

THE PLAME GAME: FRAMING A POLITICAL SCANDAL

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, David Albrecht, who has been my daily support, constant cheerleader and the occasional sounding board throughout this entire process.

This thesis is also dedicated to my parents, Alvin and BJ Kutzer, who always encouraged me to go get an education (knowledge is power) so I could have a better life. I was always encouraged to reach for the stars and not to let anyone tell me that my dreams weren't attainable, no matter what my situation was at the time. My parents instilled a self confidence in me that money can't buy; for this and so many other things I am grateful.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The media play an important role in society. They interpret political events, actions, policies, and scandals in a manner that citizens can understand. The media use frames to assist in interpretations and descriptions. They may create their own frames or use frames supplied by the political elites. Frames can also lead to biased coverage when used to omit details or present someone in a favorable or unfavorable manner.

This study examines the frames the media used during the coverage of President George W. Bush's first political scandal, the "Plame Game." On July 14, 2003, Robert Novak exposed the identity of CIA agent Valerie Plame in his syndicated editorial column. Over the next five years the media followed the "Plame Game" scandal using frames to describe the actors and their actions.

A content analysis of three national newspapers shows that the media did use frames in their coverage of this political scandal. The media used frames they created and some that political elites gave them through interviews and press releases. Over the five years, the frames associated with each actor in the "Plame Game" did change. Even though some individual articles are biased in their coverage of the actors in the scandal, statistical results prove that the cumulative coverage of the "Plame Game" was balanced. This means that an equal number of positive and negative frames were used to describe each actor and their actions over the course of five years.

Little research deals with media framing of political scandals. The results of this study can aid in future research of political scandal framing, and can extend the already existing wealth of framing research.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It seems to be an unwritten rule that every White House administration must have a scandal to overshadow important policy issues. Watergate, The Iran Contra weapons scandal, and the Blue Dress debacle all remind us of Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton. Fast forward a few years to the 2003 Bush Administration's "Plame Game," the identity leak of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent Valerie Plame. The "Plame Game" has all the elements of a great national scandal: unidentified sources, an alleged cover-up, a grand jury investigation, a special prosecutor, and even an indictment of a senior White House official (Klarevas, 2006, p. 309).

During his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush listed several reasons to justify going to war with Iraq, including the intelligence that Iraq's Saddam Hussein had large quantities of chemicals stockpiled. Saddam's arsenal could produce chemical and biological weapons, including anthrax and mustard gas, he said. Bush's strongest argument for war was Iraq's resistance to allow United Nations (U.N.) nuclear weapons inspectors into Iraq. He said it was critical that the U.N. be allowed to inspect for nuclear weapons because the British government had received intelligence that Iraq was seeking significant quantities of uranium from Africa (State of the Union address). Uranium, also known as yellow cake, is a key ingredient for making nuclear weapons.

Still reeling from the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, few people questioned the president's reasoning to invade Iraq. The people who did disagree with the president used the media to voice their concerns. A key challenger and "Plame Gate" actor was former Ambassador Joseph (Joe) C. Wilson (Valerie Plame's husband). Only weeks after the president's State of the Union address, Wilson used the media to launch an attack that sought to discredit the White House's intelligence information received from Great Britain. He gave numerous interviews and

wrote several editorial columns, most notably his July 6, 2003, op ed in the *New York Times*, “What I didn’t find in Africa,” in which he charged that the administration had manipulated intelligence findings to rationalize the invasion of Iraq (Carney, 2007; Wilson, 2004).

In his column, Wilson chronicled his February 2002 CIA Niger mission to investigate the possible sale of uranium to Iraq. This mission was based on an earlier Italian intelligence report. The CIA chose Wilson for this mission because of his 23 years (1976 – 1998) of service as a United States ambassador. Most relevant to this case is his service in Niger during the 1970’s and his late 1990’s Niger visit as a National Security Council official (Wilson, 2003, p. 9). Before leaving Niger, Wilson reported to Niger Ambassador Barbro A. Owens-Kirkpatrick that “given the structure of the consortiums that operate the uranium mines, it would be exceedingly difficult for Niger to transfer Uranium to Iraq” (Wilson, 2003, p. 9).

In an effort to discredit Mr. Wilson, the identity of his wife (Valerie Plame) as a CIA operative was leaked to selected media personnel (Wheeler, 2007). On July 14, 2003, Robert Novak (syndicated columnist) used her identity in a column to discredit Joe Wilson’s claims:

Wilson never worked for the CIA, but his wife, Valerie Plame, is an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction. Two senior administration officials told me his wife suggested sending Wilson to Niger to investigate.... The CIA says its counter-proliferation officials selected Wilson and asked his wife to contact him. (Column: The Mission to Niger)

Novak may not have known at the time, but under the Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982, it is a felony to disclose the identity of a “covert agent” (Keen, 2003, p. 12A). Although Novak wasn’t the only reporter with this information, he was the first to use it to discredit Wilson’s claims (Novak, 2003). This small paragraph in Novak’s lengthy column officially started the “Plame Game,” launching official investigations, congressional hearings, and numerous accusations against the administration for breaking laws and violating civil rights.

## Time Line of the “Plame Game”

To better explain and track the events of the Plame Game, a time line of the detailed events is listed below. The time line will start with the CIA hiring of Wilson and will conclude more than six years later with the ruling of the U.S. appeals court.

**February 2002:** The CIA asks Valerie Plame to recruit Joseph C. Wilson for an exploratory uranium sale mission in Nigeria. His mission was to determine if Iraq had bought uranium from Niger for the purpose of making nuclear weapons.

**February 2002:** Wilson travels to Niger and meets with Ambassador Barbro A. Owens-Kirkpatrick, current and former Niger officials, and people associated with the country’s uranium business (Wilson, 2003, p. 9). Before leaving Niger, Wilson verbally reported his findings, a lack of uranium sales evidence, to Ambassador Owens-Kirkpatrick. Upon returning to the U.S. in early March, Wilson gave a verbal debriefing to the CIA. He did not file a written report for any of his debriefings.

**January 28, 2003:** President Bush delivers his “State of the Union Speech” with the 16 words that started the Plame Game. “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa” (George W. Bush, 2003).

**July 6, 2003:** Joe Wilson’s editorial “What I Didn’t Find in Africa” is published in *New York Times*. “In short, there’s simply too much oversight over too small an industry for a sale to have transpired” (p. 9).

**July 14, 2003:** Robert Novak’s nationally syndicated editorial “The Mission to Niger” is published. In an attempt to discredit Wilson’s July 6, 2003 article, Novak reveals the

identity of Wilson's wife Valerie Plame as a CIA agent.

**September 28, 2003:** The Justice Department launches an investigation into the identity leak of Valerie Plame. "George J. Tenet, the director of central intelligence, had determined there was a security breach and had asked the Justice Department to investigate" (C.I.A. Seeks Inquiry Into Naming of an Operative, September 28, 2003, p. 32).

**October 3, 2003:** The Justice Department requests the White House turn over all documents relating to the Valerie Plame identity leak. The CIA, the State Department, and the Pentagon were all asked to retain their records relating to the Plame identity leak (Lichtblau, October 4, 2003, p. 11).

**December 30, 2003:** Deputy Attorney General James Comey appoints U.S. attorney Patrick Fitzgerald as special prosecutor replacing Attorney General John Ashcroft (a Bush appointee) in the Valerie Plame identity-leak investigation (Locy, December 31, 2003, p. 10A).

**May 22, 2004:** A grand jury subpoenas a reporter from *Time* magazine, Matthew Cooper, in its inquiry into whether someone in the Bush administration disclosed the identity of CIA officer Valerie Plame (Liptak, May 22, 2004, p. 14).

**June 5, 2004:** The Bush administration confirms that Vice President Dick Cheney and other White House officials have been interviewed by federal prosecutors in regard to the Valerie Plame identity leak case (Johnston & James, 2004, p. 1).

**June 24, 2004:** Federal prosecutors interview President Bush in the Oval Office for more than an hour as part of their investigation into whether administration officials illegally

disclosed to journalists the identity of Valerie Plame (Stevenson & Johnston, June 25, 2004, p. 16).

**August 11, 2004:** Judge Thomas Hogan of the Federal District Court in Washington orders that Matthew Cooper be jailed and for *Time* magazine to pay a fine of \$1,000 per day until Cooper testifies before the grand jury regarding his source in the identity leak of CIA agent Valerie Plame. The penalties are suspended pending further appeals (New York Times, August 11, 2004, p. 18).

**August 24, 2004:** Justice Department prosecutors interview Matthew Cooper in relation to the source of the Valerie Plame identity leak. A federal judge cancels the contempt-of-court order after Cooper's interview (Leonnig, August 25, 2004, p. A02).

**September 9, 2004:** Judge Thomas F. Hogan orders Judith Miller, a *New York Times* reporter, to describe any conversations she had with "a specified executive branch official" regarding the indemnity leak of Valerie Plame (Anderson, 2004, p. 18).

**September 14, 2004:** Matthew Cooper is subpoenaed a second time regarding the source of the Valerie Plame identity leak (Liptak, September 16, 2004, p. 23).

**October 7, 2004:** Federal Judge Thomas F. Hogan orders that *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller, "be jailed for refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating the disclosure of the identity of CIA operative Valerie Plame" (Gerstein, October 8, 2004, p. 5).

**October 15, 2004:** Karl Rove, President Bush's chief political advisor, testifies before a federal grand jury investigating whether anyone in the White House illegally disclosed the identity of CIA agent Valerie Plame (Johnston, October 16, 2004, p. 14).

**June 28, 2005:** Supreme Court rejects the appeals of *Time* reporter Matthew Cooper and *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller (Twilight zone for reporters, June 29, 2005, p. 11A).

**June 30, 2005:** *Time* magazine complies with federal prosecutor's orders to turn over documents concerning Matthew Copper's confidential sources in the Valerie Plame identity leak (Liptak, July 1, 2005, p. 1).

**July 2, 2005:** The notes of *Time* magazine's Matthew Cooper reveal that he had conversations with Karl Rove, President Bush's chief political advisor, in July 2003 when he was investigating Wilson's allegations. Cooper's notes did not reveal that Rove leaked the identity of Valerie Plame (Leonnig, July 3, 2005, p. A07).

**July 15, 2005:** Robert Novak acknowledges speaking to Karl Rove the week of his July 14, 2003, article. During the conversation, Novak reveals the identity of Valerie Plame to Rove. Rove's response was "I heard that, too" (Johnston & Stevenson, July 15, 2005, p. 1).

**July 19, 2005:** President Bush publicly speaks for the first time about the Valerie Plame identity leak investigation: "If someone committed a crime, they will no longer work in my administration" (Sanger & Stevenson, July 19, 2005, p. 1).

**July 25, 2005:** Senator Pat Roberts, Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and Kansas Republican, announces that the Senate Intelligence Committee will conduct hearings on American spy agencies' use of cover to protect the identities of intelligence officers. This investigation is due to the scrutiny of CIA agent Valerie Plame's identity leak (Shane, July 25, 2005, p. 16).

**October 12, 2005:** Judith Miller, a *New York Times* reporter, testifies before the grand jury regarding the identity leak of Valerie Plame: “Miller told the grand jury about a June 23, 2003, conversation she had with I. Lewis ‘Scooter’ Libby, Cheney’s top adviser, regarding former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson” (VandeHei, October 13, 2005, p. A10). Judge Thomas Hogan lifts the contempt-of-court order against Miller after her testimony.

**October 29, 2005:** A federal grand jury indicts I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, chief of staff and national security advisor to Vice President Cheney, on five counts of making false statements to the FBI, perjuring himself to the grand jury and obstructing justice as a result of his alleged lies. The indictment alleges that Cheney and six other officials, including then-White House press secretary Ari Fleischer, discussed Plame with Libby before Libby says he learned of her identity. Libby immediately resigns (Leiby, October 29, 2005, p. C01).

**November 19, 2005:** Special prosecutor Patrick J. Fitzgerald files in court for a new grand jury to continue the ongoing investigation into the Valerie Plame identity leak (Lichtblau, Johnson, & Jehl, November 19, 2005, p. 10).

**January 11, 2006:** Special prosecutor Fitzgerald files in U.S. District Court in Washington, DC, stating his investigative team had “learned that not all e-mail of the Office of the Vice President and the Executive Office of the President for certain time periods in 2003 was preserved through the normal archiving process on the White House computer system.” E-mails missing during September 30 – October 6, 2003, could be key to identifying the person(s) responsible for Ms. Plame’s identity leak.

**July 13, 2006:** Valerie Plame-Wilson and Joseph C. Wilson file suit in Federal District Court against Vice President Dick Cheney; I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Vice President

Cheney's former chief of staff; and Karl Rove, senior advisor to President Bush. The couple accuses the three of conspiring to violate their constitutional rights by destroying Ms. Plame's career by leaking her identity as an undercover CIA operative to the press (Lewis, 2006, p. 16).

**November 14, 2006:** Vice President Dick Cheney asks a federal judge to dismiss the lawsuit Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson brought against him. Cheney's attorney claims the lawsuit intrudes on national security discussions and comes two years after statute of limitations has expired (Apuzzo, November 15, 2006).

**March 6, 2007:** I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, is convicted on four of the five counts against him: two counts of perjury, one count of obstruction of justice in a grand jury investigation, and one of the two counts of making false statements to federal investigators. He is acquitted on one count of making false statements.

**March 16, 2007:** Valerie Plame testifies before Congress to clarify her covert status as a CIA agent.

**March 17, 2007:** Warner Bros. studios issue a statement that it is developing a film based on the lives of Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson (Milbank, March 17, 2007, p. A02).

**July 19, 2007:** U.S. District Judge John D. Bates dismisses the lawsuit Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson brought against Vice President Cheney, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and Karl Rove. Bates says Cheney and the others could not be held liable for the disclosures in the summer of 2003 in the midst of a White House effort to rebut criticism of the Iraq

war by Joseph Wilson. The efforts of the three are a “natural part” of the officials’ job duties, and, thus, they are immune from liability (Leonnig, July 20, 2007, p. A05).

**October 22, 2007:** Valerie Plame publicly releases her book *Fair game: My life as a Spy, my betrayal by the White House*.

**January 8, 2008:** A federal magistrate orders the White House to reveal whether copies of missing e-mails between 2003 and 2005 are stored on computer backup tapes (Cheney’s subpoenaed e-mails missing, February 27, 2008).

**January 18, 2008:** The White House admits preserving electronic messages (e-mails) by recycling its backup tapes – taping over its previously backed-up electronic documents, raising the possibility that some e-mails were erased. This process violates the Federal Records Act of 1950 which establishes the framework for records management programs in federal agencies. This act mandates that federal records may not be destroyed except in accordance with the procedures described in Chapter 33 of Title 44 which creates a schedule of records that are no longer needed for destruction (NARA code of federal regulations, 2008).

**February 26, 2008:** Steven McDevitt, former White House computer technician, and Theresa Payton, chief information officer in the White House Office of Administration, testify before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Payton defends the administration’s handling of its electronic messages (Cheney’s subpoenaed e-mails missing, February, 27 2008).

**May 8, 2008:** U.S. Court of Appeals hears arguments to overturn the July 19, 2007, decision in the case of Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson vs. I. Lewis Libby, Dick Cheney, and Karl Rove (High-profile case on the docket, May 9, 2008, p. A03).

**July 16, 2008:** The White House blocks a House Government Reform Committee's attempt to obtain internal FBI reports about the leak of CIA agent Valerie Plame's identity, asserting that notes from interviews of Vice President Dick Cheney and other administration officials are protected by executive privilege (Eggen, July 17, 2008, p. A04).

**August 12, 2008:** U.S. appeals court dismisses the lawsuit Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson brought against Dick Cheney, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and Karl Rove (Sullivan, August 13, 2008, p. A04).

### Power Struggle to Influence the Media

For more than five years, the Bush administration, the CIA, and the Wilsons (Joe Wilson and Valerie Plame) attempted to use the media to discredit the claims of the opposite party. Each side valued the media because they serve as public interpreters of events and as symbolic arenas for ideological struggles between antagonists. The key to discrediting the opposite party is the control over meaning which characterizes every political conflict (Bantimaroudis & Kampanellou, 2007, p. 82).

In this instance, each side struggled to define the status of Valerie Plame at the time of the leak, the source of the leak, the law, and value of intelligence reports. Each side has a goal of defining Plame's status with the aid of the media; scholars refer to this process as "framing." The media may use either party's frames to define the aforementioned terms which can influence public opinion and interpretations of the law. For example, it is illegal to reveal the identity of a CIA operative with "covert" status. Those accused of leaking Plame's identity will claim that since she had not been on a mission for more than three years she should no longer be classified

as a covert agent, and the opposition will argue that the time between missions is irrelevant to her covert status.

The news media typically present politics in adversarial and dualistic terms that emphasize drama and conflict (Jameson & Entman, 2004, p. 38) and that focuses on the game – who’s ahead, who’s behind, what strategies and maneuvers each side is trying (Jameson & Entman, 2004, p. 40). This type of news story sells because American culture views conflict – even political or ideological conflict - as a battle with sides that will win or lose rather than a problem to be solved (Tannen, 1998).

This study will examine the role of newspapers (*USA Today*, *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*) played in the scoring/framing of the “Plame Game.” Each side of this scandal attempted to influence the frames the media used to cover this event. Media frames are powerful in deciding the outcome of the game; they determine the players by devoting more attention to certain individuals (Scharrer, 2002, p. 395), they determine who is winning or losing with narrative word choices (attempt to affix blame – Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 339), facts to include and facts to ignore (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007, p. 44), and their choices to emphasize some components of an issue and downplay others. Any and all of these framing components affect the audience’s reality (Scharrer, 2002, p. 395).

During any news event’s life span, the news media often reframe the event by emphasizing different attributes of the event – consciously or unconsciously – to keep the story alive and fresh (Chyi & McCombs, 2004, p. 22). Although the frames may change during the course of the “Plame Game,” it is important to investigate whether the frames consistently favor one side of the scandal, which would create bias. A bias is consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of

government power (Entman, 2007, p. 166). A consistently biased news frame could aid one side's gain in power, allowing it to be freer to do what it wants without anticipation of punishment, leaving those in the losing frame weaker and less free to do what they want (Entman, 2007, p. 170).

The understanding of media framing of the "Plame Game" can help determine if anyone can have influence over the media during a political scandal. Do the media simply use the words given to them from a particular side, or do they use their own interpretations of statements issued from each side? This information may be used in future studies to help determine who "drives" the news (Wolfsfeld & Sheaffer, 2006, p. 333).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Scandals are sporadic phenomena coming to light at specific points in history, in specific environments. Central to the idea of a scandal is the admission or revelation of illegal or unethical behavior” (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003, p. 567). Yioutas & Segvic (2003) argue that political scandals are not possible without the intervention of the mass media “unmasking formerly secret peccadilloes” (p. 571).

On June 17, 1972, Washington, DC, police arrested five men who burglarized the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate apartment and office complex (Schudson, 2004, p. 1232). For the next two years, Congress, the press, and the court system will investigate the Watergate scandal, resulting in the resignation of President Nixon. The Watergate scandal became a symbol representing power of the press and proving its vital role in democracy (Schudson, 2004). Watergate not only inspired journalists to seek out political scandals, but it also gave the public a language for discussing scandal (Schudson, 2004, p. 1234).

After Watergate, the press became diligent, almost to the point of obsession, in covering political scandals. The Iran Contra weapons scandal plagued the Reagan White House. The Clinton Administration tackled the Whitewater real estate scandal and “Monicagate.” With the exception of “Monicagate,” researchers have done little to examine media frames of presidential political scandals.

On January 21, 1998, the news of a sexual relationship between President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky breaks (Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002). The scandal referred to as “Monicagate” followed the Clinton administration for a little over year when the Senate voted to acquit Clinton of impeachment charges on February 12, 1999 (Shah et al, 2002). In their study, Shah et al. (2002) examined the effects “Monicagate” media frames had on

Clinton's approval ratings. Their longitudinal content analysis found that "citizens strengthened their support for Clinton when they encountered coverage that framed the sex scandal in terms of the actions and accusations of conservative elites" (p. 366). The study also found that liberal elites were also able to strategically frame this scandal in a way that questioned motives of Republican actions (Shat et al., 2002, p. 366).

The results of Shah et al. (2002) demonstrate the power struggle among political elites to define media frames during political scandals. In their study of congressional scandals in the 1990's, Morris and Clawson (2005) describe this power struggle as journalists looking for compelling and interesting news while political elites try to achieve their personal goals (p. 298).

### Framing Theory

Sociologist Erving Goffman is credited with the foundation of framing theory in the combination of his work on social movements and his 1974 book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of Experience*. In his book, Goffman refers to individuals as characters in plays, and says the character interpretation projected to the audience is a guided product of the framing system in which we exist. In essence, everyday reality (perception and representation) is not of one piece but consists of many loosely integrated frames which provides the rules for life – traffic systems, ritual systems, bodily manipulatory systems, religious systems, etc. (Goffman, 1974, p. 562). These frames provide a set of rules governing a given type of activity. People normally adjust easily to the appropriate frame and operate within it without recognizing the principles involved (Gamson, 1975, p. 603). With this frame analysis, Goffman was interested in the organization of the individuals' experiences and their construction of reality -- "something that the individual actor can take into his mind" – and not the organization of society (Davis, 1975, p. 603).

Framing theory has evolved since Goffman's groundbreaking work in 1974. Today the remnants of his original theory are used in framing studies in psychology, sociology, communication and media studies, politics, organizational communication, etc. In political scandals, opposition parties use frames to redefine words and explain actions. Each side of a political scandal is likely to use public relations strategies and tactics as ways to dispense their frames to the general public via the media. The media can use the same frames they receive or create their own frames to provide a scandal narrative.

### Framing in Public Relations

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1995) define public relations as the process of establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations between an organization and publics on whom it depends (as cited in Hallahan, 1999). The establishment of common frames of reference about a topic or issue of mutual concern is a necessary condition for effective relations to be established (Hallahan, 1999, p. 207). Framing puts information into a context and establishes frames of reference so people can evaluate information and comprehend meaning.

Public relations practitioners use strategic frames to determine how situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, and responsibility should be posed to achieve favorable outcomes. Hallahan (1999) identified seven types of frames public relations practitioners use strategically: situation, attribute, choice, action, issue, responsibility, and news frames. Such was the case in the political scandal involving the administration of President George W. Bush and CIA operative Valerie Plame, labeled the "Plame Game." In this situation, each side used the strategic frames of issue, responsibility and news.

Framing of issues occurs when others examine alternative interpretations or reality. At the heart of most issues is the question of interpretation (i.e., how a particular problem or

concern should be understood or explained) (Hallahan, 1999, p. 217). According to Hallahan (1999), disputants involved in an issue often vie to have their preferred interpretation predominate so that others will see the dispute from a perspective similar to their own. Defining issues through the process of framing thus becomes a pivotal concern (Hallahan, 1999, p. 227). In this study, the nuclear status of Iraq was the issue Joe Wilson and the Bush administration were disputing. This dispute started the “Plame Game.”

The responsibility of an event creates the need for public relations specialists to use responsibility frames. When actors are involved in positive events, public relations eagerly frames the clients’ actions positively and attempts to call media attention to the event and the client. When involved in a controversy, an organization might want to pursue a strategy of responsibility avoidance (Hallahan, 1999, p. 227). In the “Plame Game,” the Bush administration denied responsibility for Valerie Plame’s identity leak, and in some instances official White House comments regarding the issue were “no comment.”

Cutlip et. al. (1995) said public relations practitioners supply nearly half of the content found in the news media; therefore, they are inextricably involved in the framing of the news (as cited in Hallahan, 1999). Hallahan (1999) described the public relations practitioners’ influence on news framing as a two-part process. “The first is to solicit interest in the story topic itself. The second is to assure that the story is slanted or framed in a way that is consistent with the source’s preferred framing (i.e., how a client would like to have the story told)” (p. 228). In step one, public relations practitioners will use press releases to increase journalists’ interest and awareness. In the second step, journalists and practitioners become more engaged with each other and often scheduled interviews. When being interviewed (or training clients to be interviewed), public relations workers promote particular frames using themes and deploying

framing devices that help reinforce the desired framing of a story. In the “Plame Game,” all sides deployed an array of public relations tactics vying for the press’s attention, including but not limited to dispensing press releases and giving interviews.

### Framing Theory and Political Use of the Media

According to Garin (2005), politics is not a war of ideas, but a contest of language to repack old ideas into shiny new packages (as cited in Bai, 2005). Entman’s (2003) Cascading Network Activation model of framing stipulates that the political administration (White House, State and Defense departments) has the most power in frame construction. This is because strategic word choice, information distribution and withholding, and timing are among the resources that help lend the White House and executive branch greater control over framing than congressional or other elite sources (Entman, 2003, p. 422).

Entman created the Cascading Network Activation model to explain how frames extend from the White House down. The model contains five levels: Administration (White House, State, Defense), Other Elites (Congress members and staffers, ex-officials, experts), Media (journalists, news organizations), News Frames (framing words, framing images), and the public (polls) (Entman, 2003, p. 419). The frame ideas start from the top level and cascade down with each level adding to their meanings. As the frames pass down the levels, the information becomes less precise, passing through different individual schema and creating a more narrow frame of the original situation. Fully developed frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment, and remedy promotion (Entman, 1993, p. 51).

Journalists routinely depend on those in power to provide them with newsworthy information and events (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 336). The interface between journalists and elites is a key transmission point for a spreading activation of frames (Entman, 2003, p. 420).

At this juncture the media can create or use a frame that favors one side over another. The media can choose to activate a frame using their own interpretations or the interpretations of the political elite.

Frames often transform over time. Goffman (1974) observed that reframing can occur any time a situation presents incongruent information and more plausible explanations emerge for situations.

Chyi and McCombs (2004) further explain reframing as a result of media organizations building up the salience of objects on the media agenda (p. 22). Journalists lend themselves to this process, often reframing events that have a long media life or occupy more than one media cycle. Most words come with one or more frame that was formed over time with repetition, so reframing of a word or set of words such as “tax relief” or “covert status” requires a rewiring of the brain. Reframing is telling the truth as each side sees it – telling it forcefully, straightforwardly, articulately, with moral conviction, and without hesitation (Lakoff, 2006). Reframing in politics is a battle between the two opposing parties of the issue. The result of winning the reframing of an issue in politics is that the political party controls the definition of the frame and therefore has already won the argument anytime the specific frame is used (Lakoff, 2006).

For this study, framing will be considered as “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankards, 2003 as cited in Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Therefore, frames encourage certain understanding of reality and undermine alternative interpretations of facts (Bantimaroudis & Kampanellou, 2007, p. 82).

### Political Contest Model

Political actors spend a great deal of time and resources attempting to exploit the news media as tools for political influence (Wolfsfeld & Sheaffer, 2006, p. 334) According to Wolfsfeld (1997), the political contest model sees the contest with the news media as part of a more general struggle for political control. Therefore, political news is a joint production which, more often than not, is characterized by various actors initiating events or supplying information that journalist then turn into news.

The news media are interested in those actors and institutions that have the greatest impact on society: The more political power a participant has, the easier it is to initiate major events in the news. Those with power (political elite) can also cause newsworthy events such as signing agreements, mobilizing troops, or attacking an opponent (Wolfsfeld & Tamir, 2006). The only way for weaker group to initiate newsworthy events is to carry out an outrageous act of some kind that forces both the powerful elite and the media to react; however, it is hard for the weaker party to control the event after it has been initiated (Wolfsfeld & Tamir, 2006).

It could be argued that Valerie Plame's husband, Joe Wilson (a weak power individual), created a newsworthy event with his piece "What I didn't find on my trip to Africa," but quickly lost control of the event and the frames of the event when the Bush administration (the powerful party) attacked him and his wife, creating a more newsworthy event. Legally, each side lost control of the event, but each side battled to control the frames used in the media to gain political support.

### Research Questions

RQ1: How do the media frame the "Plame Game" actors (Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, President Bush, "Scooter" Libby, Karl Rove and Dick Cheney)?

RQ2: Do the media use the frames “Plame Game” actors provide, or do they form their own frames?

RQ3: Do the media present a framing bias toward any of the actors in the “Plame Game?”

RQ4: Do the media frames of the “Plame Game” actors change over time?

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The Valerie Plame identity leak occurred on July 14, 2003, but the event of that day created five years (and perhaps more) of newsworthy coverage. To answer the research questions, a content analysis was conducted of key newspapers and personal statements (press releases and interviews). One of the advantages of content analysis is its potential to identify developments over long periods (Scharrer, 2001).

### Content Analysis

Content analysis is any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information (Wimmer & Domonick, 2006). This study examined three different types of documents, during three key periods, over five years to track frames and possible reframing.

Although the life span of a typical issue in the news is empirically described as 18.5 months, this particular event had been ongoing for five years. Therefore, this study used three separate date spans for analysis: July 2003 – July 2004, August 11, 2004 – October 2005, and March 2007 – August 13, 2008. The dates of July 2003 to July 2004 cover the initial identity leak of Valerie Plame and the subsequent investigation. “Plame Game” grand jury testimonies began on August 11, 2004, and concluded with the indictment of I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby on October 29, 2005. In March 2007, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby was convicted on four of the five counts against him, and Valerie Plame testified before congress. Congressional testimonies regarding the identity leak of Valerie Plame continued until July 18, 2008, when the White House blocked the Reform Committee’s request for FBI leak investigation reports.

### Sample

The researcher used newspaper articles to examine the media frames of the “Plame Game.” Ericson (1987) contends that newspapers are commonly considered to be a more

accurate and legitimate source of news (as cited in Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007) because newspapers enjoy significant legitimacy through their development of literary and symbolic meanings – longer items, features, and continuing stories (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007, p. 48). For this study, the researcher used articles from *USA Today*, *New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. These three papers are considered vital components of the nation’s agenda-setting media and have a prominent voice for framing national opinion (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007, p. 48). Articles were selected through a LexisNexis search using the search term “Valerie Plame” and the dates July 2003 to August 2008. Editorials and letters to editors were not included in this analysis because they are specifically written as opinion pieces rather than news. Book reviews of both Joseph Wilson and Valerie Plame’s book were also excluded from analysis.

The second set of documents examined was comprised of official statements (press releases and interviews) of the “Plame Game” actors during the same three time periods (July 2003 – July 2004, August 11, 2004 – October 2005, and March 2007 – August 13, 2008). The researcher used the White House website to obtain official transcripts, press releases, interviews, etc. of President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby. To locate statements from Valerie Plame and Joseph Wilson, several search engine websites (Google, Ask, and Yahoo) were analyzed, using the key words “Valerie Plame” and “Joseph C. Wilson” and the dates July 2003 to August 2008. Since the couple is married, it is logical to argue that any statements Wilson made were done with Plame’s knowledge and support. This assumption was validated with the following comment Wilson made during “Meet the Press” on October 5, 2003: “My wife has made it very clear -- she has authorized me to say this – she

would rather chop off her right arm than say anything to the press and she will not allow herself to be photographed” (Meet the Press).

### Procedure

To answer research question one, the researcher conducted a content analysis of newspaper articles to determine the types of frames journalist used for the “Plame Game” actors. The researcher also reviewed the sets of randomly selected articles from the sample to determine overlying frames (Calloway, et al. 2006, p. 806). (The researcher used a systematic random sampling procedure to choose the articles for this purpose.) The categories for the content analysis were constructed based on common factors or themes that emerged from the data themselves (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Chyi and McCombs (2004) coded five types of media theme frames. For this study the researcher started with three of their identified theme frames: individual (a news event is framed within a scope limited to individuals involved in the event, i.e., Valerie Plame), community (a news event is framed as relevant to a specific community, i.e., the Bush administration), and national (a news story is framed in terms of national significance, i.e., policy or legal issues) (p. 25). The unit of analysis was an article and within the article, a sentence or sentence cluster that evaluates or describes any aspect of the “Plame Game” actors (James & Entman, 2004).

A small sample of the newspaper articles (n=9) was reviewed to establish the emergent coding instrument. (The researcher used a systematic random sampling procedure to choose the articles for this purpose.) The researcher used a second coder to code the samples to ensure all frames in the coding sheet are relevant to the “Plame Game” and to ensure the researcher was coding without bias. (See Appendix B for code book.) The researcher used PRAM (a program for reliability assessment with multiple coders) to calculate inter-coder percentage agreement,

with an inter-coder agreement of .80 or higher being desired. After the coding sheet was established the research used SPSS to calculate frame type percentages for each actor.

To answer question two, i.e., whether the media used the frames “Plame Game” actors provided or whether they formed their own frames, the researcher conducted a two-stage analysis.

The first stage used search engines and White House documents to determine official statements (press releases and interviews) of each of the “Plame Game” actors. The Google, Yahoo, Ask, and White House data base searches yielded 43 personal statements related to the selected “Plame Game” newspaper articles: none from Valerie Plame, 26 from Joseph Wilson, and 17 from the White House in which President Bush made a statement or issued a statement. Karl Rove, Dick Cheney, and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby did not make any public statements regarding the “Plame Game.”

The second stage was based on a random selection of three articles from each period and comparison of the frames the media used in these articles to the frames all actors used in their public statements (dated up to three days before the news article). The researcher used a systematic random sampling procedure to choose the articles for this purpose. Further, the content analysis code sheet (developed for research questions one and three) was utilized to aid in the comparison of the media articles and personal statements to determine if the media created their own frames or used the frames of the “Plame Game” actors.

In the nine articles sampled; Valerie Plame was mentioned in all; Joseph Wilson was named in eight articles; President Bush’s name appeared in five articles; I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby was named in four articles, while Karl Rove and Dick Cheney’s names were mentioned in three articles.

To identify favorable, unfavorable, and neutral frames in determining media bias the researcher developed an emerging coding instrument starting with a “picklist” coding instrument based on the work of Jameson & Entman (2004, p. 44). They originally developed the “picklist” to identify conflict coverage in the media. Their list includes power strategy words and conflict metaphors of “game,” “adventure,” and “dance.” The coding instrument evolved to include words and phrases relevant to the “Plame Game” actors using the same method as state for question one. (See Appendix A for the complete emergent coding sheet.)

For coding purposes, the researcher assigned each article with a unit ID consisting of a letter to determine time period and a number to indicate time sequence of the articles. The researcher and another graduate student pre-coded nine articles to test the content coding instrument. The pre-coding test resulted in an overall .904 coder agreement. This is considered a high coder agreement. The pre-coding procedure resulted in no additional framing categories for Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, President George W. Bush, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Karl Rove and Vice President Dick Cheney other than those (Individual, Community, and National) already established by Chi and McCombs. In the pre-coding, the coders did not identify the use of any national frames in the articles, but the researcher opted to leave the frame choice on the coding sheet because of the small sample size of nine articles.

The pre-test of the nine articles did show some coder disagreement in regard to some of the individual favorable and unfavorable frame types. Each coder listed additional frames in the “other” category of the code sheet. The researcher examined the list of “other” frames and added two unfavorable frames (accuse and punish) and three favorable frames (cooperate, supportive, and defend) to the coding instrument. The final coding instrument consisted of five favorable and five unfavorable frames and an option for neutral. Some of the frames established in Entman’s

“pick list” were not chosen in the pre-coding process; again the researcher opted to keep them as part of the coding instrument because of the small sample size. (See Appendix C for the completed coding instrument and Appendix B for the code book.)

Once the content analysis was completed, the researcher used the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance to answer research question number three. This technique is a simple statistical measure of the extent of difference in the ratios of favorable, unfavorable, or balanced/neutral frames found in the newspaper articles in this study (Coombs, 1992, p. 101). The coefficient is designed so that it will always: (1) increase when the frequency of favorable content increases; (2) decrease when the frequency of units of unfavorable content increases; (3) equal zero if the units of content are balance/neutral; (4) equal zero if the numbers of units of favorable content are equal to the number of unfavorable content (Janis & Fadner, 1949). SPSS will be used to determine the number of favorable, unfavorable and negative frames for each “Plame Game” actor to assist in calculating the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance.

Qualitative analysis is particularly good for pinpointing the subtle ways in which newspapers create meaning and themes (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007, p. 48). Comparison of the data collected from the content analysis for questions one and three aided in the frame comparisons of the three time periods to answer question four.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This section details the results yielded from the content analysis examination of the “Plame Game” newspaper frames. Determining the types of frames the media use in political scandals is important in determining whether the media are biased in their political scandal coverage, and whether either side gains power by being able to control the frames the media use. The initial LexisNexis search yielded 95 articles from all three time periods analyzed, but the researcher discarded all editorials, letters to the editor and book reviews related to the “Plame Game” as these articles are not considered news content. The remaining 57 suitable articles consisted of: 13 articles from July 2003 – July 2004; 34 articles from August 11, 2004 – October 2005; and 10 articles from March 2007 – August 2008.

Content analysis resulted in: 56 articles for Valerie Plame (one article did not use Valerie Plame’s name, referring to her as a CIA operative whose identity was leaked), 47 for Joseph Wilson, 33 for President Bush, 27 for I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, 24 for Karl Rove, and 23 for Vice President Dick Cheney.

### Media Frames of the “Plame Game” Actors

Political scandals involve the actions of more than one person and at times the actions of groups, which can affect national issues. The media often frame scandals emphasizing the: actions of individuals (“Plame Game” actors), the actions and relevance of the event to a community (Bush Administration, CIA, etc), or national (policy and legal) ramifications.

Table 1 shows that the media used individual frames for each of the “Plame Game” actors 80 percent of the time. The media’s use of community frames for each actor varied from Joseph Wilson’s 2.1 percent to 69.7 percent for President Bush. The most common type of community frames were the “Bush White House” and “Bush Administration.” In some articles

the media framed actors as individuals and as community members contributing to the actions of the group. Within various articles, President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby and Karl Rove were all associated with “the Bush White House” and “Bush Administration” community frames. Valerie Plame’s community frames linked her to the actions of CIA agents and to Joseph Wilson as a married couple. The only community frame for Joseph Wilson was as a couple (married to Valerie Plame). As indicated in the pre-coding procedure, no national frames were identified in this process. (See Table 1 for detailed frame information.)

### Providing the Media with Frames

Journalists often rely on those in political power to supply them with information about policy’s and events. In this process the political elite distribute information via press releases and interviews packed with framed information in the hope the media will cover the issue at hand with the frames the politically elite have given them. However, any good journalist will tell you that every story has at least two sides, and it is their job to go out and get the other sides of the politically elites’ version. Often they are given more frame-filled information from the other side. Political scandals, of course, could involve three or four sides providing the media with frame-filled content in the hope of influencing the media to use their frames to describe the event or actions of individuals or a community. Entman’s (2003) Cascading Network Activation model shows that the media are more likely to use the frames of the political elite than those less powerful.

In the “Plame Game,” all actors are political elites. When referencing Entman’s Cascading Network Activation model to this study, it was determined that President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby and Karl Rove are at considered the top political elites, with Joseph Wilson (a former ambassador) and Valerie Wilson (CIA agent) right

below them, which is also a place for frame origination. Since both sides are considered political elites, they are adept at supplying the media with frames for events.

To determine if either side was successful in supplying the media with frames of the “Plame Game,” the researcher examined nine articles (chosen using a systematic random sampling procedure from the 57 articles a previous LexisNexis search yielded for this study). This coverage was then analyzed in light of the 43 public statements (including press releases and interviews) made by the “Plame Game” actors during the three days leading up to the selected article.

In the early media coverage of the “Plame Game” (August 2003 – July 2005), Joseph Wilson was very outspoken, granting interviews to the media and writing opinion pieces. Based on interviews given three days before an article appeared in *USA Today* on October 2, 2003, Joseph Wilson used the frame “punish” to describe why the identity leak of Valerie Plame (his wife) occurred. He said the Bush Administration leaked her identity to the media to “punish” him for criticizing the reasons President Bush gave for going to war with Iraq in his State of the Union Address on January 28, 2003. Joseph Wilson was successful. The media used his frame “punish” to describe why the identity leak of Valerie Plame occurred across all three time periods.

The White House was also successful in its attempt to influence media use of its frames. On October 3, 2003, President Bush released a statement to the press via Scott McClellan, the White House spokesperson, stating that he had directed everyone to “cooperate” with the Department of Justice during the leak investigation. The media used the “cooperation” frame during the three time periods to describe actions of President Bush, Karl Rove, “Scooter” Libby, Dick Cheney, and other White House officials during the “Plame Game” investigation. This

includes descriptions of interviews granted to investigators, overturn of official documents, and congressional testimony.

**Table 1 – Media Frames of the “Plame Game” Actors**

	Valerie Plame n=56		Joseph Wilson n=47		Pres. George W Bush n=33		"Scooter" Libby n=27		Karl Rove n=24		Dick Cheney n=23	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Individual	56	100	47	100	27	81.8	26	96.3	24	100	22	95.7
Community	7	12.5	1	2.1	23	69.7	2	7.4	3	12.5	2	8.7
National	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

### Framing Bias of the “Plame Game”

Both conservatives and liberals are likely to charge that the media are biased and say favorable things only about side X and unfavorable things about side Y. The political elites are constantly battling each other to have their version of events covered positively in the news. As indicated in the previous section (Providing the Media with Frames), both Joseph Wilson and President Bush were successful in supplying the media with frames to describe the “Plame Game.” The media also used several other frames, both favorable and unfavorable, when describing the events and actors of the “Plame Game.”

The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance is a statistical measure to determine the difference in ratios of favorable, unfavorable, or balanced/neutral media frames of an event or person. Content analysis pre-coding results of nine systematic randomly selected articles found five types of unfavorable and favorable frames the media used for the “Plame Game” actors. (See Appendix C for complete list of unfavorable and favorable frames.) After coding a total of 57 *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Washington Post* articles (sample is the results of a LexisNexis search – see Chapter 4 section Media Frames of “Plame Game” Actors for full details), the researcher used SPSS to determine the total number of favorable, unfavorable, and neutral frames for each actor across the three time periods to assist in calculating the Janis-Fadner Coefficient.

For each actor of the “Plame Game,” a coefficient calculation resulted close to zero. (See Table 3). According to the Janis-Fadner Coefficient, total calculations resulting in zero or points close to zero indicate balanced media coverage. In this instance, bias may be detected in most individual articles, but the results indicate that the cumulative media coverage of the event and actors yields an equal number of negative and positive frames for each actor.

**Table 2 – Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Media Imbalance**

	<b>Valerie Plame</b> n = 56	<b>Joseph Wilson</b> n = 47	<b>Pres. Bush</b> n = 33	<b>“Scooter” Libby</b> n = 27	<b>Karl Rove</b> n = 24	<b>Dick Cheney</b> n = 23
Favorable Frames	8	15	24	8	4	1
Unfavorable Frames	11	51	25	11	16	8
Neutral Frames	43	9	3	11	7	16
<b>Coefficient</b>	.02	.20	.33	.09	.07	0

Note: Numbers indicate counts and *n* is the number of articles in which each actor is mentioned.

The researcher used the Janis-Fadner formula  $Cu = (fu - u)/rt$  (*f* = favorable units; *u* = unfavorable units; *r* = relevant units [*f* + *u* + neutral]; and *t* = total units) to calculate media bias.

Results of zero or close to zero indicate balanced media coverage of the “Plame Game” actors.

#### Reframing of “Plame Game” Actors

The typical news span of a political scandal is 18.5 months, but the “Plame Game” continued for more than five years. To keep a story alive and interesting for their subscribers, journalist will often re-frame events and people as the political scandal evolves.

The “Plame Game” consists of three time periods in which the scandal significantly changed. The first period (July 2003 – July 2004) consists of the initial leak of Valerie Plame’s identity and the subsequent investigation. Grand jury testimonies began in August 2004 starting the second change in the “Plame Game” coverage and concluded in October 2005 with the indictment of I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby. The third period of significant “Plame Game” coverage started in March 2007 when a jury found I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby guilty on four of the five counts against him. Congressional testimony also began at this time and continued until July 2008 when the White House stopped “cooperating” with officials.

The researcher divided the 57 “Plame Game” newspaper articles into the three significant event periods of the “Plame Game” to help determine if the frames of the actors changed over time. (See Appendix C for a sample of the code sheet). The researcher used SPSS to compare the actors’ frames across the three time periods. The sample consisted of 13 articles for the first event period (July 2003 – July 2003); 34 articles for the second event period (August 2004 – October 2005); and 10 articles for the third event period (March 2007 – August 2008).

To determine if the media changed the frames of the “Plame Game” actors over time, the researcher used SPSS to compare the total number of each frame type (Individual, Community, National, Favorable, Unfavorable, and Neutral) for each actor (Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, President Bush, Karl Rove, and Vice President Dick Cheney) across all three event cycles. SPSS results show some differences in changes of actor frames among the three event periods of the “Plame Game.”

The frames of Valerie Plame changed significantly over time; neutral frames decreases from 10 (86 percent) in the first event period to 2 (17 percent) in the third, unfavorable increased from 0 (0 percent) in the first time period to 8 (55 percent) in the third time period, and favorable frames decreased from 3 (14 percent) in the first event cycle, to 1 (4 percent) in the event cycle, and rose again to a high of 3 (27 percent) in third event cycle. No other significant difference was determined in change for the remaining Valerie Plame frames (Individual, Community, and National).

The unfavorable, favorable and neutral frames of Joseph Wilson also changed over time. Unfavorable frames dropped from 17 (72 percent) in the first event cycle to 3 (33 percent) in the third cycle; and neutral frames rose from 1 (4 percent) in the first event cycle to 4 (45 percent) in

the third event cycle. Joseph Wilson's individual, community, favorable, and neutral event frames were consistent across the three event cycles.

The community frames of President Bush decreased from 16 (53 percent) in the first event period to 1 (20 percent) in the third event period, and his favorable frames decreased from 11 (77 percent) in the first event period one to 5 (36 percent) in the second time period and rose in the third time period to 2 (50 percent). His neutral frames peaked in the second event cycle at 2 (14 percent) decreasing to 0 (0 percent) in the third time period. All other frames (individual, national, unfavorable and neutral) for President Bush were constant throughout all three event cycles.

Perhaps the most interesting frame change is of that of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby. His unfavorable frames dropped from 4 (57 percent) in the first time period to 3 (24 percent) in the middle time period, and rose again in the third time period to 3 (43 percent). His favorable frames decreased from 5 (33 percent) in the second time period and dropped to 0 (0 percent) in the third time period (when he was found guilty of committing felonies). Libby's neutral frames increased from 2 (29 percent) in the beginning of the "Plame Game" to 4 (57 percent) in the third event segment. The individual, community, and national frames for Libby were constant across the three event periods.

The 5 (33 percent) unfavorable frames of Karl Rove in the first event sequence increased to 9 (60 percent) in the second event sequence, and rose again to 2 (40 percent) in the third event sequence. The community frames of Karl Rove steadily increased from 1 (10 percent) in the first time period to 2 (17 percent) in the middle event segment, and decreased to zero in the third time period. Rove's favorable frames jumped from zero in the first period to 3 (17 percent) and

stayed consistent (1, 17 percent) in the third period. His national, individual, and neutral frames were constant through all three event periods.

Vice President Dick Cheney's unfavorable frames increased from 4 (17 percent) in the first event period to 4 (43 percent) in the third period, and his neutral frames decreased from 5 (100 percent) in the first event period to 3 (43 percent) in the third event period. All other event frames (individual, community, national and favorable) for Dick Cheney were consistent across the three event periods. (See Table 3 for complete frame and event time comparisons.)

**Table 3 – Media Frame Changes Over Time**

	<b>Time Period 1</b> <b>July 2003 - July 2004</b> Total Articles = 13		<b>Time Period 2</b> <b>Aug. 2004 – Oct. 2005</b> Total Articles = 34		<b>Time Period 3</b> <b>March 2007 – Aug. 2008</b> Total Articles = 10	
Valerie Plame (Articles = 56)	n = 12		n = 34		n = 10	
Individual	20	80%	26	100%	10	83%
Community	5	20%	0	0%	2	17%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	0	0%	3	11%	6	55%
Favorable	3	14%	1	4%	3	27%
Neutral	18	86%	23	85%	2	17%
Joseph Wilson (Articles = 47)	n = 12		n = 26		n = 9	
Individual	19	100%	19	100%	9	90%
Community	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	1	72%	13	54%	3	33%
Favorable	6	24%	7	29%	2	22%
Neutral	1	4%	4	17%	4	45%
Pres. G. W Bush (Articles = 33)	n = 9		n = 20		n = 4	
Individual	14	47%	9	60%	4	80%
Community	16	53%	6	40%	1	20%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	10	45%	7	50%	2	50%
Favorable	11	50%	5	36%	2	50%
Neutral	1	5%	2	14%	0	0%
"Scooter" Libby (Articles = 27)	n = 7		n = 13		n = 7	
Individual	7	88%	12	92%	7	100%
Community	1	12%	1	8%	0	0%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	4	57%	3	24%	3	43%
Favorable	1	14%	5	38%	0	0%
Neutral	2	29%	5	38%	4	57%
Karl Rove (Articles = 24)	n = 4		n = 15		n = 5	
Individual	9	90%	10	83%	5	100%
Community	1	10%	2	17%	0	0%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	5	50%	6	33%	2	33%
Favorable	0	0%	3	17%	1	17%
Neutral	5	50%	9	50%	3	50%
Dick Cheney (Articles = 23)	n = 6		n = 10		n = 7	
Individual	6	86%	9	90%	7	100%
Community	1	14%	1	10%	0	0%
National	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Unfavorable	1	17%	2	20%	3	43%
Favorable	0	0%	0	0%	1	14%
Neutral	5	100%	8	80%	3	43%

\*Note: All numbers indicate counts, and n = number of articles actor is mentioned in each time period.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

On July 14, 2003, columnist Robert Novak exposed the identity of CIA Agent Valerie Plame in his column “The Mission to Niger.” Whether Novak knew it or not, the identification of a CIA agent is a felony, and his action launched the first political scandal for the Bush Administration, the “Plame Game,” which is a unique political scandal. After a year-long investigation, grand jury and congressional testimonies, no one was charged with the felony of leaking Valerie Plame’s identity. (I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby was convicted on two counts of perjury, one count of obstruction of justice in a grand jury investigation and one count of making false statements to federal investigators. President Bush commuted his sentence but did not pardon him at the end of his second term in 2008). The status of Valerie Plame (covert or non-covert agent) within the CIA organization is still unknown. The “Plame Game” did exceed the average 18.5-month media life cycle normal for political scandals, expanding to more than five years with three significant media cycles of coverage (July 2003 – July 2004; August 2004 – October 2005; and March 2007 – August 2008).

By March 2009, the media were still covering remnants of the “Plame Game.” Joseph Wilson and Valerie Plame were still pursuing a lawsuit against Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, Richard L. Armitage (United States Deputy Secretary of State from 2001 – 2005), and I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby for violating their constitutional free speech, due process and privacy right. The Bush Administration records were still being searched for missing e-mails. (The missing e-mails are a separate Bush Administration scandal, but it is considered possible that the missing e-mails could prove malicious intent in the revealing of Valerie Plame’s identity resulting in charging someone with a felony). The extended life of this scandal provides a researcher with the perfect opportunity to examine media frames over extended periods of time.

## Discussion

The media are vital to the average citizen in times of scandal because through their use of frames they provide accounts and interpretations of scandals. The frames used by the media to describe a political scandal may affect public opinion, so it is important to know if the media establish their own frames or use the frames of political elites involved in such scandals. Political elite and others attempt to control the media frames by distributing their own frames to the media through press releases, interviews and other relevant material. Journalists also establish their own frames to describe events, policies, issues, and political scandals.

Throughout media history the press has covered all types of such political issues from the Presidential level to the small city mayor in rural America. In recent history, each President since Richard Nixon has endured at least one major political scandal while in office. However, few scholars have examined the frames the media use during political scandals. This study investigated the frames the media used in their coverage of the “Plame Game” (a political scandal). This type of research is important because it can aid in determining how such media frames originate and assist in determining media bias.

## Conclusion

The foundation of this study is based on framing theory and the implications frames have on political scandal media coverage. The media are important to the general public because they are interpreters of political events and policies. The frames the media use aid in interpretations and descriptions of events and people, helping the public better understand the situation and form opinions. This study found that the media also rely on frames to describe political scandals and that the frames they use are not always their own.

The results of this study indicate that the media used several different types of frames to describe the actors and their actions during the “Plame Game.” In most frame instances the media identified the six actors (Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, and Karl Rove) of the “Plame Game” as individuals acting separately in this scandal. The community frames of “The Bush White House” and “The Bush Administration” were often associated with President Bush or the actions of White House staff. The media also used a CIA community frame for Valerie Plame when describing her job and actions within the organization.

Because journalists are readily available to political elites, both sides (The Bush Administration and Valerie Plame/Joseph Wilson) of the “Plame Game” had opportunities to supply the media with their frames of interpretation. Evidence indicates that each side was at least partially successful in supplying the media with frames, but since the media used only one such supplied frame from each side, neither won the battle to control the media’s interpretation. Joseph Wilson supplied the media with the unfavorable “punish” frame to describe why Valerie Plame’s identity was leaked. President Bush successfully supplied the favorable “cooperate” frame which the media used to describe the actions of the White House actors associated with the leak. The media used both frames early in the first time period of the “Plame Game” and continued their use to the end of the third time period.

As the details of the “Plame Game” changed over time, the frames associated with the actors changed as well. For example, the media used unfavorable frames in the first-period coverage to describe Joseph Wilson and his actions. The unfavorable frames of Joseph Wilson decreased by the third period, resulting in neutral or no frames associated with him and his

actions. This demonstrates that the media do reframe events and people during a scandal's life to keep the story alive and fresh for the viewers.

For any political scandal lines are drawn in the sand, causing politicians and even everyday citizens pick sides. This "choosing of sides" leads people to believe that the media are biased when they don't feel their side is represented enough or is associated with negative frames. This attitude often occurs when people are reacting to a small number of stories, perhaps only one. But the results of the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance indicate that overall the media coverage of the "Plame Game" was balanced. Specifically, the media used an equal number of favorable and unfavorable frames for actors on both sides of the "Plame Game" during the three event cycles examined in this study.

The evidence in this study indicates that media do rely on frames to describe actors and their actions in political scandals. These represent a mix of frames they create and the frames provided by political elites. While the use of frames may result in a biased report of an actor or their actions at one time or another, the coverage of a political scandal as whole may be balanced over time with an equal number of favorable and unfavorable frames. These results can help future researchers further examine; the media's use of frames, the originations of news frames, the power the political elite has over the press and the further examinations of media bias.

Entman's Cascading Network Activation (2003) model of frames demonstrates that the media exist as an arm of a government dispensing information to the public using the frames of the White House and at times those of other political elites such as members of Congress. Other scholars have argued that the duty of the media is not to function as an arm of the government, but work to serve the public, questioning the government to provide the public with objective information to ensure the democratic process functions properly.

In the case of the “Plame Game” the media did depend on the White House and the political elites for information on the scandal using some of the frames given to them. Many of the articles examined consisted of direct statements from “Plame Game” actors or their representatives (lawyers, press agents, etc.). However, the newspapers examined in this study did develop most of the frames associated with this research. In various articles it seem like the public wasn’t getting objective information about the events and actors of the “Plame Game,” but the overall accumulation of articles proved that the media are capable of creating their own frames without reliance on the White House or the political elite, making it possible to report on political scandals objectively allowing the public to make form their own opinions.

#### Strengths and Weaknesses

The “Plame Game” is a political scandal the media covered in print, TV, radio, and on the internet for more than five years. Time constraints limited this study to the examination of print articles from three national newspapers (the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*) across three separate time intervals (July 2003 – July 2004; August 2004 – October 2005; and March 2007 – August 2008) of the “Plame Game.” These three newspapers are considered reputable national sources, often setting the agenda for other media coverage. Print media also are the most analyzed among researchers because it is easy to locate and relatively inexpensive to examine. A small sample of press releases and “Plame Game” actor interviews were also examined in this study to help determine whether the media used frames given to them by the actors.

The sample size of newspaper (57) articles did limit the statistical analysis possibilities of this study. However, the article samples did consist of all articles printed in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *USA Today* during the three event periods of the “Plame Game.”

Sample size could be expanded using a larger number of newspapers or expanding the length of each event period of the “Plame Game Articles.”

### Future Research

The Bush Presidency endured many political scandals over the course of eight years. This study is limited to the first, the identity leak of CIA agent Valerie Plame which became known as the “Plame Game.” The researcher examined media frames of the “Plame Game” actors to determine how the media framed these actors, whether the frames changed across time, whether it is possible to influence the frames media use during a scandal, and whether the media presented a bias.

Future research could examine the media frames of all of the Bush Presidency scandals to determine whether the media treated each scandal in the same manner or whether media frames vary for each scandal. A researcher could also duplicate this study by expanding the sample to more media or by using a scandal from a different president (i.e., Bill Clinton) to determine whether media frames differ among presidential administrations and scandals. All of this research would be helpful in determining the types of frames the media use, the source of frames, and possible media framing bias.

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**APPENDIX A:**  
**EMERGENT CODE SHEET**

1. Unit ID:

2. Year:

2003            2004            2005            2006            2007            2008

3. Month:

Jan            May            Sept  
Feb            June            Oct  
March            July            Nov  
April            Aug            Dec

4. Name of Newspaper:

The Washington Post            The New York Times            USA Today

5. Is Valerie Plame Mentioned?

Yes            No

6. If Plame is mentioned, then what's the frame?

Individual            Community            National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

7. Type of Plame Frame:

Unfavorable – Game            Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack            Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend            Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is Joseph Wilson mentioned?

Yes            No

9. If Joseph Wilson is mentioned, what type of frame?

Individual            Community            National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

10. Type of Joseph Wilson Frames?

Unfavorable – Game            Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack            Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend            Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

11. Is President G. W. Bush mentioned?

Yes            No

12. If President Bush is mentioned, then what's the frame?

Individual            Community            National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

13. Type of President Bush Frame:

Unfavorable – Game            Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack            Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend            Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

14. Is I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby mentioned?

Yes            No

15. If “Scooter” Libby is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

16. Type of “Scooter” Libby Frame:

Unfavorable – Game                      Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack                      Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend                      Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

17. Is Karl Rove mentioned?

Yes                      No

18. If Karl Rove is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

19. Type of Karl Rove Frame:

Unfavorable – Game                      Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack                      Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend                      Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

20. Is Vice President Dick Cheney mentioned?

Yes      No

21. If Vice President Dick Cheney is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

22. Type of Vice President Cheney Frame:

Unfavorable – Game                      Favorable – Benefit

Unfavorable – Attack                      Favorable - Winner

Unfavorable – Defend                      Neutral

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **EMERGENT CODE SHEET BOOK**

Code the nine newspaper article samples for all of the players in the “Plame Game” (Valerie Plame, Joseph Wilson, President G. W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, I. “Scooter” Lewis Libby, and Karl Rove). Answer all questions based on the individual paragraphs of the article the player is mentioned in.

1. Unit ID: The unit ID is written on each individual article and will start with an A, B, or C.
2. Year: Indicate the year the article was printed.
3. Month: Indicate the month the article was printed.
4. Name of Newspaper: Indicate which paper the article is from.

Numbers 5, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 20 - Is the individual mentioned? Indicate yes or no

- If the answer is no, skip the following two questions about the individual and proceed to the next individual mentioned.
- Ex: Number 17; Is Karl Rove mentioned? No, skip to question number 20.

Numbers 6, 9, 12, 14, 18, and 21 – If the player is mentioned, what type of frame?

- Individual: a news event is framed within a scope limited to individuals involved in the event, i.e., Valerie Plame.
- Community: a news event is framed as relevant to a specific community, i.e., the Bush administration or the C.I.A.
- National: a news story is framed in terms of national significance, i.e., policy or legal issues.

- NOTE: It is possible for a player to have more than one type of frame. This can vary between paragraphs or can switch within an article.

Numbers 7, 10, 13, 15, 19, and 22 – Type of frame used for the player.

- Unfavorable: use of “game” descriptive words associated with the player or their actions.
- Unfavorable: use of “attack” descriptive words associated with the player or their actions.
- Unfavorable: use of “defend” descriptive words associated with the player or their actions.
- Favorable: use of “benefit” descriptive words associated with the player or their actions.
- Favorable: use of “winner” descriptive words associated with the player or their actions.
- Neutral: no additional descriptive words or used when describing the player or their actions. Ex: Valerie Plame, C.I.A. agent.
- Other: Use this section to add any positive or negative frames that are not listed above.
- NOTE: It is possible to have more than one type of frame (positive and negative) associated with an actor.

**APPENDIX C:**  
**FINAL CODE SHEET**

1. Unit ID:

2. Year:

2003            2004            2005            2006            2007            2008

3. Month:

Jan            May            Sept  
Feb            June            Oct  
March            July            Nov  
April            Aug            Dec

4. Name of Newspaper:

The Washington Post            The New York Times            USA Today

5. Is Valerie Plame Mentioned?

Yes            No

6. If Plame is mentioned, then what's the frame?

Individual            Community            National

7. Type of Plame Frame:

Unfavorable – Game            Favorable – Benefit            Neutral  
Unfavorable – Attack            Favorable - Winner  
Unfavorable – Defend            Favorable - Cooperate  
Unfavorable – Accuse            Favorable - Supportive  
Unfavorable – Punish            Favorable – Defend

8. Is Joseph Wilson mentioned?

Yes            No

9. If Joseph Wilson is mentioned, what type of frame?

Individual            Community            National

10. Type of Joseph Wilson Frames?

Unfavorable – Game	Favorable – Benefit	Neutral
Unfavorable – Attack	Favorable – Winner	
Unfavorable – Defend	Favorable – Cooperate	
Unfavorable – Accuse	Favorable – Supportive	
Unfavorable – Punish	Favorable – Defend	

11. Is President G. W. Bush mentioned?

Yes            No

12. If President Bush is mentioned, then what's the frame?

Individual            Community            National

13. Type of President Bush Frame:

Unfavorable – Game	Favorable – Benefit	Neutral
Unfavorable – Attack	Favorable – Winner	
Unfavorable – Defend	Favorable – Cooperate	
Unfavorable – Accuse	Favorable – Supportive	
Unfavorable – Punish	Favorable – Defend	

14. Is I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby mentioned?

Yes            No

15. If “Scooter” Libby is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

16. Type of “Scooter” Libby Frame:

Unfavorable – Game                      Favorable – Benefit                      Neutral

Unfavorable – Attack                      Favorable – Winner

Unfavorable – Defend                      Favorable - Cooperate

Unfavorable – Accuse                      Favorable - Supportive

Unfavorable – Punish                      Favorable - Defend

17. Is Karl Rove mentioned?

Yes                      No

18. If Karl Rove is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

19. Type of Karl Rove Frame:

Unfavorable – Game                      Favorable – Benefit                      Neutral

Unfavorable – Attack                      Favorable – Winner

Unfavorable – Defend                      Favorable – Cooperate

Unfavorable – Accuse                      Favorable – Supportive

Unfavorable – Punish                      Favorable – Defend

20. Is Vice President Dick Cheney mentioned?

Yes      No

21. If Vice President Dick Cheney is mentioned, then what’s the frame?

Individual                      Community                      National

22. Type of Vice President Cheney Frame:

Unfavorable – Game	Favorable – Benefit	Neutral
Unfavorable – Attack	Favorable – Winner	
Unfavorable – Defend	Favorable – Cooperate	
Unfavorable – Accuse	Favorable – Supportive	
Unfavorable – Punish	Favorable – Defend	

## VITA

Misty Dawn Albrecht was born in Johnson City, Texas, in November 1977, (the oldest of three children). Her father is a farmer and mechanic and her mother is a homemaker. Although Misty was born in Texas, her education has been the compilation of many different public schools and universities in several different states.

Misty attended kindergarten through sixth grade at Blanco Elementary in Blanco, Texas. The summer before her seventh grade year Misty's parents moved her to Arkansas where she graduated from a small public high school (Danville High School in Danville, Arkansas). Misty attended her freshman year of college at Arkansas Tech University majoring in nursing. After a hectic first year of college and not meshing well with her choice of nursing as a major, Misty took two years off from school.

During her time off Misty married her high school sweetheart (David Albrecht) and moved to Burlington, Massachusetts (a suburb of Boston), so he could attend school at the University of Massachusetts Boston and play baseball. At this time Misty took a job as an accounts payable clerk in a car dealership and returned to school (Middlesex Community College) majoring in accounting. Misty found her accounting classes to be very boring but fell in love with a marketing class; this was the turning point of Misty's academic career.

After Misty's husband graduated college in 2002, she and David moved back to Texas. Misty enrolled for her final two years of college at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). Misty majored in communication concentrating in public relations. While attending UTSA Misty was on the Honor Roll in Fall 2003 and Dean's List Fall 2004, won an Outstanding Achievement Award for Publication of Paper (McDonald's Balanced Lifestyles Campaign: A Public Relations Case Study, *Business Research Yearbook*, 12 [2005]), was a nominee for the

UTSA Ambassadors program, Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) Public Relations Coordinator, Account Executive for the PRSSA Bateman Competition, and a member of Lambda Pi Eta. On Friday, May 13, 2005, Misty graduated *Cum Laude* receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in communication.

After graduation Misty started working for an advertising agency as an Experiential Account Executive in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Misty worked with her client (Gulf States Toyota) to coordinate marketing, advertising, and public relations campaigns across a five state territory (Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi). Misty knew she needed more than a bachelor's degree to be competitive with her advertising colleagues.

Misty applied for graduate school in the spring of 2006 and was accepted at Louisiana State University's Manship School for Mass Communication. Misty started school in the fall of 2006 and continued working full-time with the advertising agency until January 2008. Misty will receive the degree of Master of Mass Communication in the spring of 2009. Afterwards she will continue her work in the advertising field and may one day return to school for her doctoral degree.