

**A dramaturgical analysis of political rhetoric contained in media reports  
regarding the Yarmouth Ferry**

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August 2016

### **Dedication**

To mom, for teaching me that my mind will always be my greatest strength;  
& to John for reminding me.

### **Acknowledgement**

To my family, friends and people of all political stripes I have worked with over the years, thank you for being a part of this study. And a special thank you to the politicians, staffers and all people of Nova Scotia who give so much of themselves to serve our province.

*“Do not look for fiscal logic on political battlefields.”*

*~ Marilla Stephenson, Chronicle Herald, October 18, 2014*

### **Abstract**

Using the lens of Goffman's theory of dramaturgy and its social framework as the case study lens, this paper explores reports between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2014 in Nova Scotia's provincial news publication, the Chronicle Herald, about the Yarmouth ferry.

The ferry linking the south coast of Nova Scotia to the United States has been a part of provincial infrastructure since the 1800s. Generations of residents navigated changes in government at all levels and their corresponding focus in order to retain the link, the jobs it produced and the resulting pride it offered its community. However, none of this came without a cost to taxpayers. It is this cost that helped set-up the case for this study.

In 2009 Nova Scotia's first NDP government made a monumental decision to cancel the subsidy the province had been giving to the Yarmouth ferry service provider resulting in the cancellation of the service. This decision caused a barrage of news reports that are examined in this study using Goffman's frames of fabrication, misframing, keying, frame disputes and frame breaks.

This application of Goffman to the drama that is the Yarmouth ferry contributes to communication studies research by offering an empirical example of frame analysis. It also brings additional focus to a theorist who is underrepresented in communication-related literature despite his influence on other academics as is apparent in the literature review. Although Goffman is present in communication studies his work is more prevalent in sociological study.

In addition to contributing to communication studies, the analysis of this data helps inform our understanding of political communication; in particular the rhetoric produced by politicians and reproduced by reporters.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

“Cutting the Yarmouth ferry was the worst decision the Dexter government made – if ‘worst’ is measured by the ratio of financial savings to political damage” (Steele, 2014, p. 128).

Using Erving Goffman’s social framework as the case study lens this study explores Chronicle Herald reports about decisions made by various Nova Scotia government officials regarding the ferry service between Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and the United States. The study specifically asks can we identify Goffman’s dramaturgical frames in the Chronicle Herald reports surrounding the Yarmouth ferry and what does that tell us about the associated political rhetoric?

In 2009 when Nova Scotians elected the first NDP government in provincial history, two things were immediately evident to me: it would be a remarkably steep learning curve for everyone involved, and the electorate was going to feel the change.

As a communications official having worked for the NS Progressive Conservative government of Premier John Hamm for several years and then the NS Liberal Caucus, a stint with the government-in-waiting NDP seemed a natural career progression. From 2009 to early 2014, I played a small role on the communications team for 32 (and then 31) remarkable men and women who I believe sincerely wanted to make life better for Nova Scotians.

During these 5 tumultuous years I witnessed many changes that helped and some that hindered. However, one moment will always stand-out in my memory: being told by a senior advisor that Cabinet decided to cancel the subsidy to the Yarmouth Ferry. The evidence I was given led me to support the decision, but no evidence could have braced me for the public relations impact that would follow in the form of public protests against a once popular government, prolonged negative writing campaigns and great deal of lost political support.

In that moment, I was quickly reminded of the days and months following the closing of the Sydney Steel Corporation in my hometown of Sydney, Nova Scotia. The gates to the largest employer and city icon that stood for over a century closed because of a political promise made by then Premier John Hamm. Hamm gained support of voters on the province's mainland and vaulted to victory in 1999 by promising to stop subsidies by either selling or closing the crown corporation that ran the facility. Nova Scotians saw an estimated 30 billion taxpayer dollars funneled into SYSCO since the provincial government took ownership in 1967 (Government of Nova Scotia, 1999).

Even though the steel mill had a much reduced workforce by 2000, the impact of the closure was felt deeply by generations of residents in Sydney and surrounding areas. At its peak under the ownership of the province from the 1960s until its closure, the company employed an estimated 900 people compared to the 5,400 employees during the most profitable times of the 1940s and 1950s (Boutlier, 2007).

The end of the steel making era in Sydney was not a surprise to my generation as we worried more about the poison entering our air, water and neighborhoods than we did the few jobs that remained at the plant. Rampant ignorance of the environmental impacts of the mill resulted in "700,000 tonnes of poison flowing" (Battis, 2013) into the tar ponds. Today the pond has been replaced with a park, but health effects of a city center filled with sludge remain.

There are difference and similarities between subsidies ending to SYSCO and those to the Yarmouth ferry. Both decisions impacted small towns but were heard about province-wide for many months and years following. The two cases held the focus of local residents but had little tangible long lasting impact to other hubs of the province, and both were essentially made with politics and the future in mind. The cases differ in the number of direct job losses; SYSCO

employed hundreds, the ferry less so. Of course the most glaring difference between the closure of Sydney Steel and the cancelling of the Yarmouth is that the ferry hadn't become a national conversation of severe pollution including carcinogens that would affect generations to come.

I left Sydney in 2002 and until receiving the ferry news in 2009 I had not thought about SYSCO. Since beginning this research, I have not forgotten.

For the next number of years after the Yarmouth ferry subsidy was cancelled I found myself directing my extra time reading media reports and listening to first and second-hand accounts of the impact the cancelled service was having on the town of Yarmouth and surrounding areas. I was enthralled at the amount of attention this decision was getting. A government overseeing billions of dollars across hundreds of departments, agencies and boards makes countless decisions daily, most of which are never reported or discussed. At the surface this decision was no different than others made that day. Yet, it was news locally, provincially and nationally for days, and then weeks and months to follow.

This was in addition to my job with the NDP which included constant awareness of media reports, trends and specific coverage of my government. On any given day I would read ten or more news sources from across the province before 9:00 a.m. paying specific attention to the provincial edition of the Chronicle Herald, the news outlet with the largest circulation in the province.

Many of the reports, including those in the Herald, contained similar information and quotes but sometimes I would find one that made me think more deeply about how and why its author chose certain words or phrases to tell the story. I attributed this personal method of discovery to my background in theatre and years of paying particular attention to the delivery of



every word, and the awareness of how others perceive the script and story you are framing on stage.

It was also this connection between words, phrases, and theatrical portrayal that prompted my interest in Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy. At its core, dramaturgy is the theory that life is portrayed on an individual's front stage or back stage. On the front stage people are interacting, being watched, performing life and managing the impression they make on other people and situations. We retreat to the back stage to be our real selves and prepare for our time on front stage. The theory goes on to break front stage interactions into frameworks including social frames which are essentially events that influence society.

Gamson (1975) describes frames as a "central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue" (p. 157). Thus, when individuals view an interaction using frame analysis the resulting interpretation is organization and isolation of the original idea, which is then made relevant to the situation that is under examination. This is precisely what this study has done: isolated specific coverage of the Yarmouth ferry, organized and interpreted it based on Goffman's frames and interpreted it as part of the larger political rhetoric.

The marriage of these elements: the impact the Yarmouth ferry decision had on me professionally and personally, my interest in framing based on word and phrase choice by Nova Scotian reporters, and my years in theatre motivated me to learn more about what the media reports were saying on an academic level.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

William Shakespeare (2013) may have penned the famous phrase “all the world’s a stage” in his script *As you Like it*, but Erving Goffman went beyond the metaphor and incorporated the predominant physical spaces of a theatre to describe how individuals behave in everyday life. This transformation from setting to situation influenced how researchers and communicators view interpersonal interactions.

In particular, Goffman’s extensive work on an individual’s choice of what facade she will allow others to see proves his grasp on interpersonal interaction. What Goffman coined as theory of face essentially states that an individual pre-determines what she will allow her audience to see before taking part in any kind of discourse (Goffman, 2003).

“As a forerunner on research into face” (Prasad, 2005, p. 2) Goffman provokes the analysis of individual behavior by empowering the audience to either accept what has been presented – the role the actor is portraying - or to question the motives involved in her presentation.

The examination of the individual in this situation, regardless of motives, is what Goffman referred to as frame analysis.

The inherent ambiguity of the presentation of self has lead Matthes (2009) to search for a concrete definition of frame and its effectiveness as a tool for situational analysis. “Scholars must share a common definition when investigating processes of frame building and framing effects” (p. 360). As themes are examined using Goffman’s frames, this paper attempts to analyze situations caused by reporters which may in-turn help establish more definitive definitions.

Seemingly in agreement, Gamson (1975) writes that “frame analysis is an excellent beginning but is a vastly incomplete conceptual apparatus” (p. 607). Citing the incomplete methods to which frame analysis is used, in his work, Gamson encourages students and theorists to continue where Goffman and others finished. I believe by using frames to analyze themes occurring in modern media, I am expanding upon the usefulness of Goffman’s research and therefore continuing where he ended.

It appears Rettie (2009) has also done this by adapting and expanding upon Goffman’s theories using today’s technology. She discusses the expansion of Goffman’s work on face-to-face interactions to include technology therefore expanding his synchronistic approach to the current asynchronistic world of mobile technology.

Goffman’s reach into communication studies is also appreciated cross-culturally. As Sudea (2014) notes in studies on Japanese situational discourse, “although the construct of face exists universally, how it is presented may vary depending on various factors” (p. 32), including but not limited to the culture and ethnicity of participants.

Although their work does not name Goffman it does contain a different application of frame analysis. Kepplinger, Geoss and Siebert (2012) examine the method in which media frame a story. “Framing is a cognitive theory of media effects, which accounts for the audiences’ active processing of media content.” For the sake of determining the particular frame to which they are referring, their work examines “individual-level framing effects in scandals” (p. 662).

When individuals absorb media reports, Kepplinger et al deduce that “recipients use the hints in media coverage as a guideline or frame for processing information. They build upon the picture, and create a coherent impression, which acts as a driving force in the formation of their

opinions regarding scandals” (p. 678). In Goffmanian terms, this could be categorized as the creation of an event in ones’ mind through the observation of keying.

In addition, building upon Kepplinger et al, this paper discusses how the reporter actually presents the frame to the reader, therefore not only affecting their opinion formation, but steering them into the reporter’s chosen direction.

### **Dramaturgy**

“Erving Goffman is unquestionably the single most inspiring figure in the social science dramaturgical tradition” (Prasad, 2005, p. 43).

Dramaturgy is based on the existence of a front stage for the portrayal of self in social interaction and back stage for personal reflection and preparation. Goffman believed that individuals are actors in the portrayal of life and the front stage is the platform where communication between individuals takes place, is observed and the meaning interpreted. Further, the back stage is where people rehearse in order to display only the best of them when they take to the front stage. Only in the back stage can individuals relax and be personal.

The theory of dramaturgy is both simple and complex. There is simplicity in the fact that the physical existence of a front stage and back stage can be represented in ones’ mind by picturing a theatre. Complexity emerges when one needs to interpret what they witness on the front stage based on what they are not privy to in the backstage.

If one closely reviews the work of Debra Marshall (2013) one can deduce a rather simplistic summary of Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy into one sentence: the knowledgeable and active human is essentially a con-artist who devises her own conduct based on external influences differently in social settings than she does on her own in an effort to control how others see her.

Marshall correctly depicts the front stage as the space for interaction. However, what she is missing in her evaluation of dramaturgy is the rehearsal and preparation that takes place in the back stage of life's theatre in order to perfect what is displayed to the awaiting audience; the preparation of the presentation of self.

It is within this interpretation of what the actor portrays that Goffman (1974) develops his theory of dramaturgy further to include frame analysis; the lens through which we view an interaction or portrayal. Craib (1978) believes that Goffman's frame work is broader than the evaluation of a specific encounter, and in fact gives meaning to the organization of all we experience (p. 80).

Similar to dramaturgy, but distinctly different in several significant ways is Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism. Goffman's dramaturgy is based on the existence of a theatre-inspired stage, whereas Burke's dramatism focuses on the drama and its meaning held by performers and observers. For Burke, "drama is like life" (Prasad, 2005, p. 52), and for Goffman drama is life that is carried out on one of 2 stages: front or back.

Burke developed his theory of dramatism further to understand the motives of individuals in their interactions with others and the "critique of explanation of action" (Overington, 1977, p. 152). His focus on dramatism as the "literal statement about human interaction" (Craib, 2000, p. 338) differs from Goffman's emphasis on the individual's actions that influence the interaction.

The theory of dramaturgy was chosen over dramatism for this study because dramaturgy is about the action that occurs on one of two possible stages; dramatism focuses on motives and meaning. Goffman's frame analysis allows for isolation of concepts for evaluation, whereas dramatism requires examination of influencing factors which are not present in most professional reporting.

The differences between dramaturgy and dramatism may in fact inspire a unique follow-up to this paper in that the re-occurrence of particular frames in more than one theme by a specific reporter could lead to the study of motives and influence by said reporter.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

#### **a) Theoretical Frame: Goffman's Dramaturgy**

##### *Social frameworks*

Arising from Goffman's social interaction theory of dramaturgy was his work on frame analysis. In his book of the same name, Goffman categorized frame analysis as "the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives" (1974, p. 13). He continued by stating there are two possible frames through which individuals see an interaction: primary and social frameworks.

The primary framework is one in which an individual finds meaning in an aspect of a scene that would otherwise be rendered meaningless (p. 21). The primary framework is a natural frame in which there exists no undue influence; interactions occur naturally. Craib (1978) described primary frameworks as ones in which "practically anything can be framed" (p. 81) and are therefore the frameworks used most by individuals to evaluate a given interaction.

The second framework is the one most influenced by society and events therein – the social framework. Because social interactions involve individuals who, according to Goffman's dramaturgy, work to display the best of themselves to the audience on the front stage, there exists within this framework additional avenues for categorization. According to Craib (1978), social frameworks are those "in which events are seen to be guided by intelligent beings open to persuasion" (p. 83). It is within this possibility of persuasion that the situational frame is changed.

The first division of the social framework is fabrication: an "activity managed to infuse false belief" (Goffman, 1974, p. 83). Under the umbrella of this frame there exists the impetus for deceit and disruption.

Misframing has occurred when an individual interprets a situation incorrectly whether based on the reports of another individual or by witnessing an interaction but not being privy to the backstage influence on the front stage action. Similarly frame disputes occur when “parties with opposing versions of events may openly dispute with each other over how to define what has been or is happening” (Goffman, 1974, p. 322).

Keying is quite possibly the most complicated of the social frameworks. Keying is when “a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else” (Goffman, 1974, p. 44). Societal keying includes interactions such as ceremonies, dramatic scripting and replication. In essence, keying is a front stage mimic of an interaction.

Finally, frame breaks are experienced when an individual in a social interaction on the front stage breaks from societal norms and expectations. This behavior is generally held for an individual’s back stage therefore giving the audience a glimpse into an area not often open to them.

All of the elements in the primary and social frameworks have two concepts in common: the control of any of these frames means the control of the situation and therefore the information. And all of the frames are based on interactions occurring on the front stage.

#### *Frameworks and social establishments*

When individuals share significant societal interpretations based on the same frame, they can form social establishments. These establishments are closed systems in which a subset of rules for front stage and back stage interactions often form (Goffman, 1974). Each individual who is a member of such a group grows over time to not only manage her own impression on the front stage, but to also be more cognizant of her colleagues’ public face as well.



Within this closed system there exists a set of rules and norms that may not be accessible to individuals outside the group. A break in any of these may lead to a glimpse into back stage that, although is considered a cause for alarm, is not so much because of the layer of protection the social establishment provides. Given the level of trust required to be a member of such a society an unexpected back stage reveal may lead to a break in dialogue, the loss of situational definition, or the loss of societal impression or role within the group.

The downfall of a social establishment is its vulnerability to frame traps. Frame traps occur “when an individual is misunderstood and others misframe his words and actions” (Goffman, 1974, p. 480). The trap is strengthened when the individual attempts to correct the “manufacture of the experience” (p. 481) and suspicion within the society strengthens.

#### **b) Theoretical Frame: Goffman and Communication Studies**

Erving Goffman’s work is regularly referenced in sociological studies. As Davis states, Goffman’s reach is far but, “he is, more essentially, a social constructionist” (1975, p. 601). There are several areas of communication studies that are impacted by Goffman’s theories. A direct link can be made between the study of interpersonal communication and his theory of face: both focus much on how individuals portray themselves within interpersonal encounters. Despite Scheff’s (1997) point that Goffman focuses on the “individual rather than [the] relational” (p. 31), the very basis of the theory of face suggests that people spend time establishing what they want others to see in an encounter.

This connection between the portrayal of face and the relation to others is a natural bridge to political communication.

Freedom of the press allows for accessibility to the front stage of government officials. Access to the back stage of said officials is sometimes granted by former societal colleagues who wish to bring back stage behaviors to the front.

It is the combination of these factors that allows for the examination of the front stage portrayal of decisions made by government officials regarding Nova Scotia's Yarmouth ferry (Nova Star).

### **c) Options: Media framing and agenda setting**

Given that this study focuses much attention on media, it may have also been conducted using the more common theories of media frame analysis or agenda setting.

The very nature of media frame analysis and its focus on making a central issue prominent is similar to what media in Nova Scotia have done with the Yarmouth ferry story. The very number of entries that were found in the early searches for this data indicated the salience of the topic in Nova Scotia. However, given the low population of people in Nova Scotia, new daily content is also inherently limited. Therefore, to focus on what provincial issue media chose to make central for the day would have to be considered in context with the limited local options available, expanding the parameters and changing the central research question considerably.

Building on McCoombs, in his discussion about the work and changing landscape of media framing and agenda setting, Weaver (2007) talks about the "central organizing idea" (p. 143) reporters use to build their content and how the placement of and concentration on certain facts and topics may influence or even set the public agenda. Again, in a province consisting of less than one million people, the need to file daily stories may be a challenge in itself.

The limited population of Nova Scotia and my belief that use of media frame analysis or agenda setting would have to include quantitative as well as qualitative interpretation is why

these theories were not used. Instead, Goffman's social frameworks are the lenses through which media reports are analyzed to identify characters, spaces and in some cases societies created by the actors – none of which would be impacted by quantitative volume.

## Chapter Four: Background

### Nova Scotia

Between the period of January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2014 Nova Scotia's Consumer Price Index increased 14 percentage points (Statistics Canada, 2015). The population of the province grew slightly (in mostly urban areas) from just over 938,000 to more than 942,700 (Statistics Canada, 2014) meaning families had more mouths to feed, adding an additional layer of caution on spending patterns for necessities and use of disposable income.

The rise in population and price of goods and services contributed to the rise in health care spending (CIHI, 2014). For Canadians who enjoy free basic health care, this rise resulted in a provincial government forced to add additional dollars to health care budgets which had to come from other areas of spending.

Yet, despite these rising costs for individuals and the government, Nova Scotia continued to generate revenue by capitalizing on an abundance of offshore resources. Natural gas continued to be the top export of the province during the period culminating in Nova Scotia's top ranking among Canadian provinces by Export Development Canada (2014).

However, the amount of money the government of Nova Scotia was adding to provincial coffers was not as much as its annual expenditures. A small surplus in fiscal 2008-2009 was followed by one additional surplus and four deficit years up to and including 2013-2014 (Urbanc, 2014).

During this period of declining revenues and increasing costs, Nova Scotians had a period of governance by all three of the official provincial parties. The New Democratic Party came to power for the first time in history in 2009 defeating the long-standing governing Progressive Conservatives. After just 4 years, the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia was victorious over the one-term NDP.

All three governments were forced to make decisions while in power to deal with the reality of an “elderly and declining population” in rural Nova Scotia (Taber, 2012). A declining population is essentially a loss for a region and this loss can generate “multiple forms of resistance in rural places” (Corbett, 2005, p. 67).

It is probable that the losses felt by residents of rural Nova Scotia during the period of 2008-2014 created communities of individuals who viewed the situation through the same frame thus creating their own version of Goffman’s social establishments.

Although social establishments tend to keep their back stage closed as Goffman taught, social groups with shared situational frames can be collectively outspoken and poignant about their concerns. When such a situation arises in Nova Scotia reports from the provincial newspaper are ready to tell the story.

### **The Yarmouth ferry (Nova Star)**

The waterway connection between Nova Scotia and the United States dates back to the late 1800s when steamships began running the route transporting people and goods. Despite changing hands and undergoing changes on many occasions for many years, the link connecting the two lands was deemed a necessity by residents and marked as an important part of the vibrancy and success of Yarmouth, its Nova Scotia based port.

Countless sails later, for the first time in the period of this study, in 2008, the Progressive Conservative government under the leadership of Premier Rodney MacDonald spent \$4.4 million to keep the ferry between Yarmouth Nova Scotia and Portland, Maine, running (CP, 2015). The investment was made because “passenger-related vehicle traffic had declined by 70% from its historic high of more than 300,000 in 2001” (CP, 2015), and an increase in fuel costs. This 2008 investment brought the total investment over the previous four years to \$15.7 million (CP, 2015).

After forming government in 2009, NDP Premier Darrell Dexter cancelled the annual provincial subsidy to Bay Ferries, the operator of the link who took over the operation in 1997 from Maine Atlantic (CP, 2015). The subsidy to operate the business “had grown to \$8.9 million in 2009” (CP, 2015) and the Minister responsible [and government decision-makers] did not believe it was a good business venture (CP, 2015).

Between 2010 and early 2012 the NDP government rejected calls from business-leaders, municipal and provincial officials and tourism operators to restore the ferry service. However, in the fall of 2012 Premier Dexter appointed a panel to determine if it was possible to make a ferry service between Yarmouth and Maine a viable business in that part of rural Nova Scotia (Expert Panel, 2012).

This came as welcome news for the people of the area, in particular those in seasonal and tourism-based business. After the end of the ferry service in 2009 “several prominent hotels, motels, cottages, and Bed & Breakfasts in the region either closed or were converted to rental apartment complexes” (Gardiner Pinfold, 2011, p. 29). These closures and business changes inevitably resulted in lost jobs and therefore loss of local money being spent in the community.

The Dexter government and its advisors continued their efforts to determine if a suitable ferry operator could be found for the region well into 2013. Just before the election which would spell defeat for the NDP, a partner with a suitable plan was found.

After the election in the fall of 2013, the newly appointed Liberal government continued with plans to reinstate a new ferry service in the South/Acadian Shore area of Nova Scotia. In April of 2014 the new Nova Star took her place in the Yarmouth Harbour.

However, the cost of reinstating the ferry quickly increased. By the end of May “\$19 million of the \$21 million of public money that was supposed to last 7 years [had] been spent”

(CP, 2015). Although costly, the first sailing of the new venture had positive implications for the Yarmouth area and the rest of the province:

Visitors arriving in Yarmouth by ferry spent an estimated \$13 million in the province this sailing season. Three-quarters of passenger vehicles arriving in Yarmouth were from the U.S. The number of New England visitors to Nova Scotia grew by 17 per cent to date over last year, including 26 per cent in July and 31 per cent in August, compared with the same months in 2013. The number of room nights sold in the Yarmouth and surrounding area jumped by 40 per cent in July and 47 per cent in August over the same months last year. They also increased on the South Shore by eight per cent in July and 10 per cent in August (Government of NS, 2014).

### **Chapter Five: Method & Data**

As Yin (2009) states in his writings about case study methodology, “the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p. 1) in order to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). This strategy is the ideal fit for this study because it is based on how reports about decisions surrounding the real-life Yarmouth ferry situation contributed to our knowledge of the phenomena that is political rhetoric.

Yin (2009) continues to establish parameters around what types of research lends itself best to the case study method. The “case study is preferred in examining contemporary events” (p. 7). Given that the Nova Star and issues surrounding the Yarmouth ferry continues to be part of today’s (July 2016) news cycle in Nova Scotia, it is indeed a contemporary event. As well “the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artifacts, interviews, and observation” (p. 8).

Seemingly in support of Yin’s research and additional support for why the case study method is applicable for this study, Bryman, Bell, Mills and Yue (2011) state “with the case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it” (p. 91).

There is perhaps a rationale for a comparative case study between SYSCO and the Yarmouth ferry given the likeness between the two as previously outlined, however, the differences outweigh the similarities. The most compelling reason not to use a comparative study includes the fact that the Sydney Steel Corporation was a direct employer to the Cape Breton area, whereas the ferry is an indirect employer within the tourism industry. As well, although the Chronicle Herald had a readership in Sydney the main source of daily news for residents was the



Cape Breton Post (published daily), whereas the Herald was the daily available in the Yarmouth area.

For this research a single-case study method will be employed using media reports as the unit of analysis. Specifically, Chronicle Herald reports regarding the Yarmouth ferry between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2014. This time period is chosen because it includes three different Nova Scotia governments: Progressive Conservatives under the leadership of Rodney MacDonald, the New Democratic Party of Darrell Dexter and concluding with the Liberal government of Stephen McNeil.

According to a 2001 report by the Rural Communities Impacting Policy group “depending on how *rural* is defined, between 60% and 75% of Nova Scotia’s total population lives in rural areas” (p. 7). However, the definition used by this now defunct community-university research alliance included all areas of Nova Scotia outside the Halifax, Dartmouth and Bedford. A more recent and perhaps more adjusted read on the population of rural Nova Scotia comes from Statistics Canada’s 2011 data. Results from the last long-form census stated “43% of Nova Scotia’s population lived in rural areas”.

Given this, it should come as no surprise that generations of governments have made – and continue to make – significant investment in the communities that compose rural Nova Scotia in addition to those in the urban core.

In 2014 the Nova Scotia government realigned the former department of Rural and Economic Development to allow “the private sector to drive the economy” (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014). They also created a board to administer investment with focus on “new technologies or expansions and regional development with emphasis on high-unemployment areas” (2015). Previous governments undertook similar ventures to better position themselves for

granting and investing in areas of the province seen as less affluent or populated than the urban centers.

In 2012, the (then) NDP government commissioned a study on building the economy of Nova Scotia which resulted in the release of a report and action plan in January of 2014. Under the current Liberal government the report, entitled ‘Now or Never: An urgent call to action for Nova Scotians’ became a starting point for necessary change in the province, in particular in rural areas.

This call to action focuses on three core messages, one of which is centered on necessary engagement to change the crisis that “threaten(s) the economic and demographic viability of our province, most dramatically in our rural regions” (2014, p.vii).

The report continues its evaluation of the economy of rural Nova Scotia stating that it “hovers on the brink of serious economic and population decline unless macro-economic conditions improve and new growth drivers emerge in the near future” (p. 16).

## **Data**

To determine the data set that would be used for this study, a broad search was initially undertaken using the news database *NewsScan*. A search of the term “Yarmouth ferry” in all of the local, national, and international resources the database contained produced 1,086 entries. A decision was made to narrow the search to focus only on the province using Nova Scotia’s widest reaching medium at the time, the *Chronicle Herald*.

The time period of this study includes Nova Scotia governments lead by the three sitting political parties: Progressive Conservative, NDP and Liberal. Yet, to remain manageable for graduate study, the period was limited to 4 calendar years.

From January 2008 to December 2014 a search of “Yarmouth Ferry” in *NewsScan* yielded 219 results. A similar search of “Nova Star” resulted in 157 articles although overlap between these two terms was expected and were filtered out of the final articles examined. An additional search adding the name of the man who was Premier during the majority of this time period, Darrell Dexter, was also completed. This combined search with overlap removed resulted in only 65 articles.

<u>Filters</u>	<u>Search term</u>	<u>Results yielded</u>
No filters applied	Yarmouth ferry	1,086
Chronicle Herald January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2014	Yarmouth ferry	219
Chronicle Herald January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2014	Nova Star	157
Chronicle Herald January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2014	Darrell Dexter	65

After applying several filters, the final analysis was completed using 177 articles: (2008 = 0, 2009 = 2, 2010 = 19, 2011 = 12, 2012 = 34, 2013 = 66, 2014 = 44). A total of 33 instances of letters to the editor, known by readers as Voice of the People, were removed as well as 2 duplicate articles, 2 stand-alone photographs and 1 letter from a sitting provincial politician.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Articles</u>
2008	0
2009	2
2010	19
2011	12
2012	34
2013	66
2014	44

In the interest of maintaining consistency and ensuring the amount of data did not become too vast, photos and their captions, and letters to the editor were also removed from the data set.

Although there is an argument for including the letters to the editor because they are indeed part of the story of the ferry, they were removed for two reasons: the first as an additional way to contain the amount of data and the second because of my backstage knowledge of the political motivations for some of these letters. On at least one occasion during my tenure with each of the three political parties included in this study, a letter to the editor was formulated by political staff to be submitted to a publication by a voter. Therefore I believe using the letters that were part of the initial data search would have interjected an amount of blatant political bias in the results that is not considered part of journalistic, peer-reviewed writing.

However, opinion editorials by Chronicle Herald employed reporters remained because they are written solely by the reporter.

The final articles were stored as a PDF document on my personal computer with a backup on my personal USB. As well all articles were printed and organized by date and placed together with the code book.

Using the process of (qualitative) iterative coding, a series of codes were developed to categorize the commonalities and differences in the reports. Each article was carefully read for emergent themes as seen through Goffman's social frameworks and any evolving social establishments.

Themes were based on the following framework definitions.

*Fabrication*: an activity managed to infuse false belief; deceit and disruption.

*Misframing*: an individual interprets a situation incorrectly based on reports of another or witnesses an interaction but is not privy to their back stage influences.

*Keying*: a meaningful activity is transformed and patterned but seen by participants as something else; ceremonies, scripting and replication.

*Frame disputes*: parties with opposing versions of events openly dispute how to define what is happening.

*Frame breaks*: an individual on front stage breaks from societal norms and expectations.

A code book was kept to track the frequency and content of themes and notes on any patters that were discovered. The book also served as a host for new thoughts and the capture of particularly poignant quotes or reporters' points of reference.

### **Chapter Six: Analysis & Findings**

During the initial read of the data, I organized articles by date beginning in 2008 and ending in 2014 instead of the computer generated format which was focused on the number of times one of the key words or phrases appeared in the entry. Organizing by date allowed me to read the data as the story unfolded instead of with concentration on the number of times the key words appeared in each entry as presented by the filters used.

Delineating by date also allowed me to focus my second read on the series of events as they were reported paying particular attention and taking notes on repetition of specific subjects or quotes from politicians and / or bureaucrats. During this second read I was also able to remove photographs and opinion entries that had previously been decided would not be part of the study.

Having a better grasp on the timeline and contents of my data, it was in my third read that I began to place articles into color-coded categories based on the topic of focus including financial, impact on politician or political party and tourism.

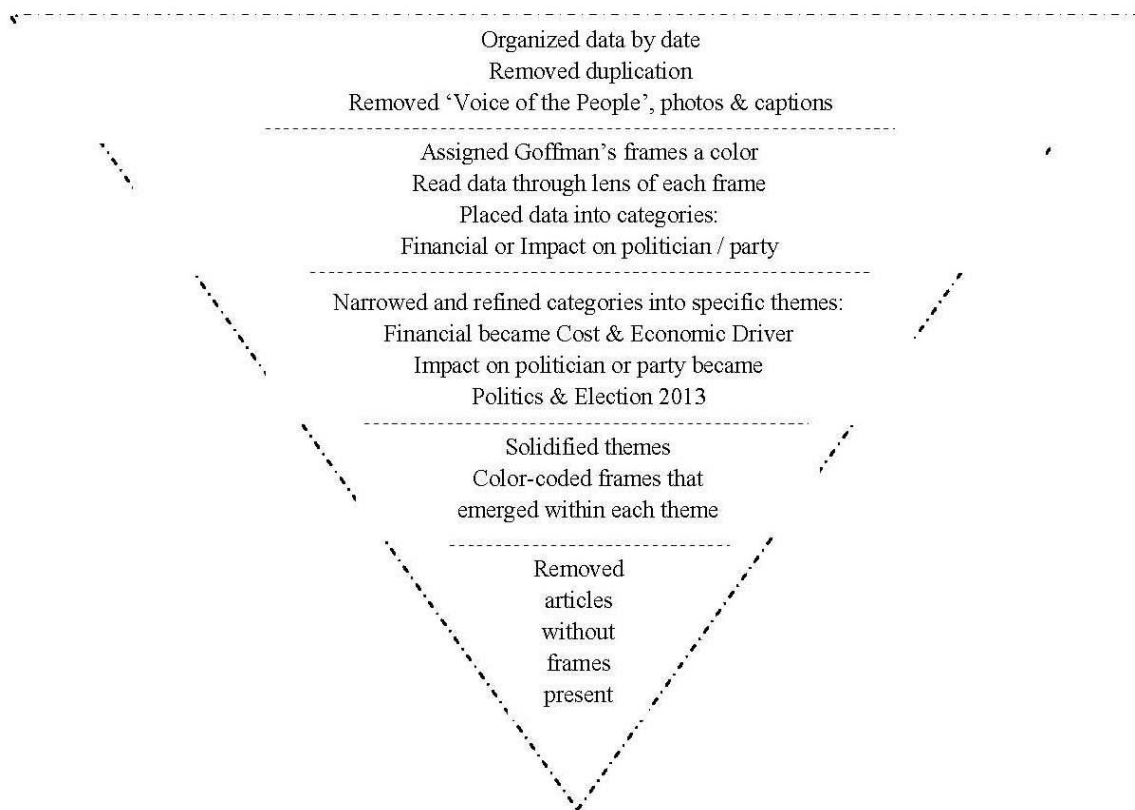
It was in my fourth read that I began to take break down the articles within these categories and take notes about more specific themes, being sure to highlight a passage that reflected a theme once it had appeared in more than one entry. When reading more carefully, the categories, such as financial, was sharpened into specific themes of economic driver and cost. Initially the theme cost was divided into sub-themes of cost to run the ferry and cost to travel, however, when I began to tally the number of entries per sub-theme cost to travel was only briefly and arbitrarily noted amongst hundreds of reports, so the sub-theme was excluded from the study.

Upon closer inspection, the category of impact on politician or political party was made into two much more specific individual themes: election issue (of 2013) and politics because

many of the noted entries were lengthy and sparked differing thoughts when reviewing them through Goffman's dramaturgical lenses.

When reviewing the articles I had categorized as relating to tourism I realized the crux of their content was actually about a connection tourism had to the economy. Therefore, tourism became a sub-themed of economic driver.

After highlighting themes as I had noted during the fourth read I undertook a fifth full read of the articles and removed any that did not have any of these themes or the sub-theme present. This left me with the data set that influences this study.



**Theme: Cost**

Before the analysis of the cost began, I had a preconceived notion it would have the most frame occurrences because much of the discourse surrounding the ferry issue seemed to include the cost to run the service as well as the cost to travel. The cost was also one of the main factors the NDP government gave for their 2009 decision to cancel the subsidy to the company operating the ferry, thus ending the service.

**Lens: Fabrication**

The relation between deceit and disruption and the meaning-latent words and phrases chosen by reporters and politicians within the fabrication frame quickly emerged during the course of this research. In fact, disruption was apparent in all instances of fabrication in the cost theme.

In one instance a reporter describes the cost to travel aboard the ferry as “ridiculously overpriced” (Schneidereit, 2012). The use of the adjective *ridiculous* leads the reader to think of humor, and *overpriced* blatantly describes an inflated cost.

Another instance of fabrication is in the statement “the NDP government is holding out a carrot” (Taylor, 2013) in the form of funding for a new ferry service provider. With this phrase the reporter is hinting that government is playing games, rather than entering a partnership with a potential supplier. This once again disrupts the reader’s ability to clearly interpret the offer as a government business transaction.

Marilla Stephenson uses one of her opinion editorial columns in October of 2014 to describe the NDP government’s offer of financial support to a company willing to re-establish a service as having been “plunked” (2014, July 31) on the table before the 2013 election call. This word implies a careless process rather than a government’s offer of funding, again hinting to the



reader that the money was offered based on a pending election rather than doing what is best for the people of Nova Scotia.

### **Lens: Misframing**

One of the most blatant examples of misframing is from author Marilla Stephenson. Stephenson makes a direct connection between the Liberal Party taking the lead in public opinion polls and the NDP offering \$21 million to a new ferry service provider, implying that the first influenced the second. This constitutes as a misframe because Stephenson did not have access to the backstage of the voters who took part in the opinion poll, nor did she have access to the backstage of the government decision-makers. Furthermore, my time in politics taught me that well-done strategic polling can take months to complete and analyze and likewise government decisions even longer, particularly when they involve millions of dollars. It would be quite difficult for any governing body to make a spending announcement of that magnitude without much preparation. Stephenson's assertion is her opinion, which is of course relevant in an opinion editorial, but nevertheless its hint steers the reader to question government's motives in allocating the funding.

A second misframe occurs when Chronicle Herald contribution writer Bill Black states that "it is not evident that the Liberal government has put any limit on future subsidies [to the Yarmouth ferry]" (2014). Since Black has no access to the backstage of the Liberal government's cabinet decisions or the Department of Finance's future spending allocations, Black's assertion is clearly a misframe.

Given that misframing has roots in access to information, it is important to point out that Black ran for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia in 2006. In

that same year he ran as a candidate for the PC Party in the provincial election and was defeated by a member of the NDP.

As a regular contributor to the Chronicle Herald without a by-line or recognition of his past political ties, readers unknowingly accept the face Black chooses to put forward, that of a reporter not a former political candidate. Certainly many in political circles are aware of the Black family history within the PC Party, but not all Nova Scotians have this information before they read his work.

By not pointing out Black's political allegiance, former or current, the Chronicle Herald is placing Black's influences backstage.

### **Lens: Frame Disputes**

The fact that the people most often involved in frame disputes are members of opposing political parties should come as no surprise. Most Nova Scotians understand that politics is very much about different sides of any given issue. Goffman's definition of frame disputes containing no special allocation or recognition for political disputes may be exactly what Gamson (1975) had in mind when he discussed the incompleteness of the frame definitions.

A frame dispute within the cost theme occurs between Liberal Minister of Economic Development Michel Samson and the former NDP government. Samson states that he believes the NDP government knew their allocation of \$21 million to a new ferry service provider was unrealistic. However, in the initial announcement of the \$21 million, the NDP government Minister explained \$10.5 million was for start-up costs and the remaining sum to be divided into \$1.5 million for marketing over the next seven years. At no time did the NDP government mention their belief that additional funds may be needed.

The two sides of these disputes state very different notions for the use of the \$21 million: one side clearly stating the allocation over the course of 7 years, the other believing the 7-year plan was never tenable; a fact the Liberals claim was known when it was announced.

What needs to be considered in this example is that at the time Samson made the comments about the NDP he was part of the new government and as such, had access to the timelines, records and plans of the very former NDP government decision he was criticizing. Keplinger et al would likely assert that Samson was using his side of the frame dispute to drop hints to the reader in an effort to influence how they process further information on the subject.

### **Lens: Keying, Frame Breaks**

It is indeed peculiar that there are no instances of keying or frame breaks within the cost theme. After four in-depth reads of the data it became apparent that the reason for this may be because the discussions of cost are concentrated on fabrication. It is reasonable to state that it would be difficult for opposition parties to interpret solid numbers differently than established financial staffers from the Nova Scotia Department of Finance.

There is however, an instance in which a reporter uses words that may make the reader believe he is discussing a frame break by a cabinet minister.

Roger Taylor begins to describe an encounter with Minister of Economic Development Michel Samson by stating “in a revealing moment this week” (Taylor, 2014). Drawing from Keplinger et al, Taylor’s use of this phrase may lead readers to assume he is about to reveal a moment of enlightenment from the Minister. However, upon closer inspection, Samson stayed close to what people in political circles refer to as the key message. The discussion is not about Samson breaking social norms, rather it becomes the frame dispute previously discussed in this theme.

One of the most compelling conclusions stemming from the theme of cost through Goffman's frames is that actual dollar amounts were rarely quoted. Instead, cost was described using leading adjectives by reporters and contributors who left hints for the reader rather than positioning their commentary with financial facts.

**Theme: 2013 Election issue**

Public discourse during an election period can influence the outcome. This is the reason politicians want to make headlines, want to have issues to champion, and want to be top of mind to the electorate. It is when this list of wants exists alongside negative messages that the political party can find themselves in popularity trouble.

During the period of this study, a provincial election was prepared, called and lost by the governing NDP. This theme was an important one to this research because it dominated the text for a period up to the writ-period, the 32 day campaign, and the time following the change in government. To not include this theme would be to overlook a key component in the life-cycle of provincial governments.

**Lens: Fabrication**

Once again the use of emotional words or phrases by a reporter or politician populates the fabrication frame.

Describing government's timetable regarding the ferry service as "dilly dallying" (Stephenson, 2012, September 8) leads the reader to believe the decision is not being taken seriously. In addition, words like "clumsy," (Opinion, 2012) "nosedive," (News, 2013) and "axe" (News, 2013) are all used in articles describing how the decision to discontinue the subsidy to the Yarmouth ferry service affected public perception of the NDP government.

Roger Taylor disrupts the independent thought of readers and voters by stating the ferry issue was “bound to be a major issue” (2013, August 20) in the election. The appearance of these words near the beginning of the article frames the rest of the report on this one statement rather than allowing the reader to make their own decision based on fact.

### **Lens: Misframing**

In August of 2013 the government made several announcements of funding to community organizations, many of which were annual allotments. A Chronicle Herald reporter witnessed these interactions between government and community and interpreted them as spending “before an election is called” (Opinion, 2014) instead of the routine practice of government.

This statement not only undermines the importance of government assistance to community organizations, but it also weakens the significant role the groups play in their region. Many grants are application-based and if organizations believe they will only receive attention during a pre-election period they may be reluctant to allocate the time and resources needed to complete the process. Therefore, this statement does a disservice to the people who run and utilize community-based institutions.

Having been a part of many of these announcements, it is important for me to disclose that there is always an amount of political thought that goes into government announcements. However, the public appearance should not take away from the importance in the award of funding.

### **Lens: Keying**

The NDP government made several announcements about a new ferry service for Yarmouth during their tenure. Each of these occasions is an example of keying: the meaningful

and routine activity of a government announcement is interpreted by opposition politicians and reporters as a pre-election statement used to gain support from voters on the South Shore. The reason this cannot be interpreted as an election statement keyed as a government announcement is because of how it is staffed. Official government announcements are staffed by government employees, whereas announcements of a strictly political nature are staffed by political staffers and not anyone paid from provincial coffers.

In addition, national reporter Paul Mcleod infers that a political rally held in September of 2013 is “mysterious” (2013) even though rallies are often replicated and a common part of politics. In the interest of full disclosure it is important to make mention that although the concept was not my idea, I helped plan and execute this rally as part of my job with the NDP at the time. In addition, ironically, after the event had concluded several reporters commented that this was in fact a smart way to ensure the NDP led the news-cycle on more than one occasion if indeed the election was soon to be called. These comments were not part of any formal report.

### **Lens: Frame Disputes**

The clearest example of opposing views within the cost theme is between South Shore MLA Vicki Conrad and area Mayor John Leefe. As an NDP MLA, Conrad defended the government decision to end the Yarmouth ferry subsidy; Leefe states his belief that it was the wrong decision.

The South Shore based reporter chose to lead her article with the assertions from Mayor Leefe and follow-up with the other side of the story mid-way through the piece thus hinting, as Kepplinger et al. would proclaim, that the mayor’s opinion was more important than that of the MLA.

After the election of 2013 the final dispute within this theme occurred which differed from the others in that it was between the new Liberal government and the former NDP government. The dispute is framed by reporter Marilla Stephenson in what appears to be an attempt to pit the two parties, their supporters and critics against each other by assigning blame for the new ferry deal to either the NDP or the Liberals.

The decisions made by all past governments inherently become the issues of any new government; therefore the “political burden” (Stephenson, 2014, October 8) is shared by all decision-makers past and present. Although it is typical for new governments to blame particularly contentious problems on past governments, situations are rarely framed as such by reporters.

### **Lens: Frame Breaks**

One of the frame breaks in the 2013 election theme occurs in 2010, years before the election. Darrell Dexter spoke candidly with a reporter about a rally chant calling for his resignation during a visit to the Yarmouth region. Dexter laughed about the chant referring to it as being as “old as the hills” (Medel, 2010). It is not the norm for any political leader to take such a chant jokingly on their front stage, even though he may on his backstage. This break allows the readers to see a human side of Dexter, one that makes him appear jovial. On the other hand, not taking a demonstration group seriously, regardless of how rudimentary their chant may be, is not a particularly politically smart thing to do as it may be seen as mocking the issue.

Another frame break is based on humor when Region of Queens Mayor John Leefe is questioned about how the Yarmouth ferry decision may affect the NDP in the next election. Leefe gives readers insight into his back stage personality by saying “the NDP have as much chance of being elected in Yarmouth as I have of being elected Pope.” (Ware, 2012). This phrase

choice is not one people are accustomed to hearing or reading from a seasoned politician and therefore constitutes as a break from societal norms and expectations.

Once again, to NDP supporters this may be seen as mocking the hard work they will put into a campaign and is perhaps not the best choice of words for a community leader. The reference to the Pope would likely not be popular in extremely Christian communities, but I do not believe the statement was made with the purpose to offend.

Also, in a debate-style round table discussion during the election period of 2013, Darrell Dexter gives insight into his back stage as he admitted regretting the way the cancellation of the Yarmouth ferry service was handled.

A break in expectations in this setting can give voters insight into the person behind the politician which may result in additional votes or a new feeling of understanding for the difficult position in which politicians often find themselves.

### **Theme: Economic driver**

Within the theme of economic driver there is a sub-theme of impact on tourism which did not emerge in the data until after the cancellation of the ferry service in 2009.

As my experience in politics led me to expect, much of the discourse surrounding the economy and impact on tourism was centered on laying blame at the feet of the NDP government for cancelling the ferry service. It is within this scenario that I noted several of the examples of fabrication connected directly to instances of misframing. In particular, opposition politicians used an interview to both misframe a government decision and then position themselves as being able to make better choices on behalf of the voters.



**Lens: Fabrication**

The use of words like “demise” (Taylor, 2009) to describe the end of the subsidy to the ferry, and “oblivious” (Medel, 2009) and “short-sighted” (Stephenson, 2012, September 8) to portray government decision-makers imprint negativity in the mind of the reader. The reporters’ use of these words to describe the situation assists in the management of negativity and makes it nearly impossible for the reader to make her own decision.

One need only watch, listen to or read any news medium to infer that negativity and disaster are the backbone of most broadcasts. Therefore, the more pessimism reporters can infuse into a situation, the longer the story is likely to last in the mind of the reader and therefore the forefront of the reporters’ agenda.

Seemingly in contradiction to the prevalence of examples of fabrication in this study, there are no instances of it in the sub-theme of impact on tourism. It is my assertion that this is because reporters with the provincial publication and politicians alike concentrated on the overall impact to the economy as it is more likely to gain attention province-wide than localized impact on tourism.

**Lens: Misframing**

It is no surprise that much of the misframing that occurred within the economic theme is one politician attempting to interpret the actions of another without any access to the decision-makers’ backstage.

Coincidentally, on the same date in 2012 and 2013 Progressive Conservative Leader Jamie Baillie claimed the NDP government made the decision to stop the ferry subsidy without understanding the impact it would have on the region. Even as a Leader and MLA, Baillie had no access to government decision-makers and thus used the media to frame his interpretation not

only as a way to tell voters the NDP government was making the wrong decision but also that his party and himself in particular knew what was right and wrong for the province.

Given that the PC Party did in fact gain seats in the 2013 election, it is plausible that this misframing had an impact. However, without access to the backstage of the voters who did cast a ballot for the PCs, I hesitate to conclusively present the situation as such.

### **Lens: Misframing (sub-theme of impact on tourism)**

Within the sub-theme of impact on tourism an economic development officer for the Region of Queens interprets a 61% decline in the number of visitors to the area's information centers as being directly related the loss of the ferry. The south shore reporter continues her article for many more paragraphs before noting that Charlton-Huskings' data came from the "number of tourists who signed the guest book" (Ware, 2010) at the centers.

Using Goffman's theory of face as a tool to interpret the motives of the reporter, I am puzzled by what prompted the author to state Charlton-Huskings' data in the first few sentences, but follow with its source much later in the article. Perhaps Ware was employing what Craib (1978) may describe as framing the situation based on more than the one encounter. More likely, the reporter's writing is, as Keppling et al would interpret, in fact using space to hint and possibly even enable Charlton-Huskings' misframe of the situation.

### **Lens: Frame Disputes**

When it came to frame disputes in the economic driver theme and impact on tourism sub-themes, several instances presented in which facts or statements by a reporter in one article disputed another. These contradictions made it difficult to digest the data in this set.

Including among these frame disputes were statements about the declining ferry industry across the country (Cosgrove, 2013) which, upon interpretation, would appear to support the

NDP decision to stop the Yarmouth subsidy. There was also an instance in which opinion-based journalist Marilla Stephenson states that population decline in the southern part of Nova Scotia was similar to what was happening in other areas of the province (2012<sup>2</sup>). Again, with further inspection, this statement seems to dispute Stephenson's previous and later summations that the NDP decision essentially crippled Southern Nova Scotia.

In keeping with oddities, in a rare partnership Liberal MLA Zach Churchill and PC MLA Chris d'Entremont joined together to gather information to solidify their frame dispute with the NDP government regarding the \$6 million ferry subsidy. In the article that describes the alliance additional Liberal MLAs for the South Shore region interject their version of events, also in direct contradiction of the NDP.

This type of alliance is rarely formed between opposing political parties. Because of its rarity, it is likely quite effective because instead of a frame dispute between two opposing views, there are two views presented against another one.

### **Lens: Frame Disputes (sub-theme of impact on tourism)**

One frame dispute in the impact on tourism sub-theme of economic driver is within comments made by one person. White Point Resort owner John Risley has what appears to be a frame dispute with himself when he blames the decrease in tourism traffic on the loss of the Yarmouth ferry and then follows that comment by stating he would have made the same decision as the NDP government to cut the subsidy.

It is possible that Risley did not pre-determine what face he would portray to the reporter and her audience, but instead disputed his own frame as a means of also breaking the frame people of the region expected of him.

**Lens: Frame Breaks**

Business reporter Roger Taylor broke from his frame as a seasoned reporter when he gave his opinion on the Yarmouth ferry service in an article that is not labeled an opinion piece. This break was in direct contradiction to Keppliner et al's theory that the media give hints to allow readers to process information as it is a direct statement of opinion complete with first-person writing.

There are no frame breaks identified in the sub-category of impact on tourism.

**Lens: Keying**

Initially the example of keying in this theme was interpreted as misframing. However, upon closer inspection, this particular passage is an example of both misframing by the reporter and keying by the quoted politician.

Reporter Marilla Stephenson followed-up a quote from MLA Churchill about his worry that a new ferry will not be in place "for next year" (2011) with a statement about job losses in the region. Because the officially documented reasons released with the job loss statistics are not also presented the situation is misframed by the reporter. By doing this, Stephenson leads the reader to infer that the amount of lost jobs is directly related to the lack of ferry service.

In addition, this passage represents an example of keying because job losses and gains are a regular part of employment and business and yet, Churchill saw this particular report as something else; a report on the loss of ferry service.

It would appear that Stephenson placed the information about job losses with the MLA's quoted apprehension to lead the reader to believe that job losses would increase if a new ferry is not secured. Once again, this is an example of Kepplinger et al's assertion that media hint about situations.

There are no instances of keying in the sub-theme of impact on tourism.

**Theme: Politics**

Years of working in political communications taught me that people like to talk about decisions that affect them, and, they like to blame politicians for the ones with which they do not agree. Politics is based on understanding what is popular amongst the voters and gaining their approval for your stance on that issue. It is safe to say the cancellation of the Yarmouth ferry service was the not popular.

**Lens: Fabrication**

Powerfully emotional words are once again at the forefront in the fabrication theme. Reporters' use of "spin mode" (Taylor, 2013, August 20) to describe political communication, and reference to the "ham-fisted" (Opinion, 2013) and "monumentally ill-advised" (Opinion, 2013, October) decision to remove the subsidy to the Yarmouth ferry provider infuse a feeling of deceit in the reader.

These negative adjectives are a not-so-subtle way for the reporter to lead the reader to a conclusion that government is not communicating truthfully to voters, nor is it capable of making difficult decisions. The fact that several of these words and statements appear in articles that are not attributed to a specific reporter is troubling: the writer is able to express him or herself and hold the government to account, but the reader nor the government is afforded the same.

The infusion of deceit by an MLA is also apparent in the political theme. Once again, Zach Churchill creates an air of disruption when he questions "why Yarmouth's being treated the way it's being treated" (Medel, 2012) in regards to the ferry. By posing this question, Churchill framed the governing NDP as being against what is good for the people of Yarmouth. Although it is customary for an opposition MLA to claim to be working in the best interest of an area

despite not being part of the ruling party, it is rare and irresponsible to imply that the government is targeting an area for destruction.

### **Lens: Misframing**

The majority of the instances of misframing in the politics theme are, once again, rooted in a politician's interpretation of a situation without any access to the backstage of the decision-makers.

On several occasions within the data, Churchill witnesses the NDP government's actions regarding the ferry and interprets the interaction with emphasis on the negative. Included in this is an article about the independent electoral boundaries commission's recommendation to split the constituency of Yarmouth. At the end of the column Churchill is quoted as saying "there is a refusal to accept the economic argument for a ferry" (Medel, 2012). The statement itself is an interpretation made by an individual who has limited access to the government decision-makers. That Medel chose to include such a quote in an article that is 95% about the newly drawn electoral boundaries is an attempt to remind readers of the impact the last government decision had on the area.

Medel's report resulting in a correlation between the two situations is particularly interesting because the boundary report was compiled by an independent body and not by the NDP government. Yet, the inclusion of the quote about the ferry decision leads readers to place both decisions in the hands of the NDP.

In addition to politicians misframing situations, columnist Marilla Stephenson also incorrectly interprets government decisions without backstage access. Without in-depth research or the capability to have access to the backstage of all voters in the province, and without a seat at the executive table of government, Stephenson interprets a boost in the popularity of the

provincial Liberal Party as the reason the NDP government announced funding for a new Yarmouth ferry.

Certainly it is common that government decisions are (partially) based on a political agenda, governments are after all elected as political parties. However, as discussed in the cost theme under misframing, polling takes a considerable amount of time as do government decisions to allocate \$21 million. Stephenson's connection of these two events is based solely on her inference as an attempt to influence voters' opinions of the inner workings of politics.

### **Lens: Keying**

The Nova Scotia government regularly makes public announcements. The activity has different meaning each time the event or news release is patterned or duplicated.

In an article about taxpayer money once again being used to subsidize the Yarmouth ferry service, reporter Marilla Stephenson interprets a 2013 NDP government announcement as being made while under duress from the voters.

The routine action of a government announcement does sometimes have deeper roots in politics than governing. However, more often than not, the announcement is routine and completed as part of the business of government departments. Stephenson is not completely wrong in her assertion that the announcement had political undertones. However, her definition of it happening when the government had their "political backs" (Stephenson, 2014, July 31) against a wall is transformative and leads the reader to assume there was in fact no purity or reason for the announcement other than to gain votes.

### **Lens: Frame Disputes**

Once again, frame disputes center on politicians' opposing version of events.

Reporting about a conversation with Minister Michel Samson, Michael Gorman concludes his article with Samson's claim that the NDP government made their decision to cut the ferry subsidy based on politics and not a realistic evaluation of the situation. [Within this theme Darrell Dexter does break his backstage frame and admit there were issues in the way the decision was handled, but it is not reported that he ever said it was the wrong decision.]

This article is about the Liberal government giving additional monies to the new operator of the Yarmouth ferry service as part of their future plans. The mention of the NDP government that was ousted more than a year previous is out of context and does not serve a necessary purpose in the piece. By ending the story with Samson's opposing version of the event, Gorman leaves the reader with hints so they may, as Kepplinger et al claim, process the information with only the one version presented.

The NDP reference and placement within the piece of this frame dispute lead me to believe the reporter felt it necessary to justify the Liberal government's allocation of unplanned funds.

### **Lens: Frame Breaks**

If being a politician is a difficult job, being Premier should be close to impossible. There is a very fine line between where the person ends and the politician begins, and when this line is blurred or crossed, a frame break occurs.

This is exactly what happened to (then) Premier Darrell Dexter when he "admitted" (Surette, 2012) that his government handled the ferry situation badly.

This interview was done at a point when the NDP was dropping in popular opinion and I believe Dexter took the opportunity to show the people of Nova Scotia that he understood his



short-comings and was principled enough to admit an error, something not often done by leaders in business or politics.

I came to this conclusion based on another potential frame break by Dexter which occurred after the 2013 election loss. I say potential because in this example, Dexter is no longer Premier so therefore has much more autonomy from his party and his government. In Goffman's terms this means Dexter's back stage is no longer as closed as it was previously. The oath of cabinet confidentiality forever remains, however, as a former premier Dexter is under less scrutiny and able to speak more openly about his own opinion of past situations; items in his back stage can be more easily moved to the front.

In an interview with Marilla Stephenson, Dexter is quoted as saying that government needs to "stop tripping over" (2013) themselves when economic development is concerned. He continues by explaining that honesty with Nova Scotians needs to happen.

As a political communicator I would not have included either of these statements in a communications plan or message track for any politician. This is an instance of a man with a plethora of experience dealing with difficult situations who chose to speak openly about one decision of great controversy.

Dexter's recognition of the controversy led him to another frame break in which Marilla Stephenson reports he "acknowledged cutting the subsidy [to the Yarmouth ferry] had been a political mistake" (2014, October 18). Interestingly, this article is not focused on the NDP government's decisions of the past, but rather on what the Liberal government is facing regarding the service. It would appear that in her 2014 article, Stephenson is using Dexter's frame break in 2013 about a decision made in 2009 to demonstrate to readers that as Craib (1978) stated, a framework is about more than one interaction.

Perhaps that both of these frame breaks occur in conversation with the same reporter is a coincidence. Perhaps that they are both with a reporter who has the most instances of fabrication during the course of this research is also a coincidence. Or, perhaps Dexter intentionally disclosed his backstage to Stephenson as a conscious way to remove that line between politician and person and leave her no room to infuse false belief.

### **Chapter Seven: Discussion**

The study of communication often begins with a very basic model: a sender formulates a message and transmits it over a common medium to a receiver, who interprets it and has the ability to send a message in return. In this study, reporters send messages about the Yarmouth ferry to readers via the Chronicle Herald. Should they choose, readers had (and continue to have) the option to write the media outlet directly with their thoughts. Instead of writing to the journalist or editor, this study produced a paper.

This application of Goffman to the drama that is the Yarmouth ferry contributes to communication studies research by offering an empirical example of frame analysis. It also brings additional focus to a theorist who is underrepresented in communication-related literature despite his influence on other academics as is apparent in the literature review. Although Goffman is present in communication studies his work is more prevalent in sociological study.

In addition to contributing to communication studies, the analysis of this data set helps inform our understanding of political communication; in particular the rhetoric produced by politicians and reproduced by reporters.

Specifically, if the reader understands that each reporter's account of a situation is presented using a chosen frame, the reader then has the option to identify the frame and review the story without it. This enables the reader to move past the rhetoric to the core of the issue being discussed. However, if this paper is any indication of the amount of time it takes to both identify and remove a frame, it would be naïve to think every reader will undertake this process for every news item they read.

Therefore, this paper may simply inform Chronicle Herald readers that reporters and politicians do use frames when portraying a situation, and that these frames almost always mean there is more to the story than what is being presented.

In the beginning of this study, the Yarmouth ferry was a somewhat problematic transportation link joining two countries; its rural setting perceived by residents as the backbone of their community. By the end of the data review, it became clear through a myriad of examples that political rhetoric can be seen through Goffman's frameworks in the Chronicle Herald coverage of this provincial story.

Goffman's theory of face provides a lens for a clearer understanding of political communication and media reporting. Politicians and reporters spend time preparing what they will allow others to see by adhering to a pre-conceived notion of what is expected of their front stage appearance. Both groups struggle to control the frames by which they present information and safeguard their backstage as they practice what they will present to others when called to perform on the front stage.

### **The impact of fabrication**

Early in the study it became apparent that Craib (1978) was correct. When reporters framed the 2009 decision to end the ferry subsidy using emotionally-laden words it disrupted the reader's ability to process the information based solely on the facts. Instead, Nova Scotians who were affected by the decision formed their own social establishments and were continually influenced by more than four years of stories from various reporters. The choice of words guided the discourse by giving the reader, as Kepplinger et al deduced, a series of hints ensuring negativity and animosities were at the forefront of the province-wide conversation.

Not only did this cause problems politically in Nova Scotia as reporters focused their stories on how the decision would affect MLAs politically, the use of fabrication came (and continues) at the detriment of solving the actual problem; a business costing taxpayers millions of dollars annually and subjecting a geographical culture to an over-reliance on one means of (perceived) economic prosperity.

In addition to the political problems caused, I know from experience that when emotion and negativity are at the forefront of a situation, it is increasingly difficult for politicians and decision-makers to take the time needed to make smart and balanced decisions. Their behavior on the front stage becomes heavily scripted as a means of protecting the social establishment that is their governing Party. Conversation and preparation in the back stage is tense and more time is spent focused on managing the face projected to constituents than solving the problem at the root of the controversy.

The same is true for the social establishments that are opposition parties. Rather than use their position in the political landscape to discuss the issues presented by the loss of the ferry service, opposition politicians were forced by fabricated discourse to focus on controlling their face and situational position. This, in an effort to gain acceptance from the aforementioned people of the South Shore who were vulnerable and focused on feeling the loss of the ferry rather than on finding a solution to their changing economic landscape (because that is the way reporters framed the issue for them).

The frequent use of fabrication by reporters influenced the focus of politicians and decision-makers.

**The impact of misframing**

Reliance on the Chronicle Herald as one avenue for information is common among Nova Scotians, and, as it is a province-wide, reputable medium, a reliable channel for news. However, reading what is presented without consideration that the writer has blended fact with assumption creates a reader who is merely following the frame controlled by the writer.

Within the data there are instances of reporters making assumptions about the conversations happening in a politician or decision-makers' backstage without elaboration. This lack of explanation leads the reader to believe the reporter is speaking on fact rather than on the more plausible assumption. By giving the reader (perceived) insight into the backstage of the political realm the reporter increases her importance to the reader and therefore sustains her role as an important player in the discourse.

By gaining the interest and trust of the reader the reporter increases paper and online sales. [Some of the impetus for clarification of fact by questioning the writer's frames and her access to a politician or decision-makers' backstage must be on the reader. Whether this is a plausible expectation is beyond the scope of this study.]

**The impact of keying**

It is also evident in this study that the meaningful work of governing is misconstrued by opposition parties as being replicated or keyed purely for political purposes. True, much of what is done by a government has political undertones, but even in a pre-election period, which is quite possibly the time when political rhetoric is most evident, government politicians must continue the business of the province. Yet writers do not state their exact thoughts about such keying by the opposition, but rather they hint and frame government announcements as being one-off declarations instead of part of a larger plan.

This frames the perception that politicians are only elected to do what is best for them and that what truly is a difficult and demanding job is basically corrupt. In an aging province of less than one million, this perception hurts the chances that quality, intelligent, hard-working individuals will ever seek public office.

It does not support optimism for future politicians that rarely in the entire set of data do we read stories about the Yarmouth ferry that are purely positive. Even when a new contract is signed near the end of the time period as is the business of government, the discourse is keyed on why the new lease was required; because the former was cancelled without prejudice by the NDP. By continuing to include negative frames like this in what should be a positive story the reporter keeps the reader focused on her pessimistic frame rather than on the positive one of government business producing results; a boat will sail again just as the people and politicians wanted.

### **The impact of frame disputes**

Even though politicians of all stripes wanted a new ferry for Yarmouth, all parties had their own way of framing their desires to reporters. We see sprinkled in the data instances of reporters transcribing selective facts and quotes from political leaders. The choice of what to report and what to omit is part of the writing process. However, when frame disputes between politicians are involved, the process mutates from presentation of fact to an often emotional transcription of politician versus politician.

Politicians know that when publicly reported frame disputes are part of the discourse it helps to solidify members of their individual social establishment. Yet, when a politician spends her time focusing on framing a dispute once again she is not directing her attention to solving the problem on which the dispute is based.

When a reporter writes about a frame dispute between politicians she is writing as the politician intended; removing the focus off the actual problem and moving it toward who has the best solution. Only when a reporter or a politician relaxes her effort to lead, does the reader gets a glimpse into the backstage, a look at the real person behind the rhetoric.

### **The impact of frame breaks**

Although rare amongst the hundreds of pages of data, Goffman's frame break is quite possibly the most important insight a reporter can include in a story. Defined in part by its break from the script, the frame break gives the reporter the chance to peek into the guarded back stage of a politician and gain insight into true thoughts and feelings.

Frame breaks matter to this study and to all political rhetoric because they give the voter the opportunity to see the real person instead of the person playing the role of a politician. We see from the pages of data that political message tracks pit one politician against another and therefore perpetuate the negative connotations of political life that make politicians want to guard their public face. Letting down that guard, and as Darrell Dexter did, admitting a move was wrong humanizes all aspects of a story. Suddenly in the midst of a frame break, the story is about people who may be politicians by profession, but are not infallible like anyone else.

The decision to cancel the subsidy to the Yarmouth ferry was made by people who were afraid to show their backstage for fear of how it would be framed. So the data shows us years of politicians guarding their public face to ensure they met with societal norms and expectations because it is easier to place blame and the cause of suffering on a message track than it is a person.



### **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

The story of the Yarmouth ferry is not over. As of summer 2016, the government of Nova Scotia continues to study, negotiate and contract ferry operators for the Yarmouth to Maine route. Because of this, the political rhetoric continues.

The theoretical contribution of this paper allows us to interpret future reports using Goffman's frame analysis and prepare for said frames in the backstage using messaging that will cut through it and allow focus to shift back where it should be, on the people affected by the issue.

It may be unorthodox for a public relations professional to undertake an in-depth analysis of stories based in-part on her years of work, but as the story of the ferry continues, so does my learning of communication. As such, additional considerations for future study have been identified.

Many of the reporters in this study would be considered seasoned veterans of their craft. Even though they have no direct access to the backstage of government decision-makers or politicians, it stands to reason that such a seasoned political reporter may have the ability to correctly interpret a situation and perhaps frame it correctly for the reader. Additional research and follow-up on accurate situational interpretation by reporters is recommended.

Furthermore, the question of whether seasoned reporters or politicians understand the frames in which they are using and grasp the impact such frames have on the reader is also a plausible study point.

There is not much in this study that affected me as a professional or political junkie quite like the impact of the frame break. From my years of experience I am able to derive that political communication is focused on the right use of specific words, facts and gestures at the right time

to the right audience. With this in mind, the frame break should cause anxiety to communicators as it is off-script and out of our control. However, this study has taught me that the occasional frame break may be exactly what people need from their politicians and reporters alike. It is in that glance into someone's back-stage where individuals may learn the most.

In addition, the frame break by Darrell Dexter during the 2009 election round-table discussion begs further research. Surely I am not the first communicator to derive that individuals, voters in particular, learn more about an individual or situation when aided by a frame break. This leads me to believe that further research as to whether such breaks on a stage as important as an election round-table are authentic or are planned for the sake of the voter. Furthermore, if the frame break is indeed planned, is it actually a frame break under Goffman's analysis?

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