraordinary move, the Corcoran Gallery of Art yesterday canceled a planned exhibit of photographs, 'Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment,' because of concern that the show would become embroiled in a political battle over federal funding of artistic work that may offend," (Kaster, 1989, p. C1).

The controversy frame, which includes mentions of debate and controversy, did not peak until mid-September. There was mention of it during June, July, and August as the House and Senate gather forces for
their mid-September funding debate. But as predicted, when Congress reconvened after Labor Day to debate the arts funding controversy the frequency of the controversy frame, or those stories that had factor scores of .5 or greater for the funding frame, shot up to ten.

An example of the controversy frame was a July 1 report in *The New York Times* (Gamarekian, 1989, p. 14) about "Crowd at Corcoran Protests Mapplethorpe Cancellation," and the July 28 report in *The Washington Post* (Kaster, 1989, p. B1) about "Art Supporters Denounce Helms, Senator's NEA Amendment Causes Unease on the Hill." During the September peak in the controversy frame, the stories focused on two main factors: the debates in Congress over arts funding; and the Corcoran Gallery's apology. Issued on September 18, the statement as reported by both *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* read,

> The Corcoran Gallery of Art, in attempting to defuse the NEA funding controversy by removing itself from the political spotlight, has instead found itself in the center of the controversy. By withdrawing from the Mapplethorpe exhibition, we, the board of trustees and the director, have inadvertently offended many members of the arts community, which we deeply regret. Our course in the future will be to support art, artists and freedom of artistic expression. (*The New York Times*, Gamarekian, 1989, p. C16)

The art frame had several spikes in coverage. The first, during June 1989, corresponds to the Corcoran Gallery's cancellation of the Mapplethorpe exhibit. The second increase, in July, was the result of the exhibition opening at the Washington Project for the Arts on July 21. The lead paragraph in a July 21 report in *The New York Times* (Gamarekian, 1989, p. C25) asks, "Wanna see some dirty pictures?" The August spike for
the art frame also included coverage of the exhibition in Washington, D.C. A
Mapplethorpe Bonanza," and heralds the fact that the Washington Project for
the Arts "reports that 48,863 people visited its gallery during the 24 days
Mapplethorpe's photographs were on display, roughly 40 times the usual
attendance." And finally, the mid-September art frame coverage was due to
the Helms amendment that challenged the NEA. A *New York Times* report
on September 13 claims, "Helms Amendment Is Facing a Major Test in
Congress." It goes on to report that,

> Both sides in the dispute are convinced the stakes are high, involving issues of artistic freedom and censorship, the proper role of government in the arts and the right, if any, of taxpayers not to have to pay for art they abhor. (Honan, 1989a, p. C17)

**Media Frames Discussion**

As we have seen in the literature, media frames, or the way the
media portray events and people, shape reality for those who listen to and
attune to media messages. As previously stated, with high-threshold topics,
such as the arts funding controversy, the media are the primary means
through which the public gains information. How the public perceives events
and issues is colored by the frames the media have created through the
words and images they choose to portray and link together. We find that in
90% of the stories used in this study, the controversy was the most salient
frame, with art and banning art closely matched. A July 21 story in *The
Washington Post* (Roberts, 1989, p. D1) takes issue with the fact that media
accounts of the exhibit are not accurate, "The press would have you believe that it's [going to the exhibit] like going over to a 14th street porno shop."

Of the 100 stories sampled for this study, 75% of them were news stories, 21% were news-columns (not editorials), and only 3% were reviews. This is ironic considering the subject in question is an art exhibit, yet obviously, the media had defined this issue as a news issue. We see in the reviews that most reviewers mentioned the controversy, but focused their attention on Mapplethorpe's style as an artist. We learn that the homoerotic photographs were part of a specific portfolio of work and did not represent the entirety of his craft. We learn that he was most well known for his portraits of people and flowers. Yet, for the opening of the Mapplethorpe exhibit at the WPA in Washington, D.C., the opening line for the evening was "Want to see some dirty pictures?" (Roberts, 1989, p. D1).

In media portrayals, art, controversy, banning art, Mapplethorpe, arts funding, the NEA, and sex are closely linked. These frames are represented in more than 65% of the stories. Controversy also becomes the most salient aspect of the stories and is the most dominant frame 90% of the time. This association that linked the NEA to controversy did create an adverse effect for the NEA. Throughout most of 1989 (and 1990), the tide of letters against NEA funding practices was more than two to one against the NEA (Platt, 1989). Eventually, the bulk of mail was so great that individual letters were not counted, they were divided up into two groups (pro and con the NEA) and then weighed.
As we have seen from the data, certain frames had a tendency to group together and pulled into three broad frames: a funding frame, a controversy frame, and an art frame. Several frames were removed from the matrix because they were cross-loading. It is interesting to note which frames pulled across the categories and why. Censorship and freedom of expression pulled from all three groups. They pulled from the funding frame because arts groups used censorship and the First Amendment as one of their arguments against restricting NEA grants due to content. The two issues pulled from the controversy frame because during the debates in Congress, and the protests at the Corcoran, censorship of free expression was again seen as an underlying issue. They also pulled from the arts frame because by canceling the Mapplethorpe exhibit, the Corcoran was accused of censoring free expression.

Another issue that cross-loaded was that of banning certain art. This topic pulled from the funding frame because the banning of obscene art was at the very heart of the controversy. It pulled from the controversy frame because banning art had two very distinct, opposing forces. It also pulled from the art frame since art was at the very core of the issue. Finally, the frame for sex was removed from the matrix since in each of the broad frame categories, the term "homoerotic" had worked itself into the heart of the issues, and was included in the final wording of the Helms amendment.
Chapter 7
EFFECTS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of media coverage are not always easy to identify and measure. Yet, with the arts funding controversy there were immediate, measurable effects that include the length of time that the controversy sustained itself in the media, the formation of alliances on both sides of the controversy, public attendance at the Mapplethorpe exhibit, the price paid for Mapplethorpe's artwork, and changes in public policy.

To examine the first effects research question—R7 How long did the controversy sustain coverage?—we compare events to media coverage, as we did in Table 5.2. In Table 7.1 we see a comparison of media coverage for the months July through December 1989. This table addresses the question of how long the controversy sustained coverage. There was sustained interest in July (eighteen stories for 291 paragraphs), August (fourteen stories for 280 paragraphs), and in September (twenty-eight stories for 563 paragraphs). In October we begin to see a drop in the coverage even though the Mapplethorpe exhibit was still traveling, and the debate still raged in Congress. The one difference was that after August, the Mapplethorpe exhibit was no longer on display in Washington, D.C.
Table 7.1 Comparison of Events to Media Coverage for July 1989 through December 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Media Coverage</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>July 1989</strong></td>
<td>18/291</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists protest at Corcoran.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress proposes NEA restrictions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit opens in Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>August 1989</strong></td>
<td>14/280</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress recesses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit closes in Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helms sends photos to conference committee.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>September 1989</strong></td>
<td>28/563</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesbitt will is changed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran issues apology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad against Helms amendment runs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House debates NEA.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate defeats Helms amendment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>October 1989</strong></td>
<td>10/114</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House-Senate compromise reached, includes restrictions for NEA.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill sent to President.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit opens in Hartford</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record price set for Mapplethorpe’s art.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 1989</strong></td>
<td>8/191</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA withholds controversial grant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA reverses itself on grant.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>December 1989</strong></td>
<td>3/57</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcoran director resigns.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>July- Dec. 1989 Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>81/1,496</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coverage is measured in stories/paragraphs Coverage= 100 stories and 1,816 paragraphs for 1989
An August 6 article in *The New York Times* focused on the fact that the Mapplethorpe photographs had sparked a controversy and that had become known on a national level.

Short of unhooking the telephone, canceling the newspaper, taking an axe to the television and hiding under the sofa, it would now be impossible not to have heard of the pseudo-controversy about the photographs of the late Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, the intervention of Senator Jesse Helms on the floor of the Senate and the possible effects of it all on the future of the National Endowment for the Arts. (Kimmelman, 1989, p. 31)

A comparison similar to Table 7.1 of stories generated by the controversy is illustrated in Figures 7.1 and 7.2. These graphs extend the information charted in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 to include the entire year for 1989.
Figure 7.1 Number of Stories through 1989
Figure 7.2  Number of Paragraphs through 1989
To examine the second effects research question--R8 Was there any public reaction to the controversy?--we surveyed the sample to determine what the public reaction was to the controversy. The reactions fell into a number of categories: grassroots movements, alliance formation, and artists' boycotts. Grassroots movements included the religious right's mobilization of a letter writing campaign to get conservative politicians to try to change public policy concerning the NEA, specifically putting content restrictions on all grants. As reported in an April 26 story in The Washington Times (Braaten, 1989, p. A5), a Mississippi pastor, Rev. Donald E. Wildmon, led the protest against NEA funding of Serrano's photograph, "Piss Christ." In addition to his demand that the arts endowment fire whoever was responsible, Wildmon suggested individuals cancel their Equitable insurance policies if Equitable, the exhibit's sponsor, did not apologize for the photograph. In this same article, the reporter also sought out information from the arts community to find out their reaction to the criticism. This comparison of the opposing alliances' views served to establish, at an early date, that there really was a controversy over viewpoints on the subject of arts funding.

A June 7 story in The Washington Post sums up the polarization of the alliances:

On one side stand D’Amato, Helms and the Mississippi Christian group American Family Association, which in April launched a letter-writing campaign to the NEA and--more significantly--to members of Congress...On the other side are arrayed arts administrators and others who are disturbed by the prospect of the government funding only conventional, tame art that will be widely accepted. (Kaster, 1989, p. C1)
One publicly-announced result of the emerging controversy in June was the cancellation of the Mapplethorpe exhibit by the Corcoran. As reported in a June 14 story in *The New York Times*, "The Corcoran Gallery of Art has canceled a planned retrospective of the work of the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, anticipating that its content would trigger a political storm on Capitol Hill" (Gamarekian, 1989, p. C22).

A June 15 report in *The New York Times* provides some perspective about the early days of the controversy:

Some 5,000 members of the Corcoran Gallery of Art received invitations in the mail this week to a June 30 reception for the exhibition "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment." It was an ironic footnote to the museum's decision Monday, at a hastily called board meeting, to cancel the photographic retrospective, saying its contents could offend people on Capitol Hill who monitor federal financing of the arts. But the cancellation and invitations did not end the matter. A coalition of local artists, arts writers and arts institutions has formed a National Committee Against Censorship in the Arts, and is circulating petitions of protest among the city's art galleries. (Gamarekian, 1989, p. C14)

A June 16 *Washington Post* (Kaster, 1989) story has the first mention of a planned protest, stating that three gay-rights groups had planned a protest that day against the Corcoran. It continues by stating that a group of Washington, D.C., artists would register its disapproval of the cancellation by projecting slides of the controversial pictures on the museum's facade on June 30. Follow-up articles in both *The Washington Post* on July 2 (Roberts, 1989) and *The New York Times* on July 1 (Gamarekian, 1989) registered reactions to the slide show protest.
The organized protest by arts alliances continued to make news. An August 30 story in *The Washington Post* (Richard, 1989) reports that the arts alliance proposed sanctions against the Corcoran, refusing to show work in the gallery. It reports that more than a dozen artists had taken steps to deny the institution the rights to show their work. As a final rebuke, one artist, Lowell Nesbitt, even changed his will, cutting the Corcoran out entirely.

To examine the final research question—**R9 Were there any economic effects of the controversy coverage?**—we will test two of the effects hypotheses—**H7 Media attention to the NEA controversy increases attendance at the Mapplethorpe exhibit,** and **H8 Media attention to the NEA controversy increases the selling price of the Mapplethorpe’s work.**

The economic effects of the controversy coverage include record-breaking attendance at the Mapplethorpe exhibit and an increase in the selling price of Mapplethorpe’s art. To measure the attendance patterns for the Mapplethorpe exhibit, each museum was surveyed to find out normal attendance patterns (for similar photographic shows), and what the attendance was for the run of the Mapplethorpe show. Table 7.2 lists each museum that exhibited the Mapplethorpe show. It compares the attendance for the Mapplethorpe show to attendance patterns for similar shows.
Table 7.2  Museum Attendance Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Mapplethorpe</th>
<th>Other Shows' Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICA, Philadelphia</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>3,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/9/88 - 1/29/89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA, Chicago</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>10,000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/25/89 - 4/9/89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPA, Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>49,000</td>
<td>1,450***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadsworth, Hartford</td>
<td>72,000</td>
<td>25,000****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/21/89 - 12/24/89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAM, Berkeley</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>4,000*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/17/90 - 3/18/90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAC, Cincinnati</td>
<td>81,000</td>
<td>11,000******</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8/90 - 5/21/90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICA, Boston</td>
<td>104,000</td>
<td>50,000 for entire year******</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*x² = 3769
**x² = 22,272
***x² = 44,816
****x² = 40,983
*****x² = 39,185
******x² = 216,000
df = 1 (for all)
p < .001 (for all)

*******Can't compute x² since figures are not per the run of the show but include a total year's attendance.

Attendance statistics in Table 7.2 for the institutions that had the Mapplethorpe exhibit show dramatic differences from previous shows' averages. Each of the institutions, those that had the exhibit before and after the controversy broke, reported an increase in attendance for the
Mapplethorpe exhibit. The ICA in Philadelphia had a mild increase of 7,000 over previous exhibits. Their public relations staff attributes this to the fact that Mapplethorpe was a well-known photographer and who had a major retrospective exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City earlier in 1988. The exhibit then traveled to the MCA in Chicago where it too enjoyed an increase in attendance over previous shows. The staff at the MCA attribute some of this increase to the fact that Mapplethorpe was well-known, and the fact that he died while the show was at the institution.

The most noticeable increases come after the show opened in Washington, D.C., and was the focus of media attention. The WPA in Washington, D.C., the Wadsworth in Hartford, and the UAM in Berkeley all report increases of over 45,000 for each institution. For a small gallery like the WPA in Washington, D.C., the increase was phenomenal. According to a staff member at the WPA, one woman came up to him and said that she had been to the exhibit four times, and each time she was more offended!

The final two institutions to receive the show, the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati and the ICA in Boston felt the greatest effects from the controversy. The CAC felt the effects not only because of record attendance, but because on the day that the exhibit opened, police officers came into the gallery, arrested the artwork, and charged the director with obscenity. A subsequent trial confirmed that the art was not obscene, testing anti-obscenity laws that are among the toughest in the nation. At the ICA in Boston, the flap from Cincinnati was still making news, as was the debate in
Washington, D.C. ICA staff reported record attendance of 81,000 for an institution that normally had 11,000 visitors per year!

To measure the selling price of Mapplethorpe's work, data were collected from the periodical *Photographic Art Market Auction Prices* (Persky, 1987, 1988, 1989). Figure 7.3 compares the years 1986 to 1987 and 1988 for the volume of art and total money spent for Mapplethorpe's art. We see that from 1986 to 1987 the volume more than doubled. From 1987 to 1989 though, the volume more than tripled. The average price for Mapplethorpe's work was also affected. Very little difference is reported from 1986 to 1987 in the average price per piece. But in 1989 the price of Mapplethorpe's work rose ten fold as illustrated in Table 7.3.

### Table 7.3 Overall Comparison of Mapplethorpe Art Prices at Auction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall comparisons</th>
<th>1986</th>
<th>1987</th>
<th>1989</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume of art sold (#)</td>
<td>9 photos</td>
<td>21 photos</td>
<td>68 photos*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ volume of art</td>
<td>$10,835</td>
<td>$26,703</td>
<td>$681,965**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average price</td>
<td>$ 1,204</td>
<td>$ 1,271</td>
<td>$ 10,028***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 59.62 \quad df=2 \quad p<.001 \]
\[ x^2 = 1,223,117 \quad df=2 \quad p<.001 \]
\[ x^2 = 90,282 \quad df=2 \quad p<.001 \]

Table 7.4 compares Mapplethorpe's art selling price for 1989, specifically looking at pre-June and post-June sales. We see a dramatic difference in the pre- and post-sales reports. Pre-June there were 26 photos...
for sale bringing in $143,330 dollars for an average price of $5,513. Post-June we see an sharp increase to 42 photos for sale bringing $538,635 for an average price of $12,824, more than double the pre-June average.

Table 7.4 Comparison of Mapplethorpe Art Prices at Auction - 1989 Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1989 comparisons</th>
<th>Pre-June</th>
<th>Post-June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volume of art sold</td>
<td>26 photos</td>
<td>42 photos*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ volume of art sold</td>
<td>$143,330</td>
<td>$538,635**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average price</td>
<td>$5,513</td>
<td>$12,824***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $x^2 = 3.7, df = 1, p < .01
** $x^2 = 229,140, df = 1, p < .001
*** $x^2 = 2,914, df = 1, p < .001

It is not always possible to get a direct comparison of art sold from one year to the next because art collectors rarely turn around and sell a work soon after they've bought it. Table 7.5 shows the art that was for sale in 1986, 1987 and 1988 and makes comparisons between similar subject matter of the photos and their sizes. The art chosen for this table was based on its size and subject matter, not that fact that it increased in value. Across the board, Mapplethorpe's art increased in value from 1986 to 1989. (This thesis does not attempt to link all of the increases in sales price to the media attention surrounding the controversy. Mapplethorpe did die during this interim period. It is recognized that when an artist dies, the value of the art increases since the quantity of art from the artist is forever set.)
### Table 7.5 Comparison of Mapplethorpe Art Prices at Auction - 1986 through 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artwork</th>
<th>Size/Year Produced</th>
<th>Year sold</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Lyons</td>
<td>15 x 15 (1983)</td>
<td>5/86</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Lyons</td>
<td>15 x 15 (1981)</td>
<td>11/89</td>
<td>$19,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patti Smith Nude</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1976)</td>
<td>5/87</td>
<td>$1,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patti Smith, S.F.</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1979)</td>
<td>1/89</td>
<td>$6,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulips</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1977)</td>
<td>11/87</td>
<td>$4,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulips</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1979)</td>
<td>11/89</td>
<td>$6,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajitto on pedestal</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1979)</td>
<td>11/86</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back of Ajitto</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1980)</td>
<td>10/87</td>
<td>$1,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back of Philip</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1980)</td>
<td>11/89</td>
<td>$14,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto portrait</td>
<td>34 x 23 (1972)</td>
<td>5/86</td>
<td>$990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto portrait</td>
<td>34 x 23 (1972)</td>
<td>10/87</td>
<td>$1,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-portrait</td>
<td>14 x 14 (1980)</td>
<td>11/89</td>
<td>$37,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2$ not able to computer since no direct comparisons are made between the same pieces of artwork.

Table 7.5 attempts to compare similar photographs by Mapplethorpe that sold at auction. No direct comparisons can be made though (to compute $x^2$), since the same work of art was not sold and then resold during the time frame under comparison. Even without direct comparison though, we see a dramatic increase in pre- and post-June sales of Mapplethorpe's work for similar works. A similarly sized portrait of Lisa Lyons increased from just over $1,000 in 1986 to just below $20,000 in 1989. The portraits of Patti Smith increased from $1,760 in 1987 to $6,600 in 1989.
Mapplethorpe's flowers also increased in value. His tulips in 1987 went for $4,675, and in 1989 they fetched $6,600. His nudes (Ajitto and Philip) rose from $1,100 in 1986 to $1,210 in 1987 to $14,300 in 1989. And perhaps the largest increase came from Mapplethorpe's self-portraits (or auto portrait). In 1986 and 1987 large (43" x 23") auto portraits sold for close to $1,000. In 1989, much smaller self portraits brought in $37,700 and $35,750.

The final hypothesis—H9 Media attention to the NEA controversy is sustained when the NEA controversy poses a threat to public policy—is supported by stories that ran in late 1989 that focused on the embattled endowments. A December 17 article in The New York Times (Honan, 1989) attempted to clarify the new rules that Congress set forth that were intended to force stricter supervision of grants. Reaction to the rules spurred cries of protest about infringement of artistic freedom. Through 1989 and into 1990 and beyond, the arts funding controversy continued to make news. As the year came to a close, newspapers were reporting about how the NEA and NEH were dealing with the changes adopted by Congress concerning the new funding rules. Reactions were gathered from administrators as well as artists and scholars on the new rules that put content restrictions on grants.

A December 10 Washington Post (McMurty, 1989, p. C10) column by Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist Larry McMurty characterizes the continuing saga over "Sex, Art and Jesse Helms." He says that one of the most distressing aspects of the debate over arts funding is the reactionary critics of art who sought to eliminate mentions of sex from American life. A cartoon
illustrating the article shows a person about to enter a door labeled "The Jesse Helms School of Acceptable Art." He goes on to challenge the idea that "legislation doesn't need to be amended, it merely needs to be defended by Americans who want the various arts to be part of their lives and their children's lives."

**Discussion of Effects**

The effects of the Mapplethorpe and arts funding controversy can be measured in economic terms from narrowly defined areas of the economy. Yet, the total impact on the economy from the controversy may never be completely known. While we can measure tangible evidence such as museum attendance statistics and the price of Mapplethorpe's art, we may never know how many areas were touched by the controversy. Because museums are considered part of the tourism trade, a rise in museum attendance has a residual effect on the local economy. Therefore visitors who traveled to see the exhibit spent money on gas, food, and possibly lodging. What is known is that more than 400,000 visitors saw the Mapplethorpe exhibition, the highest reported attendance at any NEA-funded exhibition (AAM) and that the price paid for Mapplethorpe's art broke all previous records (Persky). A *Washington Post* story on December 3 (Tully, 1989, p. C1) states that new price levels were set for Mapplethorpe's self-portraits "more than doubling their previous highs at auction." According to the head of photographs as Sotheby's, Beth Gates-Warren, the new price levels reflected growth and interest in Mapplethorpe's work and that the Corcoran controversy had contributed to this interest.
In looking at how long the controversy sustained media coverage, we see that the controversy extended beyond the bounds of 1989. In 1990, there was the "arrest" of the Mapplethorpe exhibit at the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati and the subsequent criminal charges lodged against the gallery's director and chairman of the board of trustees. As recently as October 1992, Mapplethorpe's photographs have continued to grab the cover of major mainstream publications--in *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* an article that featured several of Mapplethorpe's nudes attested to the fact that the crisis over Mapplethorpe's work was just the beginning of scrutiny over NEA grants. Many more controversies were predicted to arise (Salisbury, 1992).

Public reaction to the sustained arts funding controversy has been varied. Initial response was to form alliances with like-minded individuals to lobby Congress through grassroots letter-writing campaigns, and to protest the Corcoran's decision through organized artists' boycotts. Some staff members at the Corcoran (including the curator of the Mapplethorpe show), resigned in protest. Finally, as 1989 came to a close, the Corcoran board of trustees called for the director's resignation.

Economic effects of the arts funding controversy were measured through the attendance figures at each of the museums that exhibited Mapplethorpe's work, and through comparison on art market auction prices. In comparing the museum attendance figures, we see incredible increases in museum attendance compared to similar past shows. By the time the media frenzy reached its peak for the arts funding controversy in 1990, once the
Cincinnati charges were lodged, attendance levels at the Mapplethorpe exhibit were averaging 700% increases. An October 28, 1989 article in The Hartford Courant (Rizzo, 1989, p. G1) notes in the headline that "Controversy spells money for museum." It goes on to say that to the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Mapplethorpe exhibit was big business. Not only was admission income affected by the attendance increase, but the gift shop reported their business had nearly doubled. The 300 catalogs of the show had sold out in days, and other hot selling items included Mapplethorpe T-shirts, postcards, note cards, and posters. During the run of the show, the gift shop reported selling 1,940 catalogs and taking in $105,000 in admission income, and $77,693 in shop sales, higher than for any other exhibit ever shown at the Atheneum.

The price paid for Mapplethorpe's work at auction also generated media coverage. Typical of such coverage was a November 1 article in The Washington Post (Tully, 1989), and a follow-up story on November 3 that reported that Mapplethorpe's sale had smashed expectations. According to the article, fortune follows fame.

Mapplethorpe became a major figure in the downtown art scene and his photographs were hotly sought after worldwide. But his name did not achieve household recognition until the still-controversial decision last June by the Corcoran Gallery of Art to cancel his retrospective. (Tully, November 1, 1989, p. D1)

Tully goes onto report that Mapplethorpe had achieved cult status and that there was "no other reason" to explain the unprecedented prices being paid for his work. Tully's follow-up article on November 3 (Tully, 1989, p. C1) reports that new price levels had been set for Mapplethorpe's work,
more than doubling previous highs at auction for his work. Beth Gates-Warren, head of photographs at Sotheby's, is quoted as saying that the Corcoran controversy has contributed to the rise in auction prices for Mapplethorpe.

The effects of the arts funding controversy did not end in 1989. When the year ended, the arts community was still trying to interpret the new rules that had been imposed on arts grants. Public policy had been changed during the summer and fall of 1989, and debate looked likely into 1990. According to *The New York Times* on September 13 (Honan, 1989b, p. C17), debate on the issue included some very high stakes, such as "artistic freedom, censorship, and the proper role of government in the arts and the right, if any, of taxpayers not to have to pay for art they abhor." Through analysis of the arts funding controversy, we see that issues that change or threaten public policy do indeed continue to make news.
Chapter 8
CONCLUSION

Public controversy over funding for the arts has presented a subject for studying the content of news stories as they relate to actual events. The basic premise of this thesis is that controversy makes news. Researchers, including Gans (1979), Paletz and Entman (1981), and Lang and Lang (1981, 1991), have focused their research on various aspects of how and why controversy and conflict are two of the most prominent activities highlighted by national news organizations. Questions that have been posed throughout this thesis have now be addressed and analyzed in light of three major areas: media agenda building, media frames, and public impact.

In order to study the impact of controversy on the news agenda, it was important to identify a subject that could be studied before a controversy erupted, during the controversy itself, and then after the controversy had quieted down. The arts funding controversy is such a situation. The Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit had opened in Philadelphia and Chicago with no controversy. When the exhibit was canceled in Washington, D.C., and members of Congress reacted with the desire to impose legal sanctions against the exhibit (and its organizing institution), the exhibit was thrust into the media spotlight and from there the story took on a life of its own. Relating back to Lang and Lang's study (1981) of threshold sensitivity to issues, the
higher the threshold an issue has, the less first-hand knowledge people have about the issue. The Mapplethorpe exhibit is an interesting example of this. Though only 400,000 people actually saw the Mapplethorpe exhibit, a survey conducted by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Free Expression lists the arts funding controversy (and Mapplethorpe specifically) as having been mentioned fifteenth most frequently on an open-ended list of items over which people believe the government has censorship power. The list include eighty seven items (Yount, 1990).

It is important to understand how issues become news, because each day as we are bombarded with media messages we have to be able to determine for ourselves what issues merit our attention. As noted earlier in this thesis, further study needs to be done on the news practices of the mainstream media to examine how bureaucratic news gathering techniques affect what issues become part of the news agendas. Can savvy politicians manipulate the media for their own election campaigns? One final thought on that topic relates to the need for political candidates to be in the public spotlight, to make news. When faced with an election, candidates create, or exploit, issues that reap extensive news coverage. When politicians attempt to turn issues of debatable significance into pseudo-events, we must be wary of their motives; our only defense is to become more critical consumers of news. Unfortunately, testing such a hypothesis is beyond the scope of this paper. It is interesting to note that Senator Helms was up for reelection in 1990. Helms was a former broadcast executive and editorialist-turned-
senator who was savvy in the ways of the media. The arts funding controversy became the cornerstone of his reelection campaign.

It has been suggested earlier that there is a symbiotic relationship between issues, sources, the media, and the public who are ultimately reached with news stories. How issues get elevated to the media agendas has been one focus of this study. We have seen that the media do react to prompting from established sources such as members of the arts community and members of government. Though the Mapplethorpe exhibit had been touring the country prior to its scheduled arrival in Washington, D.C., it alone did not prompt much media coverage. It was not until members of Congress defined the exhibit in terms of its controversial nature that it became news. Alliances formed as people with similar views got together to react to what was happening in Washington, D.C. The national news agenda continued to focus on the NEA controversy throughout 1989 due to continued prompting from established sources.

The media frames that emerged from the coverage fell into several broad categories with most stories having more than one frame. While controversy was the most salient issue, art and banning art were also very important frames presented by the media. This is due in large part to the nature of the issue. The story of the NEA and the Mapplethorpe exhibit revolved around controversy--the question of federal funding of the arts and of Mapplethorpe's art being obscene. The results also show that while the controversy was a major topic in news accounts, the exhibit itself was not. More information was given about "a controversy" and little was given about
what the controversy was all about—details about the artwork in questions. The varimax rotation yielded information about what issues were grouped together and we find that three broad categories emerged; funding, controversy, and art.

Finally, the effects of the controversy were measured to see what, if any, changes took place. Economic effects were most striking: there were extraordinary increases in attendance at the Mapplethorpe exhibit, increases in the price of Mapplethorpe's art, and challenges to public policy. The challenges to public policy continue to this day. Members of Congress have once again proposed a bill to abolish the NEA. As of this writing, the decision of whether the NEA will survive or not remains to be debated in the Congress. In 1990 a House compromise was reached that reauthorized the NEA for three years, not for five years as had been the case in past years.

The NEA arts funding issue evolved into a public controversy during 1989. The interrelationship of issues, sources, and reporters in this controversy has allowed us to investigate and explore the ways in which news agendas are built by the media. The model predicted that there would be a link between how issues are elevated to the news agenda through the interaction of established, powerful sources, and the news media. The model also predicted that there would be measurable effects on the economy, public policy, social issues. But why was this particular issue important to study? The NEA arts funding controversy had several elements inherent to it that caught media attention and sustained media attention throughout 1989. The thesis has shown that one central element to this issue was that it
involved controversy, and it was the controversial nature of the issue itself that became a central focus of media attention. As Gans found from his landmark studies in the 1970s (1979), controversy does make news. This thesis has attempted to show that twenty years later, controversy still makes news.

What are the implications for the future of the NEA and the effect of this controversy on museums? Why did the media focus so much attention on this issue given the fact that taxpayers pay about $.69 per year in taxes to support the NEA, while $1100 is spent to support defense? The implications are that while controversy can spark interest in a museum and certainly effect attendance at an exhibit, it can also hurt museums where it really counts, in the donor base. Museum donors tend to be conservative, wealthy individuals who do not welcome controversy. According to a staff member at the CAC in Cincinnati, not only did the museum incur substantial legal fees in defending its director against obscenity charges, it also lost a substantial amount of donor money and corporate support. It was a hard lesson for the CAC to learn, and yet there may be a greater lesson that museums will take from this controversy. Museums may have to work harder to raise money if they take on controversial exhibits, yet what hangs in the balance is the price of freedom of expression. I think it is worth the effort.
## Appendix A

### Reliability Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic coding-unit identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story ID</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Appendix B

Recording Instrument

Unit of Analysis - each story represents one unit.

1-3 Identification numbers (001 - 250) are located in the upper right hand corner of the first page of each unit.

4-9 Date of article - located in upper right hand corner below coding number. Dates are written as follows: June 14, 1989 is 061489.

10 Is the publication a newspaper or magazine?
   1) Newspaper
   2) Magazine
   9) Can't code - can't tell

11-12 What is the name of the publication?
   1) New York Times
   2) Washington Post
   3) News Journal
   4) Philadelphia Inquirer
   5) LA Times
   6) Time
   7) Newsweek
   8) US News & World Report
   9) can't code
   10) syndicated press article
   11) Washington Times

13 What type of story is the unit?
   1) News Article (straight news story)
   2) Column (by-lined column)
   3) Editorial (no by-line)
   9) Can't code

14-15 How many paragraphs are in the unit?
Appendix B (continued)

16-17 How many photographs are in the unit?

Sources - prominence of a news source will be measured on a scale from 0 to 3. Zero is used when the subject is not a source, of information, 1 when the subject is mentioned but only in a very minor way, 2 is when the source is cited in equal amounts to other sources, and 3 when the source is a major source. Note: Being a source means that a particular source was either quoted, or directly or indirectly used as an originator of information. Example: If the article mentions the Corcoran Gallery in its telling of the story, but does not mention getting information from the Gallery or its representatives, it is NOT a source of information.

18 How prominent a source is the government (defined as a member of Congress)?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

19 How prominent a source is the Sen. Helms (by name)?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

20 How prominent a source is President Bush?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

21 How prominent a source are artists or museum personnel?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

22 How prominent a source are museum personnel specifically from the Corcoran Gallery (Director Orr-Cahall, curators)?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
Appendix B (continued)

2) equal with other sources
3) major source
9) can't code

23 How prominent a source are NEA members specifically?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

24 How prominent a source are judicial sources (lawyers, judges)?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

25 How prominent a source are religious groups?
   0) not mentioned
   1) minor source
   2) equal with other sources
   3) major source
   9) can't code

General tone of the article and particular subjects-

26 Does the major source mentioned in the article take a stand about the Mapplethorpe art?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

27 Does the major source mentioned in the article feel that the art is not obscene?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

28 Does the major source mentioned in the article have both opinions; i.e. that some of the art is obscene and some is not obscene?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

29 Does the major source mentioned in the article feel that the art is obscene?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code
Appendix B (continued)

30 Is the major source mentioned in the article neutral about the art begin obscene or not?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

31 Does the major source in the article have an opinion about the NEA funding?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

32 Is the major source in the article against restrictions on NEA funding?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

33 Does the major source in the article have mixed opinions on the NEA funding?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

34 Is the major source in the article for restrictions on NEA funding?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

35 Is the major source in the article neutral about NEA funding?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

36 Are any sources portrayed as forming alliances?
   0) No - alliances not forming
   1) Yes - alliances are forming
   9) Can't code

37 Who were the members of the alliance (fill in as many types of members as needed - open ended question)?

38 Are any of the alliances quoted as a source?
   0) No
   1) Yes
   9) Can't code

39 Who are the members of the alliance? (open ended)

Headlines

40 Does the headline on the first page of the unit emphasize the
   obscenity angle - words to look for as cues are: indecent, obscenity, controversial, censorship, ban.
   0) No
Appendix B (continued)

1) Yes
9) Can't code

41 Does the headline on the first page of the unit emphasize the funding angle - words to look for as clues are: funding, NEA, endowment, taxes.
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

42 Does the headline on the first page of the unit emphasize the protest angle - words to look for as clues are: protest, march, action, activist, conflict.
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

43 Does the headline on the first page of the unit emphasize the Corcoran angle - words to look for as clues are: Corcoran, cancellation, artists.
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

44 Does the headline on the first page of the unit emphasize the sex angle - words to look for as clues are: sex, erotic, nude, pornography, homosexual.
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

Frames- a major topic is defined as being the central topic of the article.

45 How does the article deal with obscenity as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

46 How does the article deal with censorship as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

47 Does the article deal with the controversy as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code

48 Does the article deal with banning certain art as a major topic?
0) No
Appendix B (continued)

1) Yes
9) Can't code
49 Does the article deal with arts funding as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
50 Does the article deal with the NEA as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
51 Does the article deal with tax money as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
52 Does the article deal with the organized protest as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
53 Does the article deal with the Corcoran Gallery as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
54 Does the article deal with Mapplethorpe as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
55 Does the article deal with other artists as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
56 Does the article deal with sex, sexuality, homoerotic art or homosexuality as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
57 Does the article deal with freedom of expression as a major topic?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
58 Does the article mention the First Amendment by name?
0) No
1) Yes
9) Can't code
### Appendix B (continued)

#### The exhibit

59 Does the article state that the writer has seen, or not seen the Mapplethorpe exhibit first hand?
   - 0) No, hasn't seen exhibit
   - 1) Yes, has seen exhibit
   - 2) Mentions or describes exhibit but can't tell if writer saw it
   - 9) Can't code

60 Does the article mention how many photographs are in the exhibit?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

61 Does the article mention that there are controversial photographs in the exhibit?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

62 Does the article mention how many photographs are considered controversial?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

63 Does it describe, in detail, the controversial photographs?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

64 Does the article mention that there are non-controversial photographs in the exhibit?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

65 Does it describe the non-controversial photographs?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

66 Is mention made where the exhibit is being shown?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code

67 Is mention made of when the exhibit is being shown?
   - 0) No
   - 1) Yes
   - 9) Can't code / no mention of exhibit is made

68 Is mention made about attendance at the exhibit?
   - 0) Article does not mention attendance figures
   - 1) article says exhibit is not well attended
Appendix B (continued)

2) article says exhibit is well attended
9) Can't code - no mention of exhibit made
REFERENCES


