Visually Framing the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report*

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Previous studies of U.S. war coverage have identified a narrow range of visual portrayals that reflect American-centric, government source-directed frames. This study found that the three major U.S. news magazines echoed those patterns during the invasion and occupation of Iraq. A content analysis of 2,258 images revealed that *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* framed the first 16 months of the Iraq War from an American-centered perspective, focusing on conflict, politicians, and human interest. The news weeklies generally neglected alternative viewpoints, such as antiwar protests, destruction, Iraqi military leaders and troops, and the human toll. Nor did readers see many Iraqi and American females, children, the injured, or the dead, as they appeared in less than 12% of the images.

Keywords: Images, Iraq War, news magazines, Newsweek, TIME, U.S. News & World Report, *visual framing, war photography*

Introduction

The Iraq War lasted longer than any conflict fought by the U.S. military except the War in Afghanistan. Despite President George W. Bush's declaration of victory on May 1, 2003, the insurgency overwhelmed U.S. troops and left many Americans thinking the war was lost. The war divided the United States during both the 2006 midterm elections and the 2008 presidential campaign.

Critics often accuse the U.S. news media of being too critical of wartime policies, yet scholars have found that the press tends to support the government in times of conflict, especially early on (e.g., Barnett & Roselle, 2008; Robinson, 2004). Given the power of photography to bring issues to public awareness, especially those dealing with non-Western cultures (Altheide & Grimes, 2005), analyzing the visual coverage of the Iraq War provides insights into how the media presented the early years of the conflict to the American people. As Perlmutter (1999) observed, "More than ever, the news that really matters is what is visually prominent" (p. 178).

The current study examines how *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* visually framed the first 16 months of the Iraq War—from the U.S.-led invasion until the transfer of limited

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sovereignty to Iraq's provisional government. The three news weeklies provide an ideal benchmark for comparing Iraq War images because scholars have examined their visual coverage of other conflicts. As weekly compendiums of national and international events, they are one important indicator of how the U.S. news media present war to an American audience. They reached about 9 million people each week and were read by two to four times as many people (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Their longer news cycle gave editors more time to choose images, as opposed to television's on-the-spot coverage and newspapers' daily cycle.

Previous studies of U.S. war coverage have identified a narrow range of visual portrayals that reflect American-centric, government source-directed frames. This study examines whether *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* echoed those patterns during the Iraq War. Or did they present alternative viewpoints, such as antiwar protests, destruction, Iraqi military leaders and troops, and the human toll? Did the news weeklies focus on male troops, or did they also show people who are seldom seen, such as women, children, the injured, and the dead?

War Photography as Propaganda

Images have been used for propaganda at least as far back as the U.S. Civil War (Edom, 1947). The Spanish Civil War marked the emergence of graphic images as a staple of mass media coverage of world events (Brothers, 1997). In 1939, photographs of the German invasion of Poland in four major U.S. newspapers depicted a swift, brutal German war machine (Sherer, 1984). During the early years of World War II, the U.S. government restricted publication of material that could be "used as propaganda against the war effort" and buried gory photographs in the Pentagon's secret "Chamber of Horrors" (Roeder, 1993, pp. 8, 10). Toward the end of the war, however, the government encouraged the media to show America's fallen heroes in order to revive public support (Roeder, 1993). This is significant because journalists tend to rely on official government sources and, intentionally or not, reinforce the administration's foreign policy (Bennett, 1990; Dickson, 1992, 1994).

During the Vietnam War, journalists had almost unlimited access to troops and battlegrounds. Although President Richard Nixon (1978) accused the networks of flooding the airwaves with images of "the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war" (p. 350) and blamed the media for the failure of American policy, the networks "presented a mostly sanitized view of the war" (Hallin, 2006, p. 278). The media rarely showed "sensational and demoralizing images of military and civilian casualties" (Griffin, 2010, pp. 20–21). In fact, the press generally supported U.S. policy until late in the conflict, becoming skeptical only after it was apparent that the war could not be won (Hallin, 1986). As public support for the Vietnam War declined (1968–1973), visual coverage in *Life, Newsweek,* and *TIME* was not bloodier nor did it focus on troops in battle; in fact, no combat photographs appeared during at least a one-year period in each magazine (Patterson, 1984). British photographer Philip Jones Griffiths had a hard time finding a U.S. outlet to publish his stark images of the suffering and hardship of the Vietnamese people (Knightly, 2004). If the media had reported the full picture of war earlier, the lives of Vietnamese civilians might have been spared sooner (Cohen, 2001).

For the most part, the U.S. media depicted the 1991 Gulf War in a patriotic way (Moriarty & Shaw, 1995). *Life* magazine covers reinforced the war narrative of brave U.S. troops conquering a distant enemy and returning victorious to loving families (Pompper & Feeney, 2002). Although graphic images

were taken, they were not published in the United States because editors considered them too shocking (Robertson, 2004). Griffin and Lee (1995) found that more than half the 1,014 war images in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* focused on military hardware, troops, and civilian and military leaders on both sides. Few photographs, however, depicted combat and destruction, casualties, protests, or Iraqi troops. Showing a quick, surgically clean technological invasion instead of human carnage and environmental degradation gave Americans "a false sense of their own security and a skewed view of their world" that might have influenced the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 (Kobré, 2008, p. 371).

In 2003, the U.S. media also framed the invasion of Iraq in a patriotic, American-centered way (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005) that ignored opposition from the world community (Bennett, 2003). This framing resulted in "similar patterns of imagery" (Griffin, 2010, p. 30). As with the Gulf War, the news weeklies devoted about half their photo coverage of the invasion to weapons, troops, and leaders; they rarely showed casualties, destruction, or the Iraqi perspective (Griffin, 2004). Unlike the Gulf War, where the media pool system gave only a small group of journalists access, photojournalists attached to U.S. troops in the Iraq War had greater access to the conflict. Nonetheless, the embedding of journalists "further reinforced a purely American-centered perspective" rather than opening up "a greater range of photo possibilities" (Griffin, 2004, p. 397). Although *The New York Times, Los Angeles Times,* and *Chicago Tribune* ran twice as many war photographs in 2003 as they did during the 1991 Gulf War, the number of combat photographs and close-ups increased only slightly (King & Lester, 2005). Most Iraq War visuals in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* followed a narrow, coalition-centered perspective that spotlighted coalition troops, political leaders, and joyous encounters between the invaders and Iraqi civilians (Fahmy & Kim, 2008).

Portrayals of Females in Wartime

Embedding brought journalists into close contact with troops and afforded opportunities to put greater emphasis on individuals in print and on television (Pfau et al., 2004; Pfau et al., 2005; Pfau et al., 2006). Nonetheless, the news media were more likely to show weapons, troops, and political and military leaders than they were to feature civilians, including women (Griffin, 2004). The press generally reinforced a government-promoted, and thus masculine, perspective (e.g., Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005; Griffin, 2004; Wall, 2005). During the war's early months, six international news magazines "manifested an almost total absence of women in any role," either Iraqi or American (Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005, p. 370). Females appeared in only about 10% of the Iraq War photographs in a Slovenian newspaper (Trivundza, 2004) and in 18% of photographs in 18 U.S. newspapers, 3 U.S. news magazines, and the websites of those publications (Keith & Schwalbe, 2010). One exception was the media blitz surrounding injured U.S. Army Private First Class Jessica Lynch, which the Pentagon might have staged to justify and win support for the war (Campbell, 2003; Kumar, 2004; Sussman, 2003).

Although women served in the military and as decision makers, they were generally depicted as "the spouse, significant other, victim and/or mother—all waiting for the return of their beloved soldier-hero" (Howard & Prividera, 2004, p. 89). In wartime the news media tend to portray women as victims in need of rescue (Cappuccio, 2006) or protection (Kumar, 2004). Jessica Lynch, for example, appeared in the traditional female role of victim in media portrayals of her "child-like innocence" (Tucker & Walton, 2006, p. 321), petite body, and rescue and recovery (Holland, 2006; Sanprie, 2005).

Portrayals of Children in Wartime

Like women, children in wartime are often portrayed as victims in need of rescue and are used symbolically rather than as "complex, speaking persons" (Barker-Plummer & Boaz, 2005, p. 372). During the Kosovo War, media framing of children fell into five categories: (a) torchbearers for a nation, (b) martyrs, (c) victims to be rescued, (d) angels, and (e) targets of opportunity for human interest (Moeller, 2002). During the invasion of Iraq, photographs in two British newspapers portrayed children as innocent, vulnerable figures who needed rescue, protection, and liberation from evil forces (Wells, 2007). By depicting Iraqi children without an adult or in the company of coalition soldiers, Western media stripped "them of the social and political context of their lives," thus evading "difficult questions . . . about how war will disrupt and shatter their families and other social networks" (Wells, 2007, pp. 63–64). The Arab press, however, frequently showed children in the company of adults and other children (Wells, 2007).

Portrayals of the Injured and the Dead in Wartime

Also furthering the gap between what media consumers saw and the reality of war was the relative absence of images of the injured and dead. Although the invasion of Iraq took a costly human toll (Guterman, 2005; Iraq Body Count, 2012; Roberts, Lafta, Garfield, Khudhairi, & Burnham, 2004), few images of casualties appeared in newspapers (King & Lester, 2005), in news magazines (Griffin, 2004), or on television (Aday, 2005). Less than 10% of U.S. print, television, and online news images from the war's early weeks depicted Iraqi or American casualties (Silcock, Schwalbe, & Keith, 2008). Iraqi civilian casualties appeared in 20% of the war visuals published in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* (Fahmy & Kim, 2008). On TV, firefights and battles aired five times as often as casualties, thus reducing "the war in Iraq to a fireworks display" (Aday, 2005, p. 149). Casualties were most likely civilians; the dead were rarely shown. When they were, they were usually portrayed at a distance covered by a sheet or in a coffin (Aday, 2005).

The U.S. media are more willing to show the wounded than they are the dead, especially with regard to U.S. troops (Robertson, 2004; Silcock, Schwalbe, & Keith, 2008). Although Western journalism is comfortable describing wartime deaths with words, "it has many problems using news pictures showing those who have died" (Zelizer, 2005, p. 27). One recent experiment, however, indicated that the YouTube generation might be "less sensitive" to graphic images than are older viewers (McKinley & Fahmy, 2011, p. 81). Some observers contend that too many brutal images can elicit charges of media sensationalism, offend people, or produce compassion fatigue (Moeller, 1999). Others, however, argue that no one should be protected from seeing the atrocities of war (Sweeney, 2002). Decisions about tragic images can rest with photographers who do not submit them (Rainey, 2005) or media gatekeepers who decide not to publish them (Aday, 2005; Carr, Rutenberg, & Steinberg, 2003). Other factors include U.S. military and political imperatives (Zelizer, 2005), propagandistic purposes, and a media outlet's ideology (Youssef, 2004).

By shaping the news agenda, mediated war images can, in turn, influence the audience agenda and public support for policy (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005). Only a few recent studies have explored how exposure to mediated images affects public opinion toward war and support for or against policy initiatives. Domke, Perlmutter, and Spratt (2002) did not find solid evidence linking visuals to specific effects. On the other hand, Pfau and his colleagues (2006) observed that viewers responded more

emotionally to news photos of Iraq War casualties that included captions than they did to text only; these viewers were less supportive of the war. Showing combat video resulted in more negative attitudes toward the war than did showing footage of news anchors (Pfau et al., 2008). Some scholars observed that the more shocking the visuals, the more they influenced viewers' beliefs and attitudes (Ayish, 2001; Potter & Smith, 2000). Other researchers, however, did not find that graphic images affected public perceptions of the severity of the Israel-Palestine conflict (McKinley & Fahmy, 2011). Scholars (Gartner, 2008; Gartner & Segura, 1998) have argued that recent, marginal casualties and casualty trends are stronger predictors of wartime opinion than are cumulative casualties (Mueller, 1973).

Framing War Visuals

To one degree or another, those studies involved visual framing as a framework for studying how the media portray war. Framing takes place as journalists "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). By rendering certain events more meaningful than others, frames organize experience and guide action. The way that war is depicted can evoke sympathy, spark dissent, or create apathy among viewers (Sontag, 2003). How the media select, present, emphasize, or ignore certain images can affect public perceptions and voting decisions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Lewis, 2004). Framing alone does not change behavior or influence decisions, but people comprehend issues through the interplay of their own beliefs, values, and predispositions as well as those presented by the media (Gordon & Miller, 2004). Public perceptions and opinion can, in turn, influence policymakers (Foyle, 2004). To be effective, frames must be consistent with individual values (Reese, 2001). Media frames tend to reflect the dominant social norms, values, and traditions (Daley & James, 1988) and thus can affect how the media frame stories about countries that differ politically, culturally, and/or ideologically.

Visual information influences frame construction. News magazine covers, for example, "typically summarize the dominant framing of major foreign and domestic policy issues" (Entman, 2004, p. 100). When the Bush Administration was building support for military action in Iraq, *TIME* and *Newsweek* frequently published graphics that associated Iraq with terrorism (Fried, 2005).

Research about the Iraq War has focused on one event, such as the toppling of Saddam's statue, or a relatively narrow time period, such as the invasion. No study, however, has analyzed how a national medium—in this case, the three major news weeklies—pictured a longer period—in this case, the invasion and occupation of Iraq from March 2003 through June 2004. This study attempts to provide an overview by answering three questions about how these magazines depicted the first 16 months of the war—both what was shown and what was not:

RQ 1:   Did the types of images published in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* during the first 16 months of the Iraq War differ significantly from those published in the same magazines during the Gulf War?

RQ2:   Did the visual framing in the three news magazines change over time as the nature of the conflict shifted from invasion to occupation?

RQ3:   How often did the three news magazines depict those seldom seen in war coverage—women, children, the injured, and the dead?

Method

The research questions were tested by a content analysis of war-related images published in every issue of *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* between the opening day of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (March 19, 2003) and the transfer of limited sovereignty to the provisional Iraqi government (June 28, 2004). This handover marked the beginning of the period of sovereignty and elections. At the end of 2003, *TIME* (4.1 million), *Newsweek* (3.1 million), and *U.S. News & World Report* (2 million) were the three U.S. news magazines with the largest circulations (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Limiting the study to 16 months and three publications yielded a manageable number of images to code and study.

The unit of analysis was the image, which was defined as a photograph related to the Iraq War. Although single images do not reflect the complexity of longer photo essays, today's news magazines rarely publish long visual pieces.

All 2,258 images were coded according to operational definitions considered replicable from other framing studies (e.g., Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007; Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). The following frames were used:

1. Conflict (the combatants, including weapons, troops, POWs, and combat)

2. Violence of war (the results of conflict, such as injury, death, and destruction)

3. Human interest (noncombatants, such as civilians and humanitarian relief workers)

4. Politicians

5. Antiwar protests

6. Media self-referential (journalists at home and in Iraq)

7. Looting

8. Oil resources

Some images fell into more than one category. A photograph of tanks rolling past bombed-out buildings was included in both the conflict frame and the violence of war frame. Images that did not fall into any of the frames listed were coded as *other*. Also coded were the nationality of the injured, dead, females, and children

A trained coder coded all 2,258 images. A second trained coder then coded a 10% subsample (N = 226). To correct for chance agreement between coders, Scott's *pi* was calculated and resulted in an acceptable coefficient of 0.93.

Results

Before the individual coding categories were grouped into frames, they revealed interesting data about the visual coverage of the first 16 months of the Iraq War in the three U.S. news weeklies. Of the 2,258 war images coded, *TIME* (42.2%) and *Newsweek* (39.4%) published the most, with *U.S. News & World Report* a distant third (18.4%). The largest single category was U.S. troops not in combat (23.9%), followed by Iraqi or other non-Western civilians (10.2%). George Bush appeared in 5.7% of the images, his adversary Saddam Hussein in 3.2%. (See Table 1.)

The first research question was designed to gauge if the types of images published in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* during the first 16 months of the Iraq War differed significantly from those published in the same magazines during the Gulf War. The results indicate that the types of images did not differ significantly. The triad of weapons, troops, and civilian and military leaders accounted for about 58% of the Iraq War images, almost the same as the 57% that Griffin and Lee (1995) found in their study of Gulf War photographs. Unlike the Gulf War coverage, where "catalogue-style pictures" of the arsenal not in combat accounted for 26% of news weekly images (Griffin & Lee, 1995), less than 0.1% depicted the U.S. arsenal during the Iraq War, and all showed weaponry in action. More than six times as many photographs illustrated U.S. and coalition troops not in combat (24.3%) as they did troops in combat (3.9%). Like the Gulf War coverage, neither the Iraqi arsenal (< 0.1%) nor Iraqi troops (0.6%) figured prominently. Neither did antiwar protests (1%), looting (0.6%), U.S. POWs (0.4%), oil resources (0.4%), detainees or hostages (0.3%), humanitarian relief (0.3%), or Iraqi or non-Western military leaders (0.3%).
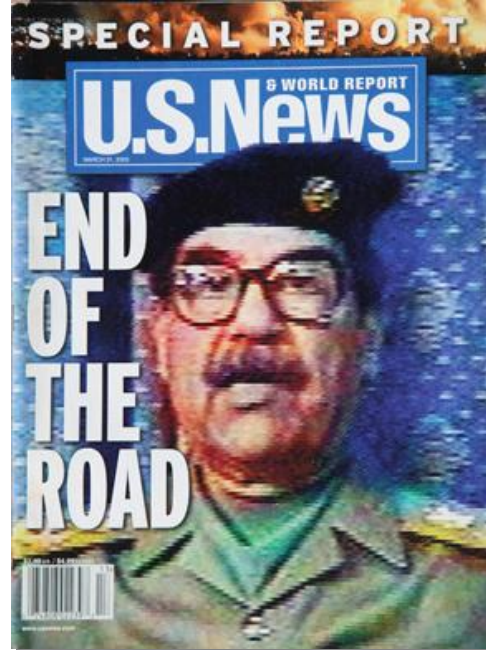
**Table 1. Frequency of War-Related Images in Newsweek, TIME,
and U.S. News & World Report. March 2003–June 2004 (N = 2,258).**

| Type of Image	Count	%
U.S. troops not in combat	540	23.9%
Iraqi or other non-Western civilians	230	10.2%
Other U.S. civilian leaders	154	6.8%
George W. Bush	128	5.7%
Other Iraqi or non-Western civilian leaders	127	5.6%
Other	127	5.6%
Injured	106	4.7%
U.S. military leaders	92	4.1%
U.S. troops in combat	85	3.8%
Dead	85	3.8%
Other Western civilian or military leaders	74	3.3%
Saddam Hussein	72	3.2%
U.S. civilian life (contractors, soldiers' families, etc.)	61	2.7%
Damage and destruction (explosions, bombed-out buildings, etc.)	52	2.3%
Total of 27 low- or no-frequency categories[1]	325	14.4%

The second research question examined whether the visual framing changed as the nature of the conflict shifted from invasion to occupation. The results were grouped into three periods: (a) Major Combat Operations (March–April 2003), (b) Post-Invasion Calm (May–September 2003), and (c) Insurgency/Civil War (October 2003–July 2004). The results indicate that the visual framing did not change over time. The conflict frame (35% of the total) dominated during all three periods, followed by politicians (28%), human interest (16%), and the violence of war (11%). (See Table 2.) Antiwar protests, looting, media self-referential, and oil resources each accounted for 1% or less of the total frames.

The data indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the presentation of frames over time (χ^2 (8) = 155.88, p < .05), indicating that they changed as the war progressed.

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[1] Low-frequency image categories included the following: Iraqi militia (splinter groups, vigilantes), 47 (2.1%); insurgents (Al Qaeda, Abu Abbas, etc.), 43 (1.9%); representations of Saddam Hussein (statue, posters, etc.), 43 (1.9%); Iraqi or other Arab POWs, 29 (1.3%); historical photos, 27 (1.2%); antiwar protests, 22 (1.0%); looting, 14 (0.6%); Iraqi troops (loyal to Saddam) not in combat, 11 (0.5%); coalition troops not in combat, 10 (0.4%); U.S. POWs, 10 (0.4%); Western journalists, 8 (0.4%); oil resources, 8 (0.4%); detainees or hostages, 7 (0.3%); city scenes in Baghdad, 7 (0.3%); Iraq outside Baghdad, 7 (0.3%); Iraqi or non-Western military leaders, 7 (0.3%); humanitarian relief, 7 (0.3%); coalition troops in combat, 3 (0.1%); U.S. arsenal in combat, 2 (< 0.1%); Iraqi troops (loyal to Saddam) in combat, 2 (< 0.1%); Iraqi arsenal not in combat, 2 (< 0.1%); and coalition arsenal not in combat, 1 (< 0.1%). There were no images of the following: coalition arsenal in combat, U.S. arsenal not in combat, Iraqi arsenal not in combat, coalition POWs, or Iraqi or other non-Western journalists.

However, given the large sample size, it is not unexpected that the results would appear statistically significant despite the similar percentages across categories. This sensitivity of the chi-square test statistic has been well documented in the past (see Agresti & Finlay, 1997, p. 268, for an example). Therefore, while this relationship is statistically significant, it may not be meaningful.

Table 2. Changes in Visual Framing of the Iraq War in Newsweek, TIME, *and* U.S. News & World Report*. March 2003–June 2004 (N = 2,858).**
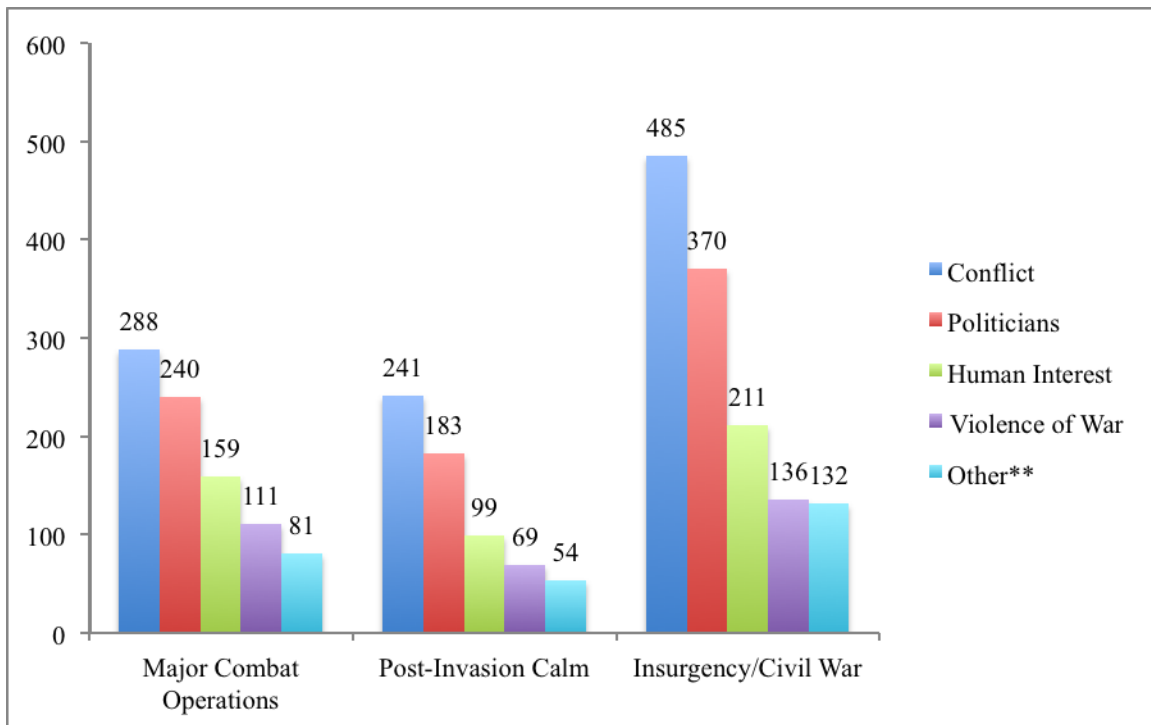
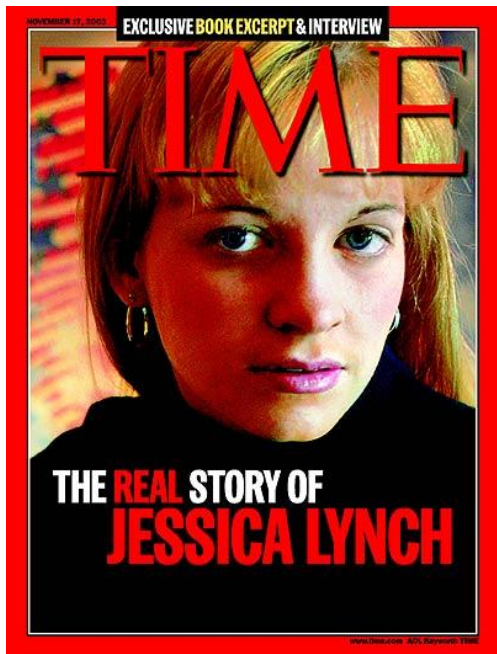**Major Combat Operations** (March–April 2003) included the invasion of Iraq and the fall of Baghdad.
Post-Invasion Calm (May–September 2003) encompassed the relative calm that masked the seeds of the ensuing insurgency and civil war.
Insurgency/Civil War (October 2003–July 2004) marked the beginning of the full-blown insurgency that eventually merged with a civil war.

* N = 2,858 because some of the 2,258 images coded fell into more than one category.
** *Other* includes the following frames: antiwar protests, looting, media self-referential, oil resources, and other.

The third research question asked how often the three news magazines depicted those not usually seen in war coverage—women, children, the injured, and the dead. The results show that the three magazines paid little attention to these groups. Of the 2,258 images coded, about 12% included women or girls. This fell within the range found by other scholars (Keith & Schwalbe, 2010; Trivundza, 2004). Of those, 7.3% featured American females, 4.8% Iraqi females, and less than 0.1% females from other countries. (See Table 3.) The number of images of U.S. females peaked during major combat operations (National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, POW Shoshana Johnson, and the contested "rescue" of Jessica Lynch) and again during the insurgency/civil war (President George Bush's Thanksgiving visit to Iraq, portraits of families back home, U.S. troops interacting with local residents, and follow-up stories on Jessica Lynch). The covers of only six (3%) news magazines featured a woman associated with the war, and all were American: a female helicopter pilot illustrating a story on "When Mom Goes to War" *(TIME,* March 24, 2003), Jessica Lynch *(Newsweek,* April 14, 2003, and *TIME,* November 17, 2003), a female soldier and two comrades representing "The American Soldier" for the Person of the Year Award *(TIME,* December 29, 2003), and then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice *(Newsweek,* February 9, 2004, and *TIME,* April 5, 2004).

**Table 3. Comparison of War-Related Images of Females in Newsweek, TIME,
and U.S. News & World Report. March 2003–June 2004 (N = 2,258).**
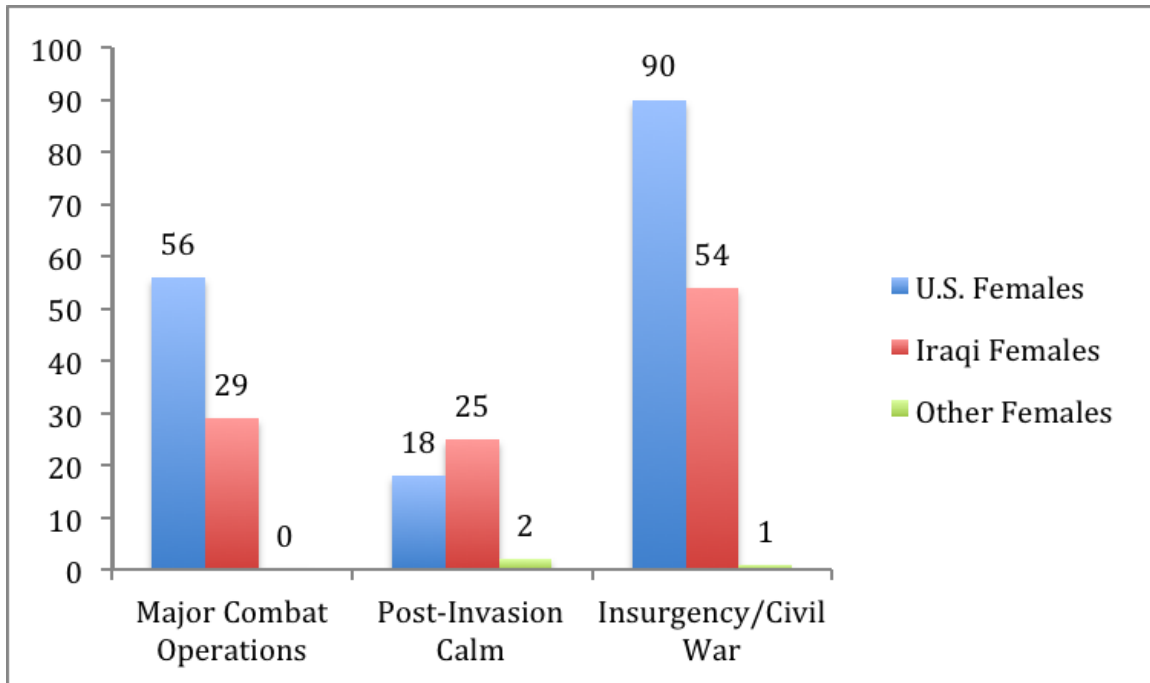

Only 6% of the images coded included children. Of those, 3.4% featured Iraqi youngsters, 1.6% included American children, and less than 1% showed children of other nationalities. (See Table 4.) Children appeared most often during major combat operations and the insurgency/civil war—mainly the children of U.S. troops back home and Iraqi children who were killed, wounded, refugees, or welcoming the U.S.-led forces.

Table 4. Comparison of War-Related Images of Children in Newsweek, TIME*,*
and U.S. News & World Report*. March 2003–June 2004 (N = 2,258).*
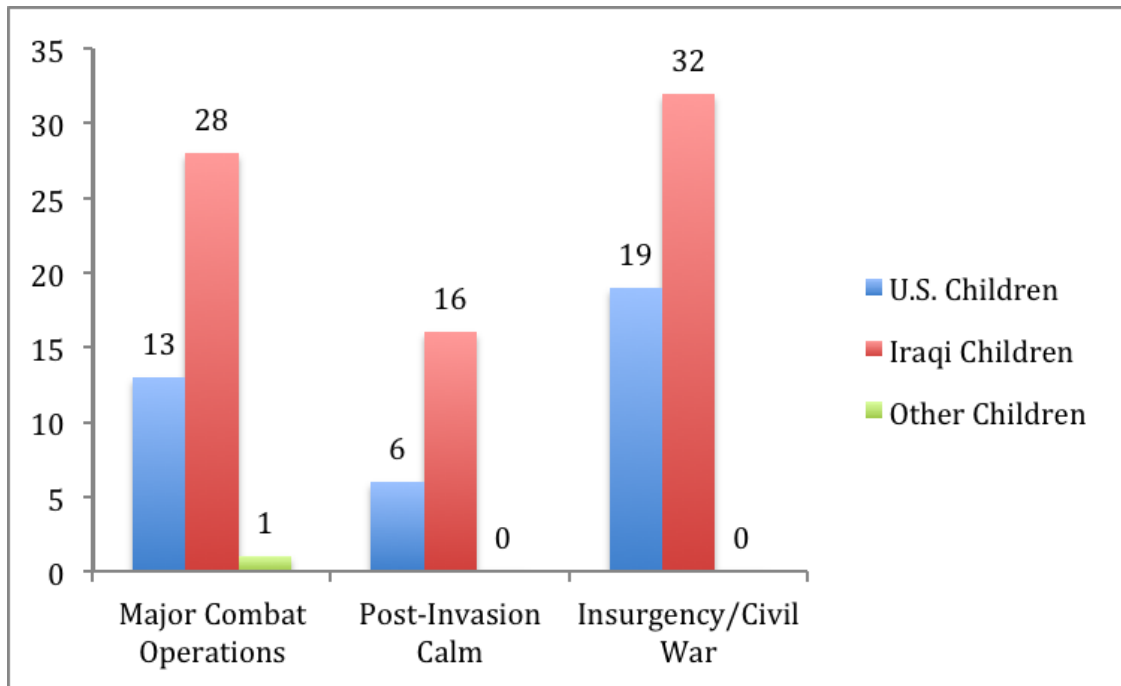
Only 8.5% of the images showed the injured or the dead. Of those, 4.9% featured U.S. or coalition troops, 3.5% Iraqi troops or civilians, and less than 0.1% victims from other countries. (See Table 5.) About one-tenth of the 191 total images of the injured and dead showed children. Of those, all were Iraqi except one. Another 14% included injured or dead females—9 Iraqis and 17 Americans. Of those, slightly more than half featured Jessica Lynch. As other studies have found, the three magazines showed fewer images of dead Americans (a total of 37, or 1.6%) than they did injured Americans (68, or 3%). The magazines depicted almost the same number of injured Iraqis (36, or 1.6%) as they did dead Iraqis (42, or 1%).

Table 5. Comparison of War-Related Images of the Injured and Dead in Newsweek, TIME, **and** U.S. News & World Report. *March 2003–June 2004 (N = 2,258).*
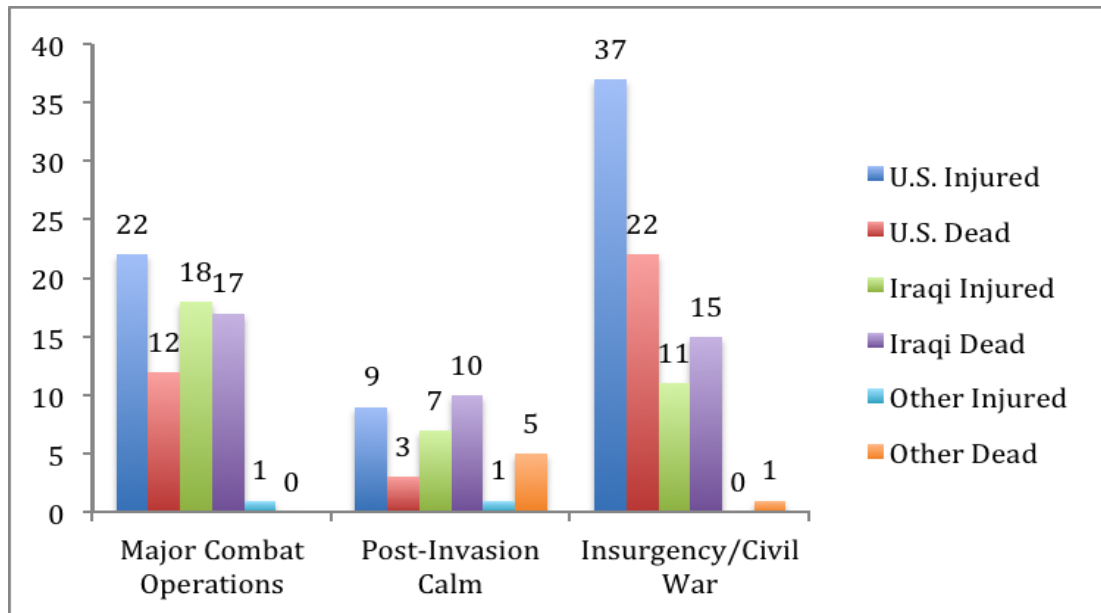
Depictions of the injured and dead peaked during major combat operations (notably April 2003) and the insurgency/civil war (mainly November 2003 and April 2004). April 2003 witnessed the intense media coverage of the invasion, as well as the "rescue" of Jessica Lynch from an Iraqi hospital. Coverage of Lynch also contributed to the increase in November 2003, when *TIME* ran a story on her recovery that included rescue pictures. The April 2004 increase resulted from a *TIME* story on war casualties, as well as coverage in all three magazines of the death of Saddam's two sons and the murder and burning of four U.S. contractors in Fallujah.[2]

The current study confirmed what other scholars have observed: Visual coverage of war declines over time (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005; Carruthers, 2008; Moeller, 1999; Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008). By June 2004, with the U.S. handover to the provisional Iraqi government, coverage had dropped to a low of 24 images from a high of 449 images in April 2003. Visual coverage averaged 141 images per month, with spikes during major combat operations (March 2003—215 images, invasion; April 2003—449 images, march to Baghdad, Lynch "rescue," and toppling of Saddam's statue),[3] during the post-invasion calm (July 2003—188 images, death of Saddam Hussein's two sons), and during the insurgency/civil war (November 2003—159 images, bloodiest month since the war began; April 2004—154

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[2] Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah killed the four contractors on March 31, but the story did not run in the news magazines until early April.

[3] The invasion began halfway through March 2003, which might account for the fact that twice as many visuals appeared in April as they did in March.

images, four slain U.S. contractors in Fallujah, and May 2004—215 images, prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib).[4]

Discussion

The results of a content analysis of 2,258 Iraq War images published in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* support previous research (e.g., Griffin, 2004; Griffin & Lee, 1995; Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008) showing that visual coverage at the outset of U.S. conflicts as far back as the Civil War begins with an American-centered war narrative. This narrative reflects the nationalistic and ideological values consistent with the dominant social values of an American audience (Bantimaroudis & Kampanellou, 2007). According to this narrative, the United States has a special moral responsibility to serve as the beacon of democracy, capitalism, and religious tolerance for the rest of the world. When forced to fight, American troops rely on technologically superior weapons to defeat the enemy (Hackett & Zhao, 1994).

The current study found that the three major U.S. news magazines echoed those patterns by framing the first 16 months of the Iraq War from an American-centered perspective, focusing on conflict, politicians, and human interest. The dominance of the conflict frame during all three periods reflects the war narrative. News magazines filled their pages with images of brave U.S. troops and mighty weapons but largely ignored the troops and weapons of both coalition allies and the enemy. As in the 1995 Griffin and Lee study of the Gulf War, Iraqi combatants remained largely an "unseen enemy" (p. 819). This could be partly attributed to military regulations, the difficulty of photographing enemy troops, and the logistics of traveling around a war-torn country. Politicians—the second most frequent frame—were largely represented by images of President George W. Bush and other U.S. civilian leaders. Similar to what Griffin and Lee (1995) found during the Gulf War, Iraq War images depicted Western leaders more than they did Iraqi or other non-Western leaders. Bush appeared in almost twice as many photographs as did Saddam Hussein, and U.S. politicians outnumbered Iraqi politicians by almost two to one, thus reinforcing a pluralistic image of American democracy fighting a lone dictator. Human interest—the third most frequent frame—"brings a human face, an individual's story, or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem" (de Vreese & Semetko, 2000, p. 95). Human interest played a bigger role in Iraq War coverage than it did in Gulf War coverage. This was to be expected because the 1991 conflict lasted only two months and did not involve civilians in Kuwait or

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[4] Although the abuse at Abu Ghraib came to light in late April, the news magazines did not cover the scandal until early May.

nearby countries. During the Iraq War, however, embedded journalists traveled with the troops and had more access to noncombatants.

Framing involves not only what images the three magazines emphasized but also what images they ignored. What was missing from the visual coverage can be just as illuminating as what was shown. The news weeklies generally neglected alternative viewpoints, such as antiwar protests, damage and destruction (to homes, infrastructure, the environment, and oil resources), Iraqi military leaders and troops, and the human toll. Journalists consider themselves government watchdogs revealing injustice and abuse of power. But in an age of terrorism, when enemies have struck inside America's borders, the news magazines might have felt sympathy toward the war effort and a reluctance to run images that appeared unpatriotic (Altheide & Grimes, 2005). The patriotic atmosphere after 9/11 "not only promoted self-censorship but also squelched debate" (Kumar, 2006, p. 53). Government officials and journalists themselves castigated news organizations not perceived as patriotic enough (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005).

Also largely absent from the visual coverage were Iraqi and American females, children, the injured, and the dead. By focusing on the military's technological prowess and troop strength, the news magazines largely ignored female troop members, who comprised one-seventh of the U.S. armed forces (Wertheimer, 2005). Both civilian and military women were affected by the war, yet they appeared significantly less often than did men. The news weeklies focused on a war narrative that portrayed women as spouses, mothers, victims (as in Lynch's "rescue"), or sexual deviants (as in U.S. Army Specialist Lynddie England's abuse of Abu Ghraib prisoners; see Harp & Struckman, 2010). As gatekeepers, photo editors might be more likely to select combat images that fit this traditional narrative rather than photographs of female troops that do not (Keith & Schwalbe, 2010). Jessica Lynch alone accounted for about one of every seven images of females. By highlighting her life, "rescue," and recovery, these photographs depicted Lynch as a victim rather than as a soldier. With so few prominent depictions of women, those who were featured tended to represent all women in war and thereby reinforced their traditional roles. Most of the wartime violence that women suffered remained invisible (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2002, p. 138).

Children rarely appeared either. When they did, the news weeklies often depicted them as innocent victims in need of liberation (welcoming the troops) or protection (fleeing as refugees, racing to receive rations, waving goodbye to a parent). Because photographs of children attract attention and empathy (Moeller, 2002), images that create this narrative of liberation and protection could strengthen public support for military involvement, while images of children as dead or wounded victims could weaken it.

The scarcity of images of the injured and the dead reflected the news magazines' reluctance to portray war's cruel face. Many media outlets did not show dead or wounded children, for example, because they might "offend the sensibilities of readers" (Wells, 2007, p. 59). In fact, "the representation of violent acts or events is somehow taken to be more obscene than the event itself" (p. 57). Magazine gatekeepers had to weigh their duty to tell the truth against their desire to show compassion toward victims and loved ones. Gatekeepers could justify publishing gruesome pictures if they illustrated official actions that viewers might not appreciate without visuals (Elliott & Lester, 2000). In wartime, for example, this principle might lead magazines to show corpses that revealed the extent of a civilian massacre.

Conclusion

A free press can present various perspectives and alternative viewpoints. During wartime, however, the U.S. news media tend to frame visual coverage in an American-centered way, especially at the onset of hostilities. This study of the photographs published in *TIME, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report* during the first 16 months of the Iraq War revealed a visual narrative of brave troops and sophisticated weapons rather than one of death and destruction, thus reinforcing a government-promoted perspective that helped boost morale and build consensus on a potentially divisive issue.

What readers do not see can be as revealing as what they do see. Not showing the harsh realities of war can give readers a lopsided, sanitized view that dehumanizes both enemy troops and noncombatants. Underplaying pictures of women, children, the injured, and the dead avoided the emotional responses these images can trigger and the possible loss of public support (Aday, 2005; Griffin, 2004). Few images illustrated the war's effects on the lives of ordinary Iraqis: the mother struggling to feed her family, the doctor saving a child's mangled leg, the entrepreneur selling air-conditioners on the street. Nor did the news magazines show the Americans who are seldom seen: a female Marine searching Iraqi women at an entry control point, medics saving a dying soldier, U.S. contractors rebuilding schools. A Poynter Institute survey indicated that American news consumers, in fact, said they wanted more comprehensive war coverage, including stories about casualties, Iraqi leaders and civilians, returning U.S. troops, veterans' families, and the impact of the conflict on Iraq and the United States (Tenore, 2008).

Editorials in at least one-third of the top U.S. newspapers opposed the invasion of Iraq (Mitchell, 2008), yet this was not the picture the news magazines presented. They displayed solidarity with the American cause. Readers saw the narrow, victorious frame of the liberator, not dissent or the broad sociopolitical picture of war or the heavy cost in terms of property loss, environmental damage, and human life. The news weeklies and other mass media play a major role in shaping the public's awareness, perceptions, and support of war (Altheide & Grimes, 2005). As with previous wars, the mainstream media "became less critical of the government and military actions and more prone to repeating propaganda both in the lead-up to and during the war" (Wall, 2005, p. 153).

Presenting the Iraq War as relatively bloodless and sanitized could make Americans more willing to accept armed conflict as an alternative to diplomacy or economic sanctions (Sharkey, 2003). As Halberstam (1999) wrote:

> So, if we look at the media today, we ought to be aware not just of what we are getting, but what we are not getting; the difference between what is authentic and what is inauthentic in contemporary American life and in the world, with a warning that in this celebrity culture, the forces of the inauthentic are becoming more powerful all the time. (para. 12)

Suggestions for Future Research

There is still much to be learned about the visual framing of the Iraq War. A follow-up study could examine the period from the transfer of limited sovereignty to the provisional Iraqi government (July 2004) to another benchmark event, such as the swearing in of the permanent Iraqi government (May 2006), the U.S. troop surge (June 2007), the drawdown (March 2009), or the withdrawal of combat troops (August 2010). A qualitative study of newsroom gatekeepers could provide insight into how editors decided which images to publish, given the often competing pressures of journalistic standards, news values, production limitations, audience perceptions, government policy, and negotiations with photographers, managers, the military, and others. Scholars could compare the visual framing of the war across cultures in international news magazines. Researchers could also compare the depiction of women, children, the injured, and the dead in U.S. news weeklies with those in international news magazines.

More research will enhance our understanding of how the media make certain aspects of war appear more significant, while others become negligible or invisible. What most Americans know of war comes from the media, yet what we know is so little. If presented with more images—with more visual voices and more context—what we think we know could change.

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