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Canadian newspaper coverage of the Alberta oil sands:
The intractability of neoliberalism

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Paul, whose support made it all possible.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between Canadian newspapers, the development of Alberta's oil sands, and neoliberalism. It uses both content and discourse analysis to analyze coverage of oil sands development in six English-Canadian newspapers between October 1, 2005 and October 31, 2007. During this period of contestation, a variety of actors were questioning the central tenets of the neoliberal policy frame governing oil sands development. Policy frames do change over time, as transformative discourses—which challenge the empirical and normative bases of an existing policy frame—gain broader acceptance and replace an existing frame. Media coverage plays an important role in deconstructing and reconstructing policy frames by articulating transformative ideas and goals. The goal of this analysis is to determine the extent to which newspaper reporting about the oil sands reflected augmentative or transformative discourses, or both.

My analysis found that, in general, these newspapers continued to embrace the augmentative discourses advanced by industry and government actors. While acknowledging some policy failures, these discourses reasserted solutions that fell within the normative boundaries of neoliberalism. Augmentative discourses prevailed across all news frames: economic, environmental, social, and those related to energy security. Transformative discourses, while not altogether absent from the coverage, were generally marginalized. That major dailies relegated the majority of their oil sands coverage to the business section served to institutionalize neoliberal values. Moreover, the newspapers repeatedly treated the normative values associated with neoliberalism as fact, requiring no further support or justification. Conversely, the newspapers viewed

critiques as controversial. This triggered the need to provide 'balance' by giving industry and government actors who were publicly criticized the opportunity to respond, which further contributed to the strength of augmentative discourses. In addition, the newspapers primarily assigned responsibility to government, rather than industry, for policy failures. Paradoxically, by embracing neoliberal values, newspaper coverage delegitimized many of the policy instruments that government could use in their efforts to resolve these challenges. These findings demonstrate the limitations of journalistic practices to capture the complexity of policy issues surrounding oil sands development. I argue that the outcome of these limitations is the further entrenchment of neoliberalism.

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1 Neoliberalism, newspapers, and the Alberta oil sands

Unfortunately wealth like this isn't healthy for vibrant democracy or public debates. It's too easy for the government to buy us off—not just with rebate cheques and RESP contributions, but with hospitals and highways and art galleries and zoos.

—Shelia Pratt, columnist, *Edmonton Journal*, December 8, 2005: B1

Journalism plays a critical role in fostering a vibrant public debate within a democracy. In this regard, we have assigned journalists—and they have accepted—several key functions. They are expected to inform us about complex issues and help us to understand them, investigate sources of concentrated power on our behalf, and help us connect with each other and with decision-makers (Schudson, 2008: 13). While examples of journalists fulfilling these functions can be found within individual newspapers, social science studies routinely find that news coverage as a whole presents a worldview that consistently reinforces dominant policy frames (Schudson, 2008: 51). Yet change does happen, often as a result of new ideas that challenge the empirical and normative basis of a current policy frame and introduce new transformative discourses. Media coverage is not immune from these shifts and thus needs to be understood as part of these broader transformations. Media discourses have the potential to deconstruct and reconstruct a policy frame, defined as a coherent framework consisting of a particular set of normative and cognitive elements (Greenberg, 2005: 252-253). By capturing and relaying transformative discourses, the news media can facilitate a change of policy frame. In order for ideas to coalesce into a force capable of shaping policy, they need to be transformed into compelling narratives. In short, transformative change requires a strong discourse in the form of a story that is

embraced and retold through the news media—one that is strong enough to overcome previously held convictions about the viability of the existing policy frame.

This study is about Canadian newspapers, the development of Alberta's oil sands, and neoliberalism. More specifically, it is about how cracks in the neoliberal policy frame governing oil sands development grew into transformative discourses that the media could ignore, dismiss or discredit, or conversely could reproduce and amplify. As Sauvageau et al. (2005: 10) notes, “news is a contested ground where a variety of forces and factors can determine the nature of reporting.” As one of the key central public forums for democratic mobilization, the Canadian news media plays an important role in the transmission, acceptance, and reversal of policy frames. This dissertation examines whether six English Canadian newspapers embraced a transformative discourse in their coverage of oil sands development by reflecting calls and/or building support for significant policy change. Alternatively, despite a broad range of actors calling for change, did the newspapers, by reinforcing neoliberal values or only supporting marginal changes to the neoliberal policy frame, result in an augmentative discourse? The goal of this dissertation is to uncover the particular forces and factors that shaped how Canadian newspapers covered this nationally significant issue.

It is important to clarify what is meant by ‘neoliberal values’, as the term has come to reflect a multitude of meanings (Jones, 2012: 1-2). At its heart, neoliberalism is a valorization of the market and the extension of market principles into the state and throughout society. Adopting Harvey’s (2007) definition, neoliberalism:

...is a theory of political economic practices that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade (22).

The attractiveness of neoliberalism at the societal level lies in its promise to revive stagnant economies through policies such as deregulation, free trade, and privatization (Taylor and Friedel, 2011: 816; Harvey 2002: 22). Neoliberal faith in the market is so strong that it is not enough for the state to simply “unbind” existing markets from regulations; neoliberals “seek to make existing markets wider and to create new markets where they did not exist before” (Connell, 2010: 23). At the individual level, its appeal lies in the assurance that an individual’s quality of life will rise through the adoption of its tenets (Harvey, 2005: 22). Although a neoliberal state actively divests itself of regulatory powers, it would be a mischaracterization to classify this state form as a “withering of the state” as the state retains an active role in the creation and preservation of the market economy (Jones, 2012; Slowey, 2008; Harvey, 2005, 2007).

Neoliberalism did not simply emerge, nor should it be treated as a “political and economic fact” (Jones, 2012: 1-10). Neoliberalism was once itself a transformative discourse—challenging the normative values and empirical basis for the post-war welfare state based on the Fordist-Keynesian economic model that existed in many advanced industrialized countries, including Canada. Although a series of economic crises in the 1970s challenged the validity of this existing policy frame, neoliberalism's ascendancy was not assured as it was forced to compete with other possible alternatives (Bradford, 1998:7). The rise of neoliberalism was aided by the fact that it was an “elite-driven movement” whose “main proponents were academics, politicians, and *journalists*” (Jones, 2012: 8-7; my emphasis). As “the preferred vehicle of neoliberal thinkers,” think tanks not only developed new policy ideas, but they also played a critical role in building networks aimed at increasing the reach of the movement (Ibid). Wealthy businesspeople and foundations provided funding for these think tanks.

Individual politicians and journalists were also instrumental in transmitting neoliberal ideas to a broader audience (Ibid). Governments began to view neoliberalism as a means to revitalize their stagnant economies and narrow the scope of their obligation. An essential element in the success of neoliberalism was the use of a “simple political language” of low taxation and limited government that resonated, to a large degree, with populations in Western countries (Ibid). The strength of the ideology also benefited from the fact that some societal actors saw it as means to increase their autonomy from a state they viewed as an ineffective or illegitimate administrator (McCarthy, 2007:1007). The alignment of government and industry interests, combined with the use of populist language, brought the neoliberal doctrine, previously considered to be part of the ‘extreme right’, into the mainstream. Neoliberalism moved from being a transformative discourse to the dominant policy frame used by government to justify the roll-back of policies and structural relationships associated with the post-war welfare state.

Neoliberalism’s “obsession with the market corroded the idea of the public realm” (Jones, 2012: 6:48). As a result, neoliberal policies tend to result in significant environmental impacts (Harvey, 2005: 172-175; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275). Scholars cite neoliberalism’s “political and ideological antagonism” towards regulation as key contributor to this tendency (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 276). State regulations are rolled back or restructured and privatized in the name of competitiveness. For example, governments embracing the neoliberal doctrine have downsized regulatory enforcement staff and embraced the concept of industry self-regulation (Ibid). When such actions conflict with labour rights or the health of the natural environment, a neoliberal state will tend to side with business (Harvey, 2005:

70). As Brodie (2007: 100) argues, the underlying goal is to increase efficiency, rather than pursuing “what is right, fair, or possible.”

Not only does neoliberalism abhor state interference, it is also an “environmental project” in itself (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 277). It views nature instrumentally, assigning value to the natural environment based only on the amount of human labour invested in it (Ibid). Stemming from this key tenet, neoliberalism grants individuals the right to exclusive control over land and allows its unlimited acquisition (Ibid). Neoliberals believe that the protection of individual property rights forms “the foundation of just and efficient social order” (Ibid). It is not only individuals that hold these rights. Notably, corporations have acquired these rights as the law treats them as if they were individuals (Harvey, 2005: 64). In the context of resource development, this privileges economic considerations and grants significant decision-making authority over development to business.

In part, neoliberalism gained broad acceptance because business actors did not “dismiss or reject environmental concerns outright” (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 279). Business actors readily accepted the idea of ‘sustainable development’ when they were assured that environmental policy solutions would “be found within the context of economic growth based in capitalist values and distribution of power” (MacDonald, 2007:184). The success of neoliberalism pushed environmentalists to relinquish some of their more radical critiques—such as limits to growth and bioequity—and embrace the concept of sustainable development in order to move closer to the “centre of the policy dialogue” (MacDonald, 2007: 184). This led some environmentalists to adopt policies in alignment with neoliberal discourse, like a tradeable emission credits regime (McCarthy

and Prudham, 2004: 279). Despite this apparent cooptation of environmental discourse, “environmental concerns (still) represent the most powerful source of political opposition to neoliberalism”—particularly those surrounding the issues of scarcity and risk (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275).

In practice, neoliberalism had a “chaotic evolution,” its implementation “geographically uneven and temporally unstable (depending on who held the reins of state power)” (Harvey, 2005: 172). Neoliberalism is not a single set of policies; it exists in various hybrid forms, resulting in a significant amount of variability in its application (McCarthy, 2005: 1007). As such, it is important to distinguish between the neoliberal state in theory and how it developed within Canada. Neoliberalism altered, but did not eradicate, all elements of the Canadian welfare state (Slowey, 2008: xiii).

Canadian corporations actively built support for neoliberalism and lobbied for its integration into public policy through a high level of business activism. This was achieved through the formation and growth of advocacy think tanks and business associations such as the Canadian Council of Chief Executives¹ (Bradford, 2004: 242, 245; Carroll and Shaw, 2001: 211). Beginning in the 1980s, Canada embraced neoliberalism as a means of staying competitive. Believing that the country’s interests were in alignment with those of business, the Canadian state² turned its attention to attracting investment by creating a favourable climate for business (Slowey, 2008: 14).

¹ This group lobbied extensively for free trade and was formerly known the Business Council on National Issues. Their current focus has broadened to include to competitiveness, productivity, and the further expansion of free trade.

² I use the term ‘Canadian state’ when I want to refer to both orders of government—federal and provincial—as a whole. The unique roles and responsibilities of the federal and provincial government in relationship to oil sands development are discussed in Chapter 3.

Neoliberalism was consolidated in Canada with the successful adoption of North American Free Trade Agreement (Carroll and Shaw, 2001: 197). The Canadian state by and large embraced the application of market principles to the delivery of government services, taxation rates, and regulations (Brodie, 2003: 25-27; Carroll and Shaw, 2001: 195-196). However, some key policy areas, such as health care, remained relatively untouched (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 730-735). Despite this partial implementation of neoliberalism, Canadian society has become increasingly polarized into 'haves' and 'have-nots' (Brodie, 2007: 94).

Neoliberalism has increased, rather than reduced, our reliance on Canada's natural resource industries. Due to our rich natural endowments and proximity to the large American market, it is one area where we have a competitive advantage (Public Policy Forum, 2012: 1). Embracing an agenda of innovation and competitiveness, Canada has pursued new natural resource developments, strengthened traditional resource industries by investing new technologies, sought out new markets for natural resource products, and maintained a stable financial sector and a low-tax environment (Ibid). The Canadian state has succeeded in creating a very business-friendly environment. But as Slowey (2008) points out, the accommodation of business interests while developing our resources for an external market is not a new endeavour for the Canadian state. What is new under neoliberalism are the strategies utilized to achieve those goals (15).³

In the early 1990s, the broad acceptance of neoliberalism shaped how both the Canadian state and the oil industry approached reigniting development in the Alberta oil

³One such strategy cited by Slowey is the dispossession of Aboriginal titles in order to open up vast areas for settlement and resource development.

sands. Both government and industry rejected the previous model used to develop Suncor and Syncrude in the 1960s and 1970s, characterized by one-off agreements and direct state investment. Instead, the Canadian state implemented a neoliberal policy frame whose hallmark policies included the institutionalization of free trade, replacing existing fiscal agreements with even more generous ones including the implementation of a generic royalty regime, and the continuation of a project-based (as opposed to a cumulative or a regionally-based) environmental review processes. If success is to be understood solely in terms of attracting investment and fuelling growth, then these policies were wildly successful. They were so successful that they even exceeded original expectations of both industry and government; production tripled in just 8 years, as opposed to the projected 25, and companies invested \$100 billion in the industry, not the \$21 - \$25 billion initially envisioned (Gillespie, 2008). This growth occurred despite the fact that provincial and federal governments lacked any plan to mitigate the negative environmental and social externalities arising from the rapid development of new oil sands projects.

However, by the mid-2000s the “policy problem”⁴ in Alberta was no longer how to reignite oil sands growth, but how to slow it down as the sheer volume of new developments had outstripped the province’s capacity to manage growth. A broad range of actors, not simply those on the left who have traditionally been opposed to the industry, were openly questioning the government’s plan for the orderly development of the oil sands. These criticisms ranged from questioning the facts used to support the current neoliberal policy frame to targeting some of its underlying normative values.

⁴ As Bhatia and Coleman (2003) aptly state, “the definition of a policy problem...arises from perceived discrepancies between what *is* and what *ought* to be” (emphasis in the original).

The oil sands industry and government responded to this challenge by reiterating the neoliberal positions that been effective in the past.

The debate over oil sands development forms part of a much larger debate as neoliberalism's most extreme versions have been "beaten back in places by virulent resistance" or "undermined by its own failures" (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275). With the return of budget surpluses in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were signs that the Canadian state was reinvesting in some social policy areas as well as in the public service (Brodie, 2007: 93). Despite having been the dominant policy frame for the last thirty years, neoliberalism is neither an absolute, nor is it unchangeable. Although the news media was a key site where neoliberal discourse was consolidated, it can also provide a "space where [neoliberal policies] can be challenged and blame for their side effects can be apportioned" (Greenberg, 2005: 254). However, criticism alone is insufficient to affect policy change. For change to occur, a new policy frame needs to be advanced through a transformative discourse. I posit that for a transformative discourse to be successful it needs to gain acceptance as a viable alternative to a current policy frame in the mainstream media.

Research question

Did newspaper coverage of the oil sands present an augmentative discourse by reinforcing the existing neoliberal policy frame? Or were news discourses more transformative in nature, by reflecting calls and/or building support for significant policy change? My primary research questions lead to the following subsidiary questions: What types of news frames did the newspapers employ in their coverage of the oil sands? Did business interests remain prominent throughout all types of news frames, or

were there any alternative interests represented in the reporting of the oil sands? How did the media portray government's interests vis-à-vis these business interests? How can patterns found in the coverage be explained? Before moving forward, it is necessary to define the central research question's key terms and examine the nature of these questions more closely.

First, adopting Surel's (2000: 496) definition, policy frames are "coherent systems of normative and cognitive elements which define, in a given field, 'worldviews', mechanisms of identity formation, principles of actions, as well as methodological prescriptions and practices for actors subscribing to the same frame." As Bhatia and Coleman (2003: 718) suggest, a policy frame defines the boundaries of what is acceptable. It is important to note that small policy failures, such as efficiency or effectiveness problems, can be adequately resolved without requiring a complete shift in policy frame. Resolution of such issues may only require the resetting of policy instruments within the normative values of the existing policy frame (Bhatia and Coleman, 2009: 719). Policy frames falter fundamentally when they can no longer resolve problems or adequately explain why major events are occurring; they may then be replaced by an entirely new policy frame. However, new policy frames facilitate, rather than cause, policy change as "policy actors are moved to frame policy problems differently, certain policy options appear more possible and others less so" (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 718).

Policy frames, which serve to identify which issues are deemed worthy of our attention, do not "simply appear in some vague location called society" but are "actively constructed, defined and contested in identifiable public arenas" (Hansen, 2010: 2-3).

Policy actors arguing for the preservation of an existing policy frame are employing an augmentative discourse, whereas those who “seek to persuade others of the merits of an alternative frame” are employing a transformative discourse (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 718). Drawing on Bhatia and Coleman’s (2003) definitions, augmentative discourses serve to reinforce or justify the normative values and cognitive elements of the existing policy frame in order to further institutionalize it (719). By employing rhetorical arguments, actors reaffirm the underlying normative bases of the policy frame at either a program-oriented or a systemic level (720). This type of discourse can also accommodate small policy failures when solutions are proposed within the confines of the policy frame’s normative values (Ibid). In this second instance, the augmentative discourse serves to justify the validity of policy frame’s systemic rules while proposing instrumental changes to individual policy instruments (Ibid).

Transformative discourses, on the other hand, openly challenge the appropriateness of facts associated with the existing policy frame in an effort to build support for alternative strategies or policy instruments, with “disagreements centr[ing] on which facts are accurate, which ones are relevant and how a given set of facts ought to be interpreted” (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 719). Transformative discourses may also contest the core principles of the existing policy frame (Ibid). In order to be persuasive, transformative discourses must also tap into core values (such as personal freedom) and demonstrate that incongruence exists between the normative values of the existing policy frame and its real world application (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: Ibid). Transformative discourses are only likely to emerge in newspaper coverage when there is broad consensus among policy actors that the current policy frame no longer is sufficient to resolve the critical issues in question.

The above discussion presupposes the existence of ideal types.⁵ In reality, there is a broad range of possible discourses that may exist concurrently within each categorization, and disagreements may even occur amongst actors within a particular discourse. In addition, actors may advance both augmentative and transformative discourses at the same time in an attempt to address different aspects of a public policy issue. Furthermore, augmentative actors may themselves employ language commonly used by those seeking change as a means of deflecting criticism. For instance, the ability of actors to stretch a concept like “integrated resource management” to encompass a multiplicity of meanings can appear to be creating consensus or the appearance of political action where none, in fact, exists (Davidson and MacKendrick, 2004). Likewise, actors desirous of transformative change may also adopt augmentative language or policy instruments in their attempt to build support for their goals. As previously noted, some environmentalists have adopted neoliberal policy instruments as means to effect change (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 279). These types of activities can serve to blur the distinction between augmentative and transformative discourses.

To determine whether news media embraced either augmentative or transformative discourses in their coverage of oil sands development, it is important to analyze how the media employed different news frames in the various stories on the subject. Since a few hundred words cannot adequately represent the complexity of public policy issues journalists, out of necessity, use news frames as a “general organizing device” to make issues more easily digestible for the reader (Nisbet, 2010:

⁵ Although I do not use the author’s sub-categorization, I note that Bhatia and Coleman (2003) developed four ideal types: rhetorical and instrumental, falling under the augmentative category, and challenging and truth-seeking under the transformative heading. For a full description of these sub-categorizations see the above reference.

49). News frames work by suggesting that there is “a connection between two concepts, issues, or things such that after exposure to the framed message, audiences accept or are at least aware of the connection” (Nisbet, 2010: 47). News frames can contain “pro, anti, and neutral arguments” within them and thus are broader than particular policy positions (Ibid). News frames often do not appear as social constructions because they are based upon commonly held beliefs; as such news frames often appear “natural,” reflecting the primary attributes of an event (Ryan, 1991: 68-70). By employing a particular news frame, the media is involved in making judgements about what is relevant, who is responsible, and what should be perceived as a legitimate solution to any problem, as illustrated by Entman’s (1993: 56) seminal definition:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

It is by making these judgments that a news frame can lend support to or, conversely, challenge the underlying normative values and/or empirical basis upon which a current policy frame is built. A news frame, by definition, privileges certain aspects of an issue over others; however, by utilizing a particular news frame throughout the body of its news coverage, the media can raise the frame’s overall salience (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 4).

Second, in order to understand what journalists ‘add’ to the story themselves, we must also analyse the interests of all the various actors. This “can be determined by observing the difference between what sources wish to directly convey to audience members or known constituents and what news stories do to those messages” (D’Angelo, 2010: 358). Journalists open themselves to criticism when they distort a

source's message to such an extent as to make their ideas unrecognizable, or ascribe claims to sources that were not initially intended (Ibid). Likewise, journalists who fail to 'unpack' or scrutinize a source's preferred frame also face reproach (Ibid).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am concerned with two different types of interests. Adopting MacDonald's (2007: 9) definitions, a *policy interest* represents what an individual actor wants government to do in a specific policy area. A *broader political interest* is "defined as what it [the actor] wants other non-governmental actors (including the general public) to do or think" (Ibid). This leads to three lines of inquiry. First, what were the policy and broader political interests of business actors? In general, businesses are expected to act rationally--economically speaking--and seek to maximize their financial return on capital invested (Macdonald, 2007: 20-21). Faced with changes to the fiscal or regulatory framework, businesses will generally seek to negotiate with government to delay or alter implementation of a proposed framework in order to minimize the costs of compliance (Macdonald, 2007: 10). While they are primarily guided by the profit-motive, businesses will seek public legitimacy both "as a means of defusing external pressure," and in recognition of their societal responsibilities (Macdonald, 2007: 180).

The second line of enquiry relates to how the media incorporates both types of business interests into the various news frames. Businesses will generally prefer closed-door negotiations when lobbying for their specific policy interests and thus rely on the media to build support only for their broader public image (e.g., their image as concerned corporate citizens) (Hansen 2010: 3-35; MacDonald 2007: 182). As such, the absence of specific policy interests in a story does not necessarily indicate that business interests are not being represented.

The third line of enquiry questions whether the interests of alternative actors-- those that directly question either the policies or broader political interest of business-- make it into news frames and are they able to disrupt/counter those of business. Alternative actors are generally required to seek out media attention for their positions and claims. However, simply garnering a large amount of media coverage is an insufficient measure of success, since the media may ignore, dismiss, or ridicule their underlying claims and wider political objectives in the news coverage of these actors (Hansen, 2010: 3-5; Anderson, 2003: 131; Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 115-116). As an elite actor, government has, at any given time, ready access to the media (van Dijk, 1998: 120). However, the media will often discredit government actors if their position runs counter to business interests (Westell cited by Taras, 2001: 59). This raises the question of the degree to which the media are supportive of government's policy interests. It is important to examine how the media incorporate these interests because neoliberal theory is prescriptive—assigning specific roles and responsibilities for state and non-state actors. As highlighted above, the primary role of the state under neoliberalism is to protect the free market. Individuals are:

...not supposed to choose to construct strong collective institutions (such as trade unions) as opposed to weak voluntary associations (like charitable organizations). They most certainly should not choose to associate to create political parties with the aim of forcing the state to intervene in or eliminate the market (Harvey, 2005: 69).

Harvey argues that the result is a paradox wherein the state may act in a highly interventionist manner in order to preserve a non-interventionist ideal (Ibid).

How can patterns in the coverage be explained? To understand how particular news frames were constructed and why some interests prevailed over others, one must examine not only the claims made in stories utilizing each particular news frame and the

actors involved in making those claims, but also the institutional structures of the setting (i.e., journalistic norms and organizational structures) which can serve to constrain, from the outset, how a news story is presented (Hansen, 2010: 4-27). Exploring the intersections between these three elements will provide insight into why the print media covered the oil sands the way it did.

To answer the research questions, I conducted an extensive content and discourse analysis of newspaper articles relating to oil sands development in six Canadian newspapers. All articles were required to be over 300 words in length⁶ and were gathered from the 25-month period from October 1, 2005 to October 31, 2007. In order to contextualize these findings, I also reviewed a variety of source documents from key actors. The rationale behind my selection of news texts and the study period are presented below. Chapter 3 provides a complete overview of the methods employed in this study.

Selection of news texts

I chose to examine newspaper articles—as opposed to magazine or web articles—because, in comparison to other media sources, they are “highly responsive to [the] structural characteristics of the communities in which they publish” (Bendix and Liebler, 1999: 661).⁷ As such, they are often in the best position to capture and report

⁶ Due to their brevity, stories fewer than 300 words tended to address particular issues related to a specific oil sands company (e.g., the appointment of new board members) as opposed to addressing broader oil sands development or community issues.

⁷ As Bendix and Liebler discuss, it may be assumed that the use of wire service copy or articles from sister publications reduces the number of differences between newspapers from different locations. However, wire stories used locally are often edited for length and content and may be revised to highlight a local angle. Even stories run “as is” represent a conscious decision to render the story newsworthy for their particular audience.

on the emergence of transformative discourses when they arise. Newspaper coverage also provides insight into how the broader English Canadian news media covers issues since two of the media organizations included in this study own both television stations and newspapers (Sampert, 2006: 8). In addition, newspapers increasingly serve as news aggregators utilizing information and ideas from semi-professional bloggers (Sampert, 2012). For these reasons, despite declining readership, newspapers remain highly relevant to understanding how the broader news media frames the issue of oil sands development.

I chose six newspapers for my analysis. Three papers from within Alberta were selected: the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and *Fort McMurray Today*. The other three papers came from outside the province: the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star*. This section begins by reviewing the local paper, *Fort McMurray Today*, followed by the provincial papers, and lastly, the national papers. Included in this latter category is the *Toronto Star*, which continues to help set the national media agenda due to its sizeable readership and public reputation as a “serious” paper (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 141).

All the major oil sands mines, and many in-situ projects, are located within the boundaries of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. I selected *Fort McMurray Today* because it is the only paper serving this large geographic area. It began publishing in 1974. In 2007, as a Monday to Friday broadsheet, *Fort McMurray Today* had a weekly circulation of 18,805 (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2007). Sun Media (Quebecor Inc.) owns the paper.

The *Calgary Herald* and *Edmonton Journal* were both selected because, as Alberta's major dailies, they are agenda-setters within the provincial policy environment (de Loë, 1995: 222-223). They also represent communities intrinsically linked to oil sands development. Calgary is home to Canada's energy sector and is Alberta's largest city.⁸ Edmonton is the provincial capital and is surrounded by oil refineries.⁹ The *Herald* has been publishing since 1883, whereas the *Journal* started in 1903. With weekly circulations of 873,553 and 866,553 in 2007 respectively, the *Journal* and the *Herald* dominate their local markets (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2007). During the study period, CanWest Media owned both the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*. Both papers have access to two foreign bureaus in Washington and London through their parent company.

Like other media outlets in the 1990s, both the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* experienced significant restructuring as veteran reporters left and many positions were cut (Sampert, 2005: 40). Moreover, ninety experienced journalists and editors left the *Herald* after a bitter strike in 1999 (Ibid). CanWest sought to improve its "efficiency" further through its "synergy policy" which resulted

⁸ Calgary is home to the head offices of every major oil and gas company in the country, as well as the industry's major trade associations, and the National Energy Board. Calgary's population has been witness to steady and sustained growth. According to the 2006 census, Calgary's population was 988,812, representing a 12.4 percent increase from its 2001 population level. Despite the economic downturn, Calgary's population grew a further 10.9 percent between 2006 and 2011. In 2006, Calgary's economic growth rate was 7.7 percent (RDA Global, 2007: 8), the unemployment rate was around 3 percent, and housing prices reached record highs (City of Calgary, 2006: 15).

⁹ Like Calgary, Edmonton has also experienced steady growth. According to the 2006 census, its population in 2006 was 730,372, representing a 9.6 percent increase from 2001 census data. It experienced an 11.2 percent growth rate between 2006 and 2011. During the study period, Edmonton also experienced significant economic growth. For example, in 2006, the economic growth rate for the Greater Edmonton area was 5.5 percent, housing prices increased 40 percent year over year, and unemployment rested at only 3.5 percent (City of Edmonton, 2007: 7).

in the *Herald* and the *Journal* picking up stories from each other and other newspapers within the chain. In addition, both papers were often relegated, by CanWest Media, “to a kind of farm team status where they would have to play second fiddle on big national stories ‘owned’ by the *Post*” (Taras, 2001: 232). While these actions aligned with the neoliberal ideal of improving “efficiency” in order to maximize economic returns, the diminished journalistic capacity greatly affected the ability of these papers to hold governments to account (Sampert, 2005: 42).

Not only did the *Herald* and *Journal* reduce the size of their newsrooms, but these flagship Alberta papers also adopted a decidedly pro-Klein agenda (Sampert, 2005: 38). As the paper’s editor-in-chief¹⁰ of the *Journal* stated, his paper “was interested in working with the government” (Sampert, 2005: 40). This was a marked change from the *Journal*’s previous position that it “would act as an unelected opposition in the face of an earlier Tory landslide” (Ibid). In fact, the relationship between the *Journal* and the Klein government was so close that one Tory staffer “was told to treat the *Journal*’s then legislative bureau chief, Tom Olsen, as though he was part of the Public Affairs Bureau” (Gregoire, 2004: 44). One of the issues of contention during the 1999 strike at the *Herald* was the pressure placed on its staff by the paper’s publishers and senior editors regarding how critical they were of the Klein government (Sampert, 2005: 40). There is nothing to suggest that *Fort McMurray Today* deviated from this overall Klein-friendly atmosphere.

Shortly after becoming premier, Ed Stelmach appointed two members of the legislature press gallery—political columnists from the *Edmonton Sun* and the *Calgary*

¹⁰ The comment was made by Giles Gherson, editor-in-chief from 2000-2003,

Herald—to serve as his director of communications and director of media relations, respectively (Thomson, 2007, February 3: A19). This cosy nature of this relationship is not new--Epp (1984) documented a similar relationship in the late 1970s and 1980s between the Lougheed government and the mainstream press. However nearing the end of Klein's tenure, there were several signs indicating that the public and the provincial media were in a more critical mood in general, and were willing to focus on problems associated with oil sands development specifically.

Canada's two national newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* were included because of their level of influence on politics. Directly their news coverage provides fodder for Question Period in the House of Commons, and indirectly their news coverage serves as reference point for other news organizations (Sampert, 2006: 85; Taras, 1990: 87-88).

Founded in 1844, the *Globe and Mail* is Canada's second largest newspaper. In 2007, it had a weekly circulation rate of over two million (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2007). In 2006, the Thompson family reacquired their controlling interest of the *Globe and Mail* from Bell.¹¹ The arrival on the scene of the *National Post* in 1998 pushed the *Globe* to become a "better" newspaper, as it "lost some [of] its stodgy conservatives" (Taras, 2001: 232). The *Globe* remains Canada's "ruling-class broadsheet of record" (Kingston, 2009: 2), a fact that it uses in its pitches to advertisers:

¹¹ In 2001, the Thomson family sold their controlling interests in the paper to Bell, a large telecommunications company that combined it with CTV to create a single company, BCE Globemedia—part of a broad trend of cross-media convergence. In 2006, Bell sold off its controlling stake in the company, retaining only 20 percent. The Thomson family resumed their 40 percent controlling interest teaming up with the Ontario Teachers Plan and Torstar (which also owns the *Toronto Star* and several other local dailies), each acquiring a 20 percent stake. Ownership again changed hands in 2010, when the Thomson family reacquired ownership of the *Globe* with Bell retaining a 15 percent equity position (Bell, 2010). This is an example of where cross-media convergence failed to produce the expected synergies.

Globe and Mail readers include the key decision-makers of Canadian households, businesses and governments—individuals whose appetite for news and views is only satisfied by The *Globe*'s critical look at what has or is about to happen--and how these events will affect their lives. The *Globe* is the essential "morning read" in Ottawa, on Bay Street and across the country (*Globe and Mail*, 2010).

As Nesbitt-Larking (2007) argues, this readership is unlikely to be a “passive and gullible lot, with few set opinions and alternative sources of inspiration. Their opinions...are likely to be reinforced by the *Globe and Mail*, but they scarcely depend on it” (279).

The *Globe*'s stature as Canada's paper of record is supported by its reach and level of expertise. In 2005, it had seven foreign bureaus, the most of any Canadian newspaper (Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication, 2006: 10). The *Globe and Mail* views its ability to present a worldview as though coming through Canadian eyes as contributing to its strong brand identity (Kingston, 2009).

In 2007, the *National Post* had a weekly circulation rate of just over 1.2 million copies daily. The *National Post* was founded in 1998 in direct opposition to the *Globe and Mail* by the controversial Conrad Black, a man who at the time actively supported the Canadian Alliance Party (Sampert, 2006: 85). However, in a 2000 survey, Soderlund found that “in spite of Black's reputation as a conservative ideologue, his editors appear considerably more centrist than those of his major chain rivals” (Soderlund et al., 2002: 73). Yet the general impression remains that the *National Post* holds a ‘right of centre position’ and as such, is an ardent supporter of neoliberalism. By 2001, CanWest Media had gained control over the *Post*.¹² Israel Asper also proved to be a controversial owner, as he too was known to direct editorial content.

¹² In 2009, its parent company, CanWest Global communications, went into bankruptcy and as a result, the newspapers were separated from the *Global* television operations. Like the *Globe* example above, convergence failed to produce the expected synergies.

Despite being poised to challenge the *Globe* supremacy as Canada's leading national paper, the *Post* has consistently struggled against the *Globe*. Whereas the *Globe* had seven foreign news bureaus in 2005, the *Post* only had access to two bureaus through its parent company (Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication, 2006: 10). The *Post*'s status as national paper was significantly reduced when, in 2007, it abandoned subscriptions throughout Atlantic Canada in 2006 and limited newsstand sales in the region to Halifax only (CBC, 2007, Aug 9).

No analysis of Canadian media would be complete without including the *Toronto Star*, the newspaper which, in 2007, had the largest weekly circulation rate in the country at over 3.2 million. It has served the Greater Toronto Area since 1892. As one of Canada's "serious" newspapers, it also influences questions asked in the House of Commons (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 141). The *Star* maintained six foreign bureaus in 2005, four more than CanWest media (Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communication, 2006: 10). In addition to foreign bureaus, it has reporters covering other parts of country and currently maintains a Western bureau. During the 1970s the *Toronto Star* arrived in Alberta due to the province's "increasing newsworthiness nationally" (Epp, 1984: 58). It is currently the flagship newspaper of Torstar Corporation, a broad-based media company. Torstar owned a stake in the *Globe*; however, during the study period the papers were never managed jointly, as the company did not "have control of (the *Globe and Mail's*) management, strategic direction, or daily operation" (Torstar, 2010). Although the *Star* is not a national paper with distribution across the country, its circulation size and number of bureaus gives it national significance.

Unlike the relatively homogenous provincial media environment, the national newspaper environment is often thought to break down along ideological lines in op-ed coverage, with the *National Post* occupying the right, the *Globe and Mail* the centre-right, and the *Toronto Star* on the centre-left. Just as the *Post* was founded in recent times as a 'conservative, 'rather than 'establishment', voice of the *Globe*, the *Star* was also founded on a distinct ideology. For over 100 years, it has used the *Atkinson principles*¹³, based on a progressive liberal agenda, to guide its news coverage. The core principles can be "summarized as follows: a strong, united, and independent Canada, social justice, individual and civil liberties, community and civic engagement, the rights of working people, and the necessary role of government" (*Toronto Star*, 2008, Nov 24). Endorsements of federal parties at election times provide a good example of the philosophical perspective guiding a paper. For example, the *National Post* supported the Conservative party in the 2004 election while the other two papers supported the Liberals. In the 2006 and 2008 elections, the *Toronto Star* was only one out of these three papers still supporting the Liberals. Substantive differences have also been found on public policy issues. For instance, a study on electricity restructuring in Ontario found that the *Star* placed greater focus on the impact that deregulation and privation would have on individuals and businesses, as well as "the province's economic and political sovereignty," while the *Post* and the *Globe* focused "more on the 'problem' of government interventionism" (Greenberg, 2005: 250-251).

Presenting the provincial media environment as though it were separate from the national one may give the false impression that they are, in fact, two distinct

¹³ The Atkinson principles are based on the paper's influential publisher Joseph Atkinson, who held this position from 1899 to 1948 (*Toronto Star*, 2008, Nov 24).

entities. In fact, many media scholars believe that Canada lacks a pan-Canadian media agenda and continues to emphasize regional differences (Soroka, 2002: 35). Proximity has been found to be an important explanatory variable when dealing with both economic and environmental stories. This suggests that there may be differences in framing between the national and provincial media environments. The variance may be as significant as transformative discourse prevailing in the one media environment while an augmentative discourse prevails in the other. However, as Soroka (2002:118-119) advises, one should look for similarities as well as differences between the two, as the connection between media environments is both temporal and issue-dependent. Where appropriate, presentation of data results in subsequent chapters will highlight both the similarities and differences between provincial and national media reporting.

Study period

This study examines the 25-month period between October 1, 2005 and October 31, 2007. At the very height of growth, this period represented a time of instability and flux where the implications of oil sands development were being questioned.¹⁴ As discussed below, increasingly a diverse range of actors were rejecting the Alberta government's "no plan" plan, which essentially defaulted responsibility for the nature and pace of oil sands development to the private sector.

¹⁴ It is important to note that the some elements of discourse are likely to have changed as a result of events occurring in the post-2007 period. Notable events include: the death of 1600 ducks on a Syncrude tailing pond in 2008; the global economic recession (2008 to 2010); continued economic uncertainty; and the current opposition to new oil sands related pipelines in British Columbia and the United States. For example, Ferguson (2011: 115) chronicled how the scaling back of growth plans by oil sands companies affected temporary workers from Atlantic Canada; as the "glory days" of the past when anyone could find work and the companies footed the bill for accommodation and travel had ended.

In October 2005, the Alberta government released the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS). This strategy would have given preference to oil sands development over all other uses (e.g., forestry, recreational, or traditional uses) across a 2,900 square kilometre area. This objective was plainly stated: “This policy shifts from managing all resources in the mineable oil sands area with equal weight to higher priority on extracting mineable oil sands (Government of Alberta, 2005: 4). It also acknowledged that reclamation would be incapable of reproducing “exactly, what existed prior to mining” but instead would create an “ecosystem that fits within the region” (Government of Alberta, 2005: 6). In addition, the consultation plan’s scope was limited to Fort McMurray. Many of the government’s traditional opponents, most notably environmental groups, spoke out against it (e.g., Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Edmonton Chapter, 2005). Surprisingly, the Alberta government abandoned MOSS and instead struck an MLA-led group to design a new consultative process. Prior to the group’s release of its recommendations in May 2006, Premier Ralph Klein had received a disappointing leadership review and announced his decision to retire at the end of the year. Thus it was, in this context of transition that an era of multi-stakeholder consultation was born. Over the following year, this process created opportunities across the province for the public, the media, and other policy actors to either openly support, or challenge, the Alberta government on its pro-oil sands development stance.

In September 2006, Ralph Klein, still premier at that time, added to the controversy surrounding the management of oil sands development when he announced that his government had “no plan” to deal with the explosive growth resulting from the oil sands boom (Fekete, 2006, September 3: A1). With announcements from oil sands companies that were looking for refinery capacity in the U.S. rather than planning to

build new ones at home, and the growing perception amongst Albertans that they were not getting a fair share of oil profits as resource owners, criticism emerged within the upper echelons of the Conservative party and other traditional pro-industry supporters. First among them to voice his concern was Peter Lougheed, the still-popular former premier, who announced that the province should have better controlled development by focusing on one major project at a time (Fekete, 2006, September 3: A1). So convincing and convenient was his argument that many others began to use his commentary to justify and lend support to their position (e.g., Alberta Federation of Labour, 2006: 3; Taylor and Reynolds, 2006: 3). Second, despite the fact that each had been a cabinet minister in the Klein government, the Progressive Conservative party's leadership candidates all sought to distance themselves from Klein's "no plan" legacy. They all promised to review the government's policy on oil sands development.¹⁵ After he ultimately won the Progressive Conservative Party leadership in December 2006 Ed Stelmach launched another public review and tasked participants with examining all energy royalties related to the industry (Government of Alberta, 2007, February 16: 1). Third, during regulatory hearings for new oil sands development, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) announced that it could no longer handle the projected growth. It argued that new resources were desperately needed or the government would need to slow down the pace of growth (e.g., RMWB, 2006^a and 2006^b).

¹⁵ Party renewal in the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party often comes from campaigning against the previous leadership. Previously, Ralph Klein successfully campaigned against the former premier, Don Getty, when he assumed control (Smith, 2001).

In response to this atmosphere of uncertainty and unparalleled criticism, the oil sands industry advanced positions that had worked well for them in the past.¹⁶ First, they began by saying that the oil sands industry was still cost-intensive and faced considerable risk related to fluctuating price of oil, a problem that was compounded by the significant lead-time needed to get to market (e.g., CAPP, 2006: 3). The suggestion was that the sector deserved a royalty regime that recognized these facts and helped share the associated risks. Second, industry appeared to be paying its fair share of royalties and taxes when compared to international baselines if one uses their numbers, euphemistically referred to as “total government take” (e.g., Stringham, 2006: 10,13; Jones, 2006: 3-4, Syncrude, 2006^c: 3-4). Industry argued that when designing the royalty system, the province should consider how much the industry was paying in other forms of taxes including federal and municipal ones. Third, industry argued that it was government’s sole responsibility to provide the necessary physical and social infrastructure (e.g., roads, health services) to support host communities (e.g., CAPP, 2006: 7-8; Syncrude 2006^c: 5). Lastly, the oil sands companies noted that they were being unfairly portrayed as ‘environmental laggards’, despite having been successful at reducing the amount of water and energy used in the production of each barrel of oil sands crude.(e.g., CAPP 2007: 10-15; Suncor 2006^b: 3-6). It is important to note that, during the same period, oil sands companies, energy analysts, and government were pitching the oil sands as one of the best places to invest given Canada’s safe political

¹⁶ These positions were advanced in various presentations by representatives from oil sands companies during the royalty review hearings. For example, Syncrude stated that 60 percent of the RMWB’s total tax revenue already comes from Suncor, Albion Sands, and themselves (Syncrude, 2006: 15).

climate, openness to private investment, and the sheer size of the reserves (e.g., Rubin, 2006: 2; Harper, 2006^b: 7-8).

This brief description suggests that this period was “unstable” (Bradford, 1998: 13). The old policy paradigm appeared to be faltering and opportunities for new or alternative ideas to emerge were being created. However, if these positions failed to be represented strongly in the news media, it could be interpreted as a sign of the continued strength of the current neoliberal policy frame rather than as the growing emergence of a new one.

Importance of study

This study fills several critical gaps in the existing literature. Although oil sands development generally has received significant attention in recent years (e.g., Nikiforuk, 2008; Urquhart, 2010; Clarke, 2009; Chastko, 2004), no study has systematically examined how the news media have reported this strategic and multifaceted public policy issue. To date only limited research has been conducted on the role of the press in shaping the way in which this important policy issue is perceived by the public at large (i.e., Paskey and Steward, 2012; Remillard, 2011). This dissertation works to remedy this failure by compiling a data set of over 2,300 articles. This data set provides a comprehensive documentation of media coverage from a critical period in oil sands development where the idea of continuing industry-led and unencumbered growth was up for debate.

In addition to this extensive and unprecedented data set, this dissertation makes several important contributions to the broader debate within political science on the role of the news media in public policy. Specifically, it analyzes how newspapers

handled challenges to the neoliberal policy frame that currently underpins natural resource development policy in Canada. While there is a rich body of literature examining the media's treatment of climate change, most studies have focused on the UK and US 'prestige' press,¹⁷ and have come from either a sociology or communications perspective. This leaves space for a unique political science approach to the issue. The majority of the existing literature has focused on the science of climate change, with only a few studies examining media coverage of low carbon energy sources such as wind power (Stephens et al., 2009) or nuclear power (Doyle, 2011; Culley et al., 2010). Scholarly attention to the media's treatment of the oil and gas sector has primarily focused on just two aspects: the sector's financial contributions to climate change sceptic groups (Anderson, 2009), and oil spills (Anderson, 2002). The Alberta oil sands have become a key battleground in the global war against climate change. By providing an in-depth examination of how Canadian newspapers have framed the issue of greenhouse gas emissions stemming from the oil sands, this dissertation extends the literature on how the media frames responsibility in the context of a key industrial sector, and specifically how criticisms of market-led growth have been handled.

Past studies have often tended to divorce environmental issues from their broader context by focusing on a specific controversy (e.g., Hessing 2003; Anderson, 2002, Bendix and Liebler, 1999) or issue, like climate change (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Corbett and Durfee 2004, Moser and Drilling 2004). By examining only a single event or issue, studies run the risk of creating an incomplete and inaccurate assessment of media portrayals of resource development. This study was

¹⁷ See Anderson's (2009) review article for the current state of this literature. For a study examining climate change in the Canadian press, see Good (2008).

designed to overcome these limitations by examining all stories over 300 words that contained the words “oil sands” or “tar sands” in either the headline or lead paragraph. Rather than focusing on one specific issue, this analysis considers all aspects of oil sands development and related economic, social, and environmental issues.

This dissertation also contributes to existing literature on the Canadian news media. Specifically, it tests the relative importance of various structural factors (e.g., newspaper sections, ownership, or place of publication) by accounting for differences in both type, and tone, of coverage. It challenges the assumption that the national and provincial media agendas are either in agreement or disaccord with each other. It also tests the resiliency of neoliberal ideas in newspaper coverage during a period where such ideas are being increasingly contested by a broad range of policy actors. It contributes to a new understanding about how newspapers frame corporate responsibility vis-à-vis the state through an analysis of how business interests are represented in multiple news frames. The importance for political scientists of understanding the role these factors play in news coverage cannot be understated; they serve to influence the types of policy options that emerge from the various actors and, ultimately, the decisions that are made.

How Canada chooses to develop its natural resources remains a significant policy issue in the 21st century. With the potential to turn Canada into an energy superpower, alter our ability to meet international environmental commitments, and re-orientate economic and political power in the country westward, decisions made regarding the oil sands will have profound implications for the nation and the future well-being of its citizens. Unlike in earlier eras, most Canadians no longer have direct, or

even indirect, experience working in extractive staples industries. In addition, most people will never visit the industrial oil sands plants, see the large open pits, or tour the communities where the oil sands are mined.¹⁸ Many will not read the government, business, or other stakeholder reports for themselves. As such, their knowledge of the issues will be gained, and their perspective will be formed, primarily through their engagement with media.¹⁹ As such, their understanding of these industries and their impact on our natural environment, the economy, and communities, is largely gleaned through the media coverage. Given this reliance, the public support needed to implement a transformative agenda—one that challenges the current neoliberal policy frame—is unlikely to materialize if mainstream newspaper coverage is too firmly rooted in an augmentative discourse.

The ultimate test of whether the news media is fulfilling its public mandate is whether its coverage helps citizens understand the economic, environmental, social, and political aspects surrounding oil sands development. While my data set does not allow me to address the mandate question directly—for example, no surveys of newspaper readers were undertaken—a better understanding of how news stories frame oil sands development still provides an opportunity to assess how successful the media has been at meeting this ultimate test. This importance of this issue cannot be understated; where the media goes, so too do policy makers follow (Yankovitzky, 2002: 427).

¹⁸ The level of media influence varies depending on an individual's level of personal experience. Readers who have little to no experiential knowledge are "more likely" to "rely on media frames and popular wisdom" than those with first-hand experience (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 29).

¹⁹ It is important to note that the media's effect on readers is unlikely to be a "simple linear influence on public beliefs, understanding, or behaviour" (Hansen, 2011: 20).

Organization of the text

Chapter 2 explores the socio-economic and institutional contexts of oil sands development by examining how four factors—public and private involvement, new technologies, and favourable market conditions—influenced the first commercial development of the industry and remain the primary factors driving new growth. This chapter chronicles how the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s changed governments’ and industry’s approach to oil sands development and how these changes helped spur a significant rise in new oil sands projects. Lastly, it explains how the mid-2000s was a period of significant political contestation, as industry and government justifications of the neoliberal oil sands policy frame met with resistance from an increasingly diverse group of actors, even growing to include the likes of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. By drawing comparisons to other staples industries throughout, Chapter 2 places the development of the oil sands into the broader context of Canada’s natural resource policy.

Newspapers are not a blank slate upon which journalists or sources can write their preferred stories. Chapter 3 interrogates the relationship between neoliberalism and newspaper reporting. It begins by examining the newspapers’ use of frames and how the underlying values held by society--most notably our belief in the free market--shapes how these frames are constructed. Chapter 3 then investigates how journalistic sources affect a story’s framing. This section looks at how, as elite actors, business and government sources have greater access to the media than most environmental non-governmental organizations and other community actors. The chapter proceeds to examine how some of the principles of objective journalism often serve to maintain, rather than challenge, the dominance of certain news frames. Finally, this chapter

explores how structural factors—the organization of news within the paper, type of story, place of publication and ownership—affect how journalists incorporate frames and interests into the news discourse and therefore, the possibility of a transformative discourse emerging.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the trends that emerged from analysis of newspaper coverage. An overview of the methodology is provided prior to a discussion of findings. As a starting point, Chapter 4 examines the number of stories published about oil sands development and provides an examination of two important structural factors: placement within the paper and type of story. Both these variables played a central role in shaping how journalists approached the story, and thus, the likelihood of a transformative discourse emerging. Key amongst my findings was the fact that major dailies published the vast majority of their coverage within their business section, and articles invariably came from an investor perspective. Chapter 4 also demonstrates that the majority of stories were hard news and thus were likely to adhere to the particular norms of objective journalism, particularly the idea of balance. Results from my discourse analysis demonstrate how this particular practice served to reinforce, rather than disrupt, the current policy frame.

Chapter 5 begins by describing the various frames utilized by newspapers in their coverage of oil sands development. To determine whether a particular frame—economic, environment, social, or energy security—was likely to be augmentative or transformative, I analyzed the particular issues represented in each of the four frames and demonstrated how the economic frame dwarfed coverage found in the other three frames. Chapter 5 then analyses the predominant sources used in coverage of oil sands

development. Transformative discourses are only likely to gain prominence if the actors advancing them are employed as a predominant source in pieces (Hansen, 2010: 2-1). The chapter then proceeds to investigate various measures designed to capture how the media portrayed oil sands development. The use of the term 'oil sands' and positive portrayals of oil sands development are likely signals of an augmentative discourse, whereas use of 'tar sands' and negative portrayal could signal the presence of transformative discourse. Most importantly, this chapter shows, through discourse analysis, how neutral and balanced stories were more often than not, augmentative in nature. Lastly, this chapter tests the effect of the four structural factors introduced in Chapter 2 on framing, source selection, and portrayal of oil sands development. My findings demonstrate that the physical location of a story in the paper has the greatest effect on how a story is likely to be told.

The next two chapters shift away from a focus on evaluating the major trends in how newspapers covered oil sands development to an in-depth examination of two controversial issues. Chapter 6 deals with the contentious issue of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the oil sands' significant use of natural gas. By examining the seemingly conflicting messages found within the news discourse, Chapter 7 concentrates on how newspapers portrayed the economic health of the oil sands industry. Did they suggest that the oil sands represent the best place in the world to invest in energy resources? Or was the oil sands industry portrayed as vulnerable, and thus deserving of a regime which shared the risk with government? Each chapter begins by highlighting both the broad and specific political and policy interests of the key actors: the federal and provincial governments; the oil sands industry; and the environmental movement. It then proceeds to examine how the newspaper told a

particular story by providing an in-depth analysis of story placement within the paper, type of story, sources used, and overall evaluation of oil sands development. Both chapters show how the newspapers employed both augmentative and transformative discourses in their problematization of these issues. Although both types of discourses were present, these chapters demonstrate how the papers rarely challenged the interests of the oil sands industry. Instead, Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate how actors who contested the existing neoliberal policy frame had difficulty in having their message represented in the news narrative.

Although this dissertation found news stories that challenged the neoliberal oil sands policy frame, coverage was overwhelming augmentative and reinforced the normative values of neoliberalism, supporting only marginal policy changes. The dissertation concludes by demonstrating that evidence for this overall finding is found not only in the examination of what newspapers chose to cover, but also which stories failed to garner significant media attention. Newspaper support of neoliberalism remains stubbornly intractable, due largely to the decision of major dailies to relegate the story of oil sands development to their business pages. Transformative discourses are unlikely to find a very receptive audience mainstream newspapers as long as papers continue to see the oil sands story as one that belongs almost exclusively in the business pages.

2 Contesting a 21st century staple

Digging the bitumen out of the ground, squeezing out the oil and converting it into synthetic crude is a monumental challenge. It requires vast amounts of capital, Brobdingnagian technology, and an army of skilled workers. In short, it is an enterprise of epic proportions, akin to building the pyramids or China's Great Wall. Only bigger.

-Stephen Harper, July 14, 2006

In many ways, the oil sands story is part of an ongoing Canadian saga: a staple is extracted by the private sector for an external market while the government facilitates its development by creating a positive business climate (Howlett and Brownsey, 2008: 4). This chapter begins with a primer highlighting the unique nature of this resource and how its development not only affects Alberta's economy, environment, and communities, but also has significant nation-wide effects. The development of the oil sands is just one commodity that has shaped the contemporary Canadian staples economy and where appropriate, similarities and differences between the oil sands sector and other staples industries will be highlighted. The second section of the chapter reviews the early history of oil sands development and how the culmination of four drivers—private and public involvement, new technologies, and favourable market conditions—led to the first successful commercial scale extraction project (Chastko, 2004: xiv-xv). The third section highlights how government and industry redefined their approach to development in the 1990s by embracing neoliberal norms and launching a new era of rapid growth.

Unlike earlier resource booms, the current period of expansion is occurring within a neoliberal policy frame which has embraced the ambiguous concept of “sustainable development” (MacDonald, 2007; Sumner 2007; Hessing et al., 2005) which

“implies the possibility of the reintegration of economic, environmental, and social considerations” (Hessing et al., 2005: 12). Sustainable development is often portrayed as though it were a three-legged stool where the economy, environment, and society are in balance (Dawe and Ryan, 2003: 1458).²⁰ A sustainable development approach has raised new environmental concerns, and brought various actors, such as Aboriginal groups, into the development process (Hessing et al., 2005: 13). Canadian governments and the oil sands industry (e.g., NRCan, 2010; Alberta, 2009; CAPP, 2009^b) have also endorsed the idea of responsible development, at least at the level of rhetoric.²¹

However, by the mid-2000s the neoliberal policy frame proved too successful as oil sands growth became unmanageable and the contradiction between the idea of sustainable development and the reality of what was occurring on the ground could no longer be ignored. Transformative discourses emerged to contest the facts and values used to support the neoliberal oil sands policy frame. Government and industry actors reasserted augmentative discourses, which while acknowledging some small policy failures upheld the broader goals and values of a neoliberal policy frame. The period of contestation between October 2005 and October 2007 will be discussed in the final

²⁰ This model is increasingly being challenged as it sets apart environmental concerns from those of the economy and social well-being (Dawe and Ryan, 2003: 1459). The environment should be viewed as the floor upon which the entire stool stands, not simply as a leg (Ibid), but as the floor, the model would no longer fit—even rhetorically—within the bounds of neoliberalism.

²¹ In their government response to a 2007 House of Commons report on oil sands, the federal government asserted that “sustainable development principles have been integrated into federal legislation through the 1995 amendments to the Auditor General Act” (3). Government of Canada, 2007: 3). Specifically, they cited the work of NRCAN’s CANMET energy technology centre as providing expertise in the development of new technologies and “for the scientific evaluation of new oil sands development during environment assessment process” (Ibid).

section of this chapter and will include an analysis of the unmediated public discourses of the various policy actors.²²

An oil sands primer

The oil sands are a staple—“a raw or unfinished bulk commodity that is sold in export markets” (Howlett and Brownsey, 2008: 4). As an unconventional source of oil, the oil sands consist of a mixture of bitumen, sand, and water. Physically, the oil sands are a black substance that resembles molasses. Unlike conventional oil, extraction requires a significant amount of processing. As such, the oil sands are part of a new generation of staples where technological innovations are part of their competitive advantage, making them part of the “new knowledge economy” (McAllister, 2008: 159). Oil sands deposits are located almost exclusively within the north-eastern corner of Alberta and cover an area larger than the province of New Brunswick (see map in Appendix 1).

Oil sands reserves contain 170 billion barrels of recoverable oil (Natural Resources Canada, 2011^b: 1). To put this into a current context, cumulative production from 1967-2009 has only resulted in the extraction of seven billion barrels (Ibid). In 2007, oil sands production represented less than half of Canadian crude production, however, by 2020 this “may rise to 80 percent” (NRCan, 2009^b: 14). There are two

²² I recognize that an actor’s public discourse (e.g., speeches, press releases, or reports) could differ from their internal position or private discourses. For instance, government privately consults with industry; Pembina provides private consultative services (Mankowski et al., 2007: 27-32), and area First Nations negotiate private impact-benefit agreements (Urquhart, 2010: 14). This information has high news value when it becomes publically available, for instance through access to information requests or leaks. Journalists have found the information on oil sands development obtained through freedom of information requests to be very useful (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 12).

primary methods for extraction: strip mining and an in-situ method. Twenty percent of the oil sands are close enough to the surface to be recovered by strip-mining (Alberta Energy, 2010: 1). To separate the bitumen from the surrounding material, large amounts of water and natural gas are used.²³ In 2008, five active mining projects accounted for 55 percent of the oil sands' 1.3 million barrels of production (IEA, 2009^a: 167).²⁴ In-situ processes are used to extract the remaining 80 percent of the resource (Alberta Energy, 2010: 1). This involves injecting "steam into the wellbore to lower the viscosity and allow it to flow to the surface" (IHS CERA, 2010: 2). Although in-situ projects consume more energy than traditional mining operations, they use significantly less surface area that can, as a result, be reclaimed more quickly and with less effort (Canadian Centre for Energy Information, 2010: 13).²⁵ As of September 2010, there were 86 in-situ projects ongoing in the province (Alberta Energy, 2010: 1). In its raw form, bitumen cannot be transported by pipelines or processed in conventional refineries (IHS CERA, 2010: 2). Suncor, Syncrude, and Shell refine about two-thirds of

²³ The industry uses approximately 12 barrels of water in surface mining production processes, of which up to 70 percent is recycled, meaning that two to four barrels of water per barrel of oil are permanently removed from the hydrologic cycle (Grant et al., 2009: 11). To produce a single barrel of upgraded crude oil from an oil sands mining project, approximately 750 cubic feet (250 extraction and 500 upgrading) of natural gas are needed (Woynillowicz et al., 2005: 15).

²⁴ The five operating mines are Athabasca Oil Sands Project's Muskeg River and Jack Pine, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd's Horizon, Suncor Energy's Millennium, Syncrude's Mildred Lake and Auroa North. Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake mine is currently under construction. Additional mining projects have been put on hold (Government of Alberta, 2011: 6-8).

²⁵ In-situ process use approximately 1500 cubic feet of natural gas in the extraction and upgrading processes (1000 extraction and 500 upgrading) (Woynillowicz et al., 2005: 15). The availability of natural gas may operate as a non-market barrier to production, given that the oil sands currently use "900 million cubic feet per day or five percent of Canada's natural gas production" with this number projected to rise to "2.2 billion and 3.2 billion cubic feet by 2020 (Levi, 2009: 11). Recent slowdown is expected to delay oil sands operators from reaching this milestone.

the current output in the province, with the remainder being processed in the United States (Alberta Federation of Labour, 2009: 22).²⁶

Being the resource's home, the province of Alberta derives most of the resulting positive economic benefits. Alberta Energy (2011^a: 2) estimates that every dollar invested in the oil sands fosters nine dollars of economic activity. Between 2009 and 2034, the Canadian Energy Research Institute (CERI) (2009: 19) forecasts that 91 percent of the oil sands total GDP impact will occur in Alberta. During this 25-year period, CERI forecasts that the province will also receive \$184 billion in royalties (Ibid). It also has the potential to reverse the national core-periphery relationship (i.e. Toronto/Montreal-the rest of the country) by creating a new economic centre for the country (Gibbins et al, 2009: 48-49). As Table 2.1 shows, CERI also predicts that the federal government and the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan will also enjoy significant economic benefits.

Table 2.1: Total impact of oil sands development within Alberta, including investment and operations, for the period of 2009-2034

	GDP impact	Employment impact	Federal taxes	Provincial taxes
Alberta	\$1,600 billion	77.2%	\$166 billion	\$94.8 billion
Ontario	\$54.9 billion	7.1%	\$7.0 billion	\$7.2 billion
British Columbia	\$45.5 billion	6.2%	\$6.4 billion	\$6.0 billion
Quebec	\$23.2 billion	3.3%	\$3.1 billion	\$4.1 billion
Saskatchewan	\$18.7 billion	2.6%	\$2.4 billion	\$2.5 billion

Source: CERI, 2009: 19.

²⁶ Although upgrading within the province produces additional economic benefits, it produces additional environmental impacts. For more information, see Griffiths and Dyer (2008).

Many area residents benefit from working in the oil sands sector. Locally, 50 percent of the residents in the Fort McMurray area work for an oil sands company or contractor (RMWB, 2009: 3). Area First Nations have also benefited; in 2009 the median income in Fort McKay was \$31,744—\$2,000 higher than the provincial average in 2005 (Urquhart, 2010: 23).

The vast majority of economic benefits are positive. However, the rapid growth of the oil sands projects has driven costs higher due to a shortage of labour and materials (Hirsch, 2005^a: 9). In 2007, the costs of starting an oil sands project rose from \$25,000 per daily barrel in 2002 to about \$40,000 per daily barrel (Nicholson, 2007: 35).²⁷ Despite production occurring in a high-cost environment, the option of shifting production to another country is limited by the reality that the Alberta oil sands represent over half of the world's remaining oil reserves open for private sector investment (CAPP, 2010: 11). This fact, along with the immense size of oil sands reserves, will likely serve to foster the continued development of oil sands leases, even marginal ones.

The development of the oil sands has also had negative impacts on other sectors of the Alberta economy and other regions of the country. First, due to its restricted market other businesses as well as government departments—particularly those in the Fort McMurray region—were affected by staggering cost increases (e.g., Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, 2006: 49; 51; 61). Second, the Alberta economy has become less diversified (Mansell and Schlenker, 2006: 51). For example, in 2007 oil

²⁷ The global economic slowdown temporarily reduced supply costs. Companies which continued their expansion during this time were able to gain a competitive advantage over their peers, as some costs were at a 10 year low (McColl, 2009: 9).

sands development accounted for \$100 of the \$169 billion of the scheduled capital projects in Alberta (Gibson, 2007: 1). The development of the oil sands continues the trend of regional overspecialization found in many staples economies, leaving the overall Alberta economy vulnerable to downturns in the energy sector (Howlett and Brownsey, 2008: 8). Third, since 2002 the rising price of oil has contributed to the rise in relative value of the Canadian dollar, as foreign exchange traders began to view the dollar as a petrocurrency (Bergevin, 2006: 5). The rising Canadian dollar negatively affected other sectors, notably manufacturers in Ontario and Quebec, that relied on a low dollar to make their exports more competitive (Ibid). Lastly, provinces without a provincial treasury boosted by energy revenue found it difficult to provide similar levels of public services with proportionally comparable levels of taxation (Courchene, 2005: 45).

While the oil sands leave a larger environmental footprint than conventional oil, they are part of a growing group of non-conventional sources of oil. As such, the gap between the oil sands' environmental footprint and that of other types of oil is “not always as large as portrayed” (IHS CERA, 2010: 20). While there is little scientific consensus on the extent of many environmental affects despite significant monitoring and research (Oil Sands Advisory Panel, 2010: 32), there is general acknowledgement amongst policy actors and the public that these impacts are felt across the environment.

Currently, the oil sands sector is responsible for the greatest output of new greenhouse gas emissions within Canada (ecoEnergy Carbon Capture and Storage Taskforce, 2008: 8). Oil sands extraction and upgrading processes produce more greenhouse gas emissions than most other types of oil. The Pembina Institute estimates

that oil sands extraction and upgrading generates 3.2 to 4.5 times more greenhouse gas emissions per barrel than Canadian or American conventional oil extraction (Hout et al., 2011: 4). Using a well-to-wheels analysis, however, another study found that oil sands production is only “5 to 15 percent greater than the average crude oil consumed in the United States” (IHS CERA, 2010: 20). Total industry emissions will continue to grow because intensity improvements have stalled despite increasing production (Hout et al., 2011: 5-6).

Oil sands extraction processes affect the quantity and quality of the area’s water resources (Griffiths, 2006). Due to the industry’s high water usage rates, there is concern over the amount of water being removed from the Athabasca River for surface mining operations, particularly during the low-flow winter months (Dyer et al, 2008: 35). In addition, the rapid development of in-situ projects is likely to affect surface and groundwater supplies (Oil Sands Advisory Panel, 2010: 16). As a result, the availability of water may serve as an additional non-market barrier to further expansion (IHS CERA, 2010: 21; Levi, 2009: 11). Oil sands mines release significant quantities of contaminated wastewater into tailings reservoirs, which covered 170 square kilometres in 2010 (Lemphers et al., 2010: 8).²⁸ Seepage containing unrecovered hydrocarbons and dissolved chemical from these reservoirs into surface and groundwater is an ongoing concern (Oil Sands Advisory Panel, 2010: 15; International Energy Agency, 2009^a: 187).

Both types of oil sands extraction processes affect the surrounding boreal forests and wetlands. As it removes the entire forest landscape, surface mining is more destructive than in-situ extraction, but its overall impact will be less, as this approach is

²⁸ Often, these are referred to as tailing ponds, but since they are a manufactured structure designed to hold wastewater, reservoir is a more appropriate term.

viable in just three percent of the total area. By 2011, only 602 square kilometres have been disturbed (Alberta Energy, 2011^a: 1). With 79,000 square kilometres already being leased out (Grant et al., 2009: 21), in-situ development also has had a significant impact on the boreal forest through fragmentation (Schneider and Dyer, 2006: 12-14). Companies have a legal duty to reclaim disturbed land back to a natural, self-sustaining state (Finch, 2008: 114-115);²⁹ however, reclamation efforts have been limited with only one certificate being issued for the creation of a grassy knoll rather than a full forest (Hildebrand, 2008: 10).

Oil sands development has not only affected the natural environment but has also had significant effects on surrounding communities. A rapidly growing population in the Fort McMurray area has placed significant strain on the community's social and physical infrastructure. For example, in 2005 the Athabasca Regional Issues Working Group (2005) estimated the gap in infrastructure at \$1.2 billion (5). A critical shortage of housing has made it difficult to recruit individuals and families, and in particular public sector workers (Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, 2006: 51). The housing shortage led to an exorbitant rise in the cost of housing with prices doubling between 2001 and 2006 (RMWB, 2006^c: 32). In 2006, Fort McMurray experienced the highest year over year increase in the province (Ibid). Unlike other Canadian municipalities, Wood Buffalo's inability to plan new subdivisions to meet the needs of its rapidly expanding population is compounded by the fact that the Alberta government owns the majority of land within the municipality and has been slow to release it for housing development (Stubbs et al., 2007: 12). Another outcome of this housing shortage has

²⁹ A self-sustaining state does not require the "restoration of the kind of habitat that used to be present" (Grant et al., 2009: 22).

been the creation of a large shadow population—individuals who live in work camps, hotels, campgrounds, or other shared accommodation (RMWB, 2006^c: 12). Many public services do not account for this shadow population in their per-capita funding model; as a result, this population places additional strain on the regional infrastructure (RMWB, 2006^a: 1). These latest challenges are neither new nor unexpected as the community of Fort McMurray also experienced significant stresses during its first boom (Huberman, 2001; Matthiasson, 1971). In addition, these stresses affected, and were perceived by, individuals differently depending on their connection to the community and place within the labour structure of the oil sands industry; the transient trade workers' concerns and hopes differed from those of short-term industry professionals and long-term residents (Dorow and Dogu, 2011).

History of oil sands development

The oil sands' potential as a source of petroleum was perceived as early as the 1880s. In the first half of the twentieth century, the federal government, as owners of the resource, primarily led development. The federal government retained jurisdiction over natural resources when it created the Province of Alberta in 1905. Although it devolved jurisdiction to the province in 1930, it retained ownership of a 5,000 square kilometre area that contained the Athabasca oil sands, further antagonizing the Alberta government (Chastko, 2004: 21).

During this early period, the federal government's interest in developing the oil sands fluctuated (Chastko, 2004: 4-6). Interest was high during the two world wars as both Canada and Britain viewed the oil sands as a strategic asset even though extraction technology was still in its infancy (6, 27-31). Throughout this period the federal

government invested in oil sands research and development because there was little alternative; Canada was still heavily reliant on foreign sources of oil (Chastko, 2004: 57). Most notable about the federal attempt to commercialize oil sands production was the development of a joint industry-government pilot plant, Abasand Oil Ltd, which produced 17,000 barrels of bitumen in 1941, but was abandoned in 1945 after a series of failures (Chastko, 2004: 39). The Alberta government also pursued its own oil sands research agenda, perceiving the oil sands as a strategic asset to help reduce the province's economic dependency on agriculture (Chastko, 2004: 13, 57). Individual entrepreneurs also tried a variety of techniques but the result was a series of failed private ventures and fraudulent stock promotions (Chastko, 2004: 5). In the end, the elusiveness of a technological breakthrough rendered all of these efforts unsuccessful (Chastko, 2004: 134). The complexity of extracting the bitumen from the surrounding material and then converting it to synthetic oil continued to delay progress.

With the discoveries of conventional oil fields like those found in Leduc in 1947, there was a surplus in North American oil production as consumer demand fell below the rate of discoveries in both countries (Chastko, 2004: 71). Both the oil industry's and the federal government's interest in developing the oil sands fell as a result (Chastko, 2004: 63, 71). The Government of Alberta decided that it would need to act as the catalyst for launching a synthetic fuel industry (Chastko, 2004: 63), believing that the Abasand failure was the result of federal mismanagement rather than a case of technological problems. After a series of technological and management failures at its pilot plant in the 1940s, the province determined that it had enough evidence to conclude that there was no longer a technological barrier to expansion (Chastko, 2006: 76). The issue then became one of determining under what conditions a commercial

plant would be successful; especially since the Alberta government was cautious, fearing the results that excessive oil production might have on its own conventional oil industry. In large part, the 1950s were spent answering this question. In 1962, the province granted approval to Sun Oil, an integrated foreign oil company, to develop a commercial plant capable of producing 31,500 barrels per day (Chastko, 2004: 111)³⁰. After five decades of small-scale production, the plant—Suncor³¹—proved that commercial success was possible.³² In addition to provincial financial support, Suncor’s success depended on a “fortuitous combination of American interests, American capital, and the access to American markets” (Chastko, 2004: 101). The oil sands sector shared its reliance on the American market with other Canadian staples industries (NRCAN, 2010). As such, it continues to fall into a similar pattern where the United States is the primary market for Canada’s natural resources and as such, its interests guide its development (Hessing et al., 2005: 33-34).

Despite the early success of Suncor, the province rebuffed other applicants for development, in a desire to protect the market share of Alberta’s conventional oil industry. As a result, the provincial government did not approve any other applications during the seven-year period from 1962 to 1969 (Chastko, 2004:120-131). Competing for scarce investment capital and access to US market, the nascent oil sands was often met with feelings of contempt from many within Alberta’s conventional oil industry. The depth of this feeling became evident through events such as the following:

³⁰ The company amended their application to increase production to 45,000 barrels per day; the change was reluctantly accepted (119). Construction of this plant occurred from 1963 to 1967.

³¹ Suncor was originally called Great Canadian Oil Sands.

³² Construction of this plant occurred from 1963 to 1967.

A member of the Petroleum Club demanded to know who had brought Fitzgerald (a former manager of the Great Canadian Oil Sands) to the club and vowed to meet with the executive to ensure that “none of your kind” would ever enjoy the club privileges (Huberman, 2001: 203).

Despite the government's resistance, world events soon pushed the development of the oil sands to the forefront again.

Uncertainty over access to world oil supplies and the rise of oil prices resulting from the policies of OPEC member countries spurred four American controlled producers³³ to form Syncrude as a joint project. By 1973, they had been successful in gaining concessions, loans, and guarantees from both the Alberta and federal governments. When one of the companies abandoned the project, these governments, as well as the province of Ontario, entered as direct investors.³⁴ Despite the rhetoric of an “energy war” between the provincial and federal governments during this period, Pratt (1976: 10) argues that both governments acquiesced to the “private power” of the energy companies.

The development of Suncor and Syncrude did not face any significant opposition. First, unlike oil or gas projects in the territorial north during this period (e.g., Mackenzie Valley pipeline), there were no perceived political barriers to early development as Treaty 8³⁵ had effectively settled the 'land' question (Pratt, 1976: 14). As such, the early relationship between Suncor and Syncrude and First Nations focused

³³ The four companies were Imperial Oil, Gulf Oil, Atlantic Richfield and Canada-Cities Services.

³⁴ In 1981, the Province of Ontario also acquired a 25 percent interest in Suncor, which it held on to until 1993.

³⁵ Treaty 8 includes the Athabasca Chipewyan, the Chipewyan Prairie, the Fort McKay the Fort McMurray No. 468, and the Mikisew Cree First Nations.

upon individuals rather than negotiations between industry and band government. For example, one of the conditions of government investment in Syncrude was a requirement that it assist First Nations individuals in finding work within its operations (Slowey, 2008: 59).³⁶ Second, in 1964 the province assumed direct control for the development of Fort McMurray when it had disbanded the village government, as the community had been unable to finance and plan for the anticipated growth (Huberman, 2001: 176-177). The Alberta government did not restore local government until 1980 when Fort McMurray was incorporated as a city (Ibid). Lastly, environmental concerns did not feature prominently during the application process. The landscape was considered empty, remote, and desolate and therefore did not attract the attention of environmentalists unlike the then proposed development of the Colorado oil shales (Pratt, 1976: 75). In addition, the province knew little about the northern environment, as “in virtually every area of potential concern, rudimentary ‘baseline’ knowledge of the ecological system of the region (was) non-existent” (Pratt, 1976: 103).

Before the OPEC crisis, Canadians had been more interested in securing greater access for oil sands exports to the United States than their American counterparts had been in opening up their market (Chastko, 2004: 31). However, the federal government sought to protect Canadians from rising oil prices as part of the 1980 National Energy Plan (NEP). Specifically targeting the oil sands, the federal government lowered the price for synthetic oil below the world price (Chastko, 2004: 181). Many in Fort McMurray thought this action had been aimed directly at Suncor (Ibid). The Alberta government reacted bitterly to price control and other NEP measures, and threatened

³⁶ However, it was not until 1997, in the neoliberal era, that Syncrude reached its goal of having a First Nations workforce proportional to their population level of 13 percent (Slowey, 2008: 59).

to stall the approval process for new oil sands projects in retaliation (Chastko, 2004: 185). Although the negotiated settlement between Ottawa and Alberta increased the price for synthetic oil, it remained lower than what the industry thought was necessary to generate a reasonable rate of return. In addition, the market in the second half of the 1980s was characterized by “oversupply, not scarcity” which, in turn, made the economics of new oil sands development “untenable” (Chastko, 2004: 194).

The neoliberal oil sands era

By the early 1990s, the federal and provincial governments, along with industry, wanted to reignite oil sands development. Industry still wanted government to create a favourable business climate, but the vision for what form this would take had changed dramatically since the development of Suncor and Syncrude. Policies implemented during this time reflected the neoliberal orientations of both government and industry. The hallmarks of this neoliberal policy framework were: (i) the institutionalization of free trade; (ii) the implementation of a generic royalty regime and other fiscal agreements; and (iii) a project-based—more limited than a cumulative or a regionally based—environmental review process. Each of these elements is explored in further detail below. Lastly, the relationships between Fort McMurray and area First Nations communities and industry’s interests and government policy are discussed.

In the late 1980s, the energy industry and the US government both sought to institutionalize free trade in order to prevent future Canadian governments from implementing measures similar to those found in the National Energy Plan, such as restrictions on foreign investment or energy exports (Chastko, 2004: 201-202). Their efforts were reinforced by the province, as Premier Peter Lougheed, as well as his

successor Don Getty, were “effusive” supporters of free trade (Lusztig, 1996: 86). During this critical time, further development of the oil sands was not seen as an essential component of approach to ensuring Canadian energy security. The Canadian state believed that its energy future was tied to “security of supply,” which could be “best achieved through the operation of a healthy, competitive market, not government intervention” (Chastko, 2004: 208). With the signing of free trade agreements, Canada’s relationship with its largest—and effectively only—customer, the United States, became one of institutionalized deregulation (Clarke 2009; Pratt, 2001). Clauses in the North American Free Trade Agreement restrict Canada’s ability to limit the quantity and type of energy exports it ships to the United States. This “security of supply” philosophy has held throughout subsequent Liberal and Conservative federal governments. The Alberta government also embraced this philosophy. For example, in a 2004 speech to the western U.S. governors, Ralph Klein underscored the idea that the Alberta oil sands were the answer to U.S. energy needs: “The oil sands are a massive, long-life oil reserve that represents a secure and sustainable energy future for all of North America. The resource is right here on the continent and it’s available from a stable, friendly neighbour” (Klein, 2004: 5).

In 1993, the Alberta Chamber of Resources created the “National Oil Sands Taskforce,” designed to reignite oil sands development.³⁷ Reflecting their neoliberal orientation, neither government nor industry viewed direct government investment as a

³⁷ The Taskforce membership reflects the economic focus of the steering committee. It consisted of representatives from oil sands companies, government, research agencies, and suppliers. Government representatives on the steering committee and various sub committees were limited to individuals from Natural Resources Canada, the National Research Council, and Alberta Energy (Alberta Chamber of Resources, 1995: 50-51).

necessary precondition for creating a favourable investment climate. The success of Suncor and Syncrude had demonstrated that the oil sands were profitable, having “reduced their operating costs from \$30 barrel in 1985 to \$14 in 1995” (Chastko, 2004: 216). One-off royalty and fiscal agreements had worked previously when the provincial and federal governments were negotiating one project at a time. Nevertheless, this type of arrangement was perceived as untenable given the projected interest in future developments. Industry sought a generic royalty regime and tax structure that would help defray capital costs until such time as projects became profitable, and both the Alberta and federal government complied. On the recommendation of the National Oil Sands Taskforce, the province implemented the 1997 royalty regime where it collected only a one percent royalty on all production until developers had recuperated all project costs, including a return allowance, at which time the royalty rate would jump to 25 percent of net revenues. Likewise, the federal government implemented a number of favourable taxation policies, the most notable being the Accelerated Capital Cost Allowance (ACCA) (House of Commons, 2007: 41-42)³⁸. A 2003 Department of Finance report calculated that the implementation of federal government taxation rules amounted to a \$583 million tax expenditure in the oil sands between 1996 and 2002 (Pigeon, 2003: 1). Again, the success in obtaining this new royalty and fiscal framework was largely attributed to private power, as Eric Newell, former CEO of Syncrude, stated: “We really sold it. . . It was the most comprehensive lobbying since Free Trade”

³⁸ Beginning in 1996, the ACCA allows an oil sands company “to write off all their capital costs (in the year spent) before they start to pay any income tax” (MacWilliam, 2007: 53). It applies to new mines or in-situ installations or expansions, which increased production by at least five percent. Similar to other mining projects, it is significantly higher than the 25 percent ACCA applied to conventional oil projects.

(Nikiforuk, 2008: 27). The plan was so successful that the goal of producing a million barrels of crude a day was reached in 2004, not in 2020 as the taskforce had projected (Ibid).

Another way in which the federal and provincial governments facilitated the growth of the oil sands was through deliberate inaction. Despite the rapid expansion of oil sands projects, which exceeded expectations, the provincial government continued to manage oil sands development on a project-by-project basis, with the Ministry of Energy taking the lead role (as opposed to either the Ministry of Environment or the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development). The provincial regulator, the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB), must first approve all oil sands projects.³⁹ In order to intervene during the approval process, an individual or group must show that they were “directly affected” by the project. This restricted participation to local groups and individuals. The other major limitation of this process is that it approved development on a project-by project basis. As a result, little overall assessment of impact is completed.⁴⁰ Currently, the ERCB has approved all mining and in-situ oil sands

³⁹ Prior to January 1, 2008, these responsibilities, along with the management of the utility industry, were combined into the body known as the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. On this date, Alberta split the board into two separate regulatory bodies.

⁴⁰ The provincial government has engaged in some integrated planning. For example, in 1996 the cabinet approved the “Fort McMurray-Athabasca oil sands subregional integrated plan,” which was further amended in 2002. The plan had no legal status and its implementation was subjected to normal budgetary processes (Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, 2002). In 1999, Alberta Environment released the Regional Sustainable Development Strategy (RSDS). However, the province “privatized” the implementation of this strategy to the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), a stakeholder group tasked with conducting research and recommending policy on wide variety of environmental issues (Urquhart, 2006). Evaluating its lack of success in its first six years of operations, Urquhart concluded that CEMA should “fire itself” (Ibid). Currently, CEMA proclaims that it has had “significant success in producing 10 Management Frameworks, which have all been implemented by the Alberta Government” (CEMA, 2012). Despite these and other initiatives, questions are still being raised

projects proposed, despite the negative environmental and social impacts posed by individual projects.

Unlike the earlier boom of the 1960s and 1970s, this new boom fostered by the 1997 royalty changes occurred within an institutional context, which increasingly recognized Aboriginal rights and title (Urquhart, 2010: 28-34). The relationship between the oil sands industry, area First Nations, and government changed from the early focus on individual employment to one with an increasing focus on fostering positive community-industry relations. For instance, the Athabasca Tribal Council, which represents the five Treaty 8 First Nations most affected by development,⁴¹ reached capacity-building agreements with both industry and all three levels of governments (Urquhart, 2010: 20-21). In 2003, their capacity efforts were further boosted with additional funding from industry and government to create Industry Relations Corporations (IRCs) (Ibid). These entities were designed to facilitate further development in a non-confrontational manner (Ibid).

Given the federal and provincial governments' unwavering support of oil sands projects, First Nations have largely acquiesced to development. According to Slowey (2008: xv), the Mikisew Cree First Nations viewed oil sands development as critical to their self-determination as it allowed them to increase their political autonomy and improve their economic status. Upon signing impact benefit agreements with oil sands

as to whether these measures will result in meaningful cumulative assessments (e.g., Dryer et al., 2011: 5).

⁴¹ First Nations in British Columbia also argued that the proposed Gateway pipeline, which would transport upgraded bitumen to the west coast, would negatively affect them (for example, see Save the Fraser Gathering of Nations' declaration). Likewise, First Nations in the Northwest Territories have argued they are negatively affected by the industry as a result of downstream water pollution (for example, see Deninu Kue First Nation, 2006: 1-3).

companies, the Athabasca Chipewyan and Mikisew Cree First Nations largely withdrew their opposition prior to regulatory hearings during the 1997 to 2007 period (Urquhart, 2010: 15-16). These impact benefit agreements represented a private and confidential social contract. While it is difficult to assess the relationship between these groups, simplistic portrayals of “aboriginal peoples as uncompromising protectors of Mother Earth” ignore a more complicated reality (Urquhart, 2010: 37).

The recent oil sands boom has also affected the capacity of the local government to meet the needs of its residents. In 1995, the province amalgamated the city of Fort McMurray with the surrounding rural district to form the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, creating a unique municipality that stretches over 68,000 square kilometres. While the primary rationale behind amalgamation was to incorporate the oil sands operations into the city’s tax base (Jaremko, 2010: 9), an underlying goal was to facilitate the development of community infrastructure to support expected growth in oil sands projects. However, even this expanded tax base has not proved sufficient. Calls for increased funding to area priorities went unanswered by the Klein government (RMWB, 2006^a, 12-13).

As early as 2004, there were signs in Alberta that the province may have been ready for a transformative type of politics. In a news commentary, Preston Manning argued that environmental conservation or a new blue-green politics could be the next big idea to sweep the province in a brand new direction:

If some group, properly led and organized politically, were to figure out how to marry Alberta’s commitment to marketplace economics and fiscal responsibility with a genuine proactive approach to the conservation of the province’s natural capital, the times and conditions are nearly ripe for such a group to form the next government (2004, September 27: A14).

According to Epp (2012: 263), the importance of Manning's formulation lies with three important realizations. First, environmental concerns are interconnected with Alberta's core policy issues. Second, environmentalism occurring was based in Alberta, and was not being imposed from the outside; harnessing their provincial powers, the Alberta government could have a significant impact within this policy realm. Third, finding a way to harness this blue-green political coalition would have to come from outside the current deliberative forums.

These early calls went unheard by the Klein government. For instance, the 2005 Speech from the Throne reconfirmed the neoliberal orientation of the province: "This government remains committed to the fiscal principles that have served the province so well: balanced budgets, no debt, and low taxes" (Kwong, 2005, March 2: 9). However, it is what was left unsaid that stands out. The throne speech made no specific mention of either the oil sands or the Fort McMurray area. Instead, it addressed general growth pressures on province-wide infrastructure and only briefly mentioned land management issues:

Wise land management is crucial to the sustainability of these sectors [energy, forestry, and tourism] and the continued prosperity for Albertans. That's why this government will develop a land-use management framework supported by effective resource and environmental policies and shared, integrated information systems (Kwong, 2005, March 2: 9).

This language clearly fits in an augmentative neoliberal policy frame, which situates environmental stewardship in terms of its ability to ensure the health of resource sectors. The 2005 budget speech's only reference to the oil sands was its mention of research funds required for oil sands upgrading (McClellan, 2005, April 13: 749). Again, there was no mention of the unique growth pressures faced by Fort McMurray. In both

of these key agenda-setting policy documents, there was no forewarning of the government's intention to develop and implement the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS), released in October 2005, which privileged oil sands development above the needs of other resource sectors and the environment. In addition, the plan would also limit consultation to the area most directly affected by holding hearings only in Fort McMurray. As an overt representation of what had already been occurring, the objective of the plan was hardly surprising.

What was surprising was that the provincial government chose to abandon the strategy in January 2006. Instead, the Klein government decided to strike a multi-stakeholder committee to lead the province in a broader public debate over how oil sands development should proceed. In addition to this new stakeholder process, industry and societal actors also had the opportunity to voice their interests to two other provincial government investigatory mechanisms: the Radke report and the Royalty Review Panel (see Table 2.2 for an overview of these three processes). Politics surrounding the fate of oil sands development were now in flux, as augmentative discourses competed with newly energized transformative ones.

Table 2.2: Alberta government commissioned reports

<p>The Radke report <i>Investing in our future: Responding to the rapid growth of the oil sands</i></p>	<p>Process: In September 2006, a senior cabinet committee appointed a four-person team, led by Doug Radke, to examine gaps in government services. The team held private consultations with key stakeholders but no public hearings were held. The final report was released in December 2006.</p> <p>Key recommendations: Fort McMurray was in need of significant investments by the province, industry, and federal government to handle current and future growth (8-10). Although the report singled out all three actors, the Radke report placed primary responsibility on the province, while suggesting that the municipality may require new financial levers (8-12).</p> <p>Existing environmental procedures were understaffed and inadequate to manage growth (9). Specific recommendations included defining the water supply available for use, developing a CO₂ framework, and reviewing the governing structure of Cumulative Effects Management Association in order to make it more effective (10).</p>
<p>Oil sands multi-stakeholder committee (MSC) <i>Final Report</i></p>	<p>Process: The Klein government appointed a multi-stakeholder committee to put forward a long-term vision for oil sands development. The MSC held its first phase of public consultations and released its interim report in fall 2006. The second phase of public consultations followed in the spring of 2007 with a final report being released in June.</p> <p>Key recommendations: The committee was able to agree on a variety of broad vision statements such as “ensures a healthy environment” and “provides a high quality of life” (13). There were nonetheless unable to agree on many specific strategies and actions particularly around how to best to manage environmental impacts of oil sands development (31-50).</p>
<p>The Alberta Royalty Review Panel <i>Our fair share</i></p>	<p>Process: Fulfilling a promise made during his fall 2006 leadership campaign, Ed Stelmach appointed an expert panel in February 2007 to review all oil and gas royalties. The Panel held public consultations from April to June 2007 and released their final report in September.</p> <p>Key recommendations: The Panel recommended keeping the existing pre- and post-payout royalty structure but advocated for increasing the post-payout rate from 25 percent to 33 percent (12). In addition, the Panel recommended a sliding severance tax linked to the price of oil (13) and recommended against grandfathering existing oil sands projects (14). It rejected calls to use the royalty or fiscal framework to address growth pressure in host municipalities (36).</p>

Augmentative discourses

Augmentative discourses are rooted in a strong interest to preserve the status-quo. They reproduce both the normative and cognitive elements associated with an existing policy frame. In the case of the oil sands, augmentative discourses would be those that affirm the values associated with a neoliberal policy frame (e.g., private sector's role as lead developer) as well existing neoliberal oil sands policies (e.g., the royalty regime). Actors that benefit from the existing policy frame—and/or subscribe to its values—are most likely to advance this type of argument. Faced with challenges, augmentative actors can adapt their discourse from a purely rhetorical one to an instrumental one, making minor refinements in order to address small policy failures (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 725). As we will see, during this period of contestation between October 2005 and October 2007 the Alberta and federal governments, as well as the oil sands industry, have all advanced augmentative discourses.

While the position of the Alberta government remained augmentative during this period, it shifted from a purely rhetorical argument under the Klein era that would have placed oil sands development above all other resource uses, including conservation, to an instrumental one that was willing to make minor adjustments to some key neoliberal policies. While waiting for the results of a new consultation process for reviewing oil sands development after the scrapping of MOSS in January 2006, the government released both its 2006 Speech from the Throne and budget. Similar to the previous year, the 2006 throne speech reasserted a neoliberal policy frame: “The government will work to build a prosperous society by staying true to the fiscal principles that have served this province so well: balanced budgets, no debt, and low taxes (Kwong, 2006, February 22: 2). In addition, infrastructure improvements,

including the twinning of Highway 63 to Fort McMurray, and the removal of “unneeded red tape” would “help maintain a competitive edge for business” (Ibid). The throne speech’s sole reference to the oil sands was that “the future belongs to nonconventional energy sources such as the oil sands and natural gas in coal” (3). A neoliberal justification was used in Budget 2006 to support further lowering the general corporate tax rate: “Alberta has to compete not only with the rest of Canada but the rest of the world. To do that, it’s not enough just to sell Alberta as great place to be. We need to be competitive on taxes (McClellan, 2006: March 22: 591).” The characteristics of both documents reaffirmed the Klein government’s commitment to a neoliberal policy frame. Yet their overall adoption was cast in doubt when within a week of the release of the 2006 budget, Klein received a disappointing leadership review and announced his retirement. Changes to the government’s rhetorical discourse would need to come from Klein’s successor.

During the Progressive Conservative leadership race, the Alberta government decided to investigate challenges associated with the rapid rise in oil sands development in two distinct ways. First, the provincial government adopted the recommendations of the MLA-led group to form a multi-stakeholder committee and launch a broad-based public review. Second, a senior cabinet committee decided to appoint a four-person team, led by Doug Radke, to examine gaps in government services due to the pressures of oil sands development. Released after just four months, the ensuing report, *Investing in our future: Responding to the rapid growth of the oil sands*, called on the province to recognize the situation in Fort McMurray as unique, and invest heavily into localized infrastructure and services (Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, 2006: 7-15).

Ed Stelmach emerged as the unlikely winner in the Progressive Conservative leadership race (Stewart and Sayers, 2009: 88). During the race, Stelmach promised a review of Alberta's royalty structure (*Calgary Herald*, 2006, November 29: A19). And although he immediately stated that he would not "put the brake on development" after his win (McLean and the Canadian Press, 2006, December 5: A1), he did follow through on his campaign promise by appointing an expert panel to review royalties and to hold public consultations.

An instrumental discourse emerged almost immediately from the Stelmach government. Responding to the Radke report, released one month after Stelmach became premier, the Alberta government acknowledged several policy failures—most notably in the areas of infrastructure, housing, and health services in the Fort McMurray Area (Government of Alberta, 2007, February 27). However, their response to these failures was mainly confined to providing increasing funding—resetting existing policy instruments— and as such, was confined to parameters of an augmentative discourse. For example, despite the infrastructure minister's assertion that, "there are unique growth pressures in Fort McMurray and they demand unique solutions," the government responded by granting additional funds to build a new water and sewer treatment plant (2). Speaking loudly through its silence, the province rejected the more transformative ideas contained in the Radke report such as dedicating a percentage of royalty rate to the municipality (Oil Sands Ministerial Strategy Committee, 2006: 148).

Unlike 2005 and 2006, the oil sands featured more prominently in the Stelmach government's first throne speech and budget. Highlighting its new funding announcements, the 2007 throne speech tied "growth pressures" specifically to the

development of Alberta's oil sands (Kwong, 2007, March 7: 3). The throne speech also addressed the issue of greenhouse gas emissions by announcing a plan to set intensity targets for large industrial emitters within Alberta (3). Couched in a language that suggested a transformative change—"ground-breaking climate change plan," and "first legislated emission intensity targets for large industrial emitters"—the plan nonetheless maintained an instrumental augmentative discourse as, for example, it placed no hard caps on the level of greenhouse gases being emitted from oil sands projects. In June, the Oil Sands Multi-stakeholder Committee released their final report in June. Although the committee embraced broad vision statements endorsing responsible development, they were unable to obtain consensus on many of the specific environmental recommendations. For the most part, the province left the myriad of recommendations untouched (Urquhart, 2008: 23-24). As a result, this process failed to produce transformative changes.

In the fall of 2007, Stelmach responded to the Royalty Review Panel's findings that Albertans were not getting their fair share of benefits by increasing royalties, but not as the Panel had envisioned. The government chose to implement a sliding scale for oil sands royalties, ranging from a base royalty rate of one to nine percent with post-payout rates ranging from 25 to 40 percent depending on the price of oil (Government of Alberta, 2007^a: 9). Often governments will ease the impact of regulatory changes on industry through grandfathering. In this case, the Stelmach government chose not to grandfather but instead decided to bring Suncor and Syncrude into the new framework as the Panel recommended (Ibid). Although Stelmach promised Albertans would be getting a "fair share," he was careful to place the new royalty regime *within* the norms of neoliberal discourse:

The New Royalty Framework gives future generations of Albertans a fair share from the development of their resources. It gives stability and predictability to the oil and gas industry. And it assures investors that Alberta will remain an internationally competitive and stable place to do business (1).

By resetting of an existing policy instrument without fundamentally changing how royalties were collected, or directing royalties for specific trusts (e.g., the heritage fund or new environmental or local trusts), the Stelmach government's approach to royalties was instrumental rather than transformative.

Albertans could no longer claim to be on the outside of political power in Ottawa when the Harper Conservatives were elected in January 2006. With the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers originating from Alberta, the 'us versus them' rhetoric subsided temporarily. As federal- provincial conflicts on energy had always been based more on rhetoric than reality, the Harper government continued to embrace a neoliberal policy frame.

In its first throne speech, the Harper government promised to “promote a more competitive, more productive economy” (Canada, 2006: 3). Likening the development of the oil sands to building the Great Wall of China, Harper’s (2006^b) first international speech clearly outlined the government’s neoliberal policy frame for the oil sands. Although he boldly proclaimed Canada as an “emerging energy superpower,”⁴² his aim was not to further state control over development or for Canada to use its energy resources as international levers, as the term originally implied (Hester, 2007: 3-4).

⁴² Harper was not the first Canadian government official to link the concept of 'superpower' to relative wealth of natural resources. In a speech he gave in 2001, for example, Raymond Chrétien, then Canada’s Ambassador to France, connected the two ideas: "our natural resources, Canada is indeed a superpower in this regard." Following this statement, he made reference not only to the oil sands, but also to other non-energy resources like water and forests.

Instead, he used the term to promote the idea of the Canadian energy sector as a desirable place for foreign private investment:

Canada is the only non-OPEC country with growing oil deliverability. And let's be clear. We are a stable, reliable producer in a volatile unpredictable world. We believe in the free exchange of energy products based on competitive market principles, not self-serving monopolistic political strategies. That's why policymakers in Washington – not to mention investors in Houston and New York – now talk about Canada and continental energy security in the same breath. That's why Canada surpassed the Saudis four years ago as the largest supplier of petroleum products to the United States. And that's why industry analysts are recommending Canada as "possessing the most attractive combination of circumstances for energy investment of any place in the world." ...And I think we'll see even more British investment as word of Canada's stature as the West's most important energy storehouse gets out (Harper, 2006^b: 7-8).

In doing so, he confirmed three basic neoliberal normative values: that the private sector should have the lead role in development; that the economy should be fully open to international capital; and that the government role's should be to "provide a stable macro-economy with clear rules of the game" (Lall, 2003: 2). Harper continued to promote this neoliberal vision to a series of other international audiences. Beginning in September 2007, Harper added the word "clean" to his portrayal of Canada as an energy superpower:

Because we're a politically stable country with a transparent regulatory system and a commitment to open markets, we are recognized as a major contributor to global energy security. Canada is an emerging energy superpower. But our real challenge and our real responsibility is to become a clean energy superpower (Harper, 2007^a: 5)

To support his claim that Canada was actively engaged in greening its energy sources, he then proceeded to list a variety of environmental programs and initiatives either proposed or implemented. All of this was likely an attempt to buffer international

criticism received after the Harper government admitted that it would not attempt to meet its Kyoto targets.

Domestically, the task of selling Canada as an emerging energy superpower largely fell to the Minister of Natural Resources (e.g., Lunn 2008, 2007^a, 2007^b, 2007^c, and 2006). This neoliberal perspective on energy existed throughout government. For instance, Environment Canada (2007) went further than the prime minister or Natural Resources Canada by asserting that Canada *is* already an energy superpower:

Canada is an energy superpower and one of only a few industrialized countries that is a net exporter of coal, oil, and natural gas and has large reserves of each. This gives Canada a major role in the long term energy security of North America and world energy supplies . . . Canada is seen as one of the few secure places in the world to invest in energy development, and one of a very few energy exporting nations that has reserves sufficiently large to provide a secure long term supply of fossil-fuels (1).

By adopting the 'energy superpower' designation, Harper's goal was to promote the oil sands as a place for safe, reliable investment (Way, 2011). His speeches were essentially 'super sales pitches' (Ibid). As such, the Harper government was acting according to norms prescribed by neoliberalism: opening the economy to investment and giving the lead development role to the private sector.

In 2007, however, the Harper government *appeared* to be reining in financial incentives for the energy industry and imposing restrictions on oil sands projects' greenhouse gas emissions. In the 2007 budget, the Harper government announced the "phasing *out* of the accelerated capital cost allowance for general investment in the oil sands by 2015" and the "phasing *in* of the accelerated capital cost allowance [ACCA] to promote promising new technologies" including the use of carbon capture and storage

in oil sands projects [emphasis in the original] (Flaherty, 2007: 15). The elimination of the ACCA was augmentative in that the federal government designed it to be minimally disruptive to the oil sands industry by providing transitional relief through long lead-times and the grandfathering of existing projects and by developing a new balancing program (G20, 2010: 11-13). In addition, the focus on investment in technology to address environmental externalities in a manner that supports the overall competitiveness of the industry is well grounded within a neoliberal policy frame.

In an international speech, in which he referred to Canada as an emerging energy superpower, Harper (2007:5) declared that climate change may be “the biggest threat to confront the future of humanity today”. The Harper government’s 2007 climate change plan proposed the adoption of a then-nascent cap and trade system, which would price carbon at \$15 per ton and called for Canada’s carbon footprint to drop by 282 megatons during the period of 2008-2012 (Dembicki, 2012: 3). It would also place intensity targets on large emitters, like oil sands developers (Harper, 2007^b: 7). At the time, these proposals appeared to be examples of instrumental discourse because they recognized, and sought to correct, a failure of the neoliberal oil sands policy frame. However, in 2010, after being twice revised, the government’s cap and trade system was quietly dropped (Dembicki, 2012: 4). By reducing environmental regulations, the Harper government further aided the “unrestrained development of oil and gas reserves” (Brownsey, 2008: 252).

The examination of federal government discourse reveals a strong augmentative discourse, similar to that of the Alberta government, because there were only minor policy changes being made, which were arguably supportive of industry. In the face of

growing public attention to oil sands operations, the energy industry did not leave it to the senior levels of government alone to advocate for their interests. Acting individually and through their sectorial groups, organizations within the oil sands industry publically advanced a strong augmentative discourse.

In their submissions before the Alberta Multi-Stakeholder Committee on Oil Sands Consultation and the Royalty Review Panel, the oil sands industry argued that sweeping regulatory changes were unnecessary as current laws and regulations were sound.⁴³ In their articulation of both their broad political interests and specific policy interests, the oil sands industry reinforced normative values of the neoliberal policy frame. For example, Syncrude (2006^b) outwardly rejected the idea that government should control growth:

We believe that the market economy should prevail. If project operators are unable to secure the people, supplies, and services they need then they will take appropriate action to manage the situation without any prompting from the government. In fact, we are already seeing evidence of some projects being delayed for these very reasons. In our view, this is far better approach than having the government dictate which projects should or should not proceed (10).

The oil sands industry repeatedly maintained that the 'facts' used to justify the creation of the 1997 royalty regime were still relevant and as such no policy change was necessary. For example, the industry argued that oil sands development continued be at “significant risk” as it remained cost-intensive and vulnerable to drops in oil prices resulting from the significant lead-time to market (CAPP, 2006: 3). However, at the

⁴³ In addition to their participation with Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, all the major oil sands and pipeline companies (e.g., Suncor, Syncrude, Total, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., Shell, UTS Energy, Imperial Oil and Encana) made individual submissions to the committee with some making multiple presentations. For example, Suncor had different representatives make submissions at each of the hearings in Fort Chipewyan, Calgary, and Fort McMurray during the Phase II hearings.

same time, it is important to note, in investment circles the industry was actively promoting itself as a mature industry and as one of the best places in the world to invest (e.g., Rubin, 2006: 2). In addition, the oil sands disputed the validity of its opponents' message that the 1997 royalty regime was not designed to capture increased revenues associated with periods of high oil prices (CAPP, 2006: 4), or that industry was not paying its fair share (e.g.: CAPP, 2006: 5; Jones, 2006: 3-4, Syncrude, 2006^c: 3-4). The industry reminded Albertans that, "revenues paid to the provincial government, by the oil and gas sector [were] instrumental to the province's prosperity and the lack of a sales tax," and as a result its existence was contributed to lower individual tax rates (CAPP, 2006: 5).

The environmental policy advocated by the industry could also be characterized as augmentative as they argued for policy based on "sound science that recognizes risk management principles" (CAPP, 2006: 10). The adoption of risk management principles, as opposed to utilizing the precautionary approach or setting limits, has facilitated the rapid development of oil sands projects. This is another example of an augmentative discourse. In addition, the oil sands industry's broad political interest was to counter the impression that it was an environmental laggard: "The fact that some of the oil sands projects have a large footprint, however, does not mean that they are necessarily 'bad' nor do the projects cause irreparable harm to the environment" (CAPP, 2006: 1). Their desire was for regulators and the public to recognize them as members of a responsible industry who sought to make continuous improvements voluntarily. In this regard, CAPP's (2006: 10-15) and individual companies' submissions to the multistakeholder committee, like Suncor (2006^b: 3-6), highlighted numerous improvements made through voluntary measures and various investments in new

environmental technologies. The take-away message was that substantive changes to the environmental regulatory framework were unnecessary, as companies were already active partners in seeking new ways to reduce their environmental footprint. Nevertheless, oil sands companies had a strong economic rationale for implementing these new technologies; many companies lowered their operating costs by improving energy efficiency, water use, and waste management.

The oil sands industry supported claims that municipalities across the province, in particular those that directly hosted oil sands projects, had insufficient funding to adequately keep pace with new developments (e.g., CAPP, 2006: 7-8; Syncrude, 2006^c: 5). In this regard, the industry moved past a strictly rhetorical argument to recognize a policy failure. Although they recommended increased funding to address this issue, their discourse was still augmentative. The oil sands industry maintained that the provincial government should be responsible for addressing negative social externalities and providing public infrastructure (e.g., Jones, 2006: 8). As such, the oil sands industry was not calling for a return to an earlier era of 'company towns', where industry assumed responsibility for many of these services, but instead maintained the neoliberal idea that businesses' sole purpose was to fuel economic growth. The oil sands industry did not advance any new policy instruments or strategies to address these problems (e.g., by dedicating a portion of royalties to be allocated to the host regions). This shows how the current policy frame allows industry a great deal of freedom to pursue its economic interest while leaving other actors to address social externalities associated with development.

Lastly, some in the industry warned that changes to the current policy frame could result in lost investment and growth. A clear example of this was present in the following statement made during the Canadian Natural Resources Ltd's presentation:

During the past 10 years, Alberta and Canada have created favourable conditions for investment in the oil sands industry. Prior to this, we had almost two decades of minimal investment in this industry. Obviously, governments can create strong or weak investment climates to achieve their goals. I ask the Panel to consider which is preferable for Albertans and Canadians (Clapperton, 2006: 6).

This statement ignores market explanations—such as low oil prices—for why the mid-1980s were a period of low growth. However, the message to the Canadian state and public was clear: renege on the neoliberal oil sands policy frame, and industry, irrespective of nationality, will look for a more favourable host.

Although industry and senior levels of government all advanced augmentative discourses as expected, it is important to note the shift in the Alberta government's discourse from rhetorical to instrumental. The public intervention of former Alberta premier, Peter Lougheed, on the other hand, was unusual. Quiet for most of Klein's tenure, Lougheed received significant attention from the news media after he chastised the Klein government for leaving a "mess," and called on the province to "act like an owner" by collecting more rent and proceeding with a more orderly pace of development (e.g., Fekete, 2006, September 3: A1). Although some observers, like Roger Epp (2012: 262), believed Lougheed's critiques were largely "managerial or distributional in nature," and thus augmentative, his comments were instrumental in opening up the space to critique government and industry's record. Here was someone whom government and industry could not paint as radical, anti-industry, or anti-

Alberta.⁴⁴ His comments helped open the door for a broader debate over the nature of oil sands development.

Transformative discourses

Transformative discourses emerge when the existing policy frame is unable to adequately address or anticipate serious policy problems. Actors advancing a transformative discourse reject the notion that instrumental changes would be sufficient to address the policy problem. In the context of this study, transformative discourses included challenging discourses that questioned the facts and truth claims associated with neoliberal policy frame. An example of this type of discourse occurred when actors challenged the validity of the 1997 royalty regime on the basis that underlying economic conditions had changed from a time when investment was scarce and oil prices were low, to one of high prices and runaway growth. Transformative discourses appearing at that time also included truth-seeking narratives, which sought to launch a broad debate about the core principles of neoliberalism. Calls for government to renegotiate free trade, limit foreign investment, or develop the resource through state-owned enterprises were all examples that met the criteria of truth-seeking discourses. Neoliberalism has longed been challenged by the progressive movement in Canada (Carroll and Shaw, 2001: 212). During this period of contestation in the mid-2000s, local governments, First Nations, and ordinary Albertans joined existing opposition groups from environment and labour to voice concerns over how government was allowing development to proceed.

⁴⁴ Dubbed the 'blue-eyed sheik' during his tenure, Lougheed's own record was supportive of the energy industry. For instance, he supported the creation of the North East Commission, which was given the authority to prevent any strikes during the construction the Syncrude consortium (Huberman, 2001: 249).

The environmental movement in Canada clearly embraced a transformative discourse during the study period. The release of the Alberta government's Mineable Oil Sands Strategy in the fall of 2005 galvanized eleven Canadian environmental groups to release a declaration outlining what an alternative development model would look like.⁴⁵ For example, these groups explicitly rejected the current neoliberal approach of treating an oil sands project in isolation by linking oil sands development to its cumulative upstream and downstream environmental impacts even to extent of consumer use of energy (CPAWS et al., 2005: 1). By extension, it also argued that oil sands development should only occur within a regulatory and policy regime whose goal was to transition to a sustainable energy economy (Ibid). They advocated for a wide range of policies including automobile fuel efficiency standards, the elimination of tax subsidies for the oil industry, carbon neutrality for oil sands operations, the use of the precautionary principle for setting water and air thresholds, and the establishment of an interconnected network of protected areas (CPAWS et al., 2005: 2).

Although ambitious and transformative, this declaration was not overtly confrontational. Instead, it built its case by using a challenging discourse based upon a reasoned set of facts and consistently used the term, "oil sands" while also avoiding the word "moratorium." In addition, the groups promised to work with "proactive companies and governments" (CPAWS et al. 2005: 2). Perhaps most importantly, the declaration optimistically stated that changes could be "implemented without significant macroeconomic impacts through innovation and strong leadership" (CPAWS

⁴⁵ The signatories of this declaration included the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Dogwood Initiative, Greenpeace, the Pembina Institute, Prairie Acid Rain Coalition, Sierra Club Canada, Sage Centre, Toxics Watch Society, West Coast Environmental Law, and World Wildlife Fund.

et al., 2005: 2). For a transformative discourse to be successful ultimately in fuelling policy change, it needs to go beyond appealing to its most ardent supporters to encompassing the interests of a wide and diverse range of policy actors (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 724). It is fair to conclude that these examples show that the environmental movement was building bridges amongst different environmental non-governmental organizations as well as reaching out to a broader audience through a collaborative discourse.

Several environmental groups⁴⁶ made presentations and/or submissions before the Oil Sands Multi-Stakeholder Committee consultations. The common theme running throughout these submissions was the need to raise and adequately mitigate environmental concerns before new oil sands development would be allowed to proceed. For example, the Alberta Wilderness Association focused its submission on the protection on the McClelland Lake Fen: “Oil sands development must take place only after identifying and legally protecting irreplaceable watersheds in our boreal forest” (Hildebrand, 2006: 1). Some, like the Pembina Institute went as far as explicitly calling for a moratorium on all new lease sales and project approvals (Raynolds, 2006, October 4: 5). A challenging discourse was even embedded in the submissions of more conservative environmental groups, like the Alberta Fish and Game Association. This hunter and angler group not only called for a range of additional environmental protection, but they also explicitly rejected the idea that industry’s self-monitoring and

⁴⁶ Groups included the Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Alberta Wilderness Association, Friends of Lily Lake, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Edmonton Chapter, Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, Coalition for Global Warming, Environmental Law Centre, Peace River Environmental Society, Parkland Institute, Pembina Institute, Sierra Club of Canada, and Sierra Club of Canada-Prairie Chapter. All groups are Canadian and the vast majority are located within the province of Alberta. However, out of all of these groups, only the Pembina Institute made submissions before the Royalty Review Panel.

reporting was sufficient, instead calling on the province to actively enforce standards, to release all environmental information in an easily accessible manner, and to train citizen volunteers to be environmental monitors (Boyd and Makowecki, 2006: 2).

American environmentalists also added their voices; most notable during this period was the participation of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and former U.S. vice president Al Gore. As the only U.S.-based organization appearing before the multi-stakeholder committee, Natural Resources Defense Council joined Canadian environmental groups in explicitly calling for a moratorium (Casey-Lefkowitz and Nakagawa, 2006: 2). The group also expressed concern “at the lack of transparency in the Alberta-United States discussions” about new trans-boundary pipelines and new American refinery capacity (Casey-Lefkowitz and Nakagawa, 2006: 6). Recommending a broad policy frame, which accounted for and addressed current and future environmental, health, and community impacts, NRDC urged Alberta to embrace a new approach to development:

We see Alberta as a province that is standing at a crossroad. Alberta has the opportunity to emerge as a leader in energy by promoting environmentally and socially sound practices. We hope to see Alberta choose a sustainable energy path for its future (Ibid).

Despite being based in the United States, NRDC did not view their participation as 'outsider' but as a directly-affected participant based on the fact that U.S. demand was driving the rapid development of the oil sands (Casey-Lefkowitz and Nakagawa, 2006: 2). That, in itself, was a transformative idea.

In 2006, Al Gore was promoting his widely successful documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, about global warming. His film was credited for raising public awareness about the issue around the world (Nielsen and Oxford University, 2007, July

2). In the July 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone*, Al Gore strongly criticized the oil sands, equating their development with an unhealthy addiction:

For every barrel of oil they extract there, they have to use enough natural gas to heat a family's home for four days. And they have to tear up four tons of landscape, all for one barrel of oil. It is truly nuts. But you know, junkies find veins in their toes. It seems reasonable, to them, because they've lost sight of the rest of their lives (Finlayson and Cryderman, 2006, July 5: A6).

Accepting the Oscar in 2007, Al Gore called for global action to solve the climate crisis, saying that the issue transcended politics, as it was a “moral issue” (Nagourney, 2007, February 27). Later, Al Gore spoke before 1,600 people in Calgary where, instead of hostility, he found a “willingness of the energy company executives to have an open and honest discussion” (2007, April 26). While remaining 'skeptical' about whether the industry would be able to eliminate CO₂ emissions, he nonetheless credited Alberta for investing in new technologies like carbon capture and storage (Ibid). The presence of American voices served to raise the stakes of the debate since the U.S. was, and remains, the largest foreign market for oil sands production. American policy drivers may make it necessary for the Canada and its energy industry to accept transformative ideas in order to maintain access to their largest market.

Other societal actors, including labour groups and progressive institutes, joined environmental groups in expressing their concerns about the pace and nature of oil sands development. The common denominator amongst them was a renewed call for government to reinsert itself back into the planning process. In their submissions before the multi-stakeholder committee, labour organizations questioned the validity of some of the underlying assumptions of the neoliberal policy frame. For instance, the Alberta Federation of Labour specifically challenged the idea that the private sector should determine how development proceeds:

We need a planning system with teeth. The system must not be merely consultative. It must consciously pace and stagger development. The choice about pace must lie with the public and the government, not industry. And when making decisions about pace, we must look not only at industry desires—but also at environmental concerns and work force limitations. What's in the long-term best interests of Albertans must trump what's in the narrow best interest of energy companies (AFL, 2007:7)

Likewise, the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) challenged the notion that a continental energy market—a hallmark of NAFTA—was in this country's best interest: "If bitumen is to be pipelined out of Alberta, does it make a difference whether it goes to Illinois or Sarnia? We say it does make a difference—Alberta's oil sands must be part of a Canadian energy strategy" (Boucher, 2007: 4) In calling for "outright government intervention," the Alberta Federation of Labour (2007: 5) was clearly rejecting a fundamental tenet of neoliberalism that market principles should be the ultimate guide for decision-making.

To be successful in fostering a change in policy, actors advancing a transformative discourse need to build bridges between themselves and other actors in order generate legitimacy for their ideas. It is in this vein that references to Peter Lougheed should be understood. For instance, the CEP stated, "We need a vision and set of policies similar to those that Peter Lougheed introduced in 1974 to ensure a petrochemical industry would grow up in Alberta" (Boucher, 2007: 5). The Alberta Federation of Labour also referenced Lougheed: "But as former Premier Peter Lougheed has so eloquently put it, we can't be cavalier with royalty rates because once you sell a barrel of oil it's gone forever. You can't sell it again later for a better price. It's like a farmer selling off its top soil" (McGowan, 2006: 3). By referencing the elder conservative statesman, representatives of Alberta's labour movement were clearly

trying to situate themselves within the boundaries of acceptable public discourse within Alberta.

Three progressive research institutes, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Parkland Institute, and the Polaris Institute, funded a report examining “the profound economic, ecological, and social costs” associated with oil sands development (McCullum, 2006: 6). Far-reaching in its scope, the report rejected several central neoliberal values, namely that resources should be privately owned and that the economy should be open to free trade. Instead, it not only called for a moratorium on new development until a host of conditions were met, but the report also called for an increase in provincial and federal government ownership of the energy industry and a renegotiation of the NAFTA's proportionality clause to obtain an exception or “failing that withdraw completely from NAFTA” (McCullum, 2006: 7). The spirit of the report was a resetting of the policy frame to the era that produced Trudeau’s National Energy Plan characterized by policy instruments such as a national oil reserve and government control of energy prices. Their intention was openly acknowledged: “While these policy actions may sound like bold measures to some, the fact remains that much of what is needed now was commonplace in this country a quarter-century ago” (McCullum, 2006: 60).

Joining these societal actors were the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and area First Nations who also advanced transformative discourses. As respected local voices, their arguments for the need to slow the pace of development strengthened the overall legitimacy of transformative discourses. Like Peter Loughheed, the regional municipality could not be easily shrugged off as being 'anti-development'.

In July 2006, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo asked the Energy Utilities Board, when adjudicating Suncor's expansion application, to consider the detrimental effects that the explosive growth of the oil sands projects was having on the area's quality of life (RMWB, 2006^b:14). Although the regional municipality was not specifically against Suncor's application, it called on the board to "slow the pace of oil sands development" (Ibid). This type of intervention was previously unheard of. In their desire to build the case for the need for additional funding to solve their pressing infrastructure needs, the municipality advanced a transformative argument built upon a citizenship rational: "We believe that our citizens are entitled to the same level and quality of service that every other Albertan experiences" (RMWB, 2006^x: 88). The RMWB expanded further by arguing that they should be able to provide comparable services using levels of taxation comparable to other Albertan municipalities (RMWB, 2007:8 and RMWB, 2006^a: 15). Similar to the federal principle of equalization,⁴⁷ this type of argument reasserted the notion of collective citizenship wherein a quality of life is a right enjoyed irrespective of location. As such, it directly challenged the values of individual responsibility associated with neoliberalism. The second basis of the municipality's argument was that the situation they faced was "unique" in the province as the rate and duration of growth even surpassed levels associated with a boomtown (Newell, 2006: 92). As a result, normal funding mechanisms were insufficient to provide the necessary services that the residents of Wood Buffalo deserved.

⁴⁷ In response to questioning by a panel member, Mr. Newell, manager of the RMWB, rejected the idea that likening the proposal to an equalization model between the provinces and Canada was using the "right terminology" (Newell, 2006: 102). Likely this was because while equalization involves the additional transfer of federal funds to 'have not' provinces, the RMWB believed the shortage of funds was the result of money leaving the community

In response, the municipality sought to renegotiate its fiscal relationship with both the province and the oil sands industry. In its submission before the multi-stakeholder committee, the municipality argued for a special funding grant from the province (RMWB, 2006^a: 18). However, once before the Royalty Review Panel it argued that the province should designate “a predictable, annual, portion of royalty revenues from oil sands projects” to the municipality (RMWB, 2007: 16-17). There was some support for this position, notably in the then newly released Radke report (2006: 18). The municipality argued that proponents of new oil sands projects should sign an “industrial agreement” in order “to capture its portion of existing infrastructure and an appropriate contribution towards the development costs of new or expanded infrastructure required for population growth projected as a result of each new project” (RMWB, 2006^a: 18).

The municipality raised questions that directly challenged the core values of the neoliberal oil sands policy frame, specifically regarding who should benefit from oil sands development and what role the industry had in maintaining and fostering a healthy community. Its arguments were not a return to a pre-neoliberal era (e.g., they did not call for a return of the 'company town') but envisioned a new policy frame where the host municipality for the resource had increased independence from both the provincial government and industry, through the presence of more stable and robust funding mechanisms. In these respects, the municipality’s argument was transformative. However, it is also important to note that the municipality’s commitment to these transformative discourses wavered—they raised their concerns only in some public venues, but not others. In addition, its silences on other aspects of oil sands development contributed to an augmentative discourse in these areas. For

example, its oral and written submissions before both panels did not advance any arguments focused on environmental issues.⁴⁸

Similarly, area First Nations also sought increased autonomy. However, their claims began from a fundamentally different starting point, rooted as it was in a reassertion of Aboriginal and treaty rights. For example, speaking before the multi-stakeholder committee, Pat Marcel (2007), an elder of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (AFCN) summarized the primary concern of many area First Nations and Métis peoples:

Trying to address our concerns at the same time that new projects are being approved has failed—government and industry have been trying this for nearly 10 years—you can’t do both at the same time, and our concerns have to get top priority. For too long our concerns have been overlooked for the sake of approving new projects as fast as possible. I can’t accept this (2).

Underlying this sentiment is a belief that the Crown has failed to protect and/or accommodate area First Nations’ treaty rights under Treaty 8 and 6, as well as broader Aboriginal rights (e.g., Aboriginal Consultation Interdepartmental Committee, 2007: 9).⁴⁹ There were repeated calls for meaningful consultation with the Canadian state. Many area First Nations and Métis people expressed an interest in playing a large role in oil sands development if they were successful in their negotiations as many groups sought

⁴⁸ In a follow-up letter to the Community Summit, the RMWB indicated their support for vision 3 to “ensure a healthy environment”. However, specific recommendations only focused on a need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to monitor and regulate the number of hazardous materials traveling through the Fort McMurray urban service area (RMWB, 2007: 2).

⁴⁹ Both Treaty 8 and 6 First Nations were specifically consulted as part of the second phase of the Aboriginal consultation process. This consultation ran parallel to second phase of the multistakeholder committee consultation hearings. This section only touches briefly on some broad generalizations of the First Nations perspective advanced during this process. Many First Nations groups presented concrete and actionable strategies in their submissions (for example, the protection of specific areas and watersheds). The degree to which area First Nations and Métis peoples embrace development also differs. However, as stated, one can discern a transformative discourse. They all begin from a fundamentally different starting point, one based on a prior recognition of Aboriginal rights.

to benefit from a larger share of economic returns (Aboriginal Consultation Interdepartmental Committee, 2007: 11); however, the nature and pace of development would change. For instance, the Heart Lake First Nation's elders and community leaders ranked economic opportunities fourth below protection of Aboriginal and treaty rights (first), the environment (second), and the health of their people (third) in their submission to the multistakeholder committee (Heart Lake First Nation Consultation Office, 2007: 6). It is clear that the Heart Lake First Nation believed that this type of prioritization has not governed resource development to date: "Industry and the Crown are so focused on exploiting resources while product prices are high that time has not been taken to understand what impact the boom of activity has had on Mother Earth" (Ibid).

The concerns of environmental and other societal actors, local government, and First Nations gained traction as their ideas met with a receptive public. Canadians consistently ranked the environment as one of their top concerns between 2006 and early 2008 (Gunster, 2009: 26). A 2007 poll of Albertans conducted by the Pembina Institute found that 71 percent believed that oil sands project approval should be halted until the provincial government resolved environmental and infrastructure issues (Woynillowicz and Dryer, 2008: 5).⁵⁰ The same study found that only 20 percent of Albertans believed that "market forces should decide the rate of oil sands development" (Woynillowicz and Dryer, 2008: 7). A clear majority of Albertans (74 percent) were rejecting this neoliberal value believing moderately or strongly that the Alberta government "should play an active role in managing the rate of oil sands development"

⁵⁰ A Sayers and Steward's (2009) study also found that Albertans ranked environmental and regulatory measures highly (10). This suggests that there is latent support for a stronger environmental platform.

(Ibid). Seventy percent of Albertans also rejected government and industry's intensity-based approach to greenhouse gas emissions (Woynillowicz and Dryer, 2008: 8). Public opinion also favoured increasing royalties (Royalty Review Panel, 2007: 43).

These polling results were confirmed by the individual correspondence sent by Albertans and other Canadians to the multi-stakeholder committee; their writings and testimony urged caution in developing the oil sands (Oil sands Multi-stakeholder Committee, 2006: 12-34). Numerous individuals repeated the statement below, which sought to redefine prosperity for Alberta:

I am concerned about oil sands development in Alberta and want to ensure we have a healthy prosperous Alberta during and after development. "Prosperous" not only means Albertans get a fair share of wealth from [sic] our natural resources—it means that the water, air, and forests are healthy too (9-13; 15-20).

An attentive public was expressing a transformative discourse by both questioning neoliberal values—specifically the weight given to environmental and health concerns—by soundly rejecting industry and government's claims that current regulations were sufficient.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide insight into not only the positive and negative impacts of oil sands development but also the drivers behind such rapid growth. In doing so, it highlighted how social and environmental considerations have had little impact, to date, in determining the pace and scale of development. Instead, development proceeded when several elements coalesced: private and state involvement, technological breakthroughs, and positive market conditions.

What has changed under the current neoliberal policy frame is not the state's support of natural resource industries, which the Canadian state has consistently supported throughout its history, but the tactics it employs (Slowey, 2008: 15). Neoliberal doctrine has dissuaded the use of many of the policy instruments formerly utilized by the state to both control development and buffer individuals and the environment from its adverse effects. For example, as highlighted above, the implementation of a generic royalty regime has reduced the ability of the state to place individualized conditions on an oil sands project. As such, neoliberalism has served to narrow the range of acceptable strategies.

In response to attacks levelled against the oil sands neoliberal policy frame, one would have expected the Canadian state to have immediately sided with the interests of business. Instead, the province of Alberta launched two broad based public reviews while the federal government openly questioned key elements of its fiscal framework. Prior to that, both governments had argued that no review was necessary. This resulted in an unstable policy period providing opportunity for new transformative ideas to emerge. The public debate went as far as to include the suggestion of a moratorium on new projects until negative environmental and social externalities could be adequately addressed. Previously, these ideas would have been considered heretical, as they directly challenged the neoliberal underpinnings of the oil sands policy frame. In the end, instead of widespread changes, both levels of government revised some policies while leaving the neoliberal policy frame largely intact. According to MacDonald (2007: 192), governments will only increase regulatory pressure when there is adequate societal pressure to do so, originating from a populace that "is engaged, aware, and unwilling to settle for easy definitions of environmentalism." I theorize that that this

societal pressure is unlikely to grow into a policy shaping force if newspaper coverage continues to be bound by the confines of neoliberalism, favouring augmentative discourses over transformative ones. This dissertation adds to our understanding of the resiliency of neoliberalism and its ability to incorporate, rather than be disrupted by, challenges.

3 Newspapers, neoliberalism, and the possibilities for a transformative discourse

Environmental issues or problems do not simply emerge and announce themselves as issues requiring a social/political response in the form of legislation, research, or change in public practices and social arrangements...The media are a central, possibly the central forum, through which we, as audiences and publics, make sense of our environment, society, and politics.

—Anders Hansen, *Environment, media and communication*, 2010: 2-1; 2-6

News stories about natural resources such as the oil sands communicate far more to readers than simply information (Hansen, 2010: 2-5). They act as signposts for power relations in society. News stories indicate which environmental and social 'problems' are worthy of our attention, and help us to determine whether we see a particular locale as in need of conservation or as suitable place for industrial activity. Newspapers are not a blank slate without context or bias upon which stories are written. The institutional norms in place and organizational structure of papers affect which topics are selected for presentation as news stories, and precisely how the paper decides to tell those stories.

Chapter 3 first begins by arguing that frames are a necessity in newspaper reporting, and societal norms, particularly our belief in the free market, shape how these frames are created. Second, it investigates the use of sources in newspaper reporting and distinguishes between elite and other types of sources. Third, it explores how the key principles of objective journalism can have unintended consequences in shaping how reporters approach a story. Lastly, this chapter reviews the impact of four structural factors—placement of the story within the newspaper, type of story, place of publication, and newspaper ownership—on journalistic presentation of an issue or

event. Within each of these sections, the chapter explores neoliberalism's influence on newspaper reporting and the likelihood of transformative discourses emerging within newspaper coverage about natural resource issues.

News frames

If the mere decision of whether or not to cover a story serves to focus the public and decision-makers' attention on an issue, then the utilization of news frames go significantly further by telling readers "how to think about those issues" (Terkildsen and Schnell, 1997: 894). Used by necessity to provide structure to a story, news frames privilege certain aspects of an issue over others (Nisbet, 2010: 47-49). Framing "is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences" (Scheufel and Tewksbury, 2007: 11). Journalists are forced to choose how they will represent an event or issue simply because they are unable to capture the complexities of policy problems in the few hundred words allocated to a news article. This partiality from writers is evident not only from what is included in articles, but also from what is absent (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 271-272). Most often the media cluster together by favouring the reproduction of formulaic frames representing broadly shared worldviews, rather than using subordinate or alternative frames (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 335). Despite the dominance and persistence of certain news frames, it is important to remember that even seemingly hegemonic news frame can change. For example, Terkildsen and Schnell (1997: 884-885) found that the "traditional gender roles" frame that dominated media coverage of women in the 1950s had disappeared altogether by the early 1970s.

In the context of this study, the most important underlying societal value shaping news frames is the belief in the value of private markets and free enterprise. These values have risen to even higher ascendancy under neoliberalism, with the role of the state being limited to the creation and preservation of an institutional framework that fosters a 'positive business climate' (Harvey, 2005: 70). Neoliberalism has also become "less controversial in centre-left circles and axiomatic in centre-right ones" (Hackworth, 2009: 35). As such, the convergence of viewpoints has raised neoliberal values to the level of "common-sense" (ibid). Far from questioning these values or businesses' privileged place in society, Canadian news media organizations have tended to reinforce the acceptability of these values through their coverage (Hackworth, 2009: 34-35; Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 319-320; Taras, 2001: 59; Hackett and Zhao, 1988: 150-160).⁵¹

Based on media literature examining other natural resource industries as well as the general literature on natural resources and environmental policy, there are four possible overarching news frames for coverage of the Alberta oil sands. News stories may use an economic frame, thus privileging the economic aspects of the oil sands issue or an environmental frame, focusing on the environmental aspects of oil sands production.⁵² Alternatively, newspaper stories may feature a social frame by emphasizing social consequences. Finally, reporting about the oil sands may explore the implications of harnessing this natural resource for energy security (an energy security

⁵¹ The Canadian news media are not alone; studies of the American news media have also found "consistent framing in favour of capitalism" (Entman, 2010: 348).

⁵² However, as McHenry (1996) argues, it may be sometimes difficult to separate environmental discourses from economic ones because the news stories often contain partial discourses reflecting the fact that policy problems are not uniquely environmental, economic, or social. Stories were classified according to their dominant news frame.

frame). The remainder of this section reviews the literature on media coverage on natural resource issues to explore the likelihood that the four ways of framing the oil sands issue will employ transformative discourses, which challenge the 'facts' and values used in support of neoliberalism.

An economic frame focuses on “the bottom line—economic implications, considerations, and prospects” of the project or policy under consideration (de Vresse, 2010: 190). Within this frame, journalists can direct their attention to the individual, firm, sector, community, or government levels. A study focusing on electricity restructuring in Ontario found that newspapers primarily employed this frame in their news coverage (Greenberg, 2005: 247). Previous studies have shown that the news media “appear to take the standpoint of the assumed average consumer” (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 68).⁵³ For example, the press, when covering labour-management disputes, tend to focus “on inconvenience and disruptions to consumers” rather than on the “implications for working people” (Ibid). This type of framing supports the neoliberal perspective as it focuses on individualized costs while minimizing the actions of a collective actor (labour). The business press will tend to narrow their perspective further by adopting an investor standpoint (Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 194). In doing so, business journalists frame the economic consequences of an issue solely on the basis of how it affects the interest of capital. In sum, it is unlikely that newspapers will adopt a transformative discourse when employing an economic frame as relevant issues are rarely approached from a labour, or even a citizen's, perspective.

⁵³ It is important to note that on “social issues that do not threaten the fundamental issues of capital,” the Canadian news media has marginalized the extreme right (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 160). As such, the idea of the right's attack on the “liberal” media is partially credible (Ibid).

An environmental frame encompasses the environmental impacts of particular activity. Within this frame, reporters can direct their focus at environmental issues occurring at the local to the international level. While this frame has a higher potential to embrace a transformative discourse, in that it often features an environmental problem requiring immediate resolution, newspapers have typically employed an augmentative discourse instead, by downplaying any structural or institutional causes of the problem (Anderson, 2002: 14; Keating, 1997: 12). For example, when covering oil spills, the news media often evoke a “melodrama of disaster” plot, which begins with the “disruption of normalcy, investigation of a mystery, and finally restoration of normalcy” (Anderson, 2002: 13). When the press applies this framing, it is difficult for actors advancing arguments that neoliberal regulatory regimes and/or the energy industry’s processes may have contributed to oil spills. Newspaper coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill appears to have been an exception, as significant exposure to the company’s role and the responses and actions of the Obama administration was given by the American mainstream media.⁵⁴ Another underlying belief shaping newspaper coverage about natural resources and environmental issues is faith in “the march of progress through scientific and technological revolution” (Anderson, 1997:

⁵⁴ News coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, which occurred at BP facilities off the Coast in Mexico during a three-month period in 2010, faulted not only the company, but also the failure of broader regulatory processes. A PEW Research Centre’s project for excellence in journalism (2010: 4), which studied press coverage from May 10 to July 28, 2010, found that the minority of stories focused on corporate responsibility (27 percent) and the government’s role (17 percent). In this coverage, the media clearly identified BP as the villain; however, the Obama administration did not emerge as protagonist (7). The PEW study emphasizes that this oil spill did not fit the typical disaster story prototype, as it was the number one story across coverage in nine of the first fourteen weeks following the spill—never falling out of the top three positions during that period (2). The typical ‘disaster’ story generally only leads news coverage for a week, before experiencing a significant drop-off (3). Newspaper coverage of the subsequent presidential panel’s report also highlighted the findings that the cause was “systematic” rather than a “product of series of aberrational decisions made by rogue industry or government officials” (Broder, 2011: A14).

126). For example, research on nuclear power found that the media tended to emphasize its technological advancement while simultaneously downplaying its potential long-term risks (Culley et al., 2010: 509). This approach also diminishes the role of structural causes suggesting that improvements will occur without any fundamental change in behaviour on the part of individuals or society as a whole. As a result, newspapers have tended to employ an augmentative rather than transformative discourse when discussing environmental issues.

Although the appearance of 'conflict' will often draw media attention to an environmental problem, highlighting this type of news value in an environmental frame will tend to reinforce an augmentative discourse rather than disrupt it. By focusing on conflict between actors, the media's focus is again drawn away from the structural or institutional causes of environmental issues (Anderson, 2002: 10; Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 171; Karlberg 1997: 22-27). By focusing on two competing camps (e.g. environmentalists vs. industry workers), this approach tends to obscure the role that government and resource companies have played in creating or exacerbating said conflicts. First, casting government in the role of referee ignores the fact that government policy tends to favour the resource industry's position, particularly in a neoliberal policy environment. Second, this view mistakenly conflates the interests of industry workers with those of the company itself. While their interests may overlap, the company's primary responsibility is to its shareholders, where capital must prevail. In addition, the 'environmentalist vs. workers' approach reduces the opportunity for other actors (e.g., First Nations, community groups, academics) to offer solutions.

A social frame focuses on the consequences of natural resource development for the social wellbeing of a community and/or its inhabitants. Given the unique community structure (remote, single industry town and work camps as well as neighbouring First Nations communities) which often encompasses natural resource industries, the social implications of development have often been a central focus of natural resource scholars (e.g., Halseth, 2008; Reed, 2003). However, unlike the other two frames, this frame has received little attention in the media literature. One possible explanation for this is that the media themselves have not employed this frame as actively as others, as highlighted in this example from Clayoquot Sound, where the media focused only on women environmental protestors rather than women from the local forestry communities:

In contrast to the broad interest in the environmental protestors, the international media did not turn their lenses and microphones towards these “other” women. Consequently, we know little about the women who supported the forest industry (Reed, 2003: 4).

The social frame is important to include in this study because oil sands development, like other resource development projects, has had both significant positive and negative impacts on the wellbeing of local residents. In addition, the concept of sustainable development presupposes a balance of economic, environmental, and social considerations. Media studies on other social issues provide insight as to how newspapers are likely to approach social issues in a resource development context. For example, Hackworth’s study (2009:35) of Canadian and American news stories about Habitat for Humanity found that newspapers on both sides of the border reproduced the neoliberal logic “that governments fail, that markets succeed, and that individuals are singularly responsible for their success and failure.” This was despite the fact that some prominent spokespeople of the charity, such as former President Jimmy Carter,

believed that “government [was] not interventionist enough” in providing low-income housing (34). This suggests that stories using a social frame are likely to employ an augmentative discourse; that is, finding a solution to a policy problem within the confines of neoliberal doctrine rather than from outside it.

Finally, an energy security frame focuses on a new energy project’s ability to help satisfy growing energy demand, diversify energy sources, and/or support a country’s energy independence. As with the social frame, there have been relatively few scholarly works on this issue. One study on newspaper coverage of new nuclear reactors in the southern United States located this frame within a pro-development discourse. News articles captured in that study purported that the new reactors would reduce American reliance on the Middle East, diversify the state’s energy mix, and meet increasing demand (Culley et al., 2010: 503). This author’s earlier work (Way, 2011) found that Canadian national newspapers as well as the *Toronto Star* clearly adopted the Canadian state’s preferred framing that Canada’s energy security would come from “security of supply,” not through government intervention. As such, the papers reinforced the neoliberal contention that the private market, not the state, is best able to address energy security concerns and should lead oil sands development.

The prevalence of neoliberal doctrine within the Canadian policy context, and the media’s ensuing support for this ideological perspective, suggests that the news media will primarily adopt an augmentative discourse by portraying the oil sands as a good place to invest and upholding the right of the private sector to determine the pace and scale of development. It is also likely that media will question government efforts to increase environmental regulations or dramatically alter the fiscal framework. It is

further expected that newspapers will continue to reassert their faith that improvements in the realm of oil sands development will occur as the result of technological breakthroughs.

The claim-makers: The impact of sources on the selection of story frame

As Hansen (2010: 3-4) argues, examining the sources used by journalists is important because there is a “fair degree of ‘fit’ between *who* is quoted in media coverage and *how* issues are framed and defined.” Policy actors who understand how the media works can use the media--just as a player uses the boards of a hockey rink--to advance their position effectively and efficiently (Kinsella: 2007: 85). Through press releases, interviews, and the like, policy actors seek to cultivate a positive assessment from the media, which can confirm a sense of legitimacy and credibility to their policy stance that no amount of money can buy. Less is known about communication strategies that actors use “towards staying out of the media and public limelight or more specifically towards preventing competitor-definitions or opposing groups from getting media coverage or from gaining legitimacy in the public sphere” (Hansen, 2011: 12).

Like builders using standard architectural plans, the underlying values of our society shape how the media evaluate the veracity of claims made by various news sources (Sampert and Trimble 2010: 4, Pan and Kosicki, 1993: 68-69). It is important to note that there is variation in the amount of “framing power” that each actor possesses; for instance, the head of an organization generally carries significantly more weight with the media than a lone member (Johnston-Cartee, 2005: 25).

Studies have confirmed that the media regularly rely upon elite actors (officials from government, corporations, and other business actors) as sources for business and environmental stories (Carlson, 2009: 529; Nesbitt-Larking 2007: 326, Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 39; Anderson, 1997: 67-68). This “standardization” of sources contributes to the homogenization of news frames (Johnston-Cartee, 2005: 219). For example, business actors are more likely to draw attention to the economic implications of development than to highlight an oil sands project’s environmental or social impacts. There is a symbiotic relationship between the media and elite actors. Reporters often rely on these groups to provide credible and free, although self-serving, information, on which to base their stories (Anderson, 2002: 12; Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 39). Although the relationship is mutually beneficial, there remains tension between journalists and their sources, as the former strive to present critiques and/or offer objective coverage of an issue (Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 39).

A Pritchard et al. study (2005: 300) found that journalists were increasingly sceptical of both government and business sources.⁵⁵ Indexing theory⁵⁶ suggests that this “scepticism” by the mainstream press will be the greatest when there are profound disagreements amongst elite actors (Bennett et al., 2007: 111). In fact, Bennett et al.

⁵⁵ When the business press misses out an important event (e.g., dot com bubble, Enron scandal), there is often a great deal of soul-searching on the part of individual journalists and the profession at-large as to why precisely they missed it (Pritchard et al., 2005: 301). At this moment, questions are raised, not only about the credibility of sources—particularly company and industry analysts—but also about why they failed to get below the surface of the stories (Ibid). The question is whether this introspection continues once the story has ended. Events like the housing bubble and the global recession (2008-2010) would seem to suggest otherwise.

⁵⁶ The central idea behind indexing theory is that “journalists index the range of viewpoints in the news to the divisions of power they perceive within various decision making circles of government” (Bennett et al. (2007: 217).

(2007: 50) go as far as to suggest that the “prominence of various perspectives” in the mainstream press is dependent not on whether the perspective is supported by “available facts” but on the perceived level of power held by the elite actor voicing the particular perspective (50). The most powerful actor can often be an elite actor who is arguing a position that runs counter to their party’s or organization’s interest.⁵⁷ As such, it is important to note that the framing power amongst elite actors varies. Despite this, these actors will have an easier time gaining media attention than outside actors who challenge the media’s preferred frame.

A survey of journalists currently writing about oil sands development found that industry sources were “key to almost any news story” (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 7). Not only did the media rely heavily on industry announcements, but journalists also sought their reaction for stories about the environmental or health impacts of the oil sands (Ibid). The Paskey and Steward study confirms the general trend in the literature suggesting that business actors are a predominant source. According to generalized literature on news sources, government, as another elite actor, should also tend to predominate as a source. However, Paskey and Steward’s survey of journalists currently writing stories about the oil sands actually found that the slow response time of government sources resulted in their notable absence as sources for news stories (2012: 17). This suggests that government actors will be less dominant than industry, but it is

⁵⁷ Bennet et al. (2007: 6-7) chronicled how the news narrative on detainee treatment by the U.S. military at the Abu Ghraib prison did not change substantially from framing it as “low-level abuse” to “torture” until Senator John McCain, an influential Republican senator and former Vietnam POW, challenged the Bush Administration and led efforts to hold the U.S. government accountable. This was despite the fact that the evidence used by Senator McCain had been publicly available for some time and had been utilized by numerous credible organizations like the International Red Cross.

uncertain as to whether they are more likely than non-elite actors to be cited in a story about oil sands development.

Although these elite groups' opinions are likely to be utilized heavily by the media, their reproduction in texts should not be assumed to be automatic (Carlson, 2009: 535; Schlesinger, 1990: 79). By adopting the public relations strategies of industry, such as the hiring of public relations firms, subordinate actors, like environmental groups, have become more adept in having their message resonate with the media and has assisted them in gaining prominence across "the media, policy, and public agendas" (Greenberg et al, 2011: 76). In short, a number of large environmental groups, like the David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute, have become more effective news sources (Paskey and Steward 2012: 17; Greenberg et al., 2011: 74-76; Anderson, 2002: 11). Some studies suggest that alternative voices, like environmental groups, will tend to have greater exposure at the local media level. Environmental groups may also succeed in becoming the "primary definers" of an issue when government or industry officials are slow to respond (Anderson, 1997: 167).

Interactions between various non-state actors and the news media are highly dependent on whether the actor is thought to be part of an insider or outsider group (Grant, 2000:19). Government bodies routinely consult insider groups about changes to public policy, whereas outsider groups are generally excluded from these processes. The 'insider' status of business actors affords them direct channels, through elite closed-door discussions, to communicate their preferred policy stances to government officials (Hansen, 2010: 3-17; MacDonald, 2007: 182). For example, MacDonald (2007: 182) found that Canadian businesses rarely use the media to lobby for specific environmental

policy measures; rather, a corporation's media strategy is usually focused on seeking out general public approval and support to help bolster its corporate image as a "caring, concerned member of society." As an insider group, business actors will primarily use the media to advocate for their broader political interest. This would suggest that the claims made by business actors found within news discourse on oil sands development will be geared more towards advancing their broader political, rather than specific policy, interests. Conversely, outsider groups must seek media attention both for *themselves* and for the advancement of their *claims*. From this, it can be hypothesized that there will be within news stories evidence of both specific policy claims of marginalized actors (e.g., environmental groups, aboriginal groups) in addition to claims which advance their broader political interest.

Achieving high levels of media coverage is itself an insufficient measure of an outsider groups' success, since the media may disregard or even mock their underlying claims and wider political objectives (Hansen, 2010: 3-5; Anderson, 2003: 123; Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 115-116; Anderson, 1997: 209). In *Writing about business: The New Columbia Knight-Bagehot guide to economic and business journalism*, Holusha (2001: 32) instructs journalism students to be cautious from the start: "Some environmental activists say groups like Greenpeace have a value because they focus public attention on problems. But their arguments are usually extreme cases and should be reported very carefully." The importance of insider/outsider status is better viewed on a continuum rather than with an either/or classification. For example, some environmental groups which have typically been viewed as 'outsiders' have obtained 'insider' status by participating in consultative processes with government and industry (Hansen, 2010: 3-18).

The journalist's creed

While rejecting the notion that journalism can serve to 'mirror' reality, scholars still need to be concerned with the practice of objectivism and to what extent this practice may have unintended consequences. The goal of balanced and objective journalism remains at the centre of the Canadian journalist's creed of:

...accurately reporting the views of public figures, getting information to the public quickly, giving ordinary people a chance to express their views, investigating the activities of government and public institutions and providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems (Pritchard et al., 2005: 290).

As Hackett and Zhao (1998: 119) argue, "the news can cumulatively establish and amplify particular frames without abandoning the formal criteria of objectivity...in individual reports." Frames, therefore, "co-exist with, and are not dispelled by" these practices (Ibid). For example, in pursuit of the journalistic concept of balance—the practice of quoting both sides on an issue—debate over the causes of climate change in the media served to distort the level of scientific uncertainty long after a scientific consensus emerged (Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Corbett and Durfee 2004, Moser and Drilling 2004).⁵⁸ Their adherence to maintaining objectivity, coupled with their reliance on political and business elites as sources, made journalists very receptive to neoliberalism, particularly and most notably around the 1990s deficit/debt issue (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 153-156). This led to the widespread adoption of a news frame that portrayed Canada's debt as unmanageable and ultimately as a threat to the country if not brought under control. Its 'root' cause purported to be an overly

⁵⁸ It is important to note that there have been changes in the media coverage of climate change from asking "is climate change occurring" to "what will be the effects of an already changing climate" (Good, 2008: 248). This new question leaves little room for climate change deniers.

generous welfare state, which Canada could no longer afford. Through sheer repetition, this frame was “naturalized” and thus became an “objective” account of reality (Ibid).

One way it became naturalized was through the approach taken by journalists to achieving balance in their stories. For example, Hackett and Zhao draw attention to how one *Vancouver Sun* article just randomly “threw in without explanation” a statement from a labour leader, while the viewpoint of a Fraser Institute’s economist received significant exposure throughout the entire article (1998: 158). In another case, 'balance' was achieved by having business actors comment on each other, for example, economists from financial institutions commenting on a Fraser Institute report (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 159). A third way this frame was naturalized also appeared in the *Sun*, which featured original source documents (e.g., Fraser Institute’s reports) in the business section and suggested that they were hard news, while simultaneously designating alternative voices (e.g., a Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives’ report) only as opinion pieces (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 160). A study examining coverage of proposed nuclear reactors found that in some cases, supposedly neutral informational stories contained information that benefited the pro-nuclear side; for instance, some news stories presented as fact the need for increased electrical production despite recent evidence of drop in overall demand, to the contrary (Culley et al., 2010: 508).

The demands of 'objective' journalism also results in a situation where the staying power of the mainstream media is often quite limited (Bennett et al., 2007: 67). While coverage of dramatic events or investigative reporting may push an alternative news frame, it is unlikely to remain within news coverage if the government (or another powerful actor) fails to react to it (Ibid). In that case, many journalists then view staying

on the story as “crusading” and therefore outside their professional norms (Ibid). By consistently presenting an issue in a manner that favours one side’s interpretation over another or by failing to sustain coverage on an issue, newspapers may ultimately develop a “content bias” regardless of their adherence to the practice of objective journalism (e.g., use of multiple sources, adoption of a neutral or balanced tone). In doing so, the media can help distribute political power to societal groups, governing parties, or individuals associated with this interpretation (Entman, 2010: 338).

Journalistic structural factors

It is important to remember that the majority of news organizations, including all the newspapers in this study, are private businesses. As such, they must generate returns for their owners. Stories must be sufficiently newsworthy to capture the reader’s attention and must be produced in such way that is economically efficient (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 2). This places constraints on which stories are told and the manner in which they are told. In other words, journalistic norms and the organizational structure of news organizations have a filtering effect on how frames and interests are incorporated into the news discourse. This section focuses on how four common journalistic structural factors—newspaper section, type of story, publication proximity, and newspaper ownership—may affect the likelihood of a transformative discourse emerging within newspaper coverage of the Alberta oil sands.

The newspaper is not a singular setting as specialized sections allow the newspaper to tailor its news coverage to suit the needs of a particular subset of its audience. A journalist’s speciality will shape their overall perspective, how they approach a story, and what sources they seek out (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 5). For

the purposes of this dissertation, the business section is to be understood as the most important of the specialized sections. This section has not only grown alongside the rise of neoliberalism, but also has served to uphold and reinforce neoliberal values through its coverage.

Generally, the size of business sections has grown exponentially, especially in proportion to other news sections (Henriques, 2000: 21). Although this growth may seem “natural” given that “economic considerations have become a key factor in all kinds of decisions, private as well as public,” it is a relatively new phenomenon and should be viewed as part of the broader adoption of neoliberal values (Kjaer and Slatta, 2007: 13). A contributing factor to this growth is the rise of self-directed/defined contribution retirement investment plans, which makes “everyone out there, journalists among them, [a] business player” (Simons, 1999: 56). The outcome of this growth is that newspapers’ limited resources are used in way that privileges and engrains neoliberal values.

In fact, even as overall coverage has risen, the target audience for newspapers has changed and narrowed from “readers” to “consumers” to “investors” (Henriques, 2000: 21). In defining the audience as either “consumers” or “investors,” business journalism assumes audience concerns are primarily concerned about issues at the personal level, rather than at a broader public level:

On the front page, journalists write in anticipation of readers who ask, “What is happening in the world today that I should know about as a citizen of my community, nation, and world?” On the business page, journalists presume readers who ask, “What is happening in the world today that I should know about as an investor to protect or advance my financial interests?” (Schudson as quoted in Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 235)

Accompanying this shift in focus to an audience of “investors,” an economic perspective has been further narrowed to a financial one: “Growth is considered mainly in terms of share prices or revenues and obstacles to growth are interpreted in light of the financial situation of the firms concerned” (Kajer, 2007: 176). A Canadian study on forestry debates found that pro-industry discourse increased after the *Vancouver Sun*’s 1995 decision to move the majority of its forestry-related articles, including ones about the environmental movement, to its business section (Arvai and Mascarenhas, 2001: 711). Ostensibly done to “streamline the newspaper’s layout,” this action contributed to an increased number of environmental articles adopting a “business oriented, pro-forestry theme” (Ibid). Broader media values like “celebrity” were also increasingly being embraced in this expanded news section, further reducing opportunities to explore more substantive issues (Stiglitz, 2003: 32-33).⁵⁹

A US study on newspaper coverage of alternative energy found that articles included in the business section framed the issue in terms of the domestic economy or international trade, while those in the news section employed a political strategy frame (Haigh, 2010: 58). Due to the majority of the articles appearing in the business section another American study on wind power in Texas concluded that the news discourse largely embraced an economic frame, as opposed to a risk frame (Stephens et al., 2010: 185). In summary, media literature suggests that coverage in a business section will differ significantly from the other sections of the paper in its framing, portrayal of oil sands development, and the sources used. In addition, it also suggests that there will be

⁵⁹ The news media also reproduced their own values within their coverage of economic policy making. For example, the business press bestowed “celebrityhood” status on corporate CEOs and senior public officials (Ibid). It also applied the game frame by describing economic policy making “as [if] it [was] a sporting event” (Ibid).

strong commonalities between coverage within the business section of the Alberta major dailies and their national counterparts.

Whether a story is written as an opinion piece or as a hard news piece is likely to affect how the reporter represents both augmentative and transformative discourses within the article. In a descriptive hard news story, the reporter strives to get the “facts right” (Harrison, 2008: 43). These stories tend to be augmentative because the journalist has determined that the facts need no further explanation or interpretation, nor has the issue been perceived as being controversial, thus triggering the need to provide ‘balance’ by including an opposing viewpoint. In comparison, discursive or critical news stories provide analysis and commentary, likely include the use of multiple sources, and are often written by specialist reporters (Harrison, 2008: 41). These stories are more likely than descriptive stories to include transformative discourses. However, the strongest transformative and augmentative discourses are likely to found in the various opinion formats, where the columnist, editor, or letter writer is free to write from a singular perspective (Sampert, 2006: 132).

Tasked with explaining why events occurred the way they did, and with forecasting what may happen, columnists can help identify why policy failures occurred and how they may be prevented (McNair, 2008: 113). A columnist who argues that policy failure is insignificant, or locates the solution within the current policy frame, is embracing an augmentative discourse, whereas one who challenges the validity of the current frame is embracing a transformative discourse. Editorials can be more circumspect in tone than other commentary as they seek to offer advice without offending the community they serve (Warl-Jorgensen, 2008: 75). When adopting the “voice of the reader” perspective (McNair quoted in Warl-Jorgensen, 2008: 73),

editorials are likely to be transformative only if they perceive that there is support for this challenging discourse within their readership. Editorials can also adopt the perspective of the “calm authoritative voice of the editor” (McNair quoted in Warl-Jorgensen, 2008: 73). As this type of editorial attempts to offer advice from a “detached distance,” the editor could be employing either an augmentative or a transformative discourse. As editorials are “*the place for [a] newspaper’s ideologies*” (van Dijk, 1991: 150), it is important to analyse a newspaper’s position throughout a variety of editorials in order to determine whether a paper is contesting the empirical basis or normative values of a current policy frame. The odd transformative editorial may give the appearance that newspaper is holding the policy frame to account, but should be treated as a sign that a paper’s overall ideology remains firmly rooted within the boundaries of the current policy frame. Lastly, readers’ letters are important to examine because whether they are published at all is the result of conscious editorial decision. Like columns, letters appearing on the op-ed pages tend to address an issue currently being reported on and rely on the personal or institutional authority of the writer (Richardson, 2008: 59-60).

Proximity⁶⁰ is an important factor for this study because the literature suggests that environmental and economic news coverage may differ in terms of framing, portrayal, and sources used depending on how geographically or socially close an

⁶⁰ Proximity is just one news value that determines the newsworthiness of an event. Other news values include timeliness, impact, prominence, conflict, peculiarity, currency, consonance, continuity, composition, personalization, and dramatization (Lormier et al, 2007: 242); Anderson, 2002: 9). Economic (Carroll and McCombs, 2003) and environmental stories (Hansen, 2011, Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Anderson 2002, Bendix and Liebler 1999, Karlberg 1997) generally exhibit all these characteristics.

audience is to an event (Hansen, 2011: 16-17; Stephens et al., 2009: 185).

Consequently, one may find a transformative discourse in one media market while finding evidence of augmentative one in the other. In addition, the literature suggests that a transformative discourse may be more likely to be present at the local rather than national level. U.S. and UK studies found that environmental issues are more likely to receive greater exposure in local papers than in national papers (Anderson, 1997: 132). These studies also found that environmental groups enjoy greater access to local media than national media, whereas scientists and other experts will tend to be featured more prominently at the national level (Ibid). A stronger presence for environmental groups increases the likelihood of a transformative discourse arising.

However, there are two important caveats to examining the impact of proximity on newspaper coverage. First, while close proximity has been found consistently to affect the salience of environmental controversies (i.e., the number of news stories in a newspaper), the findings have been mixed in regards to its ability to explain differences in framing (Bendix and Liebler, 1999). Second, as Soroka's (2002: 117) findings demonstrate, the link between content and region in the Canadian press is temporally and thematically inconsistent at best. He found that in a "period of heightened salience," not only do papers across Canada respond *en masse* to a particular issue, but also they are likely to respond in a more consistent fashion (Soroka: 2002: 42, 44). To determine whether the Canadian newspapers included in my study responded *en masse* to the issue, the presentation of data in subsequent chapters will highlight both linkages and disconnects between the provincial and national media markets. It will also highlight intra-provincial differences.

Newspaper ownership is an important factor shaping news coverage because disagreement arises both within the literature, and at the level of broader public debate, as to the effect of ownership influence on, and/or control over, daily reporting. At the allocative level, ownership groups and publishers exercise control over annual operating budgets, the hiring of senior managers, the overall mandate of a publication, and resource allocation between sections of the newspaper (Lorimer et al., 2007: 243-245). At the operational level, editors exercise working-level control and make the day-to-day decisions about which stories are told. The difficulty in determining how much control a publisher or owner exercises over its publication comes about because “these two levels are not mutually exclusive and some owners are more involved than others in the daily news productions” (Lorimer et al., 2007: 244).

Renewed concern over ownership arose because a series of newspaper and cross-media acquisitions and mergers occurring in the mid- to late- 1990s was believed to have reduced the diversity of news available to the Canadian public (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 8-10; Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communication, 2006: 64; Taras, 2001: 69-83). The primary concern of critics of newspaper concentration has been over the sharing of news stories, columns, and even editorial content across the chain (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 10). For instance, a former *Journal* reporter, Lisa Gregoire (2004: 42) lamented that CanWest's synergy policy, where one paper would cover a story for the entire chain, resulted in “efficiency trump(ing) diversity.”

While in theory, a high degree of concentration of ownership could lead to transformative discourses being quickly dispersed throughout many newspapers,

critics believe that the opposite occurred as overall the number of opportunities to publish alternative ideas was reduced. For instance, according to Hessing et al. (2005: 175), the low profile of environmental coverage is one outcome of this “high concentration of media ownership in Canada and the connections between economic elites” as it is not a “conducive climate for impartial coverage or the promotion of the non-status quo policy alternatives.” This is likely to be more of product of socialization than of direct control as reporters quickly learn which stories are published and which are not: “In subtle ways, the journalists and editors who survive normally are those who have adopted the taken-for-granted and status quo way of seeing things” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 102).

The impact of concentrated ownership may be more limited than it first appeared. Soroka’s study (2002: 44) of Canadian newspapers found that there was little empirical evidence to support the belief that ownership reduces the diversity of news stories. A narrowing in the type of stories being told may be more of a result of other journalistic factors as a large number of media sources can falsely create an impression of diversity (Lorimer et al., 2007: 246-247). First, competing news organizations monitor each other, are likely to attend the same events, such as project announcements, and will often rely on the same sources. Second, most media organizations supplement their own reporting with hard news stories obtained from the wire services (e.g., the Canadian Press and the Associated Press). The sharing of stories between the CanWest newspapers may not be as ominous as it first appears; it was one way that the chain reduced its reliance (and the resources expended) on newswire stories. It simply it replaced one shared service (Canadian Press) with another. In both cases, it is important to note that individual media outlets will often

adapt these wire service stories, or stories from sister publications, to meet the needs of their local audience (Bendix and Liebler, 1999: 661). These practices were in place prior to the recent wave of ownership mergers. However, since concentration of ownership has the potential to affect the diversity of stories being told, and therefore the likelihood of transformative discourses emerging, it is an important factors to test.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how news is a “product” rather than a “natural phenomenon emerging from ‘reality’” (Richardson, 2007: 222). Journalists create standardized news stories by employing formulaistic frames, utilizing the same sources, and drawing attention to a common set of news values. Not only are events that meet a narrow set of criteria more likely to be selected but once selected what made them newsworthy will be accentuated, causing further distortion (Johnston-Cartee, 2005: 125).

This chapter has demonstrated how the current neoliberal context has emphasized the economic frame and privileged the voices of business actors as sources even above those of government. A central contributing factor has been the growth of the business press that coincided with the rise of neoliberalism. The business section serves to institutionalize a newspaper's neoliberal values by reporting on events through an investor's lens. In addition, when business or government actors are criticized, the journalistic principle of balance affords them an opportunity to respond. These practices tend to favour augmentative discourses over transformative ones.

That said, the Canadian news media have not lost all their “unlovable” qualities and as such, newspapers remain an important inquisitor on the behalf of the public

(Sampert and Trimble, 2009: 10). Broad news frames do change over time as such there are periods when transformative discourses actively compete with established ones.

Neoliberal discourses have been openly challenged in Canadian media coverage in select cases (e.g., Greenberg, 2005). In addition, the news media can draw on their journalistic authority to shine the spotlight brightly on the activities of government and other sources of concentrated power in order to highlight specific examples of wrongdoing.

As such, the augmentative nature of news discourse is not impermeable; it is subject to alteration, attack, and even rapid change as a new 'normal' is defined. Transformative discourses are most likely when the exact nature of a policy problem is in flux.

4 Making the papers

“You could call this a coming-out party”

—Jeff Wojahn, EnCana oil sands chief, November 8, 2005

While the EnCana oil sands chief was proudly broadcasting his company’s plans to expand output from its oil sands operations to 500,000 barrels per day by investing \$12.5 billion, the company was looking for partners to help refine the “peanut-butter-like bitumen” (Jaremko, 2005, November 8: F1). These were the heady days of seemingly endless announcements of billion dollar projects from the industry. But as illustrated in Chapter 2, doubts were beginning to form as spiralling costs, labour shortages, worsening social conditions within Fort McMurray, and rising concerns over the cumulative environmental effects began to arise. When confronted with these growing policy failures, a range of actors, not just industry’s traditional opponents, began to advance alternative ideas and solutions. Meanwhile, industry and senior government officials continued to advance solutions that would leave the neoliberal policy frame governing the oil sands intact. I seek to answer critical questions regarding whether mainstream newspapers served to reflect and legitimize these calls for change by embracing a transformative discourse.

As an entryway into this investigation, this chapter examines the number of stories published about oil sands development and provides an analysis of two important structural variables: placement within the paper and type of story. The literature suggests that these variables play a central role in shaping how a journalist approaches a story, and thus the likelihood of a transformative discourse emerging. An

overview of my research method to show how I derived my analysis is provided prior to a discussion of my findings.

Research method

To investigate to what extent a transformative discourse challenging the existing neoliberal policy frame was present in how the newspapers told the story of the oil sands, I employed the following research methods. First, I gathered the news stories themselves. Using Factiva's database,⁶¹ I was able to select stories from the *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and *Toronto Star*. All stories had to contain the words 'oil sands', 'oilsands', or 'tar sands' in the headline and/or lead paragraph, be of a length of three hundred words⁶² or more, and be published between October 1, 2005 and October 31, 2007. I used the same search terms to access *Fort McMurray Today* through the Nexis database. This resulted in a dataset of over 2,300 stories from local, provincial, and national newspapers. These texts were subjected to two complementary methods of analysis: content and discourse analysis. Combining both quantitative and qualitative textual analysis is seen by many scholars "as the best way to get 'at' the complex, latent structures of meanings communicated by news frames" (D'Angelo, 2010: 360).

⁶¹ The removal of photos and other illustrative elements from the story, and the standardization of size of headlines resulting from the use of electronic databases introduced some methodological limitations to this study. These visual elements further mediate the text, which may lead the reader to evaluate the news story differently than an analysis based upon the text alone. For example, the inclusion of photos of the vast tailing ponds versus a "relatively benign" in-situ plant would likely affect a person's perception on how "dirty" the oil sands are. A systematic review of these visual elements would make an important additional contribution to the literature.

⁶² Due to their brevity, stories fewer than 300 words tended to address particular issues related to a specific oil sands company (e.g., the appointment of new board members) as opposed to addressing broader oil sands development or community issues.

Content analysis involves using systematic recording procedures to produce quantifiable representations of the content of a body of text (Manhein et al., 2006: 169). In other words, this approach provides a quantitative data set, which can be analyzed. By applying the same analytical criteria across texts, it produces verifiable and reliable results that are replicable (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 326). My coding framework divided each newspaper article into two subunits of analysis: headline and story body (see Appendix 2 for the coding frame). I coded headlines separately from the body of the story because they each serve a specific and unique function. Headlines are written by editors rather than journalists. Newspapers purposefully design headlines to grab the reader's attention and direct them to the content of the news story (van Dijk, 1991: 50-52). Not only do some readers read just the headlines, headlines may also shape how a reader interprets the remainder of the article (Andrew, 2007: 29). Andrew (2007: 24) found in his study of election coverage that there was "a considerable difference between articles and their headline in terms of emphasis and issue salience" as well as tone. The content analysis measured a variety of factors including the frame employed, identification of primary actors, the language used, and structural variables in the news story (e.g., placement of a news story, story type).⁶³ As such, the majority of factors measured were objective, eliciting responses independent of individual coder bias.

To reveal *how* the newspapers were telling the story, it was necessary to determine whether they were portraying oil sands development in either a positive,

⁶³ I personally completed all of the coding. To ensure accuracy, I trained a cross-coder who was responsible for randomly selecting and coding 20 percent of the stories. To determine inter-coder reliability, I divided the number of questions in agreement by the total number of questions, which generated the following values: 97 percent for the *Toronto Star*, 96 percent for the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, 95 percent for the *Edmonton Journal*, and 93 percent for *Fort McMurray Today* and the *Calgary Herald*.

negative, or neutral/balanced fashion. The purpose of this step was to help assess whether or not the overall discourse was augmentative or transformative in nature. 'Positive' stories signal to the public that the current policy frame is working well, serving to cement an augmentative discourse. On the other hand, 'negative' stories are an indicator of an emerging transformative discourse *if* they question the facts or values used to support the current policy frame. Neutral/balanced stories are more likely to reinforce the status-quo than be transformative; journalistic principles of objectivity and fairness serve to mute the strength of transformative discourses as indicated by a number of studies examining the media's portrayal of climate change issues (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Corbett and Durfee 2004, Moser and Drilling 2004).

Several questions addressed within the coding framework were designed to measure tone. This was done in a manner similar to other media studies, by coding the overall tone of the story as positive or negative only if the evaluation was clear and obvious, the default position being neutral/balanced (Culley et al., 2010: 502; Soroka and Andrew, 2010: 115).⁶⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, I designed this

⁶⁴ For instance, an American study examining nuclear power coded articles as balanced "if they presented only general information that was not overtly pro- or anti- nuclear, or if the article balanced pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear statements" (Culley et al., 2010: 502). This study found that the majority of articles were balanced (Ibid). An earlier study on newspaper coverage on the Old Man Dam within Alberta coded stories as "balanced" if they contain both positive and negative information (de Loë, 1995: 225). Another example of a conservative approach to coding was Soroka and Andrew's Canadian election study (2010). For this study, the tone of the media content was only coded as positive or negative if a story contained critical or positive commentary introduced by either the journalist or a third-party source. Reports highlighting criticism from the main protagonists (e.g., the leaders and or parties) about their opponents was coded as being neutral reporting of a campaign event (115). It is noteworthy that even election coverage was predominantly coded as neutral: 75 percent for the Liberals and 81 percent for the Conservatives (119).

subjective measure to capture the tone of the headline and overall story as it related to *oil sands development* not the *oil sands industry, per se*. For example, when measuring the overall tone of a story, the inclusion of opposing viewpoints automatically led to the article being classified as neutral/balanced. However, if it was clear that an op-ed piece was taking a positive or negative position, then I coded the article accordingly.

Headlines were coded for tone only if they contained the words oil sands, oilsands, or tar sands. In addition, I excluded headlines if these words were found only as part of a company's name, as in "Western Oil Sands."

Because content analysis alone can "obscure overall meanings and messages" by focusing on the text's individual components, I also employed discourse analysis to help interpret the results (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 326). In doing so I was able to identify dominant ideas, understand how these sets of ideas were organized, and identify the actors who served to legitimize them (Burnham et al., 2004: 247). The goal in doing so was to help illuminate existing power relations within broader society by "reveal[ing] 'every-day knowledge'" communicated through the news media to the public (Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 326). Where appropriate in my interrogation, I identified rhetorical devices, source documents, interesting quotes, normative assumptions, and problem definitions.

One of the primary reasons for analyzing quotations is that they allow the reporter of a hard news story to include subjective interpretations of events "without breaking the ideological rule that requires the separation of facts from opinions" (van Dijk, 1991: 152). Quotations give us insight into the views of the actor being quoted and into the nature of media coverage itself because journalists are forced to choose which

comments from an actor are newsworthy. Quotations enhance both the credibility of the reporter's account and the actors' viewpoints by giving readers the impression that the reporter had direct access to the actor and tacitly suggesting that the actor's words are, themselves, newsworthy (Ibid).

Many newspaper articles refer to other texts, such as stakeholder reports, court or regulatory body decisions, and government legislation. Known as 'source documents', they, too, are important to analyze. Coverage in the media of these documents often determines how they are perceived and understood by the public, since many members of the public are unlikely to consult the original. For example, Sauvageau et al. (2005) argue that the media have the "last word" in interpreting the Canadian Supreme Court's decisions, since journalists control how the message is delivered to the public. In this case, the media tended to frame court decisions through a political lens rather than a legal one (227). Studying the internal discourse of news stories alone is insufficient to understanding whether the news media limited the potential for a transformative discourse through their coverage of events. It is necessary to place news stories back into their societal context. In order to understand the extent of a transformative discourse within the unmediated positions of the actors, I reviewed a selection of their self-generated documents on the public record. The selection included submissions to the oil sands multistakeholder committee and royalty review hearings, as well as other industry and non-governmental press releases and reports. This review provided insight into how, and to what extent, the newspapers

mediated--through selection, editing, interpreting, and publishing⁶⁵--the claims made by these news sources. I analysed secondary literature about natural resources issues generally, and oil sands development in particular. My examination of other primary and secondary materials assisted in the identification of the “origins of competing discourses and how they relate to different societal interests,” as well as “the diversity of social accounts compared to what is present (and absent)” in news stories (Philo, 2007: 175).

Understanding how news is produced helps to contextualize the final news product by drawing attention to how journalistic norms and organizational structure act as constraints on newspaper coverage (Ibid). To assist in this task, I drew upon the results from Paskey and Steward's 2012 study of journalists writing about the oil sands. Fifty percent of their interviewees were actively writing during the study period. As such, their work provides insight into the decision-making processes of journalists when approaching the oil sands issue.

By combining different methodologies and including a large dataset from a variety of newspapers, I have ensured a depth to my analysis that a more singular methodology, or more limited number of news sources, would not possess. This analysis was complemented by reviews of the unmediated source documents and the secondary literature on the news media and natural resource development, particularly the history of oil sands, in Canada. To interpret these findings, I explored how neoliberalism shaped both the policy and media environments. The culmination of this

⁶⁵ Mediation does not end with publication, but rather with the readers who decide if and how they will consume and interpret news stories (Allen, 2004: 4). This aspect of news mediation was not a focus of my work, and as such, I did not conduct any surveys of readers.

analysis was a comparison of the approach taken by the news coverage to assess whether it met the ideal of being transformative—did it question the neoliberal underpinnings of oil sands policy that were being publicly debated by a broad range of actors during the study period? This meant building on an understanding of what was said, how it was said and the role of structural and institutional factors to paint a more comprehensive picture of the role of the media in the larger question of neoliberalism and decision making within this policy context.

About the stories

From an agenda-setting perspective, the development of the oil sands was clearly a larger news story within, rather than outside, Alberta. The Alberta papers published 1,627 stories: 495 stories in the *Edmonton Journal*, 518 in *Fort McMurray Today*, and 614 in the *Calgary Herald*. Since the Province of Alberta owns and manages the resource, its citizenry has a larger and more direct interest in how well the oil sands are managed. This was likely responsible for the higher number of stories appearing in the provincial newspapers. In comparison, papers outside Alberta published 682 articles with the *Globe and Mail* running 330, the *National Post* 286, and in the *Toronto Star* 66.

Table 4.1: Number of stories about oil sands development by newspaper

	Frequency
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	614
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	495
<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	518
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	330
<i>National Post</i>	286
<i>Toronto Star</i>	66
Total	2309

While proximity of the papers to the industry affected the number of stories that appeared, Chapter 4 examines whether proximity also affected *how* the newspapers

told the story, by analyzing its potential influence on story framing, the sources used, and how oil sands development was portrayed. This will provide empirical evidence of both the similarities and differences between provincial papers and papers of greater national significance.

Placement of story

The story's physical placement within the newspaper affects how a story is told, what it covers, and who reads it. At this stage, it is important to distinguish between the major daily papers, which regularly publish a business section, and *Fort McMurray Today*, which does not. As illustrated in Table 4.2, the vast majority of stories in the major papers, 71 percent, appeared in the business section, with the number of stories in this section ranging from a low of 51 percent in the *Edmonton Journal* to a high of 90 percent in the *National Post*. With this group, the *Journal* published the greatest number of articles within its front section at 16 percent and the *Post* the least at only two percent. Overall, there was a moderate relationship (Cramér's $V=0.184$)⁶⁶ between the newspaper that printed the story and placement of the story within the paper.

⁶⁶ Cramér's V measures the degree of association between two nominal variables in tables that are greater than 2x2. If the value is less than 0.10 then the strength of the relationship is weak, between 0.11 and 0.30 it is considered moderate, and a number of greater than 0.30 is considered strong (Healey, 2007: 262).

Table 4.2: Placement of story by newspapers with a business section

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Business section	440 71.7%	250 50.5%	278 84.2%	258 90.2%	46 69.7%	1272 71.0%
Front section	64 10.4%	77 15.6%	20 6.1%	7 2.4%	7 10.6%	175 9.8%
Op-ed section	54 8.8%	82 16.6%	17 5.2%	6 2.1%	8 12.1%	167 9.3%
Front page	35 5.7%	25 5.1%	4 1.2%	2 0.7%	1 1.5%	67 3.7%
Other	21 3.5%	61 12.4%	11 3.3%	13 4.5%	4 6.1%	110 6.1%
Total	614 100%	495 100%	330 100%	286 100%	66 100%	1791 100%
Notes: $\chi^2=243.354$ $p < 0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.184$ Results from <i>Fort McMurray Today</i> have been excluded as it does not have a business section.						

Table 4.3 shows that *Fort McMurray Today* published 44 percent of stories within its front section and a staggering 43 percent on the front page.

Table 4.3: Placement of story in *Fort McMurray Today*

	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	
Front section	228	44.0%
Front page	225	43.4%
Op-ed section	62	12.0%
Other	3	0.6%
Total	518	100.0%

The fact that major newspapers relegated the vast majority of their oil sands news coverage to their respective business sections is significant because, just as it would be rare to find articles that critiqued the North American car culture in the “driving” section, it would be unusual to find articles in the business section that questioned the basic tenets of the free market. Articles in the business section will reflect the fact that the newspaper has tailored “not just the choice of story but also the

tone and style of its presentation” to reflect what the newspaper perceives are “the [imagined] preferences of the expected audience” (Richardson, 2007: 90, 94). For example, both the *Herald* (Polczer, 2007, February 15: E1) and the *Journal* (Polczer, 2007, February 15: G8) published an interview with Total E&P Canada's president which focused exclusively on the company's expansion plans. At the end of the article, an oil and gas analyst confirmed the wisdom of Total's decision by reiterating the logic that Canada was “a relatively safe and stable political and economic environment” (Ibid). Not only was the topic deemed newsworthy, as it detailed the expansion plans of an international oil major, but the news story also served to reinforce the overall narrative advanced by both the Canadian energy industry and the Canadian state that the oil sands were a good investment opportunity. Although not discussed in the Total article, other articles in the business sections discussed the challenges arising from oil sands operations. For example, in his column, Charles Frank raised the issue of worsening infrastructure in Fort McMurray (2006, November 18: C1). Although supportive of claims from the municipality, he outwardly refuted the idea that any oil sands application should be rejected “on the basis of the social, economic, or other difficulties being encountered by the residents of the Wood Buffalo region” (Ibid). Instead, he advocated that Klein's replacement make it “Job No. 1” to fix municipal woes. By rejecting the assertion that regulators could use severe negative community impacts as justification to delay or deny new oil sands projects, Frank narrowed the range of acceptable proposals to ones constrained by the current policy frame. The decisions made by the journalists in the stories about Total's expansion and Fort McMurray's infrastructure woes are clear examples of the prevalence of using augmentative discourses to interpret events.

On the environmental front, the *Globe* reported concurrently in its front and business sections on how the emergence of new U.S. fuel standards, led by the State of California, might affect the market for oil sands crude. This made it possible to conduct a direct comparison between hard news coverage both within and outside of the paper's business section. The *Globe's* business article focused on how the new standard was unlikely to have much effect on the sale of oil sands crude since California was not an importer. Although this article acknowledged that if this new standard spread to other states it could be problem, it reiterated statements highlighting general American support of the oil sands (McKenna with Ebner, 2007, January 12: B6). As such, the underlying message was one of reassurance: the oil sands largest market would remain open. In comparison, the article running in the front section of the paper placed a greater emphasis on the merits of the plan and the need for oil sands producers to mitigate the impact of their emissions (Mittelstaedt, 2007, January 11: A4). Both news stories met the formal criteria of journalistic objectivity but a stronger augmentative discourse was clearly present in the story appearing in the business section.

Recognizing how the business pages framing of an issue like oil sands development differs from coverage in other sections of the newspaper is important because it provides insight into the broad political and policy interests of business actors. Nevertheless, the reach of the business section is more limited because of its smaller audience. Only 28 percent of Canadian newspaper readers read this section habitually, compared with 59 percent of readers who routinely read the provincial/national news, or the 73 percent who read local news (NADbank, 2007). Another 24 percent of newspaper readers will occasionally read the business pages (Ibid). However, the national papers such as the *Globe and Mail* (2010) reported a much

larger readership with 79 percent of its readers usually or sometimes reading their business section. Thus there is an important caveat to be made when interpreting the results of this study. Business stories reach a smaller, but likely more influential, audience than do stories appearing in the front-section of the paper. However, if one is concerned with how a newspaper frames oil sands development for its general readership then how the business pages cover this issue becomes significantly less important.

The front page is the most important part of the paper. Not only does it signal to readers the most significant news stories of the day (Maier, 2010: 10), it is used as a direct tool to grab their attention in order to sell the paper at the newsstands (Tattersall, 2008: 212-213). Proximity of the story's subject matter to its potential audience also appears to be an important factor determining if a story will make it to the front page. As Table 4.3 demonstrates, *Fort McMurray Today* placed 225 stories about oil sands development on its front page, significantly more than its two provincial counterparts (35 stories in the *Calgary Herald* and 25 stories in the *Edmonton Journal*). Likewise, both of Alberta's major dailies published a higher number of front page stories on the oil sands than did papers outside of Alberta.

Some stories likely made the front page as a result of additional resources invested by the newspaper for expenses such as travel. For example, the *Edmonton Journal* sent Graham Thomson (2007, August 10: A1) to Moncton to cover the premiers' climate change talks, along with Todd Babiak (2006, June 26: A1) to Washington to cover the Alberta exhibit--including the gigantic oil sands trucks at the Smithsonian. The *National Post* invested additional resources to send its reporter to Fort McMurray to

investigate the controversial addition of work camps in the city from the perspective of both incoming workers and the community. The first story of this three-part series appeared on the paper's front page (Hutchinson, 2006, April 1: A1).

Comments from the provincial political elite made the front page in Alberta major dailies. For example, Peter Lougheed's comments that oil sands development was a "mess" was reported the front page of the *Herald* (Fekete, 2006, Sept 3: A1). Likewise, Ed Stelmach's comments, made after his successful leadership bid, that he would not "touch the brake" on oil sands development appeared on the *Journal's* front page (McLean and the Canadian Press, 2006, December 5: A1). Outside Alberta, political conflict was the most common factor present in stories that elevated a story's status to the front page. For example, the *Star's* front page story focused on inter-provincial conflict over the best way to solve GHG emissions disputes between the Ontario and Alberta governments (Benzie and Gordon, 2007, August 10: A1). Meanwhile, a *Globe* story focused on attempts by the Martin government to promote the oil sands in China as a pressure tactic in their negotiations with U.S. over softwood lumber (York with Ebner, 2005, October 14: A1).

The front sections of newspapers included a diverse range of stories on the oils sands. Environmental stories tended to be featured more prominently than economic ones in the front section in all of the major papers except for the *Post* (where only one environmental story was run). Not surprisingly, a lack of a dedicated business section within *Fort McMurray Today* contributed to the high number of economic stories in its front section. The majority of environmental stories appearing in the front section focused on the issue of GHG emissions. For example, the *Herald* reported on the federal

environment commissioner's call on the Conservative government to limit GHG emissions from the oil sands (De Souza, 2006, September 29: A7).⁶⁷ The issue of greenhouse gas emissions was also raised in a *Toronto Star* article, which reported on the release of a World Wildlife Fund report identifying Canada as a climate change laggard within the G-8 (Woods, 2007, June 5: A17).

Alberta papers also ran numerous stories highlighting the worsening conditions in Fort McMurray in their front sections.⁶⁸ For example, housing concerns received the greatest exposure in the front section of *Fort McMurray Today* and the *Calgary Herald*. Some articles perceived the cause of the housing crisis as a failure of the provincial government for not releasing sufficient crown land for residential developments (e.g., Remington, 2005, October 24: A9). Others turned their attention to industry for exacerbating the cost of housing by providing high living allowances rather than focusing on building housing (e.g., Markusoff, 2007, February 28: A6). In the first instance, an augmentative discourse prevailed as releasing more land to allow private contractors to build more housing--a re-setting of an existing policy instrument--was viewed as the acceptable solution. The second employed a transformative discourse, returning to an older resource development model where industry assumed greater responsibility for the welfare of its host community. This ran directly counter to the policy interests of the energy industry, which wanted simply to focus on their core business--the extraction of bitumen.

⁶⁷ This article was reproduced in several CanWest papers across the country; however only the *Calgary Herald* used the term 'oil sands' in its headline. Other papers either did not directly link the report with oil sands development in their headlines or they used more general terms for the industry.

⁶⁸ *Fort McMurray Today* ran 26 social stories, the *Herald* ran 13, and the *Journal* published 10.

Nationally, the *Globe and Mail* turned its attention to the impact of the oil sands boom on Atlantic Canada by running a feature on men leaving Cape Breton Island which resulted in “losing a generation of skilled tradespeople,” inflicting high personal costs on the families left behind (Armstrong, 2006, April 17: A6).⁶⁹ The “millions of dollars” earned each week in Alberta was only “stemming the region’s inevitable decline” rather than acting as a catalyst for transformation. This story reconfirms a stereotypical frame, which sees financial wealth in Alberta but nothing else whereas Atlantic Canada enjoys a rich family and community life but a dying economy.

Since the op-ed section is designed to house specific types of stories, namely editorials, columns/commentary, and readers’ letters, I discuss my findings covering the op-ed section of the papers below under story type. It is worth noting that both the major dailies and *Fort McMurray Today* devoted considerable attention to interpreting and commenting on oil sands development on their op-ed pages, with 10 and 12 percent respectively--a sign that the editorial staff felt the issue worthy of attention.

⁶⁹ The *National Post* and the *Toronto Star* also ran stories on this theme; however, their stories appeared in other sections. The *Star* essentially adopted a similar frame as the *Globe* (Porter, 2006, March 11: F01). However, the *National Post* took a different angle on this story by interviewing a range of passengers on a St. John’s to Fort McMurray flight. As a result, a richer story emerged highlighting linkages going both ways including the idea that many individuals were now as much “Albertan as they are Newfoundlander” (Greenwood, 2006, June 1: FINP16). This was the only positive national news story under the social frame, as it concluded how migration has always been a part of the story of Newfoundland; it has just never been this “easy” (Ibid).

Type of story

Newspapers have a range of formats (news, commentary pieces, or editorials for example) at their disposal--each affecting the shape and content of a story's narrative. This section begins by exploring the various news categories, beginning with the most prevalent (Table 4.4). I then explore the various opinion formats.

Table 4.4: Type of story

	Frequency	Percentage
Hard news	1883	81.6%
Commentary	225	9.7%
Editorial	91	3.9%
Feature	64	2.8%
Readers' letters	36	1.6%
Other	10	0.4%
Total	2309	100%

Hard news ranked first across newspapers, ranging from a low of 73 percent in the *National Post*, to a high of 89 percent in *Fort McMurray Today* (Table 4.5). The larger papers relied heavily on their specialized energy reporters for regular news coverage, such as Gordon Jaremko at the *Journal*, David Ebner at the *Globe*, and Jon Harding at the *Post*. The *Herald* depended greatly on the work of Shaun Polczer, Lisa Schmidt, and Jason Fekete. In addition, the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Globe and Mail* also employed specialized environmental reporters—Hanneke Brooymans at the *Journal* and Martin Mittelstaedt at the *Globe*—to approach the issues from an environmental angle. As a small local paper, *Fort McMurray Today* relied almost exclusively on a single reporter, Renato Gandia. In short, the entire oil sands story was largely being written by just a handful of journalists.

Table 4.5: Type of story by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Hard news	508 82.7%	382 77.2%	459 88.6%	273 82.7%	210 73.4%	51 77.3%	1883 81.6%
Commentary	57 9.3%	56 11.3%	7 1.4%	50 15.3%	48 16.8%	7 10.6%	225 9.7%
Editorial	22 3.6%	21 4.2%	41 7.9%	3 0.9%	3 1.0%	1 1.5%	91 3.9%
Feature	24 3.9%	10 2.0%	0 0.0%	3 0.9%	21 7.3%	6 9.1%	64 2.8%
Readers' letters	2 0.3%	25 5.1%	8 1.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 1.5%	36 1.6%
Other	1 0.3%	1 0.2%	3 0.6%	1 0.3%	4 1.4%	0 0.0%	10 0.4%
Total	614 100%	495 100%	518 100%	330 100%	286 100%	66 100%	2309 100%

Notes: $\chi^2=224.298$ $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.139$

Hard news can either be classified as a descriptive or a discursive story type.

Usually short in length, descriptive news stories strive to get the “facts right,” with little to no interpretation to be found in the story (Harrison, 2008: 43). At 340 words, the *Toronto Star's* article highlighting Husky's announcement that it was looking for a U.S. refinery to process its bitumen is a good example of a descriptive news story (*Toronto Star*, 2007, April 20: F05). Providing only basic details of the announcement, the story contained no analysis or commentary about Husky's decision. Although descriptive stories often adopt a “neutral” tone, their subject matter generally confirms the readers' worldview (Harrison, 2008: 43). In the Husky story, it confirmed the dominant neoliberal view that investment decisions—in this case where to locate additional refinery capacity—should be made based on economic return as opposed to other

grounds (e.g., keeping value-added jobs in Alberta). Although these stories meet the journalistic criteria of objectivity, they can serve to reinforce an augmentative discourse.

Discursive, or critical, news stories are “serious, well researched or sourced, offer analysis and commentary, use experts, and are written by specialists” (Harrison, 2008: 41). An example of this type of story is Lisa Schmidt’s piece (2007, July 26: E1) on the release of the Oil Sands Multistakeholder Committee’s report, which appeared on the front page of the business section. The story provides a brief overview of the Committee’s “Vision for development” and statements from the committee’s chairperson, as well as various stakeholders’ perceptions of the report. Longer than most descriptive stories, discursive stories have a greater potential to include a transformative discourse representing alternative values or ideas. In the above example the viewpoints of the Pembina Institute and the official opposition of Alberta were both included. However, by also including the views of the Alberta government and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers the impact of transformative discourse on the overall tone of the article was muted.

Owing to their length and the amount of resources invested in them, featured stories tend to be discursive stories. Fewer than three percent of all stories fit into the “feature” category, as detailed in Table 4.5. The majority of these features appeared in the CanWest papers: 24 in the *Calgary Herald*, 21 in the *National Post*, and 10 in the *Edmonton Journal*. Features aim to create “a three dimensional standpoint” by incorporating a broader range of issues and voices than is possible in a standard hard news format (Niblock, 2008: 50). As such, there are more opportunities to raise issues that challenge the current policy frame. For example, Shaun Polczer, the *Herald’s* senior

oil and gas reporter, examined how the environmental impacts of the oil sands received increased attention from both environmental groups and the international media (2006, Nov 9: A17). Another article in this series highlighted the lack of daycare spots in Fort McMurray, which prevented some women from re-joining the workforce and, in doing so, contributed to a shortage of available skilled workers in the community (Schmidt, 2006, Nov 7: A11). These articles were part of a feature series on oil sands development that saw a group of *Herald* writers and photographers return to the Fort McMurray area to chronicle developments after a previous in-depth series published one year earlier. Both of these articles raised issues associated with the neoliberal policy frame's inability to respond adequately to environmental and social impacts of oil sands development and thus served as opportunities to include a transformative discourse.

The function of a column or commentary piece is to construct meanings (McNair, 2008: 113). Newspaper readers need to know “*why* things were happening; what was the context to the content of news, and what, given that context, was likely to happen in the future” (Ibid) and columns and commentary pieces help to fulfill that requirement. This was the second most prevalent story type (10 percent or 225 stories). However, as Table 4.5 shows, there was a significant range in the number of columns amongst the papers. At the low end, only one percent of stories in *Fort McMurray Today* were columns. This is likely due to its nature as a small local paper, lacking the range of columnists (e.g., political or business) employed at the larger dailies. At the high end of the spectrum, 17 percent of the *National Post*'s articles were columns, a contributing factor to which was the decision of the *Post* to produce a regular business column on the oil and gas industry, entitled *The Patch*.

Two types of commentators routinely appear on the op-ed pages of papers. The first is the regular columnist. For example, as one of the *Globe's* national affairs columnists, Jeffrey Simpson questioned the effectiveness of Alberta's intensity-based GHG legislation to reduce actual emissions (2006, Sept 23: A19). The second type is the 'outside expert' (e.g., an academic, a former insider, or a stakeholder representative) who submits specific articles for inclusion. In this vein, Gil McGowan, then president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, challenged the conventional wisdom that the labour shortage hitting oil sands development was negative. He argued that it may allow the province to spread development over "twenty years" rather than into "seven or eight years of frantic development followed by a jobs bust" (McGowan, 2006, July 10: A18). In another example, the *Toronto Star* ran a guest commentary from the conservation director of the Sierra Club of Canada who argued that Canada had a choice to make between "Tar nation or Kyoto country" (Hazell, 2005, October 5: A21). As either a regular or guest columnist, the columnist tries to act "as an insightful analyst and interpreter" whose opinions should be given "weight and validity beyond those of the ordinary reader" (McNair, 2008: 113-114). Only 43 percent (101 stories) of all columns appeared on the op-ed pages with the remainder appearing elsewhere in the paper, notably in the business section. Op-ed pages provide the greatest opportunities for introducing a transformative discourse into newspapers, as writers are free to write from a singular point of view (Sampert, 2006: 132). However, the persuasiveness of these arguments is often less than if they appeared in a hard news story as readers expect commentary to be opinionated (Kinsella, 2007: 103).

Newspapers often assign columnists to write specifically for their business sections. Forty-seven percent of all columns (106 stories) appeared in a business

section. A business columnist's primary job is to offer an interpretation as to why, from a business perspective, the hard news happened the way it did. Charles Frank and Deborah Yedlin were regular business columnists in the *Calgary Herald*, as were Gary Lamphier in the *Edmonton Journal* and Eric Reguly in the *Globe and Mail*. The picture is less clear at the *Post* because Claudia Cattaneo, the *National Post's* Calgary bureau chief, wrote both "The Patch," as well as many hard news stories about Alberta's energy sector. In one column, Cattaneo (2007, January 23: FP2) lauded the federal government's plan to become an "energy superpower" yet worried that the Conservatives were abandoning this objective in search of eastern votes. In another she called comments from the federal Liberal natural resources critic suggesting that limits may be needed to control the growth of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the oil sands, "loopy" (2007, Feb 6: FP1). When journalists, acting as columnists, write opinion pieces advocating for particular policies, it casts a long shadow over their regular reporting. The Canadian Association of Journalists (2011: 3) warns against this practice: "We lose our credibility as fair observers if we write opinion pieces about subjects we also cover as reporters."

A business columnist is writing for an entirely different audience than the op-ed columnist. As such, the general tone tended to be supportive of industry, with critiques largely directed at other actors. In doing so, business columnists openly advocated for the continuation of key neoliberal policies. For example, according to Yedlin (2007, July 31: C1), the pressure to change the royalty regime did not result from any inherent flaws in the system, but rather, was the result of a series of illogical demands from a public who failed to grasp that costs rose alongside oil prices, stating that "the amount left over to share isn't as big as some might like to think." There were a few exceptions to

the dominant expressions of pro-industry perspectives, most notably when discussing the issue of controlling costs. For example, Eric Reguly criticized the oil sands industry for its skyrocketing costs: “Imagine budgeting \$200,000 for a house reno and the final bill comes in at \$1-million. That’s the oil sands in financial shorthand” (2006, July 11: B2).

As noted in Table 4.5, proximity to the industry was a factor when running editorials; *Fort McMurray Today* had the highest number of editorials at 41, followed by the two large Alberta dailies, the *Calgary Herald* (22) and the *Edmonton Journal* (21). Papers outside of Alberta accounted for seven editorials. Editorials are designed to speak to the issues raised in the other types of newspaper articles, either from the perspective of the “voice of the reader” or that of the “calm authoritative voice of the editor, viewing the political scene from a detached distance” (McNair quoted in Warl-Jorgensen, 2008: 73). For example, reflecting public sentiments, *Fort McMurray Today* (2006, May 5) advocated that the oil sands industry should be held responsible for infrastructure deficiencies facing the community: “Oil sands companies are healthy; they’re cashing in record profits. They’re in a fine position to help pay for the infrastructure needed to support the employees they’re bringing here” (A4).

On the issue of Fort McMurray’s infrastructure crisis, the *Calgary Herald* (2007, October 26: A24; 2005, October 25: A20) twice adopted the authoritative voice of the editor when it advocated that the provincial government step in before the negative effects spread to other parts of the province. For example, the *Herald* (2005, October 25) argued:

Mayor Dave Bronconnier⁷⁰ may be making the most noise about the need for a greater share of the provincial funds, but Fort McMurray usurps Calgary at the top of the priority list...Fort McMurray's infrastructure and social woes are everybody's problem...Alberta is poised to become one of the most powerful petroleum producers in the world. We need politicians who are up to the job of shepherding this province through the next decade of transformation (A20).

Editors can also adopt an authoritative voice when responding to the actions of non-state actors. For example, upon Greenpeace's arrival to Alberta, the *Edmonton Journal* (2007, August 7: A14) noted that Albertans would welcome a "respectful voice" but would not appreciate Greenpeace telling them to "shut down their economy." Likewise, *Fort McMurray Today* was critical of Greenpeace and its "drive-by environmental smears" (2007, August 3: A4). In either case, newspapers want their editorial positions to influence the decision making processes of governments, other policy actors, and even their own readers and/or provide the basis for "their political knowledge and judgements" (Ibid).

Local newspaper editors try not to take radical departures from the views of their community as they attempt to express opinions without "giving offence" (Warl-Jorgensen, 2008: 75). As such, editorials frequently attempt to ally themselves with what they perceive to be the underlying worldview of their readers. Therefore, editorials will often embrace a transformative discourse particularly if there is evidence of strong community support. For example, in October 2007, both the *Edmonton Journal* and *Fort McMurray Today* argued in favour of the new royalty regime, reflecting the public mood in the community rather than the industry's position.

⁷⁰ Mayor of Calgary, 2001-2010

Due to the restriction of article length (≥ 300 words), only 36 readers' letters were captured in the dataset with the majority of these appearing in the *Edmonton Journal* (Table 4.5). This word count likely eliminated some letters from the study, as editors generally prefer "bite size commentary" to "lengthy deliberations" (Richardson, 2008: 59). Amongst papers published outside of Alberta, only the *Toronto Star* published a letter from one of its readers. The letter writer criticized the oil sands industry's environmental record, particularly its GHG emissions (Koehl, 2006, Aug 22: A19). In addition to brevity, a letter is more likely to appear if it addresses an issue *already* under consideration by the newspaper, is lively, and draws on personal or institutional authority (in the case of a local paper this is most often a local voice) (Richardson, 2008: 59-60). As Hessing (2003: 5) notes, "residence in an area, usually marked by the author's address, connotes knowledge of a place as well as membership in a community." For example, the *Edmonton Journal* published a letter that critiqued the provincial government's response to David Suzuki's remarks about the oil sands, the focus of two earlier articles (Douglas, 2007 March 5: A19). This letter contained a tongue-in-cheek introductory sentence: "The provincial government still has its head in the oil sands, even after its feathers were ruffled by environmentalist David Suzuki over greenhouse-gas emissions." The paper established the writer's personal authority by identifying him as an Edmontonian. Other letters themselves drew on an institutional authority to respond to past stories. For example, in response to perceived negative coverage in the *Calgary Herald* of Fort McMurray's social and infrastructure challenges, *Fort McMurray Today* published a letter from Syncrude's CEO and President highlighting "recent progress" and the fact that many residents are "proud" to call the community

home (Ruigrok and Carter, 2006, May 29: 4). Readers, like columnists, write in a singular voice and therefore can advance strong transformative or augmentative discourses.

Conclusion

With over 2300 articles covering the topic, newspapers gave significant exposure to oil sands development over the period from October 1, 2005 to October 31, 2007. This chapter explored the qualitative and quantitative research methods employed in this study. In my investigations of the news stories themselves, I used both content and discourse analysis. This multi-pronged approach, as well the size of the dataset utilized, permitted me to test the effects of various journalistic structural factors on the nature of coverage. Thus, I achieved a high level of statistical confidence while engaging in an in-depth analysis of the meanings embedded within the news discourses. To assist in understanding *why* particular discourses emerged, I integrated my investigations of the news stories with reviews of the source documents and secondary literature on news media and natural resource issues. Notably, the Paskey and Steward (2012) study was useful in understanding how journalists approached this particular story. The outcome was a rich analysis of both augmentative and transformative discourses present in newspaper coverage; it also provided insight into why neoliberal values remained entrenched even in the face of some compelling challenges.

As an entryway into my study's findings, I interrogated where oil sands stories were placed within the paper. Content analysis revealed that all major papers overwhelmingly printed oil sands stories in their business sections. I found a strong augmentative discourse because stories within a business section are tailored to the

needs of the investor not the citizen (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 235). The question then became whether an augmentative discourse was dominant because of the sheer number of stories in the business section or has this perspective infiltrated all sections? Findings presented here offered some evidence that the other sections of the paper may have been more likely to include elements of a transformative discourse.

The various story formats available to journalists were also discussed in this chapter. Content analysis demonstrated that the majority of stories fell into the hard news category. Journalistic norms of neutrality and balance are at the core of this type of news story. However, as discourse analysis showed, these norms tended to lead towards constructing an overall augmentative discourse rather than a transformative one. For example, by treating the activities of oil sands companies as newsworthy, descriptive news stories within the business section reconfirmed the lead role of the private sector in development. While discursive news stories were more likely to contain references to actors advancing a transformative discourse, particularly when highlighting a social or environmental policy failure, the journalistic practice of attempting to achieve balance tended to mute the overall transformative tone of the article. As expected, the strongest examples of both augmentative and transformative discourse were in the opinion formats. Typically, guest commentary from outside actors provided the strongest critiques of the current policy frame while the papers' regular business columnists supplied the strongest support for it. For the most part, editorials largely constrained their criticism of the industry preferring to direct it to actions of the provincial and federal governments.

These findings about the placement of news stories about the oil sands within the newspapers suggest that the business section is a powerful force in shaping the nature of oil sands newspaper coverage. Chapter 4 further tests the strength of the relationship between the placement of a story within the paper and important indicators (framing, predominant sources, and the portrayal of oil sands development) used to measure the presence of an augmentative or transformative discourse. It also compares this analysis with the impact of other journalistic structural factors—type of story, proximity, and ownership—to determine which plays the largest role in shaping newspaper coverage.

5 Framing, sources, and evaluation

As oil sands development has exploded so has the media attention on Fort McMurray. Hardly a week goes by when someone isn't in town, poking around, talking to the usual people, writing the usual stories (Newfies! Heavy haulers! Crime! Drugs!)

-Archie McLean, *Edmonton Journal*, March 27, 2006: A1

With thousands of stories about oil sands development appearing in Canadian newspapers during the mid-2000s, the news media were clearly signalling to the public that the oil sands warranted their attention. But as Archie McLean alluded to in his commentary, perhaps the news media were not telling the 'full' story in their coverage. Opponents of oil sands development will point to the few times when the media's spotlight shone brightly on the oil sands industry's practices as evidence that the "resistance movement" had some success (Clarke, 2009: 244). Industry proponents are also quick to point to stories documenting negative environmental and social conditions as examples of unfair news coverage.

But were Canadian newspapers adopting a transformative discourse simply by including alternative strategies or criticism of the current neoliberal policy frame in their coverage? Was it, as the media literature suggests, largely uncritical of neoliberalism by relying heavily on the use of industry and government sources, exploring a greater range of business concerns, and incorporating business political and policy interests across story frames? This chapter presents quantitative and qualitative analysis of the framing utilized by media, predominant sources used, and an evaluation of how the media portrayed oil sands development. Lastly, it tests the effect of four journalistic structural

factors—location of paper, type of story, proximity, and ownership—on framing, sources, and evaluation.

News frames

The way in which a newspaper frames an issue focuses the reader’s attention on a particular aspect of oil sands development. This study measured and analyzed four frames used by the newspapers in their reporting of oil sands development: (1) economic frame, (2) environmental frame, (3) social frame, and (4) energy security frame. Table 5.1 shows that the majority of news coverage, 64 percent, focused on the economic implications or prospects of oil sands development. Although the economic frame ranked first in all the papers, Table 5.2 illustrates how the economic frame ranged from a low of 54 percent of oil sands-related stories in *Fort McMurray Today*, to a high of 83 percent in the *National Post*. Similarly, while environmental stories ranked second across all newspapers, individual newspapers varied on the amount of attention paid to these issues ranged from a high of 32 percent in the *Toronto Star*, to a low of eight percent in the *National Post* (Table 5.2).

Table 5.1: Overall story frame

	Frequency	Percentage
Economic	1487	64.4%
Environmental	406	17.6%
Social	194	8.4%
Energy security	110	4.8%
Other	112	4.9%
Total	2309	100%

As illustrated in Table 5.2, the third place position differed according to individual media market. Energy security stories ranked third in papers published outside the province, while stories focusing on the social implications of oil sands development on individuals

or host communities ranked third in Alberta papers. *Fort McMurray Today* placed a greater emphasis on the social frame with 17 percent, while province's major dailies came in at just eight percent. Overall, there was a moderate relationship (Cramér's $V = 0.133$) between individual newspapers and the frames adopted.

Table 5.2: Overall story frame by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Economic	406 66.1%	296 59.8%	278 53.7%	230 69.7%	237 82.9%	40 60.6%	1487 64.4%
Environmental	98 16.0%	115 23.2%	100 19.3%	50 15.2%	22 7.7%	21 31.8%	406 17.6%
Social	51 8.3%	39 7.9%	89 17.2%	10 3.0%	3 1.0%	2 3.0%	194 8.4%
Energy security	34 5.5%	20 4.0%	15 2.9%	22 6.7%	17 5.9%	2 3.0%	110 4.8%
Other	25 4.1%	25 5.1%	36 6.9%	18 5.5%	7 2.4%	1 1.5%	112 4.9%
Total	614 100%	495 100%	518 100%	330 100%	286 100%	66 100%	2309 100%

Notes: $\chi^2=162.446$ $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V = 0.133$

1. Economic frame

The vast majority of stories were written using an economic frame; however, that by itself is insufficient to determine whether an augmentative discourse prevailed within this frame. It is necessary to examine the specific issues represented within the economic frame, as some issues lend themselves more to supporting an augmentative discourse over a transformative one. Table 5.3 outlines the various subcategories subsumed under the economic frame. It confirms that the newspapers spread their economic coverage over a broad range of subcategories with the number one issue—

expansion of oil sands facilities (mines, in-situ sites, upgraders, and pipelines) garnering an average of 35 percent of the overall economic coverage. With the exception of the *National Post*, expansion ranked as the most common economic story related to the oil sands. Overall, there was a moderate relationship (Cramér's $V=0.140$) between individual newspapers and the specific subcategories they employed within the economic frame.

Table 5.3: Specific subcategories within the economic frame by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Expansion ¹	162 39.9%	126 42.6%	87 31.3%	68 29.6%	56 23.6%	18 45.0%	517 34.8%
Investment ²	72 17.7%	24 8.1%	26 9.4%	60 26.1%	57 24.1%	8 20.0%	247 16.6%
Government revenues ³	49 12.1%	29 9.8%	44 15.8%	32 13.9%	30 12.7%	3 7.5%	187 12.6%
Workers ⁴	21 5.2%	37 12.5%	57 20.5%	15 6.5%	29 12.2%	1 2.5%	160 10.8%
Cost ⁵	34 8.4%	13 4.4%	10 3.6%	23 10.0%	27 11.4%	3 7.5%	110 7.4%
Impact ⁶	19 4.7%	25 8.4%	15 5.4%	4 1.7%	5 2.1%	2 5.0%	70 4.7%
Other	49 12.1%	42 14.2%	39 14.0%	28 12.2%	33 13.9%	5 12.5%	196 13.2%
Total	406 100%	296 100%	278 100%	230 100%	237 100%	40 100%	1487 100%

Notes: $\chi^2=146.718$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.140$

1. Expansion of oil sands sites and related facilities, such as refineries and pipelines.
2. Mergers, acquisitions, and general investment climate.
3. Government revenues includes all payments received by government from the oil sands industry including royalties, lease payments, corporate and property taxes.
4. Issues related to the recruitment and retention of workers.
5. Business costs associated with development of the industry.
6. Impact on other industries or regions.

The investment subcategory included stories that focused on mergers, acquisitions, and partnerships between various oil companies, as well as stories chronicling the general investment climate. This subcategory ranked second overall in

all the papers, except for the *Edmonton Journal* and *Fort McMurray Today*, where it ranked fourth and the *National Post*, where it ranked first (Table 5.3). Newspapers portrayed the investment subcategory in a similar manner to the growth subcategory. Newspapers affirmed the view of both government and industry that the oil sands represented the best place in the world to invest in petroleum resources (e.g., Canadian Press, 2006, January 24: F3). Actors who rejected this belief were seen as deviations from the norm. For example, newspapers joined other critics, like investment firms, in widely criticizing Western Oil Sands' decision to invest in Iraq rather than expanding its oil sands operations. Overall, newspapers embraced an augmentative discourse when covering this issue.

The first two subcategories focused on the decisions of oil companies to expand their presence in the oil sands. The government revenue subcategory—the total amount of revenue governments earn through taxation, royalty payments, and lease payments—ranked third overall with individual coverage ranging from a high of 16 percent of the economic stories in *Fort McMurray Today*, to a low of eight percent of stories in the *Toronto Star* (Table 5.3). The rapid and extensive growth of the industry affected how both Ottawa and Alberta viewed the economics of oil sands development. The decision by both governments to review key elements of the oil sands fiscal framework, specifically the generic royalty regime and the accelerated capital cost allowance, attracted the most coverage within this frame. Unlike the previous two categories, some of the newspapers embraced a transformative discourse particularly on their op-ed pages by supporting changes, while others firmly reiterated industry's position.

Issues relating to the recruitment and retention of workers ranked fourth overall at 11 percent of coverage. However, the amount of attention paid to this issue again varied by newspaper, ranging from a high of 21 percent in *Fort McMurray Today*, to a low of three percent in the *Toronto Star* (Table 5.3). This subcategory covered a broad range of topics, including the provision of fly-in/fly-out services and the condition and location of work camps. The majority of coverage was augmentative in nature, often focusing on the issues from the perspective of oil sands companies rather than from a labour or community-based perspective. For instance, *Fort McMurray Today* defended the oil sands operators' decision to build private airstrips to fly workers in and out of work camps as providing "a partial solution" to the housing problem despite ongoing objections from the municipality (2005, November 18: A4). In another example, Diane Francis (2006, March 18: FP2) argued that the "invisible hand" of the market was prevented from resolving the labour shortage as "governments, educational bureaucracies, and unions" controlled access to apprenticeship programs. One notable exception was a column on foreign workers by the *Journal's* Sheila Pratt (2006, April 16: A14). In it, she argued that temporary foreign workers brought in to help build new oil sands plants were not the "best way to build a community or get the job done" (A14). Pratt also argued that there was public interest in knowing the company's plans:

The CNRL contract for the Chinese workers is private, of course. But the public deserves some answers to basic questions. For a start, what wages will Chinese workers earn, given the low wages in China?

However, she placed primary responsibility for creating this situation on the Klein government for its inadequate immigration policy.

Due to a shortage of both workers and construction materials, the capital costs for many oil sands projects skyrocketed throughout the study period. Seven percent of

all economic stories focused exclusively on cost, with individual papers ranging from a low of four percent in the *Edmonton Journal* and *Fort McMurray Today*, to a high of 11 percent in the *National Post*, as shown in Table 5.3. Although the general focus of coverage in this subcategory identified weaknesses in the current neoliberal policy frame, newspapers still largely embraced an augmentative discourse. For example, when Shell announced that the expansion of its Athabasca oil sands project could cost 50 percent more than its original estimated price of \$7.3 billion, an energy analyst concluded, “It’s not a knock on Shell or this project, everybody’s facing it” (Canadian Press, 2006, July 7: D5). Newspapers, particularly in their business sections, also confirmed the neoliberal assumption that these problems were self-correcting, as oil sands companies would suspend or even cancel scheduled expansions when the costs became unbearable. For instance, a *National Post* article, entitled “Playing ‘chicken’ in the oil patch,” examines how cost pressures may cause an energy company to “blink” by delaying or cancelling their oil sands project, in turn reducing inflationary pressures on others (Harding, 2006, May 5: FP3). Utilizing this logic mirrored the industry’s position and the broader neoliberal belief that the market would be self-correcting in the medium to long term.

Ranking fifth overall amongst subcategories were stories focusing on the oil sands’ economic impact on other industries or other areas of the country (Table 5.3). The majority of articles (61 percent) focused on how oil sands would generate economic growth outside of Alberta. For instance, the Atlantic premiers’ “trade mission” to Fort McMurray to market goods and services from eastern manufacturers received widespread media attention from the *Globe and Mail* and the *Edmonton Journal* (Walton, 2007, January 27: A3; Thomson, 2007, January 25: A18). Only a small number

of articles (four percent) discussed the difficulties that other regions and industries had in competing with the oil sands sector. For example, within Alberta, other sectors were forced to raise their wages substantially in order to compete over “diminished pool of workers” (Thorpe, 2006, October 4: FP5).

Overall, the data presented in Table 5.3 shows that the news media tend to tell a diverse range of stories about business interests, confirming the findings of Hackett and Gruneau (2000). Both the sheer number of economic stories regarding oil sands development, and the multiple storylines within this frame, are signals that the newspapers deemed that the economic implications of oil sands development the most newsworthy aspect of oil sands development. Discourse analysis showed that despite the volume of coverage, an augmentative discourse prevailed throughout the economic frame. As we will see, newspapers not only gave significantly less attention to topics covered by other frames, but also reported on a limited range of stories.

2. Environmental frame

Table 5.4 compares the range of stories within the environmental frame by newspaper. Nearly half of all environmental stories focused on the oil sands’ greenhouse gas emissions or their overall energy use. Although this issue ranked first in all newspapers, coverage ranges from a low of 30 percent in *Fort McMurray Today* and a high of 81 percent in the *Toronto Star*. Chapter 6 focuses exclusively on the issue of greenhouse gas emissions generated by oil sands operations by examining how government, industry, and environmental groups saw the issue and how the newspaper covered it. Specifically, it contextualizes the coverage by linking it to the actors’

positions and to journalistic norms to discover why an augmentative discourse prevailed.

Overall, governance ranked second as a subcategory at 16 percent (Table 5.4). The focus of these stories was the appropriate role of the various actors (e.g., industry, government, and environmentalists), the processes used to measure the impacts of the oil sands industry (e.g. full cost accounting), or whether the processes in place were working well (e.g., the effectiveness of the Cumulative Environmental Management Association). General questions regarding process, rather than examinations of the specific nature of environmental problems or proposed solutions, were the common characteristic amongst governance stories. For example, by saying that the federal government used “legal magic” to avoid completing a full environmental review of the Fort Hills oil sands project, environmental groups argued that the government failed to exercise its legal responsibilities (Brooymans, 2005, December 14: A8). The federal government’s perceived failure to regulate was also subject of other news articles (e.g., De Souza, 2006, July 14: A2).

Table 5.4: Specific subcategories within the environmental frame by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
GHG emissions/energy use ¹	55 56.1%	51 44.3%	30 30.0%	28 56.0%	10 45.5%	17 81.0%	191 47.3%
Governance ²	9 9.2%	19 16.5%	20 20.0%	8 16.0%	6 27.3%	1 4.8%	63 15.5%
Water ³	10 10.2%	15 13.0%	18 18.0%	7 14.0%	4 18.2%	0 0.0%	54 13.3%
General cost ⁴	12 12.2%	10 8.7%	15 15.0%	4 8.0%	2 9.1%	3 14.3%	46 11.3%
Land ⁵	2 2.1%	12 10.4%	13 13.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	27 6.7%
Air ⁶	10 10.2%	8 7.0%	4 4.0%	3 6.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	25 6.2%
Total	98 100%	115 100%	100 100%	50 100%	22 100%	21 100%	406 100%

Notes: $\chi^2=53.781$ $p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.163$

1. Oil sands greenhouse gas emissions or its use of energy in the production process.
2. The processes used to assess and regulate environmental impacts (not specific environmental problems).
3. Water quality, their removal of water from the Athabasca River, or tailing ponds.
4. Overall environmental footprint of oil sands operations
5. Boreal forest and its wildlife as well as reclamation
6. Air quality (other than GHG emissions).

Stories that focused on the oil sands' exploitation of water or its impact on water quality accounted for 13 percent of all stories, the majority of which appeared in Alberta papers (Table 5.4). Many of these articles focused on the failure on the part of the federal and provincial governments to regulate. For example, a story discussing the hearings on Imperial Oil's Kearl project in the *Herald* focused on the (in)actions of the federal government in regards to the water levels in the Athabasca River, rather than on project's specific water usage (Canadian Press, 2006, November 23: D4). As a hard cap on water usage could potentially limit oil sands production,⁷¹ it is somewhat surprising

⁷¹ This study did not capture any other editorials on water usage.

that the *Herald* embraced the idea of limiting the amount of water oil sands operations could take from the Athabasca River: “This type of stewardship is in line with what former premier Peter Lougheed meant when he advocated an easing of oil sands development out of concern for its environmental effects” (*Calgary Herald*, 2007, March 3: A28). And by referencing Lougheed, the *Herald* sought to build a bridge between its position with the recent advice of the elder Conservative statesman in order to frame it within the established boundaries of public discourse within Alberta. This article provides a good example of an incidence when a newspaper’s editorial staff reproduced and adopted a transformative discourse.

One of the best examples of how augmentative discourse can prevail in an environmental hard news story was a *National Post* article which revisited a 10-year water “war” (1985-1995) between Imperial Oil and a handful of communities in the Cold Lake area due to a crippling drought (Harding, 2007, February 3: FP5). At the time, a local environmental group and others blamed Imperial Oil’s new thermal oil sands plant for the dropping water table. Although highlighting a former water conflict, this story sheds positive light on today’s oil sands industry for two primary reasons. First, a historical drought, not industry, was identified as the primary cause of the first crisis. Second, Imperial Oil was credited with implementing new water-saving technology. Not only was Imperial recognized for listening to the public, but the article also argued that Imperial saw lowering their water usage as in its best interest due to the uncertainty of supply. The take-away-message is that industry is not part of the problem but can be part of the solution.

Where a story listed various different environmental impacts, it was classified under the general costs subcategory, which ranked fourth across papers with an average of 11 percent (Table 5.4). For example, an *Edmonton Journal* editorial which ran both in the *Journal* (2006, July 29: A18) and the *National Post* (2006, July 31: A10) acknowledged a series of environmental problems, “destruction of forest habitat, use of water, dangers of air pollution and acid rain, and production of greenhouses gases” associated with development. As the editorial lent support for increased environmental monitoring and new regulations, this is was example of an op-ed piece moving towards a transformative discourse. However, holding only the provincial government responsible, by absolving industry of responsibility and ignoring the actions of the federal government, the editorial missed a crucial link: namely the active role of these other actors in creating the fiscal and environmental regulatory framework that served to foster this uncontrolled growth. As such, the editorial spoke to public concerns but the editorial board moderated its criticism in manner that ultimately dampened the force of its advocacy for a “committed, purposeful government to actively govern the oil sands development in an environmentally responsible way” (Ibid).

The land subcategory encompassed stories on the impact of oil sands development on the boreal forest and its wildlife, as well as reclamation efforts (e.g., Brooymans, 2007, October 14: A1; Crewe, 2007, August 16: A1; Brooymans, 2006, July 31: A1). Surprisingly given the history of past “wars in the woods” in Canadian forests and current campaigns by environmental groups on the boreal forest, none of the papers outside Alberta focused on this issue during the study period. Table 5.4 shows how *Fort McMurray Today* and the *Edmonton Journal* gave this issue the most attention, at 13 and 12 stories, respectively. Only two stories appeared in the *Calgary Herald*. A

Fort McMurray Today article examined whether arsenic levels in the oil sands region's plants and animals were too high, rendering them unsafe for safe human consumption (Gandia, 2007, April 3: 1). The article presented the results of a government study, which showed that arsenic levels found were comparable to those of uncontaminated control regions. If the levels of environmental impacts were within acceptable limits, then no further action was necessary on the part of government or industry, despite the unresolved concerns on part of the residents of Fort Chipewyan. Thus, the article became another example where an augmentative discourse prevailed in an environmental story.

The air subcategory included stories focusing on air pollution resulting from the release of specific chemical substances, and general air quality issues such as smell. Air quality issues appeared, for the most part, only to be on the provincial newspaper agenda as only three national stories in the *Globe* were captured (Table 5.4). Air quality stories often reinforced an augmentative discourse, often the result of the article approaching the story through the lens of the business section. For instance, the fact that Syncrude's new plant would be shut down for an unknown amount of time due to a sour gas order was covered prior to describing the health concerns of area residents (Harding, 2006, May 19: B3).⁷² Yet, another article on this issue fostered the impression that environmental monitoring was working—government had detected the problem and industry responded (Jaremko, 2007, August 29: G1). Problem solved.

⁷² The headline, "Syncrude shuts down Mildred Lake; Residents complain of urine-like smell," could reasonably create the impression that Syncrude shut-down their new plant in response to residents' concerns. It hides the fact that Syncrude was compelled to close the plant as the province had issued an environmental protection order in response to higher than acceptable trace levels of ammonia and hydrogen-sulphide gas.

Articles included in the environmental frame did highlight significant policy failures in the current neoliberal oil sands policy frame. Yet, journalistic norms appears to be a contributing factor in keeping the overall discourse augmentative as the news stories often reiterated, and advocated for, solutions within the neoliberal policy frame rather than outside of it.

3. Social frame

News articles focusing on the consequences of oil sands development for the social well-being of the host community, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, or its residents are contained within the social frame. As depicted in Table 5.5, the most frequent subcategory under this frame (33 percent), focused upon the overall impact of development on the quality of life in the Fort McMurray area. The physical infrastructure (e.g., roads) and housing subcategories garnered nearly identical coverage overall at 17 percent (Table 5.5). Social infrastructure (e.g., hospital, libraries) ranked third overall at 12 percent.

Table 5.5: Specific subcategories within the social frame by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Overall impact	19 37.3%	16 41.0%	23 25.8%	4 40.0%	1 33.3%	1 50.0%	64 33.0%
Physical infra-structure	8 15.7%	9 23.1%	16 18.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	33 17.0%
Housing	9 17.6%	6 15.4%	15 16.9%	2 20.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	32 16.5%
Social infra-structure	6 11.8%	0 0.0%	17 19.1%	1 10.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	24 12.4%
Other	9 17.6%	8 20.5%	18 20.2%	3 30.0%	2 66.7%	1 50.0%	41 21.1%
Total	51 100%	39 100%	89 100%	10 100%	3 100%	2 100%	194 100%

Notes: $\chi^2=13.297$ $p>0.05$

1. The overall impact of oil sands development on the quality of life within the Fort McMurray area.
2. Physical infrastructure such as roads, sewers, etc.
3. Availability and affordability of housing.
4. Social infrastructure such as health, education, and community services.

Alberta newspapers consistently accepted the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's (RMWB) claim that oil sands development unduly strained municipal services, to the point where it could no longer adequately accommodate new workers (e.g., *Calgary Herald*, 2005, October 25: A20; *Edmonton Journal*, 2006, June 15: A14; Gandia, September 19: 1; Medvesek, 2006, September 14: A4). The limited national media coverage on this issue also appeared to acknowledge the immediacy of RMWB's needs (e.g., Walton, 2007, February 27: A9; Cattaneo, 2006, August 16: FP4; Weber, 2007, January 2: E03). A transformative discourse was present in many of these stories as they lent significant weight to the notion that delaying the expansion of some oil sands projects might be required to provide the municipality with the necessary time to catch up. This directly challenged the neoliberal tenet of the market as self-correcting--the

position advanced by industry. However, a strong augmentative discourse was also present; news articles primarily placed responsibility on the provincial government to rectify problems, with significantly less attention paid to industry's role in perpetuating said problems. In addition, other articles reiterated the neoliberal idea of personal responsibility for taking care oneself. For instance, the *Fort McMurray Today* published a letter from a resident who argued that a contributing factor to the housing crisis were individuals who moved to the community without knowing where they would live (Doleman, 2006, July 11: 4). An augmentative discourse was further strengthened within this frame, with many stories suggesting that a simple re-setting of policy instruments would resolve these problems (e.g., more funding for infrastructure needs and services).

4. Energy security frame

As the dominant source of energy that fuels our modern economy, oil has a strategic value above most other resources. It is in a country's national interest to have a secure and stable supply of this valuable resource. The energy security frame encapsulates this idea. As the oil sands are a largely undeveloped resource, the plurality of news stories (29 percent) focused on the oil sands contribution to global reserves and its potential as new source of oil production, as detailed in Table 5.6. For the most part, newspapers embraced the idea that the development of the oil sands would make a meaningful contribution to global oil production (e.g., Stevenson, 2006, January 11: G4; Cattaneo, 2006, May 18: FP4). A bullish perspective was captured in this headline: "Make way, Saudis, for Alberta oil sands: Region will be top supplier of new oil" (Haggett, 2006, January 11: D4). A few stories questioned whether oil sands production

would make a significant contribution at the global scale (e.g., Frum, 2005, December 6: A22; Reguly, 2007, October 12: B7), but in general, this subcategory was representative of an augmentative discourse by building support for the idea that oil sands represent a valuable commodity and a profitable place to invest.

Table 5.6: Specific subcategories within the energy security frame by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort Murray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Global reserves/production	10 29.4%	5 25.0%	4 26.7%	6 27.3%	7 41.2%	0 0%	32 29.1%
American	11 32.4%	5 25.0%	4 26.7%	1 4.5%	3 17.3%	0 0%	27 25.5%
Chinese	6 17.6%	8 40.0%	0 0%	6 27.3%	5 29.4%	0 0%	22 20.8%
Canadian	1 2.9%	2 10%	4 26.7%	1 4.5%	0 0%	1 50%	9 8.5%
Other	6 17.6%	0 0%	3 20%	8 36.4%	2 11.8%	1 50%	20 18.2%
Total	34 100%	20 100%	15 100%	22 100%	17 100%	2 100%	110 100%
Notes: $\chi^2=36.585$ $p<0.01$, Cramér's $V=0.288$							

The idea that the oil sands could help secure American energy security by reducing America's dependence on off-shore oil reserves ranked second overall among stories, at 25 percent (e.g., Dutta, 2007, March 6, E5; Harding, 2006, July 15: FP5; Canadian Press, 2006, July 6: E4). These articles reinforced, rather than challenged, the assertion that the oil sands industry's interests, and therefore the interests of the Canadian state, were aligned with those of Americans (i.e., a secure and close supply of oil). By accepting this alignment of American and Canadian interests as fact and mutually beneficial, these articles failed to explore whether this cooperation could harm other Canadian interests (Way, 2011).

CanWest papers and the *Globe and Mail* expressed a great deal of interest in actual and potential investment by state-controlled Chinese companies. Unlike the majority of stories, which viewed the series of acquisitions of Canadian oil sands firms by global energy companies⁷³ as a positive sign of the oil sands' increasing global importance, coverage of interest from the Chinese was mixed. Apprehension centered on the apparent threats to the "natural" operations of the market.⁷⁴ For instance, the *Globe's* business columnist reasoned that Chinese state-firms could potentially take the oil "off the world market" by creating a closed state-controlled loop; as such "the crude would not be available at any price" (Reguly, 2006, April 15: B5). In the *National Post*, Foster (2006, November 29: 22) argued that federal government should not solicit Chinese investment as Canada had already learned, through its experience with Petro-Canada, that state investment "proved to be a terrible idea." While other articles expressed concern over the potential affects Chinese investment would have on the oil sands industry's relationship with its largest customer, the United States (e.g., Ebner, 2007, June 6: B1).⁷⁵ The conclusion of these articles was that Canada should reject Chinese investment.

⁷³ For example, Royal Dutch Shell bought out its Canadian subsidiary who had just acquired Black Rock Ventures while Total SA bought out Deer Creek Energy.

⁷⁴ Articles that discussed investment by a country (e.g., China, India) were coded under the 'energy security frame' rather than the 'economic frame' as it was perceived that countries, rather than companies, were making strategic investments. Another subset of energy security articles questioned whether Chinese investment was 'really' on the table.

⁷⁵ The idea that Chinese investment is a direct threat to US interests is not universally shared. For instance, Kasoff (2007: 182) argues that Chinese investment would help generate new supply rather than diverting existing output. In addition, he argues that US could hardly fault Canada for following the principles of a free market (Ibid).

This perspective was not uniformly shared as other articles challenged that position, reaffirming the belief that Alberta and Canada were open for business. Since the Chinese would be forced to follow our rules, these stories maintained that Chinese investment would be considered the same as any other foreign interests (e.g., Scott, 2007, July 13: A1; Jaremko, 2007, June 22: FP2). In addition, these articles reaffirmed the idea that the private sector should be able to seek partnerships with and/or sell assets to whomever they wanted. An industry analyst argued that by opening up a new market through Chinese investment in a westerly pipeline, oil sands operators would receive a higher price for their product:

If we dump another 400,000 barrels into that market [U.S.] without them upgrading their refineries, all they'll be doing would be getting cheap oil from us that wouldn't be good for us. We had huge differentials sometimes for our heavy oil. By diversifying markets [selling to the Chinese], we will get a better and a more appropriate price" (Perkins, 2005, October 15: C5).

As both supporters and detractors of Chinese investment alike reinforced the idea that the *private sector* should take the lead in development, the overall discussion was couched in a neoliberal discourse. The only debate was whether Chinese state-owned corporations operated essentially as private business actors abroad and thus would act within the normative values of neoliberalism.

At first glance, it is surprising that newspapers paid so little attention to the issue of Canadian energy security, accounting for only 8 percent of articles. Nationalistic concerns were largely absent from the energy security frame, nor were concerns raised within the investment subcategory. Unlike the flurry of media coverage surrounding the

recent proposed takeovers of other natural resources (e.g., potash),⁷⁶ there was little discussion over whether the oil sands were a national strategic asset. Often newspapers presented the increased internationalization of ownership of the industry as a natural course of development:

The Canadian oil sands as the single most important energy asset in the world open to private capital, its ownership will reflect the global oil industry. And the process in which the global oil industry is going to assert ownership over that sector is by buying out the people who own it now (Parkinson, 2007, September 7: B10).

Business columnists also felt that major Canadian oil sands operators such as Suncor and Encana were unlikely to be subject to foreign takeover bids, since their size and high valuations were considered excessively expensive (e.g., Cattaneo, 2007, May 29: FP2). Indeed, in her business column, Claudia Cattaneo argued that these facts made government protection of this industry both unnecessary and unwelcome (Ibid).⁷⁷

A limited number of commentaries, which viewed the Canada/U.S. energy trade relationship as problematic, were published. Their primary concerns centred on NAFTA's proportionality clause because it limited Canada's range of policy tools. For instance in a guest commentary in the *Globe*, Gordon Laxer lamented Canada's failure to

⁷⁶ In 2010, the Conservative federal government blocked the sale of Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan to the Australian firm, BHP, on the grounds that it did not offer an "overall net benefit to Canadians." This decision was made after heavy lobbying from the Premier of Saskatchewan and other parties, including the Potash Corporation, who argued that the industry was a strategic asset because of its control of a large portion of world's potash (McCarthy et al., 2010, November 3).

⁷⁷ Mergers and acquisitions amongst some of Canada's largest oil sands operators did occur after the end of the study period. Suncor and PetroCan merged in 2009 to create Canada's largest energy company. Sinopec, a Chinese state-owned company, acquired a nine percent share in Syncrude (56 percent remains Canadian-owned) also in 2009. And in 2010, Total, a French energy company, acquired UTS to become a 20 percent owner of the Fort Hills project. In 2012, the government approved CNOCC's acquisition of Nexen but, while doing so, changed the regulations for future state-owned investments.

develop its own energy policy (2006, January 6: A15). Laxer explicitly rejected the current neoliberal policy frame by calling on the government to renegotiate NAFTA's proportionality clauses or else leave the trade agreement altogether. In a commentary piece for the *Toronto Star*, Laxer, in conjunction with Tony Clarke and Bruce Campbell, identified Canada as an "energy satellite of the U.S.," not as the energy superpower proclaimed by the Harper government (2006, March 10: A19). However, these opinion pieces represented a marginalized perspective and as such, did not seriously challenge a central tenet, free trade, of the current neoliberal policy frame.

Predominant sources

The opening chapter introduced the metaphor that the news media are like the boards of a hockey rink—use them well and you can advance your position, often at the expense of your opponents (Kinsella, 2007: 84). Business actors are the star players both because of their dominance as a source for media and their success in setting the tone within an article, especially within the economic frame. As Table 5.7 illustrates, business actors prevailed over competing actors both as first (47 percent) and as second sources (35 percent). Individual papers differed in their usage rates of first sources with business actors gaining the greatest exposure in the *National Post*, and the least exposure in *Fort McMurray Today*, with 64 to 35 percent respectively. As a second source, business garnered 50 percent in the *Post* to 21 percent in *Fort McMurray Today* (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7: First and second sources

	1st source		2nd source	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Business ¹	1087	47.1%	817	35.4%
Government ²	259	11.2%	255	11.0%
Non-governmental organizations ³	225	9.7%	188	8.1%
All others	635	27.5%	435	18.8%
Not applicable	103	4.4%	614	26.6%
Total	2309	100%	2309	100%
Notes:				
1. Includes representatives from oil sands or pipeline companies as well as supplier industries and business associations.				
2. Includes federal, provincial, and municipal government representatives.				
3. Includes environmental and labour organizations as well as academic or research institutes.				

Table 5.8: First and second source by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
First source¹							
Business ²	318	195	177	180	179	38	1087
	51.8%	39.4%	34.2%	54.5%	62.6%	57.6%	47.1%
Government ³	65	67	65	35	20	7	259
	10.6%	13.5%	12.5%	10.6%	7.0%	10.6%	11.2%
NGO ⁴	50	64	69	22	13	7	225
	8.1%	12.9%	13.3%	6.7%	4.5%	10.6%	9.7%
Other	159	148	172	81	65	10	635
	25.9%	29.9%	33.2%	24.5%	22.7%	15.2%	27.5%
N/A	22	21	35	12	9	4	103
	3.6%	4.2%	6.8%	3.6%	3.1%	6.1%	4.5%
Total	614	495	518	330	286	66	2309
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Second source⁵							
Business ²	293	121	111	133	141	18	817
	47.7%	24.4%	21.4%	40.3%	49.3%	27.3%	35.4%
Government ³	57	68	80	30	14	6	255
	9.3%	13.7%	15.4%	9.1%	4.9%	9.1%	11.0%
NGO ⁴	37	52	50	26	19	4	188
	6.0%	10.5%	9.7%	7.9%	6.6%	6.1%	8.1%
Other	107	102	123	61	34	8	435
	17.4%	20.6%	23.7%	18.5%	11.9%	12.1%	18.8%
N/A	120	152	154	80	78	30	614
	19.5%	30.7%	29.7%	24.2%	27.3%	45.5%	26.6%
Total	614	495	518	330	286	66	2309
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Notes:							
1. First source: $\chi^2=104.392$, $p<0.0001$ Cramér's $V=0.106$							
2. Includes representatives from oil sands or pipeline companies as well as supplier industries and business associations.							
3. Includes federal, provincial, and municipal government representatives.							
4. Includes environmental and labour organizations as well as academic or research institutes.							
5. Second source: $\chi^2=168.536$, $p<0.0001$ Cramér's $V=0.135$							

What ensured the dominance of business actors was the sheer number of stories originating from corporate communication bureaus. Examples of this style of reporting were news articles based on project announcements or conference calls with analysts. Since oil sands companies are the main drivers of growth, their decisions about when to seek approval, start, or delay these mega-projects are newsworthy events.

Both oil sands and pipeline companies were quite bullish when highlighting expansion plans in the media. For example, the CEO of Shell proclaimed that the “oil sands [were] at the heart of [their] growth strategy” when announcing an expansion of the company’s in-situ operations, despite rising construction costs at its Athabasca oil sands mine (Stevenson, 2006, July 27: G5). However, energy companies expressed concern over the future of oil sands development when it appeared that the economic situation was changing—most notably when it looked like the government planned to introduce measures to change the existing neoliberal policy frame. For instance, Suncor’s CEO, Rick George expressed apprehension over the provincial government’s decision to review the royalty framework:

“The royalty system works... It provides developers some insurance against low oil prices and provides Albertans a hefty return with high oil prices. We should be very cautious about how we attempt to change it...We can’t escape that policy changes will have an impact on investment going forward” (Scott, 2007, April 27: B4).

This story served to validate Suncor’s augmentative position by relying exclusively on comments made by Rick George at Suncor’s annual meeting.

When journalists looked for someone to comment on a company decision, they regularly turned to analysts to interpret the company’s motivations or to address the wisdom of said decision. These analysts were drawn from a relatively small number of

energy, investment, or banking firms and can have tremendous influence over how a company or an industry is perceived by the public. Twenty percent of economic stories included analysts as a second source. In many instances, analysts repeated the company's optimistic view of oil sands development as exemplified by this comment: "Anyone watching what is happening up north will recognize that, before long, Canada will inevitably overtake Saudi Arabia as the world's oil giant" (Turchansky, 2005, November 23: G2).

Analysts firmly adopted a pro-market position when it came to the degree with which government should benefit from oil sands development. Even under the 1997 royalty framework, an analyst with First Energy Capital quipped that "the tax man is knocking...Ottawa and Edmonton will make out nicely on this one" (Haggett, 2006, January 26: D1). However, as oil sands projects were delayed and experienced costly overruns, some analysts began to question whether all growth was good. A Tristone Capital analyst cautioned that there were important differences between individual companies: "The oil sands have a history of over-promising which will get worse as the landscape becomes busier. From an investor standpoint, understanding who is going to win in that and who is going to lose is going to be essential" (*Calgary Herald*, 2006, September 27: F7).

Journalists also turned to business actors to respond to critiques leveled against the oil sands industry. The media often relied on the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) to give an industry-wide perspective in addition to seeking responses from individuals companies. For instance, in response to the release of the Pembina Institute's report on the impacts of in-situ development on the boreal forest, a representative from CAPP maintained that current regulations were sufficient to deal

with the concerns raised in the report (Haavardsrud, 2006: August 2: D4). Even within the environmental frame, there were some instances where news articles relied exclusively on a company's press release. For example, one news article reproduced, almost word-for-word, Shell Canada's media release announcing it had developed a new energy-efficient technology, in conjunction with scientists from Natural Resources Canada (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2006, November 23: A3). By limiting itself to the company's press release, this news story reproduced positive statements about "clean technologies" and "responsible development" from Shell's CEO and the then Minister of Natural Resources (Shell Canada, 2006, November 21).

Government actors ranked second overall amongst sources at an average of 11 percent as first and second sources (Table 5.7). This category includes all three levels of government—provincial (7 percent), federal (2.5 percent) and municipal (2 percent). Despite the fact that government is an elite actor and therefore is often assumed to have direct access to the media, these findings seem low. Table 5.8 shows that there was little variance amongst newspapers in their use of government actors as a first and second source. Provincial and federal governments frequently employed an augmentative discourse when communicating with journalists. For instance, Alberta's energy minister admitted that the provincial government would not sacrifice its competitive, business-friendly environment—a hallmark of neoliberalism—to achieve the province's goal of having additional refinery capacity being built within Alberta instead of in the United States: "I would suggest there is going to be an enormous challenge for us to offset the competitive advantage they have...We can't try and compel an industry to be here; that won't be competitive" (Harding, 2006, September 23: FP3). Both the federal and provincial governments recognized a certain amount of

negative environmental impacts related to oil sands projects, but argued in the majority of stories that strategies were in place to deal with them (e.g., D’Alieso, 2007, March 9: A3; Cattaneo and Harding, 2007, March 9: FP1; Schmidt, 2007, July 6: E4).

Overall, government actors received their greatest exposure within the social frame, accounting for 27 percent (45 stories) of first sources, and 20 percent (33 stories) of the second sources. Notably, government actors accounted for fewer than 7 percent of the first (91 stories) and second (96 stories) sources under the economic frame. Although in many cases the provincial and federal governments advanced positions that differed little from industry, their relative absence within the economic frame is troubling. According to van Dijk (1998: 87), journalists rely on primary sources--as the “immediate participants”-- to provide them not only with a “description of facts” but also for “the formulation of opinions.” The relative absence of federal and provincial actors in economic stories appears to have been a sign that media views government as peripheral economic actors, thus obscuring the role that government plays in establishing and maintaining the neoliberal policy frame that helped to fuel oil sands development. This reinforces the idea that the market and business actions are a “natural expression of ‘the economy’” rather than the result of deliberate actions taken by government and industry (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 320). Thus, the opportunities for a transformative debate to arise within the economic frame are diminished as being “natural,” there is no need to further deconstruct, explain, or justified these actions.

Newspapers cited non-governmental organizations—environmental and labour groups as well as academic or research institutions—as a first source in ten percent of stories, and as second source in another eight percent. Table 5.8 illustrates that these

groups were most likely to be used as the first source in *Fort McMurray Today* with 14 percent, and least likely to be cited first by the *National Post* with five percent of articles. Unlike business actors, who received exposure across all the frames, newspapers largely deemed non-governmental actors as newsworthy only within a singular frame. For instance, over 90 percent of labour's first and second source citations were within the economic frame, despite the fact that labour organizations had expressed clear policy positions on a range of social and environmental issues.

Simply cultivating media attention is insufficient for outsider groups, such as Alberta's environmental and labour communities, to affect public opinion and effect policy change; they must also seek positive assessments of their ideas from the media (Hansen, 2010: 3-5; Anderson, 2003: 123; Hackett and Gruneau, 2000: 115-116; Anderson, 1997: 209). Within the environmental frame, the Pembina Institute stood out as a non-elite source as it not only received significant media attention, but also garnered favourable assessments from newspapers. As we will see, journalists viewed Pembina as a credible source, largely due to its demonstrated expertise, institutional capacity, and long history of participation in regulatory hearings to approve new oil sands projects (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 9).⁷⁸

Newspapers used the Pembina Institute as a first source in 44 environmental stories and as a second source in another 21. This is likely because, during the study period, the Pembina Institute published several research reports on the oil sands. Newspapers reacted positively to the release of this information as they filled critical

⁷⁸ As a member of the Oil Sands Environmental Coalition (OSEC), the Pembina Institute has participated in more hearings than all other environmental groups (Urquhart, In Press: 32).

information gaps regarding the nature of environmental effects generated by oil sands projects. For instance, *Fort McMurray Today* (2005, November 25) supported the release of *Oil sands fever: The environmental impacts of Canada's oil sands rush*,⁷⁹ in an editorial that called for improving the level of discourse:

The Pembina Institute has done everyone a favour by assembling disparate facts on the oil sands and compiling them into one document. It's only through a dispassionate discussion of this important issue that we can decide where public policy will take future energy development (A4).

In another instance, the Pembina Institute's report, *Troubled Waters, Troubled Trends*, not only garnered media attention in the *Globe and Mail* but also was featured first in the introductory paragraph, placing the province in the position of having to respond to it:

The oil sands' thirst for water is far outstripping Alberta's projections, threatening to drain the Athabasca River as the pace of project development accelerates, a prominent environmental group says in a report issued yesterday. And Alberta Environment Minister Guy Boutilier said the province will start charging for water use, if necessary, to curb consumption in an increasingly parched province (Brethour, 2006, May 2: B1).

This report also received coverage in the *Calgary Herald*; however, in this news story, CAPP reacted to Pembina's recommendations (Schmidt, 2006, May 2: C4).

Despite being viewed by journalists as a reliable and trustworthy source, environmental stories citing the Pembina Institute were still largely augmentative. With

⁷⁹ Pembina's report focused on a range of environmental impacts associated with oil sands development with climate change receiving the most attention. It also linked the favourable fiscal regime for fuelling development at a pace that overwhelmed planning efforts to mitigate the environmental impacts. As such, it called for significant changes to how much economic rent the Alberta and federal governments collected.

the exception of stories in which Pembina was the only source (e.g., Canadian Press, 2005, November 24: G3), the Pembina Institute's transformative discourse was muted through the additional inclusion of government and industry sources (e.g., Gandia, 2006, March 17:A1; Schmidt, 2006, May 2: C4). For instance, a scientist from Alberta Environment concluded that "nothing has changed in the landscape" after demonstrating to reporters that the province's monitoring system found less acidification of water than predicted (Heindl, 2007, September 21: A6). As a counter point, the reporter turned to the Pembina Institute, which questioned the effectiveness of the province's sampling methods in light of new development: "Of course what Preston (the scientist) is sampling today is a very small percentage of pollution that will be emitted in the future" (Ibid). The result is that this news article had reduced the science of water monitoring to not only two competing opinions but had also placed a significantly more weight on the government's one as the article focused on the government's monitoring activities. This is unlike the practice within the economic frame where journalists used business actors to "balance" each other, which more often than not only serves to reinforce a consistent pro-industry narrative.

In addition, media occasionally highlighted the Pembina Institute's belief that the oil sands industry has the necessary capabilities (e.g., financial resources and the ability to innovate) to greatly improve their environmental footprint (e.g., Hamilton, 2006, October 24:D03; Gandia, 2005, December 6: 1). This framing lends itself to a more augmentative discourse (e.g., technology is the solution) rather than a transformative one (e.g., consumption patterns need to change or application of a precautionary principle). Both types of discourse were present in the research reports and news releases published by the Pembina Institute. Lastly, the majority of

newspaper coverage garnered by the Pembina Institute focused on its critiques of the oil sands industry as whole rather than its critiques of specific energy companies.⁸⁰

Although this may be partially due to media selectiveness, Urquhart (In Press) makes a compelling case that Pembina limits their criticism of companies with which it enjoys a positive private relationship. As such, an argument can be made that Pembina *held everyone but in effect no one* responsible for the oil sands industry dramatically increasing its environmental footprint.

One noteworthy finding is the relative absence of two groups—labour and community leaders—as sources in environmental stories.⁸¹ It seems likely that opinions of these groups were not sought because the media were unable to reproduce the stereotypical “jobs vs. the environment” conflict as each of these groups were already calling for a reduction in the pace of oil sands development for non-environmental reasons.⁸² In both cases, the environmental views of these actors remained largely hidden as they often are, subsumed under their larger “economic” identities assigned to them by the media (Reed, 2003).

Newspapers routinely dismissed the perspective of labour groups by suggesting that they were self-serving rather than viewing them as making meaningful contributions to a public debate over oil sands operators’ use of foreign workers. The ability of labour organizations or workers to contribute to discussions was largely

⁸⁰ Pembina provided specific company names in just 7 out of 63 news stories.

⁸¹ The municipal government was only cited two times as a first source and an additional two times as a second source in environmental stories. Labour organizations/workers were only cited once as a first source in an environmental story.

⁸² The “jobs vs. the environment” has recently resurfaced in the coverage of the Keystone debate in the United States (e.g., Vanderklippe, 2011, September 27).

constrained to commenting on “workers issues”; 50 out of the 53 economic stories (94 percent) where labour groups were used as a first source fell under this category. Union representatives argued against the use of foreign workers by denying that there was a significant workforce shortage (e.g., Gandia, 2006, June 8: A1; Salter, 2006: August 17: A4). In addition, labour representatives argued that oil sands expansions should be staggered in order to spread out employment over “fifteen years as opposed to five” (O’Donnell, 2006, April 12: B5). The op-ed pages soundly rejected these arguments. In an editorial, *Fort McMurray Today* (2006: June 9: A4) even argued that attempts by unions to block the hiring of foreign workers were dictatorial:

If CNRL [Canadian Natural Resources Ltd.] chooses to bring in foreign workers because the union members cost too much, should they be prevented from doing so? Should unions be given a veto over the situation? Should this country be a place where freedom is replaced by dictators?

Another *Fort McMurray Today* (2007, March 23: A4) editorial argued that the unions’ arguments against the use of foreign workers were based solely on greed, to protect their “sky-high wages not seen anywhere else.” When Synenco and Sinopec announced their plans to construct an oil sands plant in modules overseas, it was left to union representatives, like the building trades council chairman, to argue against it: “We’re exporting raw bitumen now we’re going to be exporting jobs” (Jaremko, 2006, December 7: A1). In a *Globe and Mail* article highlighting the company’s announcement, union concerns were altogether absent, instead presenting the approach as a viable way to overcome Fort McMurray’s overheated economy by reducing labour costs by half (Ebner, 2006, December 7: B1). Only the *Edmonton Journal* (2006, April 20: A18) argued in an editorial that the use of foreign workers did little towards building a “skilled workforce” or a “strong community” within the region and was, at best, a “short-term

solution.” Instead, it recommended that the province rely more heavily on immigration (Ibid). In sum, the majority of news coverage about foreign workers employed an augmentative discourse by framing the debate as a labour relations issue—unions protecting their own turf—rather than as a broader debate about the long-term implications of relying on foreign labour to build numerous oil sands projects at the same time.

Aboriginal peoples’ voices were almost entirely absent from newspaper discourse, quoted as the first source just two percent of the time (54 stories) and as a second source only one percent of the time (25 stories). However, it is important to include a brief overview of these stories because the relationship between First Nations people and resource development has undergone a transformation as Aboriginal peoples seek meaningful consultation and involvement. Successive court cases have upheld the duty of the federal government to consult with Aboriginal groups when their title or rights are threatened by pending resource development (Hessing et al., 2005).

Nearly half of cases where Aboriginal peoples were cited as first source and 36 percent of second source citations were within the environmental frame, with the majority of these focused on the impact of the oil sands on the Athabasca River. A *Globe and Mail* article chronicled how the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation withdrew its support of the Cumulative Environmental Management Association to deal with water flow issues. The article cited Pat Marcel, an elder, and included a quotation which referenced his age: “We’re experiencing the lowest water levels in my life and I’m 68 years old” (Brethour, 2006, Sept 26: B1). The article contrasted Marcel’s personal credibility with the idea advanced by industry that science would provide different answers. The article quoted CAPP as saying it hoped that “further research into water

flow issues will convince Aboriginal groups . . . that the industry's use does not threaten the watershed" (Ibid). The suggestion that Aboriginal knowledge is personal, whereas industry's knowledge is scientific, was also put forward in other articles (e.g., Harding and Cattaneo, 2007, Feb 3: FP1; Gandia, 2006, Nov 8: A3). These articles serve to reinforce a simplistic worldview that Aboriginal peoples were "protectors of Mother Earth" while casting doubt on the legitimacy of their knowledge.

Conversely, newspapers presented local Aboriginal peoples as pro-development in positive economic stories. These articles highlighted their integration into the modern oil sands economy by becoming "producers" (Harding, 2006, March 21: FP1), providing ancillary services to the oil sands companies (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2007, January 15: 1), or re-establishing industry relations corporations (Gandia, 2006, November 6: 1). The more positively-spun stories reflected a growing hope for the future, as communities gained a larger share of, and control over, the economic benefits derived from oil sands development. In her study of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Slowey (2008: 79) calls this "market-driven self-determination." The goal is to use productive businesses to finance social, educational, and other similar community initiatives. Success of these initiatives is defined within the parameters of the broad neoliberal economy not outside of it. In other stories, local Aboriginal peoples' desire to increase their involvement in oil sands development was not absent, but was tempered by concerns over how overall development was being allowed to proceed (e.g., the overall effects on water quality).⁸³ Within the economic frame, it was predominantly

⁸³ A significant split between different area First Nations was captured in only one news article after Suncor had reached an IBA which had social, environmental, and economic clauses⁸³ with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation but not the Mikisew Cree First Nation (Jaremko, 2006, July

First Nations of British Columbia who criticized the expansion of oil sands related development, specifically Enbridge's Gateway pipeline. Their concerns were centred largely around two aspects: a perceived failure of the federal government to adequately consult with First Nations (Ebner, 2006, October 26: B4; Jaremko, 2006, October 27: D4), and a determination that "very limited" benefits would flow to the area (Ebner, 2006, June 7: B6). Overall, stories using Aboriginal sources reinforced the general augmentative tenor of the economic frame.

As the above discussion suggests, it is naive to place Aboriginal peoples squarely in the 'anti-development' camp (Urquhart, 2010). Their relationship to resource development occurring within their traditional territories is exceedingly complex as groups seek to maximize the economic benefits derived from oil sands development while continuing to advocate for better environmental stewardship and even a slow-down to some aspects of development. The complexity of First Nations' interests was rarely represented in the newspaper coverage as news stories tended to emphasize an anti-development perspective in the environmental frame and a pro-development perspective within the economic frame.

13: G3). This split may be more attributed to a lack of success at the negotiation table than an outright objection to oil sands development, as the Mikisew Cree has largely acquiesced to large scale industrial expansion prior to and during this study period (Urquhart, 2010). More recently, both of these groups have taken more aggressive stands against development (Ibid).

Evaluation

Words matter; they can evoke one perspective, even while one is trying to argue the opposite (Lakoff, 2004). As what is extracted is bitumen, neither 'oil sands' nor 'tar sands' is an accurate descriptor but both are now used to evoke a particular perspective.⁸⁴ The oil sands were originally referred to as tar sands because of their physical appearance and the early use of its crude in waterproofing, and later as a paving material (Alberta Energy, 2011^b). Not only is tar considered less valuable than oil, it also creates the impression of a 'dirty' resource. Government and industry consciously worked to re-label the resource oil sands. In 1951, scientists at the Alberta Research Council decided “to clean them up” by referring to them oil sands instead of tar sands (Finch, 2008: 99). Both terms were used interchangeably until the 1990s, when oil sands received broad acceptance by being perceived as the neutral and more accurate term (CAPP, 2009^a). Mainstream media reflected and reinforced this marginalization of the tar sands moniker (*Globe and Mail* 2011; CBC, 2009). For instance, the *Globe and Mail* 's style guide (2011) cautions its writers and editors to limit their use of the term 'tar sands':

In general, use the term “oil sands” as “tar sands” carries a somewhat pejorative connotation. However, “tar sands” is acceptable in opinion pieces, columns, and letters to the editor if the writer is being critical of oil sands development and intends to evoke a negative image.

⁸⁴In French, the resource is more accurately labelled as *sables bitumineux*, literally bitumen sands. Although no corresponding term to tar sands exists in French, there is one for “dirty oil”: *pétrole sale*.

Now domestically, only critics of the industry employ the term 'tar sands' (e.g., Radford, 2008). Internationally, the discourse has been slower to change.

Only 12 stories used the words 'tar sands' in their headlines: nine times exclusively and three times in conjunction with the term 'oil sands'. I explored each of these instances below.

Table 5.9: Oil vs. tar in the headline and body of stories

	Headline		Body of the story	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Oil sands	1140	49.4%	2222	96.2%
Tar sands	9	0.4%	17	0.7%
Both	3	0.1%	70	3.0%
Not mentioned in the headline	1157	50.1%	N/A	N/A
Total	2309	100%	2309	100%

Five of the headlines appeared in the *Toronto Star*. Two headlines focusing on new investment portrayed oil sands development positively

- “State-owned oil firm buys leases to lay stake in Alberta tar sands; Norway’s Statoil pays \$2.2 billion for Athabasca oil prospector” (O’Meara, 2007, April 28: D02); and
- “Suncor to expand tar sands operations; \$4.4 billion project the latest wave of Alberta oil investments” (McKinnon, 2007, August 1: B03).

One presented in oil sands development in a neutral/balanced way: “Tar sand operator mulls options” (Graveland, 2007, May 2: F07). The remaining two cast development in a negative light:

- “Oil no panacea for our economy; Tar sands are a double-edge sword” (Crane, 2006, November 5: A21); and
- “California plan bad news for tar sands industry” (Clarke, 2007, May 30: AA08).

On three occasions, the *Toronto Star's* headline writer invoked the term without it appearing in the body of the article.

Four headlines using the term 'tar sands' appeared in the *Globe and Mail*. The first three of these headlines used the term in the expected way—to cast a negative light on oil sands development due to its large environmental footprint. Although an environmental story, the *Globe's* fourth headline focused on the negative impact climate change would have on oil sands operations rather than the oil sands industry's high level of greenhouse gas emissions or their water consumption.

1. "Alberta's tar sands are soaking up too much water" (Simpson, 2006, July 5: A17)
2. "US activist takes on Sycrude; Colorado woman 'appalled' by energy used at the Alberta tar sands operation" (Mittelstaedt, 2007, May 3: A7)
3. "Environmental costs of tar sands too high, US report says" (Weber, 2007, June 8: A11).
4. "Canada's waters threatened, report says: Warming to bring less flow to Great Lakes, Athabasca River and hurt hydro and tar sands" (Mittelstaedt, 2006, November 13: A4).

Although the *National Post* did not use 'tar sands' in any of its headlines, there were a few instances where it appeared in its sister papers. The *Edmonton Journal* published two headlines using the term. One instance appears to reflect a decision not to repeat the term oil sands: "Era of the oil sands has arrived: Money managers, executives, politicians beating a path to Alberta's tar sands" (Varcoe, 2005, October 25: F1). The second headline links the term to environmentalists: "Irresponsible to subsidize tar sands: greens" (Canadian Press, October 4, 2005: F3). This study found only one instance of the term's use in the *Calgary Herald*: "Oil sands stand tall in land of giants: Dearth of major oilfield finds bodes well for tar sands, analyst" (Haavardsrud, 2006,

March 4: C1). As this story does not use 'tar sands' in its body, it is again likely an instance of seeking to avoid repetition.

Like the *Post*, *Fort McMurray Today* also did not run any stories with 'tar sands' in the headline. However while other papers chose to run a few headlines using the term, overwhelmingly government and industry's preferred term of 'oil sands' has gained acceptance. Although the news media perceives this term as being more neutral, it privileges the interests of oil sands industry and government actors and reinforces an augmentative discourse.

'Tar sands' was used more as a descriptor of the resource in the body of stories than it was in the headlines, 4 percent to 0.5 percent respectively. In the vast majority of these instances, journalists used 'tar sands' in conjunction with 'oil sands'. As detailed in Table 5.10, the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* had the highest usage rates of using tar sands either on its own or in conjunction with oil sands.

Table 5.10: Oil vs. tar in the body of story by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Oil sands	599 97.6%	477 96.4%	504 97.3%	306 92.7%	279 97.6%	57 86.4%	2222 96.2%
Tar sands	0 0.0%	3 0.6%	0 0.0%	7 2.1%	1 0.3%	6 9.1%	17 0.7%
Both	15 2.4%	15 3.0%	14 2.7%	17 5.2%	6 2.1%	3 4.5%	70 3.0%
Total	614 100%	495 100%	518 100%	330 100%	286 100%	66 100%	2309 100%
Notes: $\chi^2=88.612$ $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.139$							

In the vast majority of stories containing the term 'tar sands', the newspaper clearly linked environmental groups to the use of the term introduced it by way of quotes from oppositional groups, rather than the journalists adopting the term themselves. Writing in the *Globe*, David Ebner used 'tar sands' once in a quote from the

director of the Sierra Club whereas in the rest of article, he himself used 'oil sands' (2007, February 27: B7). The exceptions to this trend were found in a few commentary pieces in the op-ed section where the author also used the term. Lynn McDonald, a professor emeritus at the University of Guelph and a former MP, argued in a guest commentary:

The tar sands "development" needs a word to convey the profligate waste of already dug-up fossil fuels to get at more deeply buried fossil fuels, requiring massive quantities of heretofore clean water as well. You would hardly know that this "development" causes a vast increase in Canada's greenhouse gas emissions . . . (2006, August 30: A15).

The *Globe's* editorial highlighting a speech made by Peter Lougheed also contained the term: "'My surmise is that we're into this constitutional legal conflict soon,' the eminent Canadian, who has lamented the fast pace and pollution of tar sands development, told the Canadian Bar Association convention" (2007, August 16: A14). Despite the fact that 'tar sands' was the term commonly used during his tenure as premier, Lougheed (2007) consistently referred to the resource as the "Alberta oil sands" in his speech. As such, this inclusion can be attributed to the *Globe's* editorial team. Lastly, a minority usage was tied to the fact that the term "oil sands" has been more slowly adopted abroad. An example of this was found in a *Globe* article: "High oil prices do support the higher investments in the tar sands . . ." said Mr. Al-Rodham, a Saudi (Freeman, 2005, October 18: B1). Some international actors, such as Saudi Arabian oil representatives or international environmental groups, may prefer the older term because it helps to convey the image of an inferior or 'dirty' product.

By overwhelmingly using the term 'oil sands', all newspapers reinforced an augmentative discourse. As such, the use of the term of 'tar sands' is now viewed as a political choice made by environmental non-governmental organizations and other

opponents of oil sands development, while using 'oil sands' is viewed as apolitical. At the same time, by suggesting that 'oil sands' is a neutral term, newspapers obscure the role that government and industry played in creating and promoting the use of “oil sands” as the descriptor for the resource.

Assessing how the media portrayed oil sands development in its headlines and body of new stories is important indicator of the likelihood of an augmentative or transformative discourse. A positive evaluation is a sign of an augmentative discourse as it is an affirmation that the neoliberal policy frame is shaping media representations of the oil sands. A neutral or balanced evaluation is also augmentative even though it may have transformative elements present as these elements are buffered through the inclusion of augmentative ones. Out of the three possible evaluations, a negative evaluation most likely, but not necessarily, signals the presence of a transformative discourse.

Overall, newspapers were more likely to portray oil sands development positively than negatively in both the headlines and the overall story (Table 5.11). Headlines were less likely than the overall story to be neutral or balanced, at 40 percent to 56 percent respectively.

Table 5.11: Portrayal of oil sands development in the headline and overall story

	Headline¹		Overall story	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	369	32.1%	647	28.0%
Negative	324	28.2%	366	15.9%
Neutral / Balanced	456	39.7%	1296	56.1%
Total	1149	100%	2309	100%
Notes: Only headlines with the words oil sands or tar sands are included.				

How a newspaper assessed oil sands development in its headlines provided a critical insight into the relative strength of augmentative and transformative discourses. This is because headlines provide a summary of what the paper believes to be the most important aspects of a news event: “such a summary necessarily implies an opinion or a specific perspective on events” (van Dijk, 1991, 51). In addition, headlines are free from the journalistic requirement of balance since their function is to capture the readers’ attention in a few words. As a result, headlines provide insight into a newspaper’s ideological viewpoint (Ibid).

Overall, newspapers positively assessed oil sands development in 32 percent of headlines, with individual papers ranging from a low of 21 percent in the *Globe and Mail* to a high of 41 percent in the *Calgary Herald* (Table 5.12). As home to Canada’s energy industry it is not surprising that the plurality of the *Herald’s* headlines were positive. What makes the *Herald’s* enthusiasm noteworthy, however, is that it was about 10 percentage points higher than its two Alberta counterparts and the *National Post*. There was a moderate relationship (Cramér’s $V=0.115$) between the individual newspapers and its portrayal of oil sands development in the headline.

Table 5.12: Portrayal of oil sands development in the headline and overall story by newspaper

	<i>Calgary Herald</i>	<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	<i>Globe and Mail</i>	<i>National Post</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>	Total
Headline¹							
Positive	140 41.4%	84 29.2%	50 30.1%	38 21.3%	45 32.8%	12 28.6%	369 32.1%
Negative	81 24.0%	83 28.8%	54 32.5%	56 31.5%	33 24.1%	17 40.5%	324 28.2%
Neutral/ balanced	117 34.3%	121 42.0%	62 37.3%	84 47.2%	59 43.1%	13 31.0%	456 39.7%
Total	338 100%	288 100%	166 100%	178 100%	137 100%	42 100%	1149 100%
Overall story²							
Positive	198 32.2%	141 28.5%	123 23.7%	71 21.5%	92 32.2%	22 33.3%	647 28.0%
Negative	85 13.8%	104 21.0%	54 10.4%	62 18.8%	43 15.0%	18 27.3%	366 15.9%
Neutral/ balanced	331 53.9%	250 50.5%	341 65.8%	197 59.7%	151 52.8%	26 39.4%	1296 56.1%
Total	614 100%	495 100%	518 100%	330 100.0%	286 100%	66 100%	2309 100%
Notes:							
1. $\chi^2=30.280$ $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.115$. Only headlines with the words 'oil sands' or 'tar sands' are included.							
2. $\chi^2=58.365$ $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.112$							

A strong augmentative discourse is evident in headlines like the following: “Oil sands boom to lift ailing farm region: Upgrader planned for fresh deposit” (Jaremko, 2006, March 22: D4), and “As prices surge, oil giants turn sludge into gold; France’s Total leads push in Northern Alberta to process oil sands (Gold, 2006, March 27: B12). Not surprisingly, the vast majority of positive headlines (81 percent or 297 stories) used an economic frame. Another 11 percent (41 stories) of positive headlines employed an energy security frame. The study did capture a limited number of positive headlines utilizing the other two frames (5 percent of positive headlines were environmental stories and 2 percent were social stories). For instance, a possible technological solution

to the industry's high natural gas usage rates was the focus of a story that appeared the *Herald*: "Trials of cleaner oil sands processes encourage inventors: Methods use less gas without nuclear energy" (Jaremko, 2006, November 14: D4).

Overall, newspapers negatively assessed oil sands development in 28 percent of headlines with individual papers ranging from a low of 24 percent in the *Calgary Herald* to a high of 41 percent in the *Toronto Star* (Table 5.12). The environmental frame encompassed 30 percent of negative headlines (107 stories): "Environmental cost of tar sands too high, U.S. report" (Weber, 2007, June 8: A11) and "Oil sands should pay for fresh water; Report calls for moratorium until study done" (Schmidt, 2006, May 2: C4). Both of these headlines are indicative of a transformative discourse as embedded within each are direct challenges to the current policy frame. The use of 'tar sands' was a direct refutation of the government and industry's preferred language choice, while "too high" suggested that environmental impacts were not being successfully mediated, nor were the economic benefits derived from development sufficient to compensate for the damage being done. By including the word "moratorium," the second headline lent support to the idea that market could not adequately respond to challenges being created.

Surprisingly, slightly over half of these negative headlines (165 stories or 51 percent) were for economic stories. The first set of headlines confirmed the suggestion that an overheated economy threatened the economic viability of some oil sands projects, for example: "Oil boom puts heat on Shell; Costs inflated, labour scarce in Alberta; Energy giant reviews oil sands projects" (Monchuck, April 29: D20). Although this headline raised concerns, it remains augmentative as it reinforces the notion that

market is self-regulating (i.e., companies will adjust their own behaviour). A second set of negative headlines highlighted the oil sands industry's concern that proposed government actions were threatening the economic viability of oil sands projects. For instance, a headline in *National Post* ran as follows: "Oil patch outraged by call for huge royalty increase; Rate for oil sands projects would rise to 64% from 49%" (Harding, 2007, September 19: FP1). Again, this headline clearly adopted an augmentative discourse, citing only industry concerns. These findings demonstrate that negative headlines do not always signal the presence of transformative discourse. When attached to an economic story, particularly in a paper's business section, they are, in fact, more likely to signal the presence of an augmentative one.

Table 5.12 demonstrates that the plurality of headlines across papers were neutral or balanced, except for the *Herald* and the *Star*. Discourse analysis shows that many of these headlines served to reinforce an augmentative discourse by naturalizing neoliberal norms, treating them as uncontroversial--a simple reflection of reality. The headline "Nexen project in oil sands on budget and on time; But worker inexperience causes problems" is a good example of this occurrence (Ebner, 2006, April 28: B5). The headline credits the success of being "on budget and on time" to the company, while blaming "workers" for problems resulting from their inexperience. The neoliberal norm that assigns responsibility to individuals for their training and ability to be productive workers is thus reasserted (Brodie, 2003:26). Not surprisingly, this article relied exclusively on company representatives and industry analysts as sources.

A positive portrayal of oil sands development in the body of story signals the presence of a strong augmentative discourse. As such, it is noteworthy that 28 percent

of all articles adopted this positive outlook (Table 5.2). The *Toronto Star* was the most positive at 33 percent. However, Canadian Press journalists rather than staff reporters of the *Toronto Star* wrote the vast majority (71 percent) of these positive stories. Published in the *Star's* business section, these wire services stories tended to rely heavily on press releases from energy companies for source material. For example, the *Toronto Star* ran a Canadian Press story (2006, January 6: F03) highlighting a Suncor announcement that it had produced its billionth barrel of oil. Although reduced in length from the company's press release, all information and quotes contained in the wire service story were derived directly from it (Suncor, 2006^a). This study captured over 530 positive economic stories. Positive stories also featured prominently within the energy security frame (51 out of 110 stories or 46 percent). These energy security stories also reproduced the idea that oil sands had arrived on the world stage.

As illustrated in Table 5.12, newspapers framed oil sands development negatively in 16 percent of stories with individual papers ranging from a low of 10 percent in *Fort McMurray Today*, to a high of 27 percent in the *Toronto Star*. Negative stories often focused on the problems arising in Fort McMurray due to growth; 28 percent (55 out of 194 stories) of social stories were negative. For example, one article negatively portrayed single life in Fort McMurray due to an imbalance in the numbers of men and women in the area (McLean, 2006, May 8: A1). Another focused on the problems associated with workers living out of trailers on other people's properties for indefinite periods of time (e.g., the lack of appropriate water and sewer services) (Gandia, 2006, September 19: 1). The oil sands' large environmental footprint was also the focus of another large subset of stories; 27 percent of environmental stories (107 of 404 stories) adopted a negative overall tone. Discourse analysis revealed some strong

elements of a transformative discourse within these negative environmental and social stories. Most notable was the way that policy failures were often used as justification for a “pause” or “moratorium” on oil sands development until such time as new regulations and/or infrastructure could be put in place (e.g., Woynillowicz, 2007, April 3: A16; Liepins, 2006, June 14: A1). This, of course, ran counter to the industry's interest in continued development. However, discourse analysis of these stories also revealed that the media primarily placed responsibility for deteriorating environmental and quality of life conditions on the provincial government, rather on than the oil sands industry (e.g., *Calgary Herald*, 2007, January 9: A1; Fekete and Schmidt, 2007, January 10: A1; Pratt, 2005, November 27: A18). In doing so, they ignored the real ways that industry had contributed to problems for example by failing to coordinate activities. But most importantly, they disregarded the role industry played in creating the royalty framework that help sparked this period of uncontrolled growth. This inherent illogicality weakens the overall strength of a transformative discourse within these articles.

Twelve percent of economic stories (178 of 1487 stories) portrayed oil sands development negatively in the body of the story. As with negative economic headlines, these stories focused on the perceived worsening economics of oil sands development as a result of rising costs, labour shortages, or new government taxation. Although seemingly negative, discourse analysis revealed that these stories were still more likely to reflect an augmentative discourse than they were a transformative one. For instance, a *Fort McMurray Today* editorial argued that spiralling costs, not environmentalists or Aboriginal groups, were the “biggest enemy to development,” but at the same time absolved industry of any responsibility: “Everyone knows about the Fort McMurray

Factor, pushing up the cost of everything from a chocolate bar to housing, but oil sands plants are the biggest victims” (2006, July 7: A4).

Neutral or balanced articles accounted for the majority of stories across newspapers, with the exception of the *Toronto Star*, as shown in Table 5.12. Although not as boldly as in positive articles, an augmentative discourse tended to prevail in these neutral and balanced stories. Neutral stories, although seeming to be written impartially, often reconfirmed a neoliberal oil sands framework through their topic selection. Balanced stories achieved journalistic neutrality through the inclusion of diverging opinions or conflicting information. For example, a *Fort McMurray Today* article began by inquiring as to why Suncor did not have any certified reclaimed areas, drawing attention to an issue raised during Suncor’s Voyager hearings (Gandia, 2006, July 12: A5). However, instead of following this line of inquiry further, the article simply reproduced the response given by Suncor at the hearing. Suncor had completed the reclamation work for a number of areas; however, these ‘reclaimed’ areas were located within the footprint of active projects and were therefore ineligible for certification. As will be shown in detail in the two subsequent chapters, neutral and balanced stories often serve to reinforce an overall augmentative tenor even though these news articles met journalistic objectivity criteria.

Impact of journalistic structural factors on framing, evaluation, and sources

In this section, I begin by analyzing how the four key journalistic structural factors—location within the paper, proximity, type of story, and ownership—affected how newspapers framed the story. The second part examines how these structural factors affected the way newspapers evaluated oil sands development in their headlines and in the overall story. I then examine the influence of these factors on source selection.

As Table 5.13 demonstrates, the strongest relationship (Cramér's $V=0.451$) involving the four structural factors was the association between placement of the article within the paper and the story frame employed. A greater diversity of stories frames should provide more opportunities for a transformative discourse to present itself. The business section overwhelmingly adopted an economic frame at 80 percent, leaving little room in their coverage for articles falling into other frames. Outside the business section, newspapers ran just three more economic stories than environmental ones; a sign that newspapers considered both frames equally newsworthy. Newspapers privileged not only the economic frame, but also the limited perspective of investors by overwhelmingly assigning economic stories to their business section. This is a contributing factor as to why an augmentative discourse prevails in setting the overall tone for papers.

Table 5.13: Impact of journalistic structural factors on framing

	Placement within paper ¹		Proximity ²		Type of story ³		Ownership ⁴	
	Business Section	All others	Alberta papers	Outside Alberta	Hard news	Opinion	Canwest	All others
Economic	1015 89.9%	194 37.3%	982 60.4%	507 74.3%	1308 67.4%	172 48.0%	939 67.3%	548 60.0%
Enviro.	113 8.9%	193 37.1%	311 19.1%	93 13.5%	320 16.5%	86 24.0%	235 16.8%	171 18.7%
Social	38 3.0%	67 12.9%	179 11.0%	15 2.2%	145 7.5%	47 13.1%	93 6.7%	101 11.1%
Energy security	73 5.7%	22 4.2%	69 4.2%	41 6.0%	94 4.8%	15 4.2%	71 5.1%	39 4.3%
Other	32 2.5%	44 8.5%	86 5.3%	26 3.8%	74 3.8%	38 10.6%	57 4.1%	55 6.0%
Total	1271 100%	520 100%	1627 100%	682 100%	1941 100%	358 100%	1395 100%	914 100%
Notes 1. $\chi^2=369.984$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.451$. <i>Fort McMurray Today</i> has been excluded as it does not have a business section. 2. $\chi^2=73.056$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.178$ 3. $\chi^2=67.851$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.172$. The "other" category within story type was excluded. 4. $\chi^2=23.390$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.101$								

Based on existing literature discussing the relevance of proximity (Hansen, 2011: 16-17; Stephens et al., 2009:185; Anderson 1997: 135), I hypothesized that Alberta papers would publish a greater diversity of news frames than papers outside the province. As Table 5.13 illustrates, economic stories ranked first and environmental stories ranked second inside and outside of Alberta. However, the Alberta papers gave more media attention to the environmental (19 to 14 percent) and social impacts (11 to 2 percent) of oil sands development than the national papers and the *Toronto Star*. While the social frame ranked third in provincial papers, the non-Alberta papers placed greater emphasis on the energy security frame. As articles using the social and environmental frames often highlighted a problem under the existing neoliberal policy frame, provincial papers had a greater propensity to include a transformative discourse

than those papers serving the national media market. Although these findings provide some evidence to support the assertion that proximity to the oil sands influenced the story frame and thus the likelihood of a transformative discourse being present, the strength of this relationship (Cramér's $V = 0.178$) was only moderate.

Overall, the data presented in Table 5.13 demonstrates that there was a moderate relationship (Cramér's $V = 0.172$) between story type and overall frame. Hard news stories were more likely to focus on the economic dimensions of oil sands development at 68 percent than opinion pieces, which came in at 48 percent. For environmental and social stories, the opposite occurred, with opinion pieces being more likely to use this type of framing (24 to 17 percent for the environmental frame and 13 to 8 percent for the social frame).

The opinion format of news stories is about “making sense” of events and are thus more likely to focus on controversial issues. This likely accounted for the higher percentages of stories focusing on the environmental and social implications of development. Often identifying negative environmental or social impacts arising from the rapid expansion of oil sands development, these news frames were the most likely to include examples of transformative discourses. In addition, columnists often have control over what they write about and have the freedom to write from a singular perspective (McNair, 2008: 115). As such, it is not surprising that some of the strongest augmentative and transformative discourses were found within this story type. However, there are three important caveats to these findings. First, the strongest examples of news stories defending the status quo were also opinion pieces—namely business commentaries. Second, as readers expect opinion pieces to take strong

positions, the impact of either a transformative discourse or an augmentative one within these pieces is likely lessened particularly if serve to confirm the reader's impressions of the columnist or paper. For instance, an US study found that newspaper endorsements of particular electoral candidates were more influential on readers when they appeared contrary to a readers' expectations; a left leaning paper endorsing a Democratic candidate was less influential than an endorsement for a Democratic candidate from a neutral or right leaning paper (Knight and Chiang, 2008: 19). Applying this principle to the context under study, a guest columnist from an environmental group arguing for a moratorium will be less influential on readers' than a business columnist arguing for one. However, the majority of op-ed pieces argued as one expected that they would. Third, in the desire to create 'balanced' coverage, editors will most often run transformative discourses as commentary, the effect of which is to reinforce, rather than challenge, the status-quo as the current policy frame is considered to be the neutral position (Hackett, 1998: 159).

The final column of Table 5.13 addresses whether there were significant differences between CanWest papers, as group, and the other papers. In the past, scholars and other media observers have expressed concern over the rise of media conglomerates, and in particular certain CanWest ownership practices, such as its sharing of editorials and news stories, amongst its holdings as unduly homogenizing coverage (e.g., Sampert and Trimble, 2010: 10; Gregoire, 2004: 42). This loss of diversity, in turn, could reduce the number of opportunities for transformative discourses to emerge. Although CanWest papers were statistically more likely to publish economic stories at 67 percent than the other papers were at 60 percent, the overall

relationship was only moderate (Cramér's $V=0.101$) and played a less significant role than the other explanatory factors.

As detailed above, in the majority of cases, a story or headline that portrayed oil sands development in a positive manner embraced an augmentative discourse while some negative portrayals of oil sands signalled the presence of a transformative discourse. As Table 5.14 shows, none of the journalistic structural factors analyzed resulted in a strong relationship between the factor and how the newspaper portrayed oil sands development. Whether or not a story appeared in a paper's business section had the greatest impact in how the story evaluated oil sands development (headline: Cramér's $V=0.236$; overall story: Cramér's $V=0.266$). For example, 39 percent of headlines within the business section were positive compared to only 17 percent of those appearing in the other sections. This positive approach towards oil sands development was continued in the body of the story (Table 5.14). Although not surprising, these results are noteworthy because of the magnitude of business coverage.

Table 5.14 depicts a moderate relationship (Cramér's $V=0.178$) between type of story and the portrayal of oil sands development overall. Not unexpectedly, opinion pieces were more negative than hard news stories, 31 to 13 percent respectively. However, what was unexpected was the highly positive portrayal of oil sands development, at 30 percent, in hard news stories. Contributing factors to this result were the overall number of hard news business stories, the dominance of the economic frame within the hard news category, and the media use of business actors to 'balance' each other. There was a weak relationship between the portrayal of oil sands

development in the headline and type of story, which suggests headline writers play a role in homogenizing the tone of the headline across hard news and op-ed coverage.

Table 5.14: Impact of journalistic structural factors on evaluation of oil sands development

	Placement within paper ¹		Type of story ²		Ownership ³		Proximity ⁴	
	Business Section	All others	Hard news	Opinion	Canwest	All others	Alberta	Outside Alberta
Headline⁵								
Positive	270	49	337	30	269	100	274	95
	39.1%	16.7%	33.8%	20.7%	35.4%	26.0%	34.6%	26.6%
Negative	155	115	272	51	196	127	218	105
	22.5%	39.2%	27.3%	35.4%	25.8%	33.0%	27.6%	29.7%
Neutral/balanced	265	129	388	63	294	158	299	153
	38.4%	44.0%	38.9%	44.1%	38.7%	41.0%	37.8%	43.7%
Total	690	293	997	144	759	385	792	353
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Overall story								
Positive	456	68	577	67	431	216	462	185
	35.8%	13.1%	29.7%	18.7%	30.9%	23.6%	28.4%	27.1%
Negative	160	152	254	109	232	134	243	123
	12.6%	29.2%	13.1%	30.4%	16.6%	14.7%	14.9%	18.0%
Neutral/balanced	655	300	1110	182	732	564	922	374
	51.5%	57.7%	57.2%	50.8%	52.5%	61.7%	56.7%	54.8%
Total	1271	520	1941	358	1395	914	1627	682
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Notes:								
1. Headline: $\chi^2=54.537$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.236$; overall story: $\chi^2=126.864$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.266$; <i>Fort McMurray Today</i> removed.								
2. Headline: $\chi^2=10.264$ $p<0.01$, Cramér's $V=0.095$; overall story: $\chi^2=72.948$, $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.178$; other category removed.								
3. Headline: $\chi^2=12.084$ $p<0.01$, Cramér's $V=0.103$; overall story: $\chi^2=20.138$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.093$.								
4. Headline: $\chi^2=6,829$ $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.077$; overall story: $\chi^2=3.476$ $p>0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.039$.								
5. Data for headlines represent only those headlines that contained either "oil sands" or "tar sands."								

Table 5.14 illustrates how ownership had a very limited effect on how the newspapers portrayed oil sands development. Headlines in CanWest news stories were more likely to portray oil sands development positively than the other papers, (35 to 26 percent respectively) and less likely to portray it negatively, (26 to 33 percent

respectively) than the other papers. However, the strength of these relationships was moderate (Cramér's $V=0.103$). In addition, ownership was not a factor in shaping how newspapers portrayed oil sands development in the overall story as there was a weak relationship between these variables (Cramér's $V=0.093$). The data presented provides only limited evidence that CanWest papers portrayed oil sands development more positively than the other papers. As such, one cannot use this measure to support an argument that CanWest papers, as a group, were less likely to be transformative than the other papers.

Since the use of the term 'tar sands' is closely associated with actors who are critical of the current policy frame, examining its use in articles is another way to assess the likelihood of a transformative discourse being present. As Table 5.15 illustrates, newspapers overwhelmingly used 'oil sands' as the preferred descriptor, with usage rates of over 90 percent in the body of story.⁸⁵ The placement in the paper was the only journalistic structural factor that demonstrated a moderate association (Cramér's $V=0.160$); 'tar sands' was used in only two percent of business stories compared with its usage rate of nine percent in the other sections of the paper. Analysis determined only weak relationships for the three other journalistic factors.

⁸⁵ I did not test these factors on 'tar sands' appearing in the headline it appeared in the headlines of only 12 stories.

Table 5.15: Impact of journalistic structural factors on the use of 'oil sands' vs. 'tar sands' in the body of the story

	Placement within paper ¹		Proximity ²		Type of story ³		Ownership ⁴	
	Business Section	All others	Alberta papers	Outside Alberta	Hard news	Opinion	CanWest	All others
'Oil sands' only	1246 98.0%	474 91.2%	1581 97.2%	643 94.3%	1878 96.8%	336 93.9%	1357 97.3%	867 94.9%
'Tar sands' ⁵	25 2.0%	46 8.8%	46 2.8%	39 5.7%	63 3.2%	22 6.1%	38 2.7%	47 5.1%
Total	1271 100%	520 100%	1627 100%	682 100%	1941 100%	358 100%	1395 100%	914 100%

Notes:

1. *Fort McMurray Today* has been removed; $\chi^2 = 45.870$ $p < 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.160$
2. $\chi^2 = 11.329$ $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V = 0.070$
3. $\chi^2 = 7.137$, $p < 0.01$; Cramér's $V = 0.056$; "Other" story type has been excluded;
4. $\chi^2 = 9.107$ $p < 0.005$, Cramér's $V = 0.063$
5. Tar sands category includes stories where "tar sands" was used in conjunction with "oil sands" as well as its exclusive use.

The choice of the predominant sources is critical to whether the news discourse remains augmentative because it helps set the tone for the rest of the article. For the most part, industry and government put forth exclusively augmentative arguments in their unmediated discourse. The high frequency of these actors as a first and second source was indicative of an augmentative discourse setting the tone for a large number of newspaper articles. Conversely, the presence of non-governmental actors, who sought to highlight the shortcomings of the current neoliberal policy frame, as first or second source was indicative of a transformative discourse setting the tone of an article. Table 5.16 compares the predominance of sources by each of the four journalistic structural factors. Placement within the paper had the strongest influence on who the newspaper selected as the first source (Cramér's $V = 0.507$) and second source (Cramér's $V = 0.360$). Not surprisingly, business actors dominated as both first (66 percent) and

second sources (50 percent) in the business section. Alongside the use of government sources, this contributed to the dominance of an augmentative discourse in the business section.⁸⁶ In the other sections of the papers, business actors still ranked first at 24 percent. Business actors fell to second place behind government sources as a second source. Although non-governmental actors—environmental and labour organizations as well as academic institutions—had a greater presence in the other sections than within the business section (14 to 6 percent as first source and 11 to 5 percent as a second source), they still lagged behind industry and government actors. This is a sign that newspapers view these actors as less newsworthy, ultimately making it even more difficult for transformative discourse to emerge.

Table 5.16 also illustrates how story type had a strong influence on the first source selection (Cramér's $V=0.488$) but only a moderate one on the selection of the second source (Cramér's $V=0.290$). Opinion pieces relied significantly less on business actors than did hard news stories as a first source (18 to 53 percent respectively). These pieces depended heavily on the voice of the columnist or editor, with 26 percent using no sources at all. Of note, non-governmental sources reached parity with government sources as a first source in the hard news category as each garnered 10 percent. This result is likely partially due to government sources failing to respond to journalist enquiries in a timely manner (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 17). However, this parity between government and non-elite sources should also be taken as a sign that these groups were successful in attracting media attention. Overall hard news stories were

⁸⁶ Although they advanced a transformative discourse, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo only account for 0.7 percent of the government sources within the business section as such their inclusion does not alter the overall augmentative nature of government discourses.

likely to be augmentative as the challenges raised by these non-elite actors tended to be buffered by the inclusion of industry and government.

Table 5.16: Impact of journalistic structural factors on first and second source

	Location within paper ¹		Type of story ²		Proximity ³		Ownership ⁴	
	Business Section	All others	Hard news	Opinion	Alberta	Outside Alberta	Canwest	All others
First source								
Business	843 66.3%	67 12.9%	1020 52.6%	64 17.9%	690 42.4%	397 58.2%	692 49.6%	395 43.2%
Gov't	79 6.2%	115 22.1%	194 10.0%	65 18.2%	197 12.1%	62 9.1%	152 10.9%	107 11.7%
NGO	78 6.1%	78 15.0%	197 10.1%	28 7.8%	183 11.2%	42 6.2%	127 9.1%	98 10.7%
Other	256 20.1%	207 39.8%	521 26.8%	107 29.9%	479 29.4%	156 22.9%	372 26.7%	263 28.8%
N/A	15 1.2%	53 10.2%	9 0.5%	94 26.3%	78 4.8%	25 3.7%	52 3.7%	51 5.6%
Total	1271 100%	520 100%	1941 100%	358 100%	1627 100%	682 100%	1395 100%	914 100%
Second source								
Business	629 49.5%	77 14.8%	775 39.9%	39 10.9%	525 32.3%	292 42.8%	555 39.8%	262 28.7%
Gov't	81 6.4%	94 18.1%	218 11.2%	37 10.3%	205 12.6%	50 7.3%	139 10.0%	116 12.7%
NGO	69 5.4%	69 13.2%	165 8.5%	22 6.1%	139 8.5%	49 7.2%	108 7.7%	80 8.8%
Other	172 13.5%	140 26.9%	367 18.9%	68 18.9%	332 20.4%	103 15.1%	243 17.4%	192 21.0%
N/A	320 25.2%	140 26.9%	416 21.4%	193 53.6%	426 26.2%	188 27.6%	350 25.1%	264 28.9%
Total	1271 100%	520 100%	1941 100%	358 100%	1627 100%	682 100%	1395 100%	914 100%
Notes:								
1. <i>Fort McMurray Today</i> removed; 1 st source: $\chi^2=460.978$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.507$; 2 nd source: $\chi^2=232.192$ $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.360$								
2. Other story type removed; 1 st source: $\chi^2=546.472$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.488$; 2 nd source: $\chi^2=192.735$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.290$								
3. 1 st source: $\chi^2=51.070$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.149$; 2 nd source: $\chi^2=35.796$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.125$								
4. 1 st source: $\chi^2=11.735$ $p<0.05$, Cramér's $V=0.071$; 2 nd source: $\chi^2=30.471$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.115$								

Table 5.16 illustrates how proximity resulted in a moderate relationship on the selection process for first (Cramér's $V=0.149$) and second (Cramér's $V=0.125$) sources. Alberta papers used a greater diversity of sources by relying less on business sources as a first (42 to 58 percent) and second source (32 to 42 percent) than papers publishing outside the province. The provincial papers and non-Alberta papers approached the use of government sources differently. The Alberta newspapers focused on the provincial government (8 percent as a first and second source) rather than the federal government (2 percent as a first and second source). Conversely, the non-Alberta papers used provincial and federal government sources at almost identical levels. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo received significantly more attention in the provincial press as well. Alberta papers used municipal sources in 41 stories as first source and in 36 stories as a second source. In comparison, the national papers and the *Toronto Star* used them as first source in just five stories, and only once as a second source. Due to the continued dominance of business and senior government actors as sources, an augmentative discourse prevailed across both media markets.

Findings about source selection presented in Table 5.16 demonstrated that once again ownership had a limited effect on results. Ownership only weakly affected the type of first source used in the article (Cramér's $V=0.071$) while moderately influencing, albeit lower than the other journalistic factor, the type of second source (Cramér's $V=0.115$).

Table 5.17 summarizes the above findings and clearly demonstrates that the most important journalistic structural factor shaping a newspaper story about oil sands development was its location in the paper, specifically whether or not it appeared in the

business section. Strong relationships were found between a story's location and its framing and sources used. The moderate relationships between a story's placement and evaluative measures of both body and headline, and the use of the more transformational term 'tar sands' were stronger than the other journalistic factors. These findings decisively demonstrate that it is important to compare coverage in the business section with the other sections to understand how newspapers treat a public policy issue like oil sands development.

Table 5.17: Summary table showing the strength of relationships between journalistic structural factors and framing, evaluation, and sources used

	Placement within paper	Proximity	Type of story	Ownership
	Cramér's V values			
Framing	0.451	0.178	0.172	0.101
Evaluation				
Headline	0.236	0.077	0.095	0.103
Overall story	0.266	0.039	0.178	0.093
Tar vs. oil in story	0.160	0.070	0.056	0.063
Sources				
First source	0.507	0.149	0.488	0.071
Second source	0.360	0.125	0.290	0.115

Results for the other three journalistic factors were less conclusive. Findings demonstrate that proximity—the Alberta papers compared with those published outside the province—moderately influenced framing and the sources used, but only weakly impacted how the story evaluated oil sands development and whether it used 'tar sands'. There were more opportunities for a transformative discourse to emerge in the provincial papers due to their greater use of the environmental and social frames, as well as the increased diversity of sources. However, the weak relationships in the evaluative measures demonstrate that the opportunities afforded by environmental and social frames and the diversity of sources failed to alter the overall augmentative tone.

US and UK studies also found that that environmental issues received less attention in national newspapers (Anderson, 1997: 132). This study also confirms Soroka's (2002: 117) findings that proximity's effects are inconsistent and more complex than other journalistic factors, thus there is value in examining both the similarities and differences between the provincial and national media markets.

Type of story—whether it was hard news or an opinion piece—resulted in a strong relationship with only the selection of the first source. Opinion pieces were far less likely to rely on business actors and far more likely to rely on their own voice than writers of hard news stories. Moderate relationships were demonstrated between this journalistic structural factor and three variables: framing, evaluation of oil sands development in the overall story, and the second source. The strongest examples of a transformative discourse were found in guest commentaries written by non-elite actors. However, while the papers included these transformative ideas, this approach can have a marginalizing effect by reducing the ideas to opinions.

Media ownership had the weakest effect on the various measures examined. This study found limited evidence of CanWest Media's "synergy" policy. The most frequent example of this was the sharing of stories between the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*. For example, the *Herald* reproduced several stories written by the *Journal's* business reporter, Gordon Jaremko (e.g., 2006, December 28: D5). Likewise, the *Journal* reproduced stories from the *Herald*, including stories by Shaun Polczer (e.g., 2007, February 15: G8) and Linda Schmidt (e.g., 2007, July 9: A1). However, overall, the study found only moderate relationships between ownership and three of the measures (framing, evaluation of oil sands development in the headline, and second source). In

addition, these were weaker than those found with the other three journalistic structural factors. Results demonstrated weak relationships for all other measures (i.e., evaluation of oil sands development in the overall story, first source, and the use of tar sands in the story). As such, this study confirms Soroka's findings (2002: 40-41) that there is little empirical evidence that concentrated ownership unduly limits diversity within newspaper coverage. This study found the decision to regulate the majority of coverage to the business section, a trend found across ownership groups, had larger role in reducing the diversity of coverage than newspaper ownership.

Conclusion

Journalists did not focus on crime, drugs, heavy haulers or Newfies as Archie McLean proclaimed in his front-page article in the *Edmonton Journal*. Although examples of articles discussing the above can be found, newspapers overwhelmingly focused their attention on exploring the bottom line: the economic effects of, and prospects for, the oil sands industry. Newspapers ran 1471 economically framed stories, dwarfing all of the other frames employed. Discourse analysis revealed that an augmentative discourse upholding a faith in the free market prevailed throughout this frame. This belief in the free market was also upheld in articles included the energy security frame. Reflective of the high levels of public and political interest in the environment at the time, environmental issues received considerable attention especially in the front half of newspapers. Since these stories focused on 'problems' arising from the uncontrolled nature of oil sands development, they represented a greater opportunity for transformative discourses to be present. Discourse analysis revealed that despite the increased presence of environmental groups and other non-elite actors in articles, an augmentative discourse still prevailed largely as a result of

journalistic practices. Transformative discourses were not completely absent, but they tended to be muted and marginalized. These observations also hold true for the coverage of social issues; though, it must be noted that social issues received very little national media attention at all.

Content analysis confirmed my expectations that business actors would be the lead protagonist in the oil sands narrative. They were able to use this position to effectively advance their interests across the various frames, despite the growing concerns over the negative environmental and social impacts resulting from the rapid boom. I established that government actors continued to be cited more often than non-elite actors, despite the fact that government representatives are increasingly hard to reach (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 17). Although the federal and provincial governments often advanced a similar augmentative discourse to that of the energy industry, they were far less successful in obtaining positive media assessments of their actions. Discourse analysis found that newspapers routinely faulted Ottawa and Edmonton for failing to resolve the pressing environmental and social concerns related to oil sands development. As expected, non-elite actors received less media attention and were consulted only on a narrow range of issues. Although some groups' positions were openly attacked by the newspapers as self-serving, the Pembina Institute stood out as an exception, often garnering positive media attention.

My findings demonstrate that the evaluative measures assessed in this study—the use of 'oil sands' versus 'tar sands' and the portrayal of oil sands development in the headline and body of stories—cemented an augmentative discourse. Overwhelmingly, all newspapers adopted industry and government's preferred descriptor of the resource,

'oil sands', in both the headline and body of stories. Given the media's preference for utilizing an economic frame, it was not surprising that positive stories outnumbered negative ones. Positive stories were clearly an overt affirmation of the current policy frame. Yet discourse analysis also revealed that an augmentative discourses were present in some negative portrayals, namely within headlines and stories employing an economic frame. Similar to findings within the media literature on reporting of climate change (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007), journalists seeking 'balance' had the perverse effect of enhancing the overall strength of an augmentative discourse and arguably resulted in unbalanced coverage. In fact, this study found that a transformative discourse seemed to appear only when the journalist failed to follow this practice within an article by relying only on actors critical of the current policy frame or writing from a singular perspective.

Although an augmentative discourse prevailed, there were still important differences in the news coverage. As expected, coverage in the business section differed greatly from that found in the front half of major papers. Tests of association found that the business section played a larger role in shaping the type of oil sands coverage than did proximity, ownership, or type of story. On this basis, I argue that there needs to be greater focus within political communications literature on the business press's coverage of politics and policy issues. As the rapid growth of the business press coincided with the rise of neoliberalism, comparing coverage in this section to that which is contained in the front half of newspapers will provide insight into why neoliberalism remains so intractable. The next two chapters test the resiliency of neoliberalism in the newspaper coverage on two controversial issues in order to determine whether the media captured a transformative discourse within and outside

of the business section on these limited issues: greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the oil sands high energy use and the government take from the oil sands industry.

6 Newspaper coverage of oil sands' greenhouse gas emissions

"Any plan to reduce greenhouse gases must involve consumers of oil and gas as much as producers like Alberta's oil sands producers."

—Rick Hyndman, CAPP (Baxter, November 1, 2006: A19).

"The environment doesn't care about intensity-only about the absolute amount emitted."

—Aaron Freeman, Environmental Defence (Gorrie, October 12, 2006: A04).

Climate change was *the* environmental news story in the mid-2000s, as a potent mix of international and national events spurred Canadian newspapers to give the issue greater attention. Coverage reached its peak in 2007 (Gunster, 2009: 25), the last year of my study period. In addition, Canadian newspapers changed how they covered the story: "The principle questions were no longer is [climate change] real or will it have a significant (and negative) impact upon the planet, but rather what could Canadians do, both individually, and collectively to minimize the possibility of climate change" (Ibid). During this period, newspapers' portrayal of climate change shifted from questioning the science of climate change to examining the viability of potential solutions. Central to this new portrayal was the debate over where responsibility for environmental pollution lay. This shift towards examining the issue through an environmental lens should have been problematic for the oil sands industry, given their role as a significant and growing domestic point source of GHG emissions. Therefore, the environmental focus of coverage meant that the issue of oil sands emissions represented one of the best opportunities to introduce a transformative discourse into the coverage. Yet my

analysis shows that discourse over Canada's climate change policy in general, and the oil sands in particular, remained in flux as augmentative and transformative discourses competed with each other.

A key difference between augmentative and transformative discourses being utilized in coverage of the environmental debate was each discourse's perspective on whether GHG emission targets should be intensity-based or focused on absolute reductions. Intensity-based targets seek to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions per barrel while still permitting an overall growth in emissions. This is an augmentative approach as there is no requirement that overall emission levels actually decrease. This is in sharp contrast to conclusions from the scientific community on climate change, which requires global greenhouse gas emissions to fall significantly (IPCC, 2007). Conversely, absolute reduction targets seek to lower the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions generated by oil sands projects. This approach represents a transformative change if meaningful targets are set and enforced through effective mechanisms that will achieve actual reductions. However, achieving actual reductions, even in meaningful quantities, may not represent transformative change if the continued expansion without consideration of other negative environmental and social externalities is still permitted.

The first part of this chapter examines the policy positions advanced by key actors - federal and provincial governments, the oil sands industry, and the environmental movement - as presented to the public in their unmediated texts. The second part investigates how newspapers covered the issue of rising greenhouse gas emissions from the oil sands industry by examining the story's placement within the

paper, the sources used by journalists, and how the GHG/energy use issue affected the newspaper's evaluation of oil sands development in the headline and overall story. The third part shows how the newspapers employed both augmentative and transformative discourses in their problematization of the issue. Although both types of discourses were present, this section demonstrates how the papers rarely assigned responsibility to the oil sands industry. Subsequently, the discussion section explores the implications of this finding by linking it to the broad political and policy interests of the various actors. I demonstrate how, in some instances, actors who contested the existing neoliberal policy frame had difficulty in having their perspective resonate in the news story as it was effectively muted through the application of journalistic norms.

How actors problematized the issue

The broader political interest of the oil sands industry in the context of environmental issues was to be perceived as responsible corporate citizens who treated the issue of greenhouse gases seriously. To achieve this, they consistently highlighted industry efforts to increase the energy efficiency of oil sands processes, which would, in turn, reduce GHG emissions through intensity-based measures. For instance, in their submission to the oil sands multi-stakeholder committee Canadian Natural highlighted how the company had achieved a "75 percent reduction of corporate greenhouse gas intensity since 1997" (Clapperton, 2006, September 27: 5). Likewise, Suncor referenced in their submission how technological advances "have allowed (Suncor) to cut our per-barrel greenhouse gas emission nearly in half since 1990" (Lambert, 2006, September 28: 4). The consistent unmediated message from the oil industry to the public was that the resource was being developed responsibly and companies were continually investing to improve their environmental performance.

The oil sands industry, as well as the federal and provincial governments, continued advocating for intensity-based targets as a means of improving the levels of GHG emissions released per barrel. For instance, Syncrude (2006^a: 1) proposed that their GHG policy should be a “commitment to energy efficiency measured by targets for per barrel intensity, which will, in turn, reduce per barrel GHG emissions.” North American Oil Sands (2007, April 10: 7) rejected the idea that setting overall targets was a reasonable strategy, stating that it would, “force upgrading to be done outside of Alberta.” The implication was that, if such a path was followed, emissions would still be generated but Alberta would no longer benefit from the employment opportunities associated with the construction and ongoing operation of upgraders. In 2007, the Alberta Government set out its greenhouse gas intensity targets for all large-scale industrial emitters of GHGs, including oil sands operations (2007, September 12: 1).⁸⁷ Although this regulation allowed total emissions to continue to increase, the provincial government heralded its plan as the first comprehensive GHG regulatory system for large scale emitters in North America (Ibid). In response to a House of Commons report on the oil sands, the federal government (2007: 19) stated that it supported the goal of reducing oil sands-related greenhouse gas emissions, citing their announcement of the Regulatory Framework for Air Emissions as evidence of this. At the time, the Harper Government claimed that its framework would give Canada “one of the most stringent regulatory systems in the world” (Ibid). However, this plan would only have put in place

⁸⁷ These regulations required large emitters (over 100,000 tonnes) to reduce their GHGs by 12 percent a year by making improvements. Companies unable or unwilling to do so could either buy Alberta credits or contribute to a research development fund by paying \$15 per tonne for any emissions going above the legal limit. By March 2012, companies had paid “almost C\$200 million” in this “clean energy technology fund” (Government of Canada, 2012: 1).

“short-term emission-intensity targets” which were scheduled only to come into force in 2010 (Dembicki, 2012: 6). After two revisions, the plan was ultimately dropped in 2010 (Dembicki, 2012: 4).⁸⁸

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) was presented by both industry and government as a viable technological innovation. In March 2006, Natural Resources Canada released a “roadmap” outlining the federal government vision for capturing carbon underground. This report built upon earlier government-industry joint efforts (Alberta Chamber of Resources, 2004: 60-66). The push from Ottawa to develop CCS was not about improving current oil sands operations but was about facilitating future expansions by removing a perceived barrier to development:

To realize the future benefits of Canada’s rich energy resource endowments including...oil sands, while at the same time achieving reductions in domestic CO₂ emissions, requires new and innovative technologies, practices and processes that better enable efficient resource development and provide assurance of environmental integrity...While the thought of applying new technology to existing facilities may appear to be a good option, it is often easier and more economical to focus on any new facilities being built to be CO₂ ready, especially in cases like the oil sands where new infrastructure is being built at an unprecedented rate (21, 45).

One year later, Ottawa partnered with the province of Alberta to form a government-industry taskforce to identify opportunities for implementing this new technology on a large scale (Canada, 2007, March 8: 1). Beginning in 2008, both governments made

⁸⁸ Canada has now signed on to the Copenhagen Accord committing itself to reduce GHG emissions by 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 (Government of Canada, 2012, 1). However, federally it still does not have in place a regulatory framework to reduce the carbon footprint of the oil sands industry. As such, the only plan governing emissions is the Alberta Government 2007 regulations, which require oil sands operators to reduce their emission intensity by 12 percent a year.

significant investments in this technology.⁸⁹ Government placed their faith in this technology's ability to achieve their projected GHG reduction targets. In fact, Alberta's reduction plan relied on CCS to provide as much as 70 percent of its target reduction (Meadows and Crossman, 2009: 19).

During this period, the oil sands industry publicly advanced the idea that CCS was a viable solution to GHG concerns. In its presentation to the oil sands multistakeholder committee, Suncor touted this technology:

Suncor, along with industry and government partners, is pursuing a large-scale carbon capture and storage network. If a proper framework can be developed, it has a potential to reduce CO₂ emissions by up to 20 million tonnes per year by 2020. That represents about half of Canada's industrial emissions reduction target as proposed in 2005 (Lambert, 2006, September 28: 5).

Other industry presentations—including those from Albion Sands, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and Canadian Natural—also affirmed direct faith in this untested technology (Jones, 2006, September 19: 6; CAPP, 2006: 15; Clapperton, 2006, September 27: 5). However despite the enthusiasm expressed during the 2005 to 2007 period, by 2009 observers noted that industry was reluctant to develop those initial projects due to “uncertainty regarding the many issues associated with CCS, including technological feasibility, costs, regulatory requirements and long-term liability” (Meadows and Crossman, 2009: 48).

At that time, industry and government positions on the issue were being actively contested by those in the environmental movement, such as the Pembina Institute, one of the leading environmental voices on oil sands development. Journalists

⁸⁹ For instance, in July 2008, the Alberta government created a two billion dollar fund to develop large-scale carbon capture and storage projects. Using its “Clean Energy Fund,” the federal government has also invested in this technology. For example, it invested \$120 million in the Shell Quest project (Natural Resources Canada, 2011).

considered the Pembina Institute to be “a reliable source of information especially when it came to information about the oil sands and the environment” (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 15). Pembina believed that the oil sands could be “carbon neutral” by 2020 without halting development on already approved projects (Pembina Institute, 2007: 8; McCulloch et al, 2006: 36; Bramley et al., 2005: 9).⁹⁰ According to Pembina, the oil sands industry could achieve carbon neutrality by “by combining on-site GHG reductions using measures such as energy efficiency and/or fuel switching (to lower carbon fuels), carbon capture and storage, and/or purchasing offsets” (36). Although Pembina’s goal of carbon neutrality represented a transformative discourse, a central tenet of its approach—its belief that a viable technological solution would present itself—was shared by industry and government. In addition, the Pembina Institute argued that carbon neutrality would not cause undue financial harm to the industry, “given high oil prices and the subsequent high profit margins for oil sands companies” (McCulloch et al, 2006: 36). In fact, the Pembina Institute likened the associated costs to those from “removing lead or sulphur from fuel” (Ibid). The greatest barrier to achieving actual reductions was perceived by Pembina to be a lack of will on the part of government to set firm reduction targets (Bramley et al., 2005: 9), and the failure of industry to take a leadership position on the issue (McCulloch et al, 2006: 36). It is important to remember that Pembina viewed GHGs as just one component necessary for achieving responsible oil sands development (Pembina Institute, 2007; Woynillowicz et al., 2005). In addition, the Pembina Institute recommended that the Canadian state transition to a low carbon

⁹⁰ The oil sands multistakeholder committee (2007: 36) could not agree on whether to recommend carbon neutrality by 2020 as the target for the oil sands industry as it received support only from the municipal and ENGO representatives. As expected, both the provincial government and industry representatives on the committee were opposed to it.

economy through investment and providing incentives “to promote the commercialization of more efficient transportation-based technologies and the development of low-impact alternative fuels” (Woynillowicz et al., 2005: 66). Although the Pembina Institute (2007) supported the continued development of existing projects, its broad vision, which included a temporary moratorium on new oil sands approvals, represented a transformative discourse challenging the current neoliberal framework that focused on rapid development with little regard for the cumulative environmental externalities.

Polling conducted on behalf of the Pembina Institute showed that the majority of Albertans (70 percent) supported the idea that GHG targets should result in actual reductions in emissions (Pembina Institute, 2007 May 4: 2-3). There also appeared to be a near consensus (92 percent) among Albertans that “oil sands companies should be required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in each of their plants” (Ibid). These results suggest that stronger environmental regulation of the oil sands industry could find broad support.

As we will see, the media raised the possibility of utilizing nuclear power as a possible replacement for natural gas. This option gained traction after Gary Lunn, then Minister of Natural Resources, mused about its potential to reporters (Fekete and DeSouza, 2007, January 18: A1).⁹¹ However, it is important to note that the oil sands industry itself did not advance this option. Unless directly questioned by the news

⁹¹ In their official response to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the federal government (2007: 5) asserted that it would be “industry, working within the framework of provincial laws and regulations that will determine whether nuclear energy is used to extract oil from the oil sands.”

media, they were largely silent on the issue. For instance, nuclear power was absent from any industry presentations before the multi-stakeholder committee—a sign that nuclear power was not even on their radar.⁹² Neither was nuclear energy embraced by Alberta’s well-known environmental groups. Both the Pembina Institute (Wilkins et al, 2007, January 24: A19) and the Alberta Wilderness Association (2007, June) rejected claims that nuclear power could provide the oil sands industry with a low-carbon source of energy for use in their production processes. It was only a small, informal environmental group, Environmentalists for Nuclear Power, which raised nuclear power as possible replacement for natural gas (Lewis, 2006, September 18: 129).

How newspapers covered the issue

Out of the 406 environmentally-framed news stories captured in this study, 47 percent focused on greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the high amounts of natural gas used in production processes. Although the GHG emissions/energy use issue was the environmental issue that garnered the most media coverage in all the papers, there was disparity in the amount of attention devoted to it in each paper, from a high of 81 percent of environmental stories in the *Toronto Star* to a low of 30 percent in *Fort McMurray Today* (Table 6.1). The *Star* clearly gave the issue greater salience than the other papers, likely providing more opportunities for transformative discourses on this particular issue to emerge within its coverage. However, it also could be argued that *Fort McMurray Today*’s environmental coverage was more problematic for the oil sands

⁹² Burt Hunt of Petro Canada referenced a presentation on nuclear power by the Environmentalists for Nuclear power: “We may all wish to consider Gary Lewis’s reference and insights in his presentation to nuclear power” (2). However, his position on nuclear energy does not form part of the company’s official position.

industry and government because it brought to light numerous environmental problems rather than the just the “master discourse” of climate change (Hansen, 2009: 5).

Table 6.1: Number of stories about oil sand’s GHG emissions/energy use

	Frequency	Percentage of newspaper’s environmental stories
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	55	56.1%
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	51	44.3%
<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	30	28.0%
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	28	56.0%
<i>National Post</i>	10	45.5%
<i>Toronto Star</i>	17	81.0%
Total	191	47.3%

As findings presented in the previous chapters demonstrated, the nature of coverage in the business section generally differs greatly from that of other sections in the paper. As such, the tables below present the results of all papers with a business section as a singular group. This is done in order to contrast the amount of coverage in the business section with coverage in the other sections of the paper. Results obtained from my analysis of *Fort McMurray Today* are presented on their own, as that paper does not have a business section.

As illustrated in Table 6.2, the major dailies placed the plurality of their stories (35 percent) about oil sands’ greenhouse gas emissions or energy use in the business section. As expected, *Fort McMurray Today* placed the plurality of their stories (47 percent) in the front section.

Table 6.2: Location of about oil sand's GHG emissions/energy use stories

	Papers with a business section	Fort McMurray Today
Business section	57 35.4%	N/A
Front section	44 27.3%	14 46.7%
Op-ed section	38 23.6%	4 ¹ 13.3%
Front page	15 9.3%	12 40.0%
Other	7 4.4%	0 0.0%
Total	161 100%	30 100%
Notes: $\chi^2=33.094$, $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.416$		
1. One of these articles was a hard news story.		

With 15 stories, the major dailies gave this issue out of all oil sands stories the greatest amount of front page exposure.⁹³ However, it was only when other more attention-grabbing news values were attached to the story that the issue was elevated to front page status. For instance, celebrity and conflict combined when David Suzuki visited Alberta and gave 'lectures' on how the development of the oil sands contributed to Canada's failure to meet its GHG emission reduction targets. The *Calgary Herald* viewed Suzuki's visit as provocative, thus deeming it worth of the front page (Komarnicki and Fekete, 2007, Feb 24: A1). Interprovincial political conflict, or the appearance of it, between Alberta and Ontario or with the federal government also moved this issue up to the front pages in the *Edmonton Journal* (e.g., Thomson, 2007, August 10: A1), the *Calgary Herald* (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2007, April 26: A1) and the *Toronto Star* (Benzie and Gordon, 2007, August 10: A1). The *Globe and Mail* published its front page story after

⁹³ The next most prevalent issue was the expansion of the oil sands, with 12 stories, followed by seven articles focusing on workers' issues.

obtaining a leaked draft of the long-anticipated Conservative climate change plan (Curry, 2007, February 26: A1). The story confirmed that the continuation of intensity-based regulations emissions from the oil sands would be permitted. After having the proposed plan reviewed on their behalf by two environmentalists, the *Globe's* story asserted in its lead paragraph that the government was intentionally low-balling the oil sands greenhouse house emissions by significantly underestimating future oil sands development in order to portray the industry in a more positive light (Ibid). In addition to highlighting 'conflicts' over the validity of the plan, its exclusivity to the *Globe* made the story worthy of its front page status. With just three out of 15 front page stories focusing on a lack of government leadership and none holding industry directly responsible, the overall tenor of major dailies' front page coverage remained augmentative. Likewise, the front-page coverage with *Fort McMurray Today* was overwhelming augmentative in tone, as only one of the twelve stories found there employed a transformative discourse, calling for the industry to be regulated (Gandia and Canadian Press, 2005, November 30: 1). Conversely, five stories framed the issue in a more positive light by suggesting that the industry had a natural incentive to reduce its consumption of natural gas and thus would act in the interest of protecting the environment (e.g., Gandia, 2007, May 22: 1).

A newspaper's decision to tell a story on its op-ed pages is generally a sign that it believes the issue, ideas, or actors to be worthy of attention (Karl-Jorgensen, 2008: 71; Sampert, 2006: 134). These opinion formats, even more than the news stories upon which they are based, interpret the significance of ongoing events for their readers (Karl-Jorgensen, 2008: 71). As illustrated in Table 6.2, the major dailies devoted considerable space on the op-ed pages to interpreting the issue of the oil sands'

greenhouse gas emissions and their overall energy use (27 percent of all GHG/energy use articles).⁹⁴ In comparison, *Fort McMurray Today* ran only three editorials on the subject in its op-ed pages. Some of these pieces adopted an augmentative discourse by actively supporting the continued expansion of oil sands projects by delegitimizing the validity of claims by those opposed to development (e.g., Gunter, 2006, January 30: A12), or by proposing largely untested technology as workable solutions to the GHG problem (e.g., nuclear power as a replacement for natural gas, carbon sequestration) (e.g., *Calgary Herald*, 2007, May 2: A16; Thompson, 2005, October 20: A16). Others, particularly guest commentaries, introduced a transformative discourse into the papers (e.g., Boothe, 2007, February 21: A16).

Table 6.3: Type of story about oil sand's GHG emissions/energy use

	Papers with a business section ¹			<i>Fort McMurray Today</i> ²	All papers
	Business section	All other sections	Total		
Hard news	49 87.5%	60 57.1%	109 67.7%	27 90.0%	136 71.2%
Columns	4 7.1%	29 27.6%	33 20.5%	0 0.0%	33 17.3%
Editorials	0 0.0%	10 9.5%	10 6.2%	3 10.0%	13 6.8%
Readers' letters	0 0.0%	5 4.8%	5 3.1%	0 0.0%	5 2.6%
Feature	3 5.4%	1 1.0%	4 2.5%	0 0.0%	4 2.1%
Total	56 100%	105 100%	161 100%	30 100%	191 100%
Notes: No "other" story type was captured for this issue.					
1. $\chi^2=23.294$; $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.380$					
2. <i>Fort McMurray Today</i> vs. newspapers with a business section: $\chi^2=10.125$, $p<0.05$; Cramér's $V=0.230$					

⁹⁴ In comparison, Sampert (2006: 134) found that opinion pieces (editorials, columns/commentary) constituted only three percent of Canadian newspaper coverage about sexual assaults. Although Sampert's study is focused on a different policy field, the comparison does give us some indication of the magnitude of newspaper's interest in interpreting oil sands development for their readers.

One of the reasons why augmentative discourses prevailed throughout the majority of coverage was that newspapers continued to heavily rely on industry and government sources. As Table 6.4 illustrates, industry was the most common first source. However, they ranked first only within the business section of the major dailies. In *Fort McMurray Today*, they ranked second as first source, below environmental groups. In the major dailies' non-business sections they were tied for fourth. As a second source, business actors again dominated coverage within the business section of the major dailies (Table 6.5). In addition, they ranked first as a second source in the other sections of the major dailies and in *Fort McMurray Today*.

Table 6.4: First source utilized in oil sands stories where the emphasis is on GHG emissions/energy use

	Papers with a business section ¹			<i>Fort McMurray Today</i> ²	All papers
	Business section	All other sections	Total		
Business actors	21 37.5%	6 5.7%	27 16.8%	5 16.7%	32 16.8%
ENGOS	5 8.9%	10 9.5%	15 9.3%	9 30.0%	24 12.6%
Provincial government	2 3.6%	18 17.1%	20 12.4%	2 6.7%	22 11.5%
Federal government	3 5.4%	17 16.2%	20 12.4%	1 3.3%	21 11.0%
Academic/institute	8 14.3%	6 5.7%	14 8.7%	0 0.0%	14 7.3%
Other ³	17 30.4%	40 38.1%	57 35.4%	10 33.3%	67 35.1%
N/A	0 0.0%	8 7.6%	8 5.0%	3 10.0%	11 5.8%
Total	56 100%	105 100%	161 100%	30 100%	191 100%

Notes:

1. $\chi^2=39.251$, $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.494$
2. *Fort McMurray Today* vs. papers with a business section: $\chi^2=28.472$, $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.386$
3. First Nations, labour organizations, and the Regional Municipality were completely absent as a first source and as such, are *not* included in the 'other' category.

The low presence of industry sources as a first source in other sections of the major dailies limited did not lead to the introduction of transformative discourses. As Table 6.4 shows, the media relied more heavily on sources from the Alberta and federal governments than on oppositional voices. Since these governments' positions varied little from industry, an augmentative discourse prevailed in its ability to set the tone for these articles.

Conversely, the newspapers relied on representatives from environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) as a first source overall in only 13 percent of these stories, and as a second source in just 11 percent. ENGOS received their greatest exposure in *Fort McMurray Today* where their presence ranked them first as a source on the issue at 30 percent. Multiple sources are viewed by journalists as the best way to present "an informed and balanced view" when writing stories about the environmental impact of oil sands development (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 17). And yet, this study found that 17 percent of all stories (32 stories) about GHG emissions/energy use relied on just a single source (of which 17 stories were hard news). Government and industry sources dominated as exclusive sources in 53 percent (17 stories) of these sole sourced articles. Comparatively, environmental groups were the singular source in just three stories.

Table 6.6: Second source in oil sands stories whose story's emphasis was GHG emissions/energy use

	Papers with a business section ¹			<i>Fort McMurray Today</i> ²	All papers
	Business section	All other sections	Total		
Business actors	21 37.5%	14 13.3%	35 21.7%	8 26.7%	43 22.5%
ENGOS	7 12.5%	8 7.6%	15 9.3%	5 16.7%	20 10.5%
Provincial government	0 0.0%	11 10.5%	11 6.8%	5 16.7%	16 8.4%
Federal government	6 10.7%	13 12.4%	19 11.8%	0 0.0%	19 9.9%
Academic/institute	4 7.1%	5 4.8%	9 5.6%	0 0.0%	9 4.7%
Other ³	10 17.9%	25 23.8%	35 21.7%	7 23.3%	42 22.0%
N/A	8 14.3%	29 27.6%	37 22.9%	5 16.7%	42 22.0%
Total	56 100%	105 100%	161 100%	30 100%	191 100%

Notes:

1. $\chi^2=21.338$, $p<0.01$; Cramér's $V=0.334$
2. *Fort McMurray Today* vs. papers with a business section: $\chi^2=21.866$, $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.334$
3. First Nations, labour organizations, and the Regional Municipality were completely absent as a second source; as such, are *not* included in the 'other' category.

The presence of a negative headline is most often an indicator that the newspaper has identified an issue as a specific policy failure. Forty-two percent of greenhouse gas emission headlines were negative, presenting oil sands development in an unfavourable light (Table 6.6). Across the major dailies, there was virtually no difference in negative tone between headlines (44 percent) found in the business section and those found in the other sections (43 percent).

Negative headlines highlighted a variety of issues. For example, some headlines singled out the oil sands sector as the reason for Canada's poor performance in reducing its overall greenhouse gas emissions: "Oil sands make Canada complicit in global

warming” (McQuaig, 2005, November 26: F05). Other headlines criticized government plans to continue allowing emissions from oil sands operations to grow: “Climate draft allows spike in oil sands emissions; Ottawa low balling future development, environmentalists say of proposed plan” (Curry, 2007, February 26: A1). Lastly, some not only highlighted the scale of the problem, but also challenged industry to improve: “Oil sands operators challenged to be carbon-neutral by 2020; Single biggest producer of greenhouse gas emissions (CanWest News Service, 2006, October 6: A15). In contrast, only 22 percent of the stories covering this issue were negative in tone. This lower percentage in negative tone can be attributed to journalists seeking out the perspective of industry and/or government so that they might respond to criticisms leveled against them. Over 70 percent of the articles were coded as balanced or neutral, further illustrating that the newspapers adopted an augmentative discourse in the majority of the stories. Positive headlines are a good indicator of the presence of an augmentative discourse. Overall, 12 percent of greenhouse gas emissions headlines were positive (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6: Evaluation of oil sands development in headline and body of story within GHG emissions/use of energy stories

Papers with a business section ¹			Fort McMurray Today ²	All papers	
Business section	All other sections	Total			
Headline					
Positive	7	5	12	1	13
	23.3%	8.6%	12.4%	14.3%	12.1%
Negative	17	25	42	3	45
	43.6%	43.1%	43.3%	30.0%	42.1
Neutral/balanced	15	28	43	6	49
	38.5%	48.3%	44.3%	60.0%	45.8%
Total	39	58	97	10	107
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Overall story					
Positive	9	4	13	2	15
	16.1%	3.8%	8.1%	6.7%	7.9%
Negative	10	30	40	2	42
	17.9%	28.6%	24.8%	6.7%	22.0%
Neutral/balanced	37	71	108	26	134
	66.1%	67.6%	67.1%	86.7%	70.2%
Total	56	105	161	30	191
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Notes: Only headlines with the words 'oil sands' or 'tar sands' are included					
1. Headline: $\chi^2=2.148$, $p>0.05$; Overall story: $\chi^2=8.501$, $p<0.05$; Cramér's $V=0.230$					
2. Fort McMurray Today vs. papers with a business section: Headline: $\chi^2=0.909$, $p>0.05$; Overall story: $\chi^2=5.247$, $p>0.05$					

Positive headlines reinforced several augmentative discourses, including the notion that technological improvements would provide the solution to reducing the oil sands' dependency on natural gas:

- "Trials of cleaner oil sands encourage investors: Method uses less gas without nuclear energy" (Jaremko, 2006, November 14: D4)
- "Turning coke into gas: It may help the oil sands" (Gandia, 2006, February 15: 1).
- "Greener oil sands would drill for heat. Stream fuelled by Earth's heat could replace natural gas, economist suggests" (Chalmers, 2007, February 8: A1).

Others reinforced the idea that the oil sands were being unfairly targeted by environmentalists: "Alberta's oil sands just bit players in greenhouse gas emissions: Media has myopic view of Canada's role in this truly global problem" (Lamphier, 2007,

January 9: E1). Lastly, some highlighted government action to solve the problem: "Premier, PM tout greener oil sands: Ottawa to help cut emissions" (*Calgary Herald*, 2007, March 9: A1). In the vast majority of these instances, journalists also adopted a positive perspective in their story.

Nearly half of the headlines were coded as neutral or balanced; however, these headlines tended to reinforce an augmentative discourse. Even when raising the issue of greenhouse gas emissions, balanced headlines still adopted a pro-industry view. For example, this *Edmonton Journal* headline shifted responsibility to other actors: "Oil sands' contribution to emissions debated; Nationwide consumption real issue: oil producers" (Brooymans, 2005, November 30: A7). Many of the headlines in this category placed their focus on the nuclear power option rather than on the oil sands, and thus were coded as neutral: "Ottawa now keen on nuclear power for the oil sands" (CanWest News Service, 2006, December 22: A6) and "Nuclear pitch for oil sands; Upstart to market Candu reactors" (Ebner, 2006, August 17: B1). The promotion of nuclear power represented an augmentative discourse as it was portrayed as a legitimate option for oil sands operators to eliminate their greenhouse gas emissions by using nuclear power instead of natural gas in their extraction processes.

How newspapers problematized the issue

Discourse analysis revealed that even when newspapers covered the environmental component of the oil sands industry and climate change story, they rarely held industry directly responsible for problems. Instead, they embraced a series of problem definitions that either directed attention elsewhere (e.g., to government or consumers) or portrayed industry as part of the solution. However, unlike a similar American study

(Antilla, 2005: 338-352) which examined the period of 2003-2004, the science of climate change itself was not under attack. Instead papers focused on assigning responsibility and evaluating potential solutions. Each of the problem definitions is explored below.

Table 6.7: Problem definitions for GHG emissions/energy use

	Papers with a business section¹			Fort McMurray Today²	All papers
	Business section	All others	Total		
Augmentative discourses					
1. Industry has an economic incentive to reduce their consumption of natural gas. Nuclear is a possible solution	21 37.5%	25 23.8%	46 28.6%	14 46.7%	60 31.4%
2. Technology will solve the problem.	9 16.1%	11 10.5%	20 12.4%	3 10.0%	23 12.0%
3. The problem is political.	2 3.6%	20 18.1%	22 13.7%	1 3.3%	23 12.0%
4. Proposed solutions are assessed primarily on their financial impact to the industry.	10 17.9%	6 5.7%	16 9.9%	3 10.0%	19 9.9%
5. The oil sands industry is unfairly targeted.	6 10.7%	8 7.6%	14 8.7%	2 6.7%	16 8.4%
Sub-total	48 85.8%	70 66.7%	118 73.3%	23 76.7%	141 73.8%
Transformative discourses					
6. The problem is a lack of government leadership	4 7.1%	18 17.1%	22 13.7%	3 10.0%	25 13.1%
7. The oil sands are a significant point source of GHG emissions and must be regulated.	4 7.1%	17 16.2%	21 13.0%	4 13.3%	25 13.1%
Sub-total	8 14.2%	35 33.3%	43 26.7%	7 23.3%	50 26.2%
Total	56 100%	105 100%	161 100%	30 100%	191 100%
Notes:					
1. $\chi^2=19.786$ $p<0.005$; Cramér's $V=0.351$					
2. $\chi^2=5.386$, $p>0.06$					

1. *Industry has an economic incentive to reduce its dependence on natural gas; nuclear is a possible solution.*

This was the dominant problem definition among the Alberta newspapers, with 18 stories appearing in the *Calgary Herald*, 17 stories in the *Edmonton Journal* and 14 stories in *Fort McMurray Today*. Nationally, the *Globe and Mail* published five stories using this problem definition, and the *National Post* and the *Toronto Star* each ran three. In total, this problem definition accounted for 60 stories or 31 percent. As Table 6.7 illustrates, stories appearing in the business sections of major dailies were significantly more likely to use this problem definition (38 percent) than were stories printed in the other sections of the newspapers (24 percent).

Most of these articles argued that, rather than burning natural gas, the oil sands industry could use nuclear power to fulfill its energy needs. Industry would then be protected from the high cost of natural gas and/or future shortages, while significantly lowering its GHG footprint—a win for both the environment and industry. Notably, this type of reframing of nuclear power as a safe and low carbon alternative by government, industry, and some of the news media, was also happening during the time period in other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom (Doyle, 2011: 121-122). Under this augmentative discourse the oil sands could continue to grow without any consideration of environmental consequences and did not require any change in consumer or investor behavior.

Statements raising doubts about nuclear power's viability as a replacement for natural gas in processing oil sands deposits were generally only raised near the end of the articles using this problem definition. For example, the fact that both domestic and French nuclear companies have yet to “come up with a viable option” and were

exploring “a range of alternatives” was buried in a quote from CAPP in the thirteenth paragraph of a *Globe and Mail* article (McCarthy, 2006, September 25: B5). Its headline had boldly proclaimed nuclear power as the solution to energy concerns: “Nuclear power pushed for oil sands production; reliance on natural gas as heating source is the industry’s Achilles heel: Swedish group” (Ibid).

Not only did Alberta’s newspapers put themselves in the debate by writing several editorials on the subject, they clearly intended to lead public discussion. In three different editorials, the *Herald* argued strongly in favour of nuclear power: “there’s no better application in Canada than a large scale industrial user in a remote area (*Calgary Herald*, 2006, March 18: A24). When local criticism of nuclear energy did emerge, the *Herald* (2007, May 2: A16) dismissed it quickly as being irrational: “If people can live next to a nuclear power station in Pickering (ON), a plant in northern Alberta well removed from Fort McMurray should meet any objective measure of risk.” The *Herald* called on the provincial government “to take leadership on the issue” (Ibid). The *Journal* was also supportive of nuclear power as a means of reducing the oil sands industry’s dependence on natural gas but tempered the *Herald*’s enthusiasm by calling for a debate on the subject. In contrast with the province’s two major dailies, *Fort McMurray Today* suggested in two separate editorials that it should be industry which decides if nuclear power is “the best way to go,” thus attempting to limit the role of the provincial government to that of “safety not advocacy” (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2006, November 14: A4). Since no oil sands companies had actually publicly coming out in favour of nuclear power, it questioned whether it was even a viable solution:

Those behind the nuclear proposal need to put up or shut up. Is it a make-work job for a federal Crown corporation or a real possibility to help private industry cut costs and do better on

the environmental front (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2007, January 16: A4)?

Nationally, the *National Post* ran two commentary pieces, each from an opposing viewpoint. Kevin Libin (2007, January 26) supported the viability of nuclear power and felt it could improve the oil sands industry's image:

For politicians, the prospect of rising costs is bad enough. The optics of Alberta's energy firms burning a clean versatile fuel to produce a relatively dirty and inflexible one are even uglier (especially since we're burning the equivalent of two barrels to get three) (A4).

However, instead of viewing nuclear power as the industry possible salvation, the *Post's* Claudia Cattaneo (2007, August 29) argued the following in her column:

Oil sands companies are working on and have invested heavily in other technologies such as gasification that are at more advanced stages of development. Besides, they'd be insane to pile one more controversy onto the oil sands—next to concerns about greenhouse gas emissions, water usage, land defacement, labour shortages, native opposition (FP5).

Neither *the Globe and Mail* nor the *Toronto Star* ran editorials or commentary pieces on whether nuclear power had a place in the future of oil sands development.

Throughout most of its tenure, the Klein government had been opposed to nuclear power. During the leadership race to replace him, front-runner Jim Dinning floated the idea that nuclear power may have a place in Alberta's energy mix, but with no history of nuclear power in the province, these musings were tentative.⁹⁵ As such, Alberta newspapers were at the forefront of a policy discussion on this matter.

⁹⁵ In 2008, the Alberta government appointed an expert panel to explore the feasibility of nuclear power within Alberta. As part of this process, this panel examined the issue of replacing natural gas in the oil sands production process with nuclear power (Nuclear Power Expert Panel, 2009, 12, 27). However, the level of media interest in nuclear power during the 2008-2009 period was "below the radar" (Bratt, 2010: 13).

2. *Technology is the solution.*

Government, industry, and some environmental groups—like the Pembina Institute—all imagined technology playing a crucial role in reducing GHGs produced during oil sands production processes. The media reflected this sentiment in 23 stories (12 percent); six of these stories appeared in the *Journal* and in the *Herald*, four in the *Globe*, three in *Today*, and two in the *Post* and the *Star*. As illustrated in Table 6.7, tests of association showed that stories in the business sections of the major dailies tended to embrace this idea more than articles in other sections (16 to 11 percent). However, due to rising production levels, reductions in GHG emissions gained through energy-efficiency would be insufficient to reduce overall emissions, as such attention turned to new technologies which would reduce/eliminate overall emissions. Therefore, actors who favoured a technological solution most often placed their faith in untested ideas—principally carbon capture and storage or, as it is sometimes called, carbon sequestration. This involves capturing the carbon dioxide (CO₂) created as a byproduct of the in-situ process, and pumping and storing it underground to prevent its release into the atmosphere. Utilization of this problem definition represents an augmentative discourse in that it seeks to address a policy failure through instrumental change, the introduction of new untested technology.

The earliest instance of this problem definition caught in this study was found in a column by the *Edmonton Journal's* political columnist, Graham Thomson (2005, October 20: A16). In it, he supported the idea that provincial funds should be used to advance CCS technology:

Using our surplus dollars to reduce carbon dioxide emissions makes sense environmentally, economically, and politically. We'd also become a world leader in the technology. We as Albertans would end our free

ride at the expense of the environment—and we wouldn't have to build a nuclear power plant (Ibid).

In addition to the environmental benefits of CCS, articles also drew the reader's attention to the fact that the CO₂ could be injected into aging conventional oil fields in Alberta, allowing for more oil to be extracted (Gandia, 2005, December 6: 1; Schmidt, 2007, Feb 28: G4). CCS was unambiguously labeled as a "favoured concept," for its ability to allow, "fossil-fuel plants to continue their lucrative operations without pumping as much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere" (Markusoff, 2007, March 7: A2). Other articles highlighted efforts by companies to replace the natural gas used by in-situ processes with a new fuel derived from raw bitumen (Jaremko, 2007, July 23: A16). This process would be combined with carbon sequestration, therefore removing the need to burn a 'clean' expensive fuel to produce a 'dirty' one.

The overall tone of most of the articles was optimistic, assuming that carbon capture and storage would be successful if only the government and/or industry invested sufficient resources. In this regard, the newspapers treated government investments in this technology as important newsworthy events (e.g., Harding, 2007, March 9: A4). But this faith in the science behind the process was premature as the use of this expensive technology in an oil sands application was untested. And like the nuclear power solution, the media started supporting the idea without receiving firm commitments from any company that they were leaning towards its implementation. Oil sands companies expressed interest in the idea *when and if* it proved workable and economically feasible. However, one editorial in *Fort McMurray Today* (2006, February 3) explicitly recognized the untested nature of the technology while still encouraging its development:

The Alberta government, led by progressive-thinking Guy Boutilier, is taking the first steps to embrace this new idea of pumping CO₂ into the ground. No one knows if it's viable for the oil sands. No one knows if it will make a difference. No one knows if this proposal is safe or dangerous. But it is certainly worth investigating (A4).

Other articles raised doubts about whether the industry would adopt these new technologies even if full-scale pilot tests showed them to be successful. Their implementation would be dependent on whether oil sands companies could financially justify integrating carbon capture and storage into their production processes (Jaremko, 2007, July 23: A16; Cattaneo and Harding, 2007, March 9: FP1; McCarthy, 2006; November 20: B1). For example, proponents of the technology suggested that governments would need to provide incentives, and either regulate or cap carbon emission in order to create the right market conditions to facilitate its widespread adoption.⁹⁶ North American Oil Sands was credited as going 'green' by embracing carbon capture and storage technology in a *National Post* article. But even this company's support was tentative as Pat Carlson, CEO, explained: "We are setting up our plans so we can accommodate CO₂ sequestration, provided that the fiscal regimes are there to encourage that to happen" (Cattaneo, 2007: April 21: FP10).

⁹⁶ Both Alberta and Ottawa have since developed financial incentive programs to fund the expansion of carbon capture and storage. In July 2008, the Alberta government created a two billion dollar fund to develop large-scale carbon capture and storage projects. Using its "Clean Energy Fund," the federal government has invested in this technology. For example, it invested \$120 million in the Shell Quest project (Natural Resources Canada, 2011).

3. *The problem is political rather than technical.*

Stories in this problem definition (23 stories or 12 percent) recast the issue of GHG emissions as representing the opening of a new front in the 'East vs. West' battle of Canadian politics. In this battle, Alberta is viewed as the 'bad boy' of GHG emitters while Ontario and Quebec are viewed as 'hypocrites' because they have actively promoted their manufacturing sector to oil sands companies while being unwilling to place caps on their own industry (Norquay, 2010: 19). Not unexpectedly, more than half of these stories (12 stories) appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, followed by the *Edmonton Journal* (five stories), the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* (2 stories each), and *Fort McMurray Today* and the *National Post* (one story each). By focusing on the 'politics' of the issue, this problem definition received greater attention outside the business section than within it (19 percent to only 4 percent respectively). An augmentative discourse prevailed because this problem definition limits discussion of the GHG emissions/energy use issue to a 'game frame' of provincial rivalries or Ottawa vs. Alberta competition. As such, substantive policy differences, as well as the neoliberal oil sands policy frame, remained unexamined as stories focused only on the rhetoric of the parties involved.

For example, in a story appearing in the *Herald* during the leadership race to replace Ralph Klein, each candidate echoed the Alberta vs. Ottawa rhetoric: "The province will work internally to reduce greenhouse gases while at the same time keeping a close watch on any actions by Ottawa that could hamper Alberta's economy" (Cryderman, 2006, September 29: A12). The 'us vs. them' mentality was found in another article which focused on the then newly-elected leader of the Liberal Party, Stéphane Dion. The *Herald* selected quotes from two political analysts which reaffirmed

this antagonism even though provincial and Calgary municipal officials indicated that they had good working relations with Mr. Dion. For example, David Taras was quoted as saying:

His dog is named Kyoto. He is Mr. Kyoto. Alberta and the tar sands, in particular, are a major pollution problem. I can see the whole issue of the tar sands and pollution being front and centre, and there might be a lot of conflict (McGinnis and Komarnicki, 2006, December 3: A7).

Another article focused on a war of words that erupted when Premier Stelmach interpreted comments by Mark Holland, then a federal Liberal MP, as a Liberal threat to “to grab control of the oil sands” (MacDonald, 2007, February 6: A6). Holland responded by saying: “Perhaps by creating fear and distorting not only what I said, but the position of our party, that they think they can extract some political gain from it” (ibid). While transferring attention to the political game being played out between provincial and federal actors, the article also buried in its conclusion the fact that Alberta’s GHG emissions had risen by 40 percent despite a reduction in intensity of emissions per barrel of oil sands.

Both the *Toronto Star* and the *Edmonton Journal* adopted this problem definition in their coverage of the August 2007 premiers’ meeting to devise a ‘national’ strategy on GHG emissions. The *Star* painted Alberta’s interests as being in opposition to Ontario’s, suggesting an old East vs. West battle was brewing:

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty has drawn a line in the Alberta oil sands. Arguing that every province must “give a little in order that we all gain a lot,” McGuinty yesterday turned up the heat on Alberta to buy into his plan to cap greenhouse gas emissions (Benzie and Gordon, 2007, August 10: A01).

As the second source quoted in the story, Ed Stelmach was put in a defensive position:

Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach, who is concerned such measures would spell catastrophic job losses in the high polluting oil sands, said “no one

was very successful in convincing me today” to go along with McGuinty’s scheme (Ibid).

By adopting the game frame, the news story portrayed the other provinces as picking “sides” in this battle between Ontario and Alberta. Running the front page headline, “Climate talks let Stelmach off hook; Fellow premiers sympathetic to Alberta’s oil sands problem,” one would think that the *Edmonton Journal* was covering an entirely different event than the *Star* (Thomson, 2007, August 10: A1).⁹⁷ Despite declaring a different winner, the *Journal* also reproduced the Ontario vs. Alberta battle frame by labeling McGuinty a “whiner” and concluding that the lack of agreement amongst premiers made Stelmach as happy as “if the premiers had carried him out of the conference hall on their shoulders while singing Alberta Bound” (Ibid).

This perspective was also adopted in opinion pieces, particularly in editorials within the *Calgary Herald*. For instance, as the Conservative government in Ottawa sought to “green” itself, the *Calgary Herald* (2007, August 16) worried that the Conservative party, even one headed by a Prime Minister from Calgary, would be willing to sacrifice western interests in search of electoral victory in eastern Canada:

Certainly if Ottawa puts the boots to the Alberta’s oil sands to curry favour with eastern voters anxious over global warming, the provincial government would have no choice but to defend itself. Aggressive legislation would lead to overheated rhetoric—on both sides—and the possible revival of a wild card western separatist party (A16).

⁹⁷The *Calgary Herald* reproduced this *Edmonton Journal* piece in their op-ed pages. None of the other papers directly tied the premier’s climate talks to the production of oil sands in their headline and/or lead paragraph and as such were not included in this study.

When the newspapers apply this perspective uncritically, it serves to reinforce the focus on political rhetoric and competition between jurisdictions, thus allowing the issue of oil sands GHG emissions to remain largely unexamined.

4. *Proposed solutions are assessed primarily on the basis of their financial cost to the oil sands industry.*

Some of the articles focused not on a particular problem definition per se but on analysing solutions to the problem on a purely financial basis. Five articles were published in each of the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*, three in each of the *Globe and Mail* and *Fort McMurray Today*, two in the *National Post*, and one in the *Toronto Star*. In total, 19 stories, or 10 percent, focused on this problem definition. The business sections of the major dailies gave this problem definition significantly more weight at 18 percent compared to the other sections at 6 percent. These findings indicate the presence of an augmentative discourse as proposed solutions were being evaluated according to neoliberal norms assessing their impact on the competitiveness (financial health) of the oil sands industry. This means that an augmentative discourse prevailed even in those articles countering the argument that implementing Kyoto or placing hard caps on emissions would cripple the oil sands industry.

The Pembina Institute garnered media attention when it released a report arguing that the oil sands industry could go carbon neutral for as little as it cost to remove lead from gasoline (Hamilton, 2006, October 24: D03; Brooymans, 2006, October 24: B5; Canwest News Service, October 24: D4; Gandia, 2006, October 24: A1). In all of these news reports, CAPP was quoted as saying it would take time to review Pembina's numbers, but reiterated that improvements had already been made to reduce their environmental impact. No other articles captured in this study questioned

Pembina's findings specifically. At a House of Commons' committee hearing, the Pembina Institute also argued that the industry could meet its Kyoto targets for just one dollar per barrel (Curry, 2007, February 21: A3). In a *Fort McMurray Today* article, both the oil sands industry and the federal government criticized Pembina's "one dollar plan" for its reliance on the purchase of foreign credits (Gandia, 2007, February 22: A5). However, while the industry may not have agreed with this plan, it did not embrace Harper's assertion that meeting these targets would "devastate the economy," with Suncor predicting such a plan would result in "no job losses or impact on the economy" and Shell stating that "growth was inevitable for his company" (De Souza, 2007, February 21: A5). During the period between the House of Commons' hearings and the release of the Harper government's GHG plan, the industry warned that while the actions of the federal and provincial governments could affect the economic viability of projects, they were unlikely to derail them altogether (Cattaneo, 2007, April 25: FP1; McCarthy, 2007, March 13: B4).

Three articles focused on the fact that the actual cost of compliance to new federal GHG regulations would only have a marginal financial impact on the oil sands sector after the federal government announced its "Made in Canada" plan (Cattaneo et al., 2007, April 26: FP1; McCarthy and Ebner, 2007, April 27: B1; Schmidt, 2007, April 28: D4). The perceived cost of reducing or eliminating GHG emissions was also implicitly blended into many of the other problem definitions. For example, the federal and provincial governments often cited the amount of funds spent, or at least announced, on carbon capture and storage by the provincial and federal governments to show that they were doing something. An examination of articles using this particular problem definition concluded that for the most part, the costs of lowering the level of GHG

emissions generated by oil sands projects would be marginal. However, many articles noted that these costs could combine with other rising costs (e.g., labour and capital costs or increased royalties) to adversely affect the overall economics of a project.

5. *The oil sands are being unfairly targeted for their GHG emissions.*

Sixteen stories (8 percent) focusing on GHG emissions argued that the oil sands were being unfairly singled out as a high point source of GHG emissions: the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Globe and Mail* (five stories each), the *Calgary Herald* and *Fort McMurray Today* (two stories each), the *National Post* and the *Toronto Star* (one story each). There was only a slight difference between coverage in the business section of the major dailies and the other sections when adopting this problem definition of 11 percent to 9 percent respectively. By assigning responsibility for further reductions to other actors, primarily consumers, this problem definition employs an augmentative discourse which reinforces the status quo.

For example, in October 2006, environmental groups published a list of Canada's top GHG emitters, which included both Suncor and Syncrude. *Fort McMurray Today* quoted representatives from both companies before any environmental group. After citing specific energy efficiency improvements, Alain Moore from Syncrude stated: "And while Syncrude contributes 10 million tonnes of greenhouse gas, it also produces 15 percent of Canada's crude oil needs." Implicit in this comment is the idea that criticism should be directed at us, the consumers of oil, not just the companies that produce and sell the oil (Gandia, 2006, October 12: A1). A *Calgary Herald* reporter seized upon comments by France's minister of industry, who was quoted as not only being "impressed" with the oil sands, but for also suggesting that responsibility for

reducing GHG emissions lies at the feet of the consumer (Scotton, 2006, March 28: D3). And the *Globe and Mail's* regular business columnist followed this line of thought, arguing that while the oil sands were a large source of GHG emissions, one also needed to examine ubiquitous sources, like the corner store (Reguly, 2007, February 23: 19).

6. *The problem is a lack of government leadership*

Articles (25 stories or 13 percent) falling under this problem definition primarily held governments responsible for rising levels of GHG emissions resulting from increased oil sands production. Unclear, ineffective, changing, and/or divergent regulatory regimes are perceived as being the main problem. This problem definition embraces a transformative discourse by calling on the state to better regulate greenhouse gas emissions, which runs contrary to neoliberalism's typically antagonistic feelings towards state regulation. The *Globe and Mail* ran seven stories using this problem definition, followed by *Calgary Herald* at six stories, the *Toronto Star* at five stories, the *Edmonton Journal* at four, and *Fort McMurray Today* at three. No stories in the *National Post* embraced this problem definition. Again not surprisingly, this problem definition was more prevalent outside of the major dailies' business sections than within it (17 percent to 7 percent).

David Ebner (2007, January 6: B4) concluded in his in-depth article that in order to "green" the oil sands, "everyone—CEO to environmentalist—insists the threads of change must be stitched together by government's lead." Ebner's article explored how through strategic investments in new technology, and the right market signals, government could foster a new generation of oil sands technology with a significantly lower environmental impact. The importance of this article's position rests in the fact

that it suggests that the last hold-out to implementing effective GHG regulations for the oil sands industry was government, in particular, the Harper government's slow response, rather than industry. This message was reiterated in a column by the *Globe's* national affairs columnist, Jeffrey Simpson. In it, he argued that it was time for Canada to seriously regulate climate change and that it was government, not industry, that stood in the way:

Believe it or not, some representative of the Alberta oil and gas industry suggested to the Harper government that it legislate greenhouse-gas emissions for large carbon emitters such as themselves...An industry suggests government impose burdens on it, and the government refuses (Simpson, 2006, July 8: A15).

Likewise, the *Toronto Star* argued that the lack of political will on the part of the federal government was responsible for Canada's general inaction on this issue. Quoting from the then unreleased House of Commons' natural resources committee report, the *Star* reproduced the opposition-dominated committee findings that government should reject an intensity-based target and instead implement hard targets (Woods, 2007: March 3: A04). No other actors or opposing points of view were included in the piece. The *Star* also published a commentary piece from Rick Smith of Environmental Defence (2007, July 26: AA08) in which he argued that Harper "ceded the field to provinces" because the oil sands were located in Alberta. According to Smith, this created a situation where there was "a patchwork of regulations across the country" and where oil from the oil sands could potentially be barred from importation by many North American jurisdictions with low-carbon fuel standards (Ibid).

Unlike national papers that focused on the inaction of the federal government, provincial newspapers set their sights on the inaction of the Alberta government. For example, Paul Boothe, an economics professor at the University of Alberta, argued in a

guest commentary piece, which appeared in both the *Journal* (2007, February 21: A19) and the *Herald* (2007, February 21: A16), that intensity targets were “just a polite way of saying that we intend to continue increasing the absolute level of emissions.” Due to technological advancements real change was not only possible, but affordable; what was missing was “political leadership” from Premier Stelmach (Ibid).

7. *Oil sands operations represent a significant point source of GHG emissions and must be regulated*

This is the only problem definition (25 stories or 13 percent) that directly holds the oil sands industry responsible for their GHG emissions. The *Edmonton Journal* ran the most environmental stories utilizing this problem definition with nine stories, followed by the *Calgary Herald* with six stories, *Fort McMurray Today* with four stories, the *Toronto Star* with three stories, the *Globe and Mail* with two stories, and the *National Post* with one story. Not surprisingly, opponents to oil sands development were the primary sources for these stories. Unlike in other GHG/energy use stories, journalists allowed these critical opinions to set the tone for the article.

One of the stories that most strongly highlighted this perspective was the *Journal's* exclusive interview of Tim Flannery, author of *Weather Makers*. Flannery argued that companies invested in the oil sands have a moral choice:

“They (oil companies) have to ask themselves ‘do I want to continue in this business that is going to cost my children their future?’ or ‘do I want to move toward a more sustainable future.’ It’s a simple choice and they can’t squirm out of it and leave it to next generation.” (Horton, 2006, May 27: A19).

Although Flannery argued that governments and individuals could also improve through the implementation of a carbon tax and reducing their energy consumption, there is little doubt that he believed that oil sands needed to be better regulated and that

the oil companies are directly responsible for environmental damage resulting from climate change that they help to create. Since the *Journal* article focused exclusively on their interview with Flannery, these transformative ideas remained unchallenged within that particular story.

The need for meaningful improvements was the focus of several other articles using this problem definition. For example, A *Globe and Mail* article highlighted then Liberal leadership candidate Scott Brison's comments that the "tar sands" industry needs to be "cleaned-up" in order for Canada to meet its Kyoto commitments (Dobrota, 2006, December 2: A11). The release of a report by large American and Canadian environmental groups, which took "aim" at the oil sands, singling it out as the fastest growing source of GHG emissions in Canada, was the focus of a *Fort McMurray Today* article using this problem definition (Christian, 2007, June 11:3). Articles in both the *Calgary Herald* and the *National Post* focused on how the oil sands industry's growing greenhouse gas emissions represented a significant corporate liability. In both of these articles, current efforts were deemed insufficient to mitigate environmental damage. The *Calgary Herald* article cited an ethical funds company report that argued that the inaction of oil sands companies in reducing their GHG emissions represented a liability for shareholders (Hamilton, 2007, March 14: F5). In the only *National Post* article captured using this problem definition, the head of the Alberta Research Council advocated that the industry should curb emissions before Ottawa "forces them to take action" (Harding, 2006, January 19: FP5).

Discussion and conclusions

The high level of GHG emissions resulting from oil sands production was the key environmental issue confronting the oil sands industry during the study period. Similar to Arvai and Mascarenhas' findings on forestry (2001: 713), I found strong pro-industry rather than anti-environmental movement discourses throughout coverage.

Augmentative discourses dominated the ways in which newspapers covered the issue of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from oil sands development. The strength of augmentative discourses in the GHG issue could be attributed to the following factors: the application of journalistic norms, the presence of strong and coordinated pro-industry framing by business and government actors, and a lack of clear policy alternatives.

News media have tremendous “capacity to remould all kinds of alien and indigestible phenomena into a comprehensible news product” (Berglez, 2011: 455). Similar to Berglez (2011), I found that newspapers routinely reproduced their own news values and other norms when covering the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. One of the most notable examples was when newspapers problematized the issue as a political problem (i.e., the newest front line in the East vs. West battles of Canadian politics). By focusing on who the winner was in these interprovincial battles or Alberta vs. Canada bouts, newspapers failed to explore whether there were substantive policy differences between the parties or the relative merits of actions proposed by each. This problem

definition brought the game frame⁹⁸ into a policy arena. The game frame's focus on conflict is unlikely to provide the insight required to resolve complex public policy issues.

Another way that the media reproduces its own logic is through following the journalistic norm of balance. The intent of this principle is to ensure a fair hearing of opposing viewpoints. Disagreement arises not with the intent of this principle, but with how it is applied by journalists. At its best, this principle is an oversimplification; at its worst, its current application is distorting the goal that journalists are seeking to achieve. Even within this controversial issue of oil sands' greenhouses gas emissions, the plurality of first and second sources were from industry, giving them a privileged place in which to communicate their preferred policy interests. This occurred despite the fact that the Paskey and Steward (2012) study found that industry sources were *not* considered by journalists to be "the most reliable source for stories that focused on the environment" (19).⁹⁹ Lastly, the decision of Canada's two national papers, the *Globe* and the *Post*, to run the majority of their articles on this issue in their business sections is troubling, as doing so limits from the outset how the issue is approached, the sources used, and, ultimately, the outcome of the story.

Faced with a credible threat to its legitimacy, the oil sands industry employed an effective communication strategy which sought to change how both environmentalists and the general public viewed their record on greenhouse gas emissions. With the science of climate change now (and then) widely accepted by both the public and

⁹⁸ The "game frame" perspective, is one which, primarily focuses on who is winning a particular battle, rather than the substantive policy differences; it tends to view leaders as "team captains" (Trimble and Sampert, 2004:51-52). It is frequently utilized in election coverage.

⁹⁹ Reliability was defined as "sources whose information requires the least amount of checking" (Paskey and Steward, 2012:9)

regulators, the industry could no longer afford to be seen as 'deniers', so instead chose to portray themselves as a part of the solution. An analysis of the unmediated texts generated by business actors during this period shows that industry employed a cohesive communication strategy. Industry associations, such as CAPP (2006: 14), addressed the issue generally, while leaving individual companies to tout their own achievements as Suncor did in its presentation to the multistakeholder committee (Lambert, 2006, September 28: 4). Energy associations and individual companies presented a consistent message: first, that the oil sands industry had changed its own behavior by improving energy efficiency, resulting in intensity improvements; and second, that the industry continued to effect further improvements by exploring innovative new approaches such as carbon capture and storage. These messages were reinforced by the Alberta and federal governments. While government and industry would likely have preferred to keep the story out of the news altogether, they were largely successful in managing the appearance of discourse surrounding the issue.

There were several information gaps within the industry's public material which clearly showed that the oil sands industry's goal was to improve its image rather than foster an open dialogue about its greenhouse gas record or the benefits and drawbacks of proposed strategies. This material lacked the specific information to objectively assess corporations' performances or to hold them to future targets. These information gaps are not unexpected since regulated businesses generally prefer closed-door discussions with government and tend to use the media and other public forums to advance only their broad political interests (MacDonald, 2007: 182). However, what was unexpected was the degree to which newspapers allowed these information gaps to stand by not pressing sources for further information. This was partially due to the

practice of using analysts or officials from the Alberta or federal government to ‘balance’ industry sources, or indeed as the primary source in some GHG stories. These groups advanced positions which were consistent with the oil sands industry view.¹⁰⁰ The outcome was the forwarding of a variety of augmentative problem definitions which presented industry as working towards a solution.

Since they have fewer opportunities to engage directly with government, outsider groups, such as environmental organizations like the Pembina Institute, often used the media to advance specific policy proposals. Unlike the oil sands industry, the Pembina Institute put forth a clear goal for the oil sands that the organization believed could be achieved affordably: carbon neutrality by 2020. This goal was endorsed by some members of the Alberta multi-stakeholder committee as well as the opposition-dominated House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Amongst stories advancing this proposal, the newspapers ‘balanced’ Pembina’s idea with responses from industry and government which failed to directly address Pembina’s assertions, instead saying they would need more time to examine it. However, by neglecting to follow-up with either government or industry, the journalists failed to provide their readers with an adequate examination of this transformative idea. This failure illustrates how, in some instances, actors who contested the existing neoliberal policy frame had significant difficulty in conveying their positions in stories. These transformative ideas lacked the backing of the “powerful champions” needed to

¹⁰⁰ Both Alberta and Ottawa implemented “business-as-usual” regulations because oil sands were already making intensity reductions as they sought out energy efficiencies in order to lower their operating costs.

dislodge the dominant discourse being advanced by government and industry (Bennett et al., 2007: 50).

In part, newspapers avoided having to assess the desirability of either intensity-based or absolute targets by focusing on two technological solutions which would 'eliminate' emissions altogether. Newspapers devoted considerable resources (e.g., editorials) to advance the idea that nuclear power was a viable solution even though that viability was far from certain and no plans for implementation existed. This left readers with the impression that it was a serious option when clearly it was not. It also fostered the idea that oil sands could continue to grow unabatedly since nuclear power would resolve its 'dirty' image. Industry, government, and some environmental groups, such as the Pembina Institute, advanced the idea that carbon capture and storage (CCS) was a viable solution. But like nuclear power, the application of CCS in an oil sands context was untested. Despite this uncertainty, newspapers also embraced the idea of CCS with little critical assessment. Since emissions would literally be buried, advancing CCS as a viable solution also allowed newspapers to avoid discussing the merits of absolute vs. intensity-based targets.

While newspapers afforded significant coverage to examining the high level of greenhouse gas emissions stemming from oil sands operations, their coverage lacked the information necessary to help facilitate a full public dialogue on the benefits, drawbacks, and the likelihood for success for proposed strategies. Instead, coverage served to reinforce a neoliberal augmentative discourse, asserting that we should allow the continued growth in emissions while industry and government work towards a 'solution'. The inability of the media to adequately capture the complexity of the oil

sands greenhouse gas emissions issue, or adequately assess proposed solutions reconfirms the idea that the issue of climate change is “to some extent untranslatable into media logic,” and thus exposes the media’s own “limitations” (Berglez, 2011: 457). The outcome of these limitations is not neutral but result in a reinforcement of a prevailing policy frame; in this case it helped to entrench neoliberalism within the news discourse.

7 **Mixed messages: Discord in evaluating the economic viability of the oil sands**

Pity Alberta's oil sands producers. It must be hard for them to know which hat they're wearing, the snazzy Stetson they don when they tell investors how rich they are or the beggar's cap they hold out when they argue against paying higher economic rents.

—Fabrice Taylor, *Globe and Mail*, September 28 2007: B11.

As Fabrice Taylor, a brokerage firm analyst, succinctly identified in his guest commentary for the *Globe and Mail's* business section, the oil sands industry often paints two distinct images of its economic health. While clearly contradictory to an outside observer, this tactic is completely logical from an industry perspective. When making multi-billion dollar investments in either developing one's own oil sands operations or acquiring an existing oil sands company, energy companies must highlight the economic advantages of their investment. However, when faced with the possibility of paying higher royalties and property taxes or losing tax credits, it is in the industry's interest to advance a different image. As one of the key architects of the fiscal and regulatory framework, the oil sands industry has a vested interest in the continuation of the generic royalty regime and other neoliberal policies. Few sectors, or individuals for that matter, want to pay higher taxes. Resisting change, the energy industry argued that the oil sands royalty framework appropriately shared the risk of developing this high cost resource between government and industry. When this argument appeared not to be changing the public support for changes to the royalty regime, industry resorted to suggesting that any changes would threaten the viability of projects by making them 'uneconomical'.

As such, the most interesting question arising from the industry-generated mixed message about its economic health is why the newspapers allowed this discordant portrayal to remain largely unchallenged. As we will see, the newspapers largely embraced the idea advanced by both business actors and the Canadian state that the Alberta oil sands represents one of the best places in the world to invest. Yet within news coverage of changes to the oil sands fiscal framework, a more complex story involving a discursive battle over royalties emerged as non-business actors gained greater prominence and some papers, notably *Fort McMurray Today*, gave significant exposure to transformative discourses. Why did transformative discourse emerge in this context of whether the industry was paying its ‘fair share’ to government where they were completely absent within stories chronicling investment decisions? This case is very important as it provides insight into when and how transformative discourse can supplant augmentative ones. To discover why this occurred, this chapter first presents an overview of the positions of key actors as presented in their unmediated texts. The second section examines how newspapers covered “investment decision” and “government revenue” stories while the third section examines the various problem definitions employed by newspapers within each category. The chapter concludes with a discussion examining how the newspapers’ business sections varied their outlook on the future oil sands development adopting a bullish outlook in “investment decision” stories and a bearish one in “government revenue” stories. It also examines those instances where a transformative discourse emerged, as support from both the public, non-governmental organizations, and political leaders galvanized around the need for a review of oil sands fiscal framework.

How actors problematized the issues

Oil companies have increased their presence in the oil sands by expanding current operations, buying and developing new leases, or buying into existing operations. During the early to mid-2000s, there was a frenzy of activity resulting in record bids for new leases, the return of energy majors that had previously liquidated their oil sands assets, and an unprecedented growth in expansion plans. For instance, in its 2005 annual report, Suncor highlighted its plans to increase its operations to 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) by 2012.¹⁰¹ To describe what 500,000 bpd would look like to the company's shareholders, then CEO Rick George equated it to being roughly "20% of Canada's current crude oil production or twice the volume of crude oil that's imported into the U.S. Rocky Mountain region" (Suncor, 2005: 4). Suncor believed strongly that the necessary fundamentals were in place to achieve that target:

Our strategy is built on the strengths of the company's resource base, production assets and market access. With Suncor leases containing an estimated 14 billion barrels of reserves and resources, we have long believed the oil sands have world-class development potential (Ibid).

Suncor assured investors that it had plans in place to control costs and secure the necessary labour to implement its strategy (Suncor, 2005: 6). During this period, the oil sands' potential was also being marketed in private sector reports to investors. For example, CIBC Wood Gundy's chief economist Jeff Rubin (2006: 2) reported that a "mad scramble" was underway as the largest publicly traded oil companies were looking for new reserves open to private investment. Despite the oil sands' high production costs, he predicted that the oil sands would become "one of the world's most valuable" energy sources (Ibid).

¹⁰¹ Changes to the Alberta royalty framework did not affect these plans; see Suncor's 2007 Annual report.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Prime Minister Harper used a series of international speeches to promote the oil sands as a prime location for foreign investment. It is worth noting again that the Harper government consistently framed the development of the oil sands within a neoliberal context. In his 2006 speech to the Economic Club of New York, Harper reasserted his 'energy superpower' thesis, marketing the oil sands as a safe investment site to meet U.S. energy demands: "[T]he United States' largest energy supplier is its largest trading partner, an enduring democracy that believes in free markets and binding contacts" (4). The aim of these sale pitches was to garner recognition for the strength and the competitiveness of the Canadian economy and its vast resource potential, both of which were, in Harper's words, "sometimes under-appreciated" (Ibid). Likewise, the Alberta government also promoted investment opportunities in the Alberta oil sands when travelling abroad. In the fall of 2007 Iris Evans, then Minister of Employment, Immigration, and Industry, travelled to Asia to meet with government and officials from Chinese and Japanese petroleum companies:

This mission is a chance to highlight Alberta's positive investment environment, vast opportunities in all industry sectors and our employment options for foreign workers, as we work to increase our industrial development capacity" (Government of Alberta, 2007, September 27: 1)

The message from the provincial and federal governments to potential investors echoed that of the energy industry and financial analysts: the oil sands were a profitable, safe place to invest in significant oil reserves.

Throughout Alberta, there was a growing sense that the Albertans, as owners of the resource, were not benefiting as they should from the rapid development of the oil sands or the resulting high oil prices. Again, the intervention of Peter Lougheed in the debate lent credibility to those calling for a change in the royalty structure. In an

interview, Lougheed indicated that he had difficulty in seeing who exactly was benefiting from the oil sands boom: “Not the people in Red Deer, because everything they have got is costing more. It is not the people of the province, because they are not getting the royalty return that they should be getting with \$75 oil” (Policy Options, 2006, September: 6).

Calling the fiscal framework an “outdate[d] scheme,” the Pembina Institute argued that the provincial and federal governments needed to change the oil sands’ royalty and tax structures (Taylor and Raynolds, 2006: 1). Specifically, the institute lobbied for Alberta to increase the 25 percent post-payout royalty required, and for Ottawa to eliminate the accelerated capital cost allowance (ACCA) (Taylor and Raynolds, 2006: 4). Pembina’s argument was based on the assertion that the conditions that led to the creation of the generic royalty regime had fundamentally changed: the industry had matured, oil prices were now high, and international investment was flocking to Alberta. The Pembina Institute argued that the current fiscal framework failed to capture these new realities. Instead, it fueled an overheated economy and soaring profits while at the same time returning lower royalties per barrel to the province (Taylor and Raynolds, 2006: 1). In addition, the energy industry benefited from \$1.65 billion in federal tax breaks (Ibid). Since companies can deduct capital expenses, the institute also asserted that Canadians were subsidizing costly overruns (Taylor and Raynolds, 2006: 2). To build legitimacy for its ideas, Pembina once again referenced Peter Lougheed’s opposition to how oil sands development was being allowed to proceed (Taylor and Raynolds, 2006: 3). The Pembina Institute (Taylor, 2007: 1) lobbied before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance for the elimination of the ACCA, calling it a “waste of tax payer’s money.”

The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) (2007: A-3) explicitly rejected the neoliberal notion that what benefited the oil sands industry also benefited the broader community, particularly workers: “This kind of strong and consistent growth creates the basis for real prosperity. It doesn’t, however, guarantee it.” The labour organization noted that the proportion of GDP spent on wages had declined overall during the period of 1997 to 2005, while corporate profits had risen steadily (AFL, 2007: A-11). The AFL (2007: A13) also concluded that unlike previous pro-business governments, the current Alberta government no longer saw its role as mitigating “the tendency of unconstrained capitalism to generate large income and wealth gaps.” On that basis, the labour organization argued that:

Revenue windfalls from rising commodity prices can and should be captured through taxation or royalty collections, and used to provide sustainable improvements to the “social wage”- the range of public services that provide benefits for all citizens of the province (AFL, 2007: A-13).

In his submission to the Royalty Review Panel, Gil McGowan (2007, May 23: 3), then president of the AFL, rejected the notion that a generic royalty regime still benefited the province: “What was once a system that was arguably needed to kick-start investment has now become a system for looting Alberta resources and robbing Albertans of their birthright.” The labour group advanced a broad alternative vision which included capturing greater economic rent in the province, negotiating individually with companies, refusing new leases to companies that planned to upgrade and refine in the U.S., and assuming direct ownership stakes in companies if necessary (McGowan, 2007, May 23: 6-7). These policy proposals were a clear rejection of the neoliberalism policy frame. Again, this group tied its advice to Lougheed: “The sky didn’t fall when Peter Lougheed ignored dire

industry predictions in the 70s and increased royalty rates. And it won't fall today, if we do the right thing and reform our approach to royalties" (McGowan, 2007, May 23: 5).

Although its language was more circumspect than that of the Pembina Institute or the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (2007, June 5: 14-15) also rejected the idea that the current royalty framework was serving Albertans well. Specifically, it argued that the current generic royalty regime was not sensitive enough to the price of oil, that it encouraged an overheating of the economy, and that it did not sufficiently compensate the province for long-term environmental and social costs associated with development (Ibid). A key recommendation was the idea that the municipality, as well as other host municipalities, received a "predictable, annual portion of royalty regimes" (RMWB, 2007, June 5: 17).

Industry actors responded by suggesting that pressure to examine the royalty structure was based on a lack of knowledge about the fiscal framework in general, and how the royalty system worked specifically. For example, in its submission to the Royalty Review Panel, Shell Canada directly singled out the news media as contributing to a public perception that industry was "reaping windfall profits while not contributing a fair share through taxes and royalties" (Shell Canada, 2007: 2). The company maintained that an examination of the entire fiscal framework rather than just "pieces" would demonstrate how wrong this public perception was:

The oil sands royalty structure has been especially misunderstood. There are even some who refer to elements of the fiscal structure as subsidies—highly inaccurate terminology for an industry that pays its own way and, with royalties factored in, contributes a higher proportion of net profit to

governments than any other major sector of the economy including agriculture, manufacturing and services. . . The economic reality is that the industry does contribute fully to the provincial and national economy, and, indeed, has taken significant risks in making major oil sands investments in Alberta. These include risks in construction, operations, and prices (Ibid).

Likewise, CAPP (2007: 24) rejected the notion that the generic royalty regime was unresponsive to changes in oil prices. In particular, the energy association asserted that rising oil prices resulted in higher royalties in both the pre- and post-payout stages,¹⁰² as well as a shortened payout period as companies were able to recoup project costs sooner (Ibid). CAPP (2007: 27) also rejected the notion that capital costs, including cost overruns, were borne only by the province. According to CAPP, this was an erroneous claim as the pre-payout rate limits the company to recover only long-term bond rates. Lastly, the energy association asserted that the generic royalty regime did not push companies to pursue continuous expansion in order to avoid the higher royalty payout noting that the “the regulator does not approve expansions if they are not a beneficial, sustainable development of Alberta’s resources” (2007: 25). In summary, the energy industry argued that the generic royalty regime was working effectively as it fairly divided the risks and rewards associated with long-lead projects. According to CAPP, examining only one phase of the regime, or divorcing it from other aspects of the fiscal framework such as lease sales, was akin to “looking at a child from age 3 to 6 and then saying ‘they will never amount to anything important over their lifetime’” (CAPP, 2007: 3).

When confronted with the possibility that the province might change the royalty regime, the energy industry asserted that investment in the oil sands was risky as the

¹⁰² Although the percentage collected did not change, it would be calculated against higher revenues rates.

“foundation was unstable,” due to increasing labour and material costs as well as costs arising from other government actions such as the elimination of ACCA and the implementation of new GHG regulations (CAPP, 2007: 4). In fact, CAPP went as far as arguing that these changes could be used as a justification for lowering the royalty rate rather than raising it (2007: 5). The underlying message was that any additional changes to the current fiscal framework would risk losing billions of dollars pledged by investors for oil sands expansion.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Alberta and federal governments responded to concerns over a royalty and fiscal framework imbalance by favouring the industry perspective over that of the public. From the start, the Alberta government envisioned its review of the royalty process within the confines of a neoliberal policy frame: “We need to be certain that the royalty regime is providing Albertans with a fair return on the province’s natural resources while maintaining an internationally competitive system that allows the Alberta economy to continue to prosper” (2007, February 16: 1). Although the government altered royalty rates somewhat by tying them to the price of oil, it soundly rejected the more transformative ideas presented during the royalty review hearings, including tying royalties to environmental or social costs, dedicating a portion to municipalities, or direct ownership. And as discussed in Chapter 3, the federal government only changed, rather than eliminated, the ACCA from one that focused on general investment to one that focused on the introduction of new environmental technologies (Department of Finance, 2007: 15). In addition, it designed the program to disrupt oil sands companies’ plans as minimally as possible (G20, 2010: 11-13).

How the newspapers covered the issues

News coverage highlighting the series of announcements about expansion plans, mergers and acquisitions, as well as the stories chronicling a bullish investment climate, accounted for over half of all economic stories captured during the 25-month period (Table 7.1). Labelled “investment decision” stories, coverage in this category ranged from a low of 41 percent amongst all economic-framed stories in *Fort McMurray Today* to a high of 65 percent in the *Toronto Star*. Conversely, the issue of government revenues generated from the oil sands garnered only 12 percent of the economically-framed coverage. The *Toronto Star* paid the least attention to the issue at 8 percent, and *Fort McMurray Today* the most at 16 percent. In addition to covering provincial royalties and federal taxes and credits, *Fort McMurray Today* also covered the issue of municipal property taxes paid by oil sands operators.

Table 7.1: Number of “investment decision” and “government revenue” stories by newspaper

	Investment decision ¹		Government revenue ²	
	Frequency	Percentage of economic stories	Frequency	Percentage economic stories
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	234	57.6%	49	12.1%
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	150	50.7%	29	9.8%
<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>	113	41.0%	44	15.8%
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	128	55.7%	32	13.9%
<i>National Post</i>	113	47.8%	30	12.2%
<i>Toronto Star</i>	26	65.0%	3	7.5%
Total	764	51.5%	187	12.5%

Notes:

1. “Investment decision” include stories that focus on expansion of oil sands operations or pipelines, mergers and acquisitions, or general investment climate.
2. “Government revenue” includes stories that focus on taxes, royalties, and lease payments paid by the oil sands to federal, provincial, or municipal governments.
3. Relationship between individual newspaper and economic sub category: $\chi^2=146.352$ $p<0.0001$, Cramér’s $V=0.140$

Placing a story in the business section is an indication that the newspaper believes that the subject matter is of interest only to a particular subset of its readers. Table 7.2 illustrates how the major papers almost exclusively limited their coverage of investment decisions made by oil sands companies to the business section; 91 percent of these stories appeared in the business section. For instance, a *Calgary Herald* story focused on the EnCana CEO's remarks that the company was considering building an upgrader in Alberta (Canadian Press, 2006, September 7: D4). The company cited the need for an upgrader in order for its stock price to better reflect the value of its oil sands resources (Ibid). The issue was explored exclusively from a corporate perspective, indicating that its benefit resided in higher returns from selling refined petroleum products as opposed to bitumen, and the primary risk being attributed to the possibility of cost overruns.

Table 7.2: Location of "investment decision" and "government revenue" stories

	Papers with a business section¹		<i>Fort McMurray Today</i>²	
	Investment decisions	Government revenue	Investment decisions	Government revenue
Business section	591 90.8%	89 62.2%	Not applicable	Not applicable
Front section	15 2.3%	19 13.3%	59 52.2%	19 43.1%
Op-ed	19 2.9%	27 18.9%	3 2.7%	5 11.4%
Front page	12 1.8%	4 2.8%	51 45.1%	20 45.5%
Other	14 2.1%	4 2.1%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Total	651 100%	143 100%	113 100%	44 100%
Notes:				
1. $\chi^2=214.714$, $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.245$				
2. $\chi^2=14.600$; $p>0.05$				

Seven percent of “investment decision” stories within the business section were opinion pieces, the majority of which appeared in the national papers (16 columns in the *Post* and 13 columns in the *Globe*). The *Post*’s Claudia Cattaneo (2006, August 29: FP2) advanced a neoliberal perspective when she argued against providing incentives to oil sands companies to develop additional refinery capacity within the province: “But Alberta’s drive to capture more upside from its energy resources is old thinking that should also be set aside.” Instead, she argued that Albertan interests would be better served if more US refineries processed oil sands crude, as this would result in an “alignment of interests” (Ibid). The *Globe*’s Deborah Yedlin (2006, March 7: B2) used the purchase of oil sands leases by Chevron to speculate which other foreign companies would expand their oil sands presence as they sought out oil reserves. Yedlin’s columns supported the familiar industry and government narrative on the safety and profitability of the oil sands investment, despite the risks associated with its development, which she identified as “costs, labour, and reservoir characteristics” (Ibid). The message was that companies were successfully handling these pressures. Unsurprisingly, both business columnists adopted strong augmentative discourses throughout their columns.

Relatively few “investment decision” stories (46 of 651 stories) made it to the front half of the major papers. Furthermore, these stories almost exclusively appeared in Alberta’s major dailies. In fact, this study captured only one “investment decision” story appearing in the front-half of a non-Albertan newspaper. The lone case identified was the (2006, October 11: A22) *Toronto Star* reproduction of a *Calgary Herald* editorial that concluded that expanding refinery capacity in the US would not be detrimental: “Sounds like a perfect match to us: Encana buys into U.S. refineries, a U.S. company brings capital into a high-cost Canadian oil-sands project.” By exclusively relegating

“investment decision” stories to their business pages, the national papers implied that these investment decisions had no broader political, social, or even economic implications that would make them relevant to their general readership.

Hard news stories in the front half of the province’s major dailies tended to be augmentative in nature. For instance, the *Calgary Herald* (2005, November 3: A1) gave positive coverage to Canadian Natural Resources’ plan to increase spending on new oil sands projects by \$20 billion. The article focused exclusively on the company’s announcement and the subsequent rise in its share price. When concerns were raised about oil sands development in other “investment decision” stories, they were still couched within a broader discussion that accepted the benefits of proposed expansions. For example, a later front page *Edmonton Journal* article (Markusoff, 2007, October 23: A1) was more circumspect as to whether the Alberta government should develop financial incentives to encourage more upgrading in the province. Although this article raised some of the drawbacks (additional environmental, labour, and infrastructure pressures) that would likely flow from new projects, there was a greater emphasis on its perceived benefits (preservation of valued added jobs) (Ibid).

Unlike their national counterparts, Alberta’s major dailies interpreted the oil sands companies’ investment decisions for their readers in their op-ed sections. This signals that these papers felt that these decisions were noteworthy to their general readership. In this regard, the *Edmonton Journal* stood out, having published more op-ed stories than business columns (13 op-ed pieces to four business columns). Transformative discourses were present in some of these pieces. For instance, an *Edmonton Journal* editorial entitled “Can we handle the boom,” (2006, November 30:

A16) rejected the notion that government should refrain from playing a more activist role in managing new oil sands development, for fear of damaging the province's business friendly reputation:

Jim Dinning, Ted Morton, and Ed Stelmach [leading Conservative leadership candidates] are all reluctant to step in, arguing it could hurt the investment climate. That was always Klein's answer. Maybe, they should think again. With a little imagination, they could come up with some solutions.

In another editorial the *Journal* (2007, April 11: A16) repeated the call for better provincial management of industry when considering the issue of granting rights to oil sands deposits located under a lake popular with cottagers. These rare transformative discourses competed with the more frequent augmentative articles. For example, the *Journal* published a strong rebuke by one of its readers to the idea that the government should encourage oil sands companies to refine bitumen within the province, since this would entail a "massive intervention in the economy and taxpayer subsidies to private industry" (Walker, 2007, January 25: A19). The letter writer concluded that "private companies [must be able] to make business decisions on the basis of sound economics" (Ibid)—a classic neoliberal argument.

Confined to the front half of the community newspaper, *Fort McMurray Today* oil sands reporters often provided a local frame to "investment decision" stories by soliciting local responses to events or announcements occurring elsewhere (e.g., Gandia and the Canadian Press, 2005, November 3: A1). In one story, the executive director of the Regional Issues Working Group "welcomed" Canadian Natural Resources Ltd.'s announcement of its upgrader and expansion plans for its Horizon project, but also

worried that the labour shortage would “continue to be the pinch point” (Ibid).¹⁰³

Although the majority of stories remained augmentative, the practice of including a local frame enriched their coverage, adding an additional dimension to “investment decision” stories. *Fort McMurray Today’s* coverage of investment decisions was also more circumspect because it did not have any business commentators. As highlighted above, business columns reinforced—rather uncritically—the preferred message of industry.

At only 62 percent, the major papers published a significantly smaller number of stories about “government revenue” in their business section than they did “investment decision” stories at 91 percent. A *Globe and Mail* article that led with the Pembina Institute’s report examining royalties was a rare example of a transformative discourse appearing in the business section (Ebner, November 30: B9). This article “balanced” the Pembina Institute’s perspective with the view from the three front-runner Progressive Conservative candidates that a royalty review was necessary (Ibid). Once again, the actions of Peter Lougheed during his tenure as premier, as well as his then current views on the oil sands, were used to provide further legitimacy to idea that the royalty system needed changing, and could easily be changed (Ibid). By employing the positions of elite actors who reinforced, rather than challenged the Pembina Institute’s message, the journalist allowed a transformative discourse to permeate the article. An article more typical of business pieces on “government revenue” was entitled, “Ottawa piles on more pain on oilpatch: Loss of tax break expected to add \$1 a barrel to costs” (Harding, 2007,

¹⁰³ Unlike most other reporters, Gandia often made it clear when a quote came directly from a news release. For example: “‘The heated market has upped the stakes on oil sands investments,’ said Clive Mathers, president and CEO, in a news release Wednesday” (Gandia, 2006, November 2: A1). Likewise if the quote was derived from a personal interview that too was noted (Gandia, 2007, February 14: A1). Although this practice may make the writing less lively, it provides significantly more information to the reader regarding the source of information.

March 20: FP1). Focusing on the elimination of the ACCA, this article referenced only industry sources who framed the issue as one of how many new government costs could oil sands companies absorb without making projects uneconomical (Ibid). The article reproduced an augmentative discourse by viewing government actions through a neoliberal lens. An augmentative discourse was also reinforced by virtue of what was left out of the article. For instance, the article did not mention that oil sands producers would have access to a new allowance designed to help offset the introduction of environmental protection technologies, nor did it include the viewpoints of other actors who were critical of government's long lead-times in eliminating the ACCA.

Business columnists contributed eighteen percent (16 of 89 stories) of business section "government revenue" stories. The *National Post's* columnists felt that the issue of changes in the way government revenues were collected was worthy of their attention, the subject accounting for half of their columns. The columns were overt in their support of the oil sands industry. For instance, Claudia Cattaneo, (2007, May 15: FP1) in one of her "The Patch" columns, reproduced the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' submission to the royalty review:

The key messages: Government [was] already scooping half the revenues from the deposits, while adding to the sector's financing challenges by threatening to change the rule and piling on new costs. Demanding any more would put this fragile business at risk.

Not only did she uncritically accept the industry position, but she also directly challenged the validity of the royalty review by calling Alberta's finance minister a "wild card" for having initially supported the review and accusing the provincial government of "play[ing] politics with its meal ticket" (Ibid). Moreover, she failed to reconcile the disconnect between the position advanced by industry (and her own) in this arena—that

they were fragile and generating the lowest returns in the world—with the previous one they had presented—that they were a maturing sector which represented an ideal investment opportunity. Clearly, “The Patch” presented one of the strongest examples of an augmentative discourse. However, its strength lay not only in what was said in its pieces, but also in the fact there was no regular equivalent column, in any of the papers, that consistently examined the issue of oil sands development from an alternative perspective.

“Government revenue” stories made the front page of the major dailies just four times: twice in the *Calgary Herald* and once each in the *National Post* and the *Edmonton Journal*. These front page stories focused exclusively on the issue of oil sands royalties. Two of these articles embraced strong augmentative discourses. The *Journal’s* front page article reiterated one of the oil sands industry’s central arguments—that they could not “afford” to pay higher royalties due to high capital and operating costs (Jaremko, 2007, May 15: A1). The *Post’s* front page story ran with this inflammatory headline, “Royalties hike would kill ‘golden goose’; Report on oil sands; Klein warns against change made on whim” (Cattaneo and Harding, 2007, September 20: A1). By using the word “whim,” the headline dismissed the legitimacy of the analysis conducted by the Royalty Review Panel and denied that there were any valid grounds for changing the royalty structure. The headline also predicted dire consequences for Alberta in the wake of any alterations to the system. The release of the Panel’s report was also featured in one of the *Calgary Herald’s* front page stories. Unlike the *Post*, the *Herald’s* headline included Ed Stelmach’s perspective, “I won’t be bullied: premier” (Seskus et al., 2007, September 20: A1). However, the majority of the story’s headlines reiterated an augmentative discourse: “Royalty report rattles stocks; oil patch issues

warning; Klein ‘fears’ for oil sands” (Ibid). The drop in value of the oil sands stocks after the release of the Royalty Review Panel’s report was used as evidence of possible negative economic consequences that may result from implementation of the Panel’s recommendations. This, despite the fact that previously the business press had interpreted drops in the values of oil sands stocks as a sign of only short-term issues rather than representing a downgrading of oil sands investment opportunities. Only one of the *Herald’s* front page stories, entitled “New rates too low; Oil sands take not fair: expert,” captured a transformative discourse (Fekete, 2007, October 28: A1). This story focused on the perspective of one expert who believed that oil sands royalties were still low despite Stelmach’s higher royalty rates.

At 20 front page stories, *Fort McMurray Today* deemed the issue of exactly how much the government should collect in royalties and taxes from the industry as being significantly more newsworthy than did the major dailies. While the majority of these stories focused on the issue of oil sands royalties alone, *Fort McMurray Today* also published stories about rising municipal property taxes (e.g. Kauth, 2007, May 23: A1) and the federal government’s decision to cancel the ACCA (e.g. Kauth, 2007, March 20: 1). Just over half of these stories embraced a transformative discourse. For instance, one story focused on union support for changes to the oil sands royalty regime (Christian, 2007, October 19: A1), while another focused on the municipality’s desire to have oil sands companies “shoulder more of the burden for funding local services” (Kauth, 2007, March 20). A number of augmentative discourses were also evident, including several stories which highlighted the industry’s perspective that changes to the royalty regime could result in reduction or cancellation of investments, thus resulting in lowered government revenue. For example, one article focused on a report from an

investment bank which forecasted that government revenues would be \$2 billion less than what the Royalty Review Panel predicted if their changes were implemented (Chiang, 2007, October 2: 1).

Alberta papers accounted for the majority of “government revenue” stories appearing in the front section of the paper: 19 in *Fort McMurray Today*, nine in the *Calgary Herald*, and five in the *Edmonton Journal*. The provincial newspapers directed the majority of their attention to examining the issue of rising oil sands royalties. For instance, *Fort McMurray Today* highlighted an investment firm report which forecasted a loss of 11,000 future jobs if royalties were raised (Heindl, 2007, October 11: A3). The federal government’s decision to review the ACCA garnered coverage in all three papers. Not surprisingly, discussions over municipal taxes received the greatest exposure in *Fort McMurray Today*, but also in the *Journal’s* front section (Brooymans and Thorne, 2006, December 17: A16). Papers outside the province were responsible for just five government revenue stories in their front sections: three in the *Globe*, and one apiece in the *Post* and the *Star*. All of these “government revenue” stories focused exclusively on the issue of the ACCA. Coverage of a report by the Commons natural resources committee urging the federal government to cancel the ACCA was given front section placement in the *Globe* (Curry, 2007, March 3: A4).

The major papers and *Fort McMurray Today* devoted considerable attention to examining the question of whether the government was receiving sufficient compensation from the industry; op-ed pieces accounted for 19 and 11 percent of government revenue stories respectively (Table 7.2). In comparison, the op-ed section of all the Alberta papers paid very little attention in examining the merits of energy

companies' decisions to invest in the oil sands. This is another indicator that the actions of business were often treated by newspapers as a 'matter of fact' and therefore did not require any interpretation, supporting documentation, or criticism. As we will see, stark differences emerged within that commentary. Notably, only two of the papers—the *Calgary Herald* and the *National Post*—argued against changes to the royalty regime in their editorials.

Table 7.3: First and second sources in “investment decision” stories

Papers with a business section ³				Fort McMurray Today ⁴	All papers
	Business section	All others	Total		
First source					
Business actors ¹	509 86.1%	21 35.0%	530 81.4%	76 67.3%	606 79.3%
Provincial government	6 1.0%	7 11.7%	13 2.0%	6 5.3%	19 2.6%
Other ²	68 11.5%	27 45.0%	95 14.6%	29 25.6%	124 16.3%
Not applicable	8 1.4%	5 8.3%	13 2.0%	2 1.8%	15 1.9%
Total	591 100%	60 100%	651 100%	113 100%	764 100%
Second source					
Business actors	355 60.1%	19 31.7%	374 57.5%	39 34.5%	413 54.0%
Provincial government	9 1.5%	6 10.0%	15 2.3%	8 7.1%	23 3.0%
Other	58 9.8%	21 35.0%	79 12.1%	29 25.7%	108 14.2%
Not applicable	169 28.6%	14 23.3%	183 28.1%	37 32.7%	220 28.8%
Total	591 100%	60 100%	651 100%	113 100%	764 100%

Notes:

1. Includes oil sands and pipeline companies, analysts, and energy business associations.
2. All other groups measured (e.g., Labour, other levels of government, First Nations) measured below two percent overall and were included in the “other” category.
3. Business section in comparison with all other section: first source: $\chi^2=127.597$, $p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.443$; second source: $\chi^2=88.517$, $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.369$
4. Papers with a business sections in comparison with *Fort McMurray Today*—first source: $\chi^2=50.393$, $p<0.0001$, Cramér's $V=0.257$; second source $\chi^2=52.164$, $p<0.001$; Cramér's $V=0.261$

One of the reasons why a strong augmentative discourse prevailed in “investment decision” stories was the prominence of business actors in articles. As Table 7.3 demonstrates, business actors were overwhelmingly cited as first (86 percent) and second (60 percent) sources in the business sections of the major dailies. Although business actors were used significantly fewer times as a source outside the business pages, they still enjoyed greater exposure than any other source.

A typical story in this subject area chronicled a company’s announcement of a development, followed by analysts’ interpretations of said announcement. For instance, when Suncor’s unveiled plans for a \$5.3 billion dollar expansion, it generated coverage in the *National Post*’s business section (Harding, 2006, November 15: FP5) beginning with a positive portrayal of the company’s plans to reach 550,000 barrels per day, “There are cost pressures, to be sure, but the really big part of the increase is this is a growth project” (ibid). Analysts’ concerns over how this ambitious plan would affect company’s cash flow were the focus of the second half the article.

Given that the province was under pressure to review the pace of development, it’s surprising that representatives from the provincial government were used as a first and second source in just two percent of “investment decision” stories (Table 7.3). As previously noted in Chapter 5, the provincial government’s relative absence from coverage is particularly problematic because it reinforces the assertion that business decisions are apolitical (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007: 320). For instance, a *Fort McMurray Today* article outlined Klein’s staunch defense of the neoliberal oil sands policy frame: “To have a long-range plan would be [an] interventionist kind of policy which says you either allow them or don’t allow them (to proceed). The last thing we want to be is an

interventionist government” (Gandia, 2006, August 4: A1). Under the Stelmach government, Alberta Energy acknowledged that while the province could “do better” in encouraging oil sands upgrading to remain in the province, it would not interfere with Marathon-Western Oil Sands which would see bitumen shipped to U.S. refineries” (Jaremko, 2007, August 1: E1). Although the government perceived a policy problem, the Stelmach government’s discourse remained augmentative, maintaining a non-interventionist stance.

Actors who challenged the current pace of development received their greatest exposure as first and second sources when articles appeared outside of the major dailies’ business sections. No single actor dominated the discourse in these newspapers as major dailies instead used a variety of sources. However, representatives from environmental, labour, First Nations organizations individually fell below two percent representation as sources. For example, an *Edmonton Journal* article used quotes from the leaders of two provincial opposition parties as well as Peter Lougheed to build the case that “the chorus demanding the Klein government reconsider the rapid pace of oil development [was] getting louder” (Markusoff, 2006, July 6: B5). The calls for a moratorium of new project approvals and lease sales from environmental groups were also included in some stories on expansion (e.g., Gandia, 2006, September 26: 1). As the next section will show, while these individuals and groups raised some transformative ideas (e.g., the province needed to more actively manage oil sands growth), this rarely altered the overall augmentative nature of the article.

Table 7.4: First and second sources within a “government revenue” stories

Papers with a business section ³				Fort McMurray Today ⁴	All papers
	Business section	All others	Total		
First source					
Business actors ¹	44 49.4%	7 13.0%	51 35.7%	19 43.2%	70 37.4%
Provincial government	20 22.5%	9 16.7%	29 20.3%	9 20.5%	38 20.3%
Municipal government	0 0.0%	2 3.7%	2 1.4%	6 13.6%	8 4.3%
ENGOS	4 4.5%	2 3.7%	6 4.2%	1 2.3%	7 3.7%
Federal government	1 1.1%	4 7.4%	5 3.5%	0 0.0%	5 2.7%
Federal opposition	2 2.2%	1 1.9%	3 2.1%	1 2.3%	4 2.1%
Other ²	15 17.2%	24 44.4	40 28.0%	6 13.6%	46 24.5%
Not applicable	2 2.2%	5 9.3%	7 4.9%	2 4.5%	9 4.8%
Total	89 100%	54 100%	143 100%	44 100%	187 100%
Second source					
Business actors ¹	32 36.0%	5 9.5%	37 24.8%	10 22.7%	47 25.1%
Provincial government	14 15.7%	6 11.1%	20 14.2%	6 13.6%	26 13.9%
Federal government	3 3.4%	7 13.0%	10 7.1%	4 9.1%	14 7.5%
ENGOS	5 5.6%	2 3.7%	7 5.0%	5 11.4%	12 6.4%
Municipal government	1 1.1%	1 1.9%	2 1.4%	4 9.1%	6 3.2%
Other ²	22 24.7%	19 35.2%	41 29.1%	9 20.5%	50 26.7%
Not applicable	12 13.5%	14 25.9%	26 18.4%	6 13.6%	32 17.1%
Total	89 100%	54 100%	143 100%	44 100%	187 100%

Notes:

1. Includes oil sands and pipeline companies, analysts, and energy business associations.
2. Includes all groups measured (e.g., First Nations, labour) that fell below 2 percent.
3. Business section in comparison with all other sections: first source: $\chi^2=35.945$, $p<0.001$, Cramér's $V=0.501$; second source: $\chi^2=21.792$, $p<0.05$; Cramér's $V=0.390$
4. Papers with a business sections in comparison with *Fort McMurray Today*—first source: $\chi^2=26.917$, $p<0.005$, Cramér's $V=0.379$; second source $\chi^2=11.622$, $p>0.05$

Even within “government revenue” stories, the business section of the major dailies continued to utilize business actors as the predominate source (Table 7.4). Due to the higher number of articles published in this section compared to all others, this preferential treatment once again resulted in a strong augmentative tone. For example, Canadian Natural Resources was quoted as saying in a *National Post* article, “‘It’s going to hurt Canadian Natural, its shareholders but who is really going to take the real brunt? It’s going to be the pipefitters, the welders, the pipeshops, the guys who work on the rigs, the truck drivers, the entrepreneurs’” (Cattaneo, 2007, October 10: FP1). This trend continued in *Fort McMurray Today’s* coverage.

In “government revenue” stories, the Alberta government ranked second to the industry’s first place position as a first source. This represented almost half of the instances where a newspaper article quoted the Alberta government as the first source in an economic story. As a second source, the provincial government played only a minor role, quoted in only 26 stories. During the first part of the study period, the Klein government advanced an augmentative argument in articles, saying that no review was necessary (*Calgary Sun*, 2006, July 13: A4; *Edmonton Journal*, 2006, July 14: A16; Reynolds, 2006, August 9: A15). Other government sources cited the record bid prices of oil sands leases as evidence of the industry’s vitality (Jaremko, 2005, December 16: D1; Polczer, 2006, August 11: E3). After Stelmach became premier in December 2006, the Government of Alberta strenuously asserted that its intention was to ensure that Albertans received their “fair” share, as opposed to presenting an anti-industry message (e.g., Brethour, 2006, July 3: B1). Although there was a small shift in discourse, the new discourse remained augmentative. However, the acknowledgement of the need for a review lent credence to more transformative discourses. Likewise, when introducing

new fiscal policies federal government sources espoused an augmentative discourse. For example, both the *Globe and Mail* (Harding, March 20, 1997: FP1) and *Toronto Star* (Gorrie, March 20: A09's) articles specifically referenced the budget line that the oil sands were "healthy and vibrant" and thus the ACCA was no longer necessary.

How newspapers problematized these issues

Discourse analysis reveals how newspapers overwhelmingly embraced augmentative discourses through their coverage of energy companies' decisions to invest in the oil sands by either expanding their current operations, buying new oil sands leases, or acquiring existing oil sands companies. Overwhelmingly the message conveyed throughout the coverage was that the business fundamentals of oil sands development were unassailable. On the whole, transformative discourses barely registered in the coverage. As Table 7.5 illustrates, significant differences were found within the major dailies, as opposed to between those papers and *Fort McMurray Today*. Once again, placement in the business section was a defining factor (Cramér's $V=0.385$) in shaping whether or not a news story employed an augmentative discourse. Moreover, the major dailies published approximately one "investment decision" story outside of their business section for every ten they chose to run within it. Each problem definition is explored below.

Table 7.5: Problem definitions of “investment decision” stories

	Papers with a business section ¹			<i>Fort McMurray Today</i> ²	All papers
	Business section	All others	Total		
Augmentative discourses					
1. The oil sands are still an attractive investment opportunity despite present challenges.	285 48.2%	29 48.3%	314 48.2%	59 52.6%	373 48.8%
2. The oil sands represent one of the best places in the world to invest in energy resources.	283 47.8 %	17 28.3%	300 46.2%	50 44.2%	350 45.9%
3. Cancellations and delays may occur as the market cools itself down.	19 3.2%	1 1.7%	20 3.1%	0 0.0%	20 2.6%
Subtotal	587 99.3%	47 78.3%	634 97.4%	109 96.5%	743 97.2%
Transformative discourses					
4. Government needs to better control the pace of expansion.	4 0.7%	13 21.7%	17 2.6%	4 3.5%	21 2.8%
Total	591 100.0%	60 100.0%	651 100%	113 100%	764 100%
Notes:					
1. $\chi^2=96.842$; $p<0.0001$; Cramér's $V=0.386$					
2. $\chi^2=4.177$ $p>0.05$					

1. *The oil sands are still an attractive investment opportunity despite present challenges (e.g., labour shortages).*

Just under half of all “investment decision” stories utilized this problem definition, which upheld the assertion that current challenges did not threaten oil sands investment fundamentals. The *Calgary Herald* printed 121 stories employing this augmentative problem definition, followed by the *Globe and Mail* at 75, the *Edmonton Journal* at 65, the *National Post* at 64, *Fort McMurray Today* at 60, and the *Toronto Star* at 10. These stories often tempered their enthusiasm for development with recognition of rising costs and missed deadlines facing all oil sands companies. A good of example

of this is a *Calgary Herald* story focusing on how high oil prices had accelerated the plans of oil sands companies to expand, resulting in rapid price increases and bottlenecks for critical inputs such as labour, steel, etc. (Schmidt, 2006, June 16: D4).

Although these stories all identified challenges, the articles frequently presented any problems as *short-term*, and thus were not considered a disruption to the overall narrative. For example, a wire story focusing on a drop in Suncor's stock price ran with this negatively toned headline, "Suncor stock takes a hit as company downgraded; Uncertainty in oil sands sector keeps growing" (Canadian Press, 2006, July 11: D4). However, using analysts and company sources, the article ultimately attributed the downgrade to industry-wide cost pressures and not to specific company actions. It also reaffirmed the notion that fundamentals guiding oil sands development over the long-term were strong.

Indirectly, these challenges were often re-cast by the news media in a more positive light as a rise in costs would 'naturally' control development into a pattern of "consistent growth" rather than an unmanageable "fever pitch" (e.g., Christian, 2007, August 10: A1). Industry preferred this course to having the provincial government respond to calls for some form of a moratorium. These stories thus served to reinforce an augmentative discourse.

2. *The oil sands represent one of the best places in the world to invest in energy resources.*

This problem definition received the greatest exposure in Alberta's two major dailies, with the *Calgary Herald* publishing 112 stories and the *Edmonton Journal* running 70 stories. *Fort McMurray Today*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post* printed a similar number of stories at 50, 48, and 46, respectively. The *Toronto Star*

published the fewest number of stories with 15; however, as a percentage, this problem definition received the most coverage in the *Star* at 58 percent. As Table 7.5 illustrates, stories appearing in the business sections of major dailies were significantly more likely to use this problem definition (47 percent) than were stories printed in the other sections of the papers (28 percent).

During this period, both the oil sands industry and the Canadian state were actively marketing the oil sands as one of the best places in the world to invest in energy resources. The appeal of the oil sands was attributed to their immense size, geographic proximity to the U.S., maturing of oil sands technology, the Canadian fiscal and regulatory regime, and the fact that the oil sands are one of the few oil reserves open to outside investment. Appearing unassailable, these attributes encouraged a bullish outlook towards oil sands development. A *Calgary Herald* columnist called this the “maple leaf bonus”:

In a world that is becoming increasingly destabilized (politically speaking), Canada is being increasingly recognized as a safe haven for the billions of dollars of investment required to bring an oil sands plant from conception to fruition (Frank, 2006, March 4: C4).

Optimism over the industry’s future was evident in headlines that focused on individual company announcements, such as “Conoco has big plans for oil sands; Third largest U.S. oil firm is willing to pay billions to pump Alberta crude to Gulf Coast refineries” (McCarthy, 2007, July 20: B1), or “Shell growth engine caught parent’s eye: Oil sands prize” (Harding and Cattaneo, 2006, October 24: FP3).

The media treatment of Western Oil Sands also illustrates the strength of this problem definition. The Canadian media were so attached to the ‘best place in world’ narrative that they could not understand why a Canadian oil sands company would

choose to invest some of its limited resources in unstable Iraq.¹⁰⁴ As such, there was a barrage of criticism launched at Western Oil Sands, which owned a 20 percent stake in the Athabasca Oil Sands project, when it announced its purchase of oil leases in Iraqi Kurdistan (e.g., Brethour, 2006, June 1: B17). Newspapers highlighted commentary from industry analysts who challenged the basis for the decision. For example, the vast majority of an article in the *National Post* was dedicated to featuring analysts in opposition to the decision:

“I'm having trouble getting my head around the fact we've got a company here sitting on the second-largest oil resource in the world, you've got a competitive advantage, people, assets, and infrastructure in Canada, and we wake up this morning and you're moving off to the third-largest basin where you don't seem to have an advantage” (Harding and Cattaneo, 2006, June 1: FP1).

The article referenced the fact that major international oil companies were coveting Iraq's oil reserves because their large size, the vast potential of future reserves, and its low production costs only at the end (Ibid). Relegating this information to the end of the article is a sign that the journalist deemed it to be relatively unimportant. Only one business columnist, Charles Frank (2006, June 2), staked out the minority position that Western Oil Sands' venture into Iraq reflected a normal part of the energy business:

...in recent years, the oil sands and their sudden ascent to near-mythical Saudi Arabia-like status in the minds of Albertans and the world energy community have overshadowed the fact that local companies have always ventured hither and yon in search of lucrative oil and gas deposits (E1).

After its announcement, Western Oil Sands experienced a rapid decline in its stock price. Large investors began publicly revolting and demanding the sale of the company or the spin-off of its Iraqi assets (e.g., Ebner, 2006, September 23: B5). The business press

¹⁰⁴ Stories focusing on Western Oil Sands investments in Iraq were coded as “economic-other.”

turned their attention to Western Oil Sands' demise, speculating whether it might be acquired by Shell, Chevron, or Total. In the end, it was acquired by Marathon Oil in order to secure a supply of oil sands crude for its Midwestern refineries. In a news article outlining the deal, the media reiterated the preferred storyline:

Marathon is the latest in a growing herd of oil multinationals bulking up in Alberta, seen as politically stable at a time when other oil rich jurisdictions, such as Venezuela and Russia are pushing them out....Western Oil Sands has been on the block or rumoured for sale since angering shareholders last year with its plans to drill for oil in Kurdistan...The move was seen as too risky for an oil sands company (Cattaneo, 2007, August 1: FP 1).

Prior to this latest boom, the oil sands were often perceived as being a precarious investment. Western Oil Sands was founded by a team of former of BHP employees, after the Australian mining giant decided in the early 1990s that the oil sands were too risky for investment (Koc, 2006, October 1: 52). This old storyline of 'oil sands mavericks' no longer registered in an era where industry and government were promoting the oil sands as a safe place to invest.

3. *Cost overruns and construction delays are generating uncertainty. Some oil sands companies are delaying and/or cancelling expansion plans in order to avoid 'getting hurt' in the current overheated economy.*

Only 20 stories used this problem definition, ranging from a high of six in the *Globe and Mail* to a low of one in the *Toronto Star*—it was absent entirely from both the *Edmonton Journal* and *Fort McMurray Today*. Even though this problem definition focuses on uncertainty in the oil sands sector, it remains augmentative due to its reassertion of a neoliberal faith in the self-correcting nature of the market. For example, the CEO of Imperial Oil presented the decision not to build a new upgrader in this light: "We're short of people and we're short of infrastructure, and the result is that

we're getting really, really high inflation, and very high costs [*sic*] that's not really the best outcome for any of us" (Stevenson, 2005, December 7: E06). By exclusively using the comments of the company's chief executive, this Canadian Press article uncritically reproduced the sector's preferred message that market forces would slow development to a manageable pace. Columnists also reproduced industry's message that investment cancellations should be interpreted as the invisible hand of the market cooling things down itself, and as further evidence that government intervention was unnecessary. For instance, writing in the *Herald*, Frank Kerr (2007, July 16: A14) argued "Oil sands players need to make a return on their investments. As costs soar, one would expect marginal projects to get cancelled or delayed. That is already happening." After highlighting several recent cancellations, Kerr then cautions politicians to "resist any further anti-oil sands initiatives" (Ibid).

4. *Continued investment in the oil sands is contributing to an unsustainable level of growth. Government needs to better manage the expansion of oil sands projects.*

Only 21 "investment decision" stories employed this transformative discourse, with the *Edmonton Journal* responsible for publishing the majority. The remainder appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, *Fort McMurray Today*, and the *Globe and Mail*. The *Journal* adopted or reproduced this problem definition primarily in various op-ed pieces, rather than in hard news stories. For instance, the *Journal* ran a letter from Jared Milne (2007, October 23: A15), who drew upon Lougheed's lasting credibility to argue for the need for more government intervention to slow and stagger oil sands growth: "No one can accuse Lougheed as [*sic*] being a socialist, but he still seems to recognize that the market can't solve everything and that government has a role to play." This problem definition, to a limited extent, was also evident in hard news stories. For example, a

Globe story focused on how leadership candidates were proposing new measures to manage growth as they attempted to address a growing unease among Albertans over the pace of oil sands development (Ebner, 2006, October 2: B1).

“Investment decision” stories were overwhelming augmentative in nature, coming in at 97 percent. The newspapers consistently maintained that the oil sands were an attractive investment opportunity. The preferred narrative of industry and government persisted despite increasing challenges to developing new oil sands projects within forecasted timelines or budgets. As the case of Western Oil Sands demonstrated, newspapers also criticized any oil sands company whose actions appeared to contradict this key narrative. Faced with delays and cancellations of previously announced oil sands projects, the newspapers reiterated the neoliberal perspective that this should be interpreted as sign that the market was working as it should, rather than these issues signaling the presence of a flaw in oil sands fundamentals.

Part of the oil sands’ appeal to investors was the perception that Alberta and Canada were very hospitable to private investment, especially in comparison with other oil rich countries. But as the next section will demonstrate, newspaper coverage also adopted a conflicting narrative—that investment in the oil sands was risky—in its “government revenue” stories.

Discourse analysis reveals that newspapers embraced both augmentative and transformative discourses in their coverage of “government revenue” stories. Table 7.6 illustrates how *Fort McMurray Today* embraced a transformative discourse in the majority of its “government revenue” stories. This is the only instance wherein a newspaper embraced transformative discourse more often than augmentative ones. At a 44 percent incidence rate, transformative discourses in the major dailies also received

significant exposure outside of the business section. Overall, an augmentative discourse prevailed within these papers. Each problem definition is explored below.

Table 7.6: Problem definitions of “government revenue” stories

	Papers with a business section ¹			<i>Fort McMurray Today</i> ²	All papers
	Business section	All others	Total		
Augmentative discourses					
1. Changes may result in adverse economic impacts and will jeopardize Alberta’s business-friendly reputation.	43 48.3%	16 29.6%	59 41.3%	9 20.5%	68 36.4%
2. High government revenue is a sign of a vibrant oil sands industry.	13 14.6%	3 5.6%	16 11.2%	3 6.8%	19 10.2%
3. The current fiscal framework is fair.	8 9.0%	3 5.6%	11 7.7%	6 13.6%	17 9.1%
4. Changes to secure additional government revenue are politically motivated.	5 5.6%	6 11.1%	11 7.7%	0 0.0%	11 5.8%
Sub total	69 77.5%	28 51.9%	97 67.1%	18 40.9%	115 61.5%
Transformative discourses					
5. Any fiscal framework needs to ensure that governments are receiving their fair share.	14 15.7%	24 44.4%	38 28.0%	25 56.8%	63 33.6%
Other	6 6.7%	2 3.7%	8 5.6%	1 2.3%	9 4.8%
Total	89 100%	54 100%	143 100%	44 100%	187 100%
Notes:					
1. $\chi^2=18.120$, $p<0.005$; Cramér’s $V=0.356$					
2. $\chi^2=19.237$, $p<0.005$; Cramér’s $V=0.321$					

1. *Changes to the fiscal framework may result in adverse economic impacts, including lowered government revenue and job losses, jeopardizing Alberta’s business-friendly reputation.*

The plurality of news stories(41 percent) in the major papers adopted a problem definition that portrays changes to the oil sands fiscal framework as being

harmful to industry and, more importantly, to the overall health of the economy (Table 7.6). Unlike the major papers, only 21 percent of *Fort McMurray Today's* "government revenue" stories utilized this problem definition. The higher percentage amongst major dailies is partially attributable to the prevalence of this problem definition within their respective business sections (Table 7.6). For instance, the *National Post* framed the issue of changes to the oil sands fiscal framework in terms of how many "blows" the oil patch could absorb before projects became unworkable economically (Harding, 2007, March 20: FP1). Through its reproduction of a Canadian Press (2007, March 21: F03) article, the *Toronto Star* adopted a similar narrative to the *Post* by focusing on comments made by the president of Syncrude: "There's a very delicate balance for this industry to be successful, and we have to be careful not to upset that balance to the point that we frighten off investment."

The majority of articles (78 percent) using this problem definition focused on the Alberta government's decision to review and ultimately change the oil sands royalty structure. For instance, a *National Post* (2007, October 9: A16) editorial foresaw dark times for the industry resulting from Stelmach's "cash grab." The threat was apparently not just to Alberta's economy—the *National Post* believed that the provincial government would be placing the entire country's financial health at risk (Ibid). The *Herald* echoed this sentiment, notably in Barry Cooper's guest commentary (2007, October 26: A18) that likened the recommendations of the Royalty Review Panel to actions taken by Hugo Chavez. All of the *Calgary Herald's* editorials about oil sands royalties were adamant that any new regulations should apply only to new projects, thus reducing the effectiveness of any new legislation, especially if one defined "new" in

pre-lease terms. For example, the *Herald* rejected Stelmach's decision to alter Syncrude and Suncor's contracts, tying it to the larger issue of maintaining investor confidence:

Of deepest concern, however, is the government's seeming determination to reopen its Crown agreements with Syncrude and Suncor. It is certain to cause profound cynicism about its bona fides and the potential harm to Alberta's reputation, as a place where contracts mean something, can hardly be understated (*Herald*, 2007, October 26: A24).

Hard news stories also adopted this perspective. For example, one news article argued that the royalty review panel had used faulty information and applied the wrong methodology and in so doing the panel recommended a policy change that would throw into doubt the viability of numerous oil sands projects (Heindl, 2007, October 10: A1).

Nineteen percent of stories using this problem definition covered the Harper government's decision to cancel the accelerated capital cost allowance (ACCA). In one example, a hard news story in the *Calgary Herald* led with an angry perspective from the chairman of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce who, after giving the budget a "thumbs-down," was quoted as saying: "A change to the ACCA for oil sands developers undermines the single-largest contributor to Canada's economic prosperity" (Scotton, 2007, March 20: A6). Although generally negative in tone about the future of oil sands development, articles adopting this problem definition clearly advocated an augmentative discourse as they argued that government actions were unwarranted and/or harmful not only to the particular interests of the oil sands industry, but might also threaten the interests of the broader business community.

2. *High government revenues are evidence that the current fiscal framework is benefiting the state and is a sign of a vibrant oil sands industry.*

Some newspapers suggested that the increase in government revenues were not a sign that Alberta and Ottawa were ‘taking’ too much, but as positive indicator of the overall health of the industry. Overall, this problem definition accounted for 10 percent of “government revenue” news coverage with each newspaper—except the *Toronto Star*—publishing between one and six stories. The majority of these stories appeared in the business sections of the major dailies (Table 7.6).

These stories tended to focus on sales of provincial leases. The Alberta government allocates leasing rights to oil sands resources through a competitive bid process. In 2006, the average price-per-oil sands acre skyrocketed due to a high level of interest from energy companies even for marginal oil sands properties (e.g., bitumen locked in limestone).¹⁰⁵ Not only did newspapers view this as beneficial for provincial treasury, but also all of the stories interpreted the high bid prices as a sign that the energy industry had faith in the long-term viability of the resource (e.g., Cattaneo, 2006, February 10: FP5; Gandia, 2006, February 10: A1). Other stories focused on the fact that companies would be paying the 25 percent post-payout royalty rate sooner than expected because of high oil prices (e.g., Jaremko, 2005, December 3: F1). Again, these articles viewed these developments positively as indicators of a healthy and robust industry. By suggesting that the current royalty and lease systems were working well, these stories advanced a strong augmentative discourse. Only one of the stories focused on the importance of oil sands revenue to the federal government. Appearing

¹⁰⁵ For example, in 2006 Royal Dutch Shell paid \$465 million for 10 leases in areas where the bitumen is encased in limestone (Brethour, 2006, March 22: B1). Technology to extract the bitumen has yet to be developed.

in *Fort McMurray Today*, the story detailed how Ottawa would “reap” more than \$51 billion in personal, corporate, and indirect taxes from the oil sands industry between 2000 and 2020, amounting to more than two-fifths of the total tax revenue from oil sands development (Haavardsrud, 2005, October 4: A5). The article interpreted this both as a sign of the health of industry and as an indicator of how the oil sands benefited all of Canada, not just Alberta.

3. *The current fiscal framework is fair.*

This problem definition asserts that the fiscal framework benefits both government and industry, and that it appropriately distributes the risk of development between the two parties. This problem definition also asserts that the framework is capable of accommodating an environment of high oil prices. Overall, this problem definition accounted for nine percent of government revenue articles, with six stories appearing in the *Calgary Herald* and *Fort McMurray Today*, three in the *Post*, and two in the *Globe*. A good example of this problem definition’s use is a commentary piece by William Marriott (2007, August 30: A16) that challenged the “myths” used to encourage an increase in oil sands royalties. He argued that the generic oil sands royalty regime was appropriately responsive to fluctuations in oil prices and should be considered fair given the high recovery costs of extracting bitumen (Ibid). Marriott also maintained that problems associated with the “overheated economy” were the result of government mismanagement rather than an overly high growth rate in the industry (Ibid). This problem definition was also reproduced in a variety of hard news stories. For instance, a *Fort McMurray Today* article focused on how Suncor and Syncrude “welcome[d] the [royalty review] process” as it would allow them to clear up “misunderstandings”

(Gandia, 2007, June 24: A3). Both companies maintained that a generic royalty regime created sizeable benefits for Albertans and served to encourage investment (Ibid). This problem definition is inherently augmentative, as it does not perceive of any policy problem that requires correction. Proponents utilizing this perspective suggest that the push to change the royalty structure was the result of an ill-informed public, fuelled in part by news coverage that painted the industry as unduly benefiting from high oil prices.

4. *Changes to secure additional government revenue are politically motivated.*

This problem definition asserts that government decisions to alter elements of the oil sands fiscal framework were politically motivated and done in order to solicit favour among a core group of supporters/voters. By labeling the decision as “political,” these articles dismissed the notion that there was any objective reasoning behind wanting to change either the royalty framework (5 stories), or the ACCA (5 stories). The problem definition appeared only in the major dailies, ranging from three apiece in the *Herald* and the *Post*, to just one in each the *Journal* and the *Star*. For example, Derek DeCloet (2007, October 2: B2) argued that the oil sands had become “a target” because the province needed to replace its “current golden goose”—declining natural gas royalties—with a new one (Ibid). Albertans wanted high-quality services without having directly to pay for them through higher income or sales taxes (Ibid).

The *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* both interpreted the decision of the then minority federal Conservative government to cancel the ACCA as being politically motivated in their editorial pieces (e.g., *Journal*, 2007, January 19: A16; *Herald*

(2007, January, 19: A20). Both editorials expressed concern that the Conservative government was distancing itself from the oil sands in an effort to burnish its 'green' credentials when John Baird, then Minister of the Environment, questioned the utility of the ACCA and refused to defend a "Liberal" policy (Ibid). The *Journal* (2007, January 19: A16) suggested that Guy Boutilier, then Alberta's intergovernmental affairs minister and MLA for Fort McMurray, should "soon be doing his 'bad-boy of Confederation' thing in conversation with Baird." The *Herald* called (2007, January 19: A20) on the Prime Minister to "make a clear statement" about whether the province and industry had something to worry about.

Hard news stories also affirmed the notion that changes to the ACCA were politically motivated. For instance, a *Calgary Herald* story opened by quoting a representative from the Canadian Mining Association who advanced the idea that there would be political consequences for its removal:

"My sense is that if they were to remove it [ACCA funding] from the oil sands projects because of an environmental and climate change rationale. [sic] It would be opening a can of dynamite in Western Canada, no question about it because it is a pretty provocative thing to do" (Scotton, 2007, March 19: B5).

This article further privileged an industry perspective by explaining how the ACCA was "revenue neutral"—representing a deferral of taxes rather than an overt subsidy—thus negating its later inclusion in the article of conflicting statements from environmental groups and opposition parties (Ibid). An *Edmonton Journal* article focused on the negative reactions of provincial cabinet ministers to the proposals (Markusoff, 2007, March 21: A6). Stories covering proposals for changing either the royalty regime or the ACCA adopting this problem definition portrayed the status-quo as the neutral position; as such, these articles questioned the motivations of the senior levels of government.

5. *The fiscal framework should be reviewed, and changed if necessary, to ensure that governments are receiving their fair share and that the fiscal framework does not contribute unduly to an overheated economy.*

This transformative problem definition is based on the contention that the current fiscal framework was designed for different economic conditions than the period of high oil prices, which characterized this study period. Under this perspective, the policy problem resulted not from a lack of growth, but from an unmanageable rate of growth. At minimum, articles adopting this problem definition argued that a review was needed to ensure that governments were receiving their fair share and that the fiscal framework was not contributing to an overheated economy. Articles utilizing this problem definition appeared to evolve throughout the study period. Upon acceptance by governments that a review was necessary, articles began focusing on recommending specific changes to the royalty structure. It is important to note that there was little media coverage given to more radical ideas such as developing state-owned companies.

Notably, 57 percent of government revenue stories in *Fort McMurray Today* adopted this problem definition. It followed that if the oil sands companies followed through with their threats to pull development, the Fort McMurray region would be one of the hardest hit areas of the province. As such, it may surprise some that *Fort McMurray Today* (2007, September 21: A4) came out in favour of the Royalty Review Panel's recommendations and rejected the notion that changes in the royalty structure would change the economic viability of oil sands projects:

The high price of oil...means that exploiting the resource will continue to be very profitable for industry. Any company that cuts back investment simply because of the new royalties is short-sighted – its actions would be taken for no other reason than spite. If the business case [*sic*] to profit

from the oil sands existed before, it's still the case. Oil is simply worth too much.

Perhaps the editors expressed this position because the paper saw Fort McMurray's long-term future as being tied to the province's ability to fund necessary infrastructure:

It's a lose-lose for oil companies, and a win-win for individual Albertans. Lots of growth and jobs have boosted the Alberta economy like no other region on the [sic] face of the globe. We have the oil companies to thank for that. We appreciate it. In turn, the oil companies have enjoyed record profits—billions as a result. To thank us, they can pay higher royalties. They can help pay for the massive infrastructure that must be built to accommodate the growth they kicked off (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2007, September 21: A4).

Likewise, in two editorials the paper advocated shifting the property tax burden from households to industry (*Fort McMurray Today*, 2006, May 5: A4; *Fort McMurray Today*, 2005, October 28: A4). Municipalities with a 'fixed' industrial base will often employ this strategy (Kennedy and McAllister, 2005). As previously highlighted in Chapter 3, *Fort McMurray Today* (2006, May 5: A4) justified this tax burden shift by emphasizing the need to hold the oil sands industry responsible for infrastructure deficiencies facing the community.

This problem definition also received substantial coverage in the *Edmonton Journal* (13 stories) and the *Calgary Herald* (16 stories). Both papers reproduced this transformative discourse in hard news stories and columns. For example, the *Herald* covered the Pembina Institute's argument that the Alberta government needed to overhaul its oil sands royalty structure in several articles (e.g., Schmidt, 2006, September 28: D1 and Reynolds, 2006; August 9: A15). Notably, the *Herald* chose to reproduce an op-ed piece by the executive director of the Pembina Institute in which he criticized the Klein government's pro-industry perspective:

Does he [Klein] work for the mostly foreign-controlled companies raking in record profits or for Albertans who have quietly sat back and watched as their return on investment for their oil sands resource has plummeted (Raynolds, 2006, August 9: A15).

In their hard news coverage, both papers presented individual Albertans as holding this perspective. The *Herald's* coverage of the announcement of the royalty review also led with the acknowledgement that a review was warranted, the headline reading, "Alberta launches royalty review. Most residents back initiative, poll says" (Fekete, 2007, February 14: E1). In another example, a *Journal* article focused on individual presentations before the review panel by a Fort McMurray oil sands worker, a Grand Prairie city councillor, and an energy consultant, all of whom argued before the Royalty Review Panel that the provincial government should raise royalties, despite the "cries of doom and gloom" from oil executives (Henton, 2007, September 21: A5).

The *Edmonton Journal* consistently adopted this transformative discourse editorially, first calling for a review (2006, June 30: A16), and later embracing the Stelmach government's decision to change the royalty structure (2007, October 27: A18). The *Journal* (2006, June 30: A16) explicitly rejected industry arguments that oil sands companies were already paying their fair share, instead arguing that the province should be looking after its long-term sustainability: "But 'fair' isn't exactly the point. Since industry is selling oil and gas for as high a price as it can, why would taxpayers not take a similar approach"? Like others who wanted change, the paper built legitimacy by linking its position to that of Peter Lougheed:

The Alberta Government, [Peter Lougheed] says, needs to see itself as a partner in oil sands development, actively ensuring that its shareholders-the people of Alberta-get their fair share of the profit...The Lougheed government in its early days showed how an established oil and gas royalty rate can be reviewed and changed...The royalties went up and the people benefited (*Journal*, 2006, July 14: A16).

Importantly, after Stelmach's announcement that he would raise royalty rate applied to oil sands projects, the *Journal* dismissed the industry's previous dire predictions, concluding that "the sky failed to fall" (2007, October 27: A18).¹⁰⁶ Although in an earlier editorial the *Herald* recognized the need for a review (2006, June 22: A20), the paper did not embrace either the recommendations of the Royalty Review Panel or the Stelmach government's new royalty regime but rather, affirmed support for a strong augmentative discourse.

This problem definition received less overall exposure at the national level, with the *Globe and Mail* giving it the most exposure (eight stories), followed by the *National Post* (one story). Remarkably, no incidences of the *Toronto Star* utilizing this problem definition were found. The *Globe and Mail* supported the suggestion that changes to the royalty regime would help foster more orderly development of the industry. In its September 24, 2007 editorial, the *Globe* "congratulated (Stelmach) on his quest to get a bigger deal" and blamed the previous government's "unlimited development" stance for numerous problems facing the industry (A18). In his column entitled "Boom gone berserk," Reguly (2006, May 26) concluded that the royalty regime had resulted in "one of the biggest energy giveaways ever" and created "gridlock" as projects, unable to find the necessary labour, experienced costly delays (23). The only *National Post* article captured using this problem definition was an excerpt from William Marsden's book, *Stupid to the Last Drop*. These articles gave credence to that the idea that the existing oil sands policy frame had been too successful. Proponents of a moratorium on new oil

¹⁰⁶ This editorial, and other editorials about the royalty review findings, were not captured in the data set because they did not directly address the oil sands in either their lead paragraph or headline. However, upon review of articles outside the dataset, I noted that the *Journal* supported both the Royalty Review Panel and Stelmach's new royalty regime.

sands projects could argue that changes were needed not only to mitigate the myriad negative environmental and social affects, but also the economic ones.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall, the oil sands industry was less successful in having its message resonate when articles focused on government revenue than when articles were about new company investments in oil sands projects. The majority of government revenue stories in *Fort McMurray Today*, and a sizable minority (28 percent) in the major dailies, embraced the transformative notion that the neoliberal oil sands fiscal framework had significant failings that warranted correction. It is important to note that the more radical ideas (e.g., the development of a state-owned oil sands company) being advanced by some policy actors, like those in Alberta's labour movement, were not embraced by the newspapers. The following factors attributed to relative strength of transformative discourses within government revenue stories: inconsistencies in the oil sands industry's narrative on their own economic viability; the presence of elite actors who lent credence to the assertion that changes could be made; and forecasted shortfalls in government revenue at the provincial and municipal levels.

Faced with the prospect of changes to a very favourable fiscal framework that they themselves had helped design, members of the industry reverted to embracing a prior portrayal of the industry—that oil sands development was inherently risky and that industry could not “afford” to absorb any additional costs. However, this message ran counter to arguments put forth by oil sands companies, analysts, and industry associations in their direct communications with investors and across literally hundreds of news articles; they continued to assert in these communications that the oil sands

represented one of the best places in the world for investment in new oil reserves, despite increasing cost pressures. It also ran counter to the narrative displayed in government revenue articles that focused on the high bid prices paid for new oil sands leases, including leases for marginal properties. Newspapers, especially in their business pages, had interpreted these prices as a sign that the global energy industry had a strong faith in the long-term economic viability of oil sands projects. Following announcements of record profits in the industry, the idea that oil sands companies could not “afford” to pay more in government revenues seemed disingenuous. After all, as one presenter to the Royalty Review Panel noted, oil executives were paid to “keep more money on their side table” (Henton, 2007, September 21: A5). This incongruence lent credibility to the argument that Albertans were not receiving their ‘fair share’. Polls conducted during this period showed that despite industry efforts, the majority of Albertans believed a review was necessary.

Support for a royalty review gained further momentum during the Progressive Conservative leadership race. Looking to distance themselves from the increasingly unpopular stance of the Klein government, the leading candidates promised to examine the issue. The intervention of former premier, Peter Lougheed, also served to enhance the legitimacy of those calling for a review. From a media perspective, the fact that calls for a review and/or changes were being advanced by a multitude of elite actors was a key factor in their coverage. Journalists could use these elite actors to not only balance the various positions, but also to balance out the perspective of outside groups, like the Pembina Institute, in order to advance a transformative discourse in an article. These findings confirm a central tenet of indexing theory: that the mainstream media is more likely to explore the relative merits of government policy when there is political conflict

amongst those that they deemed to hold power (Bennett et al, 2007). This conflict opens up space within the news discourse for more transformative ideas to emerge.

In addition to the rhetoric of distinguishing itself from the Klein government, the new Conservative government had a material reason for exploring changes to the royalty regime as a significant drop in provincial oil and gas revenues was forecast due to declining natural gas production. Additionally, the province faced significant infrastructure and social services demands. Other potential revenue sources that might result from increasing income taxes or the addition of a sales tax were politically unsellable. As such, the rise of transformative discourse among the public and elite actors provided an ideal opportunity for the province to re-examine oil and gas royalties as an alternative avenue for revenue generation. A similar necessity existed at the municipal level, as the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo sought additional revenue to manage growth without increasing household property taxes. Although the subsequent policy changes proved to be augmentative in nature, government support of a review provided greater opportunity for transformative discourses to emerge as it cast doubt on the validity of the existing fiscal framework.

The existence of the unique circumstances described above is not to suggest that business actors lost their preferential access to the news media, or their influence with government. Business actors were still the predominant source for “government revenue” stories, especially when published in the business section. Augmentative discourses prevailed in the major dailies. By and large, the conflicting narratives presented by industry actors went largely unchallenged by the business press; the obvious discord between the portrayals of the industry as simultaneously risky and

secure investment opportunities were rarely addressed. As many business articles simply reproduced the content of corporate announcements and relied only upon business analysts for interpretation, I would suggest that these journalists were not demonstrating the level of ‘wariness’ recommended by the Canadian Press (2010:47):

Be wary of corporate self-interest in all aspects of business reporting. Remember that securities analysts are not unbiased observers of a company or sector. They work in an industry whose main job is to promote stock trading.

The government revenue stories examined present the best examples of competition between augmentative and transformative discourses. Even more so than the issue of greenhouse emissions, newspapers were prepared to readily legitimize calls for change. Three newspapers—*Fort McMurray Today*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and the *Globe and Mail*—all gave editorial support to Premier Stelmach’s decision to change the oil sands royalty structure, despite dire warnings from the oil sands industry that any changes would result in serious negative consequences. This development signaled that the newspapers could openly challenge the preferred policy interests of a dominant industrial sector. In other instances, newspapers were careful to direct their criticism at government, rather than industry. This exceptionalism is what makes the transformative discourse found in “government revenue” stories so noteworthy.

8 Conclusion

The media eagerly reports every anti-oil sands campaign and treats every energy company's executive with doubt. Is it too much to ask that they apply the same journalistic independence and skepticism towards the lobbyists and corporations who have turned fighting the oil sands into an industry itself?

-Ezra Levant, *Ethical oil: The Case for Canada's Oil Sands*, 2010: 140-141

To date, not one national newspaper has bothered to assign a reporter to the Athabasca region to daily cover this nation-changing event. The country seems unmoved by the political implications of rapid energy integration as well as the moral consequences of converting a forest into a carbon storm and the planet's third largest watershed into a petroleum dump.

-Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, 2008: 171

Both Ezra Levant and Andrew Nikiforuk are frequent commentators in the news media who aim to correct 'misinformation' about the oil sands. If only the public had the 'right facts' than the public would gravitate to the 'correct' side. Both argue, albeit for opposing reasons, that the Canadian news media has not fulfilled its role as the central 'public square' for democratic debate, or even its own professional "duty and privilege to seek and report the truth, encourage civic debate to build our communities, and serve the public interest" (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2011: 1).

Understanding how the media has covered the oil sands is important because it represents the extension of the larger debate over how oil sands development should be allowed to proceed. The debate is one in which certain facts and evidence are deemed valid, particular actions are prioritized over others, and, as a result, certain outcomes are effectuated.

Instead of focusing on singular examples of news coverage where either a pro- or anti-industry perspective was utilized, this study comprehensively analyzed the body of news stories as a whole, over a 25-month period. As such, its investigation is richer than previous studies, and provides new insight into how mainstream newspapers, and by extension other news media, cover natural resource and environmental issues. This chapter utilizes the findings of the preceding chapters to address the question of whether these newspapers, either individually or as a group, embraced a transformative discourse, or whether their coverage remained confined within the discursive boundaries of a neoliberal policy frame. The purpose of doing so is not to reproach the media for failing to report the 'truth'—a fruitless task—but to understand how various internal and external factors led to the creation of the specific body of newspaper coverage produced during the study period.

The findings present a compelling case that, with a few notable exceptions, newspapers largely embraced a neoliberal discourse in their coverage of oil sands development thus supporting, rather than challenging, the existing policy frame. The first section of this concluding chapter shows that this occurred not only because of the overwhelming dominance of the economic frame but because of the way in which in newspapers problematized the environmental and social problems associated with the rapid growth of oil sands development. This chapter section also examines the missing news: events or perspectives that should have received greater attention but often failed to garner coverage as the actors' transformative message failed to penetrate journalistic structural factors or were actively contested by journalists themselves. Although the newspapers' focus on an economic frame and reliance on industry viewpoints may seem 'natural' given the significant economic implications of oil sands

development, this finding should still be viewed as representative of a widespread acceptance of neoliberal values within the Canadian news media. The second section of this conclusion explores the possible implications of this augmentative news discourse for the broader field of natural resource and environmental politics in Canada. Lastly, I present recommendations both for how we study news coverage of public policy issues such as oil sands development and for how the actors, including the media, could foster a more open and comprehensive public discussion about the positive and negative outcomes associated with oil sands development.

A neoliberal news story

Newspaper coverage during the study period acted as a stabilizing, rather than a disruptive, force to the current neoliberal policy frame. Neoliberal values permeated the vast majority of news stories, aided by the tendency of newspapers to focus primarily on the economic implications of oil sands development, and the use of industry and government sources. This affirmation of neoliberalism was further assisted by the fact that transformative discourses were, if not altogether absent, marginalized. Had the news media attempted to outright dismiss or reject concerns over the pace of oil sands development during this period, they would likely have faced rebuke and strong opposition from the public and various actors such as the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Each of the major papers generally preferred to cover stories on oil sands development in their business sections. Stories published in the business section were more likely to employ an economic frame, utilize predominantly business sources, and present a positive portrayal of oil sands development. In addition, business columnists

were often quick to come to the defence of industry against real or imagined attacks from environmental groups and other critics. All of these factors led to the predominance of augmentative discourses. Assigning the story to their business section is a conscious decision on the part of editors, one that results in profound impacts on how the oil sands story is told. Journalists writing in this section generally orient their work towards two types of readers: “general readers who want to keep up with what is happening in the world of business and business readers who want information on investments, the economy, and developments in fields related to their own” (Canadian Press, 2010: 46). It is worth noting that when writing for this section, in both cases the subject of the story is approached from a business rather than community or citizen-based perspective. What is particularly problematic is not the utilization of this perspective, but rather how dominant the business perspective was throughout all the coverage of oil sands development. As a result, the major dailies have made a conscious decision to utilize their limited resources in a manner that privileges private, rather than public, interests. Of special concern is the fact that the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* published such a high percentage of their stories in their business sections (84 and 90 percent, respectively). This is particularly troubling since it relegated oil sands issues at the national level to only a very narrow scope of concern.

Economic stories dwarfed all other frames. By running nearly 1500 economic stories, as opposed to approximately 400 environmental and 200 social articles, the newspapers were clearly signalling to their readers that the most important aspects of oil sands development were to be found in its economic implications. Real economic challenges, such as labour and material shortages, were viewed as a natural break on accelerated pace of oil sands development rather than a sign of weakness in the overall

policy frame. By prioritizing economic issues related to development, the newspapers aligned themselves with the neoliberal tenet of valorizing the market above all other issues. The notable exception to this trend was found in the editorial sections of the *Edmonton Journal*, *Fort McMurray Today*, and *Globe and Mail* where the suggestion was made that the current structure resulted in royalty rates that were too low. In this instance, editorials were more transformative, challenging some tenets of the policy frame, albeit in a measured fashion.

Although economic stories comprised the majority of coverage in all papers, there were some important differences found across them. Notably, approximately 30 percent of the *Toronto Star* coverage focused on environmental issues. Also, as a group, Alberta papers had the most comprehensive coverage of the oil sands industry, exploring a diversity of issues within each frame and providing more coverage to the environmental and social challenges arising from oil sands development than either the *National Post* or the *Globe and Mail*. What facilitated this diversity within Alberta's two major dailies was their decision to move a larger percentage of their stories out of the business section and into the front section of the paper. Amongst these papers, the *Fort McMurray Today* stood out, publishing a greater range of stories outside the economic frame and a greater diversity of stories within each of the various frames. In many ways, this is not an unexpected finding as local and provincial residents have a greater stake in how oil sands development precedes than does a national audience; oil sands development is a much more important story within Alberta and *the* story within the Fort McMurray region.

Content analysis of news sources utilized in the stories found that business sources played the primary role in defining and analysing issues related to the oil sands, particularly when coverage related to the economic implications of development. Since the energy industry regularly defines its interest in a manner consistent with the values of neoliberalism, there is little wonder why neoliberal norms prevailed throughout coverage, even during a period of fierce contestation. Journalists privileged industry sources, being not only very receptive to industry releases, but also actively seeking industry perspectives for oil sands news stories that may have originated elsewhere.

Further, discourse analysis demonstrated that, in many cases, corporate communications were simply paraphrased and restructured to create news stories. In some cases, news stories were effectively just a shortened version of a company's press release. While this practice may have taken place in the interest of economy and expediency, it does cast doubt on the ability of Canadian news media to serve in the public interest. This practice gives readers the faulty impression that the journalist has scrutinized not only the information presented, but that they have also framed the issues themselves. The result is that business sources were extremely effective in garnering media attention for their broad political and policy interests across all news frames. If newspapers continue to present oil sands development as a business issue, one can expect this dominance of industry sources to continue.

As this dissertation has shown, the news media most often treated the normative values associated with the current policy frame—in this case a neoliberal one—as fact, requiring no further support or justification. On the flipside, the media often treated any challengers to the current frame as necessarily 'controversial'. This triggered the need to 'balance' these challenges by giving actors who were publicly

criticized the opportunity to respond. This practice led to the widespread adoption of augmentative discourses throughout all frames. For example, business and government actors were most heavily cited in stories examining the rising greenhouse gas emissions resulting from oil sands projects. As a result, many stories presented only solutions that would allow for the continued expansion of the industry, finding the solution within the current policy frame rather than looking outside of it. As suggested in the media literature, strict adherence to this creed may, in fact, hamper the search for the truth. It is not enough to simply report stakeholders' views—journalists must be able to assess and report on the veracity of claims. However, this study found few examples where journalists went beyond the most basic level of reporting in an effort to investigate the validity of underlying claims.

When newspapers were critical of oil sands development, they tended to direct their disdain towards the Klein/Stelmach or Harper governments, rather than critically examining the factors and motivations that led to their decision to implement and uphold neoliberal policies. This confirms the tendency within the broader journalistic culture to criticize individuals in government rather than the underlying system itself (Johnston-Cartee, 2005: 283). This inclination has had a significant impact on the transmission and defence of current policy frames and the likelihood of a new policy frame emerging. An inherent contradiction between what the government was being asked to do by op-ed writers and the normative values being expressed in the vast majority of news articles was revealed. In news stories examining the issue of the oil sands industry's high greenhouse gas emissions, government, not industry, was perceived as the barrier to implementing more effective regulations, yet, for meaningful reductions to occur hard emission caps would have to be placed on industry. Hard caps

were something that not only had the industry directly opposed, but was also deemed unnecessary in the majority of news stories. Instead, many news stories embraced solutions that foresaw technological solutions that would ‘eliminate’ emissions by using nuclear power or would ‘bury’ them through the use of carbon capture and storage. While newspapers recognized that rising emissions posed a policy problem, they still by and large embraced an augmentative discourse.

I have demonstrated that transformative ideas require widespread acceptance—amongst elite actors specifically— in order to go unchallenged in articles. The interventions of Peter Lougheed were critical in creating the necessary opening within the discourse in order to propose more transformative ideas. Environmental groups, labour organizations, oppositional parties, and even the news media itself grabbed onto his words in an effort to lend legitimacy to their own ideas. Not only did the stature of Peter Lougheed render his words newsworthy in their own right, but it also made it very difficult for industry or government to challenge him openly. What is notable about his participation is that outside of this context one could hardly paint him as either radical, anti-industry, or un-Albertan. Lougheed’s primary contribution was to raise the profile of policy problems associated with the oil sands development to a level that the news media, government, and industry could no longer ignore. His proposed solutions, however, were more managerial in nature than transformative. These findings confirm key element of indexing theory: that media’s receptivity to a transformative discourse is often dependent on how the actor’s level of influence is perceived by others. Oftentimes the most powerful actors are insiders, like Peter Lougheed, because they cannot be painted as partisan when they critique their own

party's wisdom (Bennett, 2007: 163). However, these interventions can often come too late to change the course of events (Ibid).

The support of transformative ideas of other non-traditional opponents was inconsistent at best. Of particular note were the interventions of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo at regulatory hearings, the multi-stakeholder committee, and the Royalty Review Panel. The most transformative ideas advanced by the municipality were that host municipalities should receive a dedicated portion of oil sands royalties, and that industry should be required to negotiate an impact-benefit agreement with the municipality. Both these proposals would result in a transfer of power back to the local arena, which could lead to more stringent conditions being placed on industry, for example as part of impact-benefit agreement. If this occurred, it would represent an expansion of the state, rather than a retraction, and thus would be in direct opposition to the normative values of neoliberalism. However, the municipality wavered in its support of these ideas, advancing them in some public forums but not others, all the while reiterating the municipality's overall support for the industry. While the municipality's infrastructure woes did receive news coverage and editorial support for their resolutions, there was little media coverage of these transformative ideas.

Support for transformative discourses also benefited from the Progressive Conservative Leadership race where candidates were willing to acknowledge problems associated with the rapid pace of oil sands development. The media embraced the opportunity to utilize the candidates to lend support to the views of environmental groups and the like. However, the window of opportunity for open dissent from senior members of the governing party was short-lived. Subsequent to the race period Ed

Stelmach did follow through on his promise to review royalties, however the discourse arising from the then new provincial government was more circumspect and generally couched in a neoliberal policy frame.

Policy change did occur during this period: royalty rates were increased; Fort McMurray received additional funding to help cope with the strains of unparalleled growth; and Alberta began to regulate oil sands' GHG emissions by setting intensity-based reduction targets and placing a price on carbon. However, these changes also remained within the confines of the current policy frame as these adjustments were made to existing royalty rates rather than through the introduction of a new framework. Fort McMurray received no additional long-term sources of funding, only new short-term grants for specific needs. The additional costs placed on carbon production were considered too low to push companies to make meaningful environmental changes. In addition, funds collected as a result of companies not meeting their targets went to fund projects (e.g., carbon capture and storage) that the industry was likely to fund, or arguably should have been funding themselves.

In order for transformative change to occur, sustained pressure is required not only from the outsider groups but it also needs to be taken up and advanced by the public and some members of the elite. In order to act as a 'central public square', it is critical that transformative discourse in the media move from beyond simply appearing in an occasional op-ed piece or hard news story. Transformative discourse must supplant the existing policy frame as the lens through which all actors and events are viewed. However, neoliberalism is proving itself to be highly intractable, due in part to the fact that it has become institutionalized within the mainstream media through the rise of the business press. The findings strongly indicate that newspapers' decision to

tell the story through their business section has affected newspapers' ability to fulfill their broader journalistic duty:

There is a difference between providing information and telling Canadians what is happening in their vast country-and how events beyond their borders affect them. Context and perspective are fundamental parts of the Canadian Press report...We deal with facts that are demonstrable, supported by sources that are reliable and responsible. We pursue with equal vigour all sides of the story (Canadian Press, 2010: 11).

While individual news stories meet the high standards of Canadian journalism, overall "context and perspective" is being lost because the widespread adoption of a singular lens. This has resulted in "untold" stories particularly around the environmental and social impacts of oil sands development; perhaps more importantly there was an absence of a critical examination of the implications of business actions for citizens. Even some journalists also recognize that there are 'untold' stories that are worth telling (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 13). In addition, these journalists identified the "driving issue" as "the tension between energy or economic security and environmental concerns" (Ibid). However, even if journalists were mandated to go out and cover these untold stories, an augmentative discourse would likely still prevail as long as newspapers, and other media sources, allocate their limited resources to covering oil sands stories through their business section.

The broader implications of oil sands news stories for natural resources and environmental politics in Canada

At the end of the day...where the media continue to have the greatest influence is in day-to-day news coverage, not the editorial pages. An ink-stained wretch can't really hurt or help a politician in an opinion piece . . . an angry ink-stained wretch can cause a lot of damage over on the news pages. A lot (Kinsella, 2007: 103).

While the above quote references the role of the media in election campaigns, one can easily argue that it could apply equally to their relationship with the oil sands industry. Readers expect columnists and editorials to be opinionated; they often seek out those pieces that confirm their previously held beliefs. While the oil sands industry, and the governments who promote oil sands development, may not like to see an unflattering portrayal on the editorial pages, these stories hardly represent a serious challenge to their position. However, challenges that are more significant may arise when negative stories appear in the news sections of the paper. Such placement did not occur frequently throughout the study period; more often than not, the news media served as a cheerleader of the oil sands industry, extolling its virtues and understating its faults.

In those cases where the media was critical, they primarily focused their analysis on evaluating the actions of government, rather than companies themselves. The media was not alone in the belief that further “government leadership” was needed. For instance, a 2010 survey of “thought leaders” also supported this idea (McAllister Opinion Research, 2010). Yet throughout its development history, it is the oil sands industry itself that has realized most of its substantive goals in negotiations with both the federal and provincial governments. In particular, the fiscal and regulatory neoliberal policy frame that governed the 25-month study period, and is still in place, was created as a direct result of industry lobbying. Yet despite this, the media generally failed to hold this “private power” to account when identifying challenges associated with unprecedented growth. So where does this leave us?

The oil sands industry was the most successful actor to use the media to advance its objectives. According to MacDonald (2007: 182), businesses “seek public

approval and support” to bolster “[their] public image as a caring, concerned member of society.” They do not, however, tend to lobby for specific policy measures through the media, for this, they rely on the “strategy that has always worked: elite-closed door discussions” (Ibid). So rather than directly lobbying against more stringent environmental regulations, in environmental stories industry sought to portray themselves as part of the solution rather than the problem by highlighting their efficiency improvements related to the amount of energy and water used per barrel. The oil sands industry typically argued that technological solutions, and not restrictions on growth, would achieve the desired environmental results. As demonstrated in coverage of the GHG emission issue, in the absence of a strong countervailing narrative, the media readily incorporated the industry's augmentative discourse into their news coverage.

Although MacDonald's analysis was directed specifically at how businesses respond to impending environmental regulation, it seems fair to conclude that such strategies might also be applied to other areas of regulation. For example, when the issue of royalties was first raised, members of the oil sands industry portrayed themselves as concerned members of society who were already making substantial contributions to Alberta's economy and fiscal security rather than directly challenging the legitimacy of the royalty review in public. However, there was one notable exception to this tactic. In response to a strengthening transformative discourse that suggesting that Alberta was not receiving its fair share of the oil sands' spoils, industry did opt to lobby publicly against the royalty review findings and challenge the legitimacy of the panel.

As the findings in Chapter 7 demonstrated, newspapers were willing to support and incorporate an augmentative discourse on the royalty issue in their hard news stories and columns, particularly in the business section. But only the *National Post* and the *Calgary Herald* advanced these positions in their editorial sections. In this rare but important case, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and *Fort McMurray Today* supported the efforts of the provincial government to gain a larger share of benefits from the industry for the province. Further, editorials dismissed industry arguments as fear-mongering rather than as rational, objective assessments of the consequences of the proposed action. Comparing the GHG emission issue to that of the provincial royalty review leads me to conclude that while business actors enjoy a privileged position vis-à-vis the media agenda, their position is not absolute, nor is it uniform across publications. It also demonstrates that neoliberal values, while dominant, do not always prevail. The implications of these findings raise four important points.

First, by assigning government primary accountability, the news media indirectly confirms that the Canadian state still play a legitimate role in ensuring healthy environments and communities. What is interesting about this is that it appears to be in contrast with neoliberal governance's preoccupation with privatization and the idea that citizens should take primary responsibility for their own well-being (Brodie, 2003: 25). While this finding is important, one should not interpret these calls for increased government action as an indicator of the return to an older form of state-led resource development. While some guest columnists embraced the concept of such a return, the majority of coverage identified solutions within existing norms and often justified state action on augmentative grounds. For example, some of the *Calgary Herald's* editorials framed the issue of resolving Fort McMurray's infrastructure challenges as one where

ensuring the existence of a positive investment climate was paramount, above the expansion or maintenance of social citizenship rights.

Second, the Alberta government was clearly the big newsmaker, in comparison to the federal government, within the provincial media environment, while the federal government took on that role at the national level. This result has important implications for natural resources and environmental policy processes, as both levels of government have unique and important roles to fill. By concentrating on the activities of each individually, Canadian newspapers at each level missed the opportunity to inform the public of the activities (or inactivity) at the other. Not only does such reticence increase the likelihood that the newspapers will apply the game frame by allowing the 'us vs. them' rhetoric to go unchallenged, it is a missed opportunity for citizens to understand how federalism both constrains, and provides opportunities for, policy reform.

Third, my study found that media coverage positioned government as the key problem and thus overlooked the role played by consumer demand in fueling oil sands growth. Unlike other studies which have found that the news media tends to over-emphasize the importance of individual lifestyle changes to improve environmental conditions, this study found few instances of newspapers holding consumers responsible for their energy consumption. Reducing oil consumption at both the individual and community levels would involve radically transforming the North American car culture. However, newspapers are unlikely to engage in a sustained critique of the automobile as newspapers support the North American car culture encourage through their driving section, which enthusiastically reviews new cars (Greve,

2011: 34-39). Furthermore, these findings support the idea that sustainable development can be achieved within the current growth paradigm rather than through a reduction in consumption. Given this broader context, the fact that instances of consumer accountability were rare is not surprising. It seems likely that the hesitation on the part of newspapers to place onus for responsibility on consumers will continue as long as they have little to no incentive to challenge their readers.

Lastly, the findings highlight an interesting paradox for provincial and federal government actors. While newspapers tended to assign government responsibility for the negative outcomes arising from the unprecedented oil sands boom, they did so while minimizing the importance of government actors by using them so rarely as a source, particularly in economic stories. As previously discussed, by shifting responsibility to government, the media largely ignored and obscured the role that the oil sands industry played in creating and maintaining the neoliberal policy frame. By failing to view government as an “immediate participant” whose opinion matters or to explore the connections between the economic and political realms, one has to wonder about the strength of calls for government intervention when these neoliberal norms go unchallenged by those very newspapers.

Findings on the media’s portrayal of subordinate actors also have important consequences for how these groups are perceived in larger public policy debates. As Aboriginal peoples were rarely utilized as a predominant source, their voices were largely marginalized. Through their limited coverage, the media largely reduced the Aboriginal perspective to representing two distinct and incompatible viewpoints: protectors of the earth, or groups seeking independence through economic

opportunities. The newspapers' dominant portrayal reinforced the stereotypical image of Aboriginal peoples as "protectors of mother Earth." This perspective was present in every environmental article that relied on them as a source. These articles served to either ignore or obscure the active participation of First Nations and Métis in oil sands development. While their participation was not altogether absent from coverage, it was limited to economic stories highlighting the increasing number of industry-Aboriginal partnerships. In those stories, further involvement in oil sands projects was viewed as leading to greater autonomy for Aboriginal peoples at both the collective and individual levels. This second portrayal aligns itself with neoliberal ideas as it positions First Nations as potential collaborators with industry. In the end, coverage did not provide a critical examination of the role of Aboriginal peoples in the public policy process.

As we have witnessed, newspapers, for the most part, treated labour perspectives as being representative of their own self-interest rather deriving out of concern for broader social goals. These findings confirm the previous trend identified within the media literature (Hackett and Zhao, 1998: 68). Labour organizations were asked to comment only on specific labour relations issues rather than on oil sands development in general. As such, their perspective was not permitted to infiltrate other economic issues or frames. The media's antagonism towards labour was nowhere more evident than in *Fort McMurray Today's* editorial pieces. The broader implication of this analysis is that labour will continue to be marginalized in the public policy process as they face increasing difficulties in getting their message heard. This finding is also an indicator of the strength of neoliberalism to individualize responsibility in its abhorrence of strong collective action.

Of all subordinate actors, environmental groups were the most successful at being perceived as legitimate actors by the media—a natural outcome of the high level of media interest surrounding environmental concerns during the study period. However, not all environmental groups benefited equally from this heightened interest. Institutional organizations like the Pembina Institute received the largest share of media coverage. As noted at the outset, subordinate actors who adopt similar tactics to those of business and government (e.g., implementing a professional public relations strategy) will have a greater likelihood of having their message resonate with media. As noted, during this period the Pembina Institute argued that the oil sands industry possessed the capability to improve its environmental performance. The newspapers were receptive to this particular discourse since it aligned well with the narrative already being advanced that suggested industry was a partner in, rather than obstacle to, environmental improvements. In utilizing this narrative, improvements can be seen to occur within the current growth paradigm of sustainable development. Conversely, the Pembina Institute's more transformative arguments, such as linking oil sands development with both its upstream and downstream environmental effects, received less media attention. Similarly, Greenpeace, perceived by newspapers to be challenging that paradigm, received not only far less exposure but was also directly criticized by the newspapers' editorial staff.

One of the driving forces behind calls for change was a receptive public, as demonstrated by polling data, and yet 'ordinary people' were used as a first or second

source in just a handful of stories and few readers' letters were captured.¹⁰⁷ This low number of citizen sources is partially the result of business journalists writing about oil sands development tending not to use the public as sources (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 10). Furthermore, other journalists want citizen sources "to have direct experience with the impact of oil sands that they can describe in detail" (Ibid). This despite the fact that one of the primary roles ascribed to the news media by the journalists themselves is to give "ordinary people a chance to express their views" (Pritchard et al., 2005: 290). These results serve to reinforce the notion that individuals were largely spectators in the public debate over oil sands development rather than active participants. By and large access to the newspapers was gained only through one's group affiliations. This finding also bolsters the assertion that participation in the public policy process is mediated through stakeholder interests rather than by individuals participating directly. Although there is insufficient space to explore the implications of the rise of social media, the relative unimportance of ordinary voices in shaping newspaper discourse will likely continue under Web 2.0. Despite social media changing the way newspapers access citizen-produced content (e.g., blogs, twitter feeds), individuals remain a relatively unimportant actor in newspaper coverage in comparison with elite sources (De Keyser and Raeymaeckers, 2011: 11). In addition, newspapers have not relinquished their editorial control over deciding which social media content is worthy of wider distribution (Rebillard and Touboul, 2010: 331). This suggests to me that business and government actors, along with representatives of other stakeholder groups, will

¹⁰⁷ The low number of readers' letters could be the result of the selection methodology (i.e., stories under 300 words were not included).

continue to enjoy greater prominence in the newspaper coverage than ordinary people enjoy.

Conclusion and recommendations

As I have argued, newspaper coverage of oil sands development is best understood as a product of neoliberalism, current journalistic practices, and the specific events of the study period. Examining the intersection of these factors and their contribution to the final news product provides a few final reflections on its relevance to the debates surrounding media literature, specifically, and neoliberalism more broadly. Generally speaking, scholarship on the news media has accounted for the journalistic factors which might reduce a journalist's ability to analyze complex issues or hold the powerful to account—particularly relevant in light of the long-held belief that both objectivity and neutrality are possible within the profession. Nevertheless, the decision on the part of major dailies to cover public policy issues, like oil sands development, predominantly through their business sections is worthy of fuller discussion since it raises important questions about a newspaper's ability, or lack thereof, to act as a central public square.

In their coverage of oil sands development, newspapers acted as a conduit for neoliberal values. In so doing, those newspapers demonstrated three important tendencies. The first is the tendency to reduce a complex policy problem to a narrow set of issues. To understand why this occurred, it is important to remember that most news stories are not, as many believe, generated simply in response to spontaneous events. Rather, they usually arise from a journalists' coverage of planned events, such as press conferences, releases, and the like (Schudson, 2008: 55). Canadian newspapers

tended to cover oil sands events as economic stories, focusing heavily on the role of business actors. This frame greatly limited the breadth of the coverage. The complexity of the issues was also reduced since the newspapers often treated many of the assumptions associated with the existing policy frame as fact, rather than as value-based assumptions, thus warranting limited (or no) justification or evidentiary support. In fact, as findings demonstrate, many stories relied on a single business actor to support their assertions, or different business sources to support each other's claims.

Second, newspapers typically presented controversies related to oil sands development within the normative boundaries of the existing policy frame. This was achieved, in part, by incorporating augmentative discourses advanced by industry and/or government actors in stories about the environmental or social impacts of development. Third, papers further simplified the story by applying journalistic frames—like the game frame—to complex public policy issues. This was most evident in the coverage of oil sands-related greenhouse gas emissions, where the debate was utilized by the news media as proxy for the broader battles between the Alberta and federal governments. While the game, or strategy, frame may make an entertaining news story, it is unlikely to elucidate the underlying structures of a policy issue and thus does little to either advance the dialogue or identify solutions. Overall, the newspapers' tendency to simplify, frame, and sensationalize provided a hospitable climate for augmentative discourses, while marginalizing transformative perspectives.

Augmentative discourses prevailed throughout the business section. Oil sands coverage in this section of the newspaper had a greater influence on the nature of discourse than did other, more commonly studied, journalistic structural factors such as

ownership, type of story, or place of publication. In contrast to the conclusions of other studies, I found that newspaper ownership mattered little when it came to shaping the nature of news coverage on oil sands development, whereas story location had a significant impact. At first glance, the high number of oil sands stories in the business section may appear to be a natural outcome of the story's inherent characteristics. After all, oil is a valuable global commodity. However, as I argued and demonstrated through an analysis of the sources used in the stories, this outcome reflects a conscious decision on the part of the major dailies, particularly the national papers, to privilege private interests above public ones.

In response to increasing corporate concentration within the Canadian newspaper industry in the 1990s and the "hands-on" approach of some media owners, scholars have paid significant attention to 'who' owned a particular paper. CanWest is routinely singled out as being particularly interventionist (Blidook, 2009: 58; Taras, 2001: 213). However, my findings demonstrated that newspaper ownership (CanWest versus the other papers) had little influence on how a story was framed, who was cited in the story, or how the story evaluated oil sands development. CanWest papers demonstrated no common editorial perspective or tendency for grouping. These results align with Soroka's finding (2002: 44) that concentrated ownership, in itself, did not reduce the diversity of news stories. My findings show that the 'who' of ownership is less relevant than previously assumed. Major papers all tend to apply the singularly focused lens of the business press, irrespective of the media conglomerate that owns them. This is perhaps a more troubling finding as it suggests the presence of an embedding neoliberalism within the newsroom itself. It is disconcerting not because neoliberalism is a set of policies that journalists and editors would immediately

recognize or ascribed to, but because business stories start from an investor perspective, which assumes the supremacy of the market. This perspective also infiltrates other sections of the paper when journalists privilege industry actors in almost every story about oil sands (Paskey and Steward, 2012:7).

My findings also confirm the importance of events whose outcomes are uncertain, such as the provincial leadership race to replace Ralph Klein or unexpected events, such as the interventions of the regional municipality before oil sands regulatory hearings and the interlocutions of Peter Lougheed, in generating openings for transformative ideas to emerge in media reports. These events also served to enhance the credibility of other actors calling for change. Ultimately, these events were insufficient to change the overall tone of coverage; however, they illustrate a strategy for achieving more thematic coverage, by opening up lines of inquiry not typically advanced (Schudson, 2008: 56). More investigations into the characteristic natures of such events would be useful to determine what types of events are the most conducive to the emergence of transformative discourses. My findings suggest that sources, particularly elite actors, who are perceived by the media to be taking positions contrary to expectations, have significant framing power that could be used to articulate alternative policy frames.

My findings can also assist in theorizing about neoliberalism as a “broad and varied political economic movement” (Young and Matthews, 2007: 183). First, my study demonstrates the resiliency of neoliberal ideas. Despite the public recognition of significant policy failures and the emergence of transformative discourses from non-traditional opponents, the neoliberal oil sands policy frame remained intact.

Augmentative strategies to resolve policy failures were advanced by industry and government actors, and were subsequently adopted throughout a large proportion of newspaper coverage. This suggests that the identification of failures in itself is insufficient to create transformative change; there must also be a compelling alternative policy frame at the ready. Second, and relatedly, my research demonstrates the institutionalization of neoliberalism, not only in the expected government and corporate structures, but also within the news media. While newspapers, particularly in op-ed pieces, may have implored government to slow down development until regulations that are more stringent were in place, newspaper coverage on the whole embraced and reaffirmed the argument that solutions to highlighted problems could be found within the current policy frame. In so doing, newspapers delegitimized many potential policy instruments, which could assist government in resolving the environmental and social challenges arising from oil sands development.

Third, my investigation indicates that a specific set of neoliberal policies will likely remain in place as long there is strong alignment between, and support from, government and corporate interests. Change is likely to occur only when the legitimacy of both is threatened. In this regard, my findings demonstrated that, at times, the news media questioned the ability of both the provincial and federal governments to manage oil sands development; however, news reporting rarely held industry responsible for failures or questioned its overall capabilities. Once again, unless the fundamental legitimacy of the industry is threatened, it is unlikely that meaningful improvements, above efficiency gains, to the industry's environmental record will occur (MacDonald, 2007, 192).

While neoliberalism's inherent mistrust of the state naturally builds upon the news media's historical skepticism towards politicians, government and state actors, this skepticism has not been consistently applied to the corporations which, as private decision makers, lead oil sands development under a neoliberal policy frame. In fact, just the opposite has occurred, as the news media has used a significant portion of its resources to extol the virtues of business and the values of free enterprise. The even greater intractability of neoliberalism within the news media represents an additional barrier to those seeking change. In the end, newspapers are not serving to provide a public space where a robust debate over ideas about oil sands development can take place.

Given that the growth of the business press occurred in tandem with the rise of neoliberalism, it is somewhat surprising that the nature of this relationship has not received more scholarly attention—from either scholars of media or those focused on neoliberalism. For the most part, scholarly attention has focused on whether consolidation within the newspaper industry—which reduced the journalistic capacity within many newsrooms through staff layoffs and closing of news bureaus—threatened these papers' ability to provide a diverse range of coverage. I argue that our attention needs to shift from a focus on ownership to considering how neoliberalism has embedded itself into journalistic practices throughout the organization. Increased attention in this regard would likely generate additional insights into how neoliberal values continue to be renewed, even in face of growing contestation from significant societal forces. It could also help identify locations within the media landscape, which may be more receptive to transformative discourses.

A more in-depth look at *how* various actors interact with the media would deepen our insight into media's involvement in the public policy process. Special focus should be placed on the communication strategies of government and business actors including an examination of the tactics used by these actors to keep information out of the news. Some journalists have also expressed a desire to know more about the behind-the-scenes workings of the oil sands industry (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 15). To be successful, one would need to overcome the methodological challenges of obtaining this proprietary information. Lastly, the broad public role we ascribe to the media assumes, in part, that citizens are paying attention to what is produced, and allowing it to inform their perceptions on the industry. Due to the constantly changing nature of media environments as well as how consumers are accessing the news, additional reception studies in this area would be beneficial.

The remainder of this section focuses upon a series of suggestions for various policy actors (media, industry, government, industry, and environmental groups); discussing ways in which they could better inform the public discourse on the costs and benefits of expanding oil sands development or other such similar natural resources.

As Brainard and Russell (2009: 44) have recommended, newspapers would be well served to “cluster” reporters from a variety of backgrounds together in order to cover complex, multi-faceted issues like energy policy. When newspapers assign stories about oil sands development to an oil and gas reporter working from the business desk, from the outset they are privileging the voices of business actors, resulting in a narrow financial perspective on the issues. Clustering—bringing together science, energy, environmental, and political journalists—would improve newspaper coverage in three

important ways. First, the overall capacity of the team would improve; newspapers would be in a better position to evaluate the veracity of the claims made by sources rather than simply reporting them uncritically. Second, clustering would likely reduce the reproduction of a business perspective, as pieces would not be predestined to fall within the confines of a particular “beat” or “section.” It would also help reporters draw connections between seemingly isolated stories by helping to identify how a national story fits with a local and/or global perspective. Although this would require a significant cultural change to the ways in which the traditional newsroom operates, such an approach to reporting is likely only to be achievable in a larger paper or across a newspaper chain where specialist reporters already exist. For small, local papers, the reporting style of Renato Gandia, *Fort McMurray Today’s* primary reporter during this study period, may offer some viable “best practices.” For example, he often supplemented coverage garnered through news releases or wire stories with his own interviews, thus ‘customizing’ news written for a broader audience—most often a business one—to be more accessible at the local level. Readers must also be prepared to support newspapers financially to ensure that they have necessary resources to fulfill this role.

Journalists may also be well-served to reflect upon how they approach the issue of ‘balance’ in their stories. The current manner in which journalists attempt to achieve balance serves to reinforce the dominance of elite actors, rather than actually allowing opportunities for the inclusion of alternative perspectives. Newspapers should assess the totality of their coverage at periodic intervals to determine whether they are truly providing the most comprehensive portrayal of oil sands development possible over the course of multiple stories. This may help editors identify the untold stories, assign the

resources necessary to cover such stories in the future, and achieve more balanced coverage over the course of multiple articles on the same issue. Journalists should also be wary of relying on analysts as the sole method for providing 'balance' to company sources. These sources are not neutral observers and should not be treated as such. Rather, journalists should seek out perspectives from a diverse group of actors to offer divergent commentaries on economic issues.

Business actors were most successful of all groups in having their perspective incorporated into coverage irrespective of the size, location, or ownership of the newspaper. Despite this success, industry proponents, including the federal government, have recently embraced the idea of rebranding the oil sands as “ethical oil,” in an effort to counter the growing “dirty oil” rhetoric (e.g., Chase, 2011, January 7; Taber, 2011, January 15: A12; Levant, 2010). Rebranding efforts have been focused at highlighting that the oil sands industry is better-studied, scrutinized, and regulated—across a broad range of measures, including human rights and the environment—than most other oil-producing countries (Levant, 2010). These efforts should be viewed as diversionary tactic as they rarely provide new information to the public and stakeholders nor do they result in policy changes, even augmentative ones.

If industry or government are serious about answering their critics, I would argue that a better litmus test would be to compare oil sands industry players with one another and alongside their progress (or lack thereof) over time. To achieve this, a series of objective tests designed to measure a range of economic, environmental, and social variables needs to be established and publically reported on. The presence of this type of data could be the first step towards a more transformative approach to the policy process. One way to accomplish this would be for the Canadian and Alberta

governments to implement a criteria and indicators framework. This would also help demonstrate to the public that governments were actively engaged in monitoring the industry, thus enhancing public confidence that government was fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and not simply acting as a marketing arm for the industry. The oil sands industry could also embrace third party certification, preferably by a group that is internationally recognized and supported by both Aboriginal and environmental groups. Done correctly, certification could lead to transformative changes in operating practices, which, in turn, would enhance the legitimacy of the oil sand sector. These measures have been successfully adopted by other resource industries. For instance, the forestry industry implemented these types of measures alongside Canadian governments—backed by real improvement—to help move past the acrimonious 'war in the woods' of the 1990s.

Alternative voices—environmental groups, labour, and Aboriginal groups—were not absent in news coverage about oil sands development but were marginalized by the news media. Journalists sought out business actors on a diverse range of issues, while alternative voices tended to be consulted on only a very narrow range of issues (e.g., labour organizations about foreign workers). As such, these groups would be well-served to develop an internal capacity to speak about issues, which at first glance seem beyond their immediate interest. A good example of this is Jim Stanford, an economist with the relatively well-funded Canadian Auto Workers Union, who is routinely sought out by the media to provide insight going beyond strictly 'union' interests. When included by the news media, Stanford is able to bring a broad labour perspective to general economic issues. As one of the most influential groups in both the provincial and Canadian media markets, the Pembina Institute has an important role to play in not

only identifying problems associated with oil sands development but also in developing a new policy frame. Over the years, its reports have established a degree of credibility with the media as a source knowledgeable about the industry's overall environmental record (Paskey and Steward, 2012: 10). As such, the Pembina Institute would do well to build on its positioning by expanding their reporting to include other aspects of development. However the success of this strategy of developing broader expertise in order to have impact on the news discourse beyond a narrow range of issues depends on both the internal financial and human resources health of groups, as well as the receptivity of the news media to their message.

The above recommendations demand more from the news media, from the oil sands industry, from government, and even from environmental groups and other non-state actors. But we must also ask more of ourselves; we must move beyond passivity and demand more of the media, become better engaged, and be prepared to make trade-offs, regardless of how difficult they may be. The negative effects of oil sands development can be mitigated, but certain costs are unavoidable. Likewise, limiting development also results in significant costs. The media have an important role in facilitating a broad public discussion about those costs, but they cannot do it alone. As Nesbitt-Larking (2007: 359) argues, "politicians, the public, and audiences" need to join with the media to bring us back to "politics, with all the messiness and ambiguity implied in such a practice." Newspapers need to tell a broader range of environmental and social stories, hold oil sands companies to account for their records, and question rather than accept as fact the central tenants of the existing policy frame. Only then, will there be sufficient openings in news coverage for transformative discourses to be properly considered. Yet, given neoliberalism's intractability and its institutionalization

within the newspaper organizational structure, the likelihood of newspapers fully feeding the public debate over oil sands development with a steady diet of transformative discourses remains remote.

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Appendix 1: Map of the Alberta oil sands



Source: Einstein (2006)

Appendix 2: Coding frame for newspaper coverage on the oil sands

General Coding Notes:

Do not code headlines banner headlines that are not associated with a story, or headlines that promote stories in other sections.

Part 1: Variables about the news story's placement, character etc.

1 Case ID

Case identification number begins with the initials of the paper being, coded followed by the sequential number: gm1, gm2, gm3

2 Name of newspaper?

1. *Globe and Mail*
2. *National Post*
3. *Edmonton Journal*
4. *Calgary Herald*
5. *Fort McMurray Today*
6. *Toronto Star*

3 Date of story

(dd, mm, yyyy)

4 Location of story

1. Front Page
2. Front section
3. Op/Ed section
4. City section
5. Business section
6. Other, please specify

5 Type of story

1. Hard news
2. Columns, guest columns, commentary
3. Editorial
4. Letters to the editor
5. Feature (longer investigative report)
6. Other, please specify

6 Gender of first reporter/columnist

1. Male
2. Female
3. Unknown (can't determine from name, "staff," or name of news paper (except for editorial)

No byline (editorial or wire service)

7 Name of city or town at the start of a story

1. Fort McMurray
2. Edmonton
3. Calgary
4. Toronto
5. Ottawa
6. Other, please specify
99. Not attributed

8 Number of headers

1. one (primary headline)
2. two (primary and secondary headline)
3. three (primary, secondary, tertiary headline)

Part 2: Variables about the news story's headline(s)

Code these variables before reading the story.

9 Main frame of the headline(s)

1. Economic
2. Social
3. Environmental
4. Energy security
5. Other, please specify

10 Emphasis of the headline(s)

If the main focus is the **economic** paradigm, which aspect is emphasized?

1. Expansion of oil sands facilities (either in terms of its physical size or the number of barrels produced, including buying of leases)
2. Profits to oil sands companies
3. Government take—provincial (e.g., royalties, lease payments, corporate taxes)
4. Government take—federal (e.g., corporate taxes, ACCA)
5. Government take—municipal (e.g., property taxes)
6. Workers (e.g., labour shortage, union issues, etc.)
7. Business costs associated with development
8. Distribution to market (pipelines, ships, etc.)
9. Impact of oil sands development on other industries and/or regions
10. Other business, please specify
34. Mergers, acquisitions, joint partnerships
36. Investment climate

If the main focus is the **social** aspect which aspect is emphasized?

11. Population Growth
- ~~12. Workers (as a social issue rather than a business issue)~~ not used
determined to be too similar to the category 6

13. Crime
14. Housing
15. Changes in the “feel” of the town
16. Physical infrastructure (roads, sewers, etc.)
17. Social infrastructure (libraries, social services)
18. Overall impact of development
19. Governance issues (who should be responsible)
20. Other social, please specify

If the main focus of is the **environmental** frame, which aspect is emphasized

21. Greenhouse gases
22. Use of energy (e.g., natural gas, potential for nuclear)
23. Use/quality of water
24. Boreal forest (including wildlife)
25. General environmental cost (more than one issue discussed)
26. Governance issues (who should be responsible)
27. Other environmental, please specify
33. Reclamation
38. Air pollution

If the main focus is **energy security** frame, whose security is emphasized

28. Albertan
29. Canadian
30. American
31. Energy security other, please specify
35. Chinese

If the main focus is **other**, please specify

32. Other

11 Portrayal of oil sands development in the headline

1. Positively
2. Negatively
3. In a balance or neutral fashion
99. N/A

Only code if the words “oil sands” or “tar sands” is present in the headline(s) and are not part of a company name. Only code as positive or negative if the evaluation is obvious.

12 Descriptor of the resource in the headline(s): oil sands versus tar sands

1. Oil sands
2. Tar sands
3. Both
99. Not present in the headline

13 Identify the first actor in the headline

1. Prime Minister
2. Federal government (general)
3. Federal government spokesperson – economic (incl. cabinet ministers)
4. Federal governmental spokesperson – environmental (incl. cabinet ministers)
5. Federal oppositional parties
6. Premier of Alberta
7. Provincial government (general)
8. Provincial government spokesperson–economic (incl. cabinet ministers)
9. Provincial government spokesperson–environmental (incl. cabinet ministers)
10. Provincial government spokesperson–social (incl. cabinet ministers)
11. Provincial oppositional parties
12. Mayor of RMWB
13. RMWB Municipal government spokesperson
14. US government spokesperson
15. Syncrude
16. Suncor
17. Oil sands company
18. Pipeline/distribution company
19. Banking/Investment/Energy Analyst
20. Energy business association/institute (e.g., Chamber of Mines, RIWG, CERI but not CAPP who has it own number)
21. Labour organization
22. Environmental group/institute (but not Pembina who has it own number)
23. First Nations groups
24. Academic/institute
25. Resident living in the oil sands area
26. Provincial resident
27. Other, please specify
28. CAPP
29. Pembina
30. Industry/oil patch etc.
31. Investors
32. Peter Lougheed
33. Boutlier as MLA
34. EUB
35. News media
36. Workers (including foreign workers)
99. N/A (no actors in the headline)

If the newspaper quotes a policy document (e.g. MOSS) attribute it to the author.

Identify the second actor in the headline(s)

Use the above list, identify the second actor in the headline or use 99 if there is no second actor.

Part 3: Variables about the body of the news story

Code only these variables after reading the entire news story

16 Main frame of the story

1. Economic
2. Social
3. Environmental
4. Energy security
5. Other, please specify

17 Emphasis of the story

If the main focus is the **economic** paradigm, which aspect is emphasized?

1. Expansion of oil sands facilities (either in terms of its physical size or the number of barrels produced, including buying of leases)
2. Profits to oil sands companies
3. Government take – provincial (e.g., royalties, lease payments, corporate taxes)
4. Government take – federal (e.g., corporate taxes, ACCA)
5. Government take – municipal (e.g., property taxes)
6. Workers (e.g., labour shortage, union issues, etc.)
7. Business costs associated with development
8. Distribution to market (pipelines, ships, etc.)
9. Impact of oil sands development on other industries and/or regions
10. Other business, please specify
34. Mergers, acquisitions, joint partnerships
36. Investment climate

If the main focus is the **social** aspect which aspect is emphasized?

11. Population Growth
- ~~12. Workers (as a social issue rather than a business issue)~~ not used
determined to be too similar to the category 6
13. Crime
14. Housing
15. Changes in the “feel” of the town
16. Physical infrastructure (roads, sewers, etc.)
17. Social infrastructure (libraries, social services)
18. Overall impact of development
19. Governance issues (who should be responsible)
20. Other social, please specify

If the main focus of is the **environmental** frame, which aspect is emphasized

21. Greenhouse gases
22. Use of energy (e.g., natural gas, potential for nuclear)

- 23. Use/quality of water
- 24. Boreal forest (including wildlife)
- 25. General environmental cost (more than one issue discussed)
- 26. Governance issues (who should be responsible)
- 27. Other environmental, please specify
- 33. Reclamation
- 38. Air pollution

If the main focus is **energy security** frame, whose security is emphasized

- 28. Albertan
- 29. Canadian
- 30. American
- 31. Energy security other, please specify
- 35. Chinese

If the main focus is **other**, please specify

- 32. Other

18 Portrayal of oil sands development in the story

- 1. Positively
- 2. Negatively
- 3. In a balance or neutral fashion
- 99. N/A

Only code as positive or negative if the evaluation is obvious.

19 Descriptor of the resource in the story: oil sands versus tar sands

- 1. Oil sands
- 2. Tar sands
- 3. Both

20 Is Fort McMurray mentioned in the story?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

21 Are sources used?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

22 Identify the first source in the story

- 1. Prime Minister
- 2. Federal government (general)
- 3. Federal government spokesperson—economic (incl. cabinet ministers)
- 4. Federal governmental spokesperson—environmental (incl. cabinet ministers)
- 5. Federal oppositional parties
- 6. Premier of Alberta
- 7. Provincial government (general)
- 8. Provincial government spokesperson – economic (incl. cabinet ministers)

9. Provincial government spokesperson—environmental (incl. cabinet ministers)
10. Provincial government spokesperson—social (incl. cabinet ministers)
11. Provincial opposition parties
12. Mayor of RMWB
13. RMWB Municipal government spokesperson
14. US government spokesperson
15. Syncrude
16. Suncor
17. Oil sands company
18. Pipeline/distribution company
19. Banking/Investment/Energy Analyst
20. Energy business association/institute (e.g., Chamber of Mines, RIWG, CERI but not CAPP who has it own number)
21. Labour organization
22. Environmental group/institute (but not Pembina who has it own number)
23. First Nations groups
24. Academic/institute
25. Resident living in the oil sands area
26. Provincial resident
27. Other, please specify
28. CAPP
29. Pembina
30. Industry/oil patch etc.
31. Investors
32. Peter Lougheed
33. Boutlier as MLA
34. EUB
35. News media
36. Workers (including foreign workers)
99. N/A (no sources used in the story)

A source is a person, record, document that provides information for a story (e.g. look for direct or indirect quotations). If the newspaper quotes a document attribute it to the author.

23. How does the first source view oil sands development?

1. Positively
2. Negatively
3. Neutral or balance fashion
99. N/A (no second source)

Take into account, the total perspective of the source in the article, not just the first quote. Only code as positive or negative if it is obvious to the reader.

24. Identify the second source in the story

Use the above list, identify the second actor in the headline or use 99 if there is no second actor.

25. How does the second source view oil sands development?

1. Positively
2. Negatively
3. Neutral or balance fashion
99. N/A (no second source)

Take into account, the total perspective of the source in the article, not just the first quote. Only code as positive or negative if it is obvious to the reader.

26	LocationOther	Specify the other location in the newspaper
27	StorytypeOther	Specify the other story type.
28	WrittenOther	Specify the other location where the story was written from.
29	HeadlineMFOther	Specify the other main frame of the headline.
30	HeadlineEMOther	If one of the "other" variables was selected, specify it.
31	FirstHeadActorOther	Specify the first actor named, if other was selected
32	SecondHeadActorOther	Specify the second actor named, if other was selected
33	StoryMFOther	Specify the other main frame of the story
34	StoryEMOther	If one of the "other" variables was selected, specify it.
35	FirstSourceOther	Specify the first source if other was selected
36	SecondSourceOther	Specify the second source if other was selected.

Discourse Analysis¹⁰⁸	
General note: Where appropriate, identify the following:	
Rhetorical Devices	Includes analogy, metaphors, irony, hyperbole, euphemisms Look for phrasing which is used as a “shortcut”
Intertextualities	List any pre-existing resources that an article refers to (e.g., government policy, stakeholder reports). The objective is to find out what is being re-presented into the public discourse through the media. This variable will generate a list of documents that will then be more closely scrutinized.
Interesting Quotes	Self-explanatory
Normative Assumptions	Taken for granted beliefs – For example, the view that technology will solve tomorrow’s crisis
Problem Definition	If the issue is presented as a problem, broadly speaking how it is being defined, who is blamed for it and who is being held responsible for its solution.

¹⁰⁸ This checklist (Discourse Analysis) is based upon one developed by Sarah Gerritsen and Sandra Grey (14 January 2004) for their working study of New Zealand abortion discourse.