This study explores the development and maintenance of topics on the public agenda and tests whether, for a new issue to compete for attention, an old issue must be displaced. This study finds little support for that assumption, and argues that the maintenance of topics is complex and the displacement effect is not as powerful as once assumed.

Research and theory concerning the development and maintenance of topics on the public agenda has evolved over the last twenty years. In 1971, Herbert Blumer called for the study of the development and history of social problems. Although some progress toward such a theory has been made, there remains a great deal of work to be done. One of the most promising theoretical models proposed is the “public arenas model” developed by Hilgartner and Bosk.

The public arenas model accepts Blumer’s view that the ascendance of certain social conditions to the status of “social problem” is poorly related to any objective measure of the importance of those conditions. For instance, the concern over the killing of animals for fur is treated as a social problem while the ongoing slaughter of native peoples in the Amazon is not. More specifically, only those conditions having certain characteristics, such as drama, and which are actively pushed by advocacy groups, will rise to a place of social prominence. Because resources are scarce, the success of those trying to raise a new social condition onto the public agenda would mean the elimination of a current social problem from one or more public arenas. To maintain a certain social condition as a social problem, activists must develop new angles or concerns to hold the attention of those in the arena. Thus, activists must continually publicize individual issues, innovations, or personalized problems likely to draw attention to the conditions defined as a social problem.

Some theorists argue that as time goes by, public attention to a particular social problem will wane, even if the objective conditions related to that problem have not changed. If public boredom leads to waning attention, the issue simply dies away. Another source of decline is “displacement.” In this case, a new social problem emerges or an old one re-emerges, and because of the limited capacity of public arenas, the existing problem is forced off the agenda.

Certain specific institutional arenas, such as the court system or the mass media, act as “environments” where social problems compete for

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attention and grow. Hilgartner and Bosk state, "The collective definition of social problems occurs not in some vague location such as society or public opinion but in particular public arenas in which social problems are framed and grow."

All public arenas have certain features. Most important for this research is the feature known as "carrying capacity." A given arena has limited resources to deal with a practically limitless potential pool of problems. Hilgartner and Bosk state that the practical outcome of this limitation is that, "except to the extent that the carrying capacity of the institutional arenas is expanding, the ascendance of one social problem will tend to be accompanied by the decline of one or more others." This view appears to assume that there is no significant unused capacity in the arenas — any new problem must push aside an existing problem to make its own room. Zhu studied the interactions of recession, deficit, and war stories and found a "zero-sum" interaction. However, Zhu's analysis does not explain why a particular problem would be displaced. As such, there is no way of determining whether the coincidental decline of one issue and rise of another represents displacement. If we accept that the agenda is dynamic, there will always be problems on the rise and in decline. If issues are compared without sufficient justification for their choice, pure chance may lead to positive results. As Zhu points out, the zero-sum assumption underlying agenda-setting research and public arenas theory is a critical one. We agree that the methodological studies of a single issue over time lose track of this consideration. Thus, replication of Zhu's work using public problems determined theoretically is necessary to test the displacement hypothesis. We will test this "displacement hypothesis" using topics of tremendous current importance.

Hilgartner and Bosk state that the news media act as a public arena. Thus, the press represents one of a small number of sites for the intense competition among groups advocating their positions and trying to raise them onto the social agenda. The carrying capacity for media can be determined by measuring their column inches, minutes of air time, or number of productions per year.

Although the public arenas model is a rather complicated set of propositions and theoretical assertions, it treats the press in a simplistic manner. In order to test the model, some important complexities relating to the press must be considered.

First, media vary in their capacity to attend to issues. Radio probably presents the fewest issues in regular news coverage, and newspapers the most. Television, like radio, is quite limited in the scope of its issue coverage, while magazines will tend to cover fewer issues than newspapers, but with a great deal of depth per story.

Second, the media vary in their ability to expand and contract with the demands of the moment. Newspapers can add pages more easily than television news can preempt regular programming. Magazines quite regularly change the amount of non-advertising content they carry, but radio does not unless a monumental story such as the Gulf War occurs.

Third, the public arenas model treats the production of news as though it occurred in a single step. However, much of the news carried in newspapers and on television originates in newswires such as the Associated Press and United Press International, or news services like the New York Times service and the Los Angeles Times—Washington Post service. Are these, also, public arenas with the attendant problems of limited capacity? Projecting
from the model, it seems as if they are, but their capacity is a great deal larger than that of the press organizations they supply. The newswires carry a huge amount of content each day, only a fraction of which is printed in newspapers (less than 20 percent for a suburban evening paper according to a study by Bagdikian) or carried on local television. Thus, it is problematic as to whether a displacement effect could be expected to occur in the newswires.

Fourth, the public arenas model implies that media content consists mainly of coverage of a few major social problems, with a small amount of entertainment content filling in the discussion. Casual perusal of the newspaper or attention to television shows that social problem content is relatively limited. It seems possible that the introduction of a new social problem will displace "soft news" that was available to fill up the space between the advertisements rather than push another social problem off the agenda.

Finally, internal structures of media organizations constrain not only how many problems they can handle, but which ones. Press organizations, in particular, assign groups of reporters and editors to arbitrarily defined divisions or beats – determined both by geography (city desk) and by topical area (science beat). A new problem falling into a beat where there is currently no major social problem will be more likely to grow quickly than one falling into a beat which already covers one or more such social problems. This is true for two reasons.

Beats are set up long-term and so resources such as reporters, camerapeople, and editors will not be transferred from one beat to another to cover transient issues. If a new social problem persists and retains prominence, there may be a gradual shift.

The power and prestige of the different beats is largely based on, and used to maintain, the share and prominence of news content placed in the paper or on the newscast by that beat. Thus, if a single beat gets two big areas for coverage, the other beats will not necessarily give way and provide additional resources and room for the problem to grow – the growth of one story on a beat must come largely from within the much smaller confines of that beat's allotted space or time rather than from the total available newshole (with room for some adjustment).

In order to test the displacement portion of the public arenas model as it relates to the press, it is necessary to find at least two social problems of sufficient magnitude that they generate substantial coverage in various press outlets. They must be related – i.e., they must fall within the same media-defined topic area or beat. One problem must be traced during a period of time from relative obscurity until it has become a major social concern. The effect of that problem on coverage of subsequent social issues must be documented over time. The coverage of the problems in several press outlets, as well as in at least one newswire, must be reviewed.

The development of AIDS as a social problem provides an excellent test case for this model. AIDS was unknown in the United States prior to the early 1980s. Since that time it has become the number one priority on the Public Health Service agenda. AIDS has been called the most devastating public health problem of this century. The preeminence of AIDS as a public health concern is controversial. Some have argued that either heart disease or cancer (both representing much larger numbers of cases leading to death or debilitation) should remain the top priority. Some point out that many sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), often less well known than AIDS, have
been increasing at an alarming rate during the last decade. Some argue that all STDs should be considered together and that defining the problem as AIDS specifically has distorted thinking and public policy.

For the society as a whole, setting the public health agenda is a critical process. How resources are distributed as well as the total amount of resources devoted to public health will quite literally mean life or death for large numbers of people.

A recent study by Rogers, Dearing, and Chang looked at AIDS as a social problem using an expanded agenda-setting perspective, meant to subsume both “natural history” and public arenas models of public issue development. Although the researchers did not compare the development of AIDS to other social problems, they did find competition among “sub-issues” of AIDS for newspaper space.

As a test of the public arenas model, Rogers et. al’s study has several shortcomings. Most important for this research, it does not relate the huge increase in the coverage of AIDS during the 1980s with any reduction in the coverage of another social problem. In our analysis we will compare coverage of AIDS with coverage of cancer and of other STDs in the press.

The volume of AIDS coverage can be compared to that of other serious illnesses - in this research STDs and cancer - to test for displacement of that content as AIDS moves from no coverage (prior to 1981, the medical community was unaware of AIDS) to the “Story of the Decade” according to Abe Rosenthal.

AIDS. The medical community first became aware of the presence of AIDS in 1981 when five unusual cases of pneumocystis pneumonia among homosexual men in Los Angeles were reported by the Centers for Disease Control. In 1983, the U.S. Public Health Service named AIDS as its number one priority, but heavy coverage in the mainstream press did not occur until 1985. By 1990, more than one hundred thousand confirmed cases had been reported, with more than seventy thousand deaths resulting. The CDC estimates that more than one million U.S. citizens are human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) positive.

Beyond even the great personal tragedy AIDS has caused for those infected and those close to them, it has affected the legal system, the health system, relations among groups in society (especially gay and hetero groups), insurance provision and costs, sex education in schools, and a host of other important facets of American life.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Sexually transmitted diseases other than AIDS represent a significant threat to the U.S. population despite an apparent disbelief that they do. Many different diseases fall into this category, some of which can cause sterility, disability, or even death. During the decade of the 1980s, a general trend of success in combatting STDs that had been the norm since World War Two began to reverse. The epidemic development of new diseases and increased incidence of familiar ones have led to great concern within the public health establishment. A recent estimate by the CDC states that 1991 saw twelve million cases of health-threatening STDs in the United States.

Cancer. Cancer, which is actually a term covering a large family of diseases, is second to cardiovascular disease as an illness-related cause of death in the United States. A slow but steady increase of deaths by cancer occurred during the 1980s. In 1980, 416,509 deaths were attributed to cancer. By 1989, the number had risen to 497,220.
These health-threatening conditions were all chosen because of their similarities as potential social problems in the press. They all have been defined as public health problems, and fall into the medical/science beat on major newspapers.

AIDS, like other STDs, can be passed along during sexual encounters of several types. Discussion of STDs carries the same potential backlash against press organizations from upset readers/viewers as AIDS stories.

Cancer, which can be severely debilitating, and is often fatal, has the additional characteristic of being largely mysterious, as was AIDS during the earliest years of the epidemic. Those with cancer often are unable to continue in their work, and may become sick for very long periods of time, as is also often true with AIDS. In addition, the uncertainty of a cure gives cancer a fearful aura much like that of AIDS. People living with AIDS (PLWAs) may develop a rare form of cancer, Kaposi's Sarcoma.

AIDS is unique in several ways, some of which affect its newsworthiness. First, so far, no one can be said to have been "cured," nor even "in remission." AIDS is linked to male homosexuality in the United States, although not in some regions of the world, notably Africa. Some blame a promiscuous form of homosexual lifestyle for the rapid spread of the disease. AIDS has the potential to grow to large enough proportions that it could become one of our leading causes of death and disablement, overtax our health system, and seriously damage the economy of the nation. While cancer can be deadly, its victims are usually older people rather than young, otherwise healthy men, the most common victims of AIDS-related disease.

Although the topics chosen are closely related, they are not a perfect fit. It is highly unlikely that any two or three social problems will ever arise with identical or nearly-identical features. We have chosen three social problems which afford the displacement hypothesis one of its best potential tests. Thus, if the displacement hypothesis of the public arenas model is correct, we should see evidence of it here.

The number of stories concerning AIDS, cancer, and STDs in newspapers, television network news, the Associated Press, the biomedical research literature, and the alternative press were estimated for the time period from 1980 through 1990. We began our estimates in 1980, prior to the first publications concerning AIDS, in order to help set a baseline for the other topics. Data collection was continued until December 1990 where possible.

To estimate the number of newspaper stories concerning AIDS, STDs, and cancer, we hand-counted the number of story entries in indexes for the following press outlets during the period from January 1980 through December 1990: New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, San Francisco Chronicle, and New Orleans Times-Picayune. In addition, USA Today stories were counted for the period from 1985 through 1990. For the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, no index was available from 1980-1982, so counts from 1983 through 1990 were carried out.

Stories concerning our topics found on ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts were estimated through counts of stories in the index to the Vanderbilt television archives. A measure of nonmainstream coverage of these health issues was provided by hand counts of stories covering AIDS, cancer, and STDs in the Alternative Press Index.
A story count on the AP was also carried out. This was accomplished by using a computerized search strategy on the NEXIS database which identified stories on the AP related to AIDS, cancer, Herpes, Gonhorrea, Syphilis, Chlamydia, and Hepatitis during each quarter from January 1980 through December 1990.

A study of the number of articles related to AIDS, cancer, and STDs on the Medline, a huge medical database (391,730 total citations in 1989) indexing medical journals and publications, was undertaken for the period from the first quarter of 1980 through the first quarter of 1990 in order to study potential displacement effects in the medical arena.

Story counts will first be compared to estimates of the total number of stories—regardless of topic—carried on the AP and Medline. The percentage of total stories/articles allotted to AIDS, cancer, and STDs will be calculated. If the ratio is exceedingly low, it will be considered unlikely that the development of a single social problem will displace others.

Declines in stories concerning STDs or cancer concurrent with increases in the number of AIDS stories will support the public arenas model. Thus, a sizable negative correlation between the number of AIDS stories and the number of STD stories or cancer stories in a given newspaper, newswire, or index will be required to support the public arenas model of media behavior. We decided that any correlation that was not at least as strong as -0.30 did not support the displacement hypothesis. That is because $R^2$ would be 9% and anything less than this does not appear to represent a significant impact of one series on another. Were this not exploratory research, we might have set our criterion at a higher level. In order to see that the Medline test is not confounded by its increasing coverage during the 1980s, we will control for the total number of stories carried per year in our calculations.

Finally, visual inspection of these relationships often can help explain them in ways that simple correlations cannot, so for each of our sources we will graph the number of stories/articles concerning AIDS, cancer, and STDs, by quarter, for the time period under study.22

**Findings**

The capacity of the AP newswire is more than adequate to deal with the increase in AIDS stories without stress. We estimated the total number of stories carried on the national wire for the time period from the first quarter of 1985 through the third quarter of 1990. During this period, the number of stories ranged from a low of 36,318 in the first quarter of 1985 to a high of 42,325 during the first quarter of 1988, with an average of about 38,500. At its most intense, the coverage of AIDS reached 442 stories during the second quarter of 1987, or 1.1% of the stories on the AP for that time period.

Likewise, the number of AIDS articles indexed on the Medline make up a small percentage of the total, even though the index is limited to medical topics. At a maximum, during the first quarter of 1990, AIDS articles made up 1.9% of the citations on Medline. Quarterly fluctuations in total articles indexed often exceed this percentage. Unlike our other sources, cancer is a far more common topic of articles on the Medline than is AIDS. Cancer accounts for a significant percentage of the total number of articles. The peak for cancer was in the fourth quarter of 1988, when 8.0% of the citations were for cancer. Thus, a large increase in cancer articles could conceivably displace articles concerning other diseases. Cancer citations were relatively steady from quarter to quarter, however.
TABLE 1
Correlations among Story Counts, Selected Sources, 1980-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>AIDS and Cancer #</th>
<th>AIDS and STDs +</th>
<th>Cancer and STDs +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Journal and Constitution</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.226</td>
<td>.593*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.394*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>-.307</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans Times-Picayune</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>-.226</td>
<td>.522*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>-.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>-.168</td>
<td>-.314*</td>
<td>.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</td>
<td>-.254</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>.439*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>-.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>-.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>-.116</td>
<td>-.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>-.192</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-.261</td>
<td>-.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Press</td>
<td>.458*</td>
<td>.767*</td>
<td>.374*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Press</td>
<td>-.212</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medline (Controlling for total number of stories)</td>
<td>.377*</td>
<td>.175*</td>
<td>.789*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*meets our criterion of r squared > .09
# based on monthly story totals
+ based on quarterly story totals

The relationship between the number of AIDS and cancer stories was tested by correlating the number of stories per month concerning AIDS with those concerning cancer in our newspaper, television, and alternative press sources. It was not practical to carry out these calculations monthly for the Associated Press or Medline, so quarterly counts were correlated for these sources. Data were only available up to the first quarter of 1990 for the Medline. The total number of articles indexed per quarter on the Medline increased significantly during our study period. In order to control for this influence, we calculated partial correlations among our Medline citation counts, with the total quarterly number of articles in the index as the control variable.

The numbers of stories on STDs per month in all sources but the Medline were so small that the correlations between STDs and the other two topics were unstable. We used quarterly totals to generate correlations between STDs and the other diseases. The correlations between numbers of stories for each of several sources are in Table 1.

The evidence does not demonstrate a displacement effect of AIDS on either cancer or STDs. If AIDS had an effect it was a slight one. Only for the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times did the negative correlation meet our criterion of support for displacement (-.30). Although the majority of newspapers provided negative correlations, they were not large enough to meet our criterion. The results concerning the relation between AIDS and STD coverage are mixed. An intriguing but unexpected result is the strong positive correlations between cancer and STD coverage which emerge for four of our papers. In these cases, the greater the number of cancer stories, the greater the number of STD stories. This directly opposes the displace-
ment hypothesis. Zhu has called this mutual reinforcement or “symbiosis” among issues. 23

Weak positive correlations between AIDS and cancer coverage were found for each of the three television networks. Weak negative correlations between coverage of STDs and AIDS and between coverage of STDs and cancer were common.

There was a strong negative correlation between AIDS and cancer coverage in the alternative press. Correlations between AIDS and STD stories and between cancer and STD stories showed no pattern. It may be that the resources available to oppositional groups or outside the mainstream press are the most constrained of all, so that displacement is maximized in this arena.

For both the Associated Press and the Medline, correlations among all three variables were positive and strong. In order to test for the possibility that the correlations for the AP were due to changes in total stories carried by quarter, the correlations among the three variables were calculated while controlling for total stories per quarter. Because we only had estimates of the total stories for 1985 on, this reduced our timeline by half. The correlations found remained positive, significant, and strong. Although we are unable to account for this finding, it is strong evidence against the hypothesized displacement effect as it relates to newswires. The results on the Medline paralleled those on the AP. The correlations between the citation trends remained positive even when controlling for the total number of Medline stories per quarter.

FIGURE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Graph showing quarterly sum of AIDS, Cancer, and STD stories carried on Associated Press Newswire, 1980-1990]
A graphic presentation of the number of AIDS, cancer, and STD stories per quarter for the Associated Press newswire is provided in Figure 1. There is no discernible relationship among the number of stories on each of our topics.

Thus, for those papers where a negative correlation between AIDS and cancer coverage was found, it does not appear to have originated in a reduction in the availability of cancer stories on the newswire.

We next graphed the total quarterly story counts in all of our newspapers combined (excluding the Atlanta Journal and Constitution and USA Today due to the gaps in their data). The result can be seen in Figure 2.

The graph of total newspaper coverage shows that a slight downward trend in cancer coverage occurred in the same time period that saw a huge increase in AIDS coverage. To support the theory that new issues displace old, a steep drop in cancer coverage coinciding with the steep increase in AIDS coverage during the period from 1985 to 1987 would have been expected. Another important feature of the graph is that as AIDS coverage declined sharply during the 1988-1990 period, cancer and STD coverage did not rebound. Figure 2 seems to indicate that a long-run decline in cancer stories had begun prior to the huge increase in AIDS coverage. STD stories peaked in the early AIDS years, with little if any clear relationship to the AIDS trend line.

Although the evidence for a displacement effect in newspapers is limited, the more constricted broadcast format might lead to significant displacement. To test for this, we combined the coverage found in the

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**FIGURE 2**

Quarterly Sum of AIDS, Cancer, and STD Stories in All Sampled Newspapers, 1980-1990*

*USA Today and Atlanta Constitution excluded due to incomplete data.
evening newscasts for the three major networks and graphed the outcome in Figure 3.

In this case, cancer coverage appears to have increased during the late 1980s, the period with the heaviest AIDS coverage. Although cancer and AIDS coverage seems to have decreased simultaneously in 1990, we hesitate to overinterpret our limited data here and will wait to see if this is a trend or simply a coincidental finding.

In the alternative press, coverage of cancer and of STDs is exceedingly low to begin with. Coverage of cancer declines slightly as AIDS coverage increases. If these two phenomena are related, they are only slightly so.

Unlike our other sources, the Medline grew significantly in volume during the period under study. The number of articles indexed increased from 253,432 in 1980 to 391,730 in 1989. Thus, an increase in the number of citations in major disease categories could be predicted as a natural consequence of the expanding volume of the database. In order to look for displacement effects on the Medline, we studied trends in the proportion of all citations attributable to AIDS, cancer, and STDs. This would help to remove the impact of an ever-increasing base of total citations over time. Figure 4 illustrates the relation among the three categories.

One important feature of this graph is that cancer far outweighs AIDS in number of citations, unlike in any of the other sources. That is, in the medical literature, cancer is much higher on the agenda than AIDS. We found a fairly significant proportion of all citations which related to cancers. In 1980,

FIGURE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDs (not including AIDS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing quarterly totals of AIDS, Cancer, and STD stories in evening television network newscasts, 1980-1990.](image)
cancer citations made up about 6% of the total. They rose to 8% by the mid-1980s and remained at that level through 1989. AIDS rose from 0% to 2% during our time period and STDs contributed a constant low percentage of citations (0%). Although the proportion of citations contributed by cancer did not decline in the face of AIDS, it did not increase at the rate found in the early 1980s, either. This provides us with mixed evidence, then. The positive correlation between AIDS and cancer citations found above no longer appears to indicate "symbiosis." A longer timeline may help us to interpret further.

Although there is a small amount of support for the displacement hypothesis in the realm of reporting of public health problems, the situation is more complicated and the effect less powerful than Hilgartner and Bosk would lead us to believe.

First, the evidence is mixed. What appears to be a displacement effect of AIDS coverage on cancer coverage in a few newspapers is absent from others. No displacement effect can be found in the Associated Press (actually, a positive relationship between AIDS and cancer coverage was found there). No displacement effect appears to occur in the medical journal space (again, positive correlations were the finding). Little, if any, such effect can be found in the alternative press. On network television, in opposition to the displace-

**Conclusions**

**FIGURE 4**
Quarterly Proportion of Medline Citations Relating to AIDS, Cancer, and STDs, 1980-First Quarter, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AIDS</th>
<th>Cancer</th>
<th>STDs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ment hypothesis for AIDS and cancer, a positive correlation between AIDS and cancer coverage is found. Although the correlations for AIDS and STDs point in the right direction, they are weak.

Two explanations for the slight negative correlations found for the newspapers compete with the displacement hypothesis. The first is that a gradual reduction in cancer coverage was underway prior to the development of AIDS as a major public health problem. This coincides with the gradual decline in cancer coverage found from the beginning of the timeline to the end on several of the graphs. In general, cancer coverage did not react to the steep increases and decreases of AIDS coverage found on the graphs.

Another explanation, which may be limited to a couple of newspaper indexes, is that the indexing format for stories in one or more of the newspapers may have changed at some point in time. This could have resulted in an increase or decrease in the number of entries (counted here as stories) in one or more of the topic areas. Thus, a change in the indexing system for cancer stories which would lead to fewer entries, if it coincided with a period of high volume in AIDS stories, could lead to a negative correlation, even in the absence of a correlation among actual story numbers in the newspapers themselves.

It is possible that AIDS displaced another public health problem or even another less-related topic. However, it would be very difficult to predict what topic that would be before searching among a number of topics for one which declined during the 1980s. To sift through a number of topics to find one that declined and then take this as evidence for the displacement hypothesis would make it unfalsifiable.

The best conclusion at this point seems to be that there is little if any significant displacement of one public health problem by another in the press or medical literature. In those few newspapers where displacement was found, the effect is much less dramatic than the public arenas model would predict. The only source exhibiting significant displacement is the alternative press, undoubtedly the most resource-constrained among our sample. Thus, the Public Arenas Model, as applied to the press, is not supported. Nor is Zhu’s “Zero-Sum theory of Agenda-Setting.” Further study, using longer timelines and a greater array of issues, is warranted.

NOTES

5. Downs, “Up and Down.”


18. Earlier indexes for *USA Today* were not available.

19. Counts were carried out by hand. For the *New York Times*, counts were taken from *The NY Times Index* (NY: NY Times Co.). For the *Washington Post*, counts were taken from *Bell & Howell’s Newspaper Index to the Washington Post* (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for the years 1980-1981, from *The Official Washington Post Index* vols. 4-10 (Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications) for 1982-1988, and *The Washington Post Index* vols. 1 and 2 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for 1989-1990. For the *Los Angeles Times*, the counts were taken from *Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the Los Angeles Times* (Wooster, OH: The Center) for the years 1980-1985, and from the *Los Angeles Times Index* vols. 3-7 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for the period 1986-1990. Counts for the *Chicago Tribune* were taken from *Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the Chicago Tribune* (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for the period 1980-1981, from the *Chicago Tribune Index* vols. 1 and 2 (NY: New York Times Co.) for the period 1982-1983, and from the *Chicago Tribune Index* vols. 3-9 (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms International) for 1984-1990. Counts of *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* stories were taken from the *Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for the period 1980-1985, from the *Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for 1986 and from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch Index* vols. 13-16 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for the period 1987-1990. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* counts were taken from *Bell & Howell’s Newspaper Index to the New Orleans Times-Picayune* (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for
1980, Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the New Orleans Times-Picayune/The States-Item (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for the years 1981-1986 and The Times-Picayune Index vols. 16-19 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for 1987-1990. Counts for USA Today were taken from Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to USA Today from 1985-1986 and from USA Today Index vols. 6-9 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International) for the period 1987-1990. Counts for the San Francisco Chronicle were obtained from the Bell & Howell Newspaper Index to the San Francisco Chronicle (Wooster, OH: Bell & Howell) for the period 1980-1990.


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