

Abstract:

POWER AND PLACE: A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO RETHINKING CRISIS
COMMUNICATION

by

Carolyn Kusbit Dunn

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Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Michelle Eble

Department: English

This dissertation examines a 2003 explosion at a pharmaceutical plant in Kinston, North Carolina against the framework of both crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis theory. In the wake of the explosion, the corporation that owned the plant engaged in communication that was widely viewed as positive by stakeholders and successful in terms of best practices in crisis communication. The communication is analyzed utilizing Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The communication is also analyzed utilizing critical discourse analysis theory developed by Fairclough and Van Dijk to determine if the power balance between the pharmaceutical plant and the community it resided in impacted the ability of the company to frame the discourse surrounding the event and the ability of stakeholders to question that framing. This dissertation makes an argument for crisis communication theory to include aspects of critical discourse analysis in order to assess and balance the power relationship between organizations and their stakeholders.

POWER AND PLACE: A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO RETHINKING
CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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By
Carolyn Kusbit Dunn

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Carolyn Kusbit Dunn

APPROVED BY:

Director of Dissertation: _____

Dr. Michelle Eble

Committee Member: _____

Dr. Will Banks

Committee Member: _____

Dr. Michael Behm

Committee Member: _____

Dr. Wendy Sharer

Chair of English Department: _____

Dr. Ron Mitchelson

Dean of the Graduate School: _____

Paul J. Gemperline, PhD

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the preface to the second edition of *Language and Power*, author Norman Fairclough notes that the book “is about how language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society” (Fairclough iix). This dissertation is, at its heart, essentially about the same thing and yet not. Fairclough argues that it is language itself that begets and maintains power. What this dissertation attempts to address is how power silences some voices, creating a vacuum in which only the language of the powerful can be heard.

It will also attempt to join the disparate theories of crisis communication and critical discourse analysis. Crisis communication theory is usually the bailiwick of communication and business scholars, and centers primarily on how an organization uses language to protect itself during and after a crisis. A company is labeled as successful or not successful in terms of its crisis communication strategies while its context within the community is only considered in terms of whether or not it has any good will to draw from during the crisis, and what role that good will plays in the company’s success or failure. The notion of power, who has it, how it is wielded and how it should be wielded, is not usually part of the current discussion. Critical discourse theories, on the other hand, do consider the notion of power, and recognize that language, as Fairclough suggests, is integral to maintaining a dominant position in a community. This dissertation will examine a specific corporate crisis from both crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis perspectives in an effort to suggest that crisis communication scholars should consider the role that power relations play in the outcome of a crisis. Methodologically and theoretically, this approach shifts the emphasis from what a company says during a crisis to what employees, citizens and other stakeholders are not saying as a result of a

company's position within the community. In his book on the work of Antonio Gramsci, author Steve Jones refers to this concept as being "noisily silenced" (Jones). As researchers, we need to be aware of those voices that are being drowned out and consider them at least as much as we consider the corporate voices heard during a crisis. Doing this will ultimately create a more reflective crisis communication theory that takes the perspective of all stakeholders into account.

The Crisis

A crisis, in common terms, is more or less what Webster's dictionary calls an "unstable condition." It is a flashpoint, usually some type of cataclysmic event. A crisis can be a natural event, such as a hurricane, or a man-made problem, such as an oil spill or building collapse. For organizations, crises usually translate into exposure: exposure to liability, exposure to criticism, and exposure to negative media coverage. Matthew Seeger and Robert Ulmer paraphrase a number of crisis communication scholars in stating that organizational crises "represent a fundamental threat to the very stability of the system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and risk to high priority goals, including organizational image, legitimacy, profitability and ultimately survival" (Seeger & Ulmer, "A Post Crisis" 126). Interestingly enough, Antonio Gramsci, a scholar who developed the concept of hegemony that many discourse scholars draw from, understood a crisis as the point at which the hegemonic position must work harder to shore up or maintain its position (Jones). Though Gramsci's theories were intended to address political situations, his description can also apply to an organization in crisis.

Because of the threat to the organization's stability, a crisis nearly always prompts some type of action on the part of the organization geared toward staving off or reducing any negative repercussions. The action always involves some type of communication, be it via news

conferences, public appearances, prepared statements or press releases. The study of these types of documents, and how an organization uses them, is a primary focus of crisis communication studies. The specific crisis this dissertation will examine is an explosion at an industrial facility in a small community in 2003.

The crisis in question will be explained in more detail a bit further in this chapter. I describe it in brief now. On January 29, 2003, the West Pharmaceutical Services plant in Kinston, North Carolina exploded. The blast killed six employees and injured several dozen more. In the aftermath of the explosion, which was ultimately blamed on a buildup of combustible polyethylene dust above a false ceiling in the plant, the company was praised for its handling of the incident and never accepted blame for the explosion, despite a U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) report that suggested West was ultimately at fault. The City of Kinston and Lenoir County gave the company a substantial incentive package to remain in the community, and West suffered no lasting economic or apparent reputational damage from the incident.

My primary question is how? How is it that West emerged from this disaster and crisis without damaging its reputation or profitability? People died, others were so badly injured that they spent months in a burn unit, one victim was permanently blinded. West had information in its possession that indicated the dust was combustible, but failed to realize the risk. Some might argue that West, in not recognizing the hazard, was responsible for the explosion, and yet the company was rewarded with a quarter million dollars in state funds and a brand new building, with the support and approval of the community, its leaders and even the employees themselves.

In order to think through that overarching question, this dissertation focuses on answering two, more narrowly focused questions. The first is what crisis communication strategies did West employ that allowed them to emerge successfully from this event? The second is what role did West's power in the community, and the lack of power of other constituents, play in the outcome?

Previous research on organizational communication during a crisis has focused almost exclusively on a company's behavior before, during and after the crisis, and how that behavior influences its ability to weather the crisis and remain profitable. A number of crisis communication theories have been developed that catalog and explain an organization's attempt to manage and recover from a crisis. But the current research on and theories of crisis communication do not consider how a company's context, or the power relations within a community, affects or even assists its ability to recover.

West held a certain position in the community that would help them frame the event. The context of West within the community was what ultimately allowed the company to establish its discourse as dominant and emerge from the crisis with no lasting reputational or economic damage. Had the company not been in a dominant position, had the community not been beholden to the jobs West provided, the public, the government, and the media may have been less likely to accept West's framing of the event. But because of that context, the community had little choice and/or voice.

The West Pharmaceutical Services Explosion

Just before 1:30 pm on Wednesday, January 29, 2003, a police officer on patrol in the City of Kinston, North Carolina, noticed a plume of smoke rising above the trees over the West plant a mile away. The West facility manufactured rubber components for medical equipment – plungers for syringes and seals for vials, for instance. According to a U.S. Chemical and Safety Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) report, the officer contacted the police dispatch center to find out if a “controlled burn” exercise was being conducted at the nearby airport. Moments later, the officer watched as the smoke grew to form a cloud hundreds of feet tall. He felt the accompanying explosion, and raced to the scene of the fire. The police officer, along with US Army Reservists and National Guard personnel, both of which had offices nearby, found the West plant in flames and began evacuating employees (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board Report).

In the moments immediately following the explosion, there was confusion about where and what had occurred. The force of the explosion was felt for miles, and windows in a school roughly a mile away were shattered by the blast. With the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks less than two years in the past, there was concern that a plane had gone down at the nearby airport, but that theory was quickly discounted. When emergency crews arrived on the scene, they found West employees shocked and, in some cases, trapped in the burning building. One male employee clung to what was left of the building’s second floor framework. Firefighters had to rescue him from the perch. The lawn behind the plant became a triage area where injured employees sought initial treatment (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board Report).

The explosion triggered several fires in the building, and the force of the blast severed the sprinkler system lines, rendering them useless. The worst of the fires would burn for several days. Three people were killed immediately and three others died later of their wounds. Thirty-eight people were injured. All six of those who died were working on the ground floor of the plant. Three were working near one of the plant's "batchoff machines," a machine used to process rubber (U.S. Chemical and Safety and Hazard Investigation Board Report). A fourth was working near a second batchoff machine. The fifth victim was thrown into another area of the plant by the force of the explosion, and the sixth victim was pinned beneath debris. Rescuers tried to reach this final victim, but were forced to abandon the attempt because of the spreading fire. The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board attributed the deaths to "thermal burns or blunt force trauma" (U.S. Chemical and Safety Hazard Investigation Board Report).

West Pharmaceutical Services is a global company with manufacturing facilities in several U.S. states and foreign countries. West had been a fixture in the community for several decades. The plant in Lenoir County opened in 1975. Lenoir County and the city of Kinston (population roughly 25,000), the county seat, had been suffering economically for years. According to government officials interviewed as part of this research, the traditional businesses that formed much of the employment base for the community had been closing for years prior to the blast. Kinston was left with a shrinking population, many of whom did not have any advanced education or skills. In this context, West was extremely important to the community's overall economic health.

The West facility in Kinston employed 264 people in a manufacturing facility that was roughly 150,000 square feet. Both at the time and now, West represents one of Lenoir County's largest employers. The manufacturing facility essentially had two sections: a rubber

compounding operation and a rubber finishing operation. In the rubber compounding area, ingredients were mixed together to create the rubber, which was then rolled smooth into strips. The strips were then dipped in a vat of liquid made up of water and polyethylene powder and air dried. The dry strips were then moved to the finishing section of the plant, where they were formed into syringe plungers and vial stoppers. The explosion occurred in the rubber compounding section of the plant. The explosion and accompanying fires destroyed the facility (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board Report).

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board is a federal agency, much like the National Transportation Safety Board that investigates airplane crashes. The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB for short) has, as its charge,

“to ensure the safety of workers, the public and the environment by investigating and preventing chemical incidents...established by the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, CSB is responsible for determining the root and contributing causes of accidents, issuing safety recommendations, studying chemical safety issues and evaluating the effectiveness of other government agencies involved in chemical safety.” (U.S. Chemical and Safety Hazard Investigation Board Report)

It is not a regulatory agency; CSB only investigates incidents and then reports on the causes. The CSB can make recommendations, but it has no enforcement capability. CSB did investigate the West Pharmaceutical facility explosion and all of its findings are available on the CSB website (http://www.csb.gov/investigations/detail.aspx?SID=36&Type=2&pg=1&F_All=y).

The CSB investigation determined that the blast itself occurred when polyethylene dust that had accumulated above the plant's false ceiling and roof ignited. The ignition source was

never discovered, and employees interviewed by CSB in the wake of the incident said there was nothing – no “sight sound or odor” – that indicated something unusual was occurring on the day of the blast. The CSB report noted that West officials stated the compounding room was cleaned daily to remove dust, primarily because the plant produced medical devices and was governed by the Food and Drug Administration. Because of that, cleaning the facility was part of normal procedure. However, the CSB reported that there was no program in place to clean dust that accumulated above the false ceiling, and that West officials did not understand the combustible nature of the polyethylene dust. Employees interviewed after the accident noted that the amount of dust above the ceiling varied, but one employee who had been in that area several weeks before the explosion estimated the dust to be 0.5 inches covering 90 percent of the area. A West company investigation subsequently put the level at 0.125 to 0.25 inches deep.

The CSB presented its final report on the incident in September, 2004, roughly a year and a half after the explosion. The report concluded that the “root causes” of the incident were as follows:

- West did not perform adequate engineering assessment of the use of powdered zinc stearate and polyethylene as antitack agents in the rubber batchoff process.
- West engineering management systems did not ensure that relevant fire safety standards were consulted.
- West management systems for reviewing material safety data sheets did not identify combustible materials.
- The Kinston plant’s hazard communication program did not identify combustible dust hazards or make the workforce aware of such. (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board Report)

The CSB recommended that West improve its hazard communication programs and revise or develop policies to review both new materials and engineering projects for safety. The CSB report also suggested that West make sure all its facilities nationwide that deal with combustible dust adhere to National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 654: Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust Explosions from the Manufacturing, Processing and Handling of Combustible Particulate Solids. Standard 654 was first introduced in 1945, and was revised numerous times, most recently in 2006. That standard deals specifically with preventing dust explosions and is more comprehensive and strict than the state code in place in North Carolina at the time of the West explosion (Barlas).

Eventually, in July of 2003, West would be cited by the North Carolina Department of Labor for allowing the dust to build up above the ceiling and for failing to communicate the hazard to employees. The company was fined \$400,000: \$100,000 went to the state of North Carolina and \$300,000 was donated to the emergency response agencies that responded to the incident. The CSB report on the incident noted that roughly \$250,000 in equipment and supplies belonging to the local emergency response agencies were used or damaged in the response to the explosion. West officials denied the state of North Carolina's assessment that the company was at least in part to blame for the incident, but the company agreed to the state settlement because it was "the best course of action for all involved and especially our employees" (Quillin).

In denying culpability, West essentially continued a discourse it had begun on the day of the explosion itself. In the year and a half following the explosion, West officials issued a number of statements, most of which make up the corpus of data examined in the following chapters. The company never admitted fault for the explosion in any of those communications. And despite the fact that this type of dust was recognized as an explosion risk by the CSB report,

at no point during or after the crisis did any local officials or employees openly criticize the company. In fact, several entities—county, city and state officials and even the regional media in some cases expressed support for West. West emerged from the incident without a loss in its stock price or severe damage to its reputation. In addition, the company received an economic incentive package from the state of North Carolina and a building from Lenoir County in which to restart production. Then Governor Mike Easley issued a press release on the day that West agreed to remain in Kinston, nearly four months after the explosion. The company had been considering relocating the facility to Nebraska or Florida. The press release notes that the state of North Carolina would “invest” \$250,000 in grant funding in West’s replacement plant, and Governor Easley was quoted as being “very pleased” that West had decided to remain in Kinston (Easley).

The subsequent chapters of this work will focus on different aspects of the information presented thus far. Chapter two locates my analysis in current research on both crisis communication and critical discourse analysis in order to suggest what aspects of critical discourse analysis might serve to augment crisis communication theory. The inclusion of discourse analysis as part of this study raises questions about power on a number of levels. In the particular case of West, the majority of the employees would be considered blue collar or working class individuals. Therefore, I also examine a variety of sources that deal with social class specifically in order to examine the problematic relationship between workers and employers. Chapter three examines the methodology and method applied to the data. It also introduces the data itself, which includes face to face interviews of various stakeholders and a review of available data and archival texts relating to the incident. The data will be analyzed from both a crisis communication standpoint, and a critical discourse analysis standpoint in

chapter four, using particular theories of each as a framework for analysis. Finally, chapter five will attempt to blend the two methods in an effort to provide a new way of analyzing the corporate crisis for future researchers.

As noted previously, the marriage of crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis theory is not currently common. Researchers in crisis communication tend to have a business mindset, and those involved in CDA seem to put more emphasis on social issues such as evening out unbalanced power dynamics. It's interesting to note that many of the scholars who write about power dynamics, Fairclough and Gramsci for instance, express support for Marxist and Socialist principles, while the scholars who write about crisis communication tend to apply it to businesses that are inherently capitalist in nature. It may be that these two areas are diametrically opposed on a philosophical level, which may explain why crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis theory haven't been joined much in the past. In this way, my research opens new doors for investigation by bringing two competing methodologies together in order to posit a more complex understanding of crisis communication than we currently have.

Ultimately, I argue that utilizing CDA to analyze the discourse surrounding this event enacts a critique of crisis communication models as tools that focus on repairing corporate image at the expense of less powerful stakeholders, who are silenced and marginalized. Calvano, in her article about multinational corporations and their interaction with local communities, notes the importance of accounting for power between the company and its local host community. Calvano warns of more tension between communities and companies as corporations go global. This could apply to West as well. West is based in Pennsylvania, and its plant in Kinston employs mostly assembly line, working class people. I also think Calvano makes an extremely interesting

and salient point in terms of coining the phrase “new colonialism,” a concept that has become important to my understanding of how the stakeholders in Kinston might have been silenced by West’s powerful standing in the community. As the workplace becomes more global, more and more corporations are utilizing working class employees in foreign countries and states. Research in crisis communication that includes a consideration of power has the potential to make corporate executives and business students aware of the potential for exploitation in a way that they may have not been before, and communities aware of their inherent rights and position in the company-worker relationship. In the end, I suggest the need for a deeper and more in depth analysis of crisis communication, one that does not consider only the company’s behavior, but also recognizes the social structures that impact and are impacted by a given crisis.

The concept of context, and its importance, is central to the research questions posed for this work. The West Pharmaceutical Services explosion did not occur in a vacuum. It occurred in a city and county that had faced a number of struggles over the preceding years and amidst a culture that assigned certain values to West’s role in the community. In order to understand what occurred, one must first try to understand where it occurred.

The rest of this chapter, therefore, will focus on providing background information on Lenoir County and the City of Kinston, where the explosion occurred and will discuss West Pharmaceutical Services’ history and standing in the community. Finally, the explosion itself will be detailed. This will provide a backdrop against which the information and data in the remaining chapters can be presented.

Lenoir County and the City of Kinston

Lenoir County is in the Eastern part of North Carolina. The City of Kinston is the largest city in Lenoir County and is the county seat. In 2000, the population of Lenoir County stood at 59, 648 people, according to United States Census figures (as of this writing, the 2000 census figures are the most recent). The residents of the City of Kinston made up nearly half of the county population, with 23,688 people living in the city limits in 2000.

United States Census figures show that the population of Lenoir County increased with each census, beginning in 1900, until 1970, when figures posted a small decline. Since 1970, Lenoir County's population figures have fluctuated, with an increase in 1980, when the population stood at an all time high of 59, 819, and a decrease in 1990. In 2000, Lenoir County posted another increase, but it still was not enough to bring the population back to its 1980 standing. Although the next census is not scheduled to begin until 2010, U.S. Census officials publish "estimates," which are figures that indicate where a particular population will stand in years that fall between formal census years. The estimates for Lenoir County show an expected decrease of 1.8% by 2004 and an additional decrease of 2.9% by 2008 resulting in an overall drop in population of 4.7 percent from 2000 to 2008. In other words, statistically, the decline that began in 1970 is only expected to get worse.

The majority of the population over 25 years of age that remains in Kinston, 59.3% according to 2000 census figures, holds a high school education. The 2000 figures note that 10.5% have less than a ninth grade education. 17.5% hold a 9th-12th grade education with no high

school diploma and 31.3% are high school graduates. By comparison, 9.6% of the population over 25 holds a bachelor's degree and 3.7% hold some type of graduate degree. Several economic development and government officials interviewed for this study confirmed these figures and noted for the most part that Lenoir County's workforce is primarily made up of people who, at most, hold a high school diploma. One economic development official noted that the "brain drain," a phenomenon in which the more highly educated in a community leave to find opportunities elsewhere, was still a problem in Lenoir County although he felt that it was not as much of a problem now as in years past.

In terms of types of jobs available in Lenoir County, the largest percentage of people, 23.3%, worked for educational, health and social service organizations in 2000. This is not surprising as Lenoir County has a hospital, a county department of social services, a public school system and a community college within its borders. The next highest concentration of jobs was in manufacturing with 20.7%. The Lenoir County Economic Development website notes that Lenoir County's economy is "more manufacturing intensive than the national average" (<http://www.lenoiredc.com/areaprofile.htm>) and statistics from the site note that while 14.67% of the workforce was engaged in manufacturing jobs in 2008, that figure is actually a decline from 2006, when 17.15% of the workforce held manufacturing jobs (<http://www.lenoiredc.com/workforce.htm>). Viewed along with the 2000 census figures, which listed manufacturing jobs at 20.7%, it's clear Lenoir County has experienced a steady decline in manufacturing jobs over the last decade. In fact, several of those interviewed for this project along with several news accounts make reference to the loss of "tobacco and textile" jobs in Lenoir County. Eastern North Carolina as a whole, Lenoir County included, was once the center of flue-cured tobacco production in the United States. More flue cured tobacco was produced in

this region than anywhere else in the country. The decline of tobacco meant a loss of jobs throughout the region. The loss of tobacco and textile jobs together was especially worrisome in Lenoir County. The economic development official interviewed for this research noted that Lenoir County was not economically diversified. Many of the jobs in the community were related to tobacco and textiles and when those jobs began leaving it was particularly hard on Kinston and Lenoir County. As of March, 2010, unemployment in Lenoir County stood at 11.9%.

Taken together, the population, education and employment figures paint an overall picture of Lenoir County and the City of Kinston. This is a community that has suffered a series of economic setbacks in the past years. (The loss of textile and tobacco jobs notwithstanding, the City of Kinston suffered two serious hurricanes, Fran in 1996 and Floyd in 1999, which resulted in massive flooding and an eventual federal buyout of flooded property). The well educated chose to leave the area for better opportunities elsewhere, which left a population that was, by and large, relatively uneducated and unprepared for jobs that might require a higher level of education. These were workers who were blue collar, working class people reliant on the very types of jobs that seemed to be disappearing.

One other aspect of the employment environment should be noted. The state of North Carolina is commonly referred to as a “right to work” state, which essentially means that no worker can be required to join a trade or labor union as part of employment. North Carolina, like much of the American South, is not a particularly union friendly state, which appeals to businesses seeking to avoid union organization in factories and manufacturing facilities. In fact, the Lenoir County Economic Development organization advertises Lenoir County’s low union

representation on its website: “North Carolina is a right to-work state, which prohibits employers or unions from requiring employees to join or support a union as a condition of employment. Lenoir County has a very low presence of unionized firms” (www.lenoiredc.com). This is pertinent in the sense that a labor union often negotiates and voices concerns on behalf of its members. There was no union representation at the West plant in Kinston at the time of the explosion, and there is none today.

West Pharmaceutical Services

Into this environment West Pharmaceutical Services is introduced. At the time of the explosion, the company was one of the top employers in Lenoir County, and the blue collar, working class jobs it provided were precisely the kind that Lenoir County was suited for and needed.

West Pharmaceutical Services is headquartered in Lionville, Pennsylvania. It has operations in Australia, Singapore, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Israel, Ireland, Serbia and Brazil. In the United States, in addition to the North Carolina facility, West has operations in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico. The company also has affiliations with sites in Japan and Mexico. The company specializes in creating components for medical devices, and was first established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1923. (West Pharmaceutical Services website).

The Kinston facility opened in 1975. According to a press release issued by West at the time of the explosion, the Kinston plant manufactured plungers for syringes and components for intravenous (IV) medication systems. The report issued by the United States Chemical Safety

and Hazard Board after the explosion noted that the plant manufactured vial seals as well. In 1987, the Kinston facility was expanded to include a rubber compounding operation, in which rubber was compounded, and then sent off to the finishing side of the plant (or shipped to other West plants) where it could be molded into the syringe plungers, IV components and vial seals. The CSB report noted that the rubber compounding operation operated 24 hours a day five or six days a week since 1987.

As noted, West provided mostly blue collar, working class jobs in a community that needed them. One government official interviewed classified these jobs as unique. The jobs at West were not textile or tobacco jobs, which Kinston and Lenoir County had been losing so much of. The jobs at West provided much needed diversity in the manufacturing base in Lenoir County. Moreover, all of the officials interviewed for this research classified the jobs at West as “good” jobs, jobs that paid above average hourly wages and provided decent benefits to employees. Employees interviewed by the local newspaper in the wake of the explosion echoed that sentiment, saying West paid more than other local companies. Those employees also noted that there was a “family” atmosphere at West, and that the employees who worked there were a tight knit group.

In addition to providing what were perceived as “good” working class jobs, West also contributed quite a bit to the local government. West was one of the largest water and electric users in the City of Kinston and paid taxes on its property. Losing West as a utility customer could mean local residents would pay more for their water and electricity. As one government official interviewed for this research noted, the cost of infrastructure for water and electric is the same whether there are many customers on the system or just a few. The more customers, the

lower rates are for everyone, which means losing West could potentially raise electric and water rates for the average citizen in the City of Kinston. In the November prior to the January, 2003 explosion, the City of Kinston passed a rate increase for electricity. Several large businesses voiced concern over the move and West was one of them. According to a newspaper account of the meeting at which the electric rate increase was approved, West sent a statement to Kinston City Council members:

“any type of increase would abort any possible future expansions in Kinston. The rate increase makes the Kinston area less competitive for the industries that are now in operation and any other that would be thinking about coming to the Kinston area. The West plant in Kinston has one of the most costly electrical rates of all our company’s plants.” (Spencer, November 19, 2002)

It’s perhaps an indication of West’s position in the local economy that it felt it appropriate to make such a strong statement regarding the rate increase, although the company’s objection did not keep the city from approving the rate increase.

In summation, prior to the January 2003 explosion, West was one of the largest employers in Lenoir County, and also one of the largest customers of city water and electric. The jobs it provided were not tied to the declining tobacco and textile industries and thus provided a much needed diversity in the manufacturing base in Lenoir County. In addition, the jobs were considered good, viable working class jobs that paid above average hourly wages and provided good benefits. The employees who worked there seemed to value these good positions and the environment in which they worked. West, in turn, seemed to recognize its standing in the

community, at least enough to comment rather strongly on the electric rate increase that passed a few months prior to the explosion.

Understanding the Kinston/Lenoir County community and West's position is important in the sense that the power relationship between the company and the community definitely impacted West's ability to both establish and maintain the dominant framing in the aftermath of the explosion. Now that the context in which West operated in the community has been explained, chapter two can focus on how the West explosion situates itself within the crisis communication and critical discourse analysis literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted in chapter one, the research regarding crisis communication and critical discourse analysis (CDA) does not generally overlap. In addition, the specific notion of power considered in critical discourse analysis theory transcends disciplines, and one can find thoughtful scholarship about power and social class written by scholars in psychology and social work. This chapter presents and discusses the literature on crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis in an effort to identify the parameters of both and the gap that exists in crisis communication theory. The communication response after the West Pharmaceutical Services explosion provides a case to discuss the inclusion of critical discourse analysis in crisis communication theory. Adding CDA to crisis communication theory will provide for a deeper and more meaningful reading of a crisis because it considers how power silences and marginalizes certain populations.

The dynamic relationship between West and the Kinston/Lenoir County community involved a number of social factors, such as class, employment, and a rural versus urban struggle, that complicate the balance of power between the pharmaceutical company and the local stakeholders. As my analysis will indicate, these factors impacted the ability of the different stakeholders to challenge West's framing of the event. Reviewing these concepts will illustrate the unique intersection of factors that led to the outcome in Kinston in 2003. Understanding and studying crisis communication theory and practice, critical discourse analysis and these social factors together is important because all of those items played a role in understanding and

learning about the aftermath of the West explosion and together could provide a model for future crisis communication.

A Review of Crisis Communication Theories

Crisis communication scholars study the communication that takes place during an organizational crisis. The phrase “organization” can apply to any number of entities including corporations, government agencies, and non-profit groups. As a result, scholars from public relations, business and communications all have addressed crisis communication in one form or another. The common theme is of course the crisis and the subsequent communication. As noted earlier, a crisis is referred to as an event that threatens both the reputation and the stability of the organization.

One of the most famous such events was the grounding of the Exxon oil tanker Valdez in the waters off the Alaskan coast in 1989. William Small summed up the oil company’s strategy for dealing with the crisis with the title of his 1991 article “Exxon Valdez: How to Spend Billions and Still Get a Black Eye.” Small alluded to the capriciousness of public reaction to such events by noting that Exxon’s chief executive was heavily criticized for not visiting Alaska in the aftermath of the spill and that, conversely, Union Carbide’s chief executive was criticized for leaving the helm of the company to visit the site of the 1984 chlorine leak in Bhopal, India. Small also explored the concept that blame for a crisis permeates public sentiment about such events; Exxon was blamed for the spill itself, and thus the public reaction to the event, Small noted, was negative. Small used the Exxon response to the spill as a case study to suggest eleven items companies should be aware of and plan for during a crisis. Those items include advice on reacting quickly, being candid with the media and the public, appointing an appropriate

spokesperson, and utilizing paid advertising to disperse the company perspective. Small maintained that the Valdez crisis offered corporations the opportunity to learn from Exxon's mistakes and the chance to avoid those mistakes in any crisis that may occur (22).

Several years after Small's article was published, communications scholar William Benoit analyzed Exxon's response in the Valdez incident as part of his book *Accounts, Excuses and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* (1995). An interesting aspect of Benoit's work was his comprehensive attempt to categorize and assimilate varying communication ploys into one overarching theory, what Benoit called the theory of image restoration. The two central themes of the theory are first, that all communication has a goal, and second, that maintaining a good reputation is one of the primary goals of communication (Benoit, "Accounts" 63). Left alone, these themes reflect much of what rhetoric scholars maintain about language. Effective language has a goal, a specific purpose and speakers or writers need to establish credibility and good will with their audiences. Benoit acknowledged this grounding in rhetoric, but went further to identify what he called "typologies" that then form a "strategy" to protect and restore reputation during a crisis. Benoit identified five typologies, or ways in which organizations or individuals save face during a crisis. They are: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. It's helpful to imagine them on a continuum; at one end is denial or claiming complete innocence, and the other end, mortification or taking full blame (75).

Denial describes the act of denying that an incident occurred. A politician accused of taking bribes, for instance, might deny that the bribery ever happened and claim the accusation is a complete fabrication. Evading responsibility is slightly different. The organization cannot deny

an incident has occurred, so it instead claims that the incident was not the organization's fault. An explosion being categorized as an accident, as opposed to preventable, for instance, is an example of evading responsibility.

Reducing offensiveness occurs when the organization cannot avoid responsibility for the crisis, so instead attempts to paint the crisis as less serious or problematic than it is. Benoit details six ways in which this is accomplished: bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser and compensation. An organization attempts to evade responsibility with bolstering by describing positive actions the organization has taken in the past. Minimization is the attempt to convince the audience that the crisis is less severe than first thought. Benoit describes differentiation as "the rhetor attempt[ing] to distinguish the act performed from other similar but less desirable actions. In comparison, the act may appear less offensive" (77). Transcendence is the attempt to portray the offensive act in a different light, one that appeals to a higher moral value. For instance, proponents of assisted suicide might claim that assisted suicide is not a form of murder, but an attempt to allow a terminally ill person a chance to end his or her suffering. Attacking the accuser is an attempt to reduce the credibility of the accusation itself, and thus reduce offense. When a rape victim is labeled as promiscuous, it is an example of attacking the accuser. The final way an organization can reduce the offensiveness of a crisis is to offer compensation, essentially the organization pays those hurt by the crisis some type of monetary compensation.

Corrective action is the next typology Benoit details. Organizations that promise to correct the problem that prompted the crisis are utilizing corrective action. And finally, Benoit identifies mortification, in which an organization accepts full responsibility for the crisis and

essentially begs for forgiveness. Benoit's typologies provide specific ways in which organizations or individuals attempt to "save face" during a crisis or protect or restore a damaged reputation. Benoit's work on this theory has been studied and referred to by practically every crisis communication scholar that came after him. Benoit himself noted that his theory required more study and possible refinement, and he spent several years writing about his theory, and how it applied to organizational crises. In 1997, he wrote an article for *Public Relations Review* that suggested public relations practitioners use image repair theory to craft messages during crises. Later that same year, Benoit and Anne Czerwinski used the theory to examine the discourse USAir employed in the wake of a 1994 plane crash in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 2000, Benoit suggested that the word "restoration" in image restoration theory be replaced with "repair." He had come to believe that regardless of how a crisis is handled, an organization or individual's reputation is irrevocably altered by that crisis, and thus questioned whether a reputation can ever be fully restored to its pre-crisis state. He suggested the use of the word "repair" to denote that his strategy might be used as a way to fix a damaged reputation as opposed to restoring it completely.

Another crisis communication theory is apologia, which is a form of defending one's actions (Hearit). Apologia seeks to re-frame the "facts" in a crisis so they are more sympathetic to the accused. Hearit noted in 1995 that the concept of apologia was rarely applied to corporate discourse and attempted to define how it could be. Hearit identified three types of apologia applied in corporate discourse: denial, differentiation and explanation. Although all three are designed to distance the corporation from direct blame, Hearit noted that they do that in different ways:

“Denial disputes the validity of the charges; in effect, it seeks to render the charges groundless. Differentiation, on the other hand, argues that individuals who acted without organizational sanction are responsible for the wrongdoing; it seeks to transfer guilt to another by separating one idea into two rival ideas. Finally, explanation admits responsibility but adopts a posture that explains the rationale behind organizational actions. Consequently, an explanative stance argues that the corporation should be judged on its long term record rather than a single act of wrongdoing.” (Hearit 119)

Hearit’s definition of these three types of apologia carries definite similarities to aspects of Benoit’s typologies. Benoit’s and Hearit’s definition of denial are the same, and Hearit’s “differentiation” is a mix of Benoit’s differentiation and evading responsibility. Likewise, Hearit’s “explanation” has characteristics of Benoit’s evading responsibility, bolstering and differentiation. It’s not surprising, since Benoit’s image restoration theory folded together many different aspects of crisis communication, apologia among them. Hearit’s analysis is perhaps more narrowly focused; while Benoit creates a broad, all encompassing theory, Hearit focuses on ways in which public relations practitioners can reframe and control the words and terms used to define and explain a crisis, something he refers to as “definitional hegemony” (Hearit 130). In other words, if an organization is able to reshape or define a crisis, then that definition will become the accepted version of events and allow the organization to retain its hegemonic position without challenge. The underlying theme of both Hearit’s and Benoit’s work is that reputation is important, and maintaining a good reputation is important to a company’s image. With that in mind, it is important for a company to establish a positive framing of a crisis and actively seek the definitional hegemony in an incident.

Predicting success in weathering a crisis, and exploring what an organization can do to improve its chances of successfully negotiating a crisis is the focus of the “post crisis discourse of renewal” developed by a trio of scholars (Ulmer, Seeger, Sellnow). Matthew Seeger and Robert Ulmer first began writing about the concept of post crisis discourse renewal roughly a decade ago, arguing that a corporation’s strong commitment to various constituents, immediately committing to rebuild after a crisis, and seeing the crisis itself as an opportunity for change and renewal offer an alternative to the traditionally defensive aspect of crisis communication (129). This theory of crisis communication is a slight departure from the corporate focused theories of Hearit and Benoit in that it turns the focus to the community and employees, the “constituents” of a corporation, but still confines the discussion for the most part to how the treatment of those constituents impacts the organization itself. In other words, the focus is still on the organization, as opposed to the constituents. A 2007 article on the post crisis discourse of renewal, which includes Timothy Sellnow as a co-author, renews the call for applying this theory more widely, but still maintains the focus on an organization’s use of this theory, as opposed to the experience of constituents.

Another communication scholar who has contributed significantly to the crisis communication research is W. Timothy Coombs. Coombs, along with scholar Sherry Holladay, developed both the Crisis Communication Standards and the related Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The Crisis Communication Standards are based on the idea that crisis response strategies can be broken into three types: instructing information, adjusting information, and addressing reputational threats. Instructing information includes a basic explanation of what occurred and what stakeholders should do (if anything) to protect themselves. Adjusting information involves showing concern for stakeholders and detailing what

the organization is doing to handle or correct the problem. Coombs notes that instructing and adjusting information must always be provided in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, regardless of what type of crisis exists. Once the instructing and adjusting information is provided, the organization can then focus on addressing the reputational threats the crisis presents. Addressing those threats is accomplished by applying Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which recommends crisis response strategies based on the type and level of crisis an organization faces. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) contends that a crisis has a situational context, and that context stipulates which response strategies should be used. The “three core elements” of SCCT are the crisis situation, crisis response strategies and matching a crisis strategy to the crisis situation (Coombs “Protective Powers” 243).

The first element, the crisis situation, considers the type and severity of the crisis itself. It also considers a prior crisis history and the relationship between the organization in crisis and its stakeholders. Based on these considerations, the crisis is identified as a “victim” crisis, in which the organization is the victim of outside forces (such as sabotage or a natural disaster), an “accidental” crisis or a “preventable” crisis. The victim crisis is the least threatening to the organization, and the preventable crisis is the most threatening. The accidental crisis is in between.

Once the crisis type is determined, the response strategy is chosen. Coombs details three response strategies, what he terms “deny, diminish and deal” (247). The deny strategy involves denying that any crisis exists or has occurred. The diminish strategy entails “alter[ing] the attributions about the crisis event to make it appear less negative to stakeholders” (247). The deal strategy is an effort to restore the organization’s legitimacy and protect its reputation. Each

strategy has particular techniques that in many ways mirror Benoit's typologies. For instance, Coombs' deny strategy is the same as Benoit's denial typology and also includes attacking the accuser as a strategy to establish denial. Coombs' diminish strategy involves making excuses for the crisis and justifying the organization's behavior which mirrors tactics in Benoit's reducing the offensiveness typology. Coombs' deal strategy includes Benoit's notions of corrective action and mortification.

It should be noted here that SCCT will be one of the methods utilized in this dissertation to analyze West's response to the 2003 explosion. Thus this theory will be examined and critiqued in more detail in chapter three, which will detail the methods used for analysis of data. It should also be noted that Coombs applied his crisis communication standards to the communication in the aftermath of the West plant explosion in an article published in *Public Relations Review* in 2004. Coombs characterized the explosion as an accidental crisis and defined the West response strategies as justification and excuse response strategies. Coombs concluded that West provided appropriate instructing and adjusting information to stakeholders and showed concern for its employees. He writes, "The justification and excuse crisis response strategies are both designed to acknowledge the crisis while diminishing the organization's connection to the event. The instructing information and expression of concern were fully developed. On the whole, West's crisis response would be judged effective by the framework provided in this article" (Coombs "West Pharmaceutical's Explosion" 472). My assessment of the West explosion will use Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory to analyze West's response and suggest possible alternatives to Coombs' conclusions.

Crisis communication, as a research focus, is relatively “young,” and it is safe to say that it is still evolving. However, the central focus remains on the organization in crisis, how it communicates, how that communication is perceived, and how said organization can better craft messages to protect its reputation. The majority of the research is also qualitative in the sense that case studies seem to be the primary form the research takes, although in the last few years there has been a push for more quantitative analysis. What is missing from the crisis communication theories and research is a definitive call to consider the notion of power and context in delivering crisis communication. No theory or model currently exists that consistently considers the question of who wields power in a given crisis, and how holding that power influences how stakeholders perceive messages. Considering the role of power in crisis communication is, of course, a primary focus of this dissertation.

A Review of the Literature on Critical Discourse Analysis, Power and Social Class

One of the primary reasons I chose the West Pharmaceutical Services explosion and its aftermath as the basis for this dissertation is because the notion of West’s context and power in the community was never raised in the aftermath of the explosion, and yet it seemed to me a perfectly obvious issue to consider. How could one not ask whether the company’s importance in Lenoir County impacted its successful emergence from the crisis? That was the point at which I began thinking about adding the concept of critical discourse analysis to standard crisis communication theory, which led to exploring the notion of critical discourse analysis itself.

Critical discourse analysis, or CDA, is heavily influenced by the Foucauldian notions of power, truth and knowledge, and is specifically concerned with how texts work to oppress people

within social communities. Critical discourse analysts tend to analyze texts from a political viewpoint and are often interested in notions of inequality and oppression.

Norman Fairclough is arguably the best known proponent of critical discourse analysis and a researcher heavily involved in studying the relationship between power and discourse. Fairclough's text *Language and Power* is considered a foundational work in CDA. In the introduction to this text, Fairclough notes that he wrote the book to "correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relations...and to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others" (Fairclough 1). Fairclough openly admits that discourse study is interdisciplinary and suggests that social practice is maintained via language; as a result, social science studies should include examinations of texts that a culture produces and conversely, discourse analysis should include social theory in its research. For Fairclough, discourses and texts reflect social norms.

Fairclough also notes that language is the primary vehicle for spreading a particular ideology and thus gaining support from the masses. If an organization can use discourse to achieve power, then that organization's message is disseminated throughout the social structure, and it becomes a "common sense" assumption that the community adopts and reproduces. The organization in power then sets the agenda for what is discussed, how it is discussed, who is heard, and who is silenced. In other words, the powerful group controls and frames the discourse, and silences the non-powerful groups. Even the media, often viewed as an objective "watchdog" in capitalist societies, may serve to reinforce the dominant ideology, according to Fairclough.

Exposing these latent power relationships is a primary goal of CDA. In a chapter of *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Norman Fairclough details an analytical framework for CDA that I applied and will discuss in more detail later in my dissertation. Fairclough's framework includes the following steps:

1. Focus on a social problem that has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to tackling the social problem via analysis of the network of practices it is located within, the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice concerned, and the discourse.
3. Consider whether the social order "needs" the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis. (125)

Fairclough's framework is an attempt to make a connection between the discourse in a community and the prevailing power structure; analyzing the discourse that exists can uncover the ways in which it serves and perpetuates the dominant group and suborns others in the community.

Ruth Wodak shares many of Norman Fairclough's ideas about critical discourse analysis. Wodak describes CDA as being inextricably linked to the concepts of "power, context and history" (Wodak & Meyer 3) and notes that "the relationship between language and society are so complex and multifaceted that interdisciplinary work is required" (8). Wodak shares the view of many of her peers in recognizing that language and discourse is invested with the power of the community that creates and supports it – it is inherently social in nature, and one cannot consider it apart from that context.

Wodak also recognizes some of the inherent problems in CDA. The overarching themes of CDA are fairly universal and clear, but the methods for actually analyzing discourse are varied and sometimes nebulous. Wodak recognizes the need for more definitive processes that make CDA more universally applicable. She also recognizes that the call for interdisciplinary work in CDA is, as yet, unanswered. And finally, she cautions that those who engage in critical discourse analysis need to be aware of the potential for bias in their readings of texts. This final caution is of particular concern to me as a researcher because I have tried to make certain that I am not adopting a bias as I read the texts surrounding the West explosion. In an effort to limit any bias I have tried to gather information from different sources and also conducted interviews with various stakeholders in Kinston and Lenoir County so that the data for this research is not reliant on my interpretation alone.

Not everyone would consider that bias a negative. Teun Van Dijk describes critical discourse analysis “discourse analysis with an attitude” and doesn’t seem very worried about Wodak’s question regarding bias, noting instead that critical discourse analysis is absolutely biased and unabashedly proud of it. Van Dijk feels that CDA has a responsibility to align itself with the dominated. Van Dijk, in a chapter in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, proposes analyzing particular texts in a discourse-cognition-society triangle. The goal is to analyze particular and specific texts and derive the overarching messages, what Van Dijk calls “macro-structures,” that are derived from the “local meaning” of the same texts. The local meaning is essentially the choice of what words and phrases are used, and what words or phrases are left out. I used Van Dijk’s method to analyze press releases West issued in the aftermath of the 2003 explosion in an effort to explore the power relationship between West and the community. The idea is to use the context of the discourse to more or less read between the lines in order to

understand the forces that shape the discourse. Understanding the balance of power leads to a better analysis of the unspoken message of a corporation.

Numerous researchers have taken these more general ideas about critical discourse analysis and applied them to specific genres or cultures. Stuart Price, in his book *Discourse Power Address: The Politics of Public Communications*, at once accepts many of the general assumptions about critical discourse analysis and at the same time, questions them. For instance, Price questioned Fairclough's notion that discourse forms ideology, stating that direct action, and the power of symbols, not just discourse, are facets of ideology, and thus ideology itself can't be measured by discourse. Price also defines several new terms that pertain directly to public communication. He defines a "directive" as communication that has a strategic goal and a "rhetorical gesture" as a speaker paying lip service to alternative views. "Implicature" is the act of suggesting meaning without stating it outright. All of these new terms are used to catalogue and explain how public communications from public relations firms, advertisers and corporations use discourse to create meaning and serve an immediate end. Touting social responsibility, for instance, is a "rhetorical gesture" that can make a corporation more profitable (Price). Price's focus on "directives" and "rhetorical gestures" suggests that public relations firms have recognized that language has power, and are using Foucault's notions to further the goals of the organizations they serve.

The text *Discourse & Silencing* explores a specific aspect of critical discourse analysis—the concept of silencing. This text addresses how individuals and groups are silenced because of gender, law and politics. Silencing is the idea that an oppressed group is deliberately prevented from speaking out or voicing concerns. For instance, a woman who is the victim of domestic violence may be physically silenced by an abusive partner, but she is also silenced by a culture

that hesitates to get involved in a couple's private problems. Witnesses in court are silenced by the judicial system; the rules in court stipulate that a witness being cross examined can only answer the questions an attorney asks, and only the attorney involved and the judge have any "institutional authority" to speak while in court. Governments can silence particular constituents, as the Polish government did when it banned certain speech in reference to the trade union Solidarity (Thiesmeyer).

In *Rural Literacies*, authors Donehower, Hogg and Schell debunked the current ideology regarding rural communities. The women noted that the dominant views of rural communities tended to describe them as lagging behind urban areas, as lacking opportunity, or as some type of walden-esque paradise hearkening back to a simpler age. The authors note that there is a failure among academics to study rural communities and rural ways of communicating because researchers favor urban settings, which are viewed as more active and diverse, thus ignoring the rural community's efforts to create an alternative narrative for itself, as it did with Farm-Aid in the 1980's.

The ideas of silencing and power and rural versus urban are important in terms of the West explosion because each helped shape the communication, and the silence, that arose from the explosion. West moved quickly to establish the framing of the event, and employed a public relations firm that helped to craft the directives Price refers to. A number of stakeholders were silenced in a number of ways following the West explosion. Employees injured in the incident were silenced by worker's compensation laws, which do not permit injured employees to sue an employer. Other stakeholders were silenced by fear of criticism. The rural, economically depressed environment in Lenoir County also served to replicate some of the

stereotypes Donehower, Hogg and Schell detail, which ultimately served West's framing of the event. Social class played a part as well.

Norman Fairclough writes that the struggle between social classes is the most prevalent struggle in capitalist societies. Certainly much has been written about class by a variety of researchers as the concept of class and class struggle is taken up by academics in sociology and social work, psychology, discourse and political science. Of course, the notion of power is inextricably linked to class because the working class in America so often finds itself with less power and currency than the more affluent and influential professional or white-collar class.

In *Class in America: An Encyclopedia*, editor Robert Weir compiles a massive, multi volume primer on social class. Weir defines indicators of class as wealth, power and prestige. He notes that the term "blue collar" came into being after World War II to describe working class individuals who performed manual types of labor for hourly wages, often wearing some type of special uniform. He goes on to say that the term "working class" is somewhat murky, but has the same hallmarks and usually defines "those whose living is derived from manual labor, paid an hourly rate and whose jobs do not require much formal education" (Weir 949). Working class jobs tend to involve more risk.

Therriault shares Weir's assessment, but reflects on specific items such as trade regulations and labor law, noting that trade policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have led to a loss of blue collar jobs in America, and that the proliferation of factory farms has decimated small agriculture. Therriault maintains that labor laws do not protect blue collar workers, and those working class individuals who work in areas not represented by trade unions make less money than their unionized counterparts (Therriault, 2003).

Lew Caccia focused on workplace risk communication in a chapter in William DeGenaro's book *Who Says? Working Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness and Community*. Caccia classified the working class as those who are exposed to risk at work. Caccia noted that risk can be sudden and catastrophic, as in a fire or explosion, or subtle and cumulative, as in exposure to a toxic substance, and that the risk assessed by employers was less than that assessed by employees. Therefore, risk communication is situational in that it is another way in which the employer inflicts his or her agenda on the worker. "Literate practices in the workplace are being used to influence, even manipulate perceptions of risk" (166). Caccia found that the literate practices of the employer are inflicted upon the working class employees, which often translated into confusion. Communicating risk is often a technical enterprise, and employees may not have the education or knowledge to understand the risk fully. This is compounded, Caccia explains, by the reality that workers are not encouraged to be aware of what their employer is doing, much less question it (166).

The concept of class and how it is accepted and enforced is complex, and sometimes the ramifications of class go unaddressed. Sayer's *The Moral Significance of Class* explores "othering" – the attempt to distance oneself from a certain social class by insisting one is not part of it and thus marginalizing that distanced social class (Sayer). Bernice Lott and Heather Bullock raised similar issues in *Psychology and Economic Justice*, but also make a distinctive connection between social class and power, noting that class definitely impacts an individual or group's power within society. Like Sayer, Lott and Bullock note that being in a less powerful class may lead to enforced silence and inhibited behavior (Lott and Bullock).

Antonio Gramsci certainly recognized this, and developed the idea of cultural hegemony to explain it. Gramsci lived from 1891-1937. He died in prison – a result of spending a good part of his life dabbling in and writing about alternative political views (he was a socialist/communist) in his native Italy. When he was sentenced to prison for his supposedly subversive writings, the prosecutor noted that “we must stop this brain from functioning for 20 years” (Jones). Thus, he was given a 20 year prison sentence, which did not equal a cessation in brain function. Gramsci continued to write, from prison, until his death.

Gramsci thought that the powerful in a society maintain their power in two ways – by domination (war) and “intellectual and moral leadership” (Femia, p.24). Intellectual and moral leadership translated to Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. In *The Modern Prince*, Gramsci critiqued Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and detailed the ways in which society becomes homogenous, and thus inflicts a set of norms upon other groups. In Gramsci’s viewpoint, this homogeneity spreads, from one sector to another, until it forms the hegemonic viewpoint:

“it is the phase in which ideologies which were germinated earlier become “party,” come into opposition and enter the struggle until the point is reached where one of them or at least a combination of them, tends to predominate, to impose itself, to propagate itself throughout the whole social sphere, causing, in addition to singleness of economic and political purpose, an intellectual and moral unity as well” (Gramsci 169).

Crisis Communication and Discourse Analysis: A Limited Mix

A small number of researchers have explored various crises utilizing standard discourse analysis techniques. Several have written about reevaluating risk communication, framing events in order to win support and applying a colonial discourse perspective to the global economy.

Author Roberta Coles examined the communication between peace activists and the first Bush administration in the lead-up to the first gulf war. Coles noted that after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the Bush administration had to decide how to frame the event for the public in order to gain support for military intervention. She applies Gramsci's notion of hegemony to explain how the Bush administration had the resources and access to disseminate its framing of the event much better than the less well equipped peace movement. Coles also applied discourse analysis techniques to Bush's framing of the event, noting that his use of phrases such as "naked aggression" to describe Hussein's actions helped demonize Hussein and set up a context in which military intervention seemed reasonable (Coles).

Linnros and Hallin explored something similar in 2001 when they examined the discourse surrounding a controversial bridge being considered between Sweden and Denmark. The bridge raised serious environmental questions, and as a result was challenged. Linnros and Hallin examined the creation of a regional vision—the idea that the two areas being linked by the bridge were a homogenous region that would only be advanced by the addition of the bridge. This vision became the hegemonic discourse. The governmental planners and other authority figures came to represent this discourse. Environmental groups challenged this discourse, however, with their own vision of the bridge damaging rich and environmentally important land. The groups further cast those advocating for the bridge as bureaucrats and elitists, unconcerned with gaining input from the average citizen. The challenge was successful and the authors noted the importance of recognizing the social aspect of discourse, and its relationship to power, when planning major projects (Linnros and Hallin).

Grabill and Simmons use the environmental example of DDT to introduce an argument for what they call a critical rhetoric for risk communication. Risk communication is slightly

different than crisis communication in that the former is meant to communicate the risks of certain activities, chemicals, processes, etc. The authors argue vehemently that risk communication should apply the tenets of discourse analysis in an effort to make risk communication more accessible and understandable. Grabill and Simmons insist that considering Foucauldian notions of power is essential so that corporate owners do not attempt to force the corporate view of the risk onto employees, and rely exclusively on the words and perspectives of subject matter experts in crafting risk messages (Grabill and Simmons).

Finally, Calvano, in her article about multinational corporations and their interaction with local communities, notes the importance of accounting for power between the company and its local host community. She echoes some of the principals of colonial and post colonial discourse theory into her work. Calvano suggests that considering power will even the balance of power between worker and corporation, and reduce the chance that workers are marginalized or silenced. (Calvano).

Conclusion and Implications

The research on crisis communication, critical discourse analysis, power and class provides a foundation from which a reader can view what happened in Lenoir County in 2003 and why. This chapter provides a broad overview of the research and ideas pertinent to this dissertation, and the next chapter will focus on the methodology, data and individual theories being used to analyze the data that has been gathered. In closing this chapter, I will attempt to pull the varied perspectives presented together in order to provide a framework to view the upcoming chapters.

The crisis communication research presented centers primarily on how an organization defines and responds to a crisis in order to avoid blame and protect the organizational reputation.

The researchers may call their theories by different names, and catalog response strategies in different ways, but the focus remains on what the organization does to protect itself. No mechanism in any of the theories considers notions of power or class and how those notions impact the organization's success in navigating the crisis, and therein lies the gap.

The information presented on critical discourse analysis, however, does provide a way to consider power and class within an analysis of the crisis and can inform crisis communication theory and practice. Particular methods by Fairclough and Van Dijk will be utilized to analyze the discourse surrounding the West explosion, and the notions raised by some of the other researchers mentioned in this chapter will be reflected in the information presented in the coming chapters, most notably the notions of silencing, framing, and class.

The data for this dissertation, and the subsequent analysis, will indicate that alternative discourses regarding this event were silenced in a variety of ways: through West's more dominant message and framing of the crisis, through the dependence of the community on the working class jobs West provided and through the fear of appearing unsupportive or critical in the eyes of the community. It's interesting to note that much of the media coverage regarding the West event commented on the perception of the community as small, agrarian, tight knit and economically depressed, which created a near caricature of the community as a tragic victim that illustrates some of the research discussed in *Rural Literacies*.

Gramsci's ideas are especially interesting in terms of West's situation or context in Kinston. West provided a large number of jobs to the community. Therefore, the community had an investment in perpetuating West's framing of the explosion. Because West was so imbedded in Kinston, its employees paid taxes and shopped at Kinston stores, West gave money to local charities, the company was part of the homogenous social fabric—and thus allowed to maintain

the hegemonic position. Another facet of Gramsci's idea also has interesting application to the West explosion. Gramsci noted that there were situations in which the hegemonic position would have to work harder to shore up its position. He called this a crisis (Jones, 2006). The explosion could certainly be defined as a crisis in this sense, and West definitely had to work to maintain the consensus it had enjoyed prior to the incident.

In short, the critical discourse analysis research reviewed in this chapter encourages an examination of all the power dynamics at play in the aftermath of the West explosion, and consideration of how issues like class, framing, silencing and the company's power impacted the outcome. The CDA research also provides a foundation for a theory of crisis communication that includes CDA.

The review of both crisis communication theory and CDA research will help in framing and understanding the research questions posed in this dissertation. The first question, focusing on what crisis communication strategies West employed that allowed them to emerge successfully from this event, will be answered with the assistance of Timothy Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The second, which examines the role West's power in the community, and the lack of power of other constituents, played in the outcome, will be considered against the framework of Teun Van Dijk's discourse-society-cognition triangle and Norman Fairclough's analytical framework for critical discourse analysis. The notions of framing, silencing and class also reviewed in this chapter will also play a role in the analysis of the West data. With this in mind, chapter three will fully explain the research methodology used in this project.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DATA & METHOD

As a resident of Eastern North Carolina, a former journalist and a former employee of the City of Kinston, I was interested in the West Pharmaceutical Services explosion and watched its aftermath with a great deal of curiosity. Having studied crisis communication as part of my master's program, I was familiar with the basic strategies organizations used to communicate in the wake of a crisis and the ways in which organizations deflect blame or criticism in the wake of a crisis. As I watched what transpired in Kinston, I was surprised by the fact that there didn't seem to be any criticism or blame assigned to West in the wake of the incident.

I began collecting data even then. At that point I had not even started my doctoral program, but I knew that I wanted to write about the West incident at some future point. So I kept newspaper articles and company press releases and statements from government officials in a folder upon which I had scrawled "West." I read statements from West corporate officials and watched how those officials behaved, and my assessment at that early stage was that West had done an admirable job of communicating during the crisis and protecting its reputation within the community.

I was also drawn to study the West explosion by my personal connection with the City of Kinston, Lenoir County and West Pharmaceutical Services. From 1990 to 1998, I was a television news journalist in Eastern North Carolina. For all of that period, the City of Kinston and Lenoir County were in my coverage area; for a number of years, it was the primary focus of my coverage area. As a result, I became very familiar with the community, its problems, its politics, its citizens and leaders.

My relationship with my husband's family, most of whom lived in Lenoir County, only deepened the connection. I spent many Sundays at my mother-in-law's house for the traditional southern Sunday afternoon family dinner. My mother-in-law was an employee at West Pharmaceuticals. She worked on an assembly line at the plant for many years. In many ways, she typified the blue collar employee at West. She left school at 15 and got married. After working a number of blue collar jobs in Kinston, she landed a "good" job at West, and seemed to genuinely enjoy the environment and her coworkers. She passed away in 1993, ten years before the West explosion. I've thought about her again and again during this project, and I've come to realize the symbolism of that. My connection to her and her employment at West has formed a kind of lens through which I've considered the perspective of the West employees.

From 1998 until 2000, I was employed as the Public Information Director for the City of Kinston. In that role, I acted as the primary spokesperson for the city. I regularly crafted news releases and spoke to the media on a variety of topics. I became familiar with the city's primary problems, demographic makeup and financial situation. I was there during Hurricane Floyd in 1999 when a good deal of the city flooded. I left my employment with the city in May of 2000 to take a position with East Carolina University, but I have so many memories of and experiences with Kinston and Lenoir County and its people that I feel compelled to tell this story and complete this research in a way that honors them.

It wasn't until a few years after the 2003 explosion, after entering my doctoral program, that I began learning about critical discourse analysis. Suddenly introduced to the notion that language wielded power, I began thinking about the West explosion in a different way. What if it wasn't just West's actions that allowed the company to successfully negotiate the explosion?

What if West's position in that community allowed it to assume a hegemonic position and frame the event in a way that no one disputed? It was at that point that I realized what I wanted my dissertation to focus on.

Methodology

Having found myself thinking about the West explosion through two different frameworks, those of crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis, I began to wonder how I might mesh these two frameworks together in one dissertation. I wanted to assess the explosion via standard crisis communication theory, and then perform a second assessment against the framework of CDA to see what these two different analyses would reveal about West's messages, the stakeholders' response to the explosion, and the power dynamic between West and the community. I wanted to find out if current crisis communication theory was focused on the organization to the exclusion of community, and whether there was a space for adding CDA to crisis communication theory in order to give voice to stakeholders possibly silenced in a crisis.

The way to do this seemed fairly clear to me. Having watched West navigate this crisis, I suspected that an analysis of the company's crisis communication would prove what I noted anecdotally, that the company was successful in terms of responding to the crisis, preserving its reputation and avoiding blame and public criticism. To confirm or disprove my hypothesis, I felt I needed to analyze the company's response to the explosion, and also the community's reaction.

But what constituted the company's response, and what constituted the community's reaction? West issued 16 press releases in the wake of the explosion, over a time frame from

January 29, 2003 to August 26, 2004. Those press releases constitute West's official, written response to the explosion, and are part of the data I collected and analyzed through the lens of crisis communication theory. In addition, the explosion and its aftermath garnered a great deal of media attention, especially from the *Kinston Free Press*, the newspaper published in Kinston. The media coverage is often where one finds criticism of an organization, if there is any, and analyzing the media coverage allowed me to discern not only if there had been criticism, but if there had been support for and repetition of West's framing of the event. In all, in addition to the 16 West press releases, I analyzed 99 *Kinston Free Press* articles that covered the West explosion and its aftermath, as well as a number of external media accounts, all of which will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

The same texts that indicate West's response to the incident and the community's perspective on the explosion can yield information about power relations between West and its stakeholders. I felt that the same press releases and media accounts I analyzed as part of the crisis communication analysis should be analyzed utilizing CDA techniques to uncover that information about power relations. Consider the following, taken from one of the press releases West issued in the wake of the explosion:

“West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc. (NYSE: WST) announces a memorial service to be held today, February 20, to honor survivors and to commemorate the lives lost during the explosion that occurred on January 29 at its plant in Kinston, North Carolina. The memorial service, entitled, "A Service of Healing and Remembrance," is to be held at 5:30 p.m. at the Lenoir Community College in Kinston. The private memorial has been organized by West for the employees

and families of the West Pharmaceutical Services Kinston Plant and those of the two independent contractors working in the facility. The West employees recovering at the North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center at the University of North Carolina Hospitals in Chapel Hill, along with their families, will be able to view the memorial service via a televised satellite feed to the hospital. Reverends Harold Burton and Jerry Waters will preside over the service. Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-North Carolina) will deliver remarks on behalf of President George W. Bush. Also providing remarks will be Donald E. Morel, Jr., PhD, President and Chief Executive Officer of West, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley and West employees. "This is a time of great sorrow for our company. It is fitting that we come together to remember those who lost their lives, and to offer our prayers for the injured and all families who will be forever changed as a result of this tragic accident," said Donald E. Morel, Jr. "We will also pay tribute to the firemen, police, National Guard, emergency responders, doctors, nurses, relief agencies, clergy and community volunteers who have all given so much of themselves to support our employees and their families." As part of West's continuing effort to assist their Kinston employees, the Company has established the Kinston Employee Fund in coordination with the American Red Cross and The United Way in Kinston. The fund has received donations from around the world." (West Press Release, "Kinston Plant Memorial Service")

Analyzed via the lens of Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this press release could be deemed successful. West is showing concern for its

employees and compassion for those killed by arranging a special memorial service in their honor. The company's CEO makes a statement expressing sorrow about the incident, and praising the rescue workers that helped during the incident. In SCCT, this would be considered an effective use of the ingratiation, concern and compassion responses. However, applying Van Dijk's discourse-cognition-society triangle indicates something else. Note that the emphasis is on the service itself, not on the victims. The phrasing "to commemorate the lives lost" is a soft way of alluding to those who died, and the use of the words "lives lost" creates the impression that there was nothing that could have been done to prevent the deaths. The press release very carefully lists the names of the public officials who will attend the service, and yet there is no mention of the names of the employees who died. The emphasis then, is on what the company is doing to commemorate "those who lost their lives" and not on the victims themselves.

But the analysis of the press releases and media accounts alone would not necessarily tell me if there were alternative discourses about the explosion that were silenced, or if West's power in the community allowed it to assume the dominant discourse. Talking to the people who represented the stakeholders would do that. I sought out local government officials, economic development leaders and West employees and asked those individuals questions about the explosion, about West's reputation and handling of the incident, about the company's standing in the community and about the assessment of blame for the explosion. In all, I interviewed two government officials, one economic development official, one emergency responder, one current West employee, and one former West employee in an effort to find out what was and what was not being publicly voiced about West and the explosion. I promised these individuals anonymity because I wanted to protect them from any negative repercussions of speaking to me and because

I wanted them to feel comfortable in sharing their honest opinions with me. Those conversations yielded a different perspective from the one that was voiced publicly regarding the explosion. A transcript from a U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board public meeting held in Kinston several months after the explosion contained comments from public officials and one West employee that, when scrutinized utilizing CDA theories, provide a stark indication of the power relations between West and the community. Taken altogether, the West issued press releases, the media accounts, the CSB transcript, and the interviews yield information that allows for full analysis from both the crisis communication and CDA perspectives.

I quickly realized that fully understanding what happened in Kinston in 2003 meant fully understanding (and explaining) technical details about combustible dust, operations at West's Kinston facility, and information about fire codes, safety regulations, government investigations, worker's compensation law in North Carolina and myriad other details. It's important to understand the details of the explosion in order to understand the analysis of the data in this dissertation, which is why I focus on the explosion itself next.

The Explosion at West Pharmaceutical Services: Incident and Outcome

The West plant explosion itself was explained in some detail in chapter one. The discussion in this chapter will focus on what caused the event and the data compiled by the United States Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) in its investigation of the incident. That data examines what West knew or did not know about the polyethylene dust that was ultimately deemed responsible for causing the explosion.

The report compiled by the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) blamed the explosion on combustible dust and ruled out other sources for the explosion. The CSB concluded that the layer of polyethylene dust that had accumulated above the false ceiling in the rubber compounding area of the plant was the fuel for the explosion. The CSB noted that the area above the ceiling housed conveying lines for other non-combustible ingredients used in the compounding process. Those lines had reportedly leaked on at least one occasion. Thus, the CSB determined that the layer of dust that had accumulated above the false ceiling may have contained the powdered remains of these other, non-combustible ingredients, in addition to the combustible polyethylene.

The CSB investigation found that the air ventilation system within the compounding area of the plant pulled the polyethylene dust into the space above the suspended ceiling, where it settled on the top side of the ceiling tiles. Although West apparently made certain the visible areas of the compounding area were cleaned regularly of dust, there was no “organized cleaning program for surfaces of beams, conduits and other features above the ceiling” (U. S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation report 32). After the explosion and subsequent fire, CSB investigators pulled ceiling tiles from the wreckage and found that:

“nearly all of the tiles appeared to be burnt and splattered on the top – but not on the bottom, which had faced the room below. Some of the fluorescent light fixture pans recovered from the...area were flattened from above, as if they had been forcefully driven downward to the concrete floor. These two items of evidence further support the theory that the explosion occurred within the confined space

above the suspended ceiling.” (U. S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation report 36).

In terms of what specifically ignited the polyethylene dust, the CSB report indicated that the damage to the plant was so extensive that it was “extremely difficult” to pinpoint what triggered the dust explosion. Several theories were examined and addressed in the report, but again, the CSB could not definitively state if any sparked the dust explosion. Those theories, as noted on page 40 of the CSB report, include:

- Overheating of a batch of rubber and subsequent ignition of the vapors produced by thermal decomposition.
- Ignition of the dust layer by an overheated electrical ballast or light fixture.
- Ignition of the dust layer by an electrical spark from an unidentified electrical fault.
- Unsettling of dust in a cooling air duct for an electric motor and subsequent ignition of the dust by the motor. (U. S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation report 40).

The most viable of these theories seem to be the first and the last, according to the report. In terms of the first, the overheating of a batch of rubber, the CSB report noted that a witness stated that just prior to the explosion, a batch of rubber descended from a mixer, and that the rubber appeared to be “shimmering” with heat. Investigators could find no residue of that rubber after the explosion, but noted it could have been burned away in the fire. The CSB also noted that the one witness they were able to speak to may have been suffering a faulty memory; he

gave his account months after the explosion after a long recovery from burns suffered in the incident. The CSB was unable to speak with anyone else who had been in that particular area of the plant the day of the explosion because none of the other people working in that area survived.

In terms of the last theory, the “unsettling of dust in a cooling air duct for an electric motor and subsequent ignition of the dust by the motor,” the CSB report noted that this theory was what West had concluded sparked the explosion after its own internal investigation. The CSB report noted that West’s investigation found that dust in the air duct which ran above the suspended ceiling exploded and then triggered the larger explosion. But again, the CSB could not find enough conclusive evidence to confirm this theory.

Regardless of the precise cause, the CSB did confirm that the electrical wiring, fixtures and fittings above the suspended ceiling were general purpose and not rated for areas containing combustible dust. The National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) recommends that facilities that contain combustible dust utilize special electrical equipment designed to prevent dust ignition.

If polyethylene dust is combustible and if polyethylene dust was present in the suspended ceiling above the rubber compounding area, then why weren’t the electrical components in that area rated for areas containing combustible dust? The answer is long and somewhat confusing but necessary to understanding how this incident might have occurred.

According to the CSB report, when West built the rubber compounding area of the Kinston plant in 1985, a version of the current National Fire Prevention Association on dust explosions existed. It was entitled NFPA 654: Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust

Explosions in the Chemical, Dye, Pharmaceutical and Plastics Industries, and had been in place since 1982, three years before the Kinston plant's rubber compounding area was built. (NFPA 654 was first introduced in 1945 – the code changed over the years and in 1997 the current name was adopted for the code). The 1982 version of NFPA 654 included information on how to control combustible dusts. However, there was no fire code in place in North Carolina in 1985 and certainly not one that recognized NFPA 654. West utilized contractors to build the rubber compounding area and relied on those contractors to follow all codes and regulations. In the end, the CSB would criticize West for this:

“Best engineering practice calls for reference to available codes and standards regardless of whether they are adopted by local regulation. West managers relied on the engineering design firms to ensure that the work met all applicable codes and standards, though West itself was positioned to most fully understand the materials and their use in the manufacturing process.” (U.S. Chemical and Safety Hazard Investigation Board report 42)

Thus, the rubber compounding area of the Kinston plant was built with all purpose wiring and electrical fixtures instead of wiring and fixtures designed for areas that house combustible dust. Compounding the issue is the presence of the dust itself. When West began the rubber compounding operation in Kinston in 1987, it used a different anti-tack agent than the polyethylene version at the root of the 2003 explosion. The anti-tack agent used in 1987 was called zinc stearate. The CSB report on the 2003 explosion noted that zinc stearate had been identified as a combustible dust by the NFPA, but that the material safety data sheets (MSDS) for the zinc stearate slurry, which West used as an anti-tack agent, did not include any warnings

about combustible dust, nor did West fully evaluate “the hazardous properties of zinc stearate with respect to its use in the manufacturing process and building” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 41). Material safety data sheets are informational documents that accompany any substance used in a manufacturing or industrial setting; the “MSDS,” as they are commonly referred to, are supposed to contain information about any hazards associated with the substance. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires that MSDS be available and accessible to anyone working in a facility. In addition, the CSB noted that when West switched from zinc stearate to polyethylene in 1996, West engineers were not involved in reviewing what hazards replacing zinc stearate with the polyethylene anti-tack agent might pose in terms of the actual rubber compounding area of the Kinston plant. The CSB report indicates that this failure was a missed opportunity for West to identify the combustible dust hazard polyethylene posed and “to implement the precautionary measures described in available codes and standards” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 42) to make the rubber compounding area dust-proof.

West corporate personnel apparently did review the use of polyethylene powder (the product’s name was “Acumist”) as an anti-tack agent in 1990. At that time, the powder was being reviewed for use as an anti-tack agent in the company’s Florida plant. The Acumist would be dusted directly onto rubber stoppers. The MSDS for the Acumist were dated with the year 1988 and stated: “Avoid conditions that create high levels of product in the air in a closed room as a dust explosion hazard can exist. Sweep up with a minimum of dusting. Remove ignition sources. Keep away from heat or flame” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 44). The 1988 Acumist MSDS did not specifically reference NFPA 654, however, it did include a section on fire and explosion hazards, and stated “High levels of product in the

atmosphere may present a dust explosion hazard. Appropriate precautions should be observed” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 44).

According to the CSB, West then reviewed a technical data sheet included with the 1988 Acumist MSDS that addressed static electricity issues and the danger of using polyethylene with solvents. The technical data sheet also stressed the importance of housekeeping. But it apparently did not indicate that polyethylene powder is itself a combustible material, nor did it explain that a buildup of polyethylene dust could be an explosion hazard. Since West intended to apply the polyethylene powder in small amounts directly to rubber stoppers, the company felt the warnings in the MSDS and technical data sheets were not relevant. The CSB suggested that the wording in the technical data sheet that accompanied the MSDS was unclear.

In 1992, West “came into possession of a revised MSDS for Acumist, dated March 1990” according to the CSB report. How the pharmaceutical company came into possession of the revised document is not explained. The 1990 Acumist MSDS, however, specifically referenced NFPA 654 and advised users to consult that regulation. There was no review of this new MSDS or the Acumist, since the product was already being used. However, the revised Acumist MSDS was sent to the Kinston plant.

In 1994, West began exploring using polyethylene on a wider scale as an anti-tack agent. The company asked its suppliers to create an anti tack slurry that replaced the zinc stearate with Acumist polyethylene powder. West then contracted with a company called Crystal, Inc. – PMC to make a water based paste of the polyethylene powder. The MSDS that Crystal created for this paste contained no warnings about the combustibility of polyethylene powder, even though, according to the CSB report, Crystal was aware that polyethylene powder is combustible. The

MSDS also calls the paste “a benign substance without health or safety risks” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 45). West corporate personnel then reviewed the paste as a “new material” being considered for use, using the MSDS Crystal provided. Since West had already reviewed Acumist polyethylene powder for use back in 1990, corporate officials did not reevaluate the polyethylene, and failed to consider the differences in how the Acumist had been used in the past (in small amounts, as a direct dusting agent on stoppers) with how it would be used in the slurry form (higher levels of polyethylene, with more potential for the polyethylene to become airborne). In 1996, West began using the polyethylene based paste in the Kinston plant. The paste was mixed with water to create the anti-tack “slurry” and then used on the rubber compounded in Kinston.

In other words, there were several disconnects that resulted in the failure to fully recognize and communicate the dangers of the polyethylene at the center of the 2003 explosion in Kinston. The rubber compounding area of the Kinston plant was not built to protect against combustible dust explosions, nor was it retrofitted when the polyethylene was put to use in the plant in 1996. West had several pieces of information that indicated the explosive nature and hazard of polyethylene powder, but failed to “connect the dots.” That failure had serious consequences in Kinston in 2003.

If West failed to “connect the dots” on the danger the polyethylene dust posed in the Kinston plant, then the workers themselves had no idea the dots even existed. The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board noted that the employees were not aware of the combustible risks of the polyethylene dust and had not been trained regarding it. This is especially tragic considering that employees had reported seeing a buildup of dust above the

suspended ceiling at the Kinston plant in the past; had employees been aware of the danger, they might have known to pass along the information about the dust buildup to plant managers. The United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires that companies communicate hazards to exposed employees “using MSDS, labeling and training” (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report 51). OSHA also requires companies that manufacture chemicals to make those using those chemicals aware of the danger via MSDS that accurately reflect the hazards and the precautions users should take to avoid problems. Although West had information regarding the explosive nature of polyethylene dust, and although the Kinston manufacturing plant had received the 1990 MSDS for Acumist that referenced NFPA 654, the dangers of the polyethylene dust were not communicated to the employees. In addition, the company that manufactured the polyethylene paste West used in Kinston did not communicate the danger of the dust in the accompanying MSDS, even though the company was aware of the danger and also aware of how West was using the paste. The MSDS made no mention of the combustible dust hazard.

West claimed that it did not realize the polyethylene powder was building up above the false ceiling and did not realize the dust was an explosion hazard. There was indication that West was aware the polyethylene was flammable. The CSB report noted that prior to the 2003 explosion, polyethylene powder in the rubber compounding area had caught fire, but the fire went out on its own. The CSB suggested that this was yet another missed opportunity for West to recognize the potential danger the polyethylene presented. One employee interviewed for this research indicated that it was “common knowledge” around the plant that the powder was flammable. It’s important to note that there’s a difference between something being flammable – able to catch fire – and combustible – an explosion hazard. The employee interviewed noted that

it was common knowledge the polyethylene could catch fire, but according to the CSB report, the employees were apparently not aware that the polyethylene dust could explode.

The United States Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board also examined the various regulatory bodies that oversee West in North Carolina. The North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration had no specific rules regarding combustible dust. As a result, NIOSH cited West for violating the general failure to provide a safe workplace guideline in the wake of the 2003 explosion. State fire and building codes in place at the time of the incident also failed to identify combustible dust issues. This has since been rectified with the adoption of NFPA 654 as part of the state building code and Lenoir County has also adopted this particular guideline. Without the proper guidelines in place, it would be difficult for any type of inspector to understand or recognize a combustible dust hazard and the CSB report noted that inspectors from several different agencies had visited the West plant in Kinston prior to the explosion, but did not recognize or identify the danger.

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board made a number of recommendations regarding the West plant explosion in Kinston in 2003. Those recommendations are listed below.

Recommendations for West Pharmaceutical Services:

- Revise policies and procedures for new material safety reviews. In particular:
 - Use the most recent versions of material safety data sheets (MSDSs) and other technical hazard information.

- Fully identify the hazardous characteristics of new materials, including relevant physical and chemical properties, to ensure that those characteristics are incorporated into safety practices, as appropriate.
- Include an engineering element that identifies and addresses the potential safety implications of new materials on manufacturing processes.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures for safety reviews of engineering projects. In particular:
 - Address the hazards of individual materials and equipment—and their effect on entire processes and facilities.
 - Consider hazards during the conceptual design phase, as well as during engineering and construction phases.
 - Cover all phases of the project, including engineering and construction performed by outside firms.
 - Identify and consider applicable codes and standards in the design.

- Identify West manufacturing facilities that use combustible dusts. Ensure that they incorporate applicable safety precautions described in NFPA 654, Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust Explosions From the Manufacturing, Processing, and Handling of Combustible Particulate Solids. In particular:
 - Ensure that penetrations of partitions, floors, walls, and ceilings are sealed dust-tight.
 - Ensure that spaces inaccessible to housekeeping are sealed to prevent dust accumulation.
- Improve hazard communication programs so that the hazards of combustible dust are clearly identified and communicated to the workforce. In particular, ensure that the most current MSDSs are in use and that employees receive training on the revised/updated information.
- Communicate the findings and recommendations of this report to the West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc., workforce.

Recommendations for the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration:

- Identify the manufacturing industries at risk for combustible dust explosions, and develop and conduct an outreach program on combustible dust hazards.

Recommendations for the North Carolina Building Code Council:

- Amend Chapter 13, Section 1304, of the International Fire Code (as adopted by the North Carolina Fire Code) to make compliance with NFPA 654, Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust Explosions From the Manufacturing, Processing, and Handling of Combustible Particulate Solids, mandatory.

Recommendations for the North Carolina Code Officials Qualifications Board:

- Incorporate the provisions of NFPA 654, Standard for the Prevention of Fire and Dust Explosions From the Manufacturing, Processing, and Handling of Combustible Particulate Solids, into the training program for State and local building and fire code officials.

Recommendations for Crystal, Inc. – PMC (The makers of Acumist paste):

- Modify the material safety data sheet for manufactured polyethylene antitack agents to include hazards posed by the end-use of the product. (U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board report 61)

This background forms the framework against which the data collected for this dissertation can be analyzed. The methodology section in this chapter provides the reasoning for collecting the data that I did, but the data itself needs to be fully explained.

An Explanation of the Data Collected

The West explosion led to a proliferation of publicly accessible data from West itself, the media and government investigative agencies. The West data is made up of two sets of documents. The first is the series of 16 press releases mentioned earlier in this chapter that West Pharmaceutical Services issued via its publicly accessible website. The press releases cover the time period from January 29, 2003 (the day of the explosion) to September 23, 2004. These press releases were accessed and archived in 2007 as part of another class related research project. The press releases give a unique view of what West chose to emphasize and communicate publicly regarding the explosion and its aftermath. The second set of documents is a case study that was placed on the publicly accessible website of Schwartz Communications, the public relations firm West hired to handle its response to the 2003 explosion. The four page document details the Schwartz communications strategy during the 2003 incident and adds another perspective to the West stance on the explosion. The case study was accessed and archived in 2005 as part of research on the West explosion.

In terms of media data, there are two types, local media data and external media data. The local media data is comprised of 99 newspaper articles and 8 newspaper editorials published in the *Kinston Free Press* between January 2003 and September 2004. All of these articles are publicly available via the *Kinston Free Press* website (<http://www.kinston.com/sections/local/>). The newspaper's online database was searched using the search phrase West Pharmaceutical. That search yielded several hundred articles that mentioned West. I went through each article and archived the 99 articles and 8 editorials that dealt with the explosion or its aftermath. The articles from the *Kinston Free Press* were chosen for analysis because the newspaper is the local newspaper for Kinston and Lenoir County. Unlike larger regional or national newspapers, the *Kinston Free Press* is located within Kinston and is part of the community. Analysis of these articles will provide an indication of whether or not the local newspaper voiced opposition to or supported West's framing of the explosion event.

There are eleven pieces of "external" media data – articles taken from media and writers outside the Kinston community. Analyzing this data will indicate whether or not the framing of the event was perceived differently by those not in the Kinston/Lenoir County community. The eleven pieces of external media data include an academic journal article by Angela Blair that examines dust explosions in general. The article was published in the *Journal of Loss Prevention* in March, 2007 and was accessed via the academic database at Joyner Library at East Carolina University. The next piece of data is an article in the *NFPA Journal* published in November of 2004. The article examines the Kinston dust explosion and several others around the United States. It was publicly accessed via the NFPA website (www.nfpa.org). The third piece of external media data is an article published in *EHS Today* in October, 2004. This journal is

written for professionals in the environment, health and safety field; this article covered the West explosion specifically and was also publicly accessible via the *EHS Today* website

(http://ehstoday.com/news/ehs_imp_37234/). The fourth piece of external media data is a very brief article posted to the *Industrial Safety and Hygiene* (ISHN) website. ISHN is a group that includes safety, health and hygiene professionals within the manufacturing industry. The article covers the state fine assessed against West after the explosion and was publicly available via <http://www.ishn.com>. These first four articles approach the West explosion not only from an external viewpoint, but also from an academic or professional viewpoint. They will provide an opportunity to discover whether or not the framing of the event was different based on the audience and the location.

The next article is from the *Smart Business* website, and was originally published in August of 2006. The article is written for a business audience, and specifically details what West officials did to “triumph” in the wake of the 2003 explosion. This article was chosen because it provides insight on how the business and executive audience views West’s performance after the explosion, and may give additional insight into whether or not West’s framing of the event was substantiated outside Kinston and Lenoir County. The article was accessed via *Smart Business*’ publicly available website www.sbnonline.com/local/article/9111/78/0/tragedy_to_triumph.aspx.

The remaining articles are from various newspapers outside the Kinston and Lenoir County area. One is an article from the *New York Times* published in the immediate aftermath of the explosion. The article was accessed via the *New York Times* publicly available website (www.nytimes.com/2003/01/31/us/explosion-extinguishes-one-of-a-north-carolina-town-s-few-bright-spots.html?pagewanted=1). This particular article was chosen as an example of how a

national newspaper might cover the West event. Four articles are from the Raleigh based newspaper the *News and Observer*, and detail several important events in the timeline of the explosion: West's settlement with the State of North Carolina, workers suing the companies that provided West with materials, an article on dust explosions in general, and an article observing the one year anniversary of the explosion. While I wanted to gather information about how regional media covered and framed the West explosion, I realized that I could not pull every article every newspaper wrote about the incident. Therefore, I limited the number of articles selected from the *News and Observer* and chose particular articles that corresponded with significant events in the timeline of the West explosion. All four of these articles are available on the *News and Observer's* publicly available website www.newsobserver.com.

The final piece of external media coverage is an editorial printed on June 27, 2003 in the *Washington Daily News*. The *Washington Daily News* is the newspaper that covers Washington, North Carolina, a relatively small community in a county not far from Lenoir County. The editorial is interesting in the sense that it is external, but it also reflects the hegemonic discourse seen in Kinston and Lenoir County. The editorial was accessed via the *Washington Daily News* publicly accessible website during a previous class related research project.

The remaining existing data that has been collected for this research comes from the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, or CSB. The CSB, as noted in chapter one, is a federal government agency much like the National Transportation Safety Board or NTSB. Whereas the NTSB investigates transportation incidents, the CSB focuses on incidents that involve chemicals. The CSB has no regulatory authority and can only investigate an incident and make recommendations.

The CSB conducted an investigation of the West explosion and collected extensive data on the incident. The data is available for public consumption on the CSB website: http://www.csb.gov/investigations/detail.aspx?SID=36&Type=2&pg=1&F_All=y. This section of the CSB site is devoted exclusively to the West incident, and involves the reports, news releases and transcripts of public meetings regarding the West explosion. The data from the CSB final report has already been related in great detail in this dissertation. The data that will be analyzed in the next chapter centers around the public hearings the CSB had in Kinston in the wake of the explosion. The first was in June of 2003, and the second was in September of 2004. The CSB website contains transcripts of these meetings. At the June 2003 meeting, several citizens – including an employee of West – spoke. In addition, state and federal legislators sent letters to be read at the hearings. The transcripts will be analyzed to see what alternative discourse, if any, is present in the letters from legislators and the words of citizens.

In addition to the existing printed data described above, I conducted six face to face interviews with stakeholders in the community to discern their perception of the incident and West's reputation in the community, West's handling of the explosion, and any notions of blame. The participants in these interviews were contacted based on their knowledge of the West explosion and their ability to discuss it. All of the participants were guaranteed anonymity and will only be referenced by generic titles. The six individuals interviewed are Emergency Responder (ER), Government Official 1 (GO1), Government Official 2 (GO2), Economic Development Official (EDO), West Employee (WE) and Former West Employee (FWE).

The Emergency Responder (ER) is an individual who worked in an emergency rescue capacity on the day of the West explosion. The questions that were asked of this individual were as follows:

1. Describe for me the events of that day in January, 2003 – the day of the explosion.
2. From an emergency standpoint, what were your concerns when you arrived on the scene?
3. What was or is your assessment of West's reaction to the incident?
4. What was or is your assessment of West's handling of the incident?
5. From an occupational safety standpoint, should West have been aware of the rubber dust danger and should they have fixed the problem before the explosion?
6. How important is the West Company (then and now) to this community?
7. Did that importance cross your mind at all the day of the explosion or afterward? If so, how?
8. Who or what do you feel was to blame for the explosion?

Government Official 1 (GO1) and Government Official 2 (GO2) are individuals who currently work or did work in local government when the West explosion occurred. These individuals will address the economic aspects of West's importance to the community, and also give insight into the efforts to keep West in Kinston after the explosion. The Economic Development Official (EDO) will address the characteristics of the workforce in Kinston and Lenoir County, the economy of the community, and the importance of the jobs West provided. The questions asked of these three individuals were the same. They are:

1. Describe for me the events of that day in January, 2003 – the day of the explosion.

2. What was or is your assessment of West's reaction to the incident?
3. What was or is your assessment of West's handling of the incident?
4. How important is the West company (then and now) to this community?
5. Did that importance cross your mind at all the day of the explosion or afterward?
If so, how?
6. Describe for me the economy of Kinston – what kind of jobs does West provide?
7. What is the skill level or education level of West employees?
8. Was there concern after the explosion that West would not rebuild in Kinston?
9. How concerned were you about losing West? What impact would that have on the local economy?
10. Describe the negotiations and incentives that were discussed to keep West in Kinston.
11. Who or what do you feel was to blame for the explosion?
12. Is it unusual that West was offered incentives to remain in the community? Why or why not?

The individual labeled as West Employee (WE) is a current West employee who was on the job on the day of the explosion. The individual labeled as Former West Employee (FEW) no longer works at the company, but did at the time of the blast, and suffered injuries. Both will address the explosion and its aftermath from the employee perspective. The questions asked both are as follows:

1. Describe for me what you did/do at West.

2. What were the extent of your injuries?
3. Was West considered a good place to work? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
4. What was the atmosphere like at West?
5. How did you feel the company treated its employees before the explosion?
6. How did you feel the company treated the employees during/after the explosion?
7. How do you feel the company handled the explosion?
8. Were you worried at any point that West would not remain in Kinston? If so, what would its leaving have done to you? The community?
9. What or who do you feel is to blame for the explosion?

It should be noted that because the participants were assured anonymity, any answers that may provide identifying information will not be used. In addition, if the answer to a question was unclear, I asked for clarification. Likewise, if the interviewee raised an issue unrelated to the specific questions asked, I asked the interviewee to elaborate on what he or she said. During the course of these interviews, I took notes, no recording devices were used.

The data provided by the face to face interviews will augment what has been collected via the various texts and offer insight into whether or not West's framing of the event was accepted, and what, if any, alternative discourses were silenced and why. The textual data from the West response, the media accounts and the investigatory material will establish what West's message was and whether or not there was acceptance and reproduction of that message within other texts. The investigatory data will reveal whether or not stakeholders such as legislators and citizens reproduced West's framing of the event, and the face to face interviews will explore West's position within the community, the assessment of blame for the incident, and again, whether or not any alternative discourses were silenced.

As noted briefly in chapter one, the theories that inform crisis communication and critical discourse analysis seem to be on opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. Crisis communication theory explores how organizations communicate in the throes of a disaster and the emphasis is often on identifying successful strategies to avoid damage to the organizational reputation and bottom line. For the most part, it's a practical scholarship, with no underlying analysis of an organization's ethical underpinnings. Organizations are deemed successful or not successful in terms of their crisis communication strategies. A company's caring response (called behaving virtuously) is noted as a strategy, not a moral imperative. That's not to say that the scholarship itself is amoral; it's simply organized around a somewhat sterile, distanced focus, and an unethical organization communicating well could ostensibly come out of a crisis better than an ethical organization communicating poorly. In other words, the focus of the research is primarily on the communication, not the context. Aside from considering the organization's reputation and behavior, the crisis is treated as if it occurred in a vacuum. There is no analysis of the organization within the context of the community, or consideration of the power the organization holds in the community.

Critical discourse analysis, on the other hand, is steeped in context. As noted in chapter two, Van Dijk is insistent that researchers look beyond the surface and expose how power is used to help the dominant retain their position. Fairclough's somewhat liberal political bent is fairly obvious in all of his writings, and Wodak, who at least recognizes the potential for bias in CDA, does not shy away from the inherently political stance of critical discourse analysis. The philosophies of crisis communication and CDA are different, and yet utilizing methods from both in this research will lead to a more complete understanding of what occurred in Kinston in

2003, and suggest a way in which crisis communication can become more reflective in the future by utilizing CDA when studying organizational crisis communication.

The primary task of this dissertation is to indicate how adding critical discourse analysis to standard crisis communication theory will yield a more comprehensive analysis that considers not only the organization's success but the empowerment or marginalization of the stakeholders in the community. Taken from the standpoint of crisis communication theory, will the analysis indicate that West succeeded in protecting its image and financial stability? Did the company's communication and behavior in the wake of the 2003 explosion lead to that success? When one applies critical discourse analysis methods to the incident, what critical and dominant power relationships are exposed? Did West's position as a primary employer in Kinston and Lenoir County impact the situation? If so, was West's success a result of its successful crisis communication or was it the result of the community's inability to challenge West's framing of the event? Critical discourse analysis adds a level of consideration to the situation that crisis communication theory alone cannot provide.

Chapter two briefly introduced Timothy Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory framework. Situational Crisis Communication Theory, or SCCT, is the crisis communication method that will be used to analyze West press releases, media accounts and data from face to face interviews. Conversely, Teun Van Dijk's discourse-cognition-society triangle will be utilized to analyze West press releases regarding the incident, and Norman Fairclough's analytical framework for critical discourse analysis will then be applied to analyze not only West's response, but the reaction of stakeholders throughout the community via the media

accounts and face to face interviews to discern what role context and power had in framing the event.

An Explanation of Situational Crisis Communication Theory

What is noteworthy about Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and what makes it a good choice for the West analysis is that it considers and incorporates many crisis communication strategies in one theory. The work of William Benoit, Matthew Seeger and Robert Ulmer are all represented in Coombs' theory.

As noted in chapter two, William Benoit created a foundational work on crisis communication with the publication of *Accounts, Excuses and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* in 1995. Benoit asserts that an organization communicates during a crisis to save face, and developed the concept of Image Restoration (later Repair) Theory from that. Benoit's primary assertion is that an organization will communicate in certain ways in an effort to save its reputation during a crisis. The criticism of Benoit is that he fails to consider a company's prior history in the community, and also the corporate behavior after the crisis. Seeger and Ulmer examine how banking good will prior to a crisis and responding virtuously afterwards serves to soften the blow to a company's reputation.

Coombs' SCCT considers all of these ideas. SCCT is designed to categorize threats to an organization and suggest crisis response strategies based on the type and severity of crisis an organization faces. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) contends that a crisis has a situational context, and that context stipulates which response strategies should be used. The "three core elements" of SCCT are the crisis situation, crisis response strategies and matching a

crisis strategy to the crisis situation (Coombs). Employing SCCT first means identifying the crisis situation, reviewing crisis response strategies, and then matching the appropriate strategy to the situation. A simplified visual of this process is below.



Figure 1: Employing SCCT

The first element, the crisis situation, is the most important since it ultimately determines what crisis communication strategies will be employed. Coombs identifies three types of crises and divides them into what he calls “clusters.” The three crisis clusters are: the victim cluster, the accidental cluster and the preventable cluster. Within each cluster, there are several types of crises that gradually worsen in severity.

Each of the clusters is based on a concept Coombs refers to as “crisis responsibility” which essentially determines how much blame stakeholders assign an organization in a crisis. (Coombs). The victim cluster will cause the least amount of blame to be levied against the organization and the preventable cluster will cause the most amount of blame. The accidental cluster falls in between. Within each cluster, the crises types move from least severe to most severe. Coombs identifies severity as “representing the amount of financial, physical, environmental or emotional harm a crisis can inflict” (Coombs, “Protective Powers”243). An increase in severity also increases the perception of responsibility. So the natural disaster crisis in the victim cluster is the least threatening crisis to organizational reputation, and the

organizational misdeed with injuries in the preventable cluster is the most threatening. However, Coombs suggests that a crisis that falls into the more severe category of each cluster should be treated as if it were part of the next strongest cluster. For instance, a severe victim cluster crisis should be treated as an accidental crisis, which insures that the reputational threat is taken seriously and the correct communications strategy is chosen. Coombs lists the three crisis clusters and their respective severity as follows:

The Victim Cluster: In these crises types, the organization is also a victim of the crisis.

- Natural Disaster: Acts of nature that damage an organization, such as an earthquake.
- Rumors: False and damaging information about an organization is being circulated.
- Workplace Violence: Current or former employee attacks current employee on site.
- Product Tampering/Malevolence: External agent causes damage to an organization.

The Accidental Cluster: In these crises types the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional.

- Challenges: Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner.

- Megadamage: A technical accident where the focus is on the environmental damage from the accident.
- Technical Breakdown Accidents: A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident.
- Technical Breakdown Recalls: A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled.

Preventable Cluster: In these crises types, the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions or violated a law or regulation.

- Human Breakdown Accidents: Human error causes an industrial accident.
- Human Breakdown Recalls: Human error causes a product to be recalled.
- Organizational Misdeed with No Injuries: Stakeholders are deceived without injuries.
- Organizational Misdeed Management Misconduct: Laws or regulations are violated by management.
- Organizational Misdeed with Injuries: Stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur. (Coombs, “Protective Powers” 244)

Once the cluster/responsibility and severity of the crisis is identified, one also has to consider a prior crisis history and the relationship between the organization in crisis and its stakeholders. Both of these things are what Coombs calls “intensifiers” because they can

intensify the effect of a crisis. Prior crisis history is simply whether or not this particular organization has suffered a similar crisis in the past. Relationship with stakeholders refers to the tenor of interactions with the organization and various stakeholders. Coombs believes that a history of crises and/or a poor relationship with stakeholders will exacerbate the damage to an organization's reputation. Just as with the severity of a crisis, Coombs recommends that an organization move the crisis up to the next strongest crisis cluster if there is a history of crises or a poor relationship with stakeholders (or both).

Once the crisis type is determined and the reputational threat identified, the second step is to choose a response strategy. But before that strategy is implemented, Coombs notes that an organization must deliver what he calls "instructing information" (Coombs, "Protective Powers" 246). All organizations, Coombs notes, regardless of reputational threat or severity, must impart instructing information to stakeholders. Instructing information is essentially telling stakeholders what occurred, telling stakeholders what they should do to protect themselves (if anything) and what the organization is doing to correct the problem. Once that instructing information is released, an organization can turn to protecting its reputation.

Much of the crisis communication literature agrees that what an organization does and says after a crisis has a tremendous impact on its reputation. Coombs details three response strategies: "deny, diminish and deal." Coombs' description of each is detailed below.

- Deny Response:
 - Attack the Accuser: Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization (the organization might threaten to sue the people who claim a crisis occurred).
 - Denial: Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis (the organization might state that no crisis event occurred).
 - Scapegoat: Crisis manager blames a person or group outside the organization for the crisis (an organization might blame a supplier for the crisis).

- Diminish Response:
 - Excuse: Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis (the organization might state it did not intend for the crisis to occur and that accidents happen as part of the operation of any organization).
 - Justification: Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis (the organization might say the injuries or damages from the crisis were minor).

- Deal Response:

- Ingratiation: Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization (the organization might thank stakeholders and remind the community about the organization contributions to a community cause).
 - Concern: Crisis manager expresses concern for the victims.
 - Compassion: Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
 - Regret: Crisis manager indicates the organization feels bad about the crisis.
 - Apology: Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
- (Coombs, “Protective Powers” 248)

One may notice that the crisis clusters and their contents imply an increasing level of responsibility as they progress. In the victim cluster, the organization is least responsible for the crisis and in the preventable cluster the organization is most responsible for the crisis. Likewise, the crisis response strategies imply an increasing acceptance of responsibility. The various “deny” strategies accept the least amount of blame, while the various “deal” strategies accept the highest level of blame. Coombs asserts that the more severe a crisis, the more stakeholders will blame the organization. Consequently, the organization must at least appear to accept that blame by utilizing the appropriate response strategy.

The third and final step in SCCT is to match the response strategy to the crisis type and severity. Because the perceived responsibility is so low in the victim cluster, Coombs notes that

organizations are not required to enact any kind of response strategy for these types of crises unless they wish to. They merely need to give instructing information and leave it at that. If the organization can prove there is no crisis, that a rumor is untrue for instance, it can utilize the deny strategy, but beyond that, Coombs notes, nothing but instructing information is expected. Outside the victim cluster, however, organizations will have an increased perception of responsibility, and that would require use of the diminish and deal response strategies. An especially severe crisis, Coombs notes can threaten not only the reputation of a company, but its legitimacy as well, and thus use of the deal response strategies would be especially important in restoring reputation and legitimacy.

SCCT is an effective and fairly descriptive, if distanced, means of analyzing an organization's crisis type and ensuing response. Coomb's theory is straightforward and relatively painless to apply. But it is that very objectivity that may be SCCT's greatest weakness. The theory fails to take into account outside factors like economic conditions in the community where the crisis occurs, the impact of the organization's message on other stakeholders, and the silencing of alternative discourses. The use of critical discourse analysis techniques will hopefully fill in the gaps that SCCT leaves.

Teun Van Dijk's Discourse-Society-Cognition Triangle for Critical Discourse Analysis

Applying Van Dijk's method to the press releases West distributed in the aftermath of the 2003 explosion will reveal the overarching messages the company was attempting to establish as hegemonic. The ability to frame the discourse allows West to preserve its reputation and legitimacy in the community, and utilizing this method of CDA will, as Van Dijk puts it: "focus

on the way discourse is involved in the reproduction of dominance” (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 119).

Teun Van Dijk devised a method of critical discourse analysis he labeled the discourse-society-cognition Triangle. Van Dijk defines the terms used in his method as such:

“discourse here is meant in the broad sense of a communicative event, including conversational interaction, written text as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images and any other semiotic or multimedia dimension of signification. Similarly, cognition here involves both personal as well as social cognition, beliefs and goals as well as evaluations and emotions , and any other mental or memory structures, representations or processes involved in discourse or interaction. And finally, society is meant to include both the local microstructures of situated face-to-face interactions as well as the more global, societal and political structures variously defined in terms of groups, group relations (such as dominance and inequality), movements, institutions, organizations, social processes, political systems and more abstract properties of societies and cultures” (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 98).

In simplistic terms, Van Dijk argues for what he calls the “text-context relationship” in which the social and cognitive sides of his triangle define the context of the discourse being studied. Van Dijk cautions that engaging in this type of CDA means carefully choosing a specific piece of communicative discourse one will analyze. It is not possible, he maintains, for anyone to perform a complete discourse analysis on all discourse surrounding a situation because there are simply too many forms of discourse and too much discourse and the analysis could go on forever. Given that, this dissertation will specifically apply Van Dijk’s discourse-society-

cognition triangle to the 16 press releases West issued regarding the 2003 explosion and its aftermath. These are the same press releases being analyzed as part of the crisis communication analysis.

Once a researcher selects specific texts to analyze, the next step is to study the texts and discern what “topics” or “global meanings” are contained in the text. Van Dijk suggests that a scholar can study words used in headlines, summaries, and conclusions and often discern the overarching meanings of the text. For example, in a chapter of *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (Wodak and Meyer 2001), Van Dijk analyzes a petition that supports the Microsoft corporation in its efforts to avoid U.S. anti-trust litigation. The “topics” or “global meanings” of this petition support capitalism and the idea of free enterprise.

Once the topics and global meanings are discovered, the next step in the discourse-cognition-society triangle method is to discern the “local meanings” of the discourse. Local meanings are the meanings that the writer or creator of the text gives to the discourse. This is important because when a writer chooses particular words for a text, he or she may be conveying a subtle message. As Van Dijk notes, the words chosen by the writer can influence “the opinions and attitudes of recipients...we thus often witness a strategy of positive self representation and negative other presentation, in which our good things and their bad things are emphasized and our bad things and their good things are de-emphasized” (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 103). My analysis of West makes use of Van Dijk’s method in order to explore how self/other representation affects the communicative act. This analysis tends to indicate that West’s ‘good things’ are being emphasized while their ‘bad things’ are being de-emphasized.

Local meaning also conveys implicit information. What a text alludes to, implies, or deliberately leaves out can emphasize what messages the writer is trying to hide or negate.

Searching for both the global and local meanings in a text can help identify “the aims and beliefs of the speaker or the recipients, the social roles, positions and relations of participants, institutional constraints and so on” (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 106).

In terms of the social side of Van Dijk’s triangle, the analysis of the press releases should indicate that West sought to establish and then maintain the dominant discourse in the aftermath of the event. The employees at West Pharmaceutical are primarily working class, blue collar workers. Both they and the community relied on the jobs that West brought to the community. As a result, West was in a position to set the tone and dictate the terms of community events such as a memorial for the workers that died, and a celebration once the newly built plant opened.

Norman Fairclough’s Analytical Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis

If Teun Van Dijk’s discourse-cognition-society triangle reveals the underlying meaning and power conveyed in the West press releases, then Norman Fairclough’s analytical framework for critical discourse analysis will indicate whether or not West’s message was reproduced by the stakeholders in Kinston and Lenoir County. Fairclough’s framework includes the following steps:

1. Focus on a social problem that has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to tackling the social problem via analysis of the network of practices it is located within, the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice concerned, and the discourse.
3. Consider whether the social order “needs” the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacle.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis. (Fairclough, “CDA as Method” 125)

In terms of focusing on a social problem that has a semiotic aspect, the social problem in this case is the uneven distribution of power between a corporation and the community in which it resides, and the ability of the corporation's discourse to overwhelm and silence competing discourses. The West explosion is an example of this social problem, and also an illustration of how language is used by a company to retain that power and frame the crisis, and potentially silence the populations that hold an alternative view.

The obstacles to tackling the problem primarily lie with the relationship between West and its workers and the community. An important piece of the power dynamic, what Fairclough would define as the "network of practices" in this case, is class. The people who run West Pharmaceutical Services at the corporate level are white collar workers, while the people who work in the plant itself are blue collar or working class people. The community where West is located sits within a rural region, one of the poorest in the state of North Carolina. Hogg has noted that rural communities are not as powerful as urban communities because of the prevailing conception that urban communities are smarter, more dynamic, more progressive and thus better. Degennaro has similarly argued that the working class is hamstrung by its subordination to corporate bosses and administrators, which is certainly true of the relationship between West, its workers, and the community. He also notes that most working class people are actually discouraged from finding out more about how their companies are managed or run; they are cogs in the wheel, and the bosses are content to keep them that way.

Fairclough's model also requires an analysis of how semiosis is related to the network of practices. The semiosis I analyze in the case of the West explosion is the press releases West issued in the wake of the explosion, the media coverage and the text of the interviews I have gathered. This material will highlight what Fairclough would refer to as "imposing, extending

and legitimizing” (Fairclough, “CDA as Method” 130) West’s framing of the event. This analysis will also explore how West’s language served to silence and “other” the employees and the community. West used language to take control of the discourse surrounding the event, and effectively quelled any significant objection. In other words, West utilized language to retain its power, power that could not be effectively challenged by the working class employees and members of the community.

The concepts of silencing and othering are also explored repeatedly by a number of the scholars mentioned in chapter two, which will augment and illuminate this step in Fairclough’s framework. The men who beat their partners in Thiesmeyer’s work physically silenced their wives by beating them and then figuratively silenced them by discouraging the women from reporting or even talking about the abuse. Migrant workers, also explored in Thiesmeyer’s book, were said to be “invisible” —because they were not regular participants in the community, they were ignored and had no voice. Degennaro noted that Pittsburgh steelworkers were bewildered and angry over the collapse of their livelihood, and hurt by the community’s attempt to trivialize their heritage by placing a mall on the site of the former Homestead Steel plant. The former steelworkers were silenced, unable to express their grief, by the celebratory nature of the new mall.

The very act of silencing a particular group permits it to be set apart from the mainstream community, and allows that community to “other” its less powerful residents. The steelworkers mentioned above were ignored, ridiculed and characterized as a bunch of men who could not let go of the past. Hogg noted an even more problematic othering in rural communities. She maintained that mainstream American culture so romanticizes the rural, agrarian ideal that rural people themselves are often set apart like displays in a museum. Those of us who do not live in

rural areas or on farms don't want those rural communities to change or assimilate because it is their very otherness that we are nostalgic for.

As to whether or not the social order in this case “needs” the problem, my analysis will indicate the answer to that question is yes. Fairclough suggests that “needing the problem” is, or can be, ideological and the discourse surrounding it helps sustain the powerful and dominant in a community. My research demonstrates that the community surrounding West needed to maintain West's power because it needed the jobs West provides. The analysis of West's discourse in the wake of the explosion indicates an effort on the part of West to retain the power it already had within the community, and actively deploy it in order to gain governmental assistance and protect the corporate image.

The final stages of Fairclough's model, stages 4 & 5, involve an analysis of how the study of the particular issue at hand can impact society and scholarship. Fairclough advocates for using CDA to effect change in power and social structures, and I hope that utilizing CDA in general and Fairclough's model in particular to analyze the discourse surrounding this event will offer up a critique of crisis communication models as tools that focus on repairing corporate image at the expense of less powerful stakeholders, who are silenced and marginalized.

The use of two separate means of analysis is meant to highlight the discrepancy between what was being said in the wake of the West explosion and what was remaining unsaid. Situational Crisis Communication Theory will indicate what the company did to emerge from the incident with minimal damage, while critical discourse analysis will address the context of the event, and consider how West's position might have silenced alternative viewpoints of the event. Because critical discourse analysis considers not only what is said, but what is not said, it reveals the hidden messages an organization may be conveying. Likewise, because critical discourse

analysis considers not only the organization and its message, but the impact of that organization and its message on the community and less powerful stakeholders, one can discover other viewpoints that may not have been aired.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

In a way, the analysis presented in this chapter follows my own personal trajectory. When the explosion actually happened, I assessed what occurred in Kinston in 2003 through the only lens I was familiar with, that of crisis communication. The conclusions I drew through the use of that crisis communication lens aligned with the general consensus: West Pharmaceutical Services did an outstanding job of navigating this crisis.

Later, as I learned about critical discourse analysis, I began questioning the assumptions I had made and readjusting my thinking to include consideration of the power dynamic in Kinston, and how that might have factored in to the nearly complete lack of criticism of West by stakeholders there. As I worked through the analysis, I was stunned to think that I had completely missed the importance of power in this incident as it seemed perfectly obvious once I began exploring it. That, ultimately is why examining a crisis utilizing both crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis is so important, because I believe that I'm not alone in missing the contribution West's power made in the company's successful navigation of the explosion, and that applying CDA is a way to force researchers to address the "sleeping giant" in crisis communication theory.

The West Pharmaceutical Services Explosion: Crisis Communication Analysis

It's important to note at the outset that crisis communication requires an organization to respond immediately, and thus an analysis of an organization's crisis communication response has to consider how the organization responded at the time of the incident. It wasn't until much, much later that West would be criticized by the CSB and fined by the state of North Carolina for what occurred in the 2003 explosion. So initially, my crisis communication analysis considers

how the company responded at the time of the crisis before a definitive cause was pinpointed. After that analysis, I consider how the findings of the CSB investigation might have altered the classification of the crisis according to Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), first introduced in chapter two.

Defining the Crisis

On the afternoon of the explosion at the West Kinston plant, the corporation itself began issuing press releases regarding the incident. The first press release was a confirmation that “an explosion of unknown origin” (“Comments on Plant Explosion”) had occurred at the plant. West CEO Don Morel was quoted in that same press release as saying, “Our overriding concern lies with the well being and safety of our employees, their loved ones and the surrounding community. We are in the process of gathering more information and will issue a more comprehensive statement when we have the facts to share” (“Comments on Plant Explosion”). Morel also expressed surprise regarding the explosion, stating “we are obviously stunned by the news of this incident at our Kinston facility” (“Comments on Plant Explosion”). Expressing surprise suggests that the company had no knowledge of any conditions that might have caused the explosion, which in turn suggests the explosion was either the result of an external attack or an accident. Given that this press release was issued immediately after the explosion, West may have chosen to frame the event this way because the CEO more than likely did not have information about the incident at first. The Kinston plant was located close to the local airport, and initial concern was that a plane had crashed into the facility. The explosion occurred less than two years after September 11, and so terrorism was also an initial concern. Those two things were rather quickly ruled out by investigators, which left only an accident as the assumed cause.

Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) requires that an organization initially determine what cluster the crisis belongs to and what type of crisis event it has on its hands in order to know the best way to respond. With terrorism and a plane crash ruled out, the crisis would not have fallen in the victim cluster. In the aftermath of the explosion, West continued to refer to it as an "explosion of unknown origin" and stated the company did not know what caused it. Kinston employees interviewed by the local newspaper also expressed shock about the explosion, and several commented that they did not know what could have caused it. This further solidified the crisis as an accident, which means it would not fall into Coombs' preventable cluster, in which an organization knowingly puts people at risk, takes inappropriate actions or violates a law or regulation. Within a week of the explosion, the local newspaper, the *Kinston Free Press*, reported that the federal bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms or ATF, had deemed the explosion "accidental." Further bolstering the argument for placing the crisis in the accidental cluster is the definition of the accidental cluster itself, which states that the actions of the organization that led to the crisis were unintentional. West's repeated declaration that it did not know what caused the explosion would clearly suggest the explosion itself was unintentional. Therefore, the explosion would fall into the accidental cluster. The next step is to define the type of accidental crisis that occurred. Within the accidental cluster, the four crisis types are:

- Challenges: Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner.
- Megadamage: A technical accident where the focus is on the environmental damage from the accident.

- Technical Breakdown Accidents: A technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident.
- Technical Breakdown Recalls: A technology or equipment failure causes a product to be recalled. (Coombs, “Protective Powers” 244)

The explosion would not be considered a challenge or a technical breakdown recall; it clearly does not fit either of these types. It would not be ruled a megadamage type crisis, since the concern was not environmental. That leaves only the technical breakdown accident, in which a technology or equipment failure causes an industrial accident.

Presence of Intensifiers

Once the cluster and type of crisis is defined, the next step in Coombs’ theory is to consider prior crisis history and the relationship of the organization with stakeholders. Coombs indicates that these can be “intensifiers;” a prior crisis history and a poor relationship with stakeholders can increase perceptions of blame for an organization, and thus dictate a stronger organizational response (Coombs, “Protective Powers” 244). West had been operating in Kinston since 1975 and had never had a crisis, therefore prior crisis history was not a factor. In addition, West enjoyed a particularly positive relationship with the community and its employees.

Within days of the explosion, officials from both Lenoir County and the City of Kinston began putting together economic incentive packages designed to encourage West to rebuild in Kinston. Employees of the plant noted that the jobs at West paid more than other jobs in the area, and that West was a good place to work. One employee, interviewed by the *Kinston Free Press*, said “The way the other factories are, you ain’t nothing but a number. Here, the only way you get

fired is if you mess up” (Spencer, “West Works Insurance”). Another *Kinston Free Press* article noted that “West Pharmaceutical Services had a reputation for having good paying jobs” (Spencer, “Area Unemployment”) and yet another noted that the company was “held locally in high regard” (Spencer, “West Pharm Recovery”).

The face to face interviews conducted for this dissertation seem to agree with this assessment. All of the six individuals interviewed were asked what kind of reputation West had in the community prior to the explosion. The Emergency Responder (ER) interviewed worked for an official emergency response agency in the community at the time of the explosion and was one of the first emergency officials on the scene of the explosion. This individual had lived in the community for years and had been working as an emergency responder for this particular agency for years as well. Because ER’s focus and perspective centered on safety issues, it’s not surprising that his answer to the question regarding West’s reputation before the explosion centered on safety issues. “They had a very good track record – safety record” ER noted. “They were viewed as a good, long term employer with a good safety record that ran a good, safe, clean facility” (Emergency Responder Interview).

Government Official 1 (GO1) currently works for a government agency in the community and did when the explosion itself happened. GO1, like Emergency Responder, had lived in the community for a number of years and worked for the government agency for a number of years prior to the explosion. GO1 noted that West had a good reputation in the community, and a reputation for paying good wages, providing good benefits and was known as a good place to work. GO1 also noted that West had a reputation for being a “good corporate citizen” with regular involvement in programs such as the local United Way charity annual

fundraiser: “Some [industries] are better community citizens than others and West was a good one” (Government Official 1 Interview).

Economic Development Official (EDO) currently works for a public agency in the community and is familiar with the situation regarding West. Even though he did not work in his current capacity at the time of the explosion, he was working in the community, had lived there for a number of years, and is familiar with the incentive package that was offered to West after the explosion. EDO also noted West’s commitment to the local United Way campaign and the fact that West offered good blue collar, working class jobs that paid good wages and benefits. In the aftermath of the explosion, when the West plant had been destroyed and the future of the Kinston plant was in question, EDO stated that the community was eager to keep West: “we didn’t want to lose this company. [It’s] not only jobs lost, but to lose a company like West – it hurt more than just [in terms of] jobs” (Economic Development Official Interview).

In terms of employee perceptions, the West Employee (WE) and Former West Employee (FEW) interviewed both noted that the company was a good place to work prior to the explosion. WE is an individual who has worked for West for a number of years and was employed the day of the explosion. WE stated that West was seen as a good place to work because the company paid higher wages than other area industries and that there was a family atmosphere among the employees, for instance they often did things together outside of work. WE also noted that prior to the explosion, the company treated its employees “fairly” and that while management may not always give employees what they wanted, management at least would listen when an employee had a concern (West Employee Interview).

Former West Employee (FWE) worked at the company for a number of years prior to the explosion, was working the day of the explosion and suffered serious injuries as a result. FWE no longer works at West. FWE felt that West was a good place to work and that coworkers were like family. The company gave raises each year and incentives for things like good attendance. “Everyone [had a] fair shot, everybody was treated the same, everyone knew the rules” (Former West Employee Interview).

In sum, the local newspaper accounts, which generally reflect the attitude of the community, and the reflections of those interviewed suggest West Pharmaceuticals did have a positive relationship with its stakeholders, and therefore there was no negative relationship that would act as an intensifier to the crisis. Given that there was no prior crisis history and no negative relationship with stakeholders, there were no intensifiers in the crisis.

Choosing Response Strategy

Coombs contends that intensifiers force a crisis into the next, more severe, crisis cluster, but since no intensifiers existed, the West crisis would remain in the accidental crisis cluster and be labeled as a medium or moderate threat to West’s reputation. After the crisis cluster, type and level of threat have been identified, the next step in SCCT requires that an organization choose a response strategy from among the three Coombs offers. Coombs identifies three response strategies:

Deny Response:

- Attack the Accuser: Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization (the organization might threaten to sue the people who claim a crisis occurred).
- Denial: Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis (the organization might state that no crisis event occurred).
- Scapegoat: Crisis manager blames a person or group outside the organization for the crisis (an organization might blame a supplier for the crisis).

Diminish Response:

- Excuse: Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis (the organization might state it did not intend for the crisis to occur and that accidents happen as part of the operation of any organization).
- Justification: Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis (the organization might say the injuries or damages from the crisis were minor).

Deal Response:

- Ingratiation: Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization (the organization might thank stakeholders and remind the community about the organization contributions to a community cause).
- Concern: Crisis manager expresses concern for the victims.
- Compassion: Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
- Regret: Crisis manager indicates the organization feels bad about the crisis.
- Apology: Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
(Coombs, “Protective Powers” 248)

Coombs’ theory also requires that a response strategy match the crisis type and threat, which means that a severe threat would require a more active “deal” response. The more serious the threat, the more an organization is perceived as responsible, so it is important that the organization chooses the correct level of response. A crisis in the victim cluster requires only a deny response. A crisis in the accidental cluster will require a diminish response and possibly a deal response as well. A crisis in the preventable cluster will definitely require a deal response.

Using Coomb’s theory for analysis, the West crisis has most of the characteristics of an accidental crisis, but because there was injury and death, the response had to include facets of the deal response as well as the diminish response. And in fact, it did.

Instructing Information & Response

Once an organization chooses a crisis response strategy, and before it implements it, Coombs theory requires that the organization provide instructing information. Recall from chapter three that instructing information is essentially telling stakeholders what occurred, telling stakeholders what they should do to protect themselves (if anything) and what the organization is doing to correct the problem (Coombs, “Protective Powers” 246).

West did provide instructing information in the 2003 crisis. As noted earlier in the chapter, the company issued a press release on the day of the explosion that announced the fact that the explosion had occurred. The press release also indicated that company CEO Don Morel would travel to Kinston immediately to oversee the company’s response to the crisis. A press release issued the day after the explosion updated the media on the situation, providing injury tolls and a statement on how the explosion would impact the production and supply chain cycle of the company. The release also indicated that the company was cooperating with investigators on the scene to determine a cause. This information fits Coombs description of instructing information; it clearly tells stakeholders (including clients of West that purchase products from the company) what occurred and what the company was doing (cooperating with investigators) to correct the problem (“Provides Update”).

After providing instructing information, West launched a response strategy that included facets of both the diminish and deal responses, and, much later, some deny responses. In terms of a diminish response, West employed the “excuse” strategy, which minimizes the organization’s responsibility by suggesting that the crisis was unintentional and beyond the control of the organization. West never did this overtly, its use of the excuse strategy was subtle. In its press

releases, the company expressed shock at the explosion, and called the cause of it “unknown.” In fact, West’s press releases refer to the explosion as an “accident” eleven times, which certainly implies that the explosion was unintentional. After the CSB issued its report on the explosion, West issued a press release that stated the company itself had performed an “exhaustive, professionally directed” internal investigation that indicated the explosion was an “accident” that was the result of “a combination of unforeseen factors” (“Comments on Chemical Safety”). Suggesting that the factors that led to the explosion were “unforeseen” certainly does suggest that the explosion was beyond West’s control, which is another aspect of the excuse response.

Examining West’s response against the framework of SCCT also indicates several examples of the deal response, most notably ingratiation, concern, compassion and regret. Even though Coombs’ framework suggests the West crisis aligns with the accidental cluster, the deal responses are appropriate because of the multiple injuries and deaths, which according to SCCT are serious enough to warrant a deal response. The most severe type of threat Coombs identifies in his theory is the preventable cluster. Within the preventable cluster, the most serious crisis is the organizational misdeed with injuries, which is the only crisis detailed in Coombs theory that mentions injury. None of the crises mention death. Given that six people died as a result of the explosion and dozens more were injured, it is not surprising that West’s response would fall into the deal category.

In terms of ingratiation, West repeatedly expressed its thanks to numerous stakeholders during the crisis. The company began thanking stakeholders one day after the explosion, saying “We deeply appreciate the outpouring of offers of support and help from far and wide, and the

continuing efforts of the rescue and recovery teams” (“Provides Update”). On February 11, 2003, CEO Don Morel released a statement that included: “I’m proud of the effort and dedication shown by our employees in response to the challenges presented by the Kinston situation and we continue to be heartened by the support shown our company and employees worldwide, by our customers, shareholders and the Kinston community” (“Update on Assessment of Manufacturing”). Later press releases praised Kinston employees as “highly skilled” and thanked North Carolina Governor Mike Easley for waiving a one week waiting period for unemployment benefits for West employees left jobless because of the explosion. On February 28, 2003, West CEO Don Morel stated “It is clear that West, along with Governor Easley and a host of federal, state and local officials, is committed to the best interests of West employees” (“Thanks General Assembly”). This comment, while thanking government officials, also subtly tells the audience that West has its employees’ best interests at heart. Without stating it baldly, the company can remind stakeholders of its commitment to employees, which is another form of ingratiation. When West reached an agreement to rebuild in Kinston, Morel issued this statement:

“West has been an integral part of the Kinston community for nearly 30 years, employing a dedicated and skilled workforce. It has always been our hope and intent to remain in Kinston and we are excited to have arrived at a solution that will make this happen. We are very grateful to the City of Kinston, Lenoir County and the state of North Carolina for working diligently with us to develop a solution that benefits our employees, our company and our local, county and state organizations. Their consistent support and quick responses will enable us to accelerate our rebuilding program, put our Kinston employees back to work and

continue to provide products critical to our healthcare customers.” (“Announces Agreement”)

This statement both praises various stakeholders and also reminds the reader of West’s long commitment to Kinston and Lenoir County. Again, this response illustrates Coomb’s textbook ingratiation strategy.

West’s response also could be classified as a strong concern strategy. Coomb’s concern strategy requires the crisis manager to express concern for victims, and West did this extensively in both actions and words. On the day of the explosion, West’s first press release contained a strong concern statement: “Our overriding concern lies with the well being and safety of our employees, their loved ones and the surrounding community” (“Comments on Plant Explosion”). The company’s behavior reinforced this sentiment; the CEO flew to Kinston that same day. The day after the explosion, the CEO visited the injured in the hospital. A press release issued on that day stated:

“I have personally had the opportunity to meet with members of the affected families and will be visiting with victims at area hospitals during the day. West has grief counselors on site providing victims and families with counseling. We are meeting with all Kinston employees today regarding the medical and salary benefits available to them from the company as well as alternative employment possibilities that may exist at other West facilities.” (“Provides Update”)

West corporate officials also arranged and held a memorial service for those who died in the explosion, which the company called “a service of healing and remembrance” (“Announces

Kinston Plant Memorial”) The service was held in the auditorium of the local community college and was broadcast to family members and victims recovering at two different hospitals. North Carolina Senator Elizabeth Dole and North Carolina Governor Mike Easley attended the event. West CEO Don Morel said: “This is a time of great sorrow for our company. It is fitting that we come together to remember those who lost their lives and to offer our prayers for the injured and all families who will be forever changed as a result of this tragic accident” (“Announces Kinston Plant Memorial”). Again, both in the action of hosting the memorial service, and in the words conveyed, the company reiterated its concern.

Several months after the explosion, West continued to display a strategy that Coomb’s theory would classify as concern, using the phrase “we continue to grieve for the loss of our friends and colleagues” in two separate press releases released in July, 2003. The first press release, issued on July 1, 2003, announced a groundbreaking for the new West facility in Kinston. The second, issued on July 17, 2003, detailed West’s response to the fine levied against the company by the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (NCOSHA). A year after the explosion West held a memorial service in Kinston on the anniversary of the incident. And when the company rebuilt its facility in Kinston, it contained a memorial to those who had died in the 2003 explosion.

The compassion strategy in Coombs’ theory differs from the concern strategy in that the compassion option focuses on offering victims money or other gifts. West’s response also could be categorized as compassion in a variety of ways. In the immediate aftermath of the explosion, West agreed to keep paying all Kinston employee salaries for one month. On the day of the memorial service in Kinston, February 20, 2003, West officials also announced the creation of

“the Kinston Employee fund” in coordination with two Kinston charitable organizations (“Announces Kinston Plant Memorial”). The fund accepted donations from the public, which were then given to West employees to help with bills and medical expenses. The company also offered Kinston plant employees who were not injured jobs at the company’s other plants in the U.S. Under that program, a Kinston employee worked for three weeks in a West plant in Florida or Nebraska and then came home for a week. The company paid for travel, lodging, and a per diem allowance. Roughly 60 employees agreed to do this; the rest were laid off.

When the company was fined \$400,000 by the State of North Carolina after the explosion, the state allowed the company to give \$300,000 dollars of the fine to agencies that assisted in the aftermath of the explosion, local fire and rescue agencies, for instance. In a press release regarding this, West acknowledged the citation from the state but did not specifically mention being fined. It mentioned the \$300,000 as a “donation” and stated that the company was “pleased to donate \$300,000 to assist local organizations that provided assistance to West and its employees in the aftermath of the January 29th incident” (“Statement Regarding NCOSHA”). And finally, after the new Kinston facility was completed, the company held a picnic for employees and their families at the site of the new plant. The event featured entertainment, a NASCAR driver there to sign autographs, games, carnival rides and drawings for prizes. The event was billed as an “Employee Appreciation Festivity” (“Honors Employees with Event”)

West did in one instance express regret, which is also one strategy in Coomb’s deal response. The regret strategy requires that a crisis manager indicates that the organization feels bad about the crisis. Although West had frequently shown concern about the incident, it shied away from actually expressing regret, instead couching its feelings about the explosion by using

phrases like “Kinston plant tragedy” and “catastrophe” and “tragic event.” However, on the day the company was fined by the State of North Carolina, West did make a statement of regret, saying: “West sincerely regrets that the accident of January 29th occurred and we continue to grieve for the loss of our friends and colleagues” (“Statement Regarding NCOSHA”). The statement of regret stops short at actually assuming responsibility for the explosion. The company only expresses regret that the explosion occurred.

In the next sentence of that same press release, however, West initiated the first of its limited “deny” responses, which utilized the attack the accuser strategy and focused on attacking the State of North Carolina for issuing citations for the explosion. The rest of the press release read:

“West cooperated fully with NCOSHA’S investigation and we are very disappointed that any citations were issued. West vigorously disagrees with its allegations of non-compliance with certain NCOSHA requirements and we firmly believe that we would prevail if we contested the citation. However, in the best interest of our employees, customers, the local community and the Company, we feel the appropriate course of action is to promptly resolve the issues presented, continue our cooperative relationship with NCOSHA and to move forward with re-establishing production operations in Kinston.” (“Statement Regarding NCOSHA”)

West cast doubt on the State’s actions, while indicating that it would not contest the citations in deference to its employees and other stakeholders.

The company issued a similar response in the wake of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Board (CSB) report that criticized West Pharmaceutical procedures leading up to the explosion. In that response, West officials called the explosion the “result of a combination of unforeseen factors” and criticized the CSB:

“West believes that the CSB's criticisms would be more appropriately directed at those entities that the CSB itself found did not warn West of the potential dust hazards. The explosion on January 29, 2003 was triggered by a complex series of events which the CSB did not conclusively explain, in spite of all of the time, effort and cooperation devoted to this effort.” (“Comments on CSB”)

The company, in issuing this response, questioned the way in which the CSB conducted its investigation and the CSB’s conclusions. This is another example of attacking the accuser strategy. The citations by the State of North Carolina and the findings in the CSB report were the only public comments that implied criticism of the company in terms of the explosion. And in both cases, West responded by attacking the entities leveling the criticism.

Crisis Communication Success?

When analyzing the crisis communication strategies West employed during the January 2003 explosion through Coomb’s framework, the strategies West used were successful in framing the event. An analysis of various media accounts and the reflections of those interviewed face to face suggests that West was successful in establishing a framework for the crisis, and that framework appears to be replicated in the data. As mentioned in chapter three, the external media data also included several articles written from an academic or occupational

safety perspective. Unlike the local media articles analyzed, these articles do not seem to replicate West Pharmaceutical's framing of the 2003 explosion, and in fact seem to offer a more critical assessment of West's responsibility in the explosion than do the local media articles. This is, I suspect, because the focus of these articles is on dust explosions and occupational safety and also because these publications have no connection to or stake in Lenoir County, Kinston or West. An article written by Angela Blair in the *Journal of Loss Prevention* in March, 2007 examined dust explosions in general and regulations governing dust explosions. Three dust explosions that occurred in the U.S. in 2003 were mentioned. The West explosion was one of them. The article mentioned that awareness of dust as a hazard was a problem, as well as incorrect and incomplete material safety data sheets. An article in the *NFPA Journal* published in November of 2004 also examined the Kinston dust explosion and several others around the United States. The NFPA, or National Fire Prevention Association, is an organization that drafts and promulgates fire safety codes and is the author of NFPA 654 – the code that specifically addresses combustible dust, which was not in place in North Carolina at the time of the West explosion. The NFPA article references the CSB report and does seem to bluntly address the issues that the local media did not. For instance, “CSB member John Breslin says the disaster at West Pharmaceutical would likely have been avoided had the company understood the hazard and followed the recommendation of NFPA 654” (Barlas). The article also discusses how an accident like what occurred at West might have been prevented:

“Why did West Pharmaceutical maintenance workers regularly see the accumulations of dust above the suspended ceiling and fail to remove them? An attorney for West Pharmaceutical says they thought the dust was inert – even

though the 1990 material safety data sheet (MSDS) for Acumist [the product that produced the polyethylene dust] advises users to consult NFPA 654. West Pharmaceutical executives didn't make the connection between that MSDS and the potential for dangerous dust accumulations from the Acumist containing slurry used in the batchoff machines. When West Pharmaceutical started using Acumist in 1990, it was in small quantities as a dusting agent, not as an ingredient in a slurry, which calls for much larger amounts of the polyethylene resin, greatly multiplying the explosion hazard." (Barlas)

An article published in *EHS Today* in October, 2004 made similar statements. The title of the article is "Investigation Finds Inadequate Dust Controls Caused West Pharmaceutical Explosion" and the article itself seems to place the blame for the explosion squarely on the company:

"The CSB report determined four root causes of the accident at West: the company's inadequate engineering assessment for combustible powders, inadequate consultation with fire safety standards, lack of appropriate review of material safety data sheets and inadequate communication of dust hazards to workers. 'If the good safety practices described in the National Fire Prevention Code and elsewhere had been followed at West, this tragic accident would likely have been avoided' said [the] CSB lead investigator." (Smith)

The fourth piece of external media data is a very brief article posted to the *Industrial Safety and Hygiene* (ISHN) website in 2003. The article focuses on the fine and citation issued by the NIOSH and does not include any comments from West officials, which means there was no opportunity given to West to frame the explosion, although comments from the CSB

preliminary report were included on the ISHN site. The author writes that the “U.S. Chemical Safety Board investigators concluded that a dust explosion occurred above an area where rubber strips were coated with moistened polyethylene powder. Investigators said the five conditions necessary for a dust explosion were all met at the West plant: fuel, oxygen, dispersion, confinement and ignition” (ISHN website). This frank assessment of West’s responsibility does not seem to be replicated elsewhere.

This left me with the question, was West’s crisis communication deemed successful outside the local and regional community? Perhaps from a business standpoint. An article published on the *Smart Business* website in August of 2006 specifically details what West officials did to “triumph” in the wake of the 2003 explosion. The article’s title is “Tragedy to Triumph.” The characterization of the dust, and the company’s awareness of it, varies substantially from the articles in the occupational/fire safety journals:

“No one knows exactly what caused combustible dust inside a drop ceiling to ignite at West Pharmaceutical Services’ Kinston, N.C., plant three years ago. Unbeknownst to workers at the plant, the dust — a product of the plant’s production of rubber stoppers for syringes and intravenous tubes — had been settling on hard-to-access surfaces for years. Early in the afternoon of Jan. 29, 2003, the dust caught fire and exploded.” (Cassano)

The article also details and assesses West’s focused plan to disseminate its message and protect its reputation:

“The disaster at Kinston could have placed a black mark on West’s reputation that may have taken years, maybe decades, to erase. But West was able to rebuild its reputation quickly, and Morel credits management and employees’ handling of the media exposure after the accident as a major reason why. A catastrophic event can bring unwanted media glare to a company. Cameras captured the devastation to West’s plant, and satellites beamed the images around the world. To keep West’s media comments straightforward and consistent immediately following the accident, Morel limited media interaction to a small group of administrators who were kept constantly abreast of the latest developments. The morning after, major television networks aired an interview with Morel in which he communicated the priorities that had been established by company leaders right after the explosion. ‘The message about our three priorities was actually telecast on the national networks at 6 the morning after the accident,’ he says. ‘All the networks picked that up. I told them, No. 1, employees, families and community; No. 2, customers and supply; No. 3, those aspects of the business we can control.’ Inevitably, the media sought out the Kinston employees and their families. Those people most affected by the explosion, however, turned out to be West’s biggest supporters in front of the cameras, giving the company’s image a major boost when it was needed most. Morel credits much of the positive employee response to the company’s emergency training. (Cassano)

This article makes several things clear – first, what precisely West Pharmaceutical focused on communicating regarding the 2003 crisis, and second – from a business standpoint, West’s

efforts were deemed successful enough to catalogue in a business journal. Overall, it appears that West was successful in framing its message in the local community and among business constituents. But what about the local stakeholders? How would they assess West's handling of the crisis? The next section will address that.

Face to Face Interview Analysis

All six of the individuals interviewed for this dissertation were asked about West's reaction to and handling of the crisis. Their answers to these questions will be detailed below in an effort to determine whether or not the local stakeholders perceived West's behavior as appropriate and also whether or not the stakeholders replicate the messages that West articulated during the crisis.

Emergency Responder (ER) was asked: What was or is your assessment of West's reaction to the incident? and What was or is your assessment of West's handling of the incident? As noted earlier, ER was one of the first emergency officials on the scene and was in a leadership position within his agency. ER had the opportunity to interact with West officials during this incident and also has extensive professional experience with emergency rescue, fire and safety issues.

ER arrived on the scene shortly after the first call came in to emergency dispatchers regarding the explosion. Upon arrival, the West facility was a scene of "massive destruction – the whole building was compromised." The immediate focus was on life saving because people were trapped inside the building and others were missing. There was no chance that emergency

crews on the scene would be able to put the plant fire out. The blaze was too extensive, so the focus was on life-saving and containing the fire.

ER noted that initially, West's reaction to the explosion was chaotic. When asked how many people had been inside the plant at the time of the explosion, company officials on the scene could not tell rescuers, and it would take more than 12 hours to account for everyone. ER says the explosion itself was so severe that it "seriously damaged" West's ability to handle it: "I don't think West had a good plan in place. It might have been adequate for a fire. But many businesses have plans. Few can activate them" (Emergency Responder Interview). The chaos seemed to subside, from ER's viewpoint, once officials from West's corporate office arrived on the scene. "I think when corporate got involved, the response was very good. The company handled it very, very well, both in caring for employees and getting information to rescuers." When asked what he meant by that, what specifically led to that assessment, ER noted that West continued to pay employees for a month after the plant explosion and also helped injured employees get the care they needed: "They were very genuine, caring, there was genuine concern for everyone in that plant. They did everything right for employees" (Emergency Responder Interview). ER also said corporate executives were forthcoming to emergency rescuers and investigators, that there was no "bunker mentality" in which company officials refused to answer questions or became defensive.

ER was also asked, from an occupational safety standpoint, if West should have been aware of the dust danger and fixed the problem before the explosion. "Could they have known? Could they have kept a cleaner plant? Yeah. Should they have known? I don't know" (Emergency Responder Interview). In terms of assigning blame for the explosion, ER felt that

the company had always had a good track record where safety was concerned, and that there was no gross negligence or intent – that the explosion was a “preventable accident.”

Government Official 1(GO1), Government Official 2 (GO2) and Economic Development Official (EDO) were also asked about how West reacted to and handled the explosion and about assessing blame. In terms of how the company reacted to and handled the crisis, GO1 said, “I was really impressed with how the company handled people’s feelings, with the commitment to employees, the company handled it very, very well. What I heard over and over again was ‘West was here for us’” (Government Official 1 Interview). In terms of whether or not the company was to blame for the explosion in any way, GO1 said “Should it have been expected? I don’t know. I don’t think anything was blatantly done wrong. Nothing was intentionally malicious” (Government Official 1 Interview).

Government Official 2 classified West’s response to the crisis as “close to being brilliant – they were very sincere about the damage, the employees, about saying and doing the right things. They immediately started a campaign to make sure people were taken care of, which were their employees and their families. They knew how to handle it. I don’t know if it was sincere, but it appeared to be sincere” (Government Official 2 Interview). In terms of what or who might be to blame for the explosion, GO2 said “I don’t know if I would blame anyone. Sure, there were standards violated, but West ran a clean plant. We just didn’t have the awareness.” (Government Official 2 Interview).

Economic Development Official also praised West’s handling of the event. EDO recalls observing the company’s response and thinking, “Look how they handled this – wow – they did

a great job” (Economic Development Official Interview). EDO also recalls thinking that it was amazing that more people were not hurt or killed in the explosion. In terms of West’s response in the wake of the explosion, EDO felt that the response was “modeled perfectly [in terms of] how a company would handle a tragedy. West did a very good job, everything was done to the best of their ability” (Economic Development Official Interview). In terms of assessing blame, Economic Development Official was quick to say West bore none. “It was truly an accident – unforeseen” he said.

As for the West Pharmaceutical employees, the two individuals interviewed, West Employee (WE) and Former West Employee (FWE), had differing viewpoints. WE did not suffer any substantial injuries in the explosion. On the day it occurred WE managed to escape the darkened, burning plant and was one of the employees who chose to transfer to another plant out of state to work until the Kinston plant was rebuilt. In terms of how the company treated employees during the crisis, WE says the company “did us fair, paid us, shipped us to another plant to work” (West Employee Interview). After the new Kinston plant opened, however, WE felt that the company more or less forgot about the employees, and that the promise to “look out” for those employees that had chosen to work in West plants in other states was not fulfilled. WE felt that the picnic the company hosted at the new plant for employees was “just for show, a [tax] write off for them [the company]” (West Company Employee Interview). In terms of blame, WE’s opinion was that the company was not “totally truthful,” that it was “common knowledge” that the polyethylene material used in the compounding area was “flammable.” WE used the word “flammable.” As noted there is a difference between flammable and combustible. A fire at West prior to the 2003 explosion had indicated the polyethylene dust was flammable. West

Employee also made some other statements, which will be examined in the critical discourse analysis portion of this dissertation.

Former West Employee (FWE) was seriously injured in the 2003 explosion and no longer works for the company. In terms of how West handled the explosion and treated employees, FWE feels employees were treated fairly and that the CEO of West expressed concern for the employees that were injured. FWE acknowledges that officials at the Kinston plant were aware of the dust buildup above the suspended ceiling, but says that the explosion was “a 100% accident – if they knew how dangerous the dust was, they would have fixed it sooner. West Company did not know nothing about it – they didn’t know” (Former West Employee Interview). FWE also says the company “learned from their mistakes. You make a mistake – it was a costly mistake – but as long as it doesn’t happen again” (Former West Employee Interview).

Crisis Communication Analysis: Conclusion

Given the severity of the explosion, the potential for serious damage to the West Pharmaceutical reputation and image was a very real and distinct possibility. But the analysis of West’s strategies clearly indicates parallels between Coomb’s SCCT responses and West’s framing of the event that helped the company avoid long term reputational and financial damage. The reflections of the stakeholders was for the most part positive in assessing both how the company dealt with the crisis and whether or not the company bore any blame for the crisis, as was the article in *Smart Business*. The only criticism came from occupational safety/fire safety

journals, which may indicate a conclusion in terms of who (academics) should raise questions about how corporations handle these incidents.

Perhaps the bottom line of determining success is the bottom line. To quote a case study put together by the public relations firm West hired to help the company manage the fallout from the explosion: “Two months after the disaster, West’s stock price was virtually unchanged from where it was at the point and immediate aftermath of the Kinston event. West has expressed its most profound gratitude to Schwartz for leading the company through this series of challenges” (Schwartz Communications 2005). Now I turn to answering the other major question in this dissertation, what role did West’s power in the community and the lack of power of other constituents play in the company’s ability to successfully navigate this crisis?

Critical Discourse Analysis of the West Pharmaceutical Services Explosion Response

The critical discourse analysis of the data collected will attempt to “fill the gap” that crisis communication strategies do not consider – primarily the context of the organization within the community in crisis and its power and how those items influence and potentially silence or marginalize stakeholders. In this chapter, the press releases that West Pharmaceutical Services issued after the incident are analyzed using Teun van Dijk’s concept of the discourse-cognition-society triangle. The second half of this chapter examines and discusses the West crisis response using Norman Fairclough’s analytical framework for critical discourse analysis. Van Dijk’s discourse-cognition-society triangle uncovers hidden meanings in texts, and draws conclusions about power relationships based on those hidden meanings. Fairclough’s model investigates an incident based on the problems it reveals, and the ways in which those problems

are suborned by the dominant entity and thus minimized by the marginalized entity. Both of these methods will reveal the hidden power issues in the West incident, and yield a deeper understanding of why stakeholders reacted in the way they did in Kinston.

Discourse-Cognition-Society Triangle Analysis

As noted in chapter three, Van Dijk argues that a researcher has to choose a particular set of documents to study in the discourse-cognition-society triangle analysis, that there can never be a complete study of every document or text that concerns a particular issue (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 98). In an effort to establish the framing that West Pharmaceutical Services gave the 2003 explosion, this chapter will examine the 16 press releases West released after the explosion. All of the press releases in question are available for public access via the company’s website, www.westpharma.com under the heading “financial releases.”

Based on the evaluation of the crisis communication response at the beginning of this chapter, it is safe to say that West was perceived as a company that took care of and was very concerned about its employees in the wake of the 2003 explosion. The reflections of those interviewed corroborate this as well. A critical analysis of the West press releases indicates that West itself promulgated the framing of the event.

From the outset, West framed its message as concerned for its employees, and for those hurt and killed in the explosion, and this idea was one of at least three “global meanings” underlying the company’s press releases. Van Dijk refers to global meanings as the overarching theme of a discourse or the “gist” (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 102). Local meanings focus on particular word choice and the implicit meaning of texts, what can be inferred by what

the text includes and leaves out (Van Dijk, “Multidisciplinary CDA” 103). The initial press release distributed on January 29, 2003 noted the company’s concern for employees. The press release issued a day later reiterated this sentiment. On February 20, West released a press release that contained statements from West CEO Don Morel, made at the company’s “Service of Healing and Remembrance.” At that service, Morel said “This is a time of great sorrow for our company. It is fitting we come together to remember those who lost their lives and to offer prayers for the injured and all families who will be forever changed as a result of this tragic accident” (“Announces Kinston Plant Memorial”). In addition to expressing concern, this last statement is what Van Dijk refers to as “positive self representation.” West officials consistently referred to “our company” and noted that “we continue to grieve for the loss of our friends and colleagues,” creating the perception that the company was one large family, and that corporate officials felt just as much grief and sorrow as those close to the injured and dead employees. On the one year anniversary of the explosion, a press release detailing a commemorative service the company held included comments the CEO made that paint the corporate officials as not only deeply concerned, but also as victims of the explosions – people who suffered just as those who were involved in the actual explosion suffered.

The second “global meaning” established in the press releases is that the explosion was accidental and beyond the company’s control. This idea is also strongly reflected in the media accounts and the reflections of those interviewed. From the very first day, West used language that suggested the explosion was unforeseen. On the day of the incident, West’s press release described the explosion as of “unknown origin” and the CEO was quoted as saying “We are obviously stunned by the news of this incident at our Kinston facility” (“Comments on Plant

Explosion”). “Stunned” is a very strong word, suggesting there was absolutely no way to foresee the explosion. The company would continue to call the explosion “of an unknown origin” before changing to phrases such as “tragic accident,” “accident” and “accidental explosion.” The use of these words again and again frames the explosion as beyond the company’s control and therefore mitigates blame. Even after the company was fined by the North Carolina Department of Labor and criticized by the CSB, West officials continued to characterize the explosion as an “accident” and the “result of a combination of unforeseen factors.”

The rather technical and limited way in which investigatory bodies used the word “accidental” only compounded this perception. The ATF and the CSB used the word “accidental” merely to define that the explosion had no criminal basis – the word accidental was not meant to convey that the explosion was not preventable. In fact, the conclusions of the CSB investigation noted that the explosion could have been prevented had West referred to the information it already had on the polyethylene based product it was using in Kinston and recognized the danger. There’s no evidence that West deliberately capitalized on this confusion, but the end result is that the word accidental was used to describe the explosion in media accounts and in the reflections of stakeholders, and the fact that West also used it to frame the explosion further solidified the idea that the explosion was, as West put it, “unforeseen.”

The third global meaning found in the press releases is that the explosion and its aftermath was a cause for sympathy for the employees affected and thus, by association, West. The explosion, coming on the heels of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as it did made it especially poignant in the eyes of the community and the people of Kinston and Lenoir County responded to the crisis by donating thousands of dollars to a West Employee fund and reaching

out to those impacted. The company's press releases consistently used words such as "devastating," "tragic" and "catastrophe" to describe the incident. These words, while possibly true, heightened the emotional impact of the explosion, and again, raised sympathy for West within the community.

In terms of local meanings, Van Dijk comments that the local meaning is more or less what the writer or creator sees as the meaning of the text (Van Dijk, "Multidisciplinary CDA" 103). What a text alludes to, implies, or deliberately leaves out can emphasize the messages a writer is trying to hide or negate. There are several local meanings in the press releases, which counter the generally positive or sympathetic view that stakeholders held of West. Although West succeeded in positioning itself as primarily concerned with the welfare of its employees, the actual text of the press releases suggest an emphasis on West's business profile. The most frequently used language in the 16 press releases is the "boiler plate" language used to describe West:

"West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc. (NYSE: WST) is a global drug delivery technology company that applies proprietary materials science, formulation research and manufacturing innovation to advance the quality, therapeutic value, development speed and rapid market availability of pharmaceuticals, biologics, vaccines and consumer healthcare products. West is the world's premiere provider of standard-setting systems and device components for parenterally administered medicines and an emerging leader in the development of advanced formulation technologies for the transmucosal delivery of drugs. Internationally headquartered in Lionville, Pennsylvania, West supports its partners and customers from 50

locations throughout North America, South America, Europe, Mexico, Japan, Asia and the Pacific and Australia. For more information visit West at www.westpharma.com.” (West Press Releases, www.westpharma.com)

Granted, it could be that West normally gears its press releases to a business audience and shareholders, and that may be why this boiler plate language is used at the end of every press release West issued about the explosion. Its presence, however, does indicate a local meaning in the sense that this wording is a substantial part of each and every press release, and thus indicates West’s focus on its business. In fact, an inordinate amount of space is given to explanation of post-explosion business practices. There are multiple mentions regarding production capability and the efforts to ensure product delivery. One phrase details the efforts to “restore production to pre-casualty levels,” a somewhat sterile way of viewing those injured and killed in Kinston. The boiler plate language mentioned above is in every press release and seems out of place when considered against the other content. Several of the press releases detail the various important people that visited Kinston in the wake of the incident: Senators Elizabeth Dole and John Edwards, NASCAR driver Bobby Allison, Broadway singer Jennifer Holliday. In contrast, the names of those employees killed are mentioned only once, in the 14th press release issued, more than a year after the explosion. That, in and of itself, is an indication of the importance of the victims. Van Dijk’s explanation of local meanings suggests that the writer(s) of these releases was avoiding naming the victims, perhaps in an effort to distance the company from the deaths and also “forget” the deaths occurred. West also consistently referred to the employees that died as “lives that were lost” instead of referring to the employees as “killed.” Obviously, the phrase “lost” is a much softer word and helps to mitigate blame. Lives can be “lost” without anyone

being to blame, but if someone has been “killed” then something or someone can be blamed. West’s phrasing lessens the questions that may arise about blame or responsibility. In eight of the press releases, the fact that people died in the January 2003 explosion was not mentioned at all; although each release reminded readers of the 2003 explosion, half did not bring up the deaths that occurred as a result of that explosion. Again, Van Dijk’s method suggests this omission is intentional. The local meaning of this omission could reflect the company’s effort to avoid mention of the deaths, or avoid reminding readers that the explosion resulted in six fatalities.

When the company announced that some of the employees from the Kinston plant would work in three week rotations at West plants in other states, the February 21, 2003 press release that the company issued focused on the arrangements West had made for the traveling employees. West would pay for transportation, lodging and a per diem. The press release also indicated what those employees would be doing at these other plants (“Announces Temporary Relocation”). What the press release failed to mention was that if a West employee declined to travel to these other plants, then that employee would be laid off. The press release notes that about 60 Kinston employees would work in plants located in other states; that mean roughly three times that number were laid off. As mentioned previously, West paid all employees of the Kinston plant for one month after the explosion. After that point, those employees that were laid off had to apply for unemployment or find some other means of making money. On February 28, 2003, the day that West halted the employees pay, the company issued a press release titled “West Pharmaceutical Services Thanks General Assembly and Governor for Legislation Expediting Benefits for Displaced Kinston Workers.” The focus of that press release was the fact that North Carolina’s governor and legislature had waived a one week waiting period for

unemployment benefits for the Kinston plant workers. Nowhere in that news release does West mention the fact that it was suspending the workers' pay. The press release that praised the legislature and governor was designed to draw attention away from the company's pay deadline.

During and after the crisis, West employed a public relations firm called Schwartz Communications. Schwartz posted a case study of its handling of the West crisis on its own website as a testimony to what the public relations firm could do for its clients given a crisis. The case study noted this about the press release that neglected to mention layoffs:

“Schwartz was asked by West to announce official layoffs at the point that extended salary benefits were ending for plant employees. Schwartz used this opportunity instead to restate that West had offered employment via relocation to nearly one hundred percent of all Kinston plant workers.” (Schwartz 2005)

In regard to the pay deadline, the case study noted:

“With growing concerns about job loss and economic impact, media outreach generated scores of positive stories about West's intentions. The layoff milestone passed without a single negative news story, supplanted by news about expedited unemployment benefits and relocation opportunities.” (Schwartz 2005)

The public relations firm also detailed its involvement in the memorial service West hosted shortly after the explosion. Schwartz noted that it “planned, produced and promoted” the memorial and prepared statements for those who spoke. The case study also noted that Schwartz arranged for several state and federal politicians to be at the memorial, including then North

Carolina Senator Elizabeth Dole, “who, at Schwartz’s request, read remarks issued by President George W. Bush” (Schwartz, 2005). The public relations firm case study also said, “The memorial service produced by Schwartz in this little town was filled to capacity, resulting in 30 broadcast placements and 11 print placements. The emotional event dominated local headlines and newspaper photos” (Schwartz 2005). The use of the term “little” to describe Kinston seems belittling and the word “produced” in reference to the memorial event makes the effort seem insincere and strategic, which is diametrically opposed to the image of the concerned employer West projected to stakeholders. Schwartz also noted that the “daily local coverage was uniformly sympathetic or neutral to West, a noteworthy result given the obvious temptation to portray a negligent, corporate scapegoat” (Schwartz 2005). The Schwartz Communication document quite candidly describes the efforts of West to frame the crisis in a certain way and maintain that framework throughout the crisis.

In terms of the social side of Van Dijk’s triangle, which focuses on the social interactions and events in which the discourse takes place, the press releases, in conjunction with the Schwartz document indicate that West was heavily involved in the social aspect of the crisis and also with the network of people involved in the aftermath of the crisis. West was able to establish and dictate how the victims of the explosion were memorialized by arranging the memorial service’s location, its date, its structure and its attendants. In this way, it’s as if West stipulated how the community would grieve for those who died. West also arranged the celebration at its new plant meant to thank the employees who traveled to other West plants to work until the new Kinston facility was completed. With the employee celebration, West was able to signal to

stakeholders that the crisis was over and that those employees and others in the community should put it behind them and move on.

The Schwartz document indicates that the public relations firm also helped West work with government officials to “build partnerships so as to explore options for recovery assistance” (Schwartz 2005). Schwartz also noted that it helped West meet with the North Carolina Governor, both North Carolina Senators, and a North Carolina Congressman and arranged for an “economic summit between West’s CEO and North Carolina elected officials.” The outcome of this networking was:

“Offers of economic recovery have been privately tendered, including land, two million dollars in environmental cleanup and grants for emergency equipment damaged in recovery efforts. In May of 2003, West received an economic incentive package from the local Lenoir County Board of Commissioners, who also approved the sale of a community owned building to West. In addition, the Governor of North Carolina granted West, through a state fund, \$250,000 for the relocation of the Kinston plant that was destroyed less than four months earlier.” (Schwartz 2005)

It’s fairly clear upon analyzing the West press releases along with the Schwartz Communication case study that the communication and behavior of the company was strategic. The evidence also indicates that the company’s local meanings varied from the global meanings that the company projected to its stakeholders, and that the company actively used its skills and its position in the community to frame the crisis. West used its power to create the message and

its framing of the crisis as the dominant message, and in the process alternative discourses regarding the crisis were silenced. The results of examining what messages were silenced, how they were silenced, and why they were silenced will be discussed next.

Norman Fairclough's Analytical Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis Applied to the West Explosion

Norman Fairclough's analytical framework for critical discourse analysis is designed to more or less identify and analyze a social problem that has a semiotic aspect (Fairclough, "CDA as Method" 121). While the framework requires a researcher to identify a social problem and the obstacles to tackling it, the framework also acknowledges that in some cases, stakeholders may not want to solve a particular social problem because they may need it (Fairclough, "CDA as Method" 134).

In terms of the West explosion of 2003 and the discourse surrounding it, Fairclough's method provides an excellent tool for analysis because it does take into account the myriad issues such as class, the rural nature of the community, silencing and the economy that compounded the power dynamic between West and its stakeholders. Utilizing Fairclough's method allows for a comprehensive assessment of the dynamic that allowed West to both frame the crisis and silence any alternative discourses of the event. Norman Fairclough's analytical framework for critical discourse analysis has five steps:

1. Focus on a social problem that has a semiotic aspect.

2. Identify obstacles to tackling the social problem via analysis of the network of practices it is located within, the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice concerned, and the discourse.
3. Consider whether the social order “needs” the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacle.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis. (Fairclough, “CDA as Method” 125)

Each one of these steps will be fully applied against the West explosion crisis response in order to better understand the context that allowed West to establish the dominant discourse in the crisis while silencing other discourses.

The Social Problem & the Semiosis: Uneven Power and Dominant Discourse

Fairclough’s first step is to identify a social problem with a semiotic aspect. In the simplest of terms, the semiotic aspect of the West explosion response is the dominant discourse West was able to establish in the wake of the explosion, and the social problem that permitted West to establish the dominant discourse is the uneven power balance between West and its stakeholders.

It’s been previously noted that West was one of Kinston/Lenoir County’s largest employers at the time of the explosion. The company provided working class jobs that paid more than the local average and was one of the largest taxpayers in the county. West was also one of the largest utility customers in the City of Kinston. In addition, the company provided a place where the community’s blue collar workers could make a decent wage and receive good benefits.

In this community, where the majority of workers hold no higher than a high school degree, West was important, even essential.

West was also important in the sense that the jobs it provided were not tied to the dwindling tobacco and textiles industries. The company also provided badly needed diversity in the manufacturing base in Lenoir County. The declining economy of Kinston and Lenoir County had been exacerbated by back to back hurricanes and floods, Fran in 1996 and Floyd in 1999, both of which damaged a large portion of Kinston and led to a federally subsidized buyout of flooded property. West had a good reputation in the community and was considered a good corporate citizen. In short, West had a certain amount of leverage in the community, and the community had a vested interest in making sure West stayed in Kinston. Given these realities, the community may also have had a vested interest in allowing West to propagate its framing of the 2003 explosion.

West's framing of the event was believed and replicated by local stakeholders and the media; Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, discussed at length in chapter two, helps explain what happened in Kinston. One of the keys to hegemony is that the dominant group makes subordinate groups believe it is serving their best interest. Therefore, the dominance is consensual in the sense that the subordinate group feels the dominant group is benevolent. West's discourse, analyzed earlier in this chapter, was the dominant voice in the aftermath of the explosion, and the company used its discourse to reinforce its image as an entity concerned with its employees and to mitigate notions of blame. The company used discourse to manufacture consent. West was also a part of what Gramsci called the civil society, the network of groups that together perpetuates the hegemonic position (Gramsci, "Letters from Prison" 41)

West's employees paid taxes and shopped at Kinston stores, West gave money to local charities, the company was part of the civil society and thus allowed to maintain the hegemonic position.

Because the Kinston community was dependent upon the jobs West provided, the stakeholders had an interest in upholding West's version of events, and the uneven balance of power, the obstacles of social class, the rural region, and the silencing of alternative discourses helped to block any challenge to West's assumption of power. That is the focus of the second step in Fairclough's framework, identifying the obstacles to tackling the social problem.

The Obstacles of Class, Place and Silence

The second step in Norman Fairclough's analytical framework for CDA is "to identify obstacles to tackling the social problem via analysis of the network of practices it is located within, the relationship of semiosis to the elements within the particular practice concerned, and the discourse" (Fairclough, "CDA as Method" 129). The primary obstacles to challenging West's framing of the 2003 explosion are the differences in social class between the employees and management, the rural makeup of the community, and the myriad ways in which alternative discourses about the explosion were silenced. Those obstacles are reflected in the local media coverage of the West explosion.

Local Media Analysis

The local newspaper, the *Kinston Free Press*, wrote 99 articles on the West Pharmaceutical Services explosion spanning a period from January 29, 2003 to September 5, 2008. These articles were analyzed to see if any were critical of West and if any reflected West's

framing of the event. All of these articles are accessible on the newspaper's web site <http://www.kinston.com/sections/local/>. Not one of the articles analyzed criticized West for its business practices or its handling of the crisis, nor did any infer that the company was responsible for the explosion. Initially, the local newspaper referred to the incident as an "explosion," a "massive explosion," and a "violent blast" and noted that the cause was unknown. When the federal bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) arrived to investigate, the newspaper reported that ATF was there to rule out a terrorist attack as the cause, and that although the investigation was being called a criminal investigation, labeling it as such was routine and did not imply criminal intent or foul play. A few days later, when the ATF ruled out criminal activity as a cause and closed their investigation, the newspaper reported that the ATF had ruled the explosion accidental, and after that point, that word was used to describe the explosion on several occasions. The ATF had not, at that point, determined what caused the explosion, although by that point dust was already being discussed as a possible cause (Spencer, "Extremely Fine Dust").

The use of the word "accidental" is problematic because the ATF's ruling the explosion accidental was more a declaration that it was not criminal, as opposed to not preventable. This was confirmed in a phone call to the CSB, the agency that took over the investigation after the ATF. A representative at the CSB noted that the ATF's use of "accidental" simply meant there was no crime committed, or any criminal intent (CSB Official Interview). It did not mean the explosion itself was unpreventable. This narrow definition is at odds with the more general definition of the word "accident", which, according to Webster's dictionary, means "an undesirable, unexpected event" or "an unforeseen incident." The popular use of the word

accidental implies that nobody or nothing is responsible for an act that could not have been prevented, which was not the meaning the ATF assigned to the word. Regardless of the semantics, after the ATF made its ruling, the framing of the incident as an accident (and not preventable) became firmly established in the media accounts.

Roughly 25 of the newspaper articles focused on the economic impact of the explosion. The articles detailed the importance of West as a large employer, a tax-paying entity and a large utility customer. On January 31, 2003, the newspaper published the first story of many that broached whether or not the West facility would be rebuilt in Kinston. That first article reported on a move by Lenoir County officials to offer West \$600,000 in incentive money to rebuild. Other stories would discuss the fact that West paid employees more than other manufacturers and had a reputation as a good employer. Taken as a whole, these stories conveyed the importance of West to the local economy.

The newspaper also covered a number of topics that West promoted in its press releases, and thus perpetuated West's framing of the event. The newspaper covered the West sponsored memorial service and also wrote a three part series about the employees who chose to work at the Nebraska West plant (Gottula). The newspaper also reported that West would continue to pay Kinston employees for one month following the explosion. The day before the company stopped paying employees, the newspaper published a story that focused on the state government waiving a one week waiting period for unemployment benefits for West employees. No mention was made of the fact that West was halting payments to employees. In fact, the only reference to such was a quote from the state legislator who sponsored the bill to waive the waiting period, who said "West Pharmaceutical was gracious enough to pay the plant's employees through February

28. The folks in Kinston and West Company really do need this” (Smith, “Waiting Period Waived”). The local newspaper also covered the memorial marking the one year anniversary of the explosion and the dedication of a memorial at the new Kinston facility, as well as the picnic held on the site of the new West facility in June of 2004.

I am by no means suggesting that the newspaper failed to cover potentially negative stories about West; the local newspaper also covered the details of the State of North Carolina citation and fine against the company and the results of the CSB report. I am merely analyzing the lack of overt “bad press” as an indicator that the crisis communication strategies West employed were successful within the Kinston community. It could also be that the local newspaper was observing the journalistic tradition of remaining objective in covering the West explosion. Even so, not one individual interviewed for any of the stories written about the West explosion was critical of the company.

If newspaper reports are traditionally objective, newspaper editorials are not. The editorial or opinion page in a newspaper is the space in which newspaper editors or publishers voice support for or criticism of issues that face the local community. As a former journalist myself, I know that one role of the press is to act as a watchdog of government. The press is frequently referred to as “the fourth estate,” by those who work in journalism, meaning an additional fixture beyond the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. It would make sense, then, that if the local newspaper was to offer a critique or an alternative framing for the West explosion, it would be found in the editorials published at that time. After a search on the *Kinston Free Press* website, I managed to locate eight editorials that mentioned the West explosion in some form or fashion. The editorials span a timeframe from January 30, 2003 to

June 12, 2004. As with the local newspaper articles, none of the editorials criticize West, and the majority praise the company and are consistent with the company's framing of the explosion.

There was criticism in the editorials, but it was not directed at West. In March, 2003 the *Kinston Free Press* published an editorial that criticized the lawyers and plaintiffs involved in filing the first lawsuit against West involving the explosion. The editorial assigned "hearts" (denoting a good development) and "darts" (denoting a bad development) to each topic covered. The lawsuit was given a dart:

"Around the courthouse, this kind of open ended litigation is known as trolling for plaintiffs. Some legitimate legal claims may grow out of the fatal tragedy at West, particularly from the families of those who died as a result of the blast or from workers injured in it. But it's hard to read legitimacy into a suit framed in such general terms that it includes all comers and holds West and its plant manager responsible for the explosion, regardless of the cause. Hunter Thompson, a writer who has chronicled (and lived) the excesses of the last four decades, once said that crack gives drugs a bad name. On the face of it, this suit seems to do the same for trial lawyers". ("Mideast Doesn't Completely")

The next section of the editorial offered a "heart" to the speculation that West had expressed its intent to rebuild in Kinston. That section of the editorial read:

The good news circulating around Kinston on Friday, that West Pharmaceutical had committed to rebuilding here, turned out to be a bit hopeful, but it was good

news nonetheless, especially on the eve of the two month anniversary of the plant explosion.” (“Mideast Doesn’t Completely”)

The juxtaposition of these two items together, a dart for the lawsuit and a heart for the speculation that West would rebuild in Kinston, not only reflects West’s framing of the incident but also acts to stifle an alternative viewpoint, the viewpoint of those that filed the lawsuit. Comparing the suit to “crack” certainly ridicules those involved. It may also have acted to silence anyone else with an alternative viewpoint. Would those individuals, too, be held up to public ridicule?

An editorial printed at the same time, and on the same subject, in the *Washington Daily News* (printed in Washington, NC, not far from Lenoir County), was even more scathing in its criticism of the lawsuit, and more overt in its praise for West:

“We cannot say lawsuits were unexpected. Any time a tragedy occurs and a company that appears to have deep pockets is involved, the lawsuits appear in a short space of time. However, we are struck by the sheer audacity of people unconnected with West Pharmaceuticals who have joined together in a lawsuit against the company, alleging they were exposed to dangerous chemicals during the Jan. 29 explosion at the Kinston plant and that their property was damaged. The three plaintiffs just happened to live within a mile of the facility. On top of that, they have asked a Superior Court judge to classify their case a class-action lawsuit, so others who were "harmed" can join them in seeking hefty payments from West Pharmaceuticals. The icing on this cake is that seven attorneys are

handling the lawsuit. Only one is from North Carolina -- New Bern to be exact -- while the others are from, of all places, Louisiana. If this is not a classic example of ambulance-chasing, then we wonder what we should call it. How many times in recent years have we seen the ads in newspapers seeking people who took a drug that had been ordered pulled from the market by the FDA. This lawsuit against West Pharmaceuticals is just a variation on a theme -- attorneys trying to get rich off a major lawsuit. In this case, at this point, we feel the probability that the defendant actually is guilty of genuine wrongdoing or gross negligence is in fact quite small. Federal investigators have concluded that the plant explosion was produced by the ignition of airborne dust particles. However, they are uncertain of the source of the spark. Dust has been the culprit in similar explosions through the years. According to news reports we have read about these situations, the best efforts to prevent accumulation of dust sometimes simply cannot prevent combustion from taking place -- such is the nature of this type of reaction. We could understand a lawsuit filed by employees of West Pharmaceuticals if they felt company management was not taking adequate steps to guard against explosions. Indeed, we believe such a lawsuit would have appeared before now if any worker at the plant felt the environment was not safe there preceding the Jan. 29 tragedy. Of course, we cannot discount the possibility that federal investigators ultimately will point a finger at West Pharmaceuticals for failure to take adequate safety precautions. However, we must applaud company representatives for what has appeared to be a determined effort to look out for their employees both before and after the explosion.” (“Lawsuit Beyond Frivolity”)

The Washington Daily News editorial criticizes the individuals filing the suit, calling their action “sheer audacity.” The lawyers from outside North Carolina are painted as opportunistic outsiders who don’t understand or care about the circumstances of the explosion. West, on the other hand, is vigorously complimented for its handling of the incident, and the editorial also seems to repeat West’s framing of the explosion as accidental. It’s also implied that the West employees involved in the explosion did not sue because the company did not *deserve* to be sued.

In another editorial, the *Kinston Free Press* chastised government officials for not being more open about incentives being offered to West to encourage the company to rebuild in Kinston. It read:

“On Friday, company officials met behind closed doors with local government officials, but neither side had anything specific to say about the negotiations at the news conference that followed. Apparently, several alternatives are being considered and all go beyond the flat financial assistance with taxes and utilities offered early on. How far they go, only a few people know. As we said in this space before, West deserves help in getting back on its feet in Lenoir County, but there’s a difference between lending a hand and giving away the farm. County officials promise to hold public hearings on the incentive plan after they iron out all the wrinkles. By the time that happens, taxpayers may feel steamrolled by the process.” (“Neighbors Take Turn”)

The phrasing of the editorial seems to criticize the government officials handling the negotiations, not West company officials. West executives were in the meeting referred to in the editorial, and the company would not divulge terms of the talks, but the editorial does not criticize the company for its silence. The editorial also notes that West deserves help, which is clearly supportive.

When the details of the incentive package were finally completed, the newspaper printed an editorial titled “Deal Paves Way for West’s Resurrection” and included the comment: “At first blush, this looks like a better deal for both parties than the \$600,000 in incentives the county offered West within days of the Jan. 29 explosion...true, the offer on the table now is more expensive, but it has the advantage of getting West up and running and its experienced workers back on the line while filling a vacant building” (“Deal Paves Way”). A few weeks later, when West officially announced it would rebuild in Kinston, an editorial featured the announcement with a “heart.”

When the CSB made its preliminary report on the explosion, the local newspaper printed an editorial titled “Agency’s West Report Loaded with Data” and as the title suggests, the editorial was more about the CSB and its process than the findings of the report. In terms of the findings, the editorial made a decidedly mild statement:

“What ignited the explosion is not now known, and may never be. Still, the CSB investigation did point out some weak spots in West’s equipment and procedures, primarily the lack of a dust collection system in the area where the explosive dust formed and the use of suspended ceiling tiles in production areas, which allowed

unseen dust to build up above the drop ceiling. How that information will play out in possible action by state Department of Labor against West remains to be seen. It may not. As a nonregulatory agency CSB investigates not to place blame but to develop recommendations that will make work in chemical handling industries safer, to prevent the recurrence of something like the West tragedy.” (“Agency’s Report Loaded”)

Again, there is a real absence of criticism for West. The use of the term “weak spots” is a very mild way of phrasing, and pointing out that the CSB does not place “blame” and that the state may take no action against West seems to infer that the newspaper supports those viewpoints.

At the end of 2003, the newspaper printed a kind of year in review editorial that catalogued what occurred in the community in 2003. The West explosion was featured. The editorial called the explosion an industrial accident twice. It also praised West corporate officials, stating “The aftermath [of the explosion] saw a community unite to help the victims, leadership that acknowledged the importance of an employer and a company that showed its gratitude in a decision to remain here” (“2003 Had its Ups”). In June of 2004, a newspaper editorial mentioned the memorial being placed at the rebuilt West facility and also the picnic that was held for employees on the new site. The editorial stated: “In these observances, West also continued to demonstrate the kind of class that affirms the wisdom of efforts made to keep this company in Lenoir County...obviously, West has reason to say thanks. To the company’s credit, it took the time to do it right” (“Kinston County Both”).

The local newspaper articles and the editorials, when examined together, offer no real criticism of the company, or an alternative discourse to the one West established. In fact, the local newspaper coverage reinforces the West image as a responsive, concerned, responsible company, and thus is a marker of the success of West's communication strategy.

External Media Analysis

In terms of other North Carolina media, four articles published by the Raleigh, North Carolina based *News and Observer* were also selected for analysis. Raleigh is North Carolina's capital, and the *News and Observer* has a presence across the state. Given the depth and breadth of the coverage of the explosion, I knew that I would not be able to analyze every article written regionally about the explosion, so I tried to collect articles that represented important events in the timeline of the explosion, as opposed to random articles. The four articles selected represent important aspects of the timeline in the West explosion: West's settlement with the State of North Carolina, workers suing the companies that provided West with materials, an article on dust explosions in general, and an article observing the one year anniversary of the explosion.

The News and Observer printed an article on July 17, 2003 that detailed the outcome of the State of North Carolina's investigation into the incident. The article detailed the fine amount West would pay and quoted West CEO Don Morel as saying the company disagreed with the settlement and felt it could have fought the citations but chose not to. The article also quoted a West employee and juxtaposed that quote with a reference to state Department of Labor investigators praising West. This section of the article read: "I think they tried to make the plant as safe as they knew how" [the employee] said. Labor investigators seemed to agree, calling

West Pharmaceutical a good corporate citizen, but said they were bound by law to find the cause of industrial accidents to prevent their recurrence” (Quillen). Despite the potentially negative focus of the article, the company being cited and fined by the North Carolina Department of Labor, the positive portrayal of West as a “good corporate citizen” that “tried to make the plant as safe as they knew how” emerges from the article, as well as an almost apologetic framing of the need to investigate by the North Carolina Department of Labor.

The next two articles, one published on January 29, 2004 and the other published on January 30, 2004, focused on the observance of the one year anniversary of the explosion. The article published on January 29, 2003 provided a detailed wrap up of all the events that had occurred in the year since the explosion, including the state citation and fine, lawsuits, and the pharmaceutical company’s decision to rebuild in Kinston. The article published on January 30 detailed the memorial service held to mark the one year anniversary, and included a remark made by West CEO Don Morel: “What happened last year on January 29 struck at the core of the global West community. That single moment took from us six of our friends and colleagues, inflicted physical and emotional pain on many more and forever changed the lives of everybody here today” (Thompson). There is no overt criticism of the company in either of these articles. In other words there were no quotes from anyone critical of the company. These *News and Observer* articles reflect a positive image of West and thus reiterate West’s framing of the event. The final *News and Observer* article, regarding a lawsuit filed by West employees against companies that supplied materials to West, was published in May of 2004. The article explains what the lawsuit alleges but does not detail why the workers are suing the suppliers as opposed to West itself. An article published in the *Kinston Free Press* at the same time about the same

lawsuit did not explain that issue either. The answer to why West workers sued suppliers as opposed to the company will be addressed more fully later in this chapter. The articles are mentioned here because the omission of explaining why West itself was not sued in both stories, regardless of the reason for said omission, implies that West did not *deserve* to be sued. It also implies that the workers, who arguably had more reason to sue than any other stakeholder, felt that West was not to blame, and therefore refused to sue their employer. This kind of unstated implication also helped bolster West's framing of the event and the company's success in navigating the crisis.

The nationally known newspaper, the *New York Times*, also published an article about the explosion itself on January 31, 2003. While it examined and answered the typical journalistic questions of who, what, when, where, why and how, it also reiterated some of the points made previously in this dissertation about both the community and West. The article started off with this quote:

“Before Wednesday, the 255 people who worked in this town’s bustling medical supply plant counted themselves lucky to work hard shifts mixing hot chemicals and stamping out syringes for \$11 or \$12 an hour. Good blue collar jobs are hard to come by in Kinston, where tobacco and textiles reigned, then vanished, nothing has taken their place, and unemployment always seems to get worse”

(Halbfinger).

This picture of a struggling community that needed to keep as many jobs as it could was reinforced later in the article, with a quote from a West employee and a paragraph describing

Kinston's economic setbacks. The West employee was quoted as saying: "There's really no jobs here. And that was one of the best companies here that was paying any money. Now we don't know what we're going to do. Lord knows, I hope they rebuild it" (Halbfinger). The article goes on to describe Kinston and its economy this way:

"For this close knit county seat of 25,000, the reality that one of its largest and best regarded employers had been dealt a devastating blow left residents contemplating a streak of bad luck that has upended thousands of lives in recent years. Hurricane Floyd in 1999 destroyed hundreds of homes. Textile mills, tobacco processors and a DuPont plant have all closed or cut back, costing an estimated 4,000 jobs" (Halbfinger).

This kind of narrative reinforces the reputation of West as a good employer that offered higher than average wages to blue collar workers. It also reinforces the idea that West had a good relationship with stakeholders with the phrase "best regarded employers." The article goes on to describe how West CEO Don Morel received more attention from assembled workers than visiting politicians such as North Carolina Governor Mike Easley and then North Carolina Senator John Edwards. This again suggests the company had a good relationship with employees. The article also indicated that Morel stated the company would pay all employees until the end of February and that the company's priorities were "the families of the victims, the wounded workers and displaced employees," which allowed West to once again reiterate its primary message and establish the context in which the explosion would be viewed. The *New York Times* article also included information that highlights a problematic conflict within the North Carolina state government, which further complicates the issue of raising an alternative

viewpoint about the explosion: “The state labor commissioner, Cherie K. Berry, said she intended to balance her department’s enforcement and job-protection missions. ‘We need to convince this company very quickly to rebuild this plant very quickly.’ Ms. Berry said” (Halbfinger). Although the *New York Times* did not comment on or address this seeming conflict of interest, it does raise questions. How can an organization balance the requirement to investigate a company with the need to keep the jobs that company provides? And what impact would publicly voicing a need to keep those jobs have on the individuals conducting that investigation? Individuals who work for the organization Berry helms.

The Obstacle of Class

As noted in chapter two, social class is most often defined in terms of who has money, power and prestige and who doesn’t. The terms “working class” and “blue collar worker” are often used synonymously. The majority of the employees at West are definitely working class individuals. The employees are paid hourly wages, wear a uniform, and perform manual labor which does not require a high level of education. Economic Development Official, when interviewed, was asked about the education level of the workforce in Kinston, and responded that most of the workforce—West included—had a high school education. Economic Development Official also said that West provided “good” working class, blue collar jobs in the community. Government Official 2 concurred, saying that most of the workforce in Kinston, and at West, had a high school education or less. The two West employees interviewed for this project both had a high school education.

The CEO of West Pharmaceutical, in contrast, holds a PhD. Most of the individuals involved in putting together the economic incentive package that kept West in Kinston had

advanced degrees as well. These more educated people probably had a limited understanding of the power dynamic between the workers and West. As with a majority of working class individuals, the employees at West didn't have a lot of employment options; their education level and qualifications put them in a position of subordination. They needed the jobs West provided and literally could not afford to voice opposition to West's framing of the explosion.

This power disparity was obvious in the aftermath of the explosion. The employees were told that they could choose to relocate to other plants, and thus keep their job, or they would be laid off. The company engineered the memorial service for the workers killed in the explosion, the location, the participants, and the agenda. There was no employee led function or alternative program. The company seemed to manage even the employees' grief.

Another aspect of the incident that highlighted the class aspect of this situation was the understanding of the risk the polyethylene dust posed in the West plant. As noted in Chapter two, Lew Caccia classified the working class as those who are exposed to risk at work and that employees may not have the education or knowledge to understand the risk. The employees at West certainly did not understand the risk the dust posed and were not in a position to find out. West officials had access to the information they needed to define the risk, but they failed to do so, and it was the workers at the Kinston plant who paid for that error.

Caccia also noted that workers are not encouraged to be aware of what their employer is doing, much less question it. The Kinston employees' attempts to question what occurred at the plant raised the issue of the disparate power between worker and boss. In the midst of the CSB investigation of the incident, the agency held a public meeting in Kinston to present preliminary information on the explosion. This public meeting was held on June 18, 2003, and a written transcript of the meeting is available on the CSB website. At that public meeting, a West

employee stepped forward to ask a question. Below is the transcript of that portion of the meeting. The name of the employee has been removed.

WEST EMPLOYEE: How ya doing? My name is XXXXXXXX. And if I'm not mistaken, I think I heard you say that the dust was like the fuel to the ignition. And I'm one of the employees that relocated down to, excuse me, down to Florida. And I'm saying I don't know if it's the same setup or whatever, but being that you said the dust, you know, I mean, what's to stop it -- what's to stop it from not happening down in the Florida plant or the Nebraska plant where most of us are at?

CHAIRMAN CAROLYN MERRITT: I think that's a question really that we can't answer. Is my microphone on? I think that's a question we really can't answer at this time concerning a facility other than this one. I would certainly suggest though that you raise the question with your employer.

WEST EMPLOYEE: I mean, like I said, you said it was dust.

CHAIRMAN CAROLYN MERRITT: Yes.

WEST EMPLOYEE: I mean, and it's a lot of dust down there also so.

CHAIRMAN CAROLYN MERRITT: I would strongly suggest that you raise that with your employer.

WEST EMPLOYEE: All right.

CHAIRMAN CAROLYN MERRITT: Thank you. Is there another question?

In reading this exchange, the power dynamic between the employees and West is hinted at. The employee asks a question of the CSB about the dust and mentions it is present in the plant he is

currently working at in Florida. The CSB representative suggests that he tell West officials about that. The employee attempts to make a point about the dust again and again the CSB representative suggests he tell his employer. It's apparent that this employee was completely unaware of the danger the dust posed. Later on, this same employee returned to the microphone to ask another question and was clearly frustrated:

WEST EMPLOYEE: Excuse me. Can I ask you another question, please. I'm standing because you know, you have people here thanking you for coming and showing up, and you know, I -- I mean, I'm greatly appreciate it too. But it's like every question we ask or people ask, you know, we're not getting an answer, you know. I'm saying you guys are saying you don't know what's going on or at this time you can't answer anything. You know, I mean, I'm coming in and I'm leaving the same way I came in, you know. I don't know anything. And -- And to be in that type environment, you know, like you was telling me, you don't know. I mean, I think it's scary. Honestly. You know, I come here to try to get some type of reassurance, you know, and what -- I mean, it's like every question that is asked it's like you guys are pleading the Fifth. I don't know.

MADAM CAROLYN MERRITT: In the middle of this investigation, we are at a point of things that we feel we can divulge but then there are regulatory issues and issues regarding the company that we cannot answer for them. So we -- we are attempting to answer the factual and scientific questions that we can with what we have as our information now. And also your comments and concerns we'll take under advisement and also make sure that -- We have another several months to

go yet with continued investigation before this is complete. So we appreciate your comment.

WEST EMPLOYEE: Well, what do you tell -- What do you tell an employee or worker that's working right now? I mean, how do you -- how do you make them feel like secure or safe? You know, what -- what do you tell them?

ANDREA TAYLOR: Can I -

WEST EMPLOYEE: Please.

ANDREA TAYLOR: Can I try and help?

WEST EMPLOYEE: Yes, please.

ANDREA TAYLOR: What we're saying is we're still in the midst of our investigation. However, you saw what we believe caused the fuel -- or the incident. If you have current problems or you feel that there may be problems at your facility right now, you can go back to your employer with the information that you did gather here so far regarding the dust and try and implement to make sure that there are changes made if there are problems, or at least get clarification on exactly what is happening at the current facility where you are. As far as the other questions that have been raised by the workers, we've taken everything back and we will investigate further. We're really taking all of your comments and questions seriously, and we will have at our final report we will have those answers for you in more detail at that time.

MADAM CAROLYN MERRITT: The Chemical Safety Board is not a regulatory agency. We are an independent agency that is commissioned by Congress to investigate incidents just like this, like the National Transportation Safety Board

investigates airplane or transportation accidents, and then to release the information about the cause so that people just like yourself can be informed to try to prevent this from happening anywhere else.

It would seem that it does not dawn on the CSB representatives that if they, as a federal investigative body, have no authority over West, that this employee, who counts on West for his living may not have any power over the company's behavior either. The employee hints at this dynamic with this statement:

WEST EMPLOYEE: I came -- I came here for answers. Like I was talking to the people back at the plant. They sent me here. You know, and like you guys say, well, go back there if you have any issues or whatever. I'm just -- Listen, I'm just - - I'm just a simple worker. I just -- I just want to feel safe at the workplace.

“I'm just a simple worker.” That way of classifying himself, that description, indicates that this employee feels he does not have the power or the status to communicate the CSB findings to his employer, and that he, and the other employees he says he represents, simply want to “feel safe.” He has turned to the CSB for that assurance, which may indicate his perception that West officials could not or would not offer that assurance. Sayer suggests the tension between classes may defy words. Lott and Bullock note that class impacts power. Sayer, Lott and Bullock note that being in a less powerful class may lead to enforced silence and inhibited behavior. The West employee's comments at the CSB public meeting reflect that.

The West employee interviewed for this dissertation also expressed doubt and anxiety about West's behavior and intentions. I met with this individual outside of Kinston, and West

Employee (WE) told me that if the company was aware WE had spoken to me, WE would be fired. WE also related a story that had not been raised publicly regarding the explosion. WE said that prior to the explosion, a gear or bearing on a piece of equipment in the compounding area of the plant —where the explosion occurred—was not working properly, and that as a result that gear or bearing was grinding against the piece of equipment and emitting a significant amount of heat, so much that it could be felt from several feet away. WE said this had been brought to the attention of Kinston plant officials, but that the piece of equipment continued to be used so that production levels could be maintained. I asked Former West Employee (FWE) about this and FWE confirmed the account. When I asked FWE why that had not been part of any public report, FWE said it was “hushed up.” When I asked WE if the story of the grinding bearing was brought to the attention of investigators, WE indicated that WE had not brought it up, nor was WE certain if anyone else had. When I asked why that was, WE responded: “If they [employees] have to give up a job paying twice as much [as other companies pay], plus, the government was in on it [was investigating the incident] I thought they would handle it. I reckon you got enough money you can sweep it under the rug” (West Employee Interview).

Whether or not that’s the case, it indicates the level of mistrust and fear present, and also West Employee’s perception that the company officials held the power in this situation. It also indicates what the transcript of the CSB’s public meeting indicated: that employees felt a government agency (the CSB) had the power to find answers and effect change that the employees themselves could not.

West Employee also felt that the company was not “totally truthful” in terms of how it dealt with the explosion. WE felt the company knew about the grinding bearing and while WE worried about whether or not West would rebuild in Kinston, WE also felt that the company

decided to rebuild in Kinston because it was “afraid it would get sued” (West Employee Interview). Former West Employee seemed to make a distinction between local plant officials and corporate officials, saying that local plant officials were aware of the bearing and also of the buildup of dust on the suspended ceiling tiles, but that “it was more important to run the [assembly] line than it was to replace those tiles” (Former West Employee Interview). FWE felt strongly that no West official knew the dust was explosive.

These reflections of both West Employee and Former West Employee represent a fairly serious divergence from statements employees made publicly about West. The media accounts quote employees as being complimentary and supportive. This difference in the public and private discourses regarding West could very well be an indication of Lott and Bullock’s assessment that those in a less powerful position exhibit enforced silence and constrained behavior. Sayer’s assessment that the powerless in a relationship may have unspoken feelings of resentment toward the powerful is an interesting parallel to yet another reflection from West Employee. West Employee expressed disappointment and disillusionment with West’s hosting of an employee picnic to celebrate the opening of the new Kinston facility and the return of all the workers who had been working at other West facilities in other states. West Employee felt that the employee picnic was “for show” and did not recognize nor respect the level of commitment Kinston employees had shown to the company.

The Obstacle of Place

The second obstacle to tackling the uneven power distribution between West and its stakeholders is the fairly rural, economically depressed region in which West’s Kinston plant operates. The loss of the agrarian and textile jobs that defined the community, the relatively working class makeup of its workforce, and the lack of a culture that encouraged union

membership and workers' rights also inhibited criticism of West and perpetuated West's framing of the explosion.

As noted previously, numerous officials interviewed for this dissertation discussed the fact that Kinston and Lenoir County had a previously strong tobacco industry that had been losing ground for years. All of eastern North Carolina had a strong presence in the tobacco industry; farmers grew the crop, which unlike other crops such as corn, paid a high profit, and warehouses throughout the region took in the crop and acted as intermediaries between the farmer and the buyer. As a journalist, I covered the opening of the tobacco market – the first day of the season that tobacco was sold – every year for a number of years, in Lenoir County. When the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or FDA began to explore regulating tobacco as a drug in the 1990's, the issue was portrayed in the national media as a health issue. In eastern North Carolina, tobacco was very much an economic issue, and those that counted on the crop to make a living struggled to voice that perspective against a government agency that had more money and more power. The traditional growing and selling of tobacco, the opening of the tobacco market each year, the warehouses, are gone now, and with them, both a way of life and a means of economic viability.

In *Rural Literacies*, the authors note that there is a general bias about rural regions that infers rural people are rednecks or bumpkins. The authors also noted that there are three typical “rhetorics” of rural regions: “lack, lag and the rosy past” (Donehower, Hogg, Schell 2007). Lack implies that rural regions are lacking in the kind of diversity, economic opportunities and cultural outlets that urban areas offer. Lag refers to the general perception that rural areas lag behind urban areas in terms of advancement and technology and the rosy past refers to the insistence of those who live outside rural regions to characterize rural areas as representations of a bucolic,

simpler life from days now gone (Donehower, Hogg, Schell 2007). Morton noted that uneven development between urban and rural areas leads to division and the perception that urban areas are better, more progressive and offer more opportunity.

This characterization of rural areas more or less automatically creates a vision of rural area as victim, and that characterization seems to have been adopted in Lenoir County. Emergency Responder, Government Officials 1 and 2 and Economic Development Official all commented on the collapse of tobacco and the disappearance of the other large employer in the community—textile manufacturing. The manufacturing base in Lenoir County was not very diversified, and as a result, when textile plants began to close, Kinston and Lenoir County suffered because they many of these facilities. Also, there was a recognized “brain drain” in the community in which young, educated residents were leaving the area to find better opportunities elsewhere. That resulted in a declining population and a remaining population that was predominantly high school educated or less.

In addition, Lenoir County, like the state of North Carolina, was known as a “right to work” community. This designation discourages union representation, which automatically creates a situation in which the business owner holds more power and has a stronger voice. Theriault noted that the majority of workers in the United States are not represented by a union, and non union blue collar workers typically make less than their union represented counterparts (Theriault 2003). In addition to lobbying for better wages for members, unions also typically provide a voice for workers regarding issues such as workplace safety and fair treatment for employees. Without that voice, employees often do not have the power to challenge the corporate discourse. In Kinston, that meant that one possible avenue for West employees to voice concerns and pose questions about the explosion was not available.

The tendency, then, to portray Kinston and Lenoir County as a rural region that was a “victim” of the West explosion was understandable. The New York Times article mentioned earlier seemed to replicate that kind of narrative. The title of the article, “Explosion Extinguishes One of a North Carolina Town’s Few Bright Spots” evokes an image of Kinston and Lenoir County as a dismal place, and West as one of its few positive attributes. Lenoir County is also referred to as “little Lenoir County” at one point, phrasing that almost makes the community, and by extension its residents, sound like children. It’s a narrative that more than likely created interest for readers, but creating an image of a rural community as both victim and child, and West as one of the few “bright spots” does ultimately create an obstacle to challenging the uneven power balance that existed between the company and the community.

The combination of class and the rural community created a context in which West was able to establish the hegemonic position in the aftermath of the explosion, and as a result, a number of constituents were silenced. Those constituents were also silenced by a system that in some ways prevented alternative discourses from being voiced. Thus the silencing itself became an obstacle.

The Obstacle of Silence

One of the most powerful statements that arose from the West explosion and what may have turned into one of the most powerful testaments to the company’s perceived virtuous response and lack of blame in the incident was the fact that none of the employees that were injured filed suit against their employer. The unspoken inference in terms of the West explosion was that none of the injured employees sued because the company did not deserve to be sued. The reality is that North Carolina workers compensation law does not *allow* employees to sue their employers. Workers compensation in North Carolina is what a representative at the North

Carolina Industrial Commission, which administers workers compensation, calls an “exclusive remedy.” That means that employees who are injured on the job cannot sue their employers in civil court. The only exception is what is commonly referred to as a Woodson claim where an employer is grossly negligent, was aware of the risk to employees, and did nothing to remove that risk or prevent injury. However, several workers compensation lawyers I spoke to for clarification, along with the representative from the North Carolina Industrial Commission, said a Woodson claim is extremely hard to prove and therefore uncommon.

Workers compensation removes an employee’s right to sue because it is considered a no-fault issue. If an employee is injured at work, workers compensation pays for the injury and treatment, even if the employee was hurt as a result of his or her own negligence or fault. For example, if I failed to wear safety glasses while working, even though I knew I needed them and they were a required part of my uniform, and subsequently was injured, workers compensation would pay for my medical care and any resulting expenses, even though technically I was injured because of my own negligence.

A civil lawsuit against a person or organization is one way in which an individual or group could voice opposition to an established discourse. Publicly seeking a redress of a grievance in court is itself creating an alternative discourse. But the injured employees of West were not legally permitted to do that, and thus the law acted as a silencer in this case.

West workers did file suit against a number of companies that provided equipment and supplies to the Kinston plant. Under workers compensation law, injured workers are allowed to sue so called third party vendors. Although both The News and Observer and the Kinston Free Press printed stories about this third party suit, neither article explained the background on workers compensation law, nor that the law did not permit employees to sue West directly.

Again, this is another instance of how the implication that West did not deserve to be sued was allowed to stand.

The fear of ridicule or backlash may have also worked to silence protest. There is some indication that voicing criticism of West would be met with derision or scorn. Several of those interviewed mentioned that West's framing was so powerful, and the community's support for the company so strong, that voicing an alternative viewpoint was considered inadvisable. Emergency Responder noted that being perceived as complaining about West would have been "the kiss of death" for anyone doing it. Government Official 2 noted that West was "savvy and smart – their P.R. was great" and that West's framing of the event simply did not allow for any alternative viewpoint. "They won public opinion, they won the poll. Why become the villain? Why would anyone become the villain? West's message, it was so strong, those critics could not find an opening – without getting stoned. There are certain fights you don't get in" (Government Official 2 Interview).

The support for West was strong, not just in the local community, but from government officials as well. When the CSB held its final public meeting in Kinston in September 2004 to announce the final results of its investigation, several prominent politicians sent letters to be read during the hearing, letters that expressed praise of and support for West. Senator Elizabeth Dole's letter said:

"West Pharmaceuticals is an outstanding corporate citizen of Eastern North Carolina. I support them in their efforts to improve their facilities. I am pleased that the United States Chemical and Hazard Investigation Board has provided its expertise for this project. With the knowledge that today's report will give us, along with the dedication I have seen from the West staff and management, I feel

confident that West Pharmaceutical and the city of Kinston will continue to benefit from their partnership” (CSB public hearing 2004).

Then North Carolina Senator John Edwards also sent a letter, which stated:

To Mr. Morel (West’s CEO), the West Pharmaceutical employees, family members and friends, may you continue to strengthen and support one another as you strive to renew your hope and faith in this ever changing world. I offer my full support in the days ahead as we strive together to make America a stronger nation for all” (CSB public hearing 2004).

Several other politicians, including Congressman Walter Jones and Congressman G.K. Butterfield, sent letters to be read at the meeting. Both of those letters expressed interest in the CSB report and mentioned the explosion, but neither mentioned the West corporate officials specifically in any way. This could be an indication that these two politicians were hesitant to support West overtly, given the CSB’s findings. But it is also noteworthy that neither expressed criticism of West in their letters. These politicians may not have felt comfortable praising West, but they also were not comfortable with voicing opposition to the accepted framing of the explosion.

Needing the Problem, Needing Jobs

The third step in Norman Fairclough’s analytical framework is to determine whether or not the social order “needs” the problem. If the problem, as I have defined it, is the uneven power balance between West and the stakeholders in the Kinston/Lenoir County community, the answer to that question is yes. In this case, the social order – the local community – needs the problem because the community needs the jobs West provides. As a result of this complex

mutually beneficial relationship, there was no effort to counter West's framework for the explosion.

As noted, at the time of the explosion, West was one of Lenoir County's largest employers. The company was also a major tax payer and a large utility customer. If West decided not to rebuild in Kinston, the community would lose more than 200 fairly well paying blue collar jobs, and local government would lose a substantial amount of revenue. In the economic climate of Lenoir County, losing 200 jobs that did not involve the embattled tobacco and textile industries would also mean losing the limited amount of diversity in the manufacturing base the community had. This would be a blow to the community, as several of those interviewed attested to.

Emergency Responder classified the jobs that West provided in the community as "critical." Government Official 1 noted that the jobs West offered were good, viable working class jobs that in a relatively small community like Kinston, were significant – the community would not weather losing those jobs as well as a bigger community might. "200 families needed jobs. Those jobs mattered" (Government Official 1 Interview). Economic Development Official concurred – "Where are those people going to work?"

Government Official 2 noted that there was a "real fear" in the community that West would not rebuild in Kinston. EDO described the period before West committed to stay in Kinston as "some tense moments" when people feared the company would not remain in the community. It's not surprising then that within days of the explosion itself Lenoir County announced it would offer West \$600,000 in incentives to stay in Kinston. As time went on and West indicated that it hoped to rebuild in Kinston, the incentive package offered to the company grew. EDO noted that negotiations between the community leaders and company officials were

intense. GO2 said that West seemed aware of its importance to the local economy. “They were good negotiators. They used it. They were hardnosed negotiators—they got a great deal” (Government Official 2 Interview). GO2 also said that there was a determination among city and county leaders to do whatever it took to convince West to rebuild because of the way the community had suffered as a result of the explosion.

In terms of the final incentive package, West paid two million dollars up front to Lenoir County for a county owned building; in return, Lenoir County agreed to pay West 2.2 million dollars over the course of 11 years, which would mean that West would actually make \$200,000 on the building. In addition, the State of North Carolina gave West \$250,000 in grant money, and the City of Kinston negotiated with West regarding how much the corporation would pay for utilities. In turn, West agreed to employ roughly 200 people at the plant, and to invest roughly 16 million dollars in the building over seven years. The building that was given to West by Lenoir County was an empty shell building the county had been unable to sell to any other manufacturer. West had to outfit the building. Government Official 2 noted that the incentive package given to West was larger than any other that had been offered to any company before and that it also set a standard for future incentive packages. Still, the package was viewed as necessary. GO2 said “In the competition we have today, we have to offer incentives” (Government Official 2 Interview). EDO said offering incentives is not unusual, and that the West incentive package had to be measured against what would be lost if the company left Kinston: “How do you weigh the benefit of keeping 200 jobs?” (Economic Development Official Interview). GO1 said that economic incentives are common, and that more than just money should be considered: “from a cash standpoint, we weren’t losing money [you have to consider] jobs, taxes and utilities” (Government Official 1 Interview).

Overcoming the Obstacles

The next step in Fairclough's framework is to identify ways past the obstacles. Frankly, the obstacles related to class and the urban versus rural narratives may be too large to ever overcome, but there may be ways to increase awareness of these issues and their context in a crisis. Applying CDA and creating a space in which alternative discourses can be heard would at least make the obstacles less difficult to overcome.

Applying the theory that informs critical discourse analysis and openly recognizing an uneven power balance might be the first step in overcoming obstacles of class, the rural nature of the region, and silencing. Recognizing that power is a factor in any situation may create awareness, and creating awareness might then create a space in which other voices could be heard. The viewpoints of those interviewed indicate alternative frames for the West explosion existed, but there was no mechanism by which the presence of those alternative frames could be heard. Adding critical discourse analysis techniques to crisis communication theory would at least force researchers to begin thinking about who in the community is not being heard.

Creating a specific space for those voices to be heard would be another way of addressing the obstacles. Typically, the local newspaper is a space for alternative discourses, but in this case, it was not. It's not surprising since the people who work at the local newspaper are themselves members of the community. Voicing criticism of West may very well have branded the newspaper, as Government Official 2 noted, a "villain." Opposing the status quo may very well have led to an abrasive relationship between other stakeholders and newspaper employees, but such discomfort is not uncommon, and the press is, traditionally, the entity that has both the money and the power to question the status quo.

Another group that also traditionally voices concerns for workers is a union; as noted, union membership is low in both Lenoir County and North Carolina, and there was no union at West. I am by no means suggesting that the outcome might have been different if a union existed. I am simply noting that unions typically give voice to employee concerns in situations like this, and the presence of one might have been an outlet for an alternative framing of the event.

Another problematic area is the seeming conflict of interest between the two missions of the North Carolina Department of Labor. The organization has investigative powers over companies but also has to be mindful of encouraging economic development in the state, which may lead to compromises on either side. It would be helpful if there was a completely separate state agency that investigated incidents like the West explosion, one that did not have to answer to state or local elected officials.

But a union and a separate state agency are not likely. Both would more than likely be met with suspicion and criticism. Given that, it may be that academic researchers have the best chance at helping raise awareness of silenced voices and powerless groups. In the analysis of external media, it was really only the academic or safety journals that seemed immune to West's positive framing of the explosion. Perhaps these individuals, who have no association with the community and thus no conflict of interest, might provide a place where alternative discourses can be voiced. If that's the case, then it's even more important that CDA techniques be folded into crisis communication theory, as that would provide a framework for communication and discourse scholars to use in these situations. Adding communication and discourse scholars to this mix would raise the number of researchers – along with those in occupational safety and fire prevention – that examine these issues.

Critical Reflection: The Perfect Storm

Fairclough's final step is to reflect critically on the analysis, which I will attempt to do here. The truth of the matter may be that the 2003 West explosion was a "perfect storm." The confluence of factors and events that led to the obstacles mentioned above may not be reproduced exactly anywhere else.

Lenoir County and Kinston was suffering from a loss of textile and tobacco jobs and could not really afford to lose the jobs West provided. The semantics of the ATF investigation helped solidify the framing of the explosion as "accidental." The state agency responsible for investigating the incident had to balance its job-creation and investigatory responsibilities. The workers compensation law effectively silenced those that might have voiced opposition via a lawsuit. All of these things played a role in the way in which this incident was perceived publicly, and there is no guarantee that each of these factors could be reproduced together in another incident somewhere else.

Still, creating a framework, a theory that takes into account these powerless or silenced populations very well may be the best way to make sure they are heard, or that they exist. If crisis communication can at least have a mechanism that considers what voices are not being heard, then crisis communication scholars and practitioners will have to make an effort to discern if those voices exist and what their concerns are. Doing that may very well create a way in which all stakeholders can comfortably and productively address power issues that arise from these situations, without a fear of backlash.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Writing this dissertation has made me think seriously about my own history, about how my personal roots are grounded solidly in the working class. My paternal grandfather immigrated to the United States from Ukraine early in the last century. Family lore has it that he arrived at Ellis Island in New York, with only his best friend for company, and that the immigration workers did not understand him when he told them how he spelled his last name; as a result, the “American” spelling was different than the Ukrainian spelling.

My grandfather was a coal miner his entire life. He worked the mines before there was union representation, and after. The union undoubtedly raised safety standards in the mines, but it was still a filthy, hazardous job, and union representation apparently brought its own issues. My father tells a story about how, when he was a young man, he criticized the union’s chosen political candidate for one office or another. My grandfather urged him to be quiet, fearful that if anyone heard my Dad criticizing the union favorite, that the union would, in my Grandfather’s words, “take my pension away.” My grandfather was convinced, despite my dad’s assurances otherwise, that the union would “know” who he voted for in the privacy of the voting booth, and that he would be punished if he did not vote for the candidate the union backed.

My Grandfather was vehemently opposed to any of his sons, including my Dad, going to work in the mine. He wanted better for them. So after serving an obligatory term in the Navy, my Dad went to college on the G.I Bill. He was married and had two young children by the time he finished, but he finished, and went on to a “white-collar” job in sales. My two brothers, my sister and I all graduated from college. Within 2 generations, we had achieved what my grandfather came to this country seeking – a better life.

When I was 18, I vividly recall standing in my parents' garage, watching my Dad pack the car with all the gear I was taking off to college with me. As I watched the pile of boxes that had been sitting in the garage slowly get smaller, it hit me that this was it, I was leaving what had been the only home I had ever known. I burst into tears, and my Dad, who had come into the garage to get yet another box, took one look at his sobbing daughter and did what any Dad would do...he promptly turned around, went back to packing the car and left my Mother to deal with me. My mom put her hands on my shoulders and told me something that I've never, ever forgotten. She said: "Your Grandfather came to this country when he was 18 years old; he was alone, he had two dollars in his pocket and he didn't speak the language. If he could do that, you can do this."

As I sit here writing this, I am the most highly educated individual in my family, the only one who went beyond a four year degree, and the only PhD. (I'm not sure how my grandfather would feel about that, since he once told my Dad that sending girls to college was a waste of money when my older sister went off to school) But regardless of my title or education level, I will always, always feel a fairly deep connection and pride in my working class background, and have an abiding respect for the men and women who make up the working class today.

So I guess it is those individuals that I think about most in regard to this research, and I wonder if they would have been better served by the ability to voice their concerns, or if in fact they were better served by silence and the preservation of their jobs. I hope there is room for both.

The West Explosion: Aftermath

Since the 2003 explosion, West Pharmaceutical Services has reopened its new plant in Kinston. Initially, there was no rubber compounding area in the new plant; the compounding area was where the 2003 explosion initiated. Now, however, compounding operations have been reinstated in the West plant in Kinston. But so have a variety of new regulations.

In its final report on the West explosion, The CSB recommended that the state of North Carolina adopt NFPA 654, the NFPA code that deals specifically with dust explosions. North Carolina has adopted NFPA 654 as part of its building code, and Lenoir County has adopted the code as well. The code requires facilities that process or handle combustible dust follow certain guidelines to remove dust and sources of ignition. The code also gives local inspectors the authority and responsibility to inspect facilities that produce dust. In addition, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which governs workplace safety in the United States, is considering crafting a combustible dust standard that would apply to American facilities.

The Contributions of this Research

I am arguing for a more detailed crisis communication model, one that specifically identifies stakeholders that might be silenced and utilizes critical discourse analysis to give those silenced individuals a voice, and the academic community a broader understanding of how power impacts the ability of an organization to frame a crisis and the ability of stakeholders to challenge that framing. Here is an example of how a model like the one I describe might have changed the analysis of the communication surrounding the West explosion.

As noted in chapter two as part of the literature review, Timothy Coombs wrote an article in 2004 that analyzed the West Pharmaceutical explosion through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Coombs' article was printed prior to the CSB issuing its final report on the explosion, and focused on the company's reaction at the time of the explosion itself. In other words, there was no analysis of the company's response in relation to the information presented in the CSB report. Coombs also did not consider the context of the company in the community, nor did he explore notions of power between the company and its stakeholders. He took the information the company released at face value and analyzed its success and from a crisis communication theory stance, that is all that is required. As such, Coombs placed the explosion at West in the accidental cluster. If one utilizes crisis communication theory that would be an appropriate placement.

However, when you add in the information from the interviews that I have gathered, and explore the context of the company in the community and the uneven power balance between West and its stakeholders, a strong case could be made that this incident could fall into the preventable cluster, which is the cluster that assesses the heaviest blame for an organization. The CSB determined that the dust explosion could have been prevented had West taken certain steps. The employees shared information about a problem with a piece of equipment in the area where the explosion occurred that they claim West officials at the plant were aware of. Several of the officials interviewed indicated they were keenly aware of West's position in the community and were unwilling to raise alternative framings for the event, and the newspaper accounts reflect West's framing of the event. If all of this information, garnered and analyzed utilizing critical discourse analysis techniques, were applied to the crisis communication the company performed,

I do believe there would at least be serious debate about whether the explosion fell into the accidental cluster or the preventable cluster if it weren't placed into the preventable cluster outright. In other words, the application of critical discourse analysis to this situation could have changed the outcome of the assessment. It could have added another layer with which to analyze the event, which would ultimately bring greater understanding of crisis situations and what impacts an organization's successful navigation of a crisis.

This research also adds to the greater conversation regarding corporate social responsibility in the communities in which companies operate. The relationship between community and corporation is what Calvano refers to as new colonialism. Calvano is a business scholar at Temple University in Pennsylvania. The focus of her article is on multinational corporations, or companies that operate in numerous countries. Calvano catalogues how the interests of these companies often conflict with the interests of the local populations, and the tensions that result. However, I feel this dissertation makes an argument for the idea that new colonialism can also be found within the borders of the United States, when companies like West Pharmaceutical Services locate plants in states outside the one where the corporate office resides. The idea is essentially the same: A corporate entity locates a facility outside its geographic "hometown" and thus becomes a powerful entity in that distant community. Calvano called the areas in which these corporations settle "communities of place" (794). Kinston and Lenoir County could certainly be seen as a community of place.

Calvano also noted that "stakeholder power inequality" is a common problem in these communities of place, saying: "they [the community] are usually at a disadvantage because of their relative lack of power. Yet traditional models for examining business' relationship with

stakeholders usually ignore or minimize power dynamics” (795). It would seem that crisis communication theory is not the only area of scholarly research that fails to recognize the importance of power in outcome, at the expense of stakeholders.

Calvano’s assessment of these multinational corporations parallels the West incident in a number of other ways. As noted, West was considered a good corporate citizen that gave to local charitable efforts. Calvano indicates that this can afford a company the opportunity to “buy off or silence communities that oppose their activities” (796). It’s also of note that Calvano posits these multinational companies choose to move to other countries because less developed countries need the economic investment and often have little or no regulation in place (797). Consider the parallel with West. The Kinston plant is in an economically distressed area, in a “right to work” state that discourages union representation, in a county that actually advertises its low union representation. The emphasis on economic development that Calvano finds in poor foreign countries can also be found within the confines of the West explosion.

Calvano argues for a shift in business management that recognizes power disparities and focuses on the needs of stakeholders to “bolster the power of communities to challenge corporate actions” (802). How to move that idea from theory to practice is a problem not only for Calvano, but also for my particular study. In viewing the West Pharmaceutical Services explosion through the lenses of both crisis communication theory and critical discourse analysis I have done what I set out to do: highlight the disparities between the two methods and emphasize the need for adding CDA to crisis communication theory to address marginalized stakeholders. How best to do that is something that may have to be studied further.

Future Research

I feel very strongly that someone needs to speak for the powerless and I do believe that academic scholars have the ability to raise awareness of this issue and push for change in a way that other groups may not. The only group that seemed to question West's framing of the explosion was the group of occupational safety/hazard professionals in the various occupational safety journals. This could make a case for academics, with tenure and the "academic freedom" that goes with it to be the group in which the concerns of the marginalized are voiced. Scholars in academic settings are not beholden to these corporations in the way that employees and other community stakeholders are. In places like North Carolina, where there are few organizations that speak for workers, academics could fill that gap. Academics could also participate in changing the policies that silence workers. Think about this: What does it mean that North Carolina bills itself as a "right to work" state? What does that discourse indicate? Is it, as Price noted, a rhetorical directive, or is it a case of Hearit's definitional hegemony? Regardless, the end result is that the "right to work" moniker encourages companies to locate in North Carolina because it is cheaper. We cannot be surprised or disappointed, then, if that company pulls up stakes and moves further south to Mexico or South America to cut expenses even more, or when that company is found to run a less than safe workplace. Ultimately, the "right to work" label may attract companies for the wrong reasons, and allow the state to marginalize its own citizens in favor of transitory economic development. Academic researchers could at least begin the discussion regarding North Carolina's discourse in this area, in an attempt to make it more worker centered.

Another factor in this case, the material safety data sheets, or MSDS, may provide a place for future research in technical discourse. The MSDS in the West case differed from one version to the next, and the CSB indicated that the workers in the West plant were not aware of the combustible nature of the polyethylene dust. It would be interesting to study the use of MSDS in manufacturing to discern if the sheets are utilized by workers, and if the language in those sheets is written for an audience of assembly line workers, or subject matter experts. If in fact the workers face the most risk, the MSDS should be written for this audience, and workers should be involved in the creation of safety documentation from the draft stage to the final printing.

I also think that implementing best practices in technical writing might help hazard and risk documentation in manufacturing facilities better while providing a space where workers can voice their concerns. Technical writing experts regularly suggest utilizing the intended audience in the production of workplace documents. If the workers who face those risks are made part of the process to communicate those risks, then those workers would have a certain empowerment, while making certain that the hazard communication material matches the literacy levels of workers and the manufacturing environment. It also guarantees that workers will be aware of risks, since they will be part of the team that creates risk communication documents.

Context, Power and Crisis Communication

In the end, I hope that I have made a case for the inclusion of CDA into crisis communication theory, and have made a relevant argument for consideration of things like context and power when examining how an organization is responding to a crisis. Ultimately, my analysis indicates that West's power within the community, and the community's reliance on the

jobs West provided, had as much to do with the company's success in framing the explosion as the crisis communication itself did.

The other outcome of including CDA in crisis communication theory is that those who study this theory and the organizations that apply it will be forced to address notions such as silencing and power relations when dealing with a crisis. If an organization is made to think beyond notions of success or failure, and truly assess what stakeholders in the community are concerned about, then there is a much better chance that those stakeholders' concerns will be addressed, and that there will be no hegemonic framing of an event. Instead, there will be a true consensus, and a consideration of how to proceed with what is best not for just the business, but the community as well. Research in crisis communication that includes a consideration of power will hopefully make corporate executives and business students aware of the potential for exploitation in a way that they may have not been before, and communities aware of their inherent rights and position in the company-worker relationship. In the end, I hope for a deeper and more in depth analysis of crisis communication, one that does not only consider the company's behavior, but recognizes the social structure that impacts and is impacted by a given crisis.

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APPENDIX A: IRB FORM



University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board
East Carolina University, 600 Moye Boulevard
1L-09 Brody Medical Sciences Bldg. • Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 • Fax 252-744-2284 • www.ecu.edu/irb
Chair and Director of Biomedical IRB: L. Wiley Nifong, MD
Chair and Director of Behavioral and Social Science IRB: Susan L. McCammon, PhD

Date: February 11, 2010

Principal Investigator: Carolyn Kusbit Dunn
Dept./Ctr./Institute: English Dept.
Mailstop or Address: 232 Slay Bldg.

RE: Exempt Certification
UMCIRB#: 10-0086
Funding Source: unfunded

Title: Crisis Communication, Power and Place

Dear Ms. Dunn:


On 2/9/10, the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) determined that your research meets ECU requirements and federal exemption criterion #2 which includes research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your Internal Processing Form and Protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The UMCIRB Office will hold your exemption application for a period of five years from the date of this letter. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit an Exemption Certification Request at least 30 days before the end of the five year period.

Sincerely,

Chairperson, University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board 

Attachments: Consent Document

pc: Dr. Michelle Eble



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Crisis Communication, Power and Place

Principal Investigator: Carolyn K. Dunn
Institution/Department or Division: Department of English, East Carolina University
Address: 232 Slay Building
Telephone #: 252-328-9661

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study problems in society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. Our goal is to try to find ways to improve the lives of you and others. To do this, we need the help of people who are willing to take part in research.

The person who is in charge of this research is called the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator may have other research staff members who will perform some of the procedures.

You may have questions that this form does not answer. If you do, feel free to ask the person explaining the study, as you go along. You may have questions later and you should ask those questions, as you think of them. There is no time limit for asking questions about this research.

You do not have to take part in this research. Take your time and think about the information that is provided. If you want, have a friend or family member go over this form with you before you decide. It is up to you. If you choose to be in the study, then you should sign the form when you are comfortable that you understand the information provided. If you do not want to take part in the study, you should not sign this form. That decision is yours and it is okay to decide not to volunteer.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the pharmaceutical plant explosion in 2003 on the community, the crisis communication employed, and the ability of the company to emerge from the incident without serious economic or reputational damage. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, I hope to learn how communities and corporations negotiate notions of power and what this has to offer to crisis communication theory.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

You are being invited to take part in this research because you may have information about the incident that might be informative. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 15 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

If you do not want to share information about the event, then you should not take part in this research.

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TO no expiration

