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PROTRACTED CONFLICT IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

The Case of the Screen Actors Guild Negotiations

Protracted conflicts are common and complex, and differ from other types of disputes because of their ongoing escalation, non-negotiable issues, unsuccessful interventions, and passage of time. Prior research on this topic lacks good operationalizations of these features. This not only makes it difficult to compare research on how journalists and media portray such conflict, but also challenging to analyze such phenomena. Hence, this study develops codes for features of protracted conflict, and then applies those to the case of the news coverage (n=148) of the 2008-2009 negotiations between the Screen Actors Guild of America *and the* Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. *Results demonstrate the applicability of these features to describe news coverage of a labor-management conflict setting, illustrate how these features vary over time, and show how features are interrelated, to reveal two underlying dimensions of the particular conflict (temporal context and resolution flexibility), and possibly protracted conflicts in general.*

**PORTRAYING PROTRACTED CONFLICT IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY:
THE CASE OF THE SCREEN ACTORS GUILD NEGOTIATIONS**

Media outlets position themselves as unbiased sources of information, yet they serve a gatekeeping role, apply frames, and set agendas by choosing who or what receives coverage and ways of characterizing conflicts and disputants (Gilboa 2009; Putnam and Shoemaker 2007). A *frame* is "a particular logic or organizing principle with which a given policy conflict is described in media reports, suggesting particular themes, interpretations, and terms by which such conflict should be understood" (Lee, McLeod, and Shah 2008, 696). Stories using conflict frames focus on parties contending over issues generally of interest to the public, typically emphasizing political strategizing or clash of interests, or as value or moral choices.

Protracted conflicts are persistent conflicts where resolution is difficult or elusive; they "have an extensive past, a turbulent present, and a murky future" (Putnam and Peterson 2003, 38). They capture media attention because of implications beyond disputing parties, such as public interest, economic consequences, environmental health and safety, etc.

Although research exists on media coverage of protracted conflicts (Putnam and Shoemaker 2007; Vraneski and Richter 2003), the term is often used vaguely and inconsistently. We agree with Bartholomé et al.'s (2017) point about the need for the use of reliable, valid, and consistent frames, to avoid fragmented, ungeneralizable, and inconsistent results. We analyze the representation in three relevant newspapers of protracted conflict in the negotiations by Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) that followed the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America strike, as a conflict-weary film and television industry braced for another work stoppage (Littleton 2013). Thus, the two main goals of this study are to (1) develop valid and reliable features of a protracted conflict frame, and (2) demonstrate the applicability of these features to understanding how relevant news media represented a labor-management conflict over time.

Media Framing of Labor-Management Protracted Conflict

Media Framing of Conflict and Negotiations in General

News framing refers to media outlets highlighting some aspects of a story and ignoring others through the design of media messages (Entman 1993). While there is debate in the field about the nature and boundaries of the concept of framing (see Cacciatori, Scheufele and Iyengar 2016; Scheufele and Iyengar 2014; Van Gorp 2006), generally "...frames ... define an issue, identify causes, make moral judgements and shape proposed solutions" (O'Neill, Williams, Kurz, Wiersma and Boykoff 2015, 380), which influence "the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104), potentially leading to changing "a person's attitude toward an object (e.g., climate change) by increasing the weight given to a subset of relevant considerations" (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014, 2). Frames can position the same situation or issue differently, but a given frame can also be applied to different situations or issues (Van Gorp 2006).

Media framing studies have focused on the presence of generic or common frames that center on broad news categories that align with news values, including conflict, human interest, morality, economic consequences, and attribution of responsibility (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; de Vreese, Peter, and Semetko 2001). Conflict is among several generic media frames (Bartholemé, Lechler, and de Vreese 2017; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). The conflict frame represents parties warring, battling or reproaching one another, and is one of the most frequently used news frames (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Bartholomé et al. (2017) summarize some of the reasons for this, such as the journalistic norm of objectivity, requiring presenting of

competing views and stakeholders, as well as reviewing several positive and negative implications of emphasizing this frame. A conflict frame is "a particular logic or organizing principle with which a given policy conflict is described in media reports, suggesting particular themes, interpretations, and terms by which such conflict should be understood" (Lee, McLeod, and Shah 2008, 696).

In conflicts, media outlets exist in a reciprocal relationship with disputing parties; that is, they are affected by and affect conflict dynamics. In particular, prior research suggests that media outlets may contribute negatively to conflicts because journalists dramatize and simplify events and issues for mass consumption (Bartholomé, Lecheler, and de Vreese 2015; Han and Federico 2017; Pedersen 2014; Vraneski and Richter 2003). At the same time, media outlets may also play a central role in shifting conflict dynamics toward de-escalation over time (Gilboa 2009). Scholars who examine media coverage sometimes focus on specific conflicts (Putnam, 2002; Putnam and Shoemaker 2007), such as labor-management negotiations, the focus here.

News Framing of Labor Unions

Media coverage of labor unions and other social movement organizations is important for them because such visibility provides a moral resource to mobilize constituents, validates the organization, and draws in third parties (Pilney, Atouba, and Riles 2014). However, when news media outlets report on labor unions, stories tend to highlight activities that disrupt business as usual, including work stoppages (Martin 2003; Kumar 2001; Tracy 2005), prospective strikes and difficult negotiations (Knight 2001), and lockouts (Brennan 2005; Lewis 2013). For example, Bruno (2009) found that over a 10-year period (1991-2001), *Chicago Tribune* articles were predominantly negative toward unions, and the majority focused on labor disputes, while positive articles focused on agreements and contract talks. Unions have been framed negatively as a monopoly face as opposed to a collective voice face (Brimeyer, Silva, and Byrne 2016), as the wrong party in disputes (Sussman 1945), as violent, degrading, or obstructive (Rollings 1983), and as irrational actors who are unwilling to bargain in good faith (Parenti 1986). Puette (1992) notes that the language to describe strikes tends to favor management. For example, labor unions make threats or demands, whereas management makes offers. Compared to peaceful labor negotiations, those that are more tumultuous, including those surrounding actual and possible strikes, garner more media attention (Bruno 2009; Ericson and Mitchell 1996).

Features of Protracted Conflict

Both Coleman (2003) and Putnam and Wondolleck (2003) have provided extensive explications of intractable and *protracted conflict*. Coleman (2003) is primarily concerned with much larger geo-political, enduring social (and often armed) conflicts, but also intergroup and interpersonal ones. Protracted/intractable conflicts suffer from a "high degree of intransigence, complexity, persistence, and malignancy" (4) and "are recalcitrant, intense, deadlocked, and extremely difficult to resolve" (6). Putnam and Wondolleck (2003) identify two central characteristics: persistence, and eluding resolution. Neither, however, provided operationalizations of their characteristics, and Putnam and colleagues' work is interpretive, without formal content analysis.

Media framing of labor unions often involves features of protracted conflict (Putnam and Wondolleck 2003; Vraneski and Richter 2003), including unsuccessful interventions and extended duration of the dispute (Ericson and Mitchell 1996), by emphasizing events such as strikes, lockouts, and difficult negotiations (Brennan 2005; Bruno 2009; Lewis and Proffitt 2013). We use the term *protracted* instead of *intractable* conflict to emphasize a continuum from less to more protracted, with each of the following six features varying from low to high.

Common ground. Common ground centers on how parties attempt to surface shared interests; the less common ground, the more protracted the conflict is likely to become. Media coverage of conflicts sometimes identifies parties' stated areas of common ground (Putnam and Shoemaker 2007). Journalists may intervene (Bartholemé et al. 2017) and suggest shared interests between disputants, although not directly stated by the parties (Putnam and Shoemaker 2007). The exploration of common interests is less likely in protracted conflicts because of the event-orientation of media organizations and structural incompatibilities "with long-term processes, calm, and cooperation" (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018, 27).

Escalation and **de-escalation.** Escalation refers to growth in the number of issues, events, costs, and consequences of a dispute (Putnam and Wondolleck 2003), while de-escalation centers on movements that decrease the intensity and complexity of a conflict. Escalation and de-escalation are newsworthy events because these moves push conflicts further from or closer to agreement. For example, suspending negotiations, and, more extremely, engaging in strikes (Bruno 2009) and lockouts (Brennen 2005; Lewis and Proffitt 2013), escalate conflict between parties and generate media attention. Resumption of negotiations and contract settlements de-escalate conflicts (Putnam and Fuller 2014) and also create media coverage, as parties return to business as usual (Bruno 2009). However, de-escalatory events and processes lack the "dramatic and threatening quality" of escalations and tend to receive comparatively less coverage (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018, 28).

Non-negotiability of dispute issues. Negotiable issues are those where parties seek alternatives to meet their underlying interests, while non-negotiable issues are those where alternative settlements are unacceptable because disputants perceive morals or values are at stake (Tenbrunsel et al. 2009). Non-negotiable issues are newsworthy because they reveal polarization between parties; this dramatic clash of ideas captures audience attention (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Negotiability of issues, however, is non-news because it lacks such drama (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018). Labeling of issues as negotiable or non-negotiable also indicates the direction toward or away from agreement. For example, Putnam and Fuller (2014) found labeling of some media issues as non-negotiable, particularly changes to a decades-old practice of paying residuals for films or TV programs that were shown outside of their initial market. Producers introduced the proposal as "recoupment", where they would pay residuals only when they recouped a profit, while the Writers Guild labeled it "rollback," which would harm their underlying interest.

Unsuccessful third-party interventions. Third-party mediators intervene, either at the request of parties to the dispute, or by mandate. Successful interventions are those that move parties closer to settlement, while unsuccessful interventions result in stalemate, litigation, or work stoppages and lockouts, and thus ongoing conflict. Ericson and Mitchell (1996) reported a positive relationship between third party (federal mediator) intervention and amount of media coverage. Putnam and Fuller (2014) analyzed news coverage of unsuccessful interventions by a federal mediator to avoid a strike, as well as successful interventions by media company CEOs to reach a settlement. Those unsuccessful and successful interventions drove turning points in the conflict. This reference to interventions is different from the conceptualization by Bartholomé et al. (2015), who characterize journalistic actors intervening through interpretation, judgement, recommendations, or direct criticism of parties in the conflict.

Time issues. Time refers to mentions of the (extended) duration of the dispute, time pressures, a history of conflict between or within groups, and/or likely continued difficult interactions among parties for the near future. Time is a salient contextual characteristic in

conflict news (Putnam 2002). Interactants use time to communicate about the context or meaning of a given topic (Bruneau 1977). That a dispute, such as a strike, de facto strike, or lockout, spans a period of time is newsworthy, especially when greater duration may result in (more) economic damage for one side or another (Kumar 2001; Martin 2003). For example, Ericson and Mitchell (1996) found a positive relationship between duration of a strike and amount of news coverage dedicated to it. Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2018) showed that severe conflicts had a baseline of news coverage over time as they dragged on, although predictably had spikes in coverage around escalatory events. Temporal behavior frequently affects negotiations through different perceptions of time and management of time (Macduff 2006).

Research Questions

Fuller and Rice (2014) established the presence of a general conflict frame in media coverage of SAG's 2008-2009 collective bargaining (described below). Although news outlets covered substantive issues, the authors revealed how most reporting focused on procedures rather than substance (e.g., content or negotiation agendas), actions taken by the union against management as opposed to moves by management against the union, and disputes within SAG and between SAG and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA). However, the SAG-AMPTP negotiations seem to meet the definition of a protracted conflict because it extended over several months, attempts to jump-start discussions failed, issues were at various time presented as non-negotiable, and intra- and extra-negotiation maneuvers pushed sides further from agreement. Thus: **RQ1**: To what extent do media outlets portray the conflict as protracted, through coverage of the six features?

Furthermore, the nature of the protracted conflict is likely to change over time as parties move away from or toward resolution of their dispute (Putnam and Wondolleck 2003). Thus: **RQ2**: Does media coverage of these protracted conflict features vary over time, and if so how?

A deeper aspect of framing is relationships or co-occurrences among discourses, images, or themes (Miller 1997; Rebich-Hespanha et al. 2015). Thus, we also interested in how the six features of a protracted conflict are associated with each other in media coverage, indicating whether there are more fundamental dimensions to the protracted conflict frame. Thus: **RQ3**: How do these features co-occur in media coverage of a protracted conflict and what aspects of protracted conflict do those associations portray?

Method

Case Description

Background. Research by Fuller and Rice (2014) established the presence of a conflict frame in media coverage of SAG's 2008-2009 collective bargaining. Most of the reporting focused on procedures rather than substance (e.g., content or negotiation agendas), actions taken by the union against management as opposed to moves by management against the union, and disputes within SAG and between SAG and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA). However, their study focused on a general conflict frame, not a protracted conflict frame. Despite a decline in strikes in the United States, workers (mainly writers and actors) in the entertainment industry have struck 17 times since the 1960s (Dawson, 2009). Hence, concerns about protracted conflicts are grounded in a long, complex history of relationships among media unions and management.

SAG was a labor union representing more than 110,000 film and television actors. SAG had a long-standing practice of negotiating its TV/theatrical contracts alongside AFTRA. AFTRA represented more than 70,000 performers, journalists, and other artists. About 44,000 actors were joint members of both unions. In 2008-2009, the film and television industry was in

a period of conflict aftermath. The Writers Guild of America (WGA) had successfully waged a 100-day strike over payments for digital media. Journalists characterized the three-year negotiations as the industry battling over the future of digital media (Littleton 2013).

Following the WGA settlement, it was SAG's turn to bargain. The negotiation process faced multiple challenges, including difficulties between SAG and AMPTP, division within SAG, and disagreements between SAG and AFTRA. In the film and television industry, all unions negotiate with the same multi-employer bargaining representative, the AMPTP, and follow a trend of pattern bargaining, where the settlement for one union provides a template for others. Leading up to negotiations, SAG leaders indicated that they would not simply accept the template negotiated by other industry unions. To add to the troubles, AFTRA leaders suspended their 27-year-long joint bargaining agreement over accusations of union raiding (SAG attempting to take away members covered by AFTRA). Negotiations began on April 15, 2008, leaving a little more than two months before the union's TV/theatrical contract expired, raising the possibility of a SAG strike. Many in the industry feared a second, larger, and likely more expensive work stoppage than the WGA strike would occur. The conflict involved three major periods.

Period 1: March 1 to July 8, 2008. Three weeks after beginning negotiations, talks between AMPTP and SAG collapsed and stalled until after AFTRA reached a separate agreement with the producers' bargaining representative. Shortly after SAG-AMPTP negotiations resumed, SAG leaders launched a campaign targeting joint members of both unions to defeat AFTRA's contract. This period culminated with the expiration of SAG's contract, and successful ratification of AFTRA's contract.

Period 2: July 9, 2008 to January 14, 2009. After an unsuccessful attempt to defeat AFTRA's contract, SAG's negotiation committee rejected the last offer provided by producers, and negotiations stagnated for several months. Meanwhile, the union held its election, which resulted in a more moderate slate of directors compared to those who advocated an aggressive stance in negotiations. Differences between the negotiation committee and the board existed, and SAG's negotiators recommended conducting a strike authorization referendum to force producers back to negotiations while the board requested mediation. Both SAG and AMPTP agreed to resume talks with the help of a federal mediator. However, mediation efforts failed and resulted in a campaign to the membership to support a strike authorization. Internal opposition to a strike authorization led union leaders to delay the vote, and members of the board to call for the firing of the executive director.

Period 3: January 15 to June 9, 2009. With a strike authorization no longer considered, and in an effort to restart long-stalled contract negotiations, the board of directors fired its executive director and replaced the negotiation committee. However, SAG's president sued the board of directors for failing to follow the proper procedure to remove the executive director, and requested his reinstatement and prevention of further negotiations. A judge declined a restraining order on negotiations, and the board again voted to fire the executive director by following protocol. Bargaining resumed, but again faltered over the duration of the contract, which SAG wanted to be concurrent with other industry unions. Two months later, when producers agreed on the duration of the contract, the union reached agreement, and the dispute ended with a ratified contract on June 9, 2009.

Sample

We gathered news articles from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Hollywood Reporter* through LexisNexis and ProQuest. These publications are in regions (Los

Angeles and New York) where the motion picture and television industries are highly salient, yet the audiences vary for each. *The Hollywood Reporter* is an industry trade magazine, which specifically reports on the industry and influences industry-related policy processes. *The Los Angeles Times* is a large, regional newspaper and plays an important role in the Los Angeles-area media industry. *The New York Time*s is an elite national newspaper, has national influence as a paper of record, and shapes the agendas of other newspapers.

A timeframe of March 1, 2008 to June 15, 2009 was selected. March 1, 2008 predates the start of SAG-AMPTP negotiations, and June 15, 2009, follows the SAG members' vote in favor of the contract. Using the search term "Screen Actors Guild", the first author downloaded news articles and selected only those that were about TV/theatrical contract negotiations (looking specifically for keywords such as negotiations, bargaining, contract, deal, in the headlines and lead paragraphs), and removed any opinion content such as columns or editorials. Op-ed articles function differently from news content, where objectivity is a journalistic norm. Of the 148 articles, 71 were from *The Los Angeles Times,* 49 were from *The New York Times,* and 28 were from *The Hollywood Reporter.*

Content Analysis of Features

Three typical approaches to identifying frames are (1) code or interpret the text using a relevant *a priori* typology, (2) code text using an emergent, inductive approach leading to a thematic analysis, or (3) a combination, with literature review and interpretive analyses used to develop a coding typology (Van Gorp, 2006). Here, as with Bartholomé et al. (2017) and many others, we use the prior literature (especially Putnam and Wondolleck 2003) to identify the valid features of the frame of protracted conflict, develop explicit operationalizations of those features, and code the relevant news stories accordingly. That is, we do not analyze the texts for emergent or inductive themes. We then use those codes to describe how relevant print news media covered the life-cycle of the entertainment media labor negotiation conflict.

Coding

Training and production coding occurred over 20 weeks. Two research assistants received an overview of the project and training in using the codebook and recording their observations into spreadsheets, using example articles from similar publications. Over several weeks, coders jointly coded several sets of articles, totaling 70 articles, from similar publications as part of their training. The codebook was updated 10 times to reflect clearer operational definitions to ensure mutually exclusive categories.

The unit of analysis for the coding was the article. We calculated reliability using the Ir reliability index (the most appropriate reliability measure for 0/1 coding, as traditional approaches do not take into consideration two 0s as agreement) (Perreault and Leigh 1989). After iterations of coding, discussing, and revising the operationalizations, these measures exhibited satisfactory reliabilities (common ground = .83; non-negotiability = .81; unsuccessful third-party intervention = .97; de-escalation = .91; escalation = .81; time = 1.00). The first author was the tiebreaking judge on remaining disagreements.

During production coding, although the two coders processed the articles independently, the first author met with them weekly, discussed issues with coding, and provided them feedback based on evaluating the cross-coder confusion matrix and the various instances of intercoder reliability measures.

Measures

First, manifest codes of **article identification, publication date, title, author, headline,** and **newspaper** were entered into the spreadsheets. We included the manifest code of publication

date in order to categorize each article into one of **three periods** representing significant shifts, or turning points, in the negotiations, as described above. This was consistent with previous research looking at periods and phases of news coverage (Bartholomé et al. 2017; Kumar 2001).

Second, applying the detailed operationalizations for the six latent codes, coders marked no (0) or yes (1) to the following questions about each of the articles. The codebook provided more detail for each, with clarifications, decision rules, exclusions, and examples. The full operationalization of the codes is available from the authors Table 1 provides examples of article text corresponding to each code.

-- Table 1 Goes About Here --

Common ground. Does the story emphasize common ground among the Screen Actors Guild/its members and the Alliance for Motion Picture and Television Producers/its members?

Escalation. Are there any references to escalation between the AMPTP and SAG (i.e., the growth in the number of issues, events, costs, and consequences of the conflict)?

De-escalation. Does the story emphasize de-escalation or resolution of the dispute?

Non-negotiable issues. Are there references to current issues that either SAG/its members or AMPTP/its members considers non-negotiable?

Unsuccessful third-party interventions. Are there references to unsuccessful, recent interventions between AMPTP and SAG?

Time. Are there references to the amount of time the dispute has gone on, a history of conflict between SAG and AMPTP, or how long the conflict is likely to persist?

Data Analysis

To answer RQ1, we computed frequencies for each of the features of protracted conflict and conducted MANOVAs to test for differences by publication. To address RQ2, we conducted MANOVAs to test for an overall significant difference in the mean percentage coverage of each feature across the three periods. Regarding RQ3, we used multidimensional scaling (MDS; Alscal method). MDS is an analytical technique that represents the "hidden structure" of behavioral data, and has been used elsewhere in research on conflict and negotiation (Pinkley, Gelfand, and Duan, 2005, 80). Using the binary similarities between each pair (0=absent, 1=present), the procedure created a Euclidean distance matrix among the six variables (common ground, escalation, de-escalation, non-negotiable issues, unsuccessful interventions, and time). Based on those distances, MDS analyzed the similarity of objects (variables or cases) to each other; the more associated they are relative to the other objects, the closer the objects appear in the MDS portrayal, using minimal dimensions (Pinkley et al. 2005). As with factor analysis, the dimensions are subjectively labeled based on the related items.

<div align="center">

Results

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Media Coverage of Features of Protracted Conflict and Variation over Time

RQ1: Overall features. Of 148 articles, percent of each conflict feature in the media coverage were: references to common ground (12%), escalation (30%), de-escalation (10%), non-negotiable issues (13%), unsuccessful interventions (9%), and time (89%). Comparing means of the six features across the three publication venues, the overall MANOVA Wilks' Lambda of .866 ($F(12,280)=1.74$) was just non-significant ($p=.06$). Individually, only escalation was just significantly different ($p=.05$), with the lowest percent (.74) for *The New York Times*, middle (.86) for the Hollywood Reporter, and highest (.90) for *The Los Angeles Times*. Common ground was noticeably lower for *The Hollywood Reporter* (.04) compared to .14 for the other two newspapers; while unsuccessful intervention was lower for *The Los Angeles Times* (.04)

compared to the other two (.14), but neither set of means was statistically significantly different ($p=.31$, $p=.11$). Thus, we analyze the combined set of articles.

RQ2: Coverage over time. *Period 1: Beginning of negotiations to AFTRA deal.* Of 53 articles in the first period, news coverage primarily focused on the features of time (81%) and escalation (81%). A few addressed non-negotiable issues (6%), common ground (2%), de-escalation (.7%), with no coverage of unsuccessful interventions (0%). Time played a central role as SAG's contract deadline approached and passed (e.g., "with the clock ticking", *The Hollywood Reporter,* July 9, 2008). Escalation also featured prominently because producers "ratcheted up pressure" (*The Hollywood Reporter*, July 9, 2008) by quickly settling with another union, AFTRA. In turn, media outlets characterized protests about the AFTRA contract as one which "could escalate into a battle royale for a new actors contract – and further push the industry into de facto strike mode" (*The Hollywood Reporter,* June 9, 2008). Negotiations between SAG-and AMPTP were "still far apart" and "studios refused to budge" as non-negotiable issues arose over payments for DVDs (*The Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 2008). After AFTRA settled, news outlets sought possible common ground between SAG and AMPTP, arguing that although it "falls short of satisfying some of SAG's key demands, it could still help the larger union craft a deal that would avoid a strike this summer" (*The Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2008).

Period 2: AFTRA deal until possibility of strike authorization dropped. Coverage in the second period, which included 46 articles, continued to emphasize the features of time (90%), and escalation (84%), with much less coverage of non-negotiable issues (16%), unsuccessful interventions (14%), common ground (8%), and de-escalation (2%). Time featured prominently in media characterizations of the period as stories frequently repeated expiration of the contract and time elapsed since contract talks had stalled (e.g., "the de facto impasse between the two sides has not of yet been broken", *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 17, 2008). Media coverage portrayed this period as escalatory because SAG rejected the studios' final offer (e.g., "SAG rebuffs studios' contract proposal", *The Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 2008) and called for a strike referendum (e.g., "Actors inch closer to a strike", *The New York Times,* October 3, 2008), which was ultimately delayed ("Actors petition their guild not to strike", *The New York Times*, December 16, 2008). Non-negotiable issues played a part too, as producers signaled it would be "difficult to reach an agreement if SAG continues to insist unreasonably that it deserves a better deal" (*The Los Angeles Times,* October 24, 2008). Although both sides agreed to a federal mediator, "mediation failed to bridge deep differences between the sides over how actors should be paid for work that is distributed over the Internet" (*The Los Angeles Times,* November 23, 2008).

Period 3: Strike authorization dropped until ratification of SAG-AMPTP contract. In the final period, 49 articles again focused predominantly on time (96%) and escalation (87%). However, this period saw increased coverage of de-escalation (29%), common ground (27%), non-negotiable issues (17%), and unsuccessful interventions (15%). A temporal element was important not only because of the amount of time that had elapsed, but also because it became a central negotiation issue itself, which further stalled negotiations (e.g., "Negotiations falter over the timing and length of contract", *The Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2009). Coverage of the negotiations focused on escalations, including litigation to halt negotiations (e.g., "SAG talks stall over legal move; Union chief Alan Rosenberg says he plans to sue to block the new leadership", *The Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2009) and rejection of another "final offer" (e.g., "SAG turns down studios' offer", *The Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 2009). Media

coverage centered on non-negotiable issues, particularly length and timing of the contract (*The Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2009). References to unsuccessful interventions stemmed from earlier failed 2-day mediation attempts (*The Hollywood Reporter*, February 2, 2009). De-escalation and common ground reporting focused on attempts by well-known members of SAG to get "warring sides back to the bargaining table" (*The Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2009), on how a "breakthrough" occurred and sides were "close to accord" (*The Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 2009), and finally on a "tentative agreement" after a "months-long standoff" (*The Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2009).

Based on an overall MANOVA (Wilks' Lambda = 4.72, $p<.001$), coverage of common ground, de-escalation, and unsuccessful interventions all increased over time. For common ground, the overall mean was 12% (SD=.33), with values at the three periods of .02, .08, and .27 (F=8.07, $p< .001$), and for de-escalation the values were 10% (SD=.30), with means of .007, .02, and .29 (F=16.5, $p < .001$), with period 3 significantly higher for both types of conflict (Duncan post-hoc test). Mentions of unsuccessful interventions (overall M=9% (SD=.29), F=4.5, $p<.01$) were significantly higher in periods 2 (.14) and 3 (.15) compared to period 1 (.00). Mean differences for escalation (M=84% (SD=.37), non-negotiable (M=13% (SD=.35), and time (M=89% (SD=.32) did not significantly vary overall.

RQ3. Association of Media Coverage of Features of Protracted Conflict

The multiple dimensional scaling procedure portrayed associations among the six features (in all 148 articles), in two dimensions, with excellent fit (stress = .03, R^2 = .997) (the associated figure is available from the authors). The conflict features of non-negotiable issues and unsuccessful interventions occupied close positions. De-escalation and common ground were also closely located. However, features of escalation and time elapsed each were in separate positions. We subjectively interpret dimension 1 (X-axis) as "temporal context", as the left entries explicitly refer to the temporal aspects (references to duration and timelines, and escalation), while, except for de-escalation, the right side refers to static features (common ground, unsuccessful intervention, and non-negotiable). We interpret dimension 2 (Y-axis) as "resolution flexibility", as the features on the top half refer to bases for possible resolution, while those on the bottom half refer to indicators of lack of resolution. These two dimensions involve four quadrants. (1) References to non-negotiable issues and unsuccessful interventions indicated a static, inflexible resolution context. (2) References to common ground and de-escalation also indicated a static context, but a deeper grounding in flexible resolution possibilities. Reference to time indicated a (3) clear temporal context but implied resolution flexibility, while (4) escalation represented movement over time toward less resolution flexibility.

Discussion

Summary and Implications

The difficult dispute involving SAG, AFTRA, and the multi-employer bargaining agent, AMPTP, garnered substantial media coverage from three relevant news publications. The frequency of escalation and of unsuccessful interventions in this study make sense because of the episodic (event-based) focus of media coverage (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018). Mentions of non-negotiable issues are also consistent with the journalistic practice of emphasizing polarization among disputing parties (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). The relative infrequency of common ground and de-escalation features resonates with previous research, because such events are less dramatic and threatening, and considered non-news (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2018). The repeated mentions of some of the features also reflects a media practice to contextualize conflict news events for readers.

Because of the method of the study (content analysis) we cannot say to what extent media coverage influenced the negotiation process or outcome. However, the coverage's emphasis on escalation probably did not help move the conflict toward resolution, despite what could be efforts to create a sense of urgency through repeated references to time. Parties may argue through media to pressure each other or persuade public opinion, but that could have undesirable consequences, including further reinforcing their positions, protracting the conflict.

Overall, coverage varied over three substantive periods on some features, but not on others. Common ground and de-escalation were significantly higher in the final period, indicating movement toward resolution, despite higher levels of unsuccessful interventions and references to time in the last two periods. However, references to escalation and non-negotiable issues did not significantly differ across periods overall, being high throughout. Time and escalation both remained consistent features of the protracted conflict framing of this labor-management news coverage. This is partly because of print news organizations' tendency to contextualize news stories by offering historical summaries of conflicts, and because each of the periods cycled through intense escalations, including turning down offers, campaigning to reject a contract, and threatening or instigating lawsuits, to name a few.

Based on the MDS results, non-negotiable issues and unsuccessful interventions frequently co-occurred in these news stories. Parties that are unable to resolve disputes on their own often stagnate because of non-negotiable issues. In turn, such issues that represent fundamental conflicts of interest are difficult to mediate. Similarly, common ground and de-escalation also frequently co-occurred. As parties discover common ground, they move closer to agreement and effective management of the conflict. Time and escalation occurred most frequently in these news stories, yet stand alone from each other in different quadrants. This may be the case simply because they occur in almost all articles, so are both dissimilar from the less frequently portrayed features that have more disparate coverage. This constant coverage may relate to print journalism norms that contextualize news stories by providing a time element to nearly all covered topics. For example, stories that mention time also mention one or both of the opposite behaviors of de-escalation and escalation. References to time reflect a sense of urgency to end the conflict (Vraneski and Richter 2003) as well as increasing contextualization of the conflict as protracted. Underlying the six features of protracted conflict (at least in this case, but possibly in other protracted conflict frames) are two main dimensions: the temporal context and the resolution flexibility.

Overall, this dispute raised larger questions about conflict in the industry. Given the long, conflictual past, would the resolution of this tumultuous period mark the beginning of a longer period of peace in the industry? In 2012, SAG and AFTRA merged into one union representing actors in film, television, and new media. Two earlier attempts to merge were defeated (McKercher and Mosco 2006-2007), but the protracted conflict between these two parties in 2008-2009 helped justify the merger. Further, how will unions, management, and media outlets provide industry stakeholders information about negotiations and contextualize them (by mentioning a conflictual past) without fueling escalation or raising premature and unrealistic expectations for settlement? If recent media coverage is an indication, parties seem more willing to conform to a media blackout in negotiations. At the same time, industry unions have not taken strikes off the table as a means to pressure management. In the 2017 round of TV/theatrical negotiations, the Writers Guild of America membership authorized a strike (*Deadline Hollywood*, May 2, 2017), and SAG-AFTRA was close to asking its membership to consider one but did not (*Deadline Hollywood*, July 4, 2017).

In light of these findings, we offer recommendations for conflicting parties, and for journalists and media organizations covering negotiations. First, conflicting parties in public or well-known organizations should be aware of journalism culture (Hanitzsch 2007) in the ideation, narration, and presentation of conflict news (Hoxha and Hanitzsch 2018). Negotiating parties should consider how the actions look in terms of moving the conflict toward or away from agreement. Their actions may affect attributions of responsibility for the conflict or for delaying its resolution, and could influence public support for their positions. Second, journalists should reflect on temporal aspects of their news coverage. In conflict news coverage, time may not be a completely neutral detail. A temporal focus can create a sense of urgency for parties. Mentions of time may also function implicitly or explicitly to lay blame for inaction or ineffectiveness. In these ways, mentions of time may function as a type of journalistic interventionism (e.g., interpretive style of writing, negative characterization of one of one or more actors, expressions doubting competence of one or more of the actors) characterized by Bartholomé et al. (2017). Moreover, media focus on the possible prolonged nature of a conflict can foster that expectation among parties, and contribute to the conditions for protracted conflict.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations, but also points to several future research directions. First, not only does protracted conflict involve multiple features, it is also of course continuous. Our (typical) binary approach to coding (absence or presence of the feature) precludes more subtle analyses of the extent (more or less) of any of these features, which could provide the basis for a more continuous construct of protracted conflict. Thus, a protracted conflict scale could involve both the number of features portrayed (within substantive time periods), but also the means of the extent of each feature. (However, our use of percentage of occurrence does represent one aspect of this inherent continuous nature.) Consequently, we define *protracted conflicts* (or their portrayal) as exhibiting less common ground, more escalation, less de-escalation, more non-negotiable issues, more unsuccessful third-party interventions, and more concerns about temporal aspects.

A second important limitation is its focus on one cycle of SAG-AMPTP negotiations in a tumultuous period. Hence, future research should examine media coverage across multiple media negotiations to establish baselines for coverage on each of these features across types of negotiations. A third limitation (common to content analysis studies) is our sole reliance on media coverage to characterize the protracted nature of the dispute, ignoring the full complement of what Van Gorp (2006) referred to as "frame sponsors", or the stakeholders who interact to shape the framing. As Putnam and Shoemaker (2007) note, although they might mutually influence each other, disputants, editors, and journalists covering conflicts may differ in their framing (intended or not). Thus, similar to research by Hoxha and Hanitzsch (2018), and as advocated by Van Gorp (2006), another possible avenue of research is applying this typology to both media coverage and to interviews with disputants and media stakeholders to reveal similar or different interpretations about the nature of the conflict and production of conflict news stories. Fourth, the present study did not code for who (labor, management, or journalist) in the articles mentioned, or were most clearly associated with, the protracted conflict features. Future research might assess how these features, and thus the overall framing, are associated with particular parties or frame sponsors involved in or covering the dispute(s).

Fifth, Bartholomé et al. (2017) showed how the frequency of coverage of sub-dimensions of the general conflict frame varies by contextual factors such as medium (online/offline), outlet (quality/tabloid), and timing of political events (proximate/not). Our study did analyze how stage

in the life-cycle of the negotiation was, and how publication venue was not, associated with coverage of the six features of protracted conflict, but of course could be expanded to include other contextual factors. Finally, Bartholomé et al. (2017) also noted that even though their conflict framing was based on a comprehensive integration of prior conceptualizations, other, perhaps more subtle, aspects of conflict framing may appear through more emergent approaches to content analysis. Indeed, much broader and comprehensive framing analyses are possible, such as Van Gorp's (2006) sociologically and culturally based "frame packages." This applies to our approach as well, providing an impetus for future research.

Conclusion

This study makes important contributions to extant research on protracted conflict. First, based on prior research on protracted conflict, for which there was no existing consistent operationalized coding typology, we developed reliable measures for the six primary features. These allow conflict and media scholars to identify reliably how protracted conflict is framed in newspapers, and to compare findings to other cases and studies. Second, we demonstrated their applicability to analyzing news coverage of a media entertainment labor-management conflict setting. News coverage of the SAG-AMPTP conflict included each of these features, suggesting that media outlets framed the conflict as protracted, particularly emphasizing escalation and time, and differentially across substantively meaningful periods. Finally, associations among the conflict features in this context indicated two underlying dimensions, or sets of features, of the protracted conflict frame: temporal context and resolution flexibility.

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