

MILLENNIUM MADNESS! Y2K?: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CATASTROPHIC THEMES IN SELECTED PRINT MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research project investigated two related but distinct moments of historic significance. The first pertained to what became known as the Y2K phenomenon. The second involved the dawning of a new millennium. The researchers speculated that each of these events, either independently or upon their convergence, could provide the impetus for mass behavior or aberrant behavior by some millennium, cultic, or new religious movements. Our interest focused on the impact of the convergence of these two events and the role of the print media in exacerbating or diminishing the effects. Content analysis was employed as the primary method of investigation. We examined the headlines of significant sources of print media throughout the calendar year 1999. Our examination included the headlines of two national magazines, three major national newspapers, one state newspaper and one local municipal newspaper. This research documented themes and narratives which emerged throughout the calendar year of 1999. The most intriguing findings included the absence of any significant event related to Y2K or the new millennium as well as the restraint of the media in their coverage of each event. The researchers explored theoretical frameworks which might explain these findings. In addition, research issues related to methodology peculiar to this type of research were addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have recognized the connection between significant or anticipated events, mass media, and collective behavior (Shriver 1995; Goode 1992; Miller 1985; Jenkins 1983; McCarthy & Zald 1973 & 1977). This qualitative research project investigated two related but distinct moments of historic significance. The first pertained to what became known as "Y2K." Y2K was simply a computer-based, technological problem suspected to disrupt major flows of commerce and indispensable governmental services. The second involved the horizon of a new millennium and the potential for violent or aberrant behavior by extremists. Some speculated that the dawning of a new millennium could have apocalyptic significance and thereby set the context for some extreme behavior. We were curious about the impact of the convergence of these two events and the role of the print media in exacerbating or diminishing the effects.

A myriad of questions were posed as we approached the research. These questions included: Would there be a growing anticipation which would give rise to collective behavior? Would there be an increase of sectarian, prophetic types of groups? How much play would the print media grant these themes and what would the content include? Would there be some spontaneous and/or mob-like behavior unrelated to religious concerns?

Sociologists have explored and addressed some of these issues in detail. The field of collective behavior and social move-

ment analysis provides a theoretical basis for explicating public behavior, both panic (mob-like) and more rational or instrumental. A brief review of these traditions is warranted.

Early explanations of collective behavior were distinctly psychological, largely drawn from the works of crowd psychologists (Morris & Herring 1987). In the early twentieth century, research on collective behavior shifted to a sociological approach. Early sociological explanations (e.g., the Chicago School) of collective behavior retained some of the elements found in the seminal works of crowd psychologists. Collective behavior was still viewed as spontaneous, contagious by bystanders, fluid in organizational structure, and lacking any instrumental agenda. The participant was often cast as irrational and vulnerable to the suggestions of others (Miller 1985; Goode 1992). By the 1960s, this view of collective behavior was supplanted with a novel set of ideas. Sociologists focused on organization, rationality of the participant, and the instrumentality of the action/behavior of the group. This later genre' became known as "social movement theory" or "social movement analysis." Without entering the debate, scholars argue whether these two traditions are related or are distinct fields within sociology (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald 1988).

The cornerstone work on social movement theory was developed by McCarthy and Zald (1973). In their conceptual framework, collective action was viewed as rational and instrumental, with organizational features as

paramount to the success and failure of any given collective action. The treatment of collective action ostensibly appeared as organizational behaviorism. Although this approach dominated the field of collective behavior for two decades, it suffered a series of setbacks that eventually led to its demise. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, social constructionists and new social movement theorists began to proffer ideas which opposed the prevailing view of collective action. These new theorists recapitulated some of the concerns found in the early research of collective behavior, mainly the role of ideology, spontaneous participation, and the social construction of collective action (Buechler 1993, 1995).

These approaches, which sociologists have developed in explicating collective action, cover a broad range of behavior. In this project, we did not subscribe to any particular branch of collective behavior prior to the year 2000. However, we recognized, and to some extent are indebted to, the variety of explanations which sociologists have developed over the years.

RESEARCH AGENDA

As stated in the introduction, our investigation involved a thematic documentation of two related but analytically distinct events. The first event related to the phenomenon of Y2K. This involved the specter of a technological catastrophe. The second event was the frontier of a new millennium and potentially extreme behavior by some millenarian, cultic, or new religious movements. The imputation of special significance by some of these groups to a new millennium could prompt disorderly action. It seemed plausible that each of these events, either independently or upon their convergence, could provide the necessary ingredients to spark panic, hysteria, or collective action.

Y2K Phenomenon

The Y2K phenomenon was associated with a technical problem involving the change from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. The source of this problem was allied to the inception of the computer. Early computers were limited by storage space. Programmers attempted to rectify this limitation by truncating the 'year' to two spaces. For example, 1950 was designated by the last two digits, indicating decade and year. The twentieth

century was assumed by the early programmers. The complications emerged at the end of the twentieth century with the designation of 2000. The computer code did not recognize the year 00 to be greater than the previous year, 99. Speculation was that this could create several problems for business data processing systems, including federal, state, and local governments. This potential problem came to be known in popular culture as the "Y2K bug."

Since the effect of this was unknown until January 1, 2000, the speculation and bantering of officials, experts, claims-makers, etc. were thought to have a social psychological consequence on collective behavior greater than the actual threat posed by the Y2K bug. Ironically, modern nations/states were considered to be more vulnerable to this problem than their less technical counterparts. Some expected that populations lacking a social infrastructure predicated on computer technology might be blissfully unaware of the potentiality of a major crisis. Nevertheless, our interest and research question focused on whether the perceived technical crises would provide the impetus for aberrant mass behavior.

Millennium

In addition to the technical problems associated with computers, the ideological phenomenon associated with the end of the century and the finality of this millennia, presented a host of problems distinct from Y2K. New religious movements, especially those which espoused an apocalyptic state of humanity, might place special emphasis on the horizon of a new millennia.

New religious movements which have manifested violence (for example, Synanon, the Manson Family, the Branch Davidians, the Lundgren group, Order of the Solar Temple, the People's Temple, and the followers of Lindberg) tend to possess an apocalyptic belief system and/or millennial visions of the "end times." Many apocalyptic belief systems or millennial visions contain an antinomian component. According to Robbins and Anthony (1995), antinomianism provides the basis for conflict and violence during selected periods of time when "the elect" are to be receptive and ready for the dawning of a new millennial age. In addition, such ideational commitments may imply persecution of "the elect" by a recalcitrant, unbelieving

world. This contributes to the marginal, precarious relationship between the new religious movement and the larger society.

Apocalyptic or millennial visions as ideological commitments are not sufficient by themselves to cause violence. Many mainstream religious groups espouse apocalyptic narratives and have proven to be very peaceful. Additional elements are needed to heighten the risk of the new religious movements' status. Robbins and Anthony (1995) developed the concept of "exemplary dualism" to explain how apocalyptic and millennial narratives become imbued with a greater sense of urgency and risk. In essence, exemplary dualism increases the group's proclivity for conflict and violence by detranscendentalizing apocalyptic or millennial narratives to contemporary social and political realities. A group will view conflict with worldly (non-elect) entities in the present, thus conferring greater importance to the outcomes of their conflict.

That the general population is knowledgeable of such themes seems entirely conceivable, as they have been central themes to many movies, documentaries, exposes, etc. The researchers believed it was plausible that the stage might be set for a violent eruption on the part of an apocalyptic new religious movement.

METHODOLOGY

Origins of the Project

This project was originally conceived by the lead researcher prior to the 1999 spring semester (roughly mid-January). He speculated that this would be a "once in a lifetime" opportunity to document the convergence of two major events. Shortly thereafter, two other researchers were invited to join the project. After exploring the boundaries of the project, content analysis was employed as the primary method of investigation. Our investigation led us to follow the headlines of significant sources of print media.

Methodological Decisions

Three major national/international newspapers were identified, each representing a different geographic section of the country and each having a sizable number of readers. The newspapers included the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*. We also decided to track two local newspapers for some contrast to the

national print media. The *Daily Oklahoman* and the *Edmond Sun* were selected. Both sources were dominant shareholders in their respective markets. In addition, we decided to follow two major news magazines, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*.

To begin the process, the researchers spent many hours in the university library looking through the January 1999 editions of all selected data sources. Initially, we were attempting to get a feel for the number and types of articles. The enormity of the project and commensurate time commitment was readily realized. To expedite the process, we decided to search for appropriate articles on the newspaper/magazine's web page. After we found the citation on-line, we then found the published article to document our investigative questions.

Along with the initial problems regarding sources and how to access the material, we also had to make decisions regarding the types of articles and the information appropriate to our research. We developed a list of keywords associated with the themes of Y2K and millennium. The following terms were included in our list:

- Y2K
- year 2000
- millennium
- cult
- religious movement
- survivalist(s)
- apocalypse
- apocalyptic
- prophecy
- prophetic
- prophet(s)
- Armageddon
- doomsday

We decided to earmark any article in which one or more of these words appeared in the title or subtitle, or were readily identifiable in the text. A keyword search was performed for the three national newspapers on their respective Internet sites. Direct observation of the paper editions of two local newspapers and two national magazines was also used as sources of data.

Determining what to record was due in part to informal interviews with editors and journalists. For example, we were going to infer the importance of an article by the size of the headline. This function is often stan-

andardized, we were informed, especially with local newspapers. This led us to discount headline size as relating to the importance of the article. In addition, we initially measured the amount of space of each article, but quickly found that the enormity of such a task was beyond the amount of time we could apportion to the project.

After several weeks of trial and error, we developed a rubric that we believed would satisfy the purpose of the project. Included in our reporting would be the title of the article, the location of the article on the page it appeared, the page number, the section (Business, Sports, Modern Living, etc.) in which it was found, and the key term of the article. Five categories were devised based on the list of keywords. Articles were categorized primarily by keywords found in the titles or subtitles. This process posed a number of methodological problems, as well as other issues as discussed in the next section.

Methodological Difficulties and Adjustments

Initial searches of the web sites of the three major newspapers were started by February 4, 1999. Immediately we encountered difficulties with this procedure. Printing the articles from the web site proved to be cumbersome and time consuming. Other difficulties arose as well. For example, the page and location of the article on the Internet site was often inconsistent with the published edition. Additionally, search engines were often down for entire days leading to spikes in the workload. We also faced times in which Internet access was incredibly slow, and searches had to be done early in the morning for best access. Perhaps the most frustrating problem encountered was that the Internet version of each edition was significantly different from the published version. We quickly determined that the Internet procedure did not grant any advantages or time-savings and was abandoned in favor of direct examination of the published editions.

Challenges also occurred in the categorization of the articles. Some newspapers used the terms "Y2K," "year 2000" and "millennium" interchangeably. For example, the *New York Times* often used the designation "year 2000" to refer to the Y2K problem. The term "millennium" was also used in reference to the Y2K problem. In addition, each researcher made decisions about categoriza-

Figure 1 - Magazine Article Theme Summary

<i>Newsweek</i>	
14 total articles or mentions	13/51 issues (25.5%)
Y2K	8
Trends	2
First babies of 2000	1
Travel	1
Prophecy	2
<i>U.S. News and World Report</i>	
30 total articles	24/52 issues (46.2%)
Y2K	13
Millennium	7
Cults	5
Millennium & Y2K	1
Cult & Doomsday	1
Other	3

tion of articles for their sources, giving rise to the possibility of variations in coding. Two of the researchers tended to identify some articles as being multi-categorical, whereas one researcher tended to place articles in only one discrete category. (This was later corrected for consistency.) We also discovered that each data source had its own design for the types and numbers of sections. This not only varied between sources, but it also varied between editions depending on the day of the week. Nevertheless, decisions were made in such cases to maintain consistency in comparing data sources.

The first few issues of January 2000 were also examined to see what kinds of follow-up articles might be presented in the aftermath of the reality of Y2K and the advent of a new millennium. (Although technically the new millennium did not start until 2001.)

RESULTS

Statistics and Theme Summary

Although the researchers had no preconceived idea of how many articles might be published in any given month, or in what sections of the newspaper the articles would appear in, or what themes would dominate, it was expected that the numbers of articles would gradually increase as the new year approached. However, the trend which emerged in terms of numbers of articles published by the print media defied our expectations.

Nearly every section of each newspaper

Table 1 - Newspaper Source, Total No. of Articles Published, Total No. of Issues with at least One Article during 1999/Total Issues Published during 1999, Percentage of Total Issues with at least One Article during 1999

Source	Total Articles	Total Issues / Total Issues for Year	Percentage
<i>Edmond Sun</i>	83	55/259*	21.2%
<i>Daily Oklahoman</i>	194	115/352	32.7%
<i>New York Times</i>	166	122/352	34.7%
<i>L.A. Times</i>	250	157/352	44.6%
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	280	174/352	49.4%

*The *Edmond Sun* is published Sundays and Tuesday-Friday.

included at least one article at some point during the year. The sections most represented by articles were the Main and Business sections. Sections less represented included Travel, Arts, Science, Editorials, Opinions, as well as sections unique to each newspaper. The articles published in these unique sections were typically concerned with local preparedness for Y2K or millennium events.

The most obvious observation in regard to themes was a lack of articles regarding cultic, doomsday, prophetic, Armageddon, apocalyptic, alarmist, or survivalist activities. The main themes emerging from the analysis related either to Y2K (preparedness) or the millennium.

The percentage of issues of *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report* containing articles appropriate to this research was in the same range of the numbers published by the local and national newspapers, as noted by Figure 1. Although *U.S. News and World Report* published nearly twice as many articles than *Newsweek*, the most represented categories were the same for both magazines, with Y2K articles outnumbering millennium articles 2:1. Except for the Y2K articles, those appearing in *Newsweek* were more of a general interest nature. As shown, *U.S. News and World Report* published some articles relative to cultic activity. More "cult" articles were published in the *U.S. News and World Report* than in the *Edmond Sun*, the *Daily Oklahoman*, or *New York Times*.

Table 1 summarizes the total number of articles containing the keyword(s) published in the five newspapers included in this analysis. The last column in Table 1 also indicates the percentage of total issues in which at least one article was published during 1999. Of these five newspapers, the *Chicago Tribune* published the greatest number of

articles and had the highest percentage of issues containing at least one article. Of the national newspapers, the *New York Times* published the fewest number of articles. Although the *New York Times* published fewer total articles than the *Daily Oklahoman*, the *New York Times* did exceed the *Daily Oklahoman* in the percentage of issues containing at least one article.

The *Edmond Sun* published the fewest number of articles and had the lowest percentage of total issues containing at least one article. During our analysis, The *Edmond Sun* was not published on Saturdays or Mondays. This could account for the low representation in total numbers. However, the percentage of issues was lower in the *Edmond Sun* than all other newspapers.

Figure 2 is a bar graph which compares on a month-to-month basis the total number of articles found in each of the five newspapers included in this study. Although the researchers speculated that an increase in the number of articles published would occur each month, Figure 2 shows that the pattern in numbers of articles published was more complicated and unpredictable. Overall, March and April saw a slight increase in total numbers of articles over January and February. May totals, however, returned to January and February levels. June through October levels were below the January and February levels. November saw a considerable increase in the number of articles published, and the numbers peaked in December.

From January through May, the *Chicago Tribune* exceeded all other newspapers in the total number of articles published. In March, the *Chicago Tribune* contained over twice as many articles as any of the other newspapers. During the months of July and December, the *Daily Oklahoman* published more articles than any other newspaper

Figure 2: Total Newspaper Articles by Source - 1999

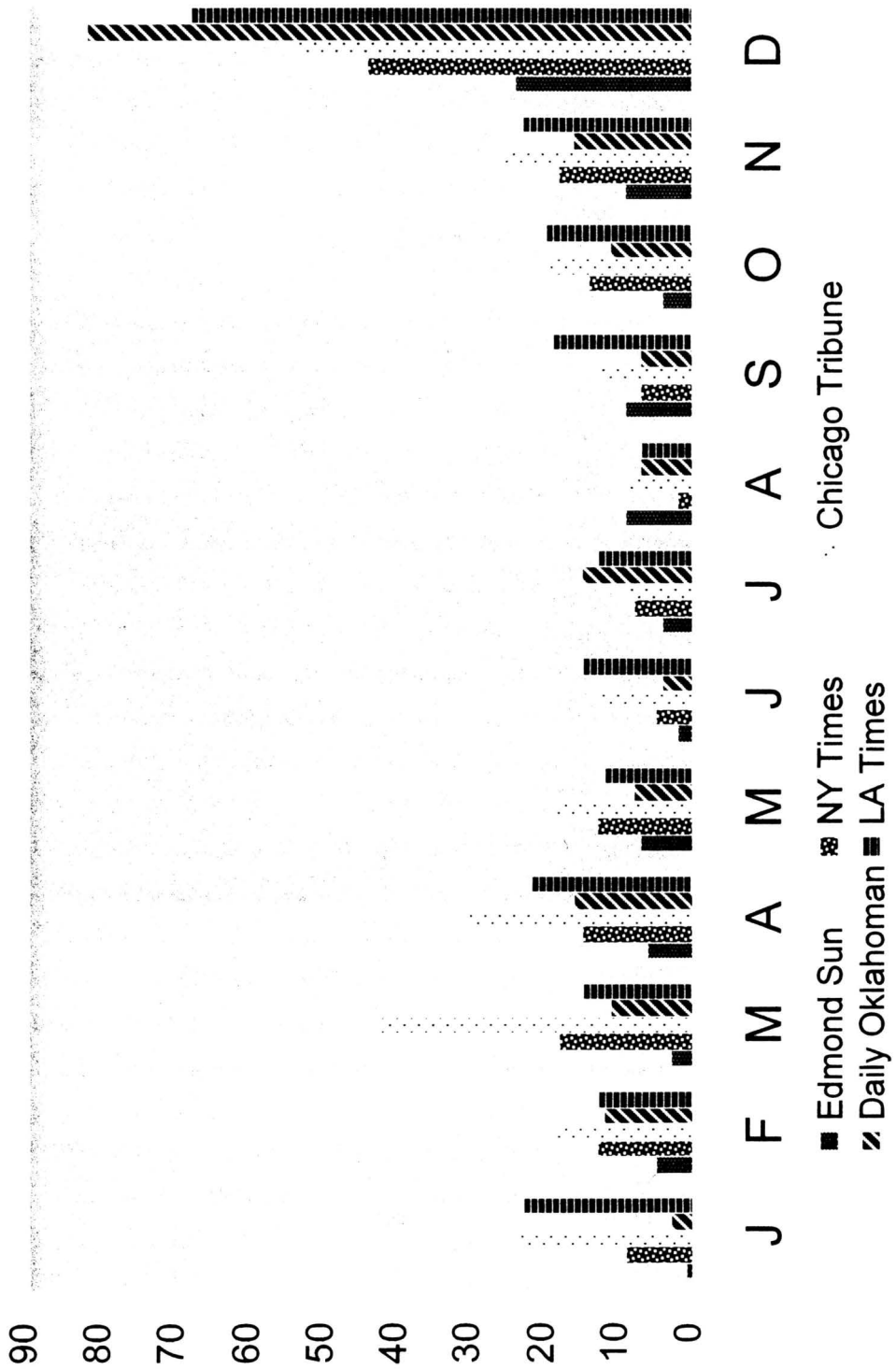


Table 2 - Article Placement in Section of the Paper

	<i>Edmond Sun</i>		<i>Daily Oklahoman</i>		<i>NY Times</i>		<i>L.A. Times</i>		<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Main	45	54.2	76	39.0	13	7.8	92	36.8	124	44.3
Business	8	9.6	75	38.5	42	25.3	67	26.8	83	29.6
Nat/Int	8	9.6	8	4.1	41	24.7	2	0.8	--	--
Opinion	10	12.0	--	--	10	6.0	--	--	--	--
Editorial	2	2.4	1	0.5	5	3.0	--	--	--	--
Travel	--	--	6	3.1	4	2.4	2	0.8	8	2.9
Living*	--	--	--	--	--	--	29	11.6	--	--
Calendar*	--	--	--	--	--	--	11	4.4	--	--
Circuits^	--	--	--	--	10	6.0	--	--	--	--
Tempo\$	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	23	8.2
Metro*	--	--	--	--	--	--	24	9.6	--	--
Local	2	2.4	3	1.5	3	1.8	1	0.4	6	2.1
Art	--	--	--	--	11	6.6	--	--	18	6.4
Science	--	--	--	--	2	1.2	--	--	--	--
Tech^	--	--	--	--	11	6.6	--	--	--	--
Road to 2000+	--	--	13	6.7	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other**	8	9.6	13	6.7	14	8.4	22	8.8	18	6.4
Total	83		195		166		250		280	

*L.A. Times only

^New York Times only

\$Chicago Tribune only

+Daily Oklahoman only

**includes such sections as Jobs, Sports

source. In December, the *Daily Oklahoman* published over 30 percent of the total number of articles published. The *Edmond Sun* published the fewest number of articles every month except August.

Table 2 is a summary of the newspaper sections in which articles were found. Although nearly every section of all five newspapers was represented with at least one article, the greatest number of articles was found in either the Business section or the Main section. A few articles were collapsed into the Other category which included sections like Jobs, Sports, Entertainment, Highway.

Over 50 percent (n=45) of the articles found in the *Edmond Sun* were found in the Main section. Thirty-nine percent (n=76) of the *Daily Oklahoman* articles were located in the Main section and 38.5 percent (n=75) in the Business section. A small number of articles were located in the Road to 2000 section, a section exclusive to the *Daily Oklahoman*.

In the *New York Times* only a few articles

were located in the Main section, 25.3 percent (n=42) in the Business section and 24.7 percent (n=41) in the National/International section. The Opinion, Editorial, Arts, Tech (a section unique to the *New York Times*) and the Other sections also contained articles worth noting.

Almost thirty-seven percent (n=92) of the *L.A. Times* articles were located in the Main section and 26.8 percent (n=67) in the Business section. Several articles were located in the Southern California Living and Metro sections (both sections unique to the *L.A. Times*). The Other section also contained a fair representation of articles.

Just over forty-four percent (n=124) of the *Chicago Tribune* articles were located in the Main section and 29.6 percent (n=83) were located in the Business section. Twenty-one percent of the articles published in the *Chicago Tribune* were located in the Tempo (n=23) (unique to the *Chicago Tribune*), Arts (n=18), and Other (n=18) sections.

A breakdown of articles by category for each of the five newspapers is set out in Table

Table 3 - Articles by Category

	<i>Edmond Sun</i>	<i>Daily Oklahoman</i>	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>LA Times</i>	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	Totals
Y2K	66	149	46	174	175	610
Millennium	8	17	30	40	41	136
Relig. Move.	1	2	0	0	1	4
Cult/Hate	0	2	4	5	6	17
Year 2000	0	16	42	1	0	59
Apocalyptic	0	3	2	5	10	20
Multiple Categories	7	4	42	10	47	110
Other	1	2	0	15	0	18
Totals	83	195	166	250	280	974

3. The number of articles written relative to Y2K far exceeded any of the other categories. Significantly, the number of Y2K articles exceeded all other categories combined by more than a 2:1 ratio. Y2K articles represented over 50 percent of the articles in each of the newspapers except the *New York Times*. This is due to the *New York Times'* reference to matters relative to Y2K as year 2000. This also explains why the *New York Times* had a larger representation in the Year 2000 category than any of the other newspapers.

The number of articles in the second largest category "millennium" was still far below the number of Y2K articles. The national newspapers published more millennium articles than any of the local newspapers.

Surprisingly, there were few articles with religious movement, cultic or apocalyptic themes (41 total). The *Chicago Tribune* published most of the articles found in these categories. The *Chicago Tribune* published twice as many apocalyptic articles than any of the other newspapers.

Many articles addressed multiple categories. For example, an article may have contained a Y2K, apocalyptic and/or a millennium theme. Therefore, a "multiple category" was established. Both the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* published more multi-categorized articles than the other three newspapers.

YEAR 2000

The researchers continued their data collection of the five newspapers into the first three days of the Year 2000. We compared the contents of coverage appearing after the new year to those prior to January 1, 2000. Several patterns were observed. First, an overwhelming number of articles appeared in each of the newspapers on January 1,

2000, relative to the prior twelve months. Each national newspaper devoted an entire section to matters related to the millennium and/or Y2K. Nearly all millennium articles related to celebrations of the new year. Only the *Edmond Sun* did not cover these celebrations. Y2K articles were slightly more varied, but were dominated by an anti-climactic theme. Consistent with the data from 1999, very few articles in any of the newspapers addressed cultic or apocalyptic activities or religious movements. As expected, there was a difference in subcategories, as 1999 focused on Y2K readiness while issues in 2000 portrayed Y2K as anti-climactic. In addition, 1999 publications contained many multiple categories, while 2000 publications focused on millennium celebrations.

The *New York Times'* coverage exceeded the other two national newspapers with the first ten pages of the Main section devoted to Y2K and millennium issues. Two special sections were included: The Millennium and The Millennium Part II which totaled 52 pages. These sections included reflections of the past millennium and a look toward the new millennium.

The headlines appearing on the front page of the *Edmond Sun's* first issue of the new year reinforced the anti-climactic theme of the national newspapers: "Y2K bug doesn't bite." In addition, headlines and articles appearing in this issue were related to the success of Oklahoma's planning in regard to Y2K. In the Neighbors section, there was a lengthy article which expressed concern that the Y2K catastrophe could still be lurking. Dissimilar to the national newspapers and the *Daily Oklahoman*, the first few issues of the 2000 *Edmond Sun* rendered no coverage to millennium celebrations. However, similar to the other newspapers,

there was an absence of cultic, apocalyptic and religious movement themes.

The first issue of the new year of the *Daily Oklahoman*, similar to the national newspapers, was extensive in its coverage of Y2K and the millennium. Most of the Y2K articles related to the anti-climactic nature of the "Bug." This is reflected by some of the headlines: "Y2K Bug turns out to be more like Y2-zzzzz," which appeared on the front page of the January 1, 2000, issue. Another headline appearing in the Main section, "Y2K: Apocalypse Not," further echoed this theme.

Similar to the national papers, the first issue of the *Daily Oklahoman* was also extensive in its coverage of local, national and international millennium celebrations. An entire page in the Main section reported what Oklahomans were doing during the final moments of 1999. A second page was devoted to the events of the other 49 states.

Front page headlines in the January 2, 2000 issue, were as colorful in portraying the anti-climactic nature of the millennium and Y2K events: "And Life Goes On: 2000 Rolls in Bug-Free"; "Only New Year's Glitch is Spelling Millennium." While the January 1, 2000, issue looked at how Oklahomans celebrated New Year's Eve, the January 2, 2000, issue included multiple pages devoted to the preparedness of each county and municipality in Oklahoma. New Year's Eve celebrations across the nation and around the world were also covered. One obscure headline in the January 2, 2000, edition summed up attitudes toward the Y2K and millennium concerns: "End of world? Many say they'd party, then pray."

DISCUSSION

As stated, we did not devise a testable, concrete hypothesis. We discussed, however, possible scenarios that might develop as the year progressed. For example, while we did not have a specific idea as to the absolute numbers of articles or the variation in numbers of articles from month to month, we did expect a graduated increase toward the conclusion of 1999. This was borne out by the data, although it occurred much later than what we had anticipated (emerging in late December).

As indicated in the introduction to this paper, we anticipated problems associated with the Y2K phenomenon and the advent of a new millennium. Perusal of the articles dur-

ing the year, including New Year's Eve, showed a notable absence of catastrophic events of any kind. The coverage of all related themes throughout the year ostensibly focussed on Y2K articles. Most of these articles dealt with preparedness of local, state and federal entities. A few alarmist articles were published regarding the lack of Y2K preparedness in some areas, such as in the military or in foreign countries.

In similar fashion, we were surprised by the dearth of articles on the topics of doomsday, Armageddon, apocalypse, and related themes. The most notable mention of any religious extremism was associated with other countries rather than domestic groups. For example, reports in several data sources regarding groups in Israel, China and Japan created some concern. The most extensive domestic coverage of the apocalyptic theme occurred in the November 1, 1999, issue of *Newsweek*. The cover was entitled, "Prophecy: What the Bible Says About the End of the World". One major article and several secondary articles appeared in this issue.

The most intriguing finding in this study was the absence of any significant event related to Y2K or the new millennium. Without a detailed thematic analysis of each article, we can only speculate as to lack of aberrant events. The highly industrialized societies, newly developing and least developed countries experienced little disruption in commerce or services. We anticipated that the least developed countries were less likely to experience any problems. This may be due to the absence or under-developed infrastructure predicated upon computer technology. The lower end of the technology spectrum appeared to be immune to such disruption. At the other end of the continuum, the highly industrialized nations experienced little disruption. In the final analysis, Y2K commenced with a whimper, rather than a bang.

Weber's (1921/1968) theory of rationalization may be one plausible explanation for this lack of disruption. Weber suggested that an increasing number of sectors within society would be dominated by rational principles. This appears to be the case for the Y2K phenomenon. The data indicate that the most alarming articles came in the Spring of 1999. The numbers decreased over the summer and then steadily increased to the pinnacle in late December. A cursory view of the titles seemed to abate the fears of a tech-

nological breakdown. As we approached the year 2000, an increasingly rational focus with concomitant technical solutions dominated the print media landscape. Technology also played a crucial role in abating public anxiety. For example, countries that were many time zones ahead of the U. S. were seen via television celebrating the new year. These nations did not report any problems.

A second point may be made from Weber's (1921/1968) ideas. Industrialized societies that appear to be most vulnerable and at the greatest risk are also highly secularized and rationalized. Weber's pessimism regarding the "iron cage" of rationality may partly explain the dearth of articles on religious zealots and other millennialists. In previous centuries the dominant theme was ostensibly religious. This study suggests that religious fears were eclipsed by technical problems with rational resolutions. This is not to suggest that religious extremism has been forever silenced. A cursory view indicates religious fervor in many industrialized and post-industrialized countries. But it is clear that today's social concerns are answered with technical solutions. Also important to note is that millennial or apocalyptic groups are not only encumbered by rationality, but by routinization as well. Sociologists of religion have noted that routinization dampens proclivities toward violent, aberrant behavior.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous finding is the treatment of these issues by the media. As previously stated, there was a notable lack of alarmist or provocative types of articles. Collective behavior theorists have cited the importance of the role of the media in promoting or encouraging various types of collective action. Among the seven sources of print media examined, it was remarkable that all exhibited restraint in reporting the issues.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE CONTENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH

In conducting this research, we became aware of the problems associated with content analysis research, particularly in reference to Internet technology as a means of accessing the print media. We would recommend to someone conducting this type of research to define their source as either the "on-line edition" or the "published edition" of particular print media. Unfortunately, the two sources diverge from one another. In addition, ascertaining the placement of an

article in the published version from the on-line version is not possible. Also, we found that newspapers are not consistent with one another in their design or layout. Newspaper publishers also cater to their unique local population, making it extraordinarily difficult to perform a comparative analysis. Making decisions relative to these variations is recommended prior to research. We would also recommend that fewer sources be included in the research, allowing more time for in-depth analysis of the contents of the articles from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

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