6

A Closer Look at Intermedia Influences on Agenda Setting: The Cocaine Issue of 1986

Lucig H. Danielian
Stephen D. Reese
University of Texas

The agenda-setting process has been described as a full circle, "beginning with the impact of the social system on media institutions, and then, on their members, particularly reporters and editors. These media operatives make decisions which, the evidence shows, have impact on the cognitions of the media audience member" (Becker, McCombs, & McLeod, 1975). Much of the agenda-setting model has been mapped out and strong evidence has been gathered to support the impact of the mass media agenda on that of the audience, but there has been little research on how the mass media agenda is formed in their review of the agenda setting research of the last 25 years. Rogers and Dearing (1988) identify four factors that influence news media agendas: (a) the structure of society, (b) real world indicators, (c) spectacular news events, and (d) gatekeepers and influential media. This fourth factor is examined in this chapter—the extent to which the media influence each other. We refer to it as *intermedia agenda setting.*

As we explained in the preceding chapter, we selected a single issue for our focus—the cocaine issue of 1985 and 1986. We see the drug issue in 1985 and 1986 as having more to do with intermedia agenda setting than with the structure of society, real-world indicators, or even spectacular news events, although of course these factors play some role in most stories. Our reasoning is based on the fact that actual drug use did not rise dramatically in 1985 and 1986, as did mass media coverage of cocaine. On the contrary, cocaine use in particular had been leveling off since the late 1970s, and, although a new drug, crack, was a problem in certain urban areas, there was no evidence of a real drug "epidemic" (Baker, 1986;

47

Kerr, 1986). Therefore, this issue provides a good opportunity for looking at ways in which the news media themselves may have contributed to such a concentrated amount of cocaine coverage in such a short period of time.

By tracing coverage of one issue over time, we hope to better isolate the leading and following tendencies of the news media rather than simple cross-media similarities. In chapter 5, we examined patterns of coverage across the major print and broadcast news organizations in order to determine the extent of media convergence. We found substantial intermedia similarities in the amount of coverage given the cocaine issue during the years 1985 and 1986 by the major national news media.

The New York Times surpassed the other newspapers we studied (including *The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post,* and *The Los Angeles Times*) in its amount of coverage of the cocaine story during 1985 and the first half of 1986. The other papers appeared to fall in line by the summer of 1986, giving the issue similar high attention. We also found indications that the print media, especially *The New York Times*, set the agenda for the network newscasts coverage of cocaine. Thus, a general intermedia agenda setting influence was noted from *The New York Times* to the other media.

This chapter extends our intermedia analysis by examining the same news media on a week-to-week rather than month-to-month basis. In addition to examining the amount of cocaine coverage, we also look at the actual story content of the four newspapers for selected peak weeks and examine their themes and sources in order to better trace intermedia influence processes taking place on a daily basis in the daily press.

COMPARING MEDIA COVERAGE
FROM WEEK TO WEEK

In the previous chapter we showed that the media followed each other from month-to-month in coverage of the cocaine issue. These similarities in attention suggest that the media influence each other's agenda from month to month. We would expect to find the same agenda similarities from week to week and from day to day.

Our week-to-week analysis focuses on a period extending from April through December of 1986. As seen in Fig. 5.3 and 5.4 in the preceding chapter, this period features a normal-like curve of rising and falling coverage and is the peak period of coverage over the 2 years of our study. The national news media analyzed in this chapter include three newspapers, three television newscasts, and two news magazines: *The New York Times; The Washington Post; The LostAngeles Times; The Wall Street Journal;* the

nightly network newscasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC; and *Time* and *Newsweek*.[1]

As in the study discussed in the previous chapter, the DIALOG information service was used to electronically access newspaper and magazine databases for cocaine stories.[2] Bibliographic information and a short story summary were obtained for each story. A similar search strategy was used to find the network news stories. The Vanderbilt University Television News Index and Abstract was searched for stories indexed under "cocaine," and these stories were coded for date and length in seconds. The searches resulted in 465 newspaper stories, 231 network news stories, and 44 newsmagazine stories.

Each story was coded with high intercoder agreement ($cr = .90$) into 1 of 10 story catagories: (a) *deaths* of prominent people and the events surrounding them; (b) specific *crime* crimes involving cocaine, trials, arrests, and so on; (c) *the antidrug movement* in schools and communities and by national figures aimed at discouraging the use of cocaine; (d) general reports on the *use and abuse* of cocaine and on its various medical and social implications; (e) four categories dealing with *policy responses* by the *national, state and local, international,* and *private sectors*; (f) problems encountered by *foreign* countries in combating drugs (without reference to direct U.S. involvement); and (g) extensive reports on the *general drug crisis*.

Correlating the Weekly Amount of Coverage

During the 40-week study period, from March 30 through December 31, 1986, 406 stories were found to deal with cocaine. A week of coverage is defined as beginning on Sunday and ending with Saturday.

The New York Times carried 139 cocaine stories during these 40 weeks, followed by *The Washington Post* with 60, *The Los Angeles Times* with 38, and *The Wall Street Journal* with 13 stories–260 newspaper stories in all. The three nightly television network newscasts covered the cocaine issue with 129 stories–ABC ran 34 stories, CBS 49, and NBC 46. *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines ran 8 and 9 stories, respectively.

Table 6.1 shows the coverage broken down by category and type of medium. The distribution is similar to the entire 1985/1986 period (see Table 5.3, this volume), with "crime" and "use and abuse" stories getting the most prominent coverage. When the four subcategories are combined, we can see that the "policy response" category is also given heavy

---

[1]We dropped the *Christian Science Monitor* from this in-depth study because its contribution was found to be insignificant in our overall look at agenda setting over the 2-year period of our original study (see chapter 5).

[2]We limited our search to the term *cocaine* in order to narrow the scope of the search into a manageable, yet comparable, sample of stories across media.

TABLE 6.1
Nature of Cocaine Stories During 1986 Study Period. Frequency of Story Types
by Combined Media—Newspapers, News Magazines, and Television Networks

	Medium		
Type of Story	Newspapers	News Magazines	Networks
Deaths	13%	18%	13%
Crime	29	6	25
Antidrug movement	7	6	4
Use and abuse	25	18	29
Policy Response			
National	3	6	10
State/local	5	0	3
International	10	24	8
Private sector	0	0	4
Foreign	6	12	4
General crisis	2	12	0
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	(260)	(17)	(129)

play, with international and national policies being the most prominent topics.

Pearson correlation coefficients between the number of cocaine stories covered by each medium during each week demonstrate the extent to which the major news media's attention to cocaine rose and fell simultaneously during the 40-week period (see Table 6.2). The unit of analysis is the week ($n = 40$) with summed coverage measures (newspaper column inches, television seconds, news magazine pages) for each medium for each week.

We expected some similarities in coverage across media, if only due to their covering the same dramatic or specific events. For example, many of the stories in our census dealt with the tragic deaths of famous people like John Belushi, Len Bias, and Don Rogers and with routine crime news such as arrests, seizures, and trials. And indeed we do see many statistically significant correlation coefficients in the bottom half of Fig. 6.2, showing that overall media coverage of cocaine did rise and fall in concert at least part of the time.

We suspected, however, that media coverage of cocaine did not change only in response to newsworthy events such as deaths and crimes. Therefore, we deleted these "event-driven" categories and recalculated the correlation coefficients to determine if the observed relationships in coverage among the media were due simply to the media covering the same spectacular news events. The correlation coefficients representing similarities in the media's more issue-oriented coverage (all categories

TABLE 6.2
Correlations Between Major Media in Amount of Coverage Given Cocaine
Stories in Newspaper Column Inches, Television Seconds, News Magazine
Pages

	Newspapers				TV Networks			News Magazines	
	NYT	WSJ	Post	LAT	ABC	CBS	NBC	Time	Nwsk
NYT	–	.10	.46***	.45**	.31*	.18	.35*	.18	.08
WSJ	.29*	–	.00	.06	–.12	–.13	–.02	–.09	–.02
Post	.44**	–.11	–	.48***	.36*	.13	.44**	.12	.03
LAT	.38**	–.01	.26*	–	.33*	.46**	.61***	–.15	–.11
ABC	.24	–.16	.54***	.23	–	.28*	.36*	.58***	–.07
CBS	.18	–.17	.20	.37*	.32*	–	.48***	–.15	–.12
NBC	.23	.05	.43*	.47*	.47***	.48***	–	–.09	.12
Time	.10	–.14	.36*	–.08	.56***	–.08	.11	–	.29*
Nwsk	.08	–.05	.05	.12	.10	–.08	–.08	.21	–

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$
***$p < .001$

Note. The bottom triangle contains correlations between coverage measures based on all cocaine stories. The top triangle of correlations is based on measures excluding "crime" and "prominent deaths" stories.

except those representing crime and prominent deaths) appear in the top triangle of Table 6.2.

We can address several important questions with these results. How strong were intramedium similarities in the amount of cocaine coverage, that is, convergence among the members of one medium (e.g., newspapers)? Did the major newspapers devote similar amounts of coverage to cocaine at similar times, implying a cross-media agenda-setting process? Or did one newspaper appear to be more consistently correlated with all the others, implying a leadership role? How strong were intermedia similarities, or convergence, among the various media? And, finally, do these relationships differ for overall and issue-oriented coverage?

Of the four newspapers examined, *The Wall Street Journal's* cocaine coverage was the least associated with that of the other newspapers. Although both the *Journal* and *The New York Times* are distributed nationally to an elite audience, the *Journal's* focus on business news may have lessened the newsworthiness of cocaine-related stories. *The New York Times'* cocaine coverage, however, was significantly correlated with each of the other newspapers' coverage of all cocaine stories, thus supporting the general view of *The New York Times* as a leader among the newspapers.

Did the television news networks follow each other closely in the timing and amount of coverage given to cocaine? The correlation coeffi-

cients are of roughly the same magnitude as those among the newspapers. All three correlation coefficients among the television networks are statistically significant in both sets of correlations—those representing all story types and those for just issue-oriented stories.[3]

Finally, *Time* and *Newsweek*'s cocaine coverages were significantly associated for the "issue"-oriented correlations, those stories excluding the crime and death categories. The two news magazines' cocaine coverages were not significantly correlated with each other when all stories were included in the analysis.[4]

We also looked at whether cocaine coverage was similar across the media and found substantial relationships for "intermedia" agenda setting. Network television coverage of cocaine was generally related to newspaper coverage, except for *The Wall Street Journal*, whose cocaine coverage was not significantly correlated with that of any network. CBS appears to be the most individualistic of the networks; its coverage was associated with only that of *The Los Angeles Times*. In fact, of the four newspapers, only *The Los Angeles Times*' cocaine coverage was significantly correlated with that of all three television networks.

It is interesting to note that there are stronger and more significant relationships among the newspapers and the television networks when crime and death news is excluded (statistically significant correlations range from .31 to .61). Looking at groups of coefficients in Table 5.2, 7 of the 12 newspaper/television correlations for stories excluding crime and prominent deaths reached significance. Only four of the newspaper/television correlations for all stories (lower triangle) were significant.

As for the news magazines, they showed almost no significant correlations with either the networks or newspapers (except for between *Time* and the *Post* for all stories). The strong association between *Time* and ABC news may have been due to a one-time coincidence between a cover story issue and an ABC series that same week. In the future, we will look at news-gathering structures that link the mainstream media. These include shared wire services, joint polling activities, syndicated satellite networks, and so forth. These intermedia structures may help explain similarities in content.

Overall, media follow others of the same type more closely than they do other media types. Excluding *The Wall Street Journal*, the newspapers are all significantly interrelated, as are the three networks. Newspapers are

---

[3]These correlations are not so high, though, as to justify calling the networks, as does Altheide (1982), a "national news service" featuring indistinguishable content.

[4]It is interesting to note that both magazines ran cocaine stories before the study period, running simultaneous covers in February on the cocaine wars in South America. *Newsweek* ran a cover on crack in the middle of March and a later cover story on crack in June which fell within the 40-week census period.

less consistently related to the networks, although there are substantial correlations. Newspapers show more significant relationships with networks for those more general drug issue stories, excluding crimes and prominent deaths. Fewer significant relationships are found between newspapers and networks when all story types are included. For example, Table 6.2 shows that for all stories, *The New York Times* is unrelated to the networks. This may be due to the fact that the *Times* covered many local drug stories, such as criminal activities, that were not suitable for the national evening news broadcasts. As mentioned, the news magazines show few relationships with the other media. These outlets may have a significant intermedia influence role, but it may not be apparent in week-to-week variations.

Week-to-Week Trends in Cocaine Coverage

So far in this analysis, we have looked at relationships among the media's coverage of cocaine. High correlation coefficients show that organizations transmitted similar weekly amounts of cocaine coverage, either large or small, during the 40-week period of our analysis. However, these correlation coefficients do not take into account how the coverage of cocaine by one medium in a preceding week or weeks may lead to greater attention by other media in following weeks. In order to identify these leading and following tendencies, we graphed newspaper and television cocaine coverage for the entire 40-week period.[5] These charts show coverage for only the "issue"-oriented stories. Crime and death, the more "event-driven" categories have been excluded from this analysis. The 40-week study period is divided into four sets of graphs for easier viewing, each made up of a 10-week period.

One example of leadership influence occurred during the first 10 weeks of the study period (see Fig. 6.1). *The Washington Post* ran four related articles on cocaine on May 14, 1986 (during week 7 of our analysis). And on the following Sunday, May 18, 1986 (week 8), *The New York Times* ran a major story on cocaine (as did two other New York city newspapers). Peter Kerr (1986) marked this point as one of the media milestones in "discovering" the cocaine issue.

In addition to looking at leadership among the newspapers, we can also see that the newspapers apparently also provided leadership for the

---

[5]We chose this descriptive route over more statistical methods, such as cross-lagged correlations, because such methods require more theoretical assumptions than we are prepared to make now. For example, a consistent time lag among the media types would have to be present to produce such relationships. However, we hope this initial descriptive study will help to build toward more systematic theoretical and methodological methods.
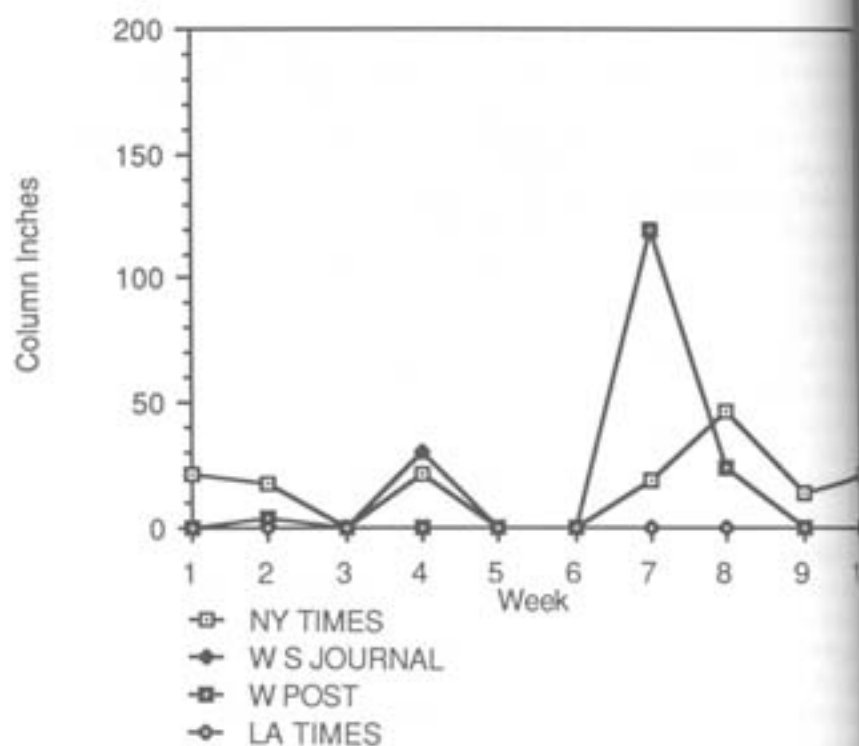
FIG. 6.1. Newspaper coverage excluding crime and death weeks 1–10 (March 30 through June 7).

television networks (see Fig. 6.2). NBC followed *The New York Times'* lead with cocaine coverage later in the week, while ABC and CBS aired cocaine stories during the following week (week 9 in Fig. 6.2, May 25–31, 1986).

Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show the rise and fall in cocaine coverage for both newspapers and the television networks during our second 10-week period. *The New York Times* generally ran more cocaine coverage than did the other newspapers at each point in time, although changes over time in the amounts of the four newspapers' cocaine coverage were similar. During the same time period, the television networks followed the peaks of attention shown by the newspapers, although they did not stay with the story quite as long.

Although news magazine coverage is not shown, it is worth noting that *Time* did a multipage cocaine story during week 12 (June 15–21, 1986); both news magazines carried major cocaine stories during week 18 (July 27 to August 2). These news magazine stories preceded increases in
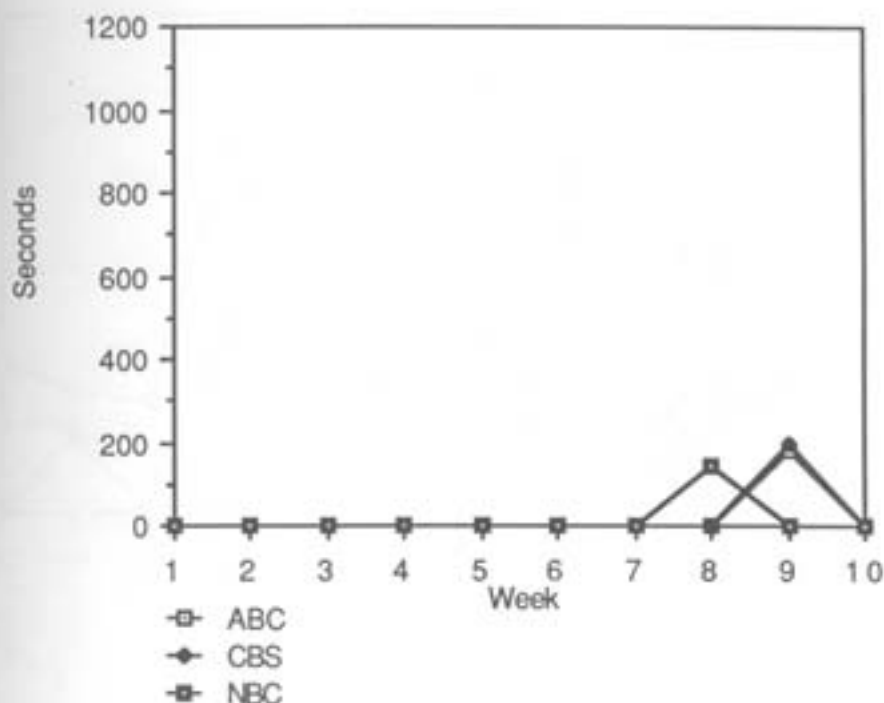
FIG. 6.2.   Television coverage excluding crime and death weeks 1–10 (March 30 through June 7).

coverage by the newspaper and television networks during the following week, indicating some leadership by the news magazines.

In the third 10-week period, still other media influences on cocaine coverage are suggested (see Fig. 6.5 and 6.6). *The New York Times* shows a spike in coverage in week 24 (September 7–13, 1986), followed the next week by a major *Time* magazine cocaine story and by coverage in the *Washington Post.* ABC followed with almost 20 minutes worth of cocaine news that same week. *The Los Angeles Times* and the other networks increased their coverage during the next week. An increase in coverage by *The New York Times* in week 27 (September 28 through October 4) was followed in turn by an increase during the next week in coverage by the CBS and NBC nightly newscasts. (ABC already had a great deal of coverage by this time.)

This reciprocal, back-and-forth attention cycle suggests that the issue was kept in the news by first one medium and then another dealing with it in turn, each perhaps reinforced by the preceding week's coverage and indicating a sort of "epidemic" of media interest in the cocaine issue.

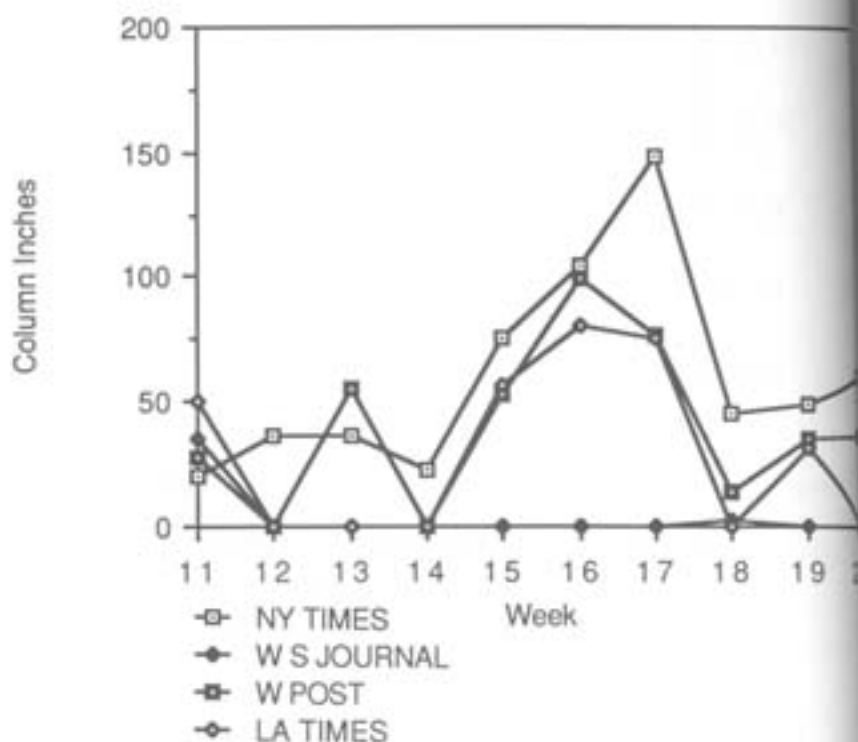Newspaper and television coverage for the final 10-week period of

FIG. 6.3. Newspaper coverage excluding crime and death weeks 11-20 (June 9 through August 16).

1986 are shown in Fig. 6.7 and 6.8 (October 26 through December 31, 1986). *The New York Times* "carried" the issue for the media during this period, and its coverage spiked sharply in week 34 (November 16-22). The news magazines were the first to drop the drug story (week 25) followed by the television networks (week 34, coinciding with the big spike in the *Times*), and finally by the newspapers (week 38).

These results show that *The New York Times* did lead cocaine coverage for the other media in some instances and that it covered the story the longest and the most consistently. However, the news magazines and other influential dailies also played a part in keeping the issue before the public. There were some weeks where media coverage seemed to converge, whereas in others the media appeared to alternate covering cocaine from week to week, first one medium and then another giving the issue heavy play, until all joined in.

These graphs help demonstrate that cocaine coverage in the mass media did not monolithicly rise and fall during 1986, with the media marching in lockstep close behind *The New York Times*. Rather, the trends
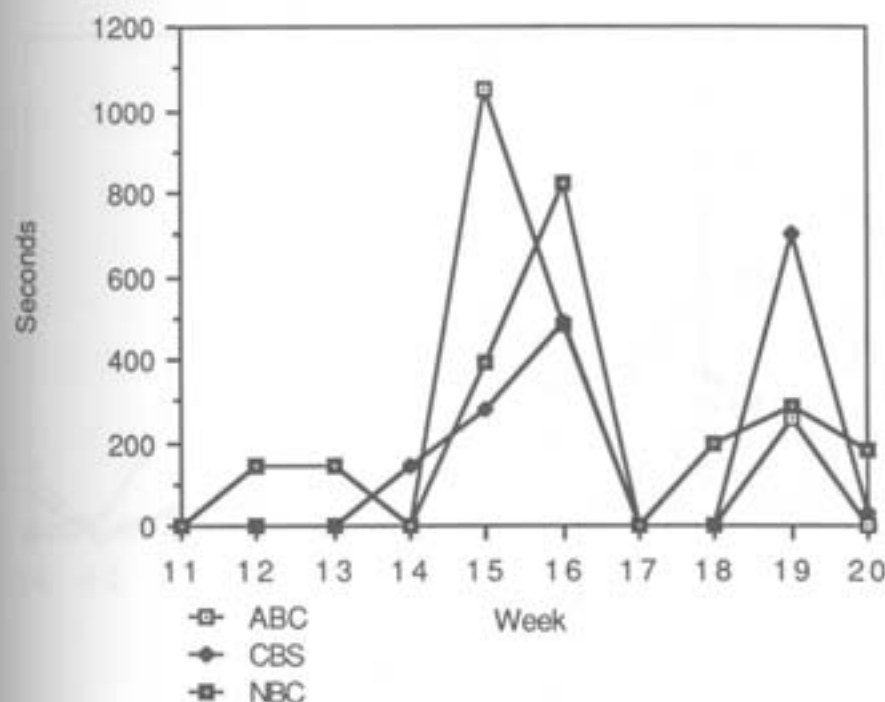
FIG. 6.4. Television coverage excluding crime and death weeks 11-20 (June 8 through August 16).

of increasing and decreasing attention to the drug issue during the last two-thirds of 1986 can be seen as many separate changes in the separate media's attention to cocaine.

The intermedia agenda setting process is more like a square dance than a forced march – the patterns and partners continually change as both external events and the media "dancers" themselves call the steps.

NEWS SOURCES AND THEMES: NEWSPAPER INTERMEDIA AGENDA SETTING

Studying the amount of coverage the media transmit about cocaine over time tells only a part of the tale. In this part of the chapter, we use a qualitative approach to dissect the processes taking place in intermedia agenda setting. We examine the extent to which prominent sources may create similarities in media coverage. In general, the more national the story, and in particular the more national the sources, the more we expect convergence on a story. We use the term *convergence* to describe a process
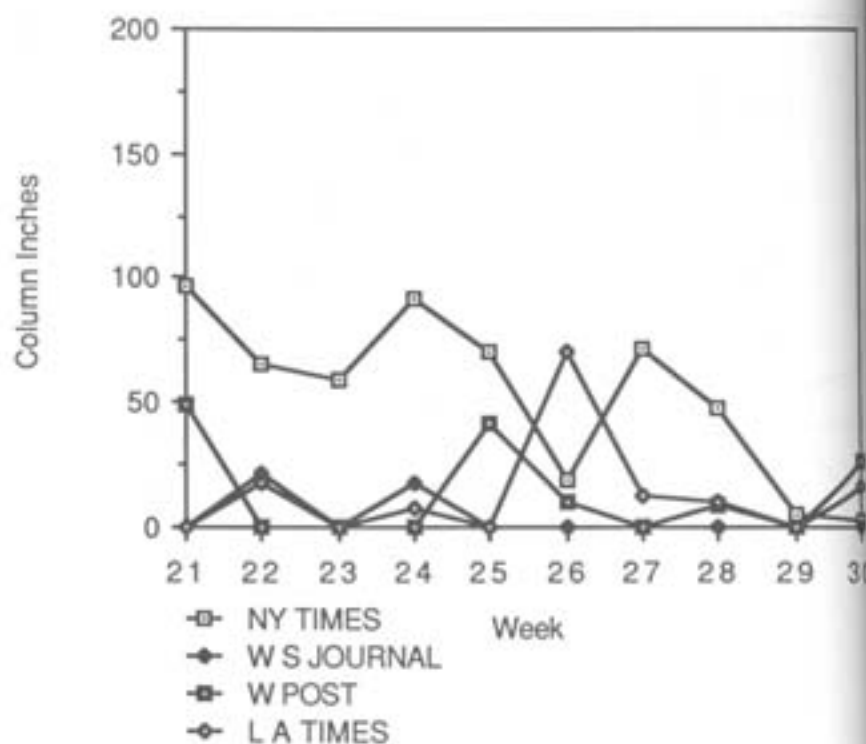
FIG. 6.5. Newspaper coverage excluding crime and death weeks 21–30 (August 17 through October 25).

in which the media discover issues and respond to each other in a cycle of peaking coverage. For example, we expect more homogeneous coverage when the story comes from the nation's capital, Washington DC.

Gans (1979) suggested that sources are covered most when they have (a) incentives, (b) power, (c) the ability to supply suitable information, and (d) geographic and social proximity to journalists. All four conditions are satisfied by administration sources based in the District of Columbia, whom Gans referred to as "national leaders." Also lending support to Gans' summation is Sigal's (1973) analysis of the content of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Sigal found that 74% of the sources of information for all news stories were made up of U.S. officials and agencies and of foreign or international officials and agencies.

To more closely examine the influence processes that are suggested in the quantitative analyses, all issue-oriented cocaine stories in the four newspapers (*The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times,* and *The Wall Street Journal*) during the 40-week study period were located
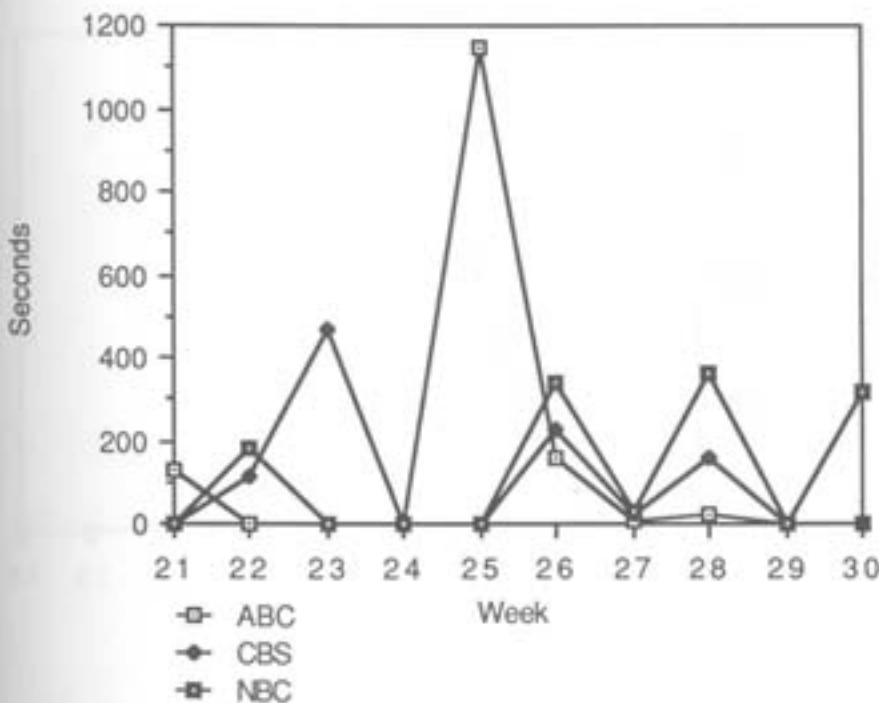
FIG. 6.6. Television coverage excluding crime and death weeks 21–30 (August 17 through October 25).

on microfilm and photocopied. We then culled through this 40-week supply of articles. We sought to identify those weeks during which all four newspapers had cocaine stories, under the assumption that such coverage is necessary before intermedia processes can be seen on a daily basis. Because only one such week was found (week 11 – June 8–14) due to *The Wall Street Journal*'s not covering the cocaine story heavily, those weeks in which three of the four newspapers carried stories were also identified. Ten such weeks were located, and from these the weeks exhibiting the most total newspaper coverage were chosen for a textual analysis. This peak period, easily seen in Fig. 6.3, is made up of weeks 15, 16, and 17 (July 6–26, 1986). The stories in this 3-week period were analyzed for sources used and for the general themes of the news stories.

Week 11, the one week in which all four newspapers covered cocaine stories, is by no means a "peak" period (see Fig. 6.3), but it provides some interesting insights. On June 8, 1986, *The New York Times* ran a front-page story, "Crack Addition Spreads Among the Middle Class," with the focus on New York City. It was followed on June 10 by two stories with a business peg in *The Wall Street Journal*, one a two-paragraph front-page
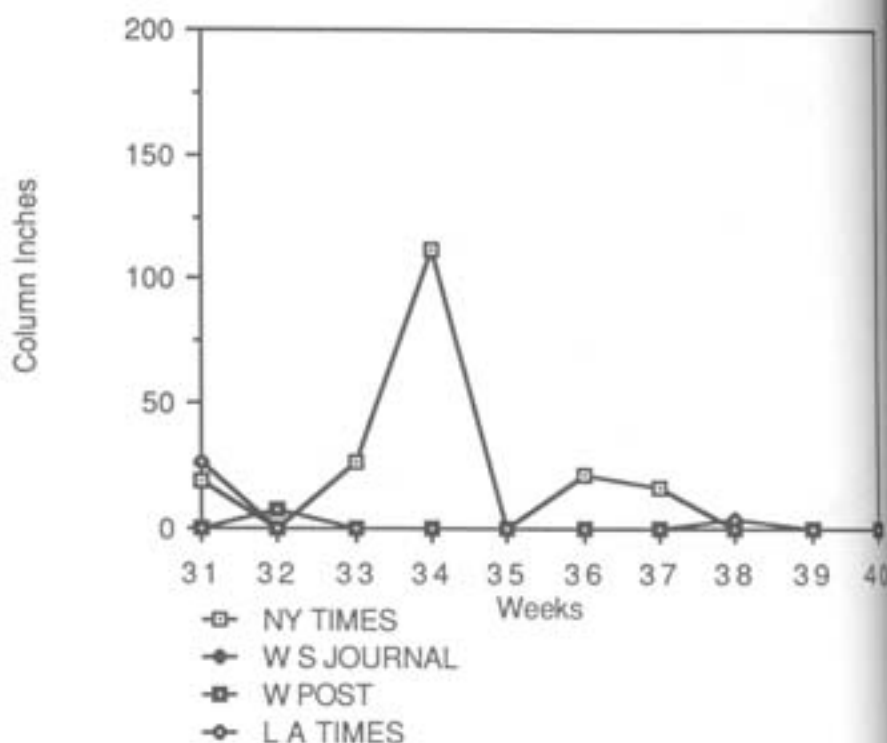
FIG. 6.7. Newspaper coverage excluding crime and death weeks 31–40) (October 26 through December 31).

story, "Crack Addiction–Executives Are Tougher to Treat than Blue Collar Workers," and the other an opinion column, "Lessons of the First Cocaine Epidemic." *The Los Angeles Times* came in next with a California story "Crank [sic] Labs Cooking Up More of Poor Man's Cocaine." (They referred to the new drug as "crank" instead of "crack.") On June 13, *The Washington Post* closed the week's coverage with a New York datelined story, "Crack Making Violent Presence Felt in New York." The three east coast papers all used a national cocaine hotline report as a source, but they put their own spins on the story. Nevertheless, *The New York Times* was definitely in the lead chronologically.

The New York Times, The Washington Post, and *The Los Angeles Times* covered the story during the 3-week "peak" period from week 15 through week 17. This period provides an interesting look at some patterns among the newspapers.

Ten stories were found in week 15–4 in *The New York Times,* 3 in *The Washington Post,* and 3 in *The Los Angeles Times.* All three newspapers covered a July 11 story based on a National Institute on Drug Abuse report
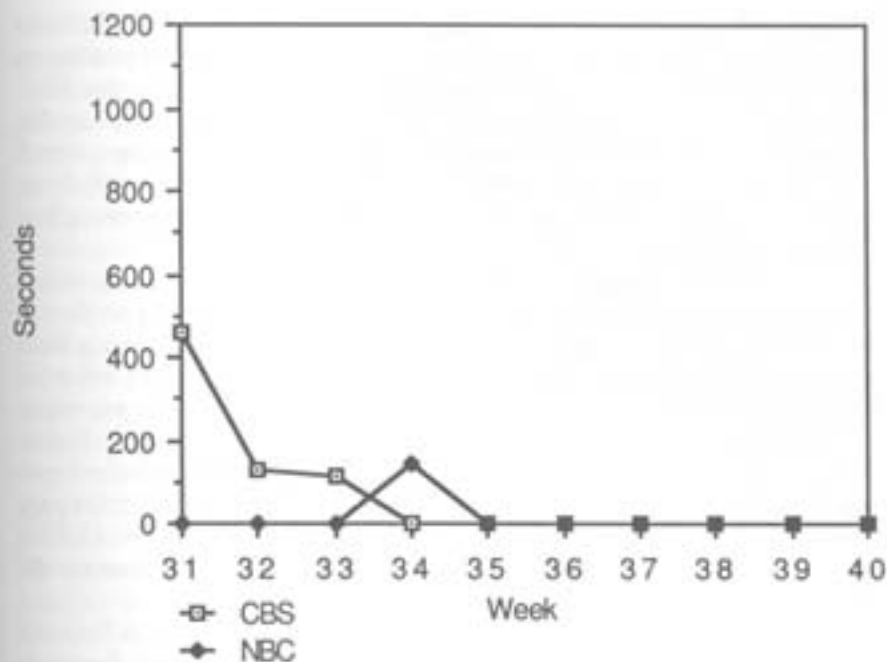
FIG. 6.8. Television coverage excluding crime and death weeks 31–40 (October 26 through December 31).

with front-page coverage and a DC dateline. A July 8 story, based on a survey funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, made it into both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, again with DC datelines.

The Los Angeles Times (July 6) and *The Washington Post* (July 9) both covered a UPI story out of Boston on cocaine and premature labor. But, *The Los Angeles Times* actually led the week's coverage with an extensive front-page science report, "Medications Found to Block Cocaine's Effects." *The New York Times* also did a story with a local peg that ran on page 1 of its July 11 metropolitan section on the need for more federal action against cocaine, as well as a long sports section story the same day by Tony Eliot of the New Orleans Saints, "How Cocaine Took Control of My Life."

Although *The New York Times* led in the number of cocaine stories during this week, the national stories coming out of Washington DC seem to create the most convergence among the newspapers, especially as we look at the process from week to week. It is important to note that the preceding week had minimal coverage, none for *The Washington Post* or *The Los Angeles Times* and only two shorter stories in *The New York Times*.

Fifteen stories on cocaine made up week 16 coverage–6 for *The New York Times*, 4 for *The Washington Post*, and 5 for *The Los Angeles Times*.

Thirteen of these stories dealt with the U.S.-assisted raid on Bolivian cocaine operations (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* at 4 stories and *The Los Angeles Times* at 5). Actually, it is little wonder that such convergence existed when the story finally broke on Tuesday, July 16. All three newspapers sat on the story in order to protect the operation.[*] They broke the story only when newspapers in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, published alarmed reports about the landing of a huge U.S. transport plane bearing helicopters.

All three U.S. newspapers used the same unnamed administration and Bolivian officials as sources. Sidebar stories on July 16 focused on the use of the military in the operation, with *The New York Times* using both administration officials, citizen rights groups (ACLU and the Center for Constitutional Rights), and other experts such as law professors as sources. *The Washington Post* sidebar concentrated on Vice President Bush's successful lobbying for military action over Pentagon and Defense Secretary Weinberger's objections. *The Los Angeles Times* featured a front-page story on July 17, "U.S. May Aid Anti-Cocaine Assaults in Peru, Columbia," (clearly not wanting to be left behind again) with a focus on the Bush/Weinberger debate.

All three newspapers also covered a more "issue"-oriented Bolivian story on July 18 with La Paz, Bolivia, datelines focusing on Fernando Barthelemy, Bolivia's Minister of the Interior. *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and *The Los Angeles Times* headlines are similar and read, respectively, "Bolivia Says Its Drive in Cocaine Will Go On Until Trade is Ended," "Bolivia Vows to End Drug Traffic," and "Bolivia Vows to 'Root Out' Cocaine Producers." The July 16 and 18 stories were written by the same foreign reporters for each of the newspapers. (Joel Brinkley for *The New York Times*, Bradley Graham for *The Washington Post,* and Juan de Onis for *The Los Angeles Times* wrote nearly all of the Bolivian stories during weeks 16 and 17.) The same writers also got stories printed on July 19 in both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* on a successful raid on a Bolivian cocaine factory. The source for these stories was Bolivia's Minister of Information, Herman Antelo.

The Los Angeles Times was the only newspaper to cover Defense Secretary Weinberger's San Diego speech to the local Chamber of Commerce in which he "decried" the Bolivian leaks. (In this article, *The Los Angeles Times* noted that it had held the Bolivian story the longest. In an earlier

---

[*]Both *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post* had verified the story with administration officials at least a week in advance, whereas *The New York Times* claims not to have had the story until Monday, July 15, 1986 (*The New York Times*, 1986). *The Los Angeles Times* actually held the story until July 17 and then printed it on page 14.

title it had inaccurately claimed it broke the story along with the others in an earlier article.)

The coverage during week 16 helps clarify the intermedia convergence patterns among newspapers: When a story broke with national leaders as the source of information, convergence followed among the newspapers on the same day.

Our last week of analysis also demonstrates that nationally based stories lead to the greatest amount of convergence on story themes and sources. Week 17 included 14 cocaine stories, and once again the majority of the stories focused on the foreign situation. Five of the 7 *New York Times* stories were about Bolivia, while 2 of the 3 *Washington Post* stories and 3 of the 4 *Los Angeles Times* stories focused on the Bolivian situation.

During this last week of the peak in cocaine coverage, the story themes and sources began to vary somewhat. Both *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* covered the cocaine issue, but with different pegs. On July 20, 1986, *The New York Times* published two and *The Los Angeles Times* published one Bolivian cocaine story. One of *The New York Times* stories, "Bolivians Deny They Asked U.S. to Send Troops to Help in Raids," had a La Paz dateline and used White House and Bolivian officials as sources. *The Los Angeles Times* used various nonleadership sources (mostly peasant cooperatives) for its La Paz datelined story, "Bolivia Unions, Leftists Decry U.S. Role in Drug Raids."

The Los Angeles Times led with a July 22 story out of La Paz based on a press conference with Minister of Information Antelo headlined, "Bolivia Claims Victory Over Cocaine." The next day, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* got on the bandwagon with their own stories based on a news conference with Interior Minister Barthelemy and U.S. officials on the success of the Bolivian operations.

Interviews with Bolivian President Paz and Planning Minister de Losada made it into both *The Los Angeles Times* on July 23 and *The Washington Post* on July 25. The stories focused on the Bolivian leaders' call for more U.S. aid in that country's fight against cocaine production. *The New York Times* did not cover this story, but, instead, did two other cocaine stories on July 25. One story was out of Trinidad, Bolivia, "Bolivian Town Resents Drug Glare," and the other was a front-page metropolitan section story on "Colombian Named as Boss of 'Monster' Cocaine Ring" (in New York).

The textual analysis has indicated that weekly convergence on a story exists when a story is breaking, when coverage is at its peak, and when the story comes from a national or international source. When the newspapers all go in on a breaking story, they cover it in the same ways using the same themes and sources.

The Bolivian issue is an interesting example because it is an instance where the newspapers actually also converged on not covering a story. When *The Los Angeles Times* sat on the story one day too long, it even made efforts at appearing to be in on the breaking story, and therefore to appear as if its coverage was similar to that of the other newspapers.

Convergences on the issue can also continue after a story breaks, sometimes using the same themes and sources. For example, in the July 18 story on Bolivian vows to end cocaine trafficking, the agenda is set for all three newspapers by that country's minister of the interior. At other times, the themes and sources vary. For example, *The New York Times* continued to focus on official and authoritative sources for one of its follow-up stories on Bolivia while *The Los Angeles Times* followed its lead in the peasant communities in one of its stories. Nevertheless, it is clear that, for both the Bolivian story and the earlier use and abuse story out of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, when national leaders speak, most newspapers do listen and report.

These findings hold true even when we take a look at a week we might refer to as a "valley." For example, the lowest period of coverage during which three of the four newspapers covered the cocaine story occurred during weeks 28 (October 5–11, 1986) and 30 (October 19–25). Although during these weeks *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and *The Los Angeles Times* each ran only one cocaine story, two of these three stories were on the same theme and used the same national sources.

INTERMEDIA AGENDA-SETTING PROCESSES

Intermedia agenda-setting relationships are complex, and they represent only one aspect of the agenda-setting process. Methodologically, we have attempted to move away from simple cross-sectional analyses of the various media to tracing the dynamic process of changing media coverage over time. In their review of the factors affecting media agendas, Rogers and Dearing (1988) left no room for influences from sources who seek to purposefully influence media agendas. Therefore we propose adding sources as a factor in media agenda setting.

In chapters 5 and 6, we have looked at how the media influence each other, that is, how the media themselves set each other's agendas. However, it is clear that, although the media do seem to affect each other's coverage decisions, they also respond to events and prominent sources in a complicated cycle of convergence on a single issue. There are a variety of processes that contribute to the news media product: structural limitations, economic imperatives, and social and ideological factors, and all of these processes operate to set the news agenda. Nevertheless, we have at

least begun to demonstrate that the media did converge on the drug issue in 1986, both in amount and type of coverage, and that the media themselves are important factors in setting each others' agendas.

We found that *The New York Times* sometimes acted as a leader for the other media's cocaine coverage, but it was not the only one. Other news media also sometimes picked up the cocaine "tune" and led coverage during the last two-thirds of 1986. At other times, media coverage resembled a chorus, singing together in virtual harmony.

The media did "converge" on the drug issue, as viewed both over the entire study period and within specific weeks. When weekly convergence was noted, the reasons appeared to be some prominent news event outside the local beat, fueled by prominent sources. The more long-term convergence observed over several months, the total rise in media coverage, consisted of alternating attention by media organizations from one week to the next. This cycle of attention appeared to be due more to intermedia influence, or agenda setting than to prominent news events. By looking at the entire span of coverage given the drug issue, we found that these processes, both convergence in prominent events and intermedia influences, contributed to an overall crescendo of coverage.

For example, we can speculate that the individual events (such as occurred in Bolivia) might not have been given such heavy play had they not been bracketed by peaks in media coverage of the drug issue generally. And the angles, or themes, taken on Bolivia might have been different if the overall coverage of the "drug epidemic" had not primed subsequent stories. The agenda-setting model places mass communication in the center of political theory, and in a society based on pluralistic principles, how the media converge on vital public issues is an essential question. It is, essentially, a question of diversity. But the findings of convergence among the media on the themes and sources of the cocaine stories certainly do not support assumptions of diversity among the newspapers studied.

We have seen that another important question revolves around which sources get to set the media's agenda. For the cocaine story, it appeared to be mostly national leaders. This is potentially troublesome, for if we hear mostly the voices of national leaders on issues as they are first developed and defined, and if an issue becomes a story when national leaders speak, then they can frame the debate. For example, what happens when these leaders decide that the "cocaine epidemic" calls for military action in a foreign country? What other voices are heard?

These questions are becoming more important given the central role of the media in political life. Consequently, we need to be fully aware of all the factors that set the agenda of the media, causing them to converge on certain issues, sources, and themes.

REFERENCES

Altheide, D.L. (1982). Three-in-one news: Network coverage of Iran. *Journalism Quarterly*, *59*, 482–86.

Baker, R. (1986, July 26). Same old junk. *New York Times*, p. 15.

Becker, L., McCombs, M., & McLeod, J. (1975). The development of political cognition. In S. Chaffee (Ed.), *Political communication: Issues and strategies for research* (pp. 21–63). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Bolivian reports were withheld. Several U.S. news groups say they delayed disclosure of anti-cocaine offensive. (1986, July 20). *The New York Times*, p. 8.

Gans, H. (1979). *Deciding what's news*. New York: Random House.

Kerr, P. (1986, November 17). Anatomy of an issue: Drugs, the evidence, the reaction. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

Rogers, E.M., & Dearing, J. W. (1988). Agenda-setting research: Where has it been, where is it going. In J. Anderson (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 11* (pp. 555–594). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Sigal, L.V. (1973). *Reporters and officials. The organization and politics of newsmaking*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.

Journalism

Pamela J. Shoemaker, Editor

Communication Campaigns About Drugs

Government, Media, and the Public