

Whose Streets?

Representations of the G20 protests in the *Toronto Star*

The following excerpt¹ employs content and critical discourse analyses to investigate the Toronto Star's representation of the protests that took place during the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit. Through the theoretical lens of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, it assesses the inclusion and representation of protesters and their motivations for protesting.

Cumulatively, the findings of this research point toward a hegemonic narrative in which the ideological status quo and those who support it are presented as legitimate and natural, whereas dissenters are depicted as illegitimate and socially harmful. These findings are generally consistent with previous analyses of corporate media coverage of other protests in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Douglas McLeod provides a normative understanding of media's role in the ongoing national dialogue of a country's norms, values, laws, and policies: "to stimulate informed participation" (McLeod, 1995, p. 7). Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony explains why and how the integrity of this dialogue is jeopardized by ideologically biased coverage that favours dominant actors, viewpoints, and goals over their subaltern counterparts. As such, the following excerpt analyzes representations of the protests which took place during the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit in the *Toronto Star*, a for-profit Canadian news medium, according to two primary research questions: (1) what percentage of articles paraphrases or includes quotations from (a) protester sources, (b) official sources (police and government officials), and/or (c) bystander sources; and (2) what percentage of articles discusses the purpose, aims, or intentions of protesters (a) positively, (b) negatively, or (c) neutrally, and/or includes no such discussion. I hypothesize that as a for-profit news source that seeks to attract a mainstream

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audience by providing conventional and noncontroversial news coverage, the *Toronto Star's* representations of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests will feature little to no discussion of the motivations of protesters; rather, journalists will rely primarily on official sources that emphasize the deviance of protesters and ultimately discredit and undermine protesting groups and individuals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following analysis employs a content analysis that systematically quantifies manifest content of the text in selected articles published in the *Toronto Star* from 19 June 2010 to 3 July 2010 in order to identify patterns of representation from which primary frames of coverage are induced. To complement the quantitative findings of my research, I also provide some qualitative observations using a critical discourse analysis that identifies the relationship between the content of the articles and the hegemonic power structures embedded in the *Toronto Star*. Completing a critical discourse analysis subsequent to a content analysis provides quantitatively verifiable qualitative results and also highlights the degree to which power relations impact the content of each article.

Content analysis: strategy and procedure

The following research was conducted using *Canadian Newsstand—Major Dailies*, an online database for Canadian newspapers. The *Toronto Star* was chosen because it is a highly circulated mainstream news medium.² The time period accounts for five days before, the weekend of, and five days after the Toronto G20 Summit and therefore demonstrates patterns of representation in anticipation of, during, and in reflection of the Summit. I sought out articles matching the search terms “G20” and “protests” or “protesters,” which yielded a total of 47 articles, of which 29 were written by employees of the *Toronto Star*.³ The resulting 29 articles were surveyed to ensure that they pertain to the “G20 protests” and do not contain these search terms incidentally: four articles were excluded.⁴ To create a sample group of the remaining 25 articles that was practically feasible and representative of the entire population, I used a process of systematic sampling (Deacon et al., 2010, p. 48) in which the articles were listed according to the date of publication, numbered from one to five, and every article numbered three and five was removed, producing a total of 15 articles. As a result, the final sample accounts for 60% of all the *Toronto Star* articles published by 21 June 2010 and 2 July 2010 that match the search terms “G20” and “protests” or “protesters” and that were written by *Toronto Star* employees.

HEGEMONY AND MAINSTREAM CORPORATE MEDIA

To understand hegemony one must begin with ideology, which may be defined as a way of thinking or a complementary set of ideas that reinforce one another and

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maintain power relations (Mazepa, 2011). Antonio Gramsci, living and imprisoned under Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, came to identify “hegemony” as the normalization of ideology in which ideology becomes unchallenged, unquestioned, and institutionalized in laws and policies (Mazepa, 2011). Rather than maintaining domination through physical force, “consent” of the citizenry is ideologically secured by convincing citizens that the ruling class ideology is common sense and that “ruling class power [is] founded on that class’s unique, self-evident ability to run the nation” (Downing, 2001, p. 14).

When speaking of hegemony in the North American and European contexts, one is often referring to the dominant capitalist ideology. For example, Charles Hall (1993) explains that, “By shaping social and political consent, the state sustains the dominant-subordinate class relations and the expansion of production required for capital” (p. 13). Although the *Toronto Star* is a relatively independent news source in comparison with other Canadian mainstream corporate media, it is nonetheless a for-profit entity that maximizes its advertising revenue by appealing to as wide an audience as possible.⁵ The desire to attract the largest audience possible means that controversial issues and sources that challenge the status quo are less likely to receive coverage (Hamilton, 2000, pp. 357-358).

While few theorists will suggest that the audiences of mainstream media passively absorb the information they receive, many do propose that news media are powerful social institutions because they set the agenda of social dialogue (Duggan, 2011, p. 36). In other words, news media outlets determine which events warrant coverage, what aspects of an event should be emphasized, and what should be ignored (Ashley & Olsen, 1998, p. 263). The cumulative effect of this is that consumers of mainstream corporate media are left thinking about and discussing events based on the filtered information that mainstream media choose to cover and, more specifically, *how* they choose to cover it.

Previous research demonstrates the way hegemony manifests itself and operates in the way corporate media frame coverage of social protests. Of particular significance for this excerpt is the “official source” frame in which articles are organized around the comments of official personnel, such as police and government officials (Duggan, 2011, p. 8).⁶ With little to no discussion of protesters’ motivations, such articles tend instead to depict protesters as social deviants that are uninformed, naïve, or childishly protesting too many issues (Boykoff, 2006, pp. 218-221).⁷

RESEARCH DATA: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This study examines 15 *Toronto Star* articles; 14 are classified as news stories and 1 is classified as entertainment.

Sources

Of the total number of sources used in each article, six articles include protester sources and six articles include official or authoritative sources including police leadership, government officials, or representatives thereof for 50% or more of the total sources used (see [Appendix A, Table A1](#), and [Appendix B, Table B1](#)).

Based on these findings, quantitatively, protesters are as likely to receive representation as official and authoritative sources. An article by Thomas Walkom (2010), published on Saturday 26 June, discusses the extraordinary stop-and-search powers that Dalton McGuinty secretly granted to police during the G20 weekend, allowing police to demand identification from anyone within five metres of the “G20 security zone” and to search those who do not comply. Of the total eight sources used in this article, three are protester sources and two are official sources. Although the number of comments from both types of sources is roughly equal, Walkom makes four disparaging comments about the protesters before and after quoting them. He criticizes McGuinty for passing the secret law in part because “[McGuinty has] given anti-G20 protesters something concrete to protest.” Walkom also says that prior to the passing of the secret law, protesters “lacked credible focus,” and dismisses anti-elitist, anti-capitalist, animal rights, and transgender equality motivations as factually unfounded and/or unrelated to the purpose of the G20 Summit. As such, the protester sources at the end of the article are undermined by multiple denigrating comments made by the journalist.

Similar comments appear in five of the six articles that feature protester sources for 50% or more of the total sources used. On average, each of these articles features 2.8 protester sources and 3.4 comments that criticize protesters. In other words, the average number of protester sources used in these 5 articles is equal to the average number of undermining or delegitimizing comments also used ([Appendix B, Table B1](#)).

Motivation(s) of protesters

To obtain a statistically meaningful measurement of the number of times protesters’ motivations receive coverage in each *Toronto Star* article, I compared the number of times each protester and/or protesting group’s motivations are mentioned to the total number of times each protester and/or protesting group is listed in each article. This comparison included only 14 articles that directly deal with protesters.⁸ On average, the motivations of protesters are mentioned in approximately 38% of the instances in which protesters are mentioned generally. To put it differently, eight of the 14 (57%) articles analyzed mention protesters’ motivations 40% or less of the time. Of the six articles that include protesters’ motivations in more than 40% of the instances in which protesters are mentioned, four are immediately preceded or followed by undermining or delegitimizing comments about the protesters. Six of 13 articles (46%) that discuss protesters include no mention of the

protesters' motivations. Essentially, the motivations of protesters are more likely to be ignored, and those that do receive attention are 62% likelier to be discredited (Appendix B, Table B2).

Andrew Chung's (2010) article "Police Targeted Quebecers," published on 29 June, is focused on protester accusations that police officials deliberately targeted people from Quebec during stops-and-searches and arrests. The first quote is that of Mathieu Francouer, a spokesperson for the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC): "For us, it's not violence. It's a means of expression and doesn't compare to the economic and state violence we're subjected to." Although the inclusion of this quote gives voice to the motivations of the members of the ACC, albeit vaguely, the impact of this statement is obscured by the preceding comment by Chung, that "[Protesters from Quebec] made no apologies for the broken windows and other mayhem that all but overshadowed the meeting of the world leaders." In other words, by introducing Francouer's quote with this statement, Chung focused the reader's attention on the tactics, and not the motivations, of the ACC. Two lines below, Chung similarly focuses the reader's attention back on the actions of the ACC, this time describing *them* as an "upheaval," vilifying the ACC for a second time in the first half of the article. Subsequent quotes from Montreal protester Danie Royer, who explains his anti-capitalist message, are followed by Chung's statement that, "Activists complained of 'unjustified' confrontations with police." As Laura Ashley and Beth Olsen (1998) have demonstrated, the use of quotation marks around a word—in this case "unjustified"—challenges the legitimacy of the word being cited (p. 268). The quotation marks question the validity of the word by implying that the author does not support its accuracy and that s/he feels compelled to specifically attribute the word to another source. In effect, Chung implies that police confrontations were justified; furthermore, despite Chung's relatively extensive commentary on the tactics used by the ACC, he does not offer a single comment, opinion, or fact in reference to the protesters' motivations. Thus, although this article may reference the motivations of protesters in two of the four instances in which protesting groups are mentioned, the impacts of these motivations are undermined by comments that criticize the group's tactics and distract the reader's attention from said motivations.

DISCUSSION

Sources

Many of the *Toronto Star* articles analyzed in this study do not use an official source frame; instead, protester sources are equally as likely to be used as official sources. This finding is dissimilar to previous scholarly research of protests, including Duggan's analysis of representations of the G20 Summit protests in the *Globe and Mail* (Duggan, 2011, p. 8). However, as demonstrated above, the undermining and discrediting quotes and/or commentary that appear in most of the

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articles that use protester sources effectively undercut the sources' impact. From the perspective of a hegemonic analysis, the counter-hegemonic motivations of protesters, as reflected in their quotes and paraphrases, are muffled and filtered by the hegemonic perspectives of journalists and official sources that criticize protesters' motivations. The *Toronto Star* thus appears to substantiate the point of view of those with power against whom the protesters are protesting—a trend that Gamson et al. (1992) observe in media coverage of protests generally (p. 374). As such, consistent with the coverage of social protests in other Canadian and American mainstream news sources, a hegemonic narrative that supports the ideological status quo is employed instead of a challenging counter-hegemonic narrative.

Motivation(s) of protesters

As hypothesized, motivations of protesters do not receive significant coverage in the *Toronto Star* articles researched for this study, and when motivations are represented, disparaging comments from the journalist(s) and other sources are often present. From the perspective of a hegemonic analysis, these data suggest that the counter-hegemonic motivations of protesters are at odds with the ideological underpinnings of the *Toronto Star*. This ideological tension is manifested in the systematic delegitimization of protesters' motivations through criticisms of protesters that support the status quo; these criticisms demonstrate a favouring of the hegemonic narratives with regard to capitalism, physical and economic state violence, and the undemocratic nature of the G20 Summit.

CONCLUSION

Although my hypothesis that *Toronto Star* articles would rely primarily on official sources was disproven, the latter portion of my hypothesis was substantiated in this study: *Toronto Star* articles provide minimal coverage of protesters' motivations. What unexpectedly emerged were repeated occurrences in which journalists themselves provided hegemonic criticisms of protesters and protest activity, in addition to official sources. Cumulatively, these findings indicate a consistent theme in which protests are socially disruptive and largely unwarranted as opposed to democratic expressions of justifiable grievances. This theme reinforces a hegemonic narrative in which the ideological status quo and those that support it (such as the representatives of the G20 Summit and sources of authority, including police and government officials, who enforce the hegemonic order) are presented as legitimate and natural, whereas dissenters are depicted as illegitimate and socially harmful. It is not coincidental that many of the themes that emerged during this analysis are consistent with the themes that have been observed in other scholarly work analyzing mainstream coverage of social protests. Rather, this demonstrates an ideologically normalized pattern of representation that discredits

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the objectives of protesters and thereby limits their social impact. This may owe more to the structure of for-profit news media than to intentional efforts on the part of journalists and editors to create bias: it may be an attempt of a for-profit news source to avoid controversial issues in order to appeal to a mainstream audience and thereby increase profits from advertisements, as Hamilton (2000) suggests (pp. 357-358). Either way, this type of coverage stifles the efforts of protesters, who depend on mainstream media to broadcast their grievances and objectives to a mainstream audience (Cottle, 2008, p.854). Future analyses may look at *Toronto Star* coverage of the G20 Summit protests in comparison to the same coverage from alternative news sources in order to better understand the (non)hegemonic coverage of corporate and alternative news sources.

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¹ This excerpt has been abbreviated for publication. To preview the full article, which explores the context of the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit and G20 protests in greater detail, and also provides evidence of the marginalization of protesters and as well as disproportionate reference to the “anticipation of violence,” please contact the author.

² According to the Print Membership Bureau (PMB) results posted on the *Toronto Star* website, it is the most read daily newspaper in Toronto and has the largest audience in Ontario of all the national newspapers (Toronto Star Readership).

³ The 18 articles excluded from analysis were letters submitted to the *Toronto Star*, rather than articles written by employees of the newspaper. Newspapers often receive many letters and selectively choose which letters to publish, thus reflecting a form of gate-keeping; however, such letters are generally opinion pieces that do not include sources and would have therefore skewed the results of the source-related portion of this study. As such, these articles were removed from analysis.

⁴ For example, one of the four articles removed made reference to the G20 protests only in order to describe the behaviour of Justin Bieber fans at the MuchMusic video awards (Daubs, 2010).

⁵ The *Toronto Star* is one of two daily newspapers in Canada that is not owned by the Canadian media conglomerates Bell Media, Shaw, or Quebecor (May).

⁶ McLeod (1995) makes a similar observation about the over-reliance on police sources in protest coverage generally; he connects this, however, to a “protesters vs. police” frame and the criminalization of protesters (p. 6).

⁷ Ashley and Olsen (1998) describe this frame as the “illegitimacy” frame (p. 265); Boykoff (2006) uses the terminology of a “freak frame” (p. 216); and Duggan (2011) refers to this as a “trivialization of protesters” (p. 8).

⁸ The article “Foam ‘Weaponry’ Confiscated” does not discuss protesters per se; this article provides coverage of a man whose foam weapons, intended for a charade unrelated to the G-20 Summit protests, were confiscated by police as weapons.

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APPENDIX A

Term:	Examples:
Protester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-identified protester - Labelled “protester” by journalist - Spokesperson for protesting group
Official Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Police officer - Spokesperson for police - Integrated Security Unit (ISU) representative or spokesperson - Government official or spokesperson thereof - Business owners
Bystander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resident - Onlooker not involved in protest
“Other”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Author - University professor - Non-<i>Toronto Star</i> news source, e.g. foreign news program - Member of think-tank - Person mistaken for protester

Table A1. Definition of Source Types.

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APPENDIX B

Each Source/Total Number of Sources Used per Article						
Date	Case No.	Article Name	Protester	Official Source	Bystander	Other
22-Jun-10	1	"The First Encounter"	5/6	1/6		
22-Jun-10	2	"Raucous Protest a Taste of What's to Come"	1/3	2/3		
23-Jun-10	3	"As Protesters and Police Move In"	1/4	2/4	1/4	
24-Jun-10	4	"I am a Protester, Not a Terrorist"		1/4	3/4	
25-Jun-10	5	"G20: It's Starting"		2/4	2/4	
25-Jun-10	6	"Sweeping Police Power Demanded by Blair"		2/5	1/5	2/5
26-Jun-10	7	"A Tale of Two Protests"	4/6	2/6		
26-Jun-10	8	"The City, Through Frightened Eyes"				2/2
26-Jun-10	9	"McGuinty Gives Protesters a Rallying Cry"	1/2	1/2		
28-Jun-10	10	"The Lonely (and Hungry) Protester"	1/1			
28-Jun-10	11	"Violent Mob Who Never Were"	3/8	2/8		3/8
29-Jun-10	12	"City Slowly Recovers"		4/5		1/5
29-Jun-10	13	"Police Targeted Quebecers"	4/6	1/6		1/6
29-Jun-10	14	"An Open Letter to Citizens in Other Big Cities"				1/1
01-Jul-10	15	"Foam 'Weaponry' Confiscated"				1/1

Table B1. Sources.

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Indication of Motivations of Protesters in Relation to Mention of Protesters					
Date	Case No.	Article Name	Motivation of Protesters/ Mention of Protesters	Motivations/ Mention of Protesters as Percentage	Instances of Research from Websites or Organization Rallies
22-Jun-10	1	"The First Encounter"	1/1	100%	0
22-Jun-10	2	"Raucous Protest a Taste of What's to Come"	1/3	33%	0
23-Jun-10	3	"As Protesters and Police Move In"	0/1	0%	0
24-Jun-10	4	"I am a Protester, Not a Terrorist"	4/5	80%	0
25-Jun-10	5	"G20: It's Starting"	0/2	0%	0
25-Jun-10	6	"Sweeping Police Power Demanded by Blair"	0/1	0%	0
26-Jun-10	7	"A Tale of Two Protests"	4/8	50%	3
26-Jun-10	8	"The City, Through Frightened Eyes"	0/1	0%	0
26-Jun-10	9	"McGuinty Gives Protesters a Rallying Cry"	4/5	80%	1
28-Jun-10	10	"The Lonely (and Hungry) Protester"	1/1	100%	0
28-Jun-10	11	"Violent Mob Who Never Were"	2/5	40%	0
29-Jun-10	12	"City Slowly Recovers"	0/1	0%	0
29-Jun-10	13	"Police Targeted Quebecers"	2/4	50%	0
29-Jun-10	14	"An Open Letter to Citizens in Other Big Cities"	0/1	0%	0

Table B2. Motivations of Protesters.