FRAMING THE FALLEN:

PORTRAYALS OF IRAQ WAR TROOP CASUALTIES IN U.S. NEWSPAPERS

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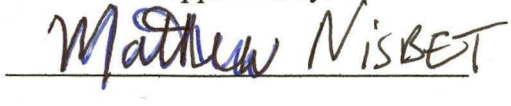

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ABSTRACT

Casualties are the most tangible cost of war. They represent a quick way for the public to determine how well a war is progressing, and media provide the means for the public to learn of casualties. Using Gamson and Lasch's (1983) signature matrix method of analysis, this thesis examines how two local papers and one national paper portrayed Iraq war casualties. Though some differences are uncovered, the majority of coverage in both types of papers is made up of dramatic, personal portrayals of dead soldiers dominated by similar description and word choice. The results are discussed in terms of sponsor activities and media practices, with the latter discussion augmented by interviews with journalists who have covered Iraq casualties.

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On to the next adventure…

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On April 18, 2004, the *Seattle Times* published a picture of Iraq-dead U.S. soldiers' flag-draped coffins. In the photo, the coffins were being readied for departure from Kuwait International Airport; they would be flown to Delaware's Dover Air Force Base. The photographer, a cargo worker based in Kuwait, lost her job soon after the photos appeared (Bernton, 2004).

Three days later, writer Russ Kick posted similar images of soldiers' coffins on his Web site at www.thememoryhole.org; he had obtained them after filing a Freedom of Information request. Soon after, newspapers all over the country were running photos of the coffins (Smolkin, 2004).

It wasn't long before the Pentagon clamped down on the pictures' further dissemination. "We don't want the remains of our service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice to be the subject of any kind of attention that is unwarranted or undignified," John Molino, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, said at a briefing. The

Figure 1.1. Cartoon by Jeff Parker, *Florida Today*.

military also cited a 1991 ban preventing media from covering coffins as they arrived in Dover, and a 2003 directive that said there should be no media coverage of "deceased military personnel returning to or departing from" air bases (Smolkin, 2004).

The ban whipped up a firestorm of strong opinions. Opponents, such as *Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby, decried the images as "utterly dehumanizing." Jacoby said the photos "reduce Americans who died for their country to an abstraction. They deprive them of every shred of their individuality and personality" (Jacoby, 2004).

Silicio said the photo was a testament to the reverence with which the soldiers' bodies were treated and that she simply hoped the images would "give Americans the opportunity to speak from their hearts" (Smolkin, 2004). Others, however, saw the Pentagon's motives as a political move to suppress photos showing the reality of war

from the American people. The cartoon in Figure 1.1 highlights this position, as does the following *New York Times* editorial:

> The theory seems to be that the pictures are intrusive, or possibly hurtful, to bereaved families. But it seems far more likely that the Pentagon is concerned about the impact that photos of large numbers of flag-draped coffins may have on the American public's attitude toward the war.
>
> That certainly underestimates the fortitude of average citizens, who are able to accept the cost of war whenever they are confident that the cause is right. American men and women are currently suffering danger, death and injury every day in Iraq. The least those of us back home can do is to bear witness to the sacrifice of the real soldiers as well as the fictional ("The Real War," 2004).

The coffin photo incident is a vivid illustration of the many ways — and opinions — as to how the media cover casualties. Importantly, the debate extends far beyond photography and applies to the written word as well. Are dead soldiers simply statistics? Are they heroes? Are they mothers, fathers, sons or daughters?

Casualties are the most tangible cost of any war, so much so that it seems an insensitive question to ask why they matter, in a normative sense. Still, aside from the obvious heartache sustained by soldiers' loved ones and the economic costs the military absorbs upon every death, the biggest reason is simply this: War casualties — and by extension, the mediated portrayal of those casualties — have great potential to affect public opinion about the war.

Amid whispers of imminent combat, the loudest and most persistent voices wonder about the human cost of war. The build-up to the U.S. offensive in Iraq on March 20, 2003, was no exception. Scholars, journalists, pundits and analysts all speculated about what kind of losses the American armed forces would sustain.

But how do most Americans learn of world events, including far-off wars? Despite the pervasive argument that the world is shrinking because of the interconnectivity provided by faster transportation and technology, geographically, the same natural barriers prevent most people from the cross-cultural observation and experience that would create a "global village" not only in name, but practice.

Americans, in particular, have been frequently maligned for shoddy knowledge of foreign affairs and geography. A 2002 National Geographic Society survey that showed only one in seven 18-24-year-olds could find Iraq on a map is only one of many embarrassing examples (Trivedi, 2002).

Of course, media have rushed to fill this gap in the global village; it is mainly through newspapers, television news reports, radio broadcasts and Internet news stories that people learn what is happening in the rest of the world. But what of Americans' traditional disinterest in the world outside U.S. borders, especially considering the glut of media sources in this country is beyond compare? Lent (1977) probably said it best: "The United States is seen as a major news source rather than a receiver because of its Big Power status and because of its pervasive, worldwide network of news agencies" (p. 46).

Whether post-September 11 events have affected this "newsmaker, not-news-consumer" attitude is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, the focus here will be on a specific international event of ongoing significance: The Iraq war. How have different newspapers portrayed U.S. troop casualties to the American people? Before exploring this question further, a brief timeline of U.S. involvement and casualties in Iraq is in order.

Iraq war background

On February 28, 1991, only four days after U.N. coalition forces began a land offensive to remove invading Iraqi forces from neighboring Kuwait, a cease-fire ended military operations. Iraqi officials accepted the cease-fire conditions within a few days, and the Persian Gulf War was over approximately a month-and-a-half after it had begun (Brown, 2004).

U.S. troops accounted for 148 or the 240 coalition losses. President George H.W. Bush's approval ratings skyrocketed to 85 percent during the conflict in what observers have commonly termed a "rally 'round the flag" effect, but plummeted after the war's end as the economy worsened (Lindsay, 2003). The U.N. imposed strict new sanctions, calling for Iraq to destroy missiles, chemical and biological weapons and refrain from nuclear weapons experiments or testing; Iraq was also to submit to periodic sanctions to ensure enforcement of these conditions.

As history has shown, Iraq resisted. Moreover, Saddam Hussein remained in power. Ultimately, however, coalition members decided his removal could cause more instability in an already volatile region for the time being (Brown, 2004).

Whether the keenest political observers could foresee George H.W. Bush's son's ascendancy to the presidency in 2000 is debatable. Whether those observers could have forecast the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the nebulous events that led the new Bush administration back to a focus on Iraq is unlikely.

Nevertheless, the new war on terror put an old enemy — Hussein — in sharp relief once more. A year after the 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., President George W. Bush called for a new U.N. resolution reiterating demands that Iraq

cease production of "weapons of mass destruction" and halt support for terrorist activities (Bush, 2002). Weapons inspections in Iraq resumed shortly after.

A short time later, however, the Bush administration remained displeased with inspection progress. Despite pleas from weapons inspectors and other U.N. members for more time for inspections, U.S. troops began an air assault on Baghdad on March 20, 2003.

U.S. troops suffered 140 losses by May 1, when Bush announced that major combat operations in Iraq were over from the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln. Despite the end of the major military offensives, that number would continue to climb as troops tried to restore order and quash insurgents. By the time the United States returned sovereignty to the Iraqis on June 28, 2004, U.S. casualties numbered 857; as of the January 30, 2005, elections in Iraq, 1436 soldiers had died (Iraq Coalition, 2005).

The media in society

To answer normative questions as to why media portrayals of casualties matter, it is helpful to consider the societal roles scholars have attributed to the media. McQuail (2000) outlines several ways to conceptualize how media and power integrate and interact.

The mass society. One theory of media in society is what McQuail terms "the mass society." The label is very telling, for in this conceptualization the media play an active, causal role in shaping people's beliefs and worldviews. A power elite monopolizes media organizations and transmits ideas only from the top down. "The media cannot be expected to offer a critical or alternative definition of the world, and

their tendency will be to assist in the accommodation of the dependent public to their fate," McQuail writes (p. 74).

C. Wright Mills (1956), perhaps the most influential sociologist to articulate the mass society, writes that the elite conceive of public opinion as a prize to be made and manipulated in the mass media:

> As the scale of institutions has become larger and more centralized, so has the range and intensity of the opinion-makers' efforts. The means of opinion-making, in fact, have paralleled in range and efficiency the other institutions of greater scale that cradle the modern society of masses. Accordingly, in addition to their enlarged and centralized means of administration, exploitation, and violence, the modern elite have had placed within their grasp historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation, which include universal compulsory education as well as the media of mass communication (p. 315).

Political-economic theorists such as Herman and Chomsky (1988) similarly regard the media as controlled by the small, powerful elite that has economic ownership and control of media; content is viewed as subordinate to monetary concerns and thus diversity of ideas suffers. The audience is still thought of in terms of a "mass," and it is also a "commodity" that exercises power in terms of what it chooses to consume (McQuail, 2000, 82-83).

Functionalism. A very different conceptualization of media's role in society is functionalism. In this view, the media are tasked with maintaining the societal status quo rather than challenging or changing it. Media support and reinforce the dominant values of a society; those who go against those values are highlighted and marginalized. "Media are generally found to give disproportionate attention either to those who exemplify the aspirations of the majority or to those who reject the values of society," McQuail writes (p.81).

Sociologist Robert Merton was the foremost theorist of functionalism. Institutions such as the mass media fulfill the needs of society in this context. More pointedly, the functionalist media fulfill several roles — they confer status on important people, issues and events, enforce social norms by illuminating extremes and numb the public to various social ills, substituting knowledge for action:

> To the extent that the media of mass communication have had an influence upon their audiences, it has stemmed not only from what is said, but more significantly from what is not said. For these media not only continue to affirm the status quo, but in the same measure, they fail to raise the essential questions about the structure of society (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948, p. 503).

Iraq casualties and the media role. Whether any one media-society role is "correct" is, of course, debatable. Scholars have found characteristics of each theory in the U.S. media. Importantly, no matter which theory one subscribes to, there remain important implications for media coverage of the Iraq war casualties.

In the mass society and political economic views, content would be closely entwined with the views of the political and economic elite, perhaps skewing content toward alignment with current foreign policy and effectively silencing dissenting perspectives. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) outline the dangers of "co-optation" as journalists have to depend heavily on the military to give them information in conflict situations:

> (Co-optation) is often signified in news discourse by the use of 'we' and similar terms that identify reporters with governmental and military interests: "We invaded," "our troops," "our country" … Media dependence also means that the military's definition of success is absorbed uncritically by journalists. Thus, the military is allowed to claim achievements using terms of its own making, crowding out other potential criteria for evaluating the government's policy in diplomatic, economic, environmental, moral, and other areas (p. 136).

From a more functionalist standpoint, coverage of Iraq casualties could be a mechanism for the maintenance of pervasive American values — soldiers who served their country are heroes; they made the "ultimate sacrifice" in the name of freedom. Gans (1979) identifies this bias as a type of ethnocentrism in which news promotes American values over all others. This most noticeably affects war news, with personalized, detailed U.S. casualty counts the norm. "While reporting in the Vietnam War…casualty stories reported the number of Americans killed, wounded, or missing…but the casualties on the other side were impersonally described as 'the Communist death toll' or the 'body count'" Gans argues (p. 42-43).

Framing: A sociological, constructionist view

Framing theory influences the vast majority of studies of international news. Generally, framing is the process through which journalists provide a way for media consumers to view a story or happening. Through frames, news flow is streamlined and structured into common, often reoccurring concepts, enabling the journalist to encourage one interpretation over another (Norris, 1995).

Though framing, the media can help maintain their own role in society. Through the use of culturally accepted, middle-of-the-road frames, media might fulfill a functional role, promoting societal stability. Alternately, sources or journalists could heavily co-opt certain frames that reflect certain policy goals, thus reflecting a "mass society" role. Of course, a third possibility could entail the media using alternative frames to promote new ideas or social change.

Pan and Kosicki (1993) outline two major theoretical perspectives on framing: sociological and psychological. Whereas the sociological perspective conceives of frames as inextricably located in the fabric of issue cultures and political discourse, the latter focuses on the news frame as an organizing mechanism and how it affects cognitive processes. "Framing…may be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself," they write (p. 57). Scheufele (2000) similarly distinguishes between media and individual frames, with the former as meaning attributed to an issue or event and the latter as an internal mechanism that helps an individual process information; the sociological framing research tradition more fully focuses on media frames and psychological research delves into the individual frames.

This study approaches its texts using the lens of the sociological approach. While the two perspectives do overlap, as Pan and Kosicki (1993) note, framing research in the sociological tradition more closely examines the frame as it is linked to discourse over a particular issue and how it might arise from news production norms. D'Angelo (2002) calls this a "constructionist paradigm" in which journalists actively shape the frames emerging from their sources, sometimes resulting in a "co-optation" of news coverage when certain frames control news discourse for long periods of time (p. 877).

Gamson and issue packages. William Gamson's extensive work within this constructionist, sociological framing tradition is especially salient to this study. Gamson has examined the issue cultures of contentious political issues including welfare (1983), affirmative action (1987b), and nuclear power (1989). In these examinations, Gamson examines how these issues are reflected throughout the news in packages of elements

such as metaphors, catchphrases and exemplars (this method will be discussed in more detail later in this paper).

In Gamson's work, frames are the core organizing concepts — "what the issue is all about" — and allow for a variety of issue positions. They are embedded in a larger issue package, which contains those elements (metaphors, catchphrases et al.) that signify the central frame (1987a, p. 167).

To explicate dominant packages surrounding the welfare issue, Gamson and Lasch (1983) examined materials such as books, journal articles, cartoons and a media sample. They identified four prevalent packages (the core package frame is in parentheses): "welfare freeloaders"(welfare recipients are lazy and unmotivated), "working poor" (recipients are hard-working but simply cannot get ahead), "poverty trap" (the system has failed the poor, who are powerless to change their situation) and "regulating the poor" (poverty is permanent and welfare is simply a system through which the government can control and regulate the poor). The packages resonate with larger cultural themes such as civic duty and self-reliance, Gamson and Lasch argue.

Gamson and Modigliani's (1987b) examination of affirmative action discourse, including television, opinion columns, cartoons and newsmagazines, similarly reveals three major packages: "remedial action" (one should consider race-based programs to combat racism), "delicate balance" (it is proper to consider race as long as it does not exclude because of race) and "no preferential treatment" (policy should be race-blind).

In their examination of nuclear power discourse, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) find an evolution in package presence and prominence. While nuclear power is hailed as "progress" almost uninterrupted and without competing packages in the 1950s and '60s,

in the '70s anti-nuclear packages emerged: "soft paths" (highlights the need for less drastic energy options) "public accountability" (points out the need for transparency in the nuclear industry) and the "not cost effective" package (highlights a poor cost-benefit nuclear showing). The authors then examine nuclear power public opinion surveys, finding that older people who were exposed to unchallenged "progress" packages were more likely to support or feel ambivalent about nuclear power, whereas younger people exposed to more competing packages were more likely to be opposed.

It is difficult to sum up the results of these largely interpretative studies because the packages are uniquely embedded in the issue cultures they illuminate. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) acknowledge that these packages "ebb and flow in prominence" and suggest three determinants that may influence their relative prominence: cultural resonance, sponsors, and media organizations and practices. Packages congruent with larger prevalent cultural themes are at a "natural advantage" (p. 167) while packages with sponsor organizations may be more prominent since sponsors are often well aware of journalists' preferences and habits and thus able to spin a story in a more attractive manner. Factors within media organizations such as source relationships, the objectivity norm and predisposition to highlight conflict and drama (see Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) can also affect the construction and prominence of these packages.

CHAPTER 2

RATIONALE, NORMATIVE CONCERNS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Thus far, framing theory has been at the heart of most literature. If, as scholars such as Gamson (1983, 1987a, 1987b,1989) suggest, frames are a mechanism through which certain concepts can be made more or less accessible or more or less important, it is certainly worth investigating what types of frames dominate the coverage of Iraq casualties.

While scholars disagree on the magnitude or type of casualties that will affect public opinion, they all agree that casualties are quite able to affect opinion in some manner. Because most Americans learn of casualties from the mass media, its role is that of a crucial linking mechanism that itself could have potential to alter opinion, given tone of coverage.

Gartner (2004) establishes a logical starting point for a study of Iraq war casualty coverage. He identifies two reasons why local-level reporting on national or international events will differ from elite national media: local news outlets are less likely to cover a national or international story to begin with, and when they do cover these stories, they have a pervasive tendency to "localize" them, that is, to spin the story with an angle that makes it more relevant to the area's readers or viewers. Given these two factors, Gartner found that national newspapers were more likely to report on the U.S.S. Cole bombing,

but local newspapers from regions that experienced casualties from the incident were more likely to report on it as well. "Regional papers provide vivid and detailed stories about the local victims of the Cole bombing; they do not just report wire stories...Even after the victims are buried, the stories of their lives and those affected continue to make news," he concludes (p. 153).

But while Gartner found that areas with international casualties are more likely to cover the events, he examined nothing regarding the content of the coverage itself. This study will seek to fill that gap.

Many studies of international news focus on the conflict itself, rather than consequences, such as casualties (e.g. Entman, 1991; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kim, 2000; Wall, 1997). Further, studies of international news coverage almost exclusively examine elite, national-level coverage, but many people get the majority of their news from local sources. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) established that personalized news stories — likely to be found when news sources "localize" stories — are perceived by audiences as more vivid than information containing statistics and other intangible, contextual and thematic tidbits. Gartner (2004) notes that certain literature from psychology documents that this vivid information has a greater ability to alter beliefs. Thus, it becomes even more important to determine the qualitative differences between these levels of coverage.

Consequently, this study will investigate how Iraq war casualties have been framed at a local and national level, paying particular attention to any differences in coverage between these two levels. Will coverage be "localized" to interest readers or kept at a more abstract level?

Additionally, this study will seek to determine if casualty coverage differs according to the time period of war, whether from the initial stages of combat, after the end of major combat was declared, after Saddam Hussein was captured, or after sovereignty was returned to the Iraqis. Comparing results from these four phases of the war will help show if there are any qualitative differences in casualty coverage as the war drags on; it isn't unreasonable to expect some qualitative variations as the U.S. role in Iraq shifts from that of a combatant to a peacekeeper, and from the time when combat ends to when it's declared over. As Gamson and Modigliani (1989) write, "packages, if they are to remain viable, have the task of constructing meaning over time, incorporating new events into their interpretive frame" (p. 4). Additionally, officials, interest groups and other people or organizations with a vested interest in package prominence may use current events to promote a point of view, resulting in a rise in that package's prominence.

Reese and Buckalew (1995) employ a similar method to examine how newsroom routines affected one local station's coverage of the Gulf War. "Routines are linked to content; they provide the underpinnings for ideological frames of reference," they note (p. 42). This study will similarly investigate the production norms and routines that contribute to package types that dominate casualty coverage. To what factors might they attribute the casualty coverage that emerges?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Norris (1995) distinguishes between three types of framing research: "Production research looks at how journalists' values and news-gathering structures shape news frames. Contents research…analyzes the characteristics of news frames. Effects research examines the impact of news frames on the public's interpretation of events" (p. 360). Following this conceptualization, this study would fall under the rubric of contents research, with the ultimate goal of identifying possible sponsor activities and production factors as explanatory of the results.

Gamson (1983, 1987a, 1987b, 1989) offers a comprehensive, constructionist method of frame identification termed the "signature matrix" that this study will emulate. The signature matrix method has a number of strengths. Aside from identifying salient frame types (embedded in larger issue packages, to be discussed in more detail below) as rooted in the studied text, the method also identifies justifications and reasons for the positions signified by each frame type. The latter takes on increased importance, as scholars such as Iyengar and Simon (1993) note attributions of responsibility are vital characteristics of any salient frame. The method also allows for an unusually detailed breakdown of frame types that will allow more in-depth study and discussion than less defined, although more quantitatively friendly, categories.

The study encompasses three newspapers' coverage of Iraq war casualties during four distinct phases of the war:

1. ***The initial U.S. assault (phase one).*** This period lasts from March 20, 2003-May 1, 2003, when President Bush announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq.
2. ***After "mission accomplished" (phase two).*** The second phase began May 2, 2003 and lasted until Saddam Hussein was captured by American troops December 13, 2003.
3. ***From capture to sovereignty (phase three).*** The third phase began after Hussein's capture, December 14, 2003, and lasted until Iraq regained its sovereignty June 29, 2004.
4. ***Post-sovereignty, pre-elections (phase four).*** The fourth phase began June 30, 2004, and lasted until the Iraq elections, January 31, 2005.

Publications selected for review were *The Washington Post*, *The Arkansas Democrat Gazette* and *The Oregonian*. The *Post* serves as a benchmark national publication, useful in illuminating how Iraq casualties are framed for the nation's elite. The *Democrat Gazette* and *Oregonian* were purposively selected because they are the largest newspapers in the only major metropolitan areas of Arkansas and Oregon. Both are states that have been disproportionately affected by Iraq war casualties.[1] Because the *Washington Post* is a national paper that covers the Iraq war with much greater frequency, articles were drawn by random sample to create a numerical balance of articles comparable with the other two publications.

Because the *Democrat Gazette* and *Oregonian* are the main newspapers for their respective states, it is reasonable to assume that any soldier from Arkansas or Oregon who dies in Iraq will be treated as a newsworthy subject. Moreover, there are enough deaths in each state as of the January 30 elections (23 and 25, respectively) to provide a significant opportunity for variation in coverage.

To identify additional frame types and issue packages that may or may not be present in the mainstream newspapers, media outlets at the political extremes will also be examined. Pertinent articles from conservative news magazines *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review* will provide an opportunity to determine how casualties are framed by the right, while articles from liberal news magazine *The Nation* and *The Progressive* will provide the same function for the left. The packages presented on the fringes will enable this study to better determine whether these newspapers are covering the spectrum of views on Iraq war casualties.

Articles[i] from the three newspapers were culled from Lexis Nexis for each of the four phases of war identified above. The database searched pertinent terms[3] in the headline and lead paragraphs to allow for both increased relevance and economy of results. Articles were then further checked for relevance; stories that were irrelevant or did not mention Iraq war casualties in more than a cursory manner were eliminated from the study. This process resulted in a total of 130 relevant articles from *The Oregonian* and *Arkansas Democrat Gazette.* An equal number of articles was then randomly sampled from the *Washington Post.*

The signature matrix method identifies several elements that taken together suggest a larger frame, or package[4]:

1. ***Metaphors*** are two-pronged literary devices that evoke both the subject they are intended to elucidate and the actual substance of the metaphor that aids this understanding. One New Jersey newspaper said of Howard Dean's failed presidential bid, for example, "presidential hopeful Howard Dean was the most popular Vermonter since Ben and Jerry. Like ice cream, Dean didn't hold up well to intense heat" ("Howard Dean" 2005). Political cartoons are also often a great source of metaphors and can be helpful in illuminating them.
2. ***Exemplars*** are simply real-life, concrete events invoked in comparison to the issue at hand. For example, a scientist who asserted the danger to the Arctic environment is from shipping, not drilling, remarked "There is no such thing as a safe ship — the Titanic was one" (Frykholm 2005).
3. ***Catchphrases*** are succinct "theme statements, taglines, titles or slogans" that commentators and journalists use to sum up issues and events (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 399). To return to Howard Dean, several commentators tagged his enthusiastic post-Iowa caucus concessions speech the "Dean scream" or "I Have a Scream" speech (Morrison 2004).
4. ***Depictions*** of principal subjects can range from bland to colorful; this category entails general word choice. For example, opponents of the privatization of Social Security have likened the plan to "gambling with retirement" (Krugman, 2005).
5. ***Roots*** illuminate the cause of an issue or problem: A recent article highlights disagreements over Iran's nuclear problems, the Iraq war, the International Criminal Court, the European arms embargo on China, and Kyoto treaty on

global warming as reasons why tensions remain between the Bush administration and European leaders (Marshall and Chen, 2005).

6. ***Consequences***, both short and long-term, are often highlighted for an issue or event. Opponents of President Bush's recent budget, for example, have asserted that it will only deepen the national debt ("Democrats" 2005).
7. ***Appeals to principle*** moralize an issue or event. As Gamson and Lasch (1983) highlight, opponents of welfare reform argued that "rewards should be commensurate with effort" and the lazy should not be rewarded for no good reason (p. 411).

Taken together, then, with core issue packages organized into rows and these seven elements be organized into columns, the issue at hand is described through a detailed matrix.

Gamson and Lasch (1983) note that the packages can be most easily identified according to their sponsor — i.e., whose view is being represented? Public officials almost always sponsor at least one such package, while a main opposition group, discrete interest groups, and other challengers often sponsor packages as well. "These actors…utilize the cultural system in their efforts to achieve their goals. More specifically, they attempt to further the careers of particular interpretive packages and act as sponsor or organizational carriers for some of these packages," Gamson and Lasch write (p. 401).

The study findings will be supplemented by in-depth interviews of journalists responsible for some of the Iraq casualty coverage, in the same vein as Reese and Buckalew (1995). The four journalists interviewed in this paper were purposively

selected because all have recently covered Iraq casualties extensively. Interviews will help to discern the relative influence of production norms, routines, the journalist's own internal frames, biases and any other identifiable factors that can illuminate factors that shaped and influenced the coverage. "Journalists may draw their ideas and language from any or all (public discourse) forums, frequently paraphrasing or quoting their sources. At the same time, they contribute their own frames and invent their own clever catchphrases, drawing on popular culture that they share with an audience," Gamson and Modigliani (1989) write. Interviews will help determine where the journalists' own frames end and those of their sources and audience begins.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The following section will describe the five packages gleaned from the three newspapers in detail. These packages are summarized in a signature matrix (Table 4.1). It will then discuss packages present in the magazine sample, and compare them with the newspaper packages. Finally, the packages will be compared across phase of war and newspaper type.

As Gamson and Modigliani (1987b) note, describing a package of someone else's making is potentially difficult, as personal bias may creep in. To help alleviate this issue, package examples will be quoted at length where appropriate in order to bolster validity and present the clearest possible picture of package types.

"When God made him, he stamped 'Marine' on his forehead": The selfless soldier

Gamson (1983, 1987b,1989) uses political cartoons, which often illuminate core frames through use of dynamic metaphors, as a way to illustrate issue packages in an effective technique that will also be employed here.[5] Figure 4.1 presents a cartoon

	Core Frame	Core Position	Metaphors	Exemplars	Catchphrases	Depictions	Roots	Consequences	Appeals to Principle
The Selfless Soldier	Soldiers' deaths are sacrifices; Solider shows selflessness beyond the human norm	Dead soldiers must be honored because they do something we are unwilling to do	Cartoon of a woman stoically showing her dead son's flag	Stories of soldiers' selfless motivations (love of family; love of country)	Somebody's got to do it; freedom is not free, fulfilled a dream, death as sacrifice	Soldiers as "heroes," "band of brothers," "team players" "family men"; death as a price to be paid	Single-incident; bombs, snipers, etc.	Personal loss to family; sometimes community. Citizens "in debt" that they can never repay.	Death is an inevitable part of war and a necessary evil for protecting freedom; God in charge
Soldiers not Statistics	Soldiers had lives and relationships just like us; there are faces and names behind body counts	Soldiers must be mourned because they have fallen in their prime; policy may be questioned	Cartoon of a couple sobbing while a signature machine signs a notice of their son's death for Rumsfeld	Stories of soldiers' more selfish motivations, Stories of soldiers' personalities, relationships and quirks	Life was cut short, soldier had plans, Death hits home, freedom is not free, soldiers are more than a number.	Soldiers as "kids," "rebels," dads, moms, brothers, etc.	Single-incident; bombs, snipers, etc.; also, some Bush policy, war in general	Personal loss to family; sometimes community. Citizens "in debt" that they can never repay.	Death is a regrettable part of war; because of high price, debate a necessity

Continued

Table 4.1 Signature matrix for casualty packages

Table 4.1 continued

	Core Frame	Core Position	Metaphors	Exemplars	Catchphrases	Depictions	Roots	Consequences	Appeals to Principle
Quagmire	Soldiers' deaths are best understood within the context of previous conflicts.	Deaths could lead to increased opposition to the war.	Cartoon of a couple arguing over Iraq's and Vietnam as soldiers continue to die around them	Analyses comparing Iraq to Vietnam, WWII, N. Korea	Mounting casualties, U.S. as getting bogged down or choosing to stay the course.	Deaths as "drip" "drumbeat" Conflict as "quagmire"	Bush policy, military size, strength and technology, other wars	Public opinion could turn against war with too many deaths	Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.
Stay the course	Casualties are sad, but also a given in war.	Deaths will not sway U.S. from its mission.	---	Official reaction to Iraq deaths	Stay the course, Strengthened resolve U.S. will "stand firm" and "finish the job"	Deaths as "sacrifice," a "test," a "reality of war"	Combat incidents, insurgents, the reality of war	Increased determination by U.S. forces, measured grief as motivator	War is messy; deaths illustrate the importance of fighting
Body Count	---	---	---	Stark descriptions of deaths, little personal information	---	---	Single-incident; bombs, snipers, etc.	---	---

Figure 4.1. Cartoon by Mike Lester, *Rome (N.Y.) News Tribune*.

detailing two women, one of whom good-naturedly shows off a wallet-sized photo of her son. The other responds by also showing her son's "picture" — the neatly folded flag she likely received at her deceased son's military funeral. The woman isn't sobbing, questioning policy or asking "why" — she is stoic; perhaps even proud. Her son has sacrificed his life; moreover, the text at the top, "Somewhere in America…" suggests that this is a scene that could be playing out in dozens of places at any given time.

General writing style. The *selfless* package is characterized with a very high degree of stylized, descriptive writing as the journalists evoke the emotional burden of dead soldiers' families and friends. Some of the writing seems more appropriate for a novel; consider, for instance, the following passage from a story covering a soldier's funeral that appeared in *The Oregonian*:

> Under an achingly blue sky and a bright sun that torched the trees in bright oranges, umbers and reds, Johnson was awarded the Bronze Star, the Oregon Distinguished Service Award and the Purple Heart...
>
> Throughout the solemn 30-minute ceremony, the rope that held the U.S. flag at half-staff above Johnson's coffin flapped back and forth, tapping out a military beat against the flagpole.
>
> There was a 21-gun salute. Two buglers played taps, a call-response version of trills and echoes. And three National Guard helicopters flew overhead; one then peeled off to the west, signifying the fallen soldier (Tomlinson, 2004).

Core frame and position. In a word, the core frame of the *selfless* package is that of sacrifice. The soldiers who died in the Iraq war are portrayed as altruistic young men and women who were willing to defend freedom with their lives. Thus, the core position becomes one of honor and respect — these soldiers must be honored and respected to the utmost degree, because they have done something that most civilians are unwilling to do themselves.

Exemplars. In story after story of this package, the dead soldiers' personalities and motivations are described as exceptionally noble. In one instance, a soldier gives candy to poor Iraqi children; in countless others, soldiers die because they're helping defend their friends.

The majority of stories contained in this package discuss the soldiers' motivations for joining the military. Most are portrayed as having joined because they felt a calling to defend the United States — at one common extreme, serving in the military is described as the soldier's dream, or even the only thing that he or she could ever imagine doing. One soldier is described as "rarely out of his fatigues after he was given his first pair at age 4" (Frago, 2004). Another had "wanted to be a Marine 'since he could spell it'"

(Vedantam & Sanchez, 2003). "When God made him, he stamped 'Marine' on his forehead," one grieving father of a dead soldier told the *Washington Post* (Rivera, 2004).

By extension, their deaths are painted as events that, while sad, are fitting, because the soldiers believed in their work and wanted to be in Iraq. Consider the beginning of this story from the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*:

> Sgt. Russell Collier couldn't keep away from the military — particularly because he "hated civilian life."
>
> And when Collier was shot and killed as he tried to save another soldier's life outside Baghdad Sunday, the 48-year-old Crossett native died doing "exactly what he always wanted to do," Carolyn Pfaus said Tuesday. "If he was going to die, that was the way he wanted to die — helping someone" (Zeman, 2004).

Catchphrases and depictions. In the *selfless* package, soldiers' deaths are portrayed as a necessary evil for the preservation of freedom — "a high price to pay" but ultimately a necessary one. Accordingly, other common catchphrases include "freedom isn't free," and "somebody's got to do it."

How, then, are the soldiers who pay this price depicted? By and large, they are called "heroes" and "selfless" over and over; other frequent depictions include soldiers as "team players" and "family men." Their service was their "duty," and by and large most of these soldiers are portrayed as fearless. In one article a soldier is remembered as assuaging his mother's worry by telling her that "it's not bad over here. It's just like living with another family" (Levine & Williams, 2004).

Roots and consequences. To ask why soldiers are dying in Iraq seems a silly question, until one considers the potential options. Their deaths could be plausibly attributed to any number of things, including war in general, the Bush administration's policies, the quest to oust Saddam Hussein, the hunt for weapons of mass destruction, or

dangerous insurgents, to name just a few. But the question remains: At root, what is causing the death of these American soldiers?

In the *selfless* package, deaths are most often portrayed as the direct result of discrete combat incidents: mortar and sniper attacks, roadside explosions, suicide bombers, friendly fire, and so on. The articles often begin by identifying the soldier and how he or she died. Stories often go on to give more background on the soldiers, and perhaps the incidents that lead to their deaths. Rarely, however, do stories within this package go beyond combat incidents to attribute blame for soldiers' deaths to a larger, more thematic issue, whether that be policy, the morality of war, preparedness of the soldiers or the like.

Importantly, however, several stories in the *selfless* package often identify one more of the deaths' roots: God. Though soldiers die in Iraq, nothing can be done about it, because ultimately, as in this *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* article, God is in charge:

> Since her son's death, Norfleet has fought bitterness through prayer and often wondered why her son died at an early age, she said.
>
> She has concluded that God wanted him to die in his noblest moments while he risked his life serving another (Deere, 2004).

And what of the consequences from these deaths? Much like the preceding roots are confined to single combat tragedies, the consequences are largely restricted to a portrait of families' and friends' grief. Occasionally, stories in this package take a wider lens and examine the effect the deaths may have on an entire community. In keeping with the ubiquitous presence of references to the price of freedom, deaths are often equated with debt, accrued by families, communities, and Americans on the whole.

Except, as this package notes, this type of debt is one that can never be repaid, except for similar service and sacrifice for freedom.

Appeals to principle. As Gamson (1983) notes, appeals to principle include moral appeals and general precepts. In the *selfless* package, these appeals are the implicit culmination of the above framing and reasoning devices. Death is a necessary evil of war; war is a necessary evil to protect freedom. In a sense, reality triumphs over idealism. Moreover, this package often enlists principle appeals borne of faith in God and destiny: Because a higher power predestined these soldiers' deaths, it is fitting to honor them and mourn them, but keep questions to a minimum.

"These dead are our own": Soldiers not statistics

To get a feel for this package, consider the editorial cartoon in Figure 4.2. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stands at left, a bit crazed-looking, having just flipped on a machine that signs letters of condolence that will go to families of slain U.S. soldiers: "We are sorry to inform you about the death of your son," they read. At right, a man and woman who have recently lost their son stand haggard and sobbing as the signature machine that will deliver their mass-produced letter extends tissues.

The most obvious difference between this cartoon and the one accompanying the *selfless* package is the former's implicit criticism of the Bush administration. Rumsfeld cannot be bothered to sign these notes himself. Another difference is the obvious emotion displayed by the parents. Unlike the stoic mother in the first cartoon, these parents are visibly sad and distraught.

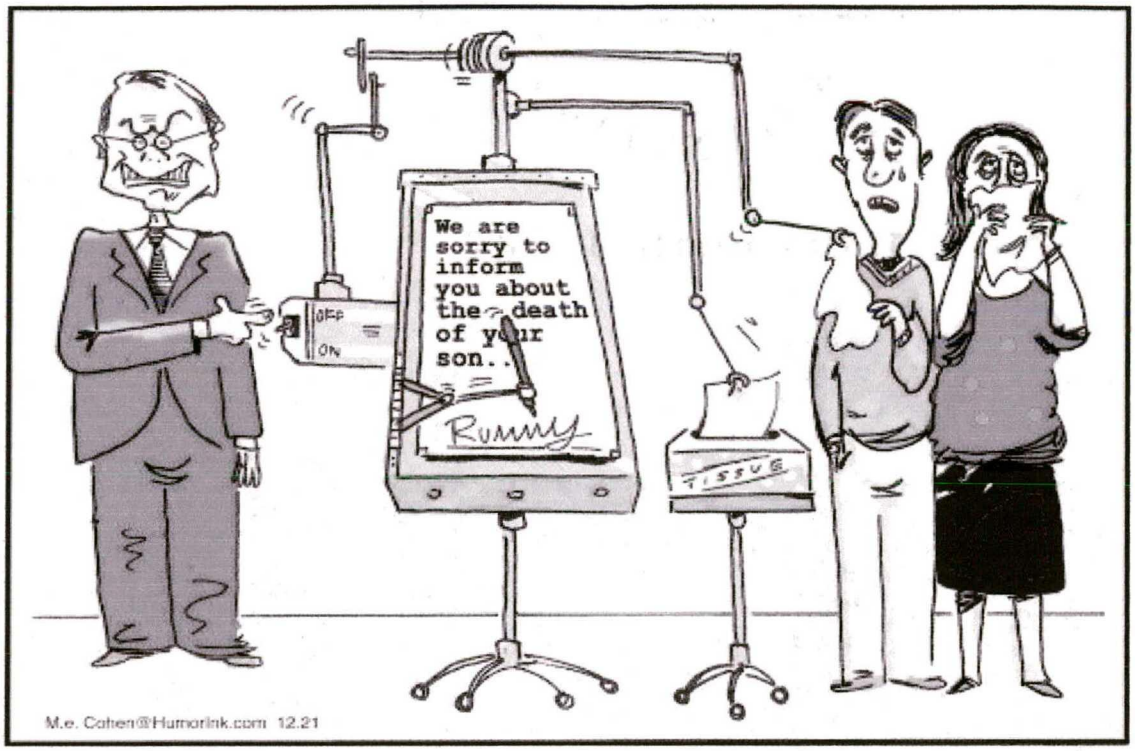


Figure 4.2. Cartoon by M.E. Cohen, Humorlink.com

General writing style. The writing in this package is very similar to that of the first package; it is often quite descriptive and novelistic. For reasons to be discussed below, grief and suffering are more visible in this package. Consequently, the writing is often of a slightly darker, more somber tone, as in this *Washington Post* story:

> As the days passed, most of the reporters drifted away; friends continued to arrive with fried chicken and pies. Michael Waters-Bey retreated, keeping busy with such routine tasks as a trip to the dentist.
>
> Kendall's body arrived at Dover Air Force Base on Thursday. His father braced himself to make funeral plans.
>
> Only once in a while does he glance at television reports of the war (Harris & Pressley, 2003).

Core frame and position. The *soldiers not statistics* package puts the dead soldiers on the reader's level. Whereas in the *selfless* package soldiers were depicted as

somehow apart from civilians through their selfless motivations to defend their country, this package frames soldiers via their similarities to everyone else, whether through their relationships, personality quirks or desires for self-betterment. The soldiers are framed in contrast to what they are not — casualty statistics, numbers, bodies among hundreds of others in the flag-draped coffins arriving in Dover.

In this package, soldiers' deaths are more frequently an occasion for mourning, rather than honor. That isn't to say that this package never includes references to soldiers' heroism or sacrifice, but there are more instances of heavy grief and regret. In this package, casualties are more lamentable, and in a few cases, depicted as unjust.

Accordingly, the soldiers' deaths in this package are sometimes accompanied by questions regarding policy and the war in general, as a complacent reading public must occasionally be reminded to think critically about the war and remember what is really on the line: not just soldiers, but human beings.

Exemplars. Stories in the *soldiers not statistics* package often depict men and women who joined the armed forces not out of some altruistic sense of duty or desire to protect freedom, but on a quest for a more self-centered fulfillment: money for college, direction in life, a way out of poverty. Soldiers are often humanized to a greater degree than in the *selfless* package in that they are remembered as having flaws; their death, while tragic, does not erase these flaws.

Frequently, the reader is made aware that the soldier had designs on a life beyond the military; in some cases, this fact is their defining characteristic. This story from the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* led with the dead soldier's plans for his post-Iraq life:

> Marine Cpl. Jason S. Clairday, 21, of Camp planned to return to his Fulton County home from Iraq in June and go to college.
>
> Instead, he was killed Sunday by enemy fired in the Anbar province of Iraq during what military officials called a "security and stabilization operation." The area west of Baghdad is home to the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, both of which harbor supporters of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein.
>
> "He just wanted to come home and start a family," Clairday's mother-in-law, Cindy McCullough, said Tuesday evening... (Heard, 2004).

The more personal stories within this package describe the average-Joe soldiers who had ordinary human quirks and vivacious personalities. These are often described through short vignettes about the soldier's time in Iraq, or more often, his or her life before the war, as in this example from *The Oregonian*:

> On school mornings he'd barrel up Gap Road in an old brown Toyota pickup, coming after the friend who didn't have a driver's license. Honk, honk, honk, Travis Moothart would blast his horn. And Terrence Skinner would climb into the cab next to him for the drive to Central Linn High School.
>
> "You're a senior," Skinner remembers a grinning Moothart telling him. "You can't ride the bus."
>
> Saturday, seven years after walking by his side at graduation, Skinner gathered with Brownsville and Halsey residents in the high school gymnasium to remember Moothart, an Army soldier killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq (Parker, 2004).

Similar ordinary scenes play out throughout this package. In fact, in December 2003 *The Oregonian* devoted substantial space to memorializing the then-471 Iraq troop casualties with short paragraphs highlighting information beyond how they died: One soldier was said to love karaoke, another was a left-handed trumpet player, a third was a surfer and skydiver.

In more abstract articles, personal stories of soldiers' backgrounds are replaced with other identifying information, as in this *Washington Post* editorial:

> Forty-one soldiers from Virginia, Maryland and the District, more than enough to fill an Army platoon, have died in Iraq over the past 18 months. They came from Northwest Washington, from Baltimore, Richmond, Fairfax and Bowie. They came from small towns, too — from Leonardtown and Rawlings in Maryland, from Troutville and Clifton in Virginia. They died singly and in groups. They died under enemy fire and in senseless accidents. Two were women, a dozen were officers, and, it bears repeating, all perished serving their country ("Remembering," 2004).

Catchphrases and depictions. These soldiers are commonly described as having their "lives cut short" or "killed in their prime." They "had plans." Other common turns of phrase include the "deaths hitting home" or references to casualties being "more than a number." As in the *selfless* package, readers are told once again of the "price of freedom" or that "freedom is not free."

These soldiers are depicted in a myriad ways — while some are still described as heroes, they are more frequently depicted as "kids" or "rebels" who straighten themselves out through the military. They are brothers, fathers, sisters, mothers. One *Washington Post* article describes soldiers as youthful and unassuming individuals who are sucked into the armed forces: "It's desperation; they want to improve their lives," a friend of a slain soldier is quoted as saying. "The Marine Corps paints a beautiful picture to these young guys — adventure and travel and all that … And these kids are so innocent — they are looking for a way out" (Sullivan, 2003).

Roots and consequences. Just as in the "selfless" packages, some of these articles attribute the soldiers' deaths to single combat incidents. However, there is more likelihood that families of the dead soldiers ask why their sons and daughters are gone. Accordingly, this package often touches on factors beyond these combat incidents,

including whether Bush administration policy is correct and American forces should be in Iraq in the first place.

Consider this story excerpt, from *The Oregonian*:

> East of El Paso, Estrella's parents are still not sure when their son's body is coming home. They are frustrated by the waiting and the Army's lack of answers for how their son died.
>
> Her eldest son, Amalia Estrella says bitterly, was sucked in by the Army's promises of a golden future. He wanted to become an architect or a math teacher. The service offered a shot at college financing after he got out.
>
> "They were going to give him $28,000 to go to school," says his mother. "I don't know where that money goes now. In the garbage I guess, like everything he hoped for and dreamed of" (Read, 2004).

While extreme, this example demonstrates the crux of the difference between the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages. In the former, reverence is prized over debate; in this package, the roots dialogue is more varied.

One similarity between the two packages comes in the form of consequences. Like the *selfless* package, families, friends, and sometimes communities suffer through their loss, but rarely do the reverberations reach to a more expansive level, whether that level is national, political or otherwise.

Appeals to principle. The underlying appeals to principle in this package evoke a common theme: No war, politician, policy or incident is above question when casualties are so personal and irreversible. Because soldiers are flesh and blood beyond their fatigues and dog tags, questioning of policy is acceptable. As a colonel told *The Oregonian,* "This isn't just some little scrimmage. These are 19- and 20-year-olds with their whole lives ahead of them. We've got to pause and ask if we're doing the right thing. That's the beauty of democracy" (Denson & Larabee, 2004).

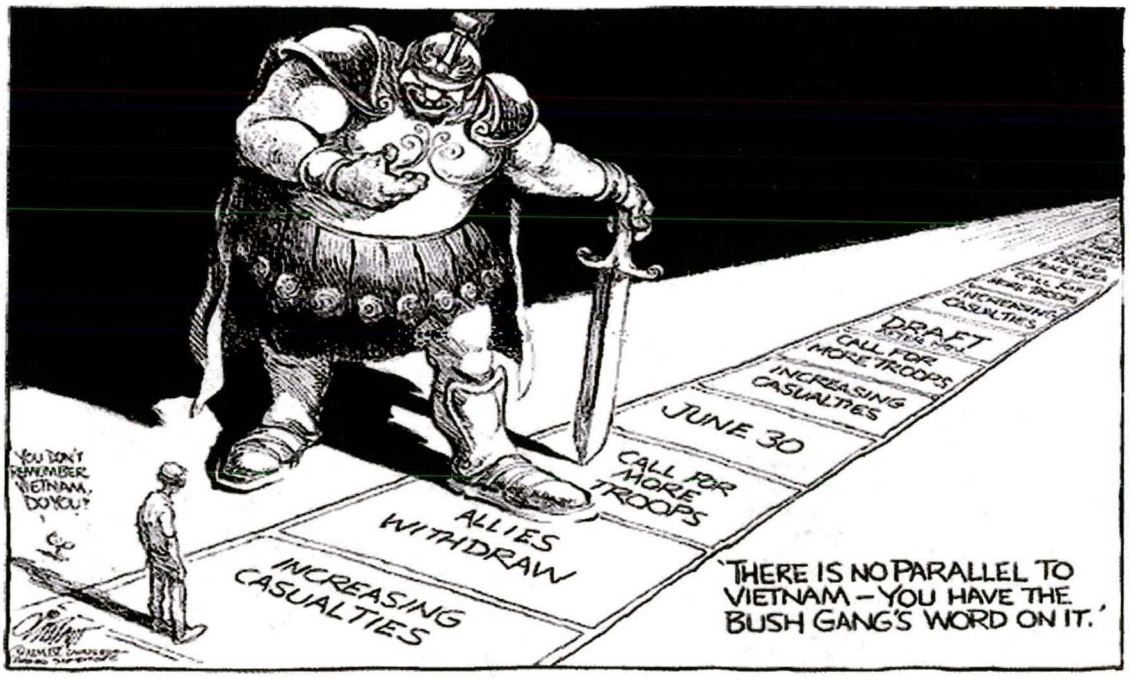


Figure 4.3. Cartoon by Pat Oliphant, Universal Press Syndicate.

"The analogy with Vietnam was always there, waiting its cue": Quagmire

The cartoon in Figure 4.3 presents a man standing at the beginning of a path that stretches to the horizon. Sections of the path are labeled with similarities between the Iraq war and Vietnam, but an imposing gladiator looms above him and tells him with a smile, "There is no parallel to Vietnam — you have the Bush gang's word on it."

This is a cartoon of conflicting messages: The man sees a path made up of consistent parallels between Iraq and Vietnam, but the Bush administration claims they're false. What should the man believe? What effect might the "increasing casualties" — repeated three times along the path — have on his level of support for the war?

General writing style. The language of the *quagmire* package is the most technical of any of the packages thus far. Instead of personalized accounts of families'

grief or soldiers' motivations, this package is driven by the context of previous conflicts and casualty number-crunching. The following is an example from the *Washington Post*:

> The U.S. military death toll after 10 months of engagement in Iraq reached 500 yesterday, roughly matching the number of U.S. military personnel who died in the first four years of the U.S. military engagement in Vietnam…
>
> The cumulative toll of 500 U.S. deaths was reached in Vietnam in 1965, the year when the U.S. deployment there rose from 23,300 to 184,300 troops. In Iraq, by contrast, the United States is rotating forces with the goal of reducing the total from 130,000 to 105,000 by June and also sharply scaling back its military presence in Baghdad.

Core frame and position. The *quagmire* package acknowledges very plainly that war deaths are political; the main frame here is one of increased context by looking back and comparing previous conflicts and casualty levels with those in Iraq.

The core position then becomes whether casualties will affect public support for the war. By extension, it also asks how casualties affect the Bush administration. Importantly, the articles do not reach a consistent answer. Most leave ambiguous the question as to how many deaths are too many, and if Iraq can even be fairly compared to any other conflict.

Exemplars. While this package does reference other conflicts, Iraq casualties are most often compared to those of the Vietnam War, as in this *Oregonian* column:

> President Bush calls any comparison between the Vietnam and Iraq wars a false analogy, and he's mostly right. Iraq and Vietnam are different planets. But it's time we acknowledge the one similarity that matters most: thousands of Americans may die over the next decade as a result of the Iraq war, and the death toll may mount in a way that brings shock to every living room in America (Nielsen, 2004).

Some of the articles go to great, sophisticated lengths in making this comparison — historians, opinion analysts, war scholars, veterans and all manner of politicians weigh in

on the matter. One *Washington Post* columnist goes so far as to break his comparisons down into mathematical formulas:

> On the other hand, improved body armor, field medical procedures and medevac capabilities are allowing wounded soldiers to survive injuries that would have killed them in earlier wars. In World War II there were 1.7 wounded for every fatality, and 2.6 in Vietnam; in Iraq the ratio of wounded to killed is 7.6. This means that if our wounded today had the same chances of survival as their fathers did in Vietnam, we would probably now have more than 3,500 deaths in the Iraq war.
>
> Moreover, we fought those wars with much larger militaries than we currently field. The United States had 12 million active-duty personnel at the end of World War II and 3.5 million at the height of the Vietnam War, compared with just 1.4 million today. Adjusted for the size of the armed forces, the average daily number of killed and wounded was 4.8 times as many in World War II than in Iraq, but it was only 0.25 times greater in Vietnam — or one-fourth more (Gifford, 2004).

Catchphrases and depictions. It makes sense that in invoking the example of Vietnam, this package also invokes the language and descriptions levied during that conflict. In the face of "mounting casualties" supporters often urge troops and the public to "stay the course"; opponents and commentators often described the deaths as a "drip" or a "drumbeat," slow but consistent, and the conflict as a "quagmire." Others vehemently opposed use of such loaded words, as in this *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* editorial:

> Inevitably, the Vietnam analogy was dusted off and rolled out, not that it had ever really been stored away. It had been ready to go since the first American troops crossed into Iraq last spring, but Baghdad had fallen too soon, and then Saddam Hussein's capture delayed its deployment again. But the analogy with Vietnam was always there, just waiting its cue.
>
> The cue came this week as firefights erupted in Fallujah, Sadr City, Ramadi, Karbala, Najaf, Kut and half a dozen other spots, the ghost of the Tet offensive in Vietnam rose again. All the armchair generals reappeared, as if they'd just been waiting in some big green room until they got another chance to chant their favorite words: Vietnam! Quagmire! Tet! ("Looking for Vietnam," 2004).

Roots and consequences. The reasons behind the Iraq casualties are more wide-ranging than in the previous two packages. While the articles often reference combat incidents, such as roadside bombs or sniper attacks, as boosting the number of recent deaths, most go beyond these incidents to break down other reasons: the complicated nature of war with scattered insurgents, troop levels relative to other combat situations, increasing sophistication of weaponry, war tactics and Bush policy stances.

Given the range of roots this package takes into account, the discussion of potential consequences of Iraq casualties is far more limited. Family and community grief is a non-issue; instead, the question is how soldiers' deaths could affect public support for the war, and by extension, the administration.

Appeals to principle. Philosopher George Santayana is attributed with the saying, "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it." The *quagmire* package, given its emphasis on putting casualties into a historical context, appeals to this sensibility. Casualties and the Iraq war can only be understood by comparing soldiers' deaths and analyzing how public opinion was affected by examining previous conflicts.

"Our losses only strengthen the resolve of the coalition": Stay the course

General writing style. Like the *quagmire* package, the writing style in the *stay the course* package is on the technical side. Deaths are described quite impersonally (often using the term "casualties") and stories rely heavily on official quotations.

Core frame and position. In this package, soldiers' deaths are framed as a necessary evil of war — they are tragic, but to be expected. As such, the United States must not change course, even in the face of soldiers' deaths; switching policy because of

casualties would reflect a weakness of will. While deaths occur, progress is being made every day.

Exemplars. The meat of this package centers on the reaction of military or Bush administration officials to recent war deaths or milestones — 1,000 deaths, or 138 after May 1 (the same number that occurred before May 1 and before Bush declared the end of "major combat operations"). This is an example from *The Washington Post*:

> President Bush departed yesterday from his practice of not commenting on setbacks in Iraq and acknowledged that it had been a "tough week." It ended with the death of the 400th U.S. soldier in Iraq since the war began and the deadly collision of two U.S. Arm Black Hawk helicopters.
>
> "We're going to stay tough and deal with the terrorists," Bush said...(Allen, 2003).

Catchphrases and depictions. Common phrases in this package include the package namesake — "stay the course," or "standing firm," deaths as "strengthening resolve," a "test" or failing to "intimidate" the U.S. military.

Casualties are once more depicted as "sacrifices," but they are also a somber reality of war, as in this Pentagon official's reaction to a *Washington Post* reporter's question about recent deaths:

> "The loss of every service member is deeply felt, and their courage and sacrifice will not be forgotten," said Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman ... "Creating a stable and secure environment for the Iraqi people is important to the national interests of the U.S. and the international community. Our losses only strengthen the resolve of the coalition to accomplish their vital mission" (Graham, 2003).

Roots and Consequences. This package attributes deaths to one of three root causes: discrete combat incidents, the insurgents or terrorists who perpetuate these combat incidents, and the bloody reality of war.

In *stay the course*, the consequence of these deaths (as touched on above) seems to be determination by military and administration officials. Grief, while mentioned, is secondary to casualties' role in making success in Iraq an ever-more vital mission.

Appeals to principle. To withdraw from Iraq in response to casualties would be like running scared, without finishing the job, officials in this package insist. They appeal to readers' desire to "finish what was started" as well as realists' sense of death as an inevitable consequence of war.

"Another soldier died...": Body count

The technically written *body count* is most definable by what it does not do: personalize deaths in any way, connect them to any problems larger than combat incidents or insurgents, or take any sort of position on casualties. In this sense, it is not a complete package so much as a fragment of one.

Still, to overlook these articles would be to overlook a major portion of casualty coverage. Gamson (1987b) notes that "the absence of certain packages can be at least as significant as relative changes in the standing of major contenders" (p.144). The same logic can be extended to attributes of the casualty coverage itself. It is still vital to include this type of coverage in the analysis because the absence of the previous package types further illuminates how newspapers cover war casualties.

Exemplars and roots. The stark nature of these portrayals precludes many of the package characteristics previously analyzed in this section. But in a way, *body count* is the opposite of the *soldiers not statistics* package. Whereas the latter package reminds readers that soldiers are people instead or numbers, *body count* often includes no

identifying information, or only names, if they are available, of soldiers who have died. It does, however, often include quite a lot of detail about how the deaths occurred. Here is an example from the *Washington Post*:

> Six U.S. soldiers were reported Wednesday to have been killed in Iraq, while the country's interim prime minister threatened a major offensive against the city of Fallujah unless its residents hand over Abu Musab Zarqawi, the Jordanian guerrilla leader thought to be hiding there.
>
> Two of the U.S. soldiers were killed Wednesday when a suicide bomber drove his car into a U.S. convoy in the northern city of Mosul, a tactic that has grown more frequent among insurgents in recent weeks. Another soldier died when a roadside bomb was detonated in west Baghdad, the military said.

Body count often references military sources, who are often quoted in the stories regarding incidents. Unlike the *stay the course* package, though, these comments are often merely descriptive.

The edges of the debate: Casualties in right- and left-wing magazines.

Less mainstream groups and organizations also construct packages to portray issues in such a way that is compatible with their agenda. But as these groups are often on the fringes of the debate — "challengers," Gamson and Modigliani term them (1987b), their packages may or may not be reflected in the way the mainstream media cover an issue.

An analysis of relevant articles in *National Review*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Nation* and *The Progressive* reveal three main packages: *stay the course, quagmire,* and *Bush's war*.

Stay the course. As one would likely suspect, *stay the course* appears exclusively in the right-wing magazines. The meat of the package — that the U.S. military must not

Figure 4.4. Cartoon by Monte Wolverton, Cagle Cartoons.

alter its mission, even in the face of casualties — remains unchanged from the newspapers, as shown by this example from *National Review*:

> The blunt truth is that the U.S. can withstand the death of one soldier a day — or fewer than 4,000 soldiers a decade — indefinitely, provided that the American people believe that the deaths are in a decent and winnable cause. And the sooner that fact is generally appreciated, the quicker the terrorists will lose the battle in Iraq and lose heart across the world. If, on the other hand, the U.S. loses heart and scuttles, Iraq will become the headquarters and training ground for terrorist violence committed not in Iraq against soldiers but in American and West European cities against civilians. Take your choice (O'Sullivan, 2003).

However, there is one variation worth noting in this package as it is present in these news magazines. In Figure 4.4, President Bush appears on television to tell the public that the military is making "good progress" in Iraq; consequently, they shouldn't "believe any o' that negative stuff!" Meanwhile, the coffins of American soldiers are stacked high next to the television.

Ostensibly, that "negative stuff" is perpetuated by the media. And while this cartoon is almost certainly ironic, intended to show that the media are only doing their job, it also shows the administration's second-guessing of "negative" news from Iraq about casualties.

In the *stay the course* package, *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard* also highlight perceived failings of the media to cover anything but soldiers' deaths and general chaos. While the package remains in tact, in this context it is akin to David-and-Goliath drama of the enlightened few versus the malicious media; the magazines acknowledge that such "bad news" can help undermine the administration's desire to finish what it started, and seek to "set the record straight," as in this example from *The Weekly Standard*:

> Success in Falluja can be attributed to two factors: a well-conceived plan and the outstanding execution of that plan by Marines and soldiers on the ground.
>
> But the second-guessing has already begun … Media accounts also routinely describe the fighting outside Falluja as a "rebel counteroffensive" that surprised the U.S. military, implying that the reduction of Falluja merely created more insurgents.
>
> But the view conveyed by these headlines is myopic. An equivalent headline in June 1944 would have read: "Massive U.S. Casualties on Omaha Beach; Hitler's Reich Remains Intact, Defiant." Such stories fail to place Falluja, Mosul, Tal Afar, and other cities in northern Iraq in context (Owens, 2004).

Quagmire. Both the left- and right-wing magazines marshal this package for their cause, which isn't surprising, given its ambiguous nature in the newspaper sample. Articles in *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review* insist that Vietnam-Iraq is a shoddy comparison made by anti-war proponents who know little about warfare or the worth of the U.S. mission in Iraq, as in this *National Review* example:

> Is Iraq anything like the debacle of Vietnam — an impossible situation in which almost all the odds were heavily stacked against the United States? So far, the resemblance rests mostly with those who invoke it. The protest generation that in 1968 was 20, on campus, and angry is now 55, worried about 401(k)s, but also entrenched in the universities, media, and government…Familiar critics have reemergered — now aging — ready for one last muster at the barricades (Hanson, 2003).

On the other hand, articles in *The Progressive* and *The Nation* invoke Vietnam as an example of what Iraq's escalating casualties could become if others reflexively deny the comparison and the United States does not pull out of Iraq. As Howard Zinn writes in *The Progressive*:

> The suggestion that we simply withdraw from Iraq is met with laments: "We mustn't cut and run. ...We must stay the course .... Our reputation will be ruined .... " That is exactly what we heard when, at the start of the Vietnam escalation, some of us called for immediate withdrawal. The result of staying the course was 58,000 Americans and three million Vietnamese dead ...
>
> The only rational argument for continuing on the present course is that things will be worse if we leave. There will be chaos, there will be civil war, we are told. In Vietnam, supporters of the war promised a bloodbath if U.S. troops withdrew. That did not happen (Zinn, 2004).

Thus, while the package is the same as in the newspapers — the core frame is unchanged and the same exemplars, catchphrases and so on are invoked — the magazines mold the package position to fit their publications' ideology.

Bush's war. The cartoon in Figure 4.5 depicts President Bush standing on the edge of a battleship in pilot gear, smiling impishly and flashing his "victory" sign. An officer compliments his pose and adds, "If you could step aside, our daily casualty flight is coming in."

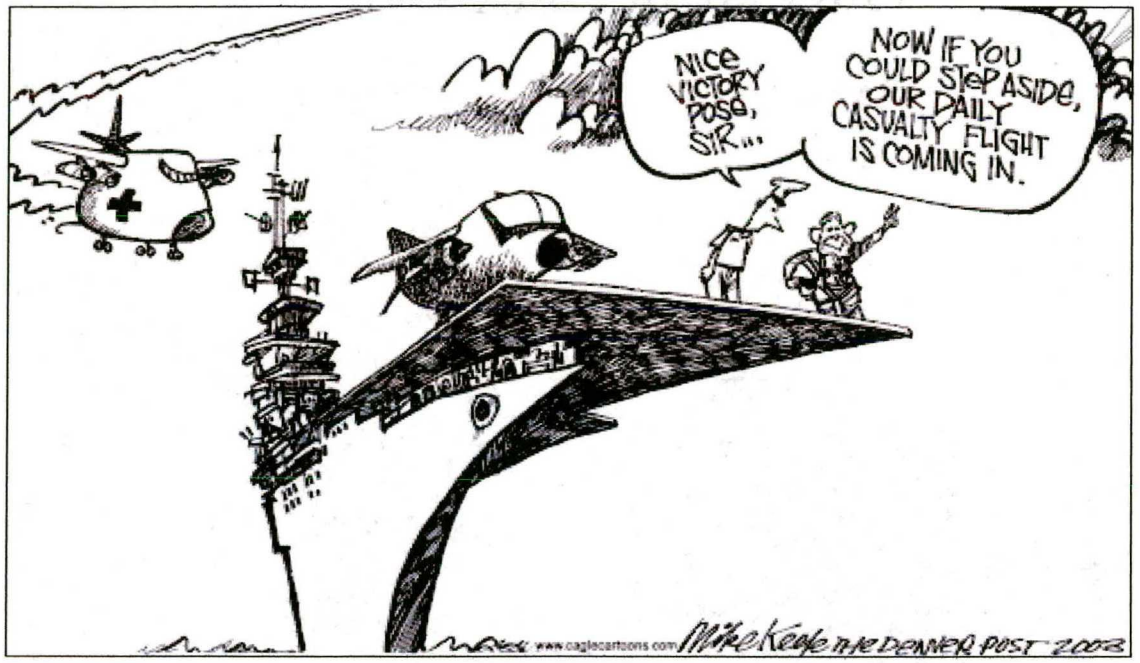


Figure 4.5 Cartoon by Mike Kegle, *The Denver Post.*

General writing style. This writing is often personal in the sense that it reaches out to the reader through heavy use of second person, employing "we," "us" and so on. This contributes to a an intimate but persuasive type of rhetoric not found elsewhere in texts examined for this study.

Core frame and position. *Bush's war* is the only major package that, while present in the magazine sample, is completely absent from the newspapers. It is present exclusively in the two left-wing magazines, *The Nation* and *The Progressive.*

As the package title suggests, this package frames Iraq war casualties as the express responsibility of the Bush administration's policy. The soldiers died because the administration put them in harm's way, and moreover, the administration lied in order to do so.

Exemplars. The package paints casualties as the consequence of the administrations' follies. Emphasis is not on honoring dead soldiers, but using them as the strongest example as to why the U.S. military should pull out of Iraq, as in this example from *The Nation*:

> The price we are paying for George W. Bush's unnecessary and illegal war in Iraq keeps rising. The number of Americans killed in the war has now passed the 1,000 mark. And the price will keep rising until Washington accepts the fact that this is a war we cannot win — and that by trying to win it, we are only further radicalizing the Iraqi people and giving life to Islamic extremists by handing them the cause of Iraqi nationalism ("Iraq" 2004).

Moreover, this package emphasizes that the only way to support soldiers is to keep them from dying instead of putting on a patriotic front regarding duty and sacrifice. "Yes, we support our GIs, we want them to live, we want them to be brought home," writes Zinn in *The Progressive*. "The government is not supporting them. It is sending them to die" (Zinn, 2003).

The package also utilizes anecdotes from soldiers and soldiers' families who question the Iraq war after seeing the reality of death. Here is an example from *The Progressive:*

> Not all of the men are thrilled to be in Iraq. When asked how long he had been there, one enlisted 21-year-old snaps, "Way too long. When we first got here it felt like we were doing something good. Now it feels like a waste."
>
> "If we find weapons of mass destruction it was worth it," says another 21-year-old. "But if we don't and we're just here because Bush wanted to finish what his daddy started, then a lot of boys died for nothing, and that's fucked up" (Rosen 2003).

Catchphrases and depictions. The rhetoric of this package is quite strong, and particular phrases and words certainly resonate. Beyond the package's namesake,

"Bush's war," as in other packages, we are told of the "rising costs of war," deaths as "the price we are paying," and soldiers as having "died for oil."

Moreover, the war is often depicted as a "betrayal" "illegal" or "illegitimate." As discussed above, soldiers are often depicted as having been duped into putting their lives in danger under false pretenses.

Roots and consequences. The root cause of Iraq casualties — the Bush administration — is very plainly discussed in this package. However, there is some variation as to Bush's motivations for sending soldiers to Iraq in the first place. The administration-cited reason of "weapons of mass destruction" is derided as false; rather, the roots detailed here are a general sense of imperialism, a desire to finish the conflict started during the first Gulf War, or greed run rampant in the name of oil, as in this example from *The Nation*:

> God, how much easier it must be to believe one's son or daughter is fighting for a just and noble cause! But no matter how hard I scrutinize the invasion and the occupation of Iraq, all I see are lies, corruption and greed fueled by a powerful addiction to oil. Real soldiers get blown to tatters in their "Hummers" so that well-heeled American suburbanites can play in theirs (Allison, 2004).

As the roots are overtly political, it follows that the consequences are, as well. The *Bush's war* package emphasizes political action as a remedy for the ongoing casualties in two major ways: voting President Bush out of the White House and supporting the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and harm's way.

Appeals to principle. The only real way to support our troops is to bring them home, this package insists. Death is too high a price to pay for a war that simply won't accomplish anything it was billed to do — reduce terrorism or remove weapons of mass

destruction; moreover, war in any situation other than an immediate threat to a country's sovereignty or livelihood is immoral.

Packages across newspaper types and war phases

Figure 4.6 summarizes the five packages' frequency of occurrence by percentage in the two local papers. Figure 4.7 does the same for the *Washington Post*.

In the local newspapers, the *selfless* package is the most prevalent. In phase one of the war, it represents 36 percent of the local paper texts; it then climbs to 47 percent in phase two, peaks at 54 percent in phase three, and declines slightly to 52 percent. The *selfless* package starts at a lower level, 28 percent, in the *Washington Post*, declines to 25 percent, and then rising to 38 and 39 percent in phase three and four of the war, respectively. While it does not dominate phase one as in local papers, its dominance in the latter half of the war is similar to that of the local papers.

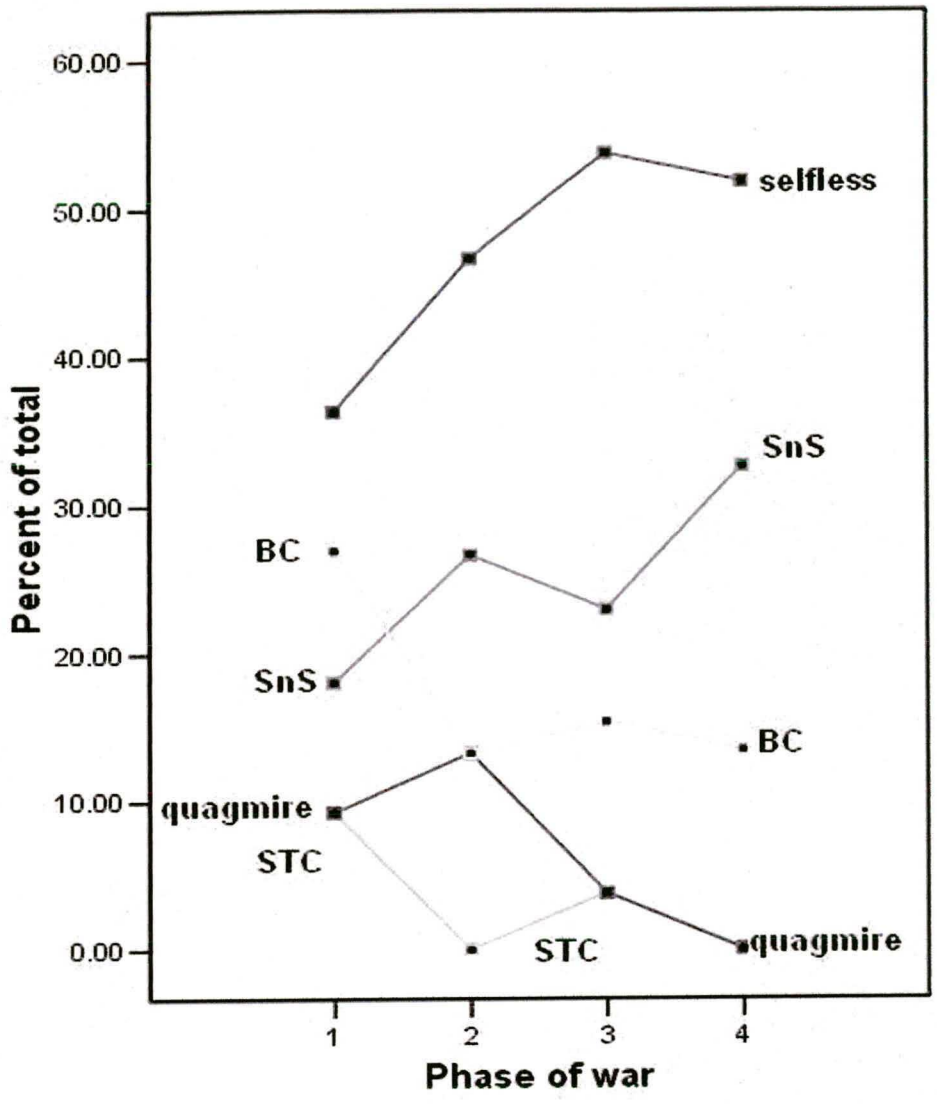
The *soldiers not statistics* package rose in a similar manner as the *selfless* package did in the local papers as the war went on. It started at 18 percent in phase one, then rose to 27 percent, 23 percent and 33 percent in phases two, three and four. In contrast, in the *Washington Post*, the *soldiers not statistics* package started out quite strong at 45 percent but declined sharply in phase two to 22 percent, more or less leveling off across phase three and phase four at 25 percent and 21 percent, respectively.

Quagmire starts at a relatively low percentage, 9 percent, in the local papers during phase one, escalates very slightly to 13 percent in phase two, and drops off to 4 percent and 0 percent in phase three and four, respectively. Similarly, in the *Washington*

Post, *quagmire* also declines across the war, but starts and ends as a higher percentage of the articles than in the local papers.

Stay the course represents a very small percentage of articles in the local papers: 9 percent during phase one and 4 percent during phase three. There were no examples of this package in phase two or four. In the *Washington Post*, there are no examples in phase one, but a sharp, noticeable escalation to 22 percent in phase two, and a decline to 6 percent in phase three and 7 percent in phase four.

Finally, *body count* started relatively strong in the local papers at 27 percent, then leveled off at 13.3, 15.4 and 13.5 percent in Phases two, three, and four, respectively. In the *Washington Post*, it started at 11.1 percent, rose to 22.2 percent, declined slightly to 18.8 percent in phase three, and rose again to 27.3 percent in phase four.



N = 11 15 52 52

Figure 4.6: Package frequency across phase of war in local newspapers.

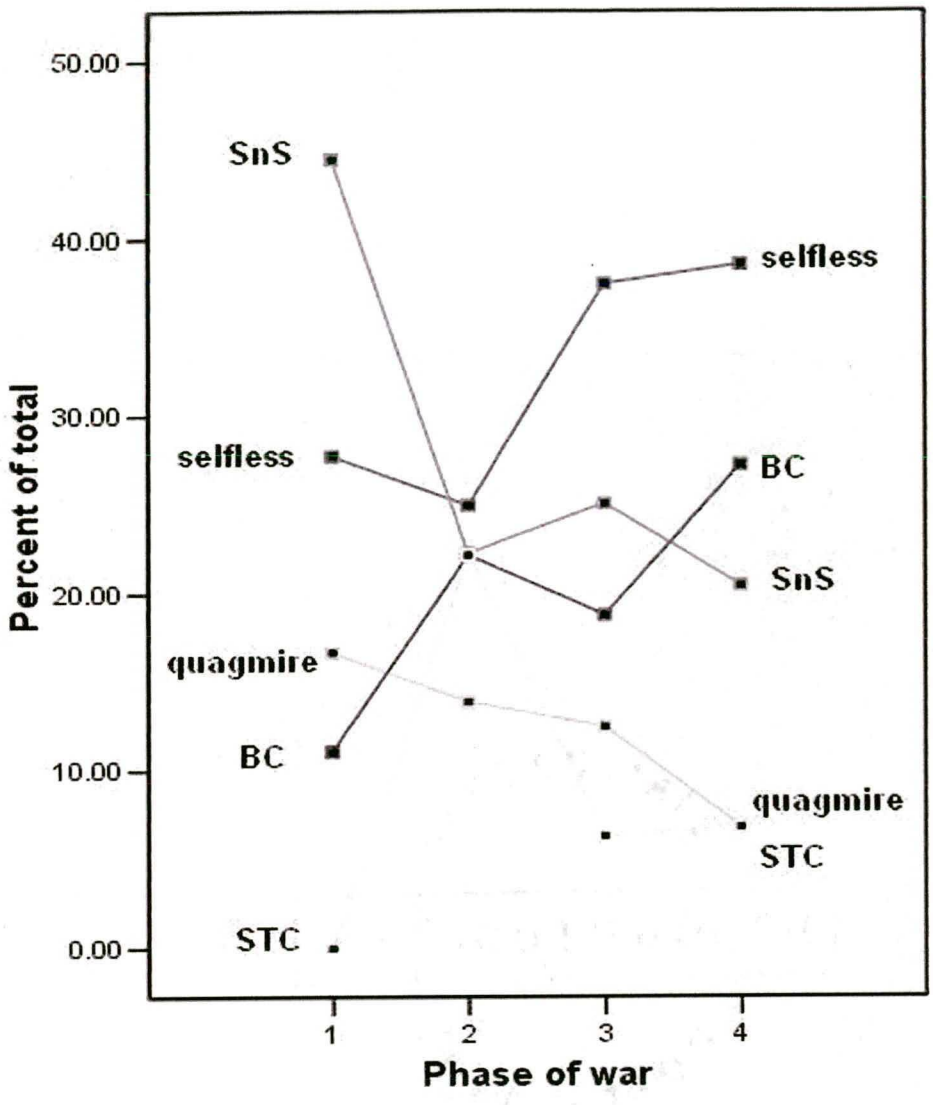


Figure 4.7: Package frequency across phase of war in *The Washington Post*.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Sponsor activity

Sponsors promote certain packages to further their agenda. And as these packages show, even death can be spun — even death, and its portrayal, can bolster or damage a cause.

As Pan and Kosicki (2001) note, actors in the public sphere have a range of resources at their disposal. Among them, public officials tend to be resource-rich, with power, important relationships and inherently newsworthy status, while expert sources can draw upon their research and academic prestige. Activists may cultivate networks of association among similarly minded groups or cultivate relationships with journalists; the public most obviously has electoral power.

Aside from inherently unequal distribution of such resources, sponsors must also take into account the political landscape. They may seize on particular occurrences to become more vocal. "Certain events create perturbations — occasions when sponsors feel called upon to reassert their preferred package and interpret the latest development in the light of it," Gamson (1987b, p.151) writes. Thus, a certain package may ebb and flow in part because sponsors increase or decrease their efforts to disseminate their particular message.

Official views and indexing. Gamson and Lasch (1983) note that in examining the portrayal of an issue through a signature matrix, there is typically one or more officially sponsored packages that aligns with "positions of public officials who are protagonists in the set of events" (p. 401). Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis states that for a given topic, journalists tend to "index" the spectrum of available mainstream official views. The president is the first place journalists look to do so.

The *stay the course* package — the view that war deaths must not sway the U.S. military from its mission in Iraq — is certainly the official package of casualty portrayals. In both types of newspaper, *stay the course* represents a relatively low percentage of articles. Given their potential impact on the 2004 election, President Bush rarely spoke publicly about casualties, so the relatively low *stay the course* percentage is not surprising.

However, in phase two of the war, immediately after President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq, there is a sharp escalation of the package in the *Washington Post.* Administration officials initially had to defend the casualties that took place after Bush's proclamation, which was widely panned in the media as premature. The officials did so by asserting that the military still had work to do and that to quit because of casualties would be premature, the essence of the *stay the course* package.

Interestingly, the *soldiers not statistics* package suffered a precipitous decline in the *Washington Post* as the *stay the course* package rose. Journalists, thus far starved of an official view of Iraq casualties, jumped to cover those views. *Soldiers not statistics*, formed under the weight of families' grief, was often incongruent with official comment and neglected as journalists indexed official views.

However, *quagmire,* a package comparing Iraq deaths to the mounting casualties of Vietnam, could potentially have been an opposition or challenger package, as it was in *The Nation and The Progressive.* Democrats, led by presidential nominee John Kerry, certainly had a stake in perpetuating this view, but it was always balanced by views from more neutral academics or official military sources. Indeed, experts — academics, military analysts, think-tank representatives — dominated this package.

The experts' domination of the package helps explain its strong start and steady decline in the local papers and *Washington Post.* Because no one knew what kind of casualties would result in Iraq, speculation was strong in the first two phases of the war. Experts were willing to provide such analysis, but the Kerry campaign generally avoided arguing that Iraq represented a Vietnam-style quagmire until later in the presidential campaign (VandeHei & Kurtz, 2004). It's curious that more instances of *quagmire* did not occur in phase four, when the campaign stepped up its rhetoric, but its' lack could be an artifact of the search method employed in obtaining articles.[6] Of course, the package decline may also be explained in part by signs of "progress" as marked by phases two, three and four (Saddam's capture, Iraq regaining sovereignty, independent elections).

The protest paradigm. The absence of *Bush's war* from the newspapers is not surprising. Democrats, while vocalizing their disagreement with administration policy, shied away from calling for troops' immediate removal from Iraq, leaving protest groups as the main sponsor of the package.

A number of scholars have documented protest groups' difficulty getting coverage in the mainstream media. "Social movement activists rarely exercise much control over the 'stories' media organizations choose to cover or how the media represent

the activists' claims," Benford and Snow (2000, p. 626) note. Additionally, when they are covered, protesters are often marginalized or depicted within what Reese and Buckalew (1995) term a "control frame," in which primary emphasis is on not on protesters' views but what law enforcement officials are doing to keep the peace.

Mark Larabee, a reporter with *The Oregonian* who has covered both Iraq war casualties and protesters, said he tries to balance protest coverage, but often times, protesters simply aren't considered newsworthy:

> When we cover protests, it has to be from all sides — the city's point of view, the organizers, the real people participating, and the bystanders. We tend to cover the bigger protests, but if 20 people are picketing on the corner, that's not news. As an organization, we tire of the same old thing. But if the president comes to town or this protest is about something that affects all people, or if the cops get called and there are broken windows and potential for physical conflict, then we're there (M. Larabee, personal communication, May 16, 2005).

The antiwar movements staged their most massive protests, including one in Washington, D.C., that drew tens of thousands of people, before the beginning of the war. While such numbers of people certainly warranted coverage, smaller efforts throughout the war often did not.

The personalized packages. The *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages are not dominated by official sponsors, but family and friends of slain soldiers who generally have no agenda except to remember their loved ones. The high frequency of these packages across papers and war phases results from a steady stream of deaths and reportorial norms leading to an intense, personal focus on families' reactions to casualties. Their escalation in the local papers also may help to explain the decline of *body count*, perhaps indicating the local papers' choice to leave abstract casualty

information to the wire services and focus their own resources on in-depth, personal coverage.

Media practices

Newspaper stories, television broadcasts, radio talk shows and any number of other media products are shaped by journalists' norms and routines. These practices are both intentional and unconscious, but all are deeply rooted in news organizations' daily operation, and subsequently influence the content those organizations produce.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) contend that these norms and routines result from three major factors: the organization's internal capabilities, what journalists' sources provide, and audience pressures.

Organizational mission and capabilities. Obviously, local and national newspapers have a different caliber of resources on which to draw. The latter is likely to have a better-paid, larger staff, more contacts to draw upon for sources, more influence to levy against important public officials, and so on. As a reporter for a local paper said in Bernard Cohen's *The Press and Foreign Policy*, "We are not like the *New York Times*, which has a large staff and covers all the news of the day. We have to decide, is it really news? We use the wire services and the *Times* as a springboard" (Cohen, 1963, p.59).

Reporters at the local papers studied here also acknowledged their organization's limitations. Katherine Marks, a reporter with the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette,* said her paper has covered every Arkansas death in an attempt to localize the Iraq war (K. Marks, personal communication, May 13, 2005). Mike Francis, a reporter with *The Oregonian* who has covered casualties both at home and while embedded in Iraq for 13 weeks, said

that local families are sources who are easier to obtain than prominent national officials or experts:

> The *Washington Post* has inside-the-beltway-type sources that we don't have right off the bat. But our mission is to be the best regional newspaper in the country. Management looks at Iraq as a local story. As long as a battalion of our guys is half a world a way, it's our story. If they yanked those guys, sure, we'd rely on the wires (M. Francis, personal communication, May 12, 2005).

Gartner (2004) similarly observes that international conflicts are extremely expensive for local papers to cover, as opposed to running Associated Press or other wire-service copy. "A regional paper's dedication of resources to pursue these types of stories demonstrates their importance and the paper's unique ability to access local information," he writes (p. 154). It follows, then, that packages with a tight, personal focus on soldiers' lives (*selfless, soldiers not statistics*) constitute much of the local papers' casualty coverage.

Larabee said *The Oregonian* made a commitment to readers from the beginning of the Iraq war. "The paper put it out there that we're going to cover Iraq and give it an Oregon angle. Our job is to put the face on the people who are going and give a taste of the dirt and the dust and the heartache and soul-searching that war entails."

Thus, according to reporters, both local newspapers consider it their mission to cover each casualty from their state, which isn't surprising, according to Gartner:

> Local casualties make international events dramatically more salient for a community member, which means the local media give the incident more attention…The status of soldiers abroad facing the hazards of combat and violence, is central to regional media coverage of international conflict (p. 143).

But what of *The Washington Post*, an elite, national paper with considerably greater scope and resources? It serves a dual function as a local and a national paper, and

its coverage is more balanced than the local papers' coverage between the heavily personalized packages (*selfless* and *soldiers not statistics)* and the more abstract packages (*quagmire, stay the course, body count).* It has the same mission as *The Oregonian* and *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, said Martin Weil, a long-time *Washington Post* metro reporter who has covered many D.C.-area casualties. "The *Post* is still very much a local paper. The metro staff writes about any soldier who dies in Virginia, Maryland or the District. Otherwise, if it will be covered, national desk will get it" (M. Weil, personal communication, May 14, 2005).

Source reliance. A number of scholars have documented journalists' sourcing patterns. Sigal (1973) divides these sources into routine, informal, and enterprise channels. In a content analysis of *The Washington Post* and *New York Times*, he found that "routine" channels — press briefings and releases, official happenings, and prescheduled events such as speeches or ceremonies — account for nearly 60 percent of sources.

The most obvious reason for official-source reliance, as both scholars and journalists note, is that these sources provide access to facts that would otherwise be more difficult to get. Francis said while he's aware of the dangers in relying on officials for too much information, he often feels he has no choice:

> I try to be vigilant about buying the administration line too much; and I hear from either side of the audience (conservatives or liberals) if they think I've gone too far in either direction. But because the military controls the information, sometimes we have to trust them more than we're comfortable with; we have to accept certain things on faith.

Larabee said that the angle of the story certainly affects the number and type of sources consulted. "We get more sources, experts maybe, to weigh in when we get into

the harder news edge regarding these deaths — for example, whether troops have enough equipment, enough armored vehicles, and whether or not those issues have a role in deaths," he said. "But the military is very bad about giving out timely information."

Local casualty stories, however, are less reliant on official pronouncements and more reliant on sources who will illuminate the soldier's personality, motivations and accomplishments. The *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics packages* are excellent examples of what Gartner (2004) calls "ripple effect" coverage, touched off by a casualty, that focuses on "a victim's friends and family, his or her past, and plans for the future" (p. 144). Hallin and Gitlin (1993) assert that these families become symbolic of the community as a whole, resulting in an increased emphasis on their perspectives.

Marks describes a reliance on a mix of official and unofficial sources for local casualty stories:

> I try first to talk to the family members. Principals of the schools they went to are also good people to talk to, as many of the Marines who died were very young. A number of National Guardsmen were older and had families, so instead of talking to a high school principal I'd try to find a coworker or boss … basically I want more information on who this person was and more information on how he served. Was this his second tour of duty? Was he a career military officer? From a technical standpoint, I need to try to get a picture form the military or family. I need to check the local paper and see if they've reported anything. I may need to call the local military people to check and see what awards the person had received. And I typically check the Department of Defense's Web site for an up-to-date number of total casualties.

Marks, who noted above that she often checks soldiers' hometown papers to see if they've reported anything on the death, said that taking information from other sources is also a common practice, especially on deadline:

> I once couldn't find any information on a Marine and just googled his name. It turns out a military magazine had done a long profile on him, so we were able to quote from that. We, of course, used the magazine's name and when the article

> was published. Sometimes, you'll have to lift info from the Associated Press or a local TV station and you'll note that the family member told (that news outlet).

Bennett (2002) outlines reasons why media organizations often lift from and follow their competitors when reporting a story. "It is easier…to justify similarities in the coverage of stories than to account for differences … the transparency of the objectivity or fairness claim becomes most evident when the coverage of one organization differs from the others and, as a result, journalists must defend it" (p. 205). In other words, while media organizations look to others news sources for logistical reasons such as speeding the reporting process, they also do so in order to protect themselves from charges of bias.

Weil said be believes that the rubric for personalized casualty coverage emerged from the *Washington Post's* major national competitor, *The New York Times*. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the *Times* ran its "Portraits of Grief" series that detailed the lives of the victims, Weil said:

> We've never actually discussed what we want from these stories… but the most famous stories of this kind are those (*New York Times*) stories. Reporters everywhere read those and said 'this is how this should be done.' Everyone realized how effective they were without being overly sentimental or maudlin.

Because a major national competitor covered death this way, as Weil said, the *Post* felt this type of personalized coverage was legitimate and expected. "There's certainly no structural formula (to these stories) — we're tying to free ourselves from formula restrictions," he said. "But certainly reporters paid attention to the *Times* coverage and internalized it."

Audience expectations. Audience wants have been streamlined into news values: prominence, human interest, conflict or controversy, unusualness, timeliness, and proximity (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Stories that fit these criteria are much more

likely to be covered than others, and these news values influence casualty coverage, as they would any other story.

Gans (1979) writes that journalists consider whether audiences can identify with stories when the stories have "personal relevance or because it creates feelings about a hero, villain, or victim" (p. 242). These types of stories, as exemplified by the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages, are considered more attractive to potential readers. Kaniss (1991) notes that while some critics call these dramatized stories "sensationalized," reporters dispute this claim by saying "emotional stories filled with descriptive detail provide crucial information and keep audiences from dismissing the implications of tragedies" (p. 48).

According to reporters who have covered Iraq casualties, a local soldier who is killed in Iraq is a "must-cover" for primarily this audience-related reason. "I want readers to know who this person was instead of accepting that these deaths are just a list of names," Weil said. "It's our responsibility to the community to tell who these people were."

"I think readers want to know the basics, how the person died, when and where," Marks said. "But also they want to know who he was and who he left behind. I think in this situation they want to know what my editor and I want to know. Essentially, these are obituaries."

Larabee also called the casualty stories he's written "obituaries" and said he's written such pieces with two separate, vastly different audiences in mind:

> We're writing these stories for the general public to let them know yet another local person died in the war. But for the people that actually knew him, this story

> is going in a scrapbook somewhere. We want to give the families and friends of these guys more than just a cut-and-dry three paragraphs.

While some scholars (e.g. Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) have noted that media are sometimes lambasted for harping on so-called "bad news," in the case of local Iraq deaths, readers respond to detail and depth, Francis said. "These stories of loss add up to a bleak landscape…But there's value to putting a face to a statistic and showing this soldier was loved. Readers call and say, 'thanks for making him real.'"

The collision of objectivity and 'good taste.' There is another side to audience considerations, as Gans (1979) writes. Journalists are protective of the audience and consider themselves guardians of the taboo and arbiters of taste. Marks acknowledged that she has excluded a source's less-than-flattering description from a casualty story:

> Recently, a principal described a young man who died as "just an average kid." I chose not to put that in the article because in the next sentence the principal said the young man, I can't remember what branch he served in, was in the drama club, wanted to be a broadcaster and did the morning announcements each day. How's that average? If a person who died had faced charges or was known for something bad we would be obligated to put that in, but many of these guys are unknown.

Death is an inherently sensitive subject, and journalists may feel it necessary to shield readers from certain details. "People being wounded or killed during disasters or battles are virtually never shown," Gans writes. "During the Vietnam War, film editors routinely cut the bloodier scenes from battle and patrol film before top producers reviewed it" (p. 244).

Bennett (2002) critiques the press for imposing standards of "middle-class moralism" and says that viewing news from such a standpoint can have a sanitizing effect that can give even the most tragic events a "familiar quality," as certainly happens in the

selfless and *soldiers not statistics* packages (p. 200). However, he also notes that keeping news content within the prevailing boundaries of good taste is a tenet of objectivity.

The reporters discussed tension between the objectivity norm and casualty coverage. Francis said this was an especially salient consideration while he was embedded in Iraq with the troops:

> At what point to you draw lines on graphic descriptions of death? War is full of these brutal incidents and details; that's the peril of going over there to spend time embedded with them, because then we're literally depending on them for our lives. I often had to check myself and also remind the soldiers that I'm not one of them.

Francis said that in more personal stories of loss, "Funerals bring out flowery descriptions. Families are going to talk about the best things, and it's hard to get more intimate details." Larabee said tender feelings resulting from deaths alter what might otherwise be a more complex story:

> In death we tend to oversimplify things. We tend to make someone more than they are by glorifying them. Everyone has faults, but we can't focus on the fact that someone's bank account is overdrawn or that they have thousands of parking tickets. We get caught up in the emotion of it all…and it's hard to do a balanced obituary.

Weil similarly remarked that families' grief can alter normal methods of reportage. "No questions are out of bounds … But you never call them and immediately ask them 'was it worth it.' You may give them the opportunity to comment on the political background of the war but I can never force it."

In order to extract more sensitive information form grieving families, Weil said he often simply frames his questions in a more sympathetic manner. "I sometimes ask, 'it seems dangerous; how did you feel about him being over there,' or that kind of thing. A lot depends on how you phrase the question."

Death and detachment. Detachment, or neutrality, has long been considered alongside objectivity in discussions of journalism norms. "Objectivity derives from the use of similar fact-gathering methods…the methods themselves are considered objective because the journalists, being detached, do not care how the story comes out," Gans (1979) writes.

However, personalized casualty stories as in the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages are quite different from stories that allow journalists to play an adversarial role that often goes hand-in-hand with the detachment norm, as Bennett (2002) discusses. In these stories, journalists aren't trying to pry information from public officials as much as they are trying to detail a soldier's life, potentially altering the reporter's approach.

"I am more patient with people enduring tragedies than I am with, say, a mayor who won't return my calls," Marks said. "Whenever you write about someone who dies you can't help but feel bad for the family." She continued:

> There's no need to maintain a total sense of detachment. If you sound cold on the phone and treat this guy like a number, you've done a disservice. But in a big way, I'll always have a sense of detachment since I'm writing about someone I've never known.

The other journalists, who said that it was acceptable to empathize with their sources, echoed Marks' comment. Weil said that the tragedy transcends personal feelings on the matter. "If you focus on the notion of every person's life being a story, empathy is not a violation of objectivity in any way," he said. "You don't need to let your views be known to make clear that death is tragic."

Francis said that while covering casualties, his role as a journalist is overridden by human vulnerability. "I have to have a certain degree of detachment, yes, but is there

something wrong that I feel sad, or that I feel grief? I don't think so. It's okay not to be completely detached. I have to be a human being before anything else," he said.

Time and typifications. Timeliness is certainly another constraint in casualty stories, the reporters noted. "The military is really bad about giving timely info," Larabee said. "And we try to do the best we can, but sometimes the stories become the same if we can't get enough details in limited time. The details are what make these stories."

Weil said time constraints contribute to the what he called "the biggest failing" of local casualty stories: similarity in theme and word choice, repetitive quotes and redundant language:

> In these stories, a hit is getting enough facts to tell readers who this person is no later than the day after the announcement. Announcements often come late in the day, and the Pentagon posts the info on their Web site. Because we want them in the paper the day after the announcement, sometimes we can't do the most thorough reporting.
>
> Consequently, sameness of the language is a great weakness of these stories. Often we just don't have long enough to truly get to draw more details out of these families other than the standard 'he was a hero' talk. This is a failure of the reporting process.

Weil added that the *Washington Post* has made recent attempts to reconcile the "stories' redundancy" by having reporters revisit the stories of dead soldiers and tell tem with greater depth. "We weren't content with what we had done so far," he said. "We want to examine these lives at greater length."

Tuchman (1978) writes that journalists often deal with time constraints by streamlining stories into "typifications," or similar narratives. "Being a professional reporter capable of coping with idiosyncratic occurrences means being able to use typifications … Faced with the need to predict and to plan, news workers may be seduced

into applying what everyone knows" (p.58-59). And with death after death, Marks said casualty stories are "in a way … sadly, routine. The stories are always tear-jerking, a wife, father, mother left behind."

Casualty stories are vulnerable to these stock-type narratives, even if that vulnerability is unintentional, Weil said:

> One of the most cliché stories in journalism is about young people dying in a car crash. It's number 33, say, on a list of maybe 100. Their future was ahead of them, and now it's been cut short. When people die young, as in their 20s like many of these soldiers, there is an element of tragedy inherent, and that's always going to be one of the central elements of good story.

As Bird and Dardenne (1988) write, journalists "feel the need to 'humanize' events … attributed quotes often take on the nature of dialogue, a point of view develops, and details are added that turn a statistic into an unemployed miner or a bereaved parent" (p.343). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) discuss how journalists often treat discrete incidents in a continuing story as a melodrama, complete with emotion-laden language and plot-like techniques that imbue stories with beginnings, middles and ends. As part of a larger, overarching conflict, personalized casualty stories as in the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages are treated in a similar manner. "I try to find a scene to make more vivid, whether it's sunlight reflecting off a coffin, someone's tears, or a bowed head," Francis said. "I feel like I need to make these stories more special and less dry."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The coverage examined in this paper, especially in the local papers, is dominated by highly personalized, dramatized stories of loss from the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages.

To summarize, this results from a number of media practice-related factors. The *Washington Post* has more ready access to a more diverse range of sources that lend themselves to a more diverse range of stories, but maintains a strong metro focus that includes covering every local death. The local newspapers expressly set out to localize the war by covering every death.

Moreover, each media organization looks to its competitors to ensure its own coverage is similar to speed the reporting process and defend against charges of bias. Reporters believe the audience wants to know who these soldiers were in an intimate way, not simply how they died. They oblige the audience but shield it from potentially offensive information; similarly, deadline pressure and empathy for grieving families contribute to dramatic but benign stories full of familiar descriptions and redundant phrases.

Sponsor activities also affect media coverage of casualties. In accordance with indexing theory, when Bush was forced to speak out about Iraq deaths, coverage of the

stay the course package spiked in the *Washington Post.* The *quagmire* package, brought to prominence by Kerry but perpetuated by experts, languished as the war went on. The far left's package, *Bush's war*, was wholly excluded from the examined texts as protest groups were largely left out of casualty coverage.

Casualty coverage in a larger frame context

In his 1991 comparison of the Korean Air Lines and Iran Air incidents, Entman finds that KAL victims "were humanized in the verbal and visual messages, encouraging identification with them" (p. 15). Highly personalized casualty coverage, as in the *selfless* and *soldiers not statistics* packages, presents soldiers in a similar manner. Rather than reading of the larger, contextual variables surrounding Iraq war casualties, the audience is encouraged to empathize with a particular soldier or family on the basis of one tragic incident.

Iyengar and Simon (1993) note that this type of "episodic" framing can encourage audiences to attribute problem responsibility in a myopic manner to a particular person, place or thing. By contrast, "thematic" framing, as in the *quagmire* package, encourages the opposite. Readers are encouraged to attribute problem responsibility to larger forces on a political, historical, economic, or cultural level, Iyengar and Simon (1993) contend.

Similarly, stories can be thought of on a dramatic-technical continuum. As Bennett (2002) writes, dramatized stories emphasize conflict, human frailty and emotional connections with the one or more distinct characters. More technically written stories downplay emotion and drama in favor of contextual information and facts that speak for themselves.

Figure 5.1 locates the packages uncovered in this study in an episodic-thematic, technical-dramatic context.

Future research directions and limitations

Considering the dominance of the two packages in the dramatic-episodic quadrant, a fruitful avenue of future research would determine what effect this highly personalized coverage has on its audience.

Because this study is intended only to elucidate the coverage itself and what processes and theories might lead to the content, it does not say anything about effects. Given the gravity, however, of casualty portrayals, further research could certainly probe the effects of casualty coverage on public opinion, either through the use of surveys, secondary polling data or experimental means.

This research suffers from several limitations. It is not generalizable, nor is it intended to be. It is a first attempt to illuminate potential patterns in casualty coverage; the first qualitative step in what could develop into a more quantitatively sophisticated content analysis utilizing independent coders and reliability measures.

Such an analysis would do well to include a larger sample of papers and a wider range of media — including mainstream newsmagazines, broadcast coverage, and material from other groups, including antiwar groups, think-tanks, and so on. It would employ a more detailed search method and finer level of measurement, perhaps coding assertions in each story, rather than the story itself. Aside from investigating coverage characteristics uncovered in this paper, it could employ measures of media

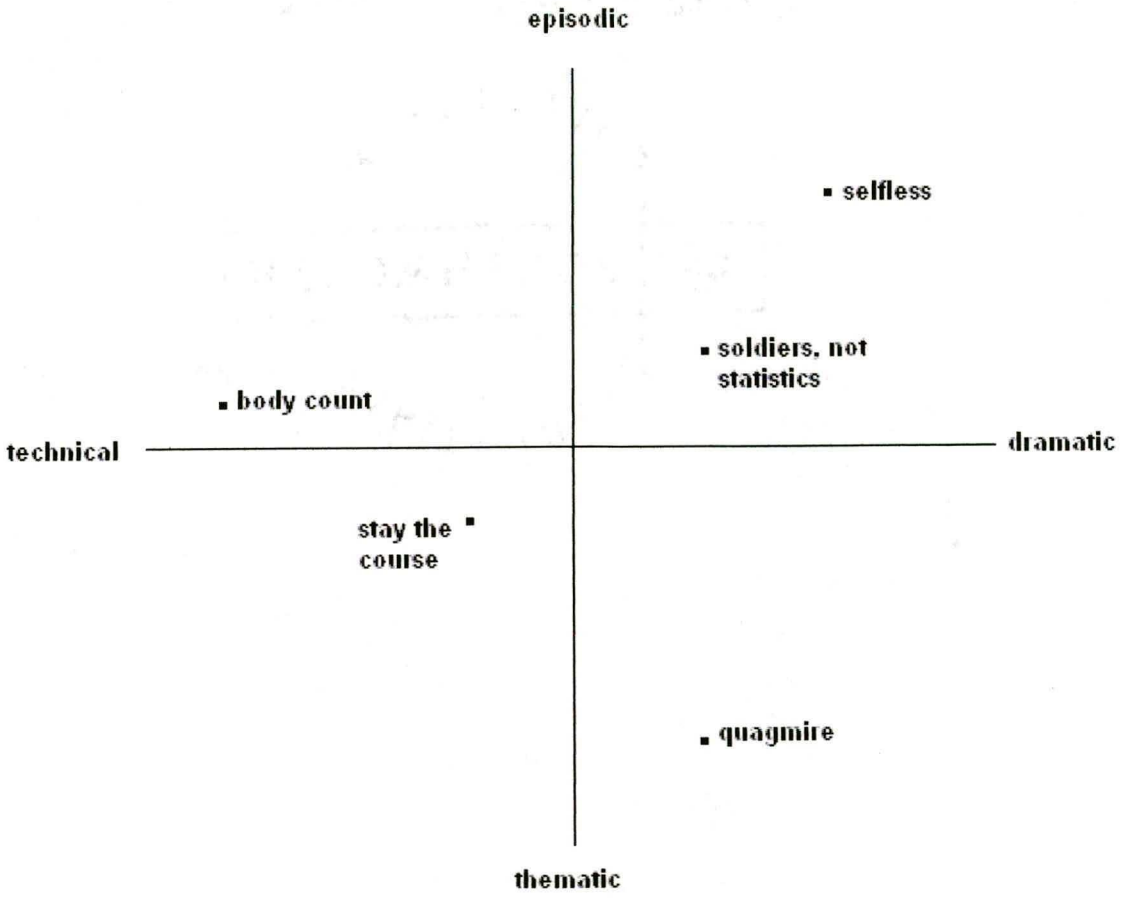


Figure 5.1 Newspaper package placement along episodic-thematic, technical-dramatic frame type continuums.

prominence to determine whether one type of coverage consistently reaches a wider audience.

Another interesting research project could compare today's Iraq casualty coverage with that of another conflict, such as Vietnam, as Reese and Buckalew (1995) contend that the all-volunteer nature of the military may affect public perception of soldiers' service:

> Removing the coercive element of the draft legitimates military service for those who chose it. Reliance on the volunteers and reservists weaves the military more tightly into the fabric of local communities. Soldiering takes its place among other jobs citizens are obliged to perform for their livelihood, while still retaining the patriotic overlay of service to the country (p. 57).

Media role revisited

Given the aggregate of the casualty coverage examined here, what role do the media play? Is the coverage a product of strict elite control, as in the mass society view, or does it maintain social order, as in the functionalist view?

In the aggregate, casualty coverage is not uniformly supportive of elite opinion, as it would be in a mass society role. But the patterns uncovered do support a functionalist role, in which the media maintain the status quo. As discussed early on in this paper, functionalist media serve to uphold widely accepted social values. The prevailing *selfless* package tells its audience that soldiers who died in Iraq are heroes who sacrificed all they had. Gans (1979) documents a pervasive celebration of individualism, and by extension, "the preservation of freedom of the individual against encroachments of nation and society" (p. 50).

However, for a society to progress, it must not shut out or marginalize views from beyond the mainstream. It must include a variety of opinions and perspectives. "To the extent that there is homogeneity in media portrayals of issues and events, the impact of social control will be accentuated," write McLeod and Hertog (1998).

This analysis shows that local readers are especially vulnerable to a homogeneity of casualty portrayals. Reporters interviewed in the discussion section defended this coverage as a mechanism through which the community is encouraged to stop and think about casualties in a more emotional, less abstract manner. "The more you can bring out the real people, the more you can shape the political landscape," Larabee said. "In the aggregate, these stories will somehow impact the psyche of your readers, and people will take something from the coverage." The question remains, however, what readers can take from such personalized stories beyond a heavy heart.

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ENDNOTES

[1] As determined by calculating a percentage of war dead from soldiers from that state who died as of Jan. 30, 2005, divided by the state's population estimate for 2004, taken from the United States Census homepage at http://www.census.gov/popest/states/NST-ann-est.html

[2] Articles, editorials and columns. Wire service material is not included.

[3] Search terms are as follows: Iraq AND casualt* OR soldier* AND dead OR died OR killed. Stars allow for alternate word endings.

[4] Because visual matter was not examined in the study, Gamson and Lasch's "visual images" category was omitted.

[5] Cartoons were selected purposively from online databases. They were not included in the formal analysis.

[6] The most relevant articles were determined by searching headlines and lead paragraphs. If an article mentioned casualties but was primarily focused on the campaign, it likely would not have showed in search results.