Iraqi Civilian Death in American Mass Media: The Causes and Consequences of Silence

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Abstract of Thesis

Iraqi Civilian Death in American Mass Media: The Causes and Consequences of Silence

This thesis sets out to explain the causes and consequences of American mass media silence on the subject of civilian death in Iraq in the 2003-2012 war. The thesis finds the principal causes of silence to be: The embedding program, the need for fast, marketable, American-sourced "officialdom", the cultural-political shift to the right after 9/11 and the rise of Fox News, the takeover of advertising interests in media executive management, and various psychological causes including group diffusion of responsibility. The thesis finds the principal consequence of media silence to be *dehumanization through omission*, effecting widespread American public ignorance (and consequent apathy) of civilian death in Iraq. The concept *dehumanization through omission* is introduced in this thesis as a variant of traditional dehumanization that can be either intentional or naturally occurring. In this particular variant, the absence of like-identification across ingroups and outgroups, the absence of socially supportive affiliates interested in forming a humanizing counter-narrative, the denial of and disinterest regarding ingroup sin, the denial of event importance, the denial of individual agency, occasional overt dehumanization, sustained infrahumanization, and finally the assumption on the part of the American people that their media was vigilant against civilian death paired with that media's

actual and complete absence of vigilance against death and against the

delegitimizing and prevailing war narrative, form a dehumanization that is softer,

quieter, and more elusive than overt propaganda, but which in all likelihood is just

as fatal to those who suffer its consequences.

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FOREWORD

In February of 2002, the Pentagon purchased full commercial rights to all satellites currently orbiting over Afghanistan so that they could control information and photography completely. This purchase came after a particular attack north of Jalalabad, where so many civilians were killed that "it would have been possible to see the bodies lying there from space."[1] By purchasing all rights, the Pentagon effectively blocked those images from the entire world. Reporters trying to access similar scenes in subsequent years were told that if they attempted to visit the bombed location, they would be shot and killed by U.S. forces. It was largely effective, from a Pentagon standpoint. Images never circulated of this and similar occurrences.

This was a dark precedent for Iraq, where those killed by Americans would be rendered as non-people, denied images and a news story, denied even a number on a page accounting for the dead. Those who died in Iraq were truly erased.

This paper asks why. It then looks at the results of their being erased, and charts a path forward with the hopes that people will not be erased in the years and the wars to come.

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[1] Michael Otterman, Richard Hil, and Paul Watson. Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage (Pluto Press: New York City, 2010) p.97

INTRODUCTION

I: "JOURNALISTIC COMPLICITY OF WAR CRIMES"

U.S. society has become the least informed and the best entertained society in the world

- Dr. Peter Phillips, testimony given at the World Tribunal on Iraq's Summit on

Media in Rome, Italy. 14 February 2005

At that summit, the World Tribunal on Iraq found American media corporations guilty of

complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity based on the sixth law of the 1945

Nuremberg Trials, whereby "accomplices" to a crime or a conspiracy regarding war

crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace are as equally responsible for

the actions of the organization executing the act as the organization itself. They found

American corporate media to have withheld information regarding such crimes, to have

censored and erased it entirely, and to have intentionally misled the American people,

thereby presumably allowing for the continuation of war crimes and crimes against

humanity. "Journalistic complicity of war crimes" in the words of another speaker

became a new charge, levied against every one of the major news outlets in the United

States.

In the eyes of those at the tribunal, Iraq was already an unjust war. Too many

civilians had died. The American media was already a joke, an intimate bedfellow to be

toyed around with and used by the Department of Defense and Pentagon for their own purposes. They had lost their credibility entirely when it came to covering Iraq. In America, meanwhile, no news of this surfaced. In the United States, the above proceedings may as well never have happened. Americans went on living, not knowing any the better for it. It is sensible that an organization would not report on its own complicity in war crimes. But, contrary to what we might expect, it seems that these hearings did not effect change in the conduct of newsmaking and reporting on the part of American outlets even in the slightest.

In this thesis, I will ask why, and I will try to understand not only why media complicity existed, but also what the consequences of that complicity were. Complicity, when it comes to those whose duty it is to speak, means one thing above all else, and that will be the subject of this thesis: Silence.

The objective of this thesis, then, is to examine the causes and consequences of media silence and of dehumanization through omission (itself a consequence effecting further consequences). The critical difference between traditional dehumanization and dehumanization through omission is a core concept this thesis seeks to explore and will do so in Section Two. In previous academic research, similar concepts have been called "lack of acknowledgement", "absence of concern", and other such names, notably by John Tirman, but in truth these concepts deal with dehumanization in very real forms– the absence of concern and acknowledgement is enabled by the dismissing of strangers' lives and deaths as unimportant, whether that unimportance is advertised and sold to us or is hidden deep and undiscovered inside of our own subconscious mind. Omission

presents no impetus for concern or acknowledgement on the part of the public and is almost always an act executed deliberately only by a few. In cases where omission is an act and in cases where omission is the lack of action both, however, the results, analyzed in this section, are indistinguishable from one another.

Roughly 2/3 of Americans polled in a February 2007 AP/Ipsos survey reported that they were emotionally distraught when they heard of civilian Iraqi deaths, *as opposed to* accepting that death as a necessary cost of war.[2] This reveals to us that no *active* dehumanization is present, and sympathy still exists. When prompted, Americans tell us that they are deeply bothered by civilian death in Iraq and *do not* accept such death as a necessary function of their war.[3] With such an opinion, it might seem that there is wide opportunity for dissidence both in the media and among the public. But in neither sector does any real dissidence exist. The first part of this thesis will ask *why*.

At the same time Americans around the country gave us this answer, they also answered that the war in Iraq was our most pressing national concern. We might assume that, with most people saying that the war was number one on our national agenda, and that they would be troubled to hear of civilian death, a healthy vigilance would exist to watch over civilian death tolls. It would be a logical enough assumption. It is, in fact, an assumption many Americans did make, and in making that assumption they inadvertently contributed to the lack of information in our society.

We are proven wrong if we ever think to make the assumption that such a healthy vigilance did exist. In this very same year, Americans estimated on average that less than

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[2] AP/IPSOS, *Military/Civilian Deaths in Iraq Study*, Stable URL: http://surveys.ap.org/data/Ipsos/national/2007-02-16%20AP%20Iraq-soldiers%20topline.pdf (Accessed October 11, 2012)
[3] This was an additional question asked in explicit terms

10,000 Iraqi civilians had died since the beginning of the conflict.[4] That survey was taken six months *after* the *Lancet* report issued its estimate of 650,000 dead Iraqi civilians as a direct result of American invasion and occupation, independent of other variables, with 150,000 of those being violent combat deaths and another 400,000 being the result of a lack of necessary life support (food, water, etc.) when structures offering that support (farms, groceries and wholesalers, water purification treatment centers, electrical grids) were bombed and destroyed by U.S. forces and not replaced.

With media companies being the sole source of information on Iraq for the huge majority of Americans, those companies are the only possible missing link between the information on death that is available and the fact that strikingly few Americans are aware of that information.

We must consider whether American responses proclaiming concern for Iraqi civilian life can be held true when faced with the reality of an environment where no one cares enough to ask questions or give answers. If Americans are being genuine regarding their concern, why do they reliably estimate American deaths while dramatically underestimating the number of civilian deaths? It is, in fact, a very possible coexistence if we consider that it was a coexistence facilitated by media silence, that is, by the failure of the link to deliver the information to the people. Silence on the part of the media prompted a no-response to a non-subject on the part of the American people, logically so. This realization brings us to the heart of this thesis and the reason for its being in exploring the causes and consequences of media silence.

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[4] One year earlier, a PIPA poll found that the median American estimate for Iraqi civilian deaths did not reach even five thousand, at a time when even the conservative-estimating Iraq Body Count was nearing its one hundred thousand death count. See: *Americans on Iraq: Three Years on Questionnaire* (The Knowledge Networks Poll: The American Public on International Issues) Stable URL: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar06/USIraq_Mar06-quaire.pdf (Accessed January 14, 2014)

The first half of this research will focus around the causes of media silence, while the second half will focus on the consequences. Silence, in this thesis, will refer to both non-reporting and chronic under-reporting.[5]

While media reporting on the American death toll has been fairly pervasive and accurate, reporting on the Iraqi death toll has been negligible at best, entirely absent at worst, and wildly inaccurate. The lack of reporting generally leads Americans to presume that the civilian death count is low, and that it might be comparable to the American death toll-- this, after all, is their only real frame of reference for combat, even though it is no reference at all. While the above may be a summary answer, it is hardly sufficient in exposing the complex reality of *why* private citizens and media professionals (some of whom have powerfully vested moral interests in exposing civilian death) both have so avidly avoided speaking or thinking about civilian death in Iraq. The entirety of this first section will crack this question open, and will discover in the end that the abundance of answers it finds are non-exclusive, and in fact complement one another in creating the powerful impetus for silence and motive for tacit dehumanization this thesis will introduce. Why media professionals did not break the silence will be considered the *causes* of media silence. Why private citizens did not break the silence will be considered the *consequences* of media silence, as the consequences are suffered by the subject (the American people) receiving the action or inaction rather than the actor itself (American media). This thesis asks both questions and divides its time accordingly.

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[5] Because a normative assessment will not generate an agreed-upon volume of stories regarding civilian death, "under" is in comparison to the *substantially* larger body of text concerning American deaths.

This thesis's core argument is that media professionals committed *dehumanization through omission*, some by intent and others not, and that this omission caused negligence and apathy on the part of the American public. Exploring the tenets of that argument take us from the causes of silence, through the consequences of silence, and on to the end recommendations. The overarching aim of this work is to understand the nature and workings of media omission of death in the hopes that in future wars there will be a greater level of investigative reporting and transparency. A greater quality of investigative journalism and transparency would predictably lead to the more responsible conduct of war and more coherent, accurate and accessible estimates of civilian death and displacement.

That this silence occurred should be obvious to any citizen who regularly follows the news and is asked to estimate the number of civilian deaths. In a war which their country initiated and partook in for more than a full decade, and which received regular coverage, it would seem at first glance that something as elementary as civilian death would be covered quite well. Yet when they shrug and answer that they do not know, they are forced to admit that their media has never told them, even if it is a hard thing for most Americans to admit.

The point is worth clarification before the thesis proceeds. American mass media organizations and individuals near-universally underreported or did not report civilian death tolls in the most recent Iraq War. In those few instances where numbers were reported, the numbers themselves were the lowest available estimates. In 2007, for instance, a story could have told Americans that 85,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed or

that close to one million Iraqi civilians had been killed. Although viable estimates at the time had the death toll pegged around 700,000, U.S. outlets ran with the lowball 85,000 figure. *USA Today* ran with an otherworldly lowball of 54,000.[6] The median American, meanwhile, reported in that same year that he/she believed 9,890 civilians had died in Iraq.[7] Americans were very precise in pinning down the number of American deaths more or less correctly, suggesting media accuracy and diligence regarding American deaths. But as news on Iraq for the median American comes exclusively from U.S. mass media, this disparity suggests that even lowball civilian death counts were systematically ignored and not covered by our media. In that same year, Americans answered that they would be extremely bothered by civilian death, that too many civilians had been killed, and that the Iraq War was America's first priority, all suggesting they would be eager to learn of such numbers were the numbers to be presented and that they would be unlikely to forget them.[8]

While newspapers printed daily statistics and TV channels ran tickers constantly updating and informing Americans about American military deaths, they categorically refused to include estimates on civilian death in these updates, in some cases going on record against doing so.

A chilling example of early omission comes to us from Fallujah in 2004. There, Americans were found to have massacred unarmed civilians in white clothes holding white flags, to have summoned civilians into a mosque and slaughtered them, to have used unarmed civilians as human shields, to have machine-gunned fleeing refugees as they swam across a river to escape the city, and to have, all told, killed in excess of six

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[6] Article: *Poll: Americans Underestimate Iraqi Death Toll*, by Nancy Benac, Associated Press (USA Today, February 24th, 2007)
Link to article online: <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-02-24-iraqi-deaths-poll_x.htm>
[7] February 2007 AP/Ipsos Poll, *Military/Civilian Deaths in Iraq Study*
[8] ibid

thousand and displaced 250,000 civilians in a period of weeks. The United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees, in the face of such crimes, publicly warned Americans that

their conduct was still subject to international law whether their military acknowledged it

or not. It was certainly high profile material and it elicited a number of U.N.

investigations. These stories did not reach the American public, and so the chance for

Americans to feel outrage was never presented. Instead, some of the top stories today

based on online hits are these: the *New York Post* ran a story on how "terrorists" were

using human shields against American soldiers, and *FOX News* ran a story on how

"kidnappers" were using child shields to fend off American Marines. The American

atrocities were not mentioned and to date have not been reported by American mass

media companies.[9] This is omission, and rather than an exception, this sort of reporting

set the norm for American coverage of Iraq from the beginning.[10]

There are a host of other facts for us. Stories which did mention civilian death

referred almost always to Iraqi-Iraqi violence instead of American-Iraqi violence. Death

count boxes in the papers continued to document American deaths but never included

civilians. Torture of the individual body as an ethical issue was debated more hotly than

the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of civilians.[11] Death as a consequence of

American action was for all intents and purposes ignored entirely. The only exceptions

are media hot-topic items like the Haditha Massacre or prisoners dying in Guantanamo.

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[9] Certain accounts are now coming to light. BBC and the *Washington Post* ran a story on January 16, 2014 that American Marines had gone around Fallujah in 2004 dousing bodies in gasoline, throwing them in heaps, pissing and burning on them, but even these took almost one full decade to reach the media.

[10] Technically, before the beginning, as we must consider the lack of American coverage regarding the c. 1,000,000 individuals killed by U.S.-led sanctions in the interwar period and those killed in the first American-Iraq war, numbering as high as 200,000. Although dehumanization did occur here, the focus of this study will remain on the Second US-Iraq War and will seldom engage sanctions or the Gulf War.

[11] Regarding abuses of the Geneva Conventions and the infringements against the rights to life and security, Tirman found "there was far more coverage of a few detainees at Guantanamo than of the entire civilian population of Iraq." See John Tirman, *The Death of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, MA, 2011)

More prisoners dying in Bagram and a more severe massacre in Fallujah, meanwhile, received no attention.

The fact that such omission occurred industry-wide is universally accepted in American media groups and among those who study them. It is similarly accepted by a large number of American mass media journalists, many of whom expressed disgust with their superiors who refused to run stories, or with networks and printers that would not accept them from editors. It was not monolithic. There was dissent, and in some cases there was independent publishing that sought to expose the reality of war. But the norm remained, and Americans were left in ignorance.

Even with all of this evidence, and with the fact being common knowledge in the industry, there remains to be completed a quantitative study examining coverage of the war as it relates to civilian death as opposed to American death. That comparison is what this thesis is grounded in, rather than a comparison of coverage of civilian death in Vietnam, Korea, or the first Gulf War. When we discuss silence in this thesis, that silence is compared to the noise of American deaths, not the somewhat comparable silences of civilian death in America's previous wars.

II: CAN WE KNOW THE COSTS OF WAR?

The public rhetoric used post-9/11 was moralistic, emotionally charged, and dualistic. It set the stage for U.S. aggression unimpeded by concerns of self-conduct. The language that writers used largely ignored international criticism, and, unlike the media of the 1990s, writers were perfectly fine with defending unilateral U.S. action in the face of

widespread international opposition.[12] "Mythical" is an adjective used widely by media

scholars looking back on these years, with absolutes in good and evil both.[13] The surficial

delegitimization of the "enemy" (itself defined in poor substance) was everywhere, as

was the purposeful ignoring of history (particularly Iraqi) and the encouragement of blind

patriotism in the name of American defense and identity. It is enough for our own selves

to remember this time, and how worried we were about anthrax, second waves of attacks,

a next-year attack, and airport security. It was easy, in the midst of these concerns, to

dismiss civilian casualties on the other side of the world. So then, as these worries died

down and support for Bush and his wars also faded, why were these questions not raised?

As I am writing this, there is still virtually no acknowledgement of just how many

civilians have died. Different sources arrived at the 100,000 dead mark as soon as 2004

and as late as 2007. Current estimates range from just over 100,000 to nearly 2,000,000.

Variables include such large factors as what you count as a civilian death-- does

starvation caused by internal conflict displacement count as a war casualty, for example,

or does it need to be a U.S. soldier actually shooting a civilian? Should we rely on

hospital counts, or can we all agree that too many deaths are undocumented? How can we

methodologically survey for these results, and will they ever be reliable when such high

tensions, censorship, and emotions are involved on all sides, Iraqi and American alike?

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[12] ed. Anandam P. Kavoori and Todd Farley, *Media, Terrorism and Theory: A Reader* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: New York, 2006) pg 3

[13] ed. Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2003) ; ed. Anandam P. Kavoori and Todd Farley, *Media, Terrorism and Theory: A Reader* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: New York, 2006) ; John Tirman, *The Death of Others: The Fate of Civilians in American's Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, England, 2011) ; Joanne Esch, "Legitimizing the War on Terror: Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric" in *Political Psychology*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, 357-391 (International Society of Political Psychology: June 2010) (for myth of American Exceptionalism) ; Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (Fordham University Press, 2009) for "myth of madness", "myth of nuclear weapons", myth of atrocities and myth of morality; "The force of freedom" needs to be deployed against "outposts of tyranny"; Terrorism as a delegitimizing, slanderous word that apoliticizes political realities and oversimplifies complex situations; for these theories see also Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, *At War With Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror* (Lexington Books: New York City, 2008)

The resulting confusion sustains itself. Wikipedia currently holds estimates between 20,000-50,000 from 2001 to the end of 2002 for deaths in Operation Enduring Freedom. The Congressional Research Service *only* reports on Afghani civilian deaths after the year 2007, when U.N. inspectors first appeared. The first Google search result with the terms "Death Count Afghanistan" on October 4th, 2012, that even *mentioned* civilian deaths was the 31st result. If searching through every result, then, the reader would need to browse 31 websites with these terms just to arrive at a single civilian death toll estimate. It is unsurprising these numbers escape most Americans. This was and is the reality for a conflict that transpired immediately after 9/11. But it was a trend that would only grow more severe in Iraq.

In the mid-2000s, the *Lancet* report revealed a much higher Iraqi civilian bodycount than the Pentagon's official estimate, breaking the 500,000 mark. They said that between March 2003 and June 2006 there had been roughly 601,027 "excess violent deaths".[14] In October of 2006 *NPR* announced that 650,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed. In 2009, *Just Foreign Policy* was reporting that almost 1.5 million civilians had died.[15] Today, in October of 2013, higher-end estimates cling to the 2,000,000 mark. And yet the WikiLeaks-released Iraq War Logs estimate only 66,081 civilian deaths between January 2004 and December 2009, while the Iraq Body Count project estimates no more

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[14] This figure later updated to 650,000 and then to 700,000, with at least 150,000 being violent combat deaths and at least 400,000 deaths caused by American occupation with all other possible variables isolated (ie, if a family dies of a waterborne illness after Americans bombed the water treatment plant and prevented clean bottled water from entering the city, that death would be attributed to the American invasion, as that family would not have met death under any other forseeable circumstances)

[15] Just Foreign Policy's methods are not the most reliable (they rely on automated calculating based on violent death rates, but they use as a base some of the most violent months of the entire war rather than using an updated average accounting for actual incidents of death), but there are more reliable estimates as high as 1.3 million, which falls just short of JFP's 1.5 million mark.

than 115,000 civilian deaths as a result of combat between March 2003-January 2012.[16]

The government of Iraq's official count is closer to 350,000, which is not really close to

any of our own counts, either on the low or the high end. What can we gather from this?

That anywhere between 68,000 and 2,000,000 civilians have died?

Let's paint a different, more coherent picture, using one of the higher-end estimates, for

the purposes of our study– as it is not our aim to deduce how many have died, but to ask

why death was outside of our purview and what the consequences of that omission were.

Otterman and Hill have concluded, in their recent book *Erasing Iraq*, the following

statistics: As of 2010, 1.2 million Iraqis have been killed, more than 2.2 million are IDPs,

roughly 2.7 million are refugees abroad, one in five Iraqis are either displaced or

refugees, and there are five million orphans nationwide. Nearly 3,000 doctors, scientists,

and professors have been executed, in addition to 341 media professionals.

Unemployment sporadically climbs to 70%. Roughly one million died from US sanctions

in the interwar period, 500,000 of whom were children under the age of five, a fact which

led to the emergence of the "Iraq genocide" discourse, a discussion widely unheard of

among the American public.[17] Some 130,000 Iraqis have been detained in blacksite-like

prison centers similar to Abu Ghraib. Less than 1% of these prisoners have been accused

of any crime, much less convicted.[18] 62% of Iraqis regard the journalist who threw a shoe

at President Bush as a national hero.[19] One out of every eleven women aged 15-80 in Iraq

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[16] The *Iraq War Logs* count is generally discredited as a wild lowball without any real basis. The *Iraq Body Count* relies only on hospital documentation and does not account for the majority of deaths that occur entirely outside of hospitals and are never processed in hospital records.
[17] Michael Otterman and Richard Hill, *Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage* (Pluto Press: New York City, 2010)
[18] John Tirman, *The Death of Others: The Fate of Civilians in American's Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, England, 2011) 230
[19] Michael Otterman and Richard Hill, *Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage* (Pluto Press: New York City, 2010) 210

is a war widow. Since 2003, the percentage of Iraqis living in slums has increased from 17% to 50%.[20]

These are numbers that mean nothing to those who do not see or hear them. In the course of a sanitized war, framed as good against evil in a clear, coherent, dualistic world, these statistics do not make sense. We learn, then, that in constructing an unrealistic frame, we are ignoring that which is real: The fact that people are dying. It is not within our capacity to determine exactly how many, as should be obvious given the above statistics. What is within our capacity is to think, and to actively fight against a passive psychological dehumanization that comes in the forms of ignorance and apathy. Iraq and Afghanistan have been sanitized so thoroughly that, although we nominally recognize that war is occurring, we do not actually know what war even is– we do not even think of the simple fact that people are dying.

The first portion of this thesis will examine how this absence of thought came to be– that is, through media omission. The second half seeks to understand the psychological outcomes of that omission on the American public, and the real consequences of those outcomes in terms of tangible events and non-events.

III: ROADMAP AND PLACEMENT

Returning to the layout of this thesis, there will be two general portions of this writing. The first will ask and seek to answer the question *Why did our media did not report these numbers?* while the second will ask *What were the consequences of their silence?* This

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[20] The MIT Center for International Studies, *Iraq: The Human Costs;* Stable URL: <http://web.mit.edu/humancostiraq/> (Accessed 13 February 2014)

thesis will find that the overarching consequence of silence, dehumanization, was also an incentive for silence. This will be referred to as "the cycle of dehumanization through omission". Dehumanization through omission is a key concept introduced in this thesis and will be explored in great detail in the second section.

There are lengthy lists of causes and consequences both, so at the beginning of each of the two sections there will be a list-format overview of the points presented therein.

In exploring the causes of silence, it will sound at times like a great number of excuses are being made. It is not so simple. Nor is our answer as simple as the economic argument of media self-interest and an elite few who cared more for profits than for real investigative journalism. Such claims are unfortunately true and worked as impediments to civilian death coverage, but they cannot suffice to explain away the failure of an entire industry. A huge variety of factors encouraged media professionals on all levels to remain silent, or otherwise prevented any one individual from overcoming colleague or superior opposition. Some of these obstacles were real, while others were only perceived or made up entirely and were likely to have been a product of moral-self psychology, which will be explained at the end of section one and in section two. This thesis does not exist to accuse; it exists to understand, but in revealing actual events blame, inferred or otherwise, will be inevitable. This will occur only at the lowest level possible in order to intimately understand the real causes of silence, with the most sincere hopes that they can be addressed and overcome, so that civilian death is never again outside of our worldview in this war or in wars to come.

To do this, I will examine actions and thought patterns among professionals who worked in American mass media companies. Tangentally, the paper must address in brief the role of the public, government, and individual soldiers. This first portion will ask A) What specific barriers newsmakers and media moguls faced in reporting civilian deaths and B) What specific barriers actual journalists experienced in reporting civilian death. I find that the overwhelming barriers were of economic, political, cultural, and/or self-serving natures, but that also the day-to-day patterns of going about one's own business influenced the decision to keep numbers hidden. It is also important to mention that silence was in some cases intentional and coordinated, or at least enforced from top-down, but at the same time, in a good many cases, silence came about as a matter of no man's or woman's choice and without direct orders to refrain from covering death. In other words, silence sometimes existed as a natural product of business, simply because the choice was never made to end the silence. In some cases it was a military officer that prevented coverage. In some cases it was a newscaster. In some cases it was an editor. In some cases it was the individual reporter. In some cases it was the Pentagon. Often it was a media executive. In other cases coverage had an opportunity to exist and to gain tacit consent through all of these potential barriers, but, for a reason this thesis struggles to understand, it did not.

Standing out from the noted failure to discuss Iraq before the invasion were those journalists who wrote passionately about the need for a public discussion on war before war became a reality. Their efforts faded after war was initiated.

This thesis finds that media organizations consciously and overwhelmingly catered toward their audience based on their perceptions of an audience's cultural and

political attitudes. This find is reinforcing of Entman's salience and schema psychology theory (*Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy[21]*) and also of the elite-market argument whereby media executives frame reports based on popular consumption patterns rather than journalistic objectivity. The idea that they were *supposed* to cater to an audience in this way seems to be the foremost excuse offered by media executives when directly asked to answer for their avoidance of civilian death ("Americans do not want to know"). They understood their job duties to be in garnering profits rather than in actually reporting the news, and in this way they justified silence as in fulfillment of their professional duties.

This behavior does not seem to account for the agency that Entman implies media professionals have the potential to exercise, nor does this behavior account for the extensive polling data demonstrating majority American interest in civilian death. Media executives, much more so in the context of civilian death, saw it as their responsibility to respond to what they mistakenly perceived as public thought in a reinforcing way rather than to engage or expand it, even when a majority of Americans expressed explicit interest in civilian death through a very public AP/Ipsos poll. Thus, I find them to have failed in using salience and schema psychology to open up a discussion about death even when they seem to have some understanding of Entman's ideas and were certainly able to access reliable evidence suggesting that civilian death would be a relevant and salient news topic. Furthermore, they failed to respond to a popular market demand that would presumably have welcomed news regarding civilian death, most probably due to stakeholder and advertiser caution.

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[21] University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2003

Sigal's work (*Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking)*[22], which revealed the overabundant reliance of newsmakers on government sourcing and government verification in normal operations, is echoed in this paper when it argues that marketplace, day-to-day business and socio-cultural demands together strongly encouraged media professionals to remain silent on the matter of civilian death. The growing significance of these factors cannot be understated. Government sources were deferred to routinely, were reliable in their being there, and were easy to access and verify as opposed to other sources. Journalists with no time to spare fell into the system of repeating what government and military sources told them more often than not.

The embedding program has been written on extensively by a sizeable number of scholars and journalists. It was certainly influential in hiding civilian death by strengthening the abovementioned barriers and by introducing new ones, among them an immediate social pressure to "be part of the team" and the physical danger associated with combat. A majority of the causes of silence are affected in some way by the embed program, so this will be discussed in detail.

While these works frame the first part of the thesis, truly the majority of it comes from testimonials and first-hand accounts. I looked at the accounts of reporters, editors, producers, executives, soldiers, officials, and war psychologists to understand what is and is not possible to argue in this thesis.

The latter portion of the thesis will transition into social psychology and will examine the consequences of silence. The investigative question here will be how media reactions

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[22] D.C. Heath and Co.: Lexington, MA, 1973. Recent work does suggest that media reliability on government has actually increased since this time. See, for example, Steven Livingston's *When the Press Fails* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2007)

(silence) to the above obstacles (barriers in reporting) amounted to and sustained a cycle of dehumanization which encouraged a non-investigative public and media and allowed for civilian death to remain largely outside of the American conscious. That this omission results in a passive form of dehumanization is the core argument of the second half of this thesis. Consequences of media dehumanization for the American public include ignorance and apathy. Because dehumanization results from omission, and because dehumanization is nothing but the manifestation and consequence of omission, the two cannot, and in any case should not, be separated.

Tirman's "absence of concern" is a passive process whereby civilian death exists outside the worldview of America's citizens and journalists both, and in that regard it is nearly identical to the more active, conscious dehumanization this thesis will accuse the media of being guilty of.[23] In this thesis I will discuss the absence of inquiry, which is the rational result of Tirman's absence of concern, and from there I will introduce dehumanization through omission as a crime to be levied against those whose responsibility it is to make visible that which lies outside the knowledge of the American people, but about which many or most Americans have a strong interest in knowing. Although dehumanization through omission requires no reporting, it is still an act, as this thesis will show. It was and is an act of hiding facts, skewing reports, and avoiding situations where numbers might escape. Because of these things, it constitutes something far more complex than an absence of inquiry. These actions were undertaken by the American government, military, and media all alike. Dehumanization through omission is still out of sight, out of mind. It is still the absence of concern and inquiry both, but it is

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[23] John Tirman, *The Death of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, MA, 2011)

the absence of those things on the part of those whose professional duty it is to inquire and to concern. In this way it is both an action and a consequence of inaction.

The idea of dehumanization through media omission, in simple terms, is this: If something is not mentioned, it has not happened or does not exist. Something that has not happened or does not exist cannot possibly be human, or merit concern even if the subject actually is non-human. If a man dies but it is not reported, then to the audience, no death occurred and there was no man. If death is not mentioned, no one has died. If there is little or no inquiry, there is little or no concern, and if there is little or no concern, there is little or no inquiry. Inquiry and concern cannot exist for that which does not exist; Inquiry and concern cannot exist where no death is reported, because no people have died, nor can it exist for death as a subject when death as a subject does not exist. Omission, in all of these regards, is self-perpetuating and constantly self-reinforcing. Dehumanization through omission is not the stripping away of humanity in the traditional sense, through overt propaganda and the like. Dehumanization through omission is the initial denial of humanity and subject so that people and death do not exist in the first place. Unlike normal dehumanization, which requires something tangible to influence an opinion, dehumanization through omission exists without anything at all. It can be either an act of omission or the complete absence of action.

The effect of traditional dehumanization is the ability to kill without caring, or to be complacent in killing. The effect of dehumanization through media omission is precisely the same, but because it pertains to the home front and not the war front, complacency is the visible result. Complacency is dually and equally a result of the ignorance which arises when media does not report on death. Ignorance allows for

complacency, and dehumanization on the part of media creates public ignorance. Complacency reinforces industry-inside opinions that Americans do not want to know or do not care about death, but as this thesis will make clear, it is the media that initiate this cycle and the media who have the agency to break it.

Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage (Hil, Wilson, and Otterman)[24] is another text that sets the theoretical precedent for the media-dehumanization correlation. Hil et al look at how death was "erased" or kept from public knowledge in both Iraq wars and the interwar sanctions period, with a focus on the disparity between the real numbers of death and displacement and what Americans believe. This thesis picks up their work and adds to it an examination of how death was erased in the mainstream media specifically, which, I contend, is where it ought to be displayed if we are to consider the media as performing the functions of a watchdog.

That the watchdog failed in reporting war accurately is an age-old critique, and an ever-accurate one at that. Social psychologists and media scholars both have lamented the sanitization of war in popular news media. The Second Iraq War's coverage differed noticeably, but what is remarkable for the purposes of this thesis is that civilian death, in the process of sanitization, became a non-subject. Sean Aday, Steve Livingston, and Maeve Hebert, in *Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War*[25] find "a war devoid of blood, dissent, and diplomacy, focusing instead on a sanitized version of combat."

The war was also devoid of civilians and devoid of numbers. Americans were never shown what happened to the people of Iraq except in delusionary ways. It is

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24 Pluto Press: New York City, 2010
25 The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 2005 10: 3

through this sanitization and delusion, present in all American wars at the very least, that dehumanization through omission occurred. It is because, in this war, death itself became hidden.

To delve deeper into dehumanization, I will look at a series of medical and psychological tests and the writings of psychology professionals interested in war, as well as some testimonials from veterans. Because these tend to be complex and scientific in the hard sense, it would be impractical to introduce them here at the outset. Some of the more important works cited for these examinations include Choi and Bowles 2007, Waytz and Epley 2012, Fussell, Shay, Broyles, Jr., and Anthony Feinstein, a professional war-journalist psychiatrist.

Because this thesis bridges together very distinctive schools (social psychology, media studies, and war) its sources must be equally diverse. What will remain true throughout the entire thesis, across all of these practices, is that these arguments will not challenge the prevailing scholarship. Instead, they find recent scholarship more than sufficient for, and validating of, the core arguments presented here. The role of this thesis will be to bridge these different practices together in order to introduce a new theory of shared responsibility and media dehumanization in wartime. I find that the paper is perfectly able to establish this theory by relying on existing literature and well-accepted theories in conjunction with extensive primary testimonies and testing that have already been collected and published.

In its conclusion, this paper will bring together "the cycle of dehumanization through omission" and offer suggestions based on the observations it finds. The cycle results in a lack of knowledge on the part of citizens and a lack of investigative reporting on the part of media professionals, and is encouraged and complemented by a government that is reinforcing of low-number estimates and assurances of military responsibility and media executives notably disinterested in reporting civilian death. Everything that this thesis explores contributes to the continuation of this cycle. So long as there is no considerable force natural or artificial dedicated to breaking it from either media, government, the American public, or an unpredictable force, then neither the causes nor the consequences of silence will change in future wars. In seeking answers to our questions– in trying to understand the cycle of dehumanization through omission– the ultimate aim of this paper is to enable its destruction. But no terse answer will allow us to do just that. The destruction of such an embedded cycle requires nothing less than our full understanding.

SECTION ONE:

THE CAUSES OF AMERICAN MEDIA SILENCE ON CIVILIAN DEATH IN

IRAQ

What media professionals did in the second American-Iraqi war amounts to dehumanization with all of its accompanying dangers to human life. By refusing to report Iraqi civilian deaths, they created and sustained an America unconcerned with and even unaware of the fatal consequences of her actions. I present a list of five reasons the media was so silent on the subject of Iraqi death, and why it remains so today. These are not presented in order of importance, because the importance of each varied– sometimes significantly– between the 2002-2012 period, across organizations and across individuals. Any of these could be the most relevant in a given situation, while another might not even be relevant at all. Thus, an argument and explanation sufficient in length and detail will be made for each.

Here are those reasons, explored, in this paper, in this order:

1) Embedding

2) Officialdom

3) Rise of Conservative Journalism and Post-9/11 Cultural-Political Shift

4) Economic, Market, and Career Considerations for the Organization and Individual

5) Psychological Causes of Silence

1-A: EMBEDDED JOURNALISM

The embedding program was a pioneer of government control over mass media in wartime. This control was less overt than it was in Grenada and the Gulf War. It was pitched as such: "It is very dangerous to work in Iraq as a journalist. How about you travel only in the company of American soldiers, and they will make sure that at all times you are protected? You will get wonderful, first-hand stories from the numerous American soldiers who you will be able to talk with, but unfortunately we cannot let you interview the Iraqis, because that would put you in very great danger and we cannot have journalists dying left and right. I hope you understand." It was, in fact, largely accepted by American mass media outlets for a number of reasons.

First, as is always true for war journalists, there was a legitimate threat to life in the daily operations of work. More journalists were killed in Iraq than in the conflicts immediately preceding it where American coverage was also high. Yet if you were to ask an experienced journalist, they would probably say that Bosnia had been their most dangerous experience, a location where they were in fact allowed to exercise true media freedom. Iraq, in their opinion, might merit a second or third place award for most dangerous.[26] It should be remembered that journalists exercised greater freedom in reporting Vietnam than they did in Iraq, and while three million civilians died in Vietnam

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[26] Anthony Feinstein, Journalists Under Fire: The Psychological Hazards of Covering War (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2006)

largely in bombing campaigns, as few as 350,000 died in Iraq. While Vietnam was

clearly a more dangerous place to be a unilateral reporter, more unilaterals existed there

than in 2003-2012 Iraq.

Furthermore, the fatality rate between embeds and independent journalists

remained more or less equal within a ten percent relative margin throughout the course of

the war.[27] This proves wrong the argument that "going at it alone" is more dangerous than

being embedded. All of those facts aside, war journalists tend to have a noted disregard

for their own safety, another reason why this excuse does not check-out quite well. The

concern for physical safety is remarkably lower among war journalists than individuals in

less dangerous professions.[28]

Yet the simple fact is that life-threatening means life-threatening, regardless of the

statistics, and this must certainly have been in the minds of some of the men and women

reporting on the ground. If only interviewing American soldiers and not Iraqis meant a

greater level of physical safety, wasn't that a price worth paying? Most journalists, had

they been given the choice, would have answered no. Even so, there was a sizeable party

answering "yes" actually eager to become embedded whether or not it was required.

Second, even in those instances where non-embedded reporters were tolerated, financial

considerations heavily incentivized media outlets to embed journalists with U.S. military

forces. To fund an independent journalist meant paying for rides, hotels, supply chains,

and– most expensive of all– bodyguards, of whom there needed to be at least six for the

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[27] ibid
[28] ibid

average journalist.[29] To defeat these financial barriers, an employer had to be especially dedicated to having non-biased, independent reporters inside of Iraq. There ended up being few such interested employers. Thus, there were few independent reporters, and their stories, though some were noteworthy and due of great praise, were overshadowed by the vastly outnumbering majority of stories coming in from journalists embedded with American troops.

Third, American media outlets had become accustomed to extreme wartime censorship in the post-Vietnam era. Media professionals were not even permitted to cover the U.S. war in Grenada. They were entirely forbidden from entering the country, and so denied live footage. Then, in the Gulf War, journalists were generally permitted to cover scenes only after clean-up. The usual routine was that the military would come in, bomb a place, remove the bodies, clean the blood, remove limbs and such, and then let journalists in. They essentially sanitized the story for the media (and quite literally sanitized the scene), not trusting the professionals to sanitize the coverage themselves. The feeling among media organizations working in Iraq was that they were very lucky to have first-hand access to the war at all, even if that meant that they had to function more as a government public relations team than a news team. It was some of the best coverage access they could have asked for from a government still jaded by the media freedom of Vietnam.

The fourth reason can best be called timing. Patriotic fervor was highest immediately following September 2001, and that fervor extended into the early Iraq years. Would not

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[29] ibid

embedding give patriotic Americans the news that they wanted to hear, and leave out only that which would be received with hostility?

And yet independent reporting inside of Iraq became more dangerous as the years progressed. So, as the American public's interest in the Iraqi side of the story increased, the safety of unilateral journalists decreased, and with it decreased their ability to deliver reports with an Iraqi viewpoint. It was this unfortunate twist of fate that played an important role in the overwhelming silence and complicity of the media.

So, the incentives for media organizations to accept the government's embedding program were very significant. The futility of resistance was enhanced by all of the reasons outlined in this paper as to why journalists did not report, or why editors did not publish, information on civilian death. Why fight the embed program if your editors are not going to publish that sort of data regardless? Why fight it as a boss if other media companies will receive greater government incentives at your own company's cost? Why, as a citizen, make an inquiry into all of this, when for all of your skepticism, in the end you still really do trust your news companies to report the facts you need? Why, when the cycle comes back around, bother trying to fight this entire system, when your report will not even be published if it is deemed too inquisitive? You may as well openly sympathize with the war effort, hide information that could be used to damage that effort, and, for it, gain resources that dissidents and freelancers would immediately be denied, as well as more viewers and readers.

Such was the conscious thought of American newspeople and the decision of the American mass media corporations, and of the senior individuals inside those corporations.

The rest of this section will discuss this mentality and its consequences below, in a list of the effects of embedded journalism, which can only truly be understood as a continuous cycle. The effects of this collective decision led to some of the most influential reasons as to why civilian death was not reported.

First, and most obviously, journalists were only exposed to what the government or its army officers wanted media workers to see. Government offices dictated which journalists would be embedded with which military units, essentially crafting the story that would be told by strategically placing media professionals. If there was to be a company of marines routinely raiding towns at midnight, officials would refrain from allowing any journalist in that unit. Instead, they might place the journalist inside of a guarded compound whose soldiers went on routine missions around the area and encountered only sporadic gunfire from active enemy combatants, a much easier enemy to hate than a villager whose home is put to the torch in the early pre-dawn hours by American marines without reporters. Thus, Americans received stories from the one source, and not from the other. Their stories were dually sourced from and verified by U.S. government sources and U.S. soldiers on the ground, and neither of these parties had any interest in mentioning civilian casualties except to assure journalists that they were being sufficiently minimized.

Second, it was the practical and personal decision of embedded journalists to withhold potentially damaging or incriminating information about the men with whom they worked on a daily basis. This is not just because these men worked together, or lived together in close quarters as brothers might. It is, more intimately, because their lives were put on the line together. It was not uncommon for soldiers in the embed company to save the life of their embedded journalist from active enemy fire.[30] Put yourself in the journalist's shoes. How can you write something bad about this man, something that his mother and father would read, days after that man saved your life? It is a more difficult choice than you might think. The majority of embedded journalists chose not to be excessively harsh, and in that decision a civilian body count was completely lost.

Third, there was managerial and editorial direction to avoid the reporting of such facts,[31] coupled with the beliefs, on the part of individual journalists, that it was the moral responsibility of the editors and managers to include such information as a body count. Many journalists were commanded not to report this information, and they accepted that command not only because it came from their superiors but because they believed it was their editors' professional responsibility to convey such things to the American people. They presumed their companies would understand this, because as embedded reporters they had less access to reliable numbers than editors. The editors, in turn, were directed not to publish such material, and had strong professional (and sometimes even personal) incentives for not doing so (retaining government sources, not losing market audiences, not jeopardizing embed safety, etc.). In sum, then, the entire professional system, as it

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[30] Michael Otterman and Richard Hill, *Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage* (Pluto Press: New York City, 2010) 110
[31] See ed. Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2003) for more on embedded journalism.

existed at the time, was structured in a way as to deter the reporting of civilian casualties. Writers were in a position where bosses would not publish, their sources would not answer, and their readers would be outraged, were they to publish stories of civilian deaths– at least, this was the belief among journalists and, more importantly and in greater affirmation, their superiors. When the government told the media not to report, and even the journalists did not supply figures themselves, was it really the place of an editor to supply such controversial data in such a pro-war public atmosphere? Editors, on their part, thought not.[32]

Fourth, and related to the second, is a sympathy among embeds that developed for the soldiers of their company. Without ever intending to jeopardize their professionalism, journalists inadvertently humanized the soldiers they lived (and sometimes killed or died) with, preventing them from reporting damaging or incriminating reports (again the same as the effects of the second reason listed here). The psychological and emotional connections developed in wartime are deep, and they become ever-deeper when you begin to understand a soldier as a real, three-dimensional man. Journalists, even in being human, could not fight off this psychological and emotional development. It bears worth repeating: Embeds faced enemy fire, and their lives were often saved, by the soldiers whom they had been assigned to report on. Sympathetic connections encouraged journalists to ignore the system described above in full, and encouraged them likewise to refrain from pressuring their managers or editors, or to condemn them when they made their own choices not to supply such information as civilian death counts.

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[32] For journalistic interview accounts in testament to this, refer to Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq* (Globe Pequot, 2004); Howard Tumber and Jerry Palmer, *Media At War: The Iraq Crisis* (Sage: London, 2004); These two texts provide early-war interviews with embeds and analyses of those interviews

Had journalists made the choice to pursue leads regarding death, they would have wound up confronting military officials who they relied upon as sources. Their stories, often, would have required access to restricted areas for verification. And they as individuals could have been unembedded by the Pentagon or DoD. This did occur in at least one instance when an embed inquired too deeply on a matter of torture that did not even indicate senior level guilt.[33] Death, certainly, would have provoked a harsher response. There were real and immediate career-ending repercussions for a journalist intent on broadcasting information about civilian death.

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[33] ed. Mike Hoyt, John Palattella, and the staff of *Columbia Journalism Review, Reporting Iraq: An Oral History of the War by the Journalists Who Covered It* (Melville House Publishing: Hoboken, NJ, 2007)

SECTION 1-B: OFFICIALDOM

The embedding program is not entirely to blame, of course. Plenty of individuals are involved in newsmaking outside of the front lines of war. What about them? What about the Washingtonian reporters, the editors back at headquarters, and chiefs of production and even the assignment desk workers? What prohibited this vast nationwide system from revealing civilian death statistics? The answers I give in this section and the sections after it will apply to the entire American news industry, with few exceptions, and as such includes everyone from embeds to managers to desk workers in the States.

In a word, the problem was, and remains, above all else: Officialdom.

Livingston and Bennett make note of four predominating considerations which determine what is reported and what is not:[34]

    1) Personal and professional news judgment.

    2) Organizational news-gathering routines that establish the working relations between reporters and their sources.

    3) Economic constraints on news production.

    4) Information and communication technologies that define the limits of time and space in news gathering.

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[34] Steven Livingston and W. Lance Bennett, *Gatekeeping, Indexing, and Live-Event News: Is Technology Altering the Construction of News?* in *Political Communication* (20:363–380, 2003)

"Officialdom", as we will use it in the context of reporting civilian death in Iraq, can be understood as an information-constraining obstruction that is effectively a combination of numbers 1, 2, and 3 in the above list. Numbers one and four sometimes worked *against* the hiding of civilian deaths, with reporters being either morally ambivalent or morally opposed to hiding the numbers and technology being more than sufficient to report such data, but number one also includes a reporter's de facto trust of American sources and distrust of non-American sources, making the reporting of death difficult provided inhibiting circumstances. The combination of this negative side of 1, and of 2 and 3 (collectively hereafter "Officialdom") was so strong, however, that it not only negated number 4 and the potential for 1 to work in favor of reporting, but overwhelmed them entirely. Where one particular journalist was very deeply morally and psychologically disturbed by such silence, the equation played out differently, but such cases are few and far between and are generally outside the scope of this thesis. In some cases they ended only with the journalist leaving his or her career. Sometimes sympathetic individuals wrote books about their experiences in the hopes of chronicling the sort of destruction that their organization refused to recognize as real.[35]

Officialdom, to be precise, is the addictive reliance of journalists and mass media companies on government sources, a reliance that was heightened remarkably in the course of a war where journalists were even more sympathetic to government sources than usual. Even outside of wartime, a majority of published and aired news stories rely

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[35] Anthony Shadid, Michael Garnter, Jurgen Todenhofer, and Dahr Jamail, among many other notable journalists, chronicled their experiences and sometimes went out of their way to conduct their own investigations. Others produced documentaries like *Dirty Wars* (Afghanistan) or *Taxi to the Dark Side* (Iraq).

either directly on government sources (press releases, press conferences, official interviews, etc.) or on government verification (that is, if the government denies a fact, the fact will not be published, leaving the government as the ultimate censor).[36]

A quick run-down of the numbers looks like this: Only 16.5% of newspaper stories rely heavily on non-US government information.[37] In the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, routine-channel sourced information outnumbered informal-channel information by nearly 3:1 even outside of war. In war this trend worsens to the point where routine-channel sources, in this case usually the Pentagon or Department of Defense, effectively control the content and release of news, because no other source has such overwhelming and monolithic influence. Fully one third of stories, even in times of peace, rely only on those sources and do not even consider any other source.[38] 46% of front-page stories in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* came from a U.S. government official.

There are a host of reasons why news companies are cooperative in this relationship, and we will cover them all briefly. Yet one thing, above all else, drives news companies toward officialdom: "The need for speed."[39]

The need for speed entails simply that: It is the need to get the story out first, before, or at the very least coinciding with, competing news agencies. The quickest way to do this,

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[36] Steven Livingston and W. Lance Bennett, *Gatekeeping, Indexing, and Live-Event News: Is Technology Altering the Construction of News?;* Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking* (D.C. Heath and Co.: Lexington, MA, 1973)

[37] Sigal, p 126 (Sigal's work is from several decades back, but again, recent scholarship suggest the reliance on government sources has grown markedly, rather than staying the same or decreasing; See Livingston and Bennett in works cited.

[38] ibid

[39] *The Military-Media Relationship 2005: How the Armed Forced, Journalists and the Public View Coverage of Military Conflict*, a McCormick Tribune Conference Series Report (McCormick Tribune Foundation: Chicago, 2005)

more often than not, is to essentially pass along a government briefing, press conference or press release in the form of a slightly re-worded news story. Fact-checking takes time. Explaining competing data takes time. Complex issues take time to explain. Looking at outside sources takes time. Who can afford the time for those tasks, when competing news agencies will be publishing the raw story, straight from a government office, almost as soon as they receive it themselves? Only a business that does not mind not being first. Time over quality, as a rule, dominated coverage of Iraq and dominates American mass media behavior in general.[40]

The need to get the story out first is a hugely important reason why journalists themselves say they did not publish civilian death data. They conveyed whatever message they received from the government to the public, simply because if they did not, some other company would first, and thus steal their share of the market.

Of course, any nationwide mass media company would have the resources to research and verify that data in preparation for such an article, so that when a press release came out, the company would be able to format it as a part of their own research and include those numbers in their article or show. Yet, for the reasons outlined in this paper, media outlets made the conscious decision not to do this.

Had they, it would have risked their relationship with a source and would therefore jeopardize their ability to print news before their competitors. Company executives were so determined to avoid that situation that they were willing to overlook hundreds of thousands of deaths.

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[40] ibid

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Speed was a complementary factor to affiliate notions of officialdom that resulted in systematic discrimination against one sort of information in favor of another. These other factors include: Hegemonic behavior on the part of mass media companies, low cultural congruence for civilian death as a subject, frames and schemas that did not account for civilian death or which dehumanized and delegitimized the dead so as to make them unworthy of concern, "push and pull" behavior, and ethnocentrism and the search for American-sourced objectivity. These concepts will be explained and argued in that order.

Hegemonic Behavior

Two predominant theories of media functions are hegemony theory and indexing theory. In hegemony theory, the media, willingly or not, acts as a channel for government propaganda due to limited satisfactory information available to them in the time they require it. In indexing, the media explores divisions between Congresspeople and acts as a vehicle in which opposing Congressional views fight with one another. Neither theory suggests that media is independent of, or in fact anything other than a product of what the government wants them to be (Hegemony) or what government is currently debating (Indexing).[41]

Although indexing is generally accepted as the more accurate of the theories, it appears that when it comes to civilian death in Iraq, American mass media organizations proved true the hegemony school of thought. They received information from government sources and passed that information more or less directly onward to the public.

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[41] Entman, *Projections of Power*

They did this because they needed news and they needed it fast, but also because they trusted American government sources a great deal more than they trusted non-American sources. The range of sources in this latter categories stretches all the way from an Iraqi civilian in the streets to the United Nations High Commissioners for Human Rights and Refugees. No end of this spectrum was viewed as comparing with the legitimacy of American government sources. This skewed sense of trust is officialdom. It was exacerbated by 9/11[42] and it is ultimately what caused American media to act in a hegemonic fashion.

Low Cultural Congruence

Cultural congruence measures the ease with which a certain news frame can cascade through the different levels of the framing and government-media-public process. If an item has high congruence, it flows freely between these groups. If an item has the lowest level of congruence, it is most likely highly classified and not even widely known inside of government, or else it exists among the people but is uninteresting for whatever reason for media and government.

Civilian death in Iraq had a low cultural congruence for the manifold reasons examined in this thesis and many beyond. This means that A) information about death was extremely unlikely to emerge from government and be passed along to media, and B) Even where media did receive such data it was extremely unlikely for them to forward that information along to the American people.

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[42] The "Rally around the flag" effect applies to media professionals much as it does to the American public, with adaptations.

If an item has high cultural congruence, it must employ a *salient frame* and access *salient schemas*. Schemas, clusters of ideas and feelings stored in human memory, predispose an individual to receive certain information in a specific way. If an American's schemas involve positive feelings for his or her armed forces, for instance, he or she would react with anger, shock, or disbelief to a story about his or her servicepeople torturing civilians to death and pissing on their bodies. An American with negative feelings toward those same forces would receive the same story with less interest, as it would not be surprising, and would react in a way that is psychologically satisfying (their worldview has been verified) but still full of disgust (the sort of disgust a person feels when a negative belief is reinforced rather than overturned).

A salient news frame keys in to active schema, that is, those schemas that are more emotional and are more frequently accessed by the brain. The more frequently accessed a schema is, the more potent the frame that keys in to that schema can be, and the quicker the mind is to access it in place of competing schemas. "Terror" and "terrorism" in this way became very powerful schema systems and a successful news frame, again in terms of profit, would employ this language. Such a frame will reinforce schematic beliefs rather than question them. Because profit, rather than investigative journalism, is the driving impetus behind American mass media behavior, profit-returning frames were of more interest than frames that might be labeled as dissenting. Salient schema, therefore, must drive the salient news frame. A salient news frame can either support an item or question it, but generally has a higher success, emotionally and in terms of profit, when supporting a strong schema rather than questioning it. When a highly salient frame accesses highly salient schema, there is a high level of cultural

congruence. Should either of those factors be absent, the level of congruence will diminish accordingly. In this way news frames are habitually self-repeating unless a powerful counterframe develops or unless the frame evolves over a prolonged course of time.

Essentially, cultural congruence theory proposes that people dislike hearing ideas or news coverage that goes against their own pre-existing schemas. Important for this thesis, Entman notes that "conveying the congruent frame yields career-enhancing attention (or avoids career-damaging inattention and criticism)..."[43], suggesting powerful personal incentives, and not just organizational or management-level incentives, to abide by the norm of culturally congruent reporting.

Civilian death, a subject that would seriously threaten the positive view Americans have of their soldiers, would not have fit at all into the schemas of American minds. Any news frame focusing on civilian death would have been considered dissenting in mainstream outlets and would enjoy presumably little successes and overwhelmingly hateful responses. They were therefore not considered as a viable option.

Push and Pull Effects

In push and pull theory, elites "push" an agenda they want and journalists "pull" in that agenda for organizational or individual purposes, seldom with any significant modifications, and subsequently feed that agenda to the American people. The theory argues that journalists follow this routine out of fear of being different, oftentimes to

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[43] Entman, *Projections of Power*, p15

advance professional interests, or because it is the first information available to them and they want to be the first ones reporting the news.[44]

Because unfamiliarity, complexity, irrelevance/carelessness, and cultural incongruency can all block frames or schemas from spreading or from finding an audience, it is usually against the interests of a journalist to go against the push-pull system.

Presidential control over framing foreign affairs coverage is highest when dealing with culturally congruent or incongruent issues, rather than culturally ambiguous issues. Dissenting foreign policy views are often revealed by journalists when the case is ambiguous, but not when it is decidedly congruent or incongruent. Journalists' motives exist in these cases to present alternative views. Elites will seldom invest in dissent or support of congruent or incongruent issues, and will only invest in ambiguous issues. War was a congruent and narrow issue in American media, the frame of which the President enjoyed near-monopolistic authority over.

As a result of these phenomenon, journalists and their organizations neither saw professional opportunity in exposing civilian death nor any risks in covering it up. The President himself was able to control the frame of war in most cases, despite low ratings, and as such his "push" was "pulled" in generally without question, given that raising supposed dissent against that push would have been a high-risk, low-reward scenario, again in terms of profit and professional advancement.

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[44] Scott L. Althaus, Anne M. Cizmar, and James G. Gimpel, *Media Supply, Audience Demand, and the Geography of News Consumption in the United States* in *Political Communication* (Online; Stable URL: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713774515) 01 July 2009

All of these lead us to believe that once schemas are established and frame has been solidly built, it is extremely difficult to change their course. Discussion, even as the issue evolves in reality, is absent, thus, so is change and adaptation to the new reality in the American public mind (and in the actions of that public's Congress).

All of these incentives for officialdom were even more prominent in Iraq than they otherwise might have been because of a cultural shift that occurred in America after 9/11. The next section will examine this in detail.

Ethnocentric Objectivity

Officialdom did not only come in the positive affirmation of military approval. It came, dually, in the negative rejection of information from non-military, non-U.S. sources. This occurred on two levels most notably: One, it entailed the rejection of authoritative independent, international, and allied reports; Two, it entailed the rejection of reports coming directly from Iraqis to the reporters themselves, oftentimes when Iraqis hoped that the American reporters might listen and report the story they had approached them with.

Additionally, the barriers journalists faced in accomplishing officialdom outside of military sources was hampered from an early stage by the Ministry of Health in Iraq, which routinely refused to cooperate with American journalists even to provide them access to locations where civilians were dead or dying.[45]

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[45] Hoyt et al, *Reporting Iraq*

The first of these two points is embodied best by the universal rejection on the part of American media outlets of reliable civilian death counts coming from anyone who was not an American. The *Lancet* reports, for instance, which gained wide acceptance around the globe, were scrutinized here in the States. Immediately before the publishing of the first *Lancet Report,* Rob Stein of Human Rights Watch responded to a report on civilian data skeptically, refusing to publish the numbers because they were "skewed" and must be too high to be accurate. He had not even reviewed the report.[46] Upon further investigation he retracted his opinion and backed the report, but the fact of it still stands that even one of the world's foremost human rights whistleblowers initially failed to expose death in Iraq.

The second is best left to testimonial. I will draw on two testimonials to explore the point that civilian data was withheld by the military and that, when journalists obtained it from other sources (directly from Iraqi individuals or organizations), they chose not to use that data for questionable reasons, notably the pursuit of "officialdom" in its manifestation in the desire for American government and military sources.

The following is an excerpt of an interview given by Dexter Filkins of *The New York Times*:

> **...And whoever of the American soldiers or civilians or whoever will say "All you do is report the Americans who were killed..." but by**

**and large when you ask them [U.S. soldiers and military officials],
"Did you return fire and if you did what were the results of that?"
They won't tell you, and they'll say, "Well, we don't do body counts."
It's a leftover from Vietnam, kind of a bad memory. "We don't do
body counts, and so we're not going to tell you how many people we
killed and wounded." And that becomes a huge problem because
there'll be, say, a large incident-- insurgents, civilians, and American
soldiers-- huge battles going on, and you're trying to get some sense of
what actually happened and maybe somebody's making an
accusation, and [when you ask them about it] they'll say, "Well, we
don't do body counts."...Well, it turns out they really do do body
counts, and they always do them. The military will decide that it is in
its interests on this particular day to tell you how many insurgents
they wounded and killed, they'll have a very precise number, and
they'll say, "Well, actually, we killed seventeen and wounded forty-
two and we took ten of them prisoner." And then you'll scratch your
head and say, "Well, I thought you didn't do body counts?"[47]**

This second testimonial, from Anthony Shadid of the *Washington Post*, not only reveals

how the pursuit of officialdom led him to not publish data on civilian death and torture,

but also reveals the truth of his feelings. He himself, in an early, pre-Abu Ghraib scandal

Iraq, could not believe Americans treated Iraqis in this manner:

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[47] Hoyt et al, *Reporting Iraq* (76)

I think it was November 2003. I remember I was out in the

countryside in Ramadi, and I was working on a story about how the

American military was arresting relatives of suspected insurgents as a

way of pressuring them. And about the repercussions this was having

on villages there. It created vendettas that I don't think the American

military understood they were creating. Anyway, as far as reporting,

Iraqis were telling me just fantastic stories about abuse that I just

kind of shook my head and blew them off. But I remember one guy

was being so detailed about this stuff that I think I even wrote it down

in my notebook...made me think; maybe there is something here. Like

all of us, I didn't follow up.[48]

A supporting testimonial from James Hider of *The Times* of London shows he also

decided he could not take stories at their word. Receiving so many stories of American

abuse, he did not report on them because Baghdad "was an extremely violent place", and,

we can suppose, officialdom could not be obtained in this context to his satisfaction:

Everyone I knew from the British press had heard stories of beatings,

and fairly severe. People would show us the scars...and I don't think

we pursued them nearly as rigorously as we should have. I think it's

very difficult to prove who's beaten somebody...I mean I saw

somebody being dragged out of his car and stabbed by carjackers. It

was really difficult to pin anything down in those months [after the

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[48] ibid 66

initial invasion]...It was very difficult to find out any sort of

accountability, responsibility. If you went and spoke to a soldier, he'd

say one thing, and if you spoke to the Iraqi police, they'd say another.

And it was difficult to get any hard evidence...[49]

He goes on to explain that the images of Abu Ghraib were the only thing to break the

pattern of non-reporting, but that before during and after the story broke journalists did

not have access to the torture and detention centers, so they were unable to find the

photographic evidence they believed was necessary to run with the story.

These correspondents knew what was happening, there is no doubt about that. As

demonstrated by the above interviews, they accepted information coming from American

military officials. But because they viewed Iraqi civilian stories as less legitimate, they

made the choice not to investigate and not to submit coverage. The American military, in

their eyes, was the most legitimate source, and because this source hid the numbers of

civilian death and torture, those numbers never made their way across the ocean.

In one sentence, then, they made the choice not to pursue such stories because they could

not attain the level of American-sourced "Officialdom" demanded of their material.

It is worth further elaborating that "Officialdom" in the context of Iraq war coverage

entailed "American-sourced" rather than a still-strict "Western-sourced". It was not just

that journalists categorically turned down stories from the Iraqi people themselves; they

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[49] ibid

also categorically turned down coverage from the rest of the Western world. As many people have pointed out, and as this paper will reaffirm in the second part of its analysis, casualty data was not hidden. Much of it was openly available to the American people if they had cared to search hard enough– if they had any idea that these numbers were being hidden. Many branches of the United Nations issued civilian death estimates. Death estimates in academic and foreign affairs journals throughout the Western world were not uncommon. European newspapers were as open about civilian death as mainstream Arab mass media, more or less, and made much less of an attempt not to cover the subject than their American counterparts. *The Iraq Body Count*, an American project using conservative estimates of death and low-balling figures, was the only project generally consulted in American coverage of civilian death, and even then it was only mentioned rarely, in passing, and its numbers were mistakenly cited as high-end rather than low-end.

This section will close with a solemn note. The decision whether or not to pursue civilian death and torture as stories was, for some reporters, a very difficult choice to make. Even those who remember wanting to expose these issues ended up making the choice not to do so. We close with one such testimonial:

> **I heard stories of torture, abuse, from Iraqis I interviewed, and I didn't dismiss them as exaggerations. As with many other things, I tried to figure out ways to confirm them and was unable to until the photos came out. I didn't doubt they were true, nor was I convinced they were true...these stories seemed plausible. But one of the**

decisions you have to make as a war reporter is how much do you go

forward with a print that's not confirmable [with photography], and I

tended to err on the side of caution.[50]

Thanassis Cambanis, *The Boston Globe*

It was in the making of such difficult decisions where the numbers of the dead were lost.

Regardless of these exhaustive reasons, the end game looked like this: When it came to Iraqi civilian deaths, reporters and media companies only reported more or less what the government wanted them to report. Obviously, our government had no interest in exposing those numbers. Because they did not, our media companies did not, and now we are left with an American public that cannot even agree on a random, uneducated guess when they are asked what their ten-year war did to Iraq.

After Abu Ghraib, journalists no longer so readily discounted stories of mock executions, disappearances, and the torture of civilians. After the *Lancet* publication in 2006, they could no longer ignore civilian death estimates approaching the one million mark. By that time, and increasingly, approval ratings of Bush and his war had dropped sharply and continued to plummet. Yet even after these changes occurred, the journalists in Iraq, their colleagues in the States, and their superiors collectively managed to maintain the habit of not reporting civilian death.

The following section explores a fundamental change in the heart of American society that hopes to explain this phenomenon on a more intimate level.

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[50] ibid 67-68

SECTION 1-C: POST-9/11 CULTURAL-POLITICAL SHIFT AND THE RISE OF CONSERVATIVE JOURNALISM

One of the strongest incentives to conceal civilian death, this paper argues, was the cultural taboo against the reporting of anything deemed unpatriotic in the post-9/11 world. The fact of the matter is that death and torture were categorized as unpatriotic material in American society, material to be erased or hidden, dismissed and done away with– anything except talked about in the open day. The cultural impetus that media executives responded to was strong. Yet if anything these executives overreacted to the point where now many people are becoming disillusioned to find that their media hid these facts from them. Worried obsessively about gains, profits, and audience competition, executives generally failed to fulfill their duty as leaders of the American free press. This component of censorship was largely private and top-down; it upset many journalists who felt they were powerless to report on death and who otherwise would have been personally inclined to do so in fulfillment of their own conceptions of their professional duties.

September 11th, 2001, radicalized our country. One rarely thinks of his or her own society as being "radical", but if we were to compare American society in 2003 to American society in 1995, the differences would be obvious and striking, and anyone who gives a moment of thought to it can realize this. Our political center shifted

dramatically to the right in the wake of the September 11th attacks, so that our new center was more hawkish, stifling of dissent, and security-oriented than before.

This shift had far-flung effects on how the media covered Iraq.

First, it was as a result of this shift that a vast majority of Americans answered they were *in favor* of Pentagon censorship of media reports, and that they trusted the Pentagon *more* than they did their media outlets.[51] It mattered little to media executives that those polled did not know what the Pentagon censored. It mattered little that these executives *did know* that civilian death was among those things censored. To media moguls, all that mattered was the poll itself. They responded to these sentiments by deferring to the Pentagon, by relying on United States Department of Defense news sources almost exclusively, by adhering to military-source officialdom, and by falling in line with the embed program described in earlier sections. Although the private choice of media executives, it amounted to a form of self-censorship more powerful than the censorship imposed by government and military forces, and more damaging in the long-run to the credibility of these media institutions.

CNN's White House Correspondent Jessica Yellin sums up the base of the equation:

> **When the lead-up to the war began, the press corps was under enormous pressure from corporate executives, frankly, to make sure that this was a war that was presented in a way that was consistent**

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[51] ed. Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2003) 148-150

with the patriotic fever in the nation and the president's high approval ratings...the higher the president's approval ratings, the more pressure I had from news executives...they would turn down stories that were more critical.[52]

Civilian death was understood by these managers as something "critical" and "not in line" with high approval ratings. In essence, these executives cared very greatly about profits and audience share, and comparably little about the actual investigative quality of the news they were feeding out. On their own, without consulting the American people and certainly without their explicit direction, these executives assumed that the American people wanted a sanitized, feel-good, largely fabricated version of what was happening in Iraq.

Executives did not reach the conclusions that they did, nor did they enforce their decisions, arbitrarily or devoid of any rationale. More than anything else, when asked about their choices, senior executives point to the rapid expansion of Fox News as evidence that viewers *wanted* pro-war, military-friendly coverage. Media companies ultimately feared Fox so much that they did not even respond to real consumer demand, which would have entailed a review of civilian death in-depth. The rise of overtly conservative and hawkish news, in print and on the screen, was deeply frightening for the more established media titans. They responded by changing their news in kind and competing with Fox for their audience. In doing so, they dismissed civilian death.

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[52] Hil et al, *Erasing Iraq* (102)

In very rare instances civilian death was mentioned. In such instances, it was almost universally low-balled and explained away with a rationale of the war as a whole. After the initial invasion of Afghanistan, CNN's Director of Standards and Practices, for example, required each and every CNN report that so much as mentioned the death of a civilian to be immediately followed by 1) a general justification of the ground war, and 2) a reminder that those hiding in Afghanistan "killed close to 5,000 Americans".[53]

This is the tradition that set the immediate precedent for coverage in Iraq. Fox played a larger role in intimidating mainstream networks when it came to Iraq in 2003 than it had in Afghanistan in 2001.[54] When it came to Afghanistan, there was a general and legitimate consensus between media executives that intervention was strategically necessary. When it came to Iraq, media executives were simply afraid of speaking out against other media executives. In what amounted to bandwagon psychology, none of the media titans volunteered to question Iraq, Knight-Ridder and respectable op-eds being important exceptions to this rule. Strikingly, even in times when Congressional debate was vibrant, media debate was hard to find.

Yet individual journalists also, and frequently, took it upon themselves to fall victim to, to react to, and to reinforce this culture of "patriotic" non-investigation. In standards of Western journalism, "objectivity" means being unemotional, uncaring, not invested in the story itself. This is especially true after Vietnam, which will be discussed in a moment. As they are expected to be unemotional and uninvested, any deliberate attempt to expose civilian death counts against prevailing norms encouraging silence could be taken as weakness, moral investment or caring, which are explicitly prohibited

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[53] Patrick Martin, CNN Tells Reporters: No Propaganda, Except American (International Committee of the Fourth International, 6 November 2001) Stable URL: http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/11/cnn-n06.html
[54] See, for example, Christine Amanpour's interview on *USA Today*, Stable URL: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2003-09-14-media-mix_x.htm

in the mass media industry. Subjectivity dies, and with it dies the body count. "Objectivity"– the absence of facts, of knowing, of reporting about civilian death– is what survives.

Vietnam merits more than passing mention. The syndrome known as "Vietnam's Ghost" profoundly shaped American culture as a whole, but most profoundly it changed how American mass media outlets cover wars.

It is easy to remember an image of a naked girl running, her arms flailing and her mouth wide open in mid-scream, from a village torched by American forces in Vietnam. It is easy to remember a blindfolded man, hands tied and crying, who only knows there is a gun against his head because he can feel the barrel on his skull. In what can only be called a genocide where four million civilians were killed across three countries, such images do no justice at all to what really happened. But they were something. Are there comparable images after Vietnam?

We have to dismiss the Abu Ghraib photographs-- these were leaked not by American media outlets, but by soldiers who found the courage to speak out and published these images initially on their own. *The Washington Post*, after they acquired the images, censored them heavily and published only the most acceptable among them in its papers. It was still a tremendous breakthrough and resulted in a serious discussion on the issue of torture, but that discussion did not concern civilian death.

So we must answer that comparable photographs do not really exist in the mass media. One journalist tells us as much, exemplifying the change in media culture after Vietnam, speaking of his experience in Chechnya:

They took us into this little room and there was this bed just full of

dismembered children. There were about eight or nine of them under

these blankets. They were in pieces, literally in pieces. You can't shoot

it. You can't...Nobody is going to publish it.

       Jon Jones[55]

An image like this was unlikely enough to have been published in Vietnam. But after

Vietnam? Almost impossible. After 9/11? *Absolutely* impossible, and very unlikely that a

journalist would have ever been able to see such a thing in the first place with his or her

own eyes given military restrictions and placement strategies.

      Vietnam had more profound effects than this. At its core, the ghost of Vietnam

left a stereotype of an anti-war, liberal media as a pervasive American belief. When

media outlets decided what to run and what to ignore, they reacted not only to the

patriotism of the American people post-9/11, nor only to the rise of Fox News; perhaps

equally, they reacted to the stereotype of a liberal, anti-war media by running

overwhelming amounts of pro-war, generally non-investigative material in an attempt to

dispel the stereotype altogether and realign themselves with what they perceived to be the

new American center. Because media executives, editors, and journalists were so

concerned with this realignment, they ended up erring on the side of hawkish

conservatism, and in doing so legitimate questions went more than unanswered-- they

went unasked.

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[55] Hoyt et al, 11

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One last and lengthy contribution to, and result of, the cultural shift post-9/11, is the heightening of Americans' mortality salience. Mortality salience is the "closeness" of death in the individual's mind. If death is "distant", salience is low, whereas salience is highest when death appears imminent and is always in conscious thought. Terror management theory teaches that as mortality salience increases, the individual will associate closer with ingroups and like-identifiers and grow further apart from outgroups. Conformity toward the ingroup and violence toward the outgroup are the dual results of an increasing mortality salience.[56]

A common way of terror management (the effect of high mortality salience) is to strive to leave something behind after death, and the meaning in one's actions which are meant to leave this something behind is found inside of the cultural worldview of the ingroup to which the individual belongs. Thus, faced with the perceived threat or fear of death coming from an outgroup, the individual bonds closer with the ingroup and is more likely to participate in, endorse, or overlook violence, in the pursuit of a meaningful achievement or acceptance inside of the ingroup. This fact becomes more of a fact as salience increases, and as salience declines, it begins to fall apart.

Because mortality salience was high among the large majority of Americans after 9/11, dissidence, at the outset, was not naturally occurring.

This is because, as Hirschberger and Pyszczynski state, "Perceiving a threat to core beliefs often allows a lifting of moral prohibitions against killing that exist in most

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[56] Gilad Hirschberger and Tom Pyszczynski, *Killing with a Clean Conscience: Existential Angst and the Paradox of Mortality* in ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, <u>The Social Psychology of Morality</u> (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 2012)

cultures."[57] The more real the threat (ie, the higher the salience), the further the prohibition can be lifted among the masses on doing harm to others.

Morals, in general and across the board, both positive and negative, tend to be stronger in people who experience higher levels of mortality salience. Those with very low levels of mortality salience are less inclined to take noteworthy actions, again either positive or negative, on the account of their morals. Thus, those Americans who were frightened by Islam or followed in line with the war on terror were inclined to suspend their condemnations on the use of violence and killing, whereas those who were not afraid or who did not believe in the war were in fact, psychologically speaking, inclined to take no action at all, because they did not see that their lives (or morals) were being threatened. Even had they been informed, their reaction would have been sluggish compared to more hawkish groups, because they did not perceive their lives as being in danger and would not have acted as quickly compared with those who did have such perceptions. The latter reacts with a noted speed because their worldview is threatened, whereas for the other no threat exists and the issue is less personal.

Mortality salience also (although it *can* have the opposite effect) decreases group and individual tolerance for ambiguity, and thus promotes peoples' believing in dualistic and definitive worlds where barriers between cultures are impassable.[58] The resulting dualistic worldview places more complex, usually correct analyses of conflicts into the realm of absurdism or conspiracy and amplifies ingroup loyalty.

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[57] ibid 333
[58] ibid 336-338

This subsequent effect, in turn, known as moral amplification, causes people "to avoid considering ways their own group may have contributed to the perpetuation of conflict...this need to perceive the other as the epitome of evil is driven not be an objective appraisal of the facts but by the existential benefits of ingroup loyalty".[59]

On the psychological side of things, then, the social pressures to "fall in line", most especially after 9/11 (as such, in early 2003) were too overwhelming for most people to consider being labeled as a dissident for inquiring about the consequences of war.

These processes did not need to occur overtly. Via the processes of moral seduction, whereby individuals are initially unaware of the pressures in their lives which are forcing them to "slant their conclusions", such processes begin and reach a progressed stage before any real resistance develops against them.[60] Complacency and obedience are the norms; an individual "must be maximally morally engaged to reject the safety of going along and instead fight for their beliefs about right and wrong." (361) Neither American journalists nor the American people in general met this criteria in 2003 or, even, for the whole remainder of the war.

Furthermore, these processes' occurrence was facilitated by the belief of would-be "dissidents" (those who ask about civilian death) that they were alone in their moral struggle. Had these processes been less defined, it is most likely that dissidents would have formed stronger bonds and that they would have done so at an earlier stage, and that, as a result, an inquiry into civilian death may have occurred. In this way, every

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[59] ibid

[60] Linda J. Skitka, "Moral Convictions and Moral Courage: Common Denominators of Good and Evil" in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil,* Ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (American Psychology Association: Washington, D.C., 2012): 353

cultural psychology process outlined above contributed to an additional factor (a perception of non-tolerance) that discouraged those who were otherwise not subject to those processes. According to Ervin Straub, there are three prevailing barriers to individuals speaking out against such strong norms which fall under the category of such results:[61]

1) Lack of belief that one voice can matter ("Just World" research shows that observers of harm to a person are more likely to devalue that person if they believe the harm will continue regardless)

2) Difficulty of organizing together to make the message bigger

3) Diffusion of Responsibility

Together, these effects led normally inquisitive people into silence. Such people considered themselves to be of no importance, and because of this they refrained from making themselves important even though their characters would suggest that they would dissent against civilian death. The fact that they did not have any clue as to how many people died certainly contributed to this, but not as much as one might otherwise think.

Pro-cultural worldviews are enduring and seldom break as easily as wars are lost or won. The psychological processes mentioned above are surely the most dramatic influences discussed in this subsection on the absence or prevalence of inquiry and information regarding civilian death in Iraq. Groups do not just refuse to acknowledge the crimes of today. Almost universally, they (and the individuals inside of those groups) will deny

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[61] Ervin Straub, *Psychology and Morality in Genocide and Violent Conflict: Perpetrators, Passive Bystanders, and Rescuers* in ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, <u>The Social Psychology of Morality</u> (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 2012)

their crimes for scores of years, sometimes even for more than a century. Israelis who participated in the 1948 Nakba did not start speaking out against their own actions and publishing memories in any great number until the 90s and 2000s. Very few Americans know that their armies killed four million civilians in Korea in the early fifties and another four million across Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in the sixties and seventies, and these statistics are not taught in public high school history courses today in 2014; Nazi officers and statesmen continued to hold high positions in German government until the 1980s and few of them expressed regret concerning their actions. A 1989 study of Germans who had been teenagers during the war years revealed that they almost never talked about the Holocaust, that they had very vague memories of what was an extremely public genocide, and that they mostly remembered singing songs around campfires.[62] Pro-cultural worldviews use essentially made-up histories to defend themselves, and those falsehoods endure usually for several generations before being corrected. The point of this recap is that the psychological issues mentioned above are universal, long-enduring, and ingrained in human psychology. Addressing them will be a tremendous challenge, but it is a necessary undertaking if we suppose that there is any point to this thesis in the first place.

It is plain by now that the political environment post-9/11 discouraged protest. In the post-9/11 world, inquiring into death *was* a form of protest. It was unacceptable enough to question Bush or his policies– but to suggest that they were fundamentally immoral by

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[62] ibid

raising the question of civilian deaths was a step too far for anyone to take. Such inquiries were dismissed as "treason".[63]

In the midst of these economic, political, cultural and societal shifts, American mass media companies were so dreadfully afraid of being perceived as non-objective that they in fact became subjective, deliberately ignoring and refusing to publish data that might cause an angry American to point a finger at them. Civilian death was surely the most important of such data.

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[63] Sandra Silberstein, *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11* (Routledge: London, 2002) 127

SECTION 1-D: THE ECONOMIC, MARKET AND CAREER
CONSIDERATIONS OF MEDIA COMPANIES AND INDIVIDUALS

The elements discussed in previous sections conspired to make data on civilian death a non-marketable product. It was understood as such by senior management individuals.

American mass media companies are guided by management persons whose foremost goals revolve not around the integrity of a product, or the quality of news, but rather around meeting expectations of profit and exceeding shareholder expectations in terms of revenue growth. This issue is more important in the 2003-2012 Iraq War than in previous instances due to the rapid takeover of traditional management by profit-driven management.

Media companies guide their organizations using Management through Objectives (MBO). An organization will have an MBO that prioritizes its goals in order of importance. Traditionally, a mass media's MBO will place the highest emphasis on investigative journalism, quality newscasts, and breaking stories. Increasingly, these have been changing. Ten years ago, and today, media MBOs revolved almost exclusively around profits. Increasing shareholder confidence, meeting and exceeding profit margin expectations, growing the organization and funding new ventures– these are today and yesterday's top MBO goals, and competing MBO goals do not even approach the significance of these economic goals.[64]

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[64] Dennis F. Herrick, *Media Management in the Age of Giants: The Business Dynamics of Journalism* (Iowa State Press: Ames, Iowa, 2003)

In part this is because of the structural-organizational shift in media companies that emphasizes recruiting senior leadership based on profit interests, profit experience, and profit backgrounds. Increasingly, leaders are selected by boards for business qualifications rather than journalistic experiences, and in several cases individuals who hold MBAs and have extensive business experience with little or no journalism experience at all (and little interest in journalism ethics) have been selected to lead journalistic ventures and to serve on mass media company boards.[65]

The goals of the organizations, then, are changing even as the individuals leading those organizations are drawn increasingly from the world of business, rather than the world of journalism. These trends complement one another and result in media companies that seek profits as the end goal and care less and less about the content and quality of the news.

Because high-risk content (civilian death) threatened profits, it was dismissed at the senior management level. That dismissal carried down from the top and effected silence throughout entire organizations.

Stocks and business minds are not the only explanation for the qualitative degradation of investigative news. As these trends became stronger, advertising became a more central component to newsmaking. Since 1950, but more dramatically throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, advertising, marketing, and business analytic departments have been delegated authority over newsrooms. What began as a cooperative relationship has dwindled into a hierarchy where a senior market relations officer can prevent a senior editor from publishing material that the marketing individual deems potentially hurtful

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[65] ibid

for revenues. Through this hierarchal reorganization, advertisers, who work closely with marketing individuals and to whose interests marketing officials must respond, gained a greater influence over newsmaking than news editors themselves.[66] Because of this, as Herrick says, "Media companies increasingly now see their product as just a vehicle for delivering customers to advertisers."[67]

This is largely because advertising rates are set by the number of viewers an agency has on cable, and the senior executives, concerned most with marketing and business, are personally uncomfortable risking those advertising rates so much so that they refuse to cover civilian death even where senior editors would like to do so.

The end consequences of all these trends, as Herrick states:

...has been a rise in creeping tabloidization in the worst instances. For most others, there has been an increase in celebrity journalism and other forms of infotainment, and plain non-coverage of important news in both print and broadcast, that seems to draw more of a mass audience. Executives characterize this effect as giving the public what it wants, while many working journalists tend to consider it to be pandering to the public and skimping on serious news.[68]

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[66] ibid; see, specifically, *Chapter Nine: Sales, Marketing, and Market Analysis*
[67] ibid, 273
[68] ibid, 266

The news that survives the organizational process of deciding what to talk about and what not to talk about, consequently, aims "more to please viewers than to inform them"[69] and "limit[s] audience choice to variations on a few profitable formulas ["frames", in essence] developed to meet advertiser needs."[70]

[69] ibid
[70] David Croteau and William Hoynes, *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest* Second Edition *(SAGE, 2006)*

SECTION 1-E: PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF SILENCE

Notwithstanding the extensive barriers already outlined in this paper, journalists ignored civilian death because to accept widespread devastation, especially when your nation is the cause of that devastation, is a psychologically difficult thing for the human mind to cope with. It is hard for the war journalist to comprehend what he or she is seeing, and the inclination to not believe it is strong unless presented with overwhelming evidence. The same psychology that causes Americans at home to understand war as sane and sanitary and comprehensible, with rights and wrongs, is the same psychology on the war front that causes journalists, oftentimes, to dismiss civilian death or linkages between death and American activity.

There are important additions to this note, various overlapping psychological phenomenon that cause media professionals to ignore civilian death. The first and most prominent of these is the "spiral of silence" trend, whereby, according to Wikipedia's definition, "one opinion becomes dominant as those who perceive their opinion to be in the minority do not speak up because society threatens individuals with fear of isolation."[71] It is important to note that the key component here is perception rather than reality. If minorities or individuals (or even majorities) perceive their opinion to be unpopular, they are less likely to voice that opinion, thereby strengthening the prevailing norm, regardless of whether or not like-minded dissidents exist.

[71] Accessed March 1st, 2014

"Pluralistic ignorance" is another psychological obstacle that prevents media professionals from reporting, and this is most true among senior media executives who were often the ones choosing not to cover civilian death, even in cases where those decisions were not relayed to reporters and editors. Pluralistic ignorance is where the spiral of silence deludes us; it is an instance where a majority of individuals hold an opinion but, believing that opinion to be taboo, are less vocal about it than an opposing minority is about their contrasting view.[72] Pluralistic ignorance psychology offers one explanation, for example, as to why civilian death coverage remained a non-subject even when the war itself was in overwhelming disfavor in the later years (the idea being that even when a majority of people opposed the war and had an interest in civilian death, the prevailing belief remained that there was *not* an interest in the subject). Acting on this misconception, executives and individual journalists continued pandering to advertisers while not realizing that a demand for civilian death coverage actually did exist.

There is one additional psychological barrier. Once a media professional has borne testament to civilian death, it is difficult for him or her to share that with the rest of the world regardless of her or her moral and professional obligation to do so, even if they are able to accept it themselves (which is not an easy thing to begin with). This phenomenon has multiple manifestations. On the executive side, it looks like this: To avoid confrontation with powerful anti-forces, professionals and decisionmakers will try to rationally convince themselves that there is no valid reason to report death. On the reporting side, it looks like this: Many veterans do not speak about their experiences in

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[72] Introduced originally by Daniel Katz and Floyd H. Allport in the 1931 study *Student Attitudes* (Craftsman: Syracuse, N.Y.)

combat, sometimes for as long as they live. Is it any real surprise, then, that war

journalists, exposed to similar trauma, maintain silence?

It is hard for our elders to talk about Korea or World War II. It is hard for our

friends to talk about Vietnam or Iraq once they have covered up their wounds, if they

ever do. It can be equally hard for a war journalist, and even harder, for they are charged

with relaying their experiences to a great majority who have no idea as to what war is

really like. How could they possibly explain it to them? It is another world entirely, one

that makes no real sense to an audience that expects to understand everything in a simple

and rational way.

Journalists recall that it is most difficult to face down these barriers when they

know it to be a useless endeavor-- after all, no one will publish this stuff. Why bother?

They let themselves ignore it, because they have no faith that anyone would pay attention

to it regardless.[73]

Lastly, the mind of a man or woman on occasion passes by that which is of incredible

importance, not realizing it as such until later years when the repercussions of that

occasion and one's reaction to it have the benefit of retrospect and clarity. The testimony

of a Vietnam war journalist who suffers from combat trauma reveals this:

I went to cover war and the war covered me...I didn't know, it took

the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you

saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you

didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years

[73] Feinstein, 11

later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there

in your eyes. Time and information...isn't frozen, you are.

Michael Herr, *Dispatches*[74]

To summarize the above points: Individual minds throughout the media industry, even those of seasoned journalists, often fail to realize the importance of speaking out as opposed to silence. Oftentimes, it is so impossible to come to terms with a certain reality that reporting on that reality is rendered impossible, with that impossibility facilitated by the underestimation of the importance of speaking out.[75] As a result, the deepest wounds that men and women bear are usually borne in silence unless an individual has consciously committed to speaking out. Witnessing death on a massive scale easily meets the qualification of an individual's deepest wounds.

There are several less grim, but just as dangerous, psychological causes of silence in on-site war reporting. Journalists are relentlessly exposed to racism, overt dehumanization, and the threat of loss of masculinity (in the case of male reporters) if sympathy or dissidence is expressed.

Often, dehumanization is an active and overt phenomenon. Jews, in the Holocaust, were likened more to rats than people. Civilians in Vietnam were "gooks" and their homes were "hooches", and the more you shot and burned the better. Chests, in boot camp, are not where you find hearts-- instead they are the "center of mass", an impersonal term for

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[74] Knopf, 1977
[75] Feinstein, *Journalists Under Fire*

an otherwise very personal concept. Dehumanization occurs in our vocabulary and our rhetoric, and manifests itself in events that those outside of dehumanization perceive as immoral or incomprehensible. But it occurs by way of racism, by way of creating emotional distance, and by punishing noncompliance or dissidence. At its root, this process occurs in the individual human mind, grows exponentially stronger in the group, and then returns to the individual mind in a more dangerous form. The mind allows for the hand to pull the trigger.

Racism and delegitimization are rampant in the U.S. military. Soldiers regularly refer to Arabs as "sand niggers" and "towelheads" and make generalizing, delegitimizing statements such as "their culture is so fucked up, you can't even understand it. It isn't worth trying to." They animalize and objectify the Iraqi people in every conceivable way. Those who protested this behavior were publicly shamed and considered less a part of the socially acceptable like-ingroup. Such individuals complain about "not fitting in", but even after the war generally believe in such statements like "their culture is so fucked up..." and will defend them.

The entirety of this thesis argues that media organizations dehumanized Iraqi civilians through their own silence, but there is an important addendum to this accusation: Individual media professionals were themselves taught to overtly dehumanize Iraqis simply by being so intimately close with U.S. soldiers, whose collective culture is disproportionately racist, dehumanizing, and unaccepting of dissimilar outgroups.

The level of emotional intimacy between reporters and the soldiers they were stationed with was often very powerful. Commonly, soldiers saved the lives of their embedded reporters, and there are very few bonds more powerful in human relations than

bonds created in this way. At the very least, reporters and soldiers shared living quarters and lived together cooperatively in a dangerous, life-threatening scenario. Through no fault of their own, it stands to reason that journalists took on some of the emotional qualities of the soldiers with whom they were so intimate.

It is not reasonable to assume that embeds came to view Iraqi culture as "fucked up", or that they conceived of them as "sand niggers", or began to refer to hearts as "centers of mass". It is, however, very plausible that when making choices about what to write, what to submit, and what to publish, journalists' decisions were influenced at least marginally by their immersion into the culture of the U.S. Army.

Male reporters, in particular, risked losing their masculinity in the eyes of their countrymen (the soldiers) if they thought of breaking a story on civilian death. Men in the U.S. Armed Forces frequently fear this happening to them, and as a result they fall quickly in line with any behavior that improves their masculinity and avoid behavior that might endanger it in the eyes of their peers.[76] This is a pattern that encourages racism, dehumanization, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and sharply discourages dissidence, forward social thought, and compassion, generally viewed as a weakness rather than a strength.[77] Because soldiers are immersed in this culture, they cast these ideals upon those who are close to them. Journalists were subject to the same socialization that the soldiers themselves went through. They dealt with the same taboos, and they had to prove themselves, psychologically, to the men they lived with just as much as the fighters did.

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[76] R. Wayne Eisenhart, *You Can't Hack It, Little Girl*: *A Discussion of the Covert Psychological Agenda of Modern Combat Training* (Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 31;4, p.13-23; Autumn, 1975 edition)
[77] ibid

To reach the full extent of dehumanization, it is generally necessary for an individual's entire worldview to be annihilated and for that individual to experience a complete emotional breakdown and the loss of all meaning in his or her life that severs the individual completely from his or her past. This is the most extreme form of trauma that an individual can experience and usually results in suicide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. It would be absurd to say that journalists were taught to dehumanize on a level that results from such experiences and leads to such actions. But the psychological encouragement of silence, all the same, was profound, and likely influenced decisionmaking whether conscious or not.

Lastly, the extremism of some individual Iraqi freedom fighters, jihadists, and paramilitary fighters encouraged some journalists to "take a side" when otherwise they might not have done so. The very real threat to life in Iraq, unique in its level of danger as the war years progressed, exacerbated this issue. As physical danger increased, the tendency for journalists to side with U.S. soldiers out of safety and group-identification needs increased along with it. As they became closer, the abovementioned processes grew in strength, and the window for dissent shrunk.

SECTION 1-F: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite these barriers it remains that civilian death numbers, readily available from reliable sources, of obvious relevance and concern for the American people, and responding to their own demonstrated and professed interest, should have been published. This stands to reason normatively, of course, but also logically when we consider all of the points: That anti-war sentiment increased as the war progressed; that high death counts were on public high authority and were published all around the globe and well-accepted everywhere except inside the United States; that many of the barriers that had inhibited reporting eroded away as the war continued; that the widely accepted ethics of journalism demanded that individuals overcome adversity and publish data; that media audiences had explicitly expressed their desire for information on civilian death.

There remains little conceivable cause that would lead to the widespread and systematic concealing of civilian death counts in the face of these realities. All of the causes of silence collected together still fail to explain away the decade-long failure of American mass media in covering civilian death.[78]

In April of 2003, 76% of the American people approved of Bush's handling of Iraq. In November of 2004 that number was 47%. By November of 2005 less than 35% supported

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[78] two-decades-long, if we consider the Gulf War and the interwar sanctions period

Bush's handling of Iraq.[79] Opportunity abounded for journalists to deliver news that

questioned the conduct of the war, but these opportunities were not taken. Instead, as Iraq

progressed, it was put on the media backburner and moved away from the front pages.

775 journalists were embedded in Iraq immediately before the invasion.[80] By the fall of

2005 that number hardly reached 100. Across the summer and fall of 2006 less than 25

embeds, all told, worked in Iraq.[81] The war itself dwindled drastically in its importance

for news outlets, so that as the relevancy of civilian death increased, the interest in the

war overall, on the part of media outlets, actually decreased.

Even with a resurgence of media interest in 2007 and 2008, media organizations

avoided civilian death reporting, or when they did report, they referenced unreliably low

figures as if they were valid and did not mention more realistic estimates. Where civilian

death could have been an important theme in this resurgence, it was not.

However deeply we understand the causes of silence, there is no explanation

sufficient to defend them. However much we understand the obstacles that media

professionals faced, it remains true that silence is legally held as an accomplice to war

crimes. Systematic, organizational silence in the face of the widespread murder of

civilians certainly meets all criteria to be classified as such.

If we can agree that silence on the topic of civilian death is a problem, and that it

requires a solution, then we can propose the following points to work toward that solution

based on the causes of silence reviewed here in the first half of this thesis:

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[79] Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, Jason Reifler, and Alexander F. Hehmeyer, *Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq* in *International Security* (Winter 2005/06, Vol. 30, No. 3, Pages 7-46; doi:10.1162/isec.2005.30.3.7)
[80] Compare this to no more than twelve unilateral American reporters. Sig Christenson, *Truth and Trust: In Iraq War Coverage, They've Become Casualties* in *The Nieman Reports* (59.2 p6-11, Summer 2005)
[81] Lee Keath and Robert H. Reid of the Associated Press, *Embedded Journalists' Numbers Dwindle* in *The Columbian* (Vancouver, Washington: October 16th, 2006) page A2

RECOMMENDATION FOR EVERYONE WORKING IN MEDIA

Every individual working in media needs to comprehend that powerful factors conspire to limit and prohibit the reporting of civilian death, that succumbing to those factors perpetuates silence and complicity in widescale death and destruction, and that this scenario has occurred in the past and will repeat in the future unless a conscious change exists to overturn it. It is the responsibility of every single individual, more so than the responsibility of the group, to achieve that change.

MANAGEMENT LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Media companies should be led by people morally and professionally committed to a defense of media ethics and investigative journalism, rather than being led by people uncommitted to these principles who are driven by increasing profits. Leaders should have more extensive backgrounds in journalism or the humanities than they do in running for-profit business ventures. This change will need to be implemented by media company boards of directors and should be a position advocated by shareholders and similarly influential individuals.

2) Management priorities should always focus on the quality of news, with profits being a second-place consideration. This change should be reflected in company MOBs and similar internal management-level documents.

3) Getting news first should never take precedence over getting the news right when there is a reasonable chance that getting the news first will produce misinformation.

4) Greater flexibility in the topics reported on by an organization's staff, the information those reports utilize, and the approach those reports take, all needs to be granted universally to expand reporting capabilities across the board.

5) News is not a product, it is a service. The service does not exist to garner a profit or fulfill a market demand. The service exists to contribute to the body of knowledge and expand the society's discussion on as wide a range of important topics as possible. This, historically, has been the purpose of news organizations, and only recently has that purpose fallen apart. There is no reason why it should continue to do so in the future. This change in vision must be incorporated throughout the entire ranks of every media organization. (Dually recommended for Broadcasters and Publishers)

EDITORIAL AND ASSIGNMENT DESK RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Editors and assignment desk workers need to push back with real force against superiors who attempt to cover up civilian death on a wide scale. They may need to threaten these superiors with exposure.

2) Editors must never be afraid to cite reliable information from trustworthy non-American sources. (Dually recommended for Reporters)

3) Assignment desk workers must never be afraid to dedicate considerable time and resources to civilian death.

4) Editors must take real steps to ensure that civilian death is not only covered, but is covered reliably and regularly and that the complexities of death are examined (different numbers, modes of counting, etc.)

5) When editors receive stories without references to civilian death, but where death is mentioned or otherwise perfectly relevant, they should add a range of reliable estimates to the submission.

REPORTER RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Reporters need to consciously commit to exposing death in current and future conflicts. As silence is self-perpetuating in that it encourages non-thought and non-discussion, reporters must take it upon themselves to realize that their professional duties always concern the real consequences of human action.

2) Reporters need to find the courage to jeopardize exclusive access to sources when they begin to realize that relying so heavily on those sources actually jeopardizes the real and investigative quality of news.

3) Reporters must never be afraid to cite reliable information from trustworthy non-American sources.

4) Reporters should always include numerical estimates of death where applicable and should never assume that someone else will do this job for them or that it would not be published. Nothing can be published if it is not submitted.

5) Reporters should seek out and expose estimates of civilian death even when it is easier not to and should collect relevant testimony and data with this explicit goal in mind.

BROADCASTER AND PUBLISHER RECOMMENDATIONS

1) News is not a product, it is a service. The service does not exist to garner a profit or fulfill a market demand. The service exists to contribute to the body of knowledge and expand the society's discussion on as wide a range of important topics as possible. This change in vision must be incorporated throughout the entire broadcasting and publishing world.

2) Broadcasters and publishers must be less afraid to bring to light difficult public issue items, such as death. It is important that a healthy society discuss these problems and broadcasters/publishers must come to terms with this.

3) Broadcasters and publishers must develop a better understanding of when ideal windows to raise these discussions occur and take greater advantage of those occurrences.

4) Broadcasters and publishers should never censor information as important as the number of people killed in a conflict, or deter in any way the coming of such information to them or its being processed and immediately made public. This should be adapted as company policy and enforced rigidly.

5) Broadcasters and publishers must spotlight submitted reports of civilian death, especially when it has been made clear that such important reports are not well-known by a concerned audience, but in all cases regardless so that this ignorance never occurs to begin with.

To conclude the recommendations and this section of the thesis, let us remember two basic principles. First, silence does not go away on it own. It requires someone to speak. Second, individuals tend to give themselves less responsibility in larger groups to the point where the responsibility of the group is lowered overall, taking into the account the number of its members. If anyone is to speak, then, it must be the case that every media professional takes it upon himself and herself to do so, assumes it as his and her own personal obligation, and fulfills that obligation as if he and she were the only one in the world capable of doing so. Such a predicament is far closer to the truth than most people think. The end of silence requires nothing less.

SECTION TWO: THE CONSEQUENCES OF AMERICAN MEDIA SILENCE ON

CIVILIAN DEATH IN IRAQ

<u>Dehumanization through Omission in the 2003-2012 Iraq War</u>

In 1916, *Harpers Monthly* ran a story by Mark Twain, unpublished at the time of his death in 1910, called *The War Prayer*. In this story, an audience, in church, listens eagerly to a Messenger of God who comes down to inform the audience of war and imminent victory, responding to the congregation's prayer for victory in combat. He informs them, however, of the full extent of their victory, which the church audience does not expect. The full extent of their victory, of course, entails the defeat of another people, their destruction. This destruction is not a part of the prayer offered up by the congregation; they pray only for one side's victory. With their prayer for victory comes a prayer for another's defeat, but this is beyond their realization until the Messenger of God comes to deliver their prayers, and finds to his surprise that the congregation is shocked to discover that praying for one's victory also means praying for one's other's defeat.

This, in short, is dehumanization through omission, as relevant today as it was in 1916.

Dehumanization is the final achievement of a psychological process that slowly renders a perceived enemy-other as non-human. Because the enemy-other's humanity is stripped away in the mind which has dehumanized, the dehumanizing actor becomes capable of committing acts which it would normally consider inappropriate. This can range from cold murder to the most perverse method of mass genocide, depending on the level of dehumanization that has been achieved.

The most ambiguous terms are used to explain this phenomenon because the dehumanizing actor can be either an individual or a group, and likewise that which is dehumanized can range from an individual person to the entire human species (this can occur when an individual distances himself or herself so thoroughly that death becomes fully meaningless). Dehumanization does not require that people commit horrible crimes; it only allows for it. Horrible crimes, however, such as genocide and ethnic cleansing, near-universally require dehumanization.

Dehumanization is neither an endpoint nor a beginning. I refer to it as an "achievement" because there are certain psychological steps that lead to dehumanization. Dehumanization is not itself a product of nothingness, but instead is a product of a wide range of psychological phenomenon that slowly develop in the mind(s) of a group or individual. Exploring the consequence of silence, then, which is dehumanization, requires that we explore the individual components and steps of dehumanization. Likewise, each component in itself effects a certain level of dehumanization that becomes a necessary part of the whole.

The ability for these steps to occur through media omission is what this thesis argues and relies upon when making the case that media dehumanized Iraqi civilians. As we explore the components, the argument will make itself apparent.

The steps in summary, and the body of the dehumanization process in Iraq, can be understood in the following points:

1) Iraqi civilians, from an early point in time, were designated by American media as outgroups unworthy of discussion. Their suffering was therefore not relevant.

2) The casting of Iraqi civilians as outgroups occurred through omission and the dismissal of humanity rather than an overt or dedicated effort aimed explicitly at vilifying an enemy population, as has been the case in perhaps a majority of wars where media dehumanization has been present. The dismissal of humanity occurred through the non-interest, non-inquiry paradigm explained in the first portion of this thesis.

3) The outgrouping of Iraqi civilians in conjunction with the casting of positive attributes upon ingroups (U.S. soldiers) resulted in negative and dehumanizing attributes subconsciously being cast upon Iraqi civilians. Therefore, even when media coverage was absent, dehumanization was present (dehumanization through omission).

4) Several of the barriers mentioned in the media studies portion of the thesis are themselves products of these psychological phenomenon. Once begun, therefore, it became increasingly difficult to break this cycle. The continuation of

similar cycles has already been shown to be a reinforcing and perpetuating factor in establishing ingroup-outgroup divides. This can help to account for why coverage did not increase substantially as support for the war decreased dramatically, although only in part.

5) An effort to expose civilian death, given the cultural and political attitudes of post-9/11 America, would have questioned the positive attributes associated with the ingroups at their expense and to the benefit of the outgroup. Generally speaking, this does not happen, so the absence of reporting is unsurprising. More importantly, this means that once these groups were divided, they grew wider apart rather than coming back together over time.

6) 9/11 primed the American people to dehumanize an enemy-other once they were told who that enemy might be. The facts mentioned above only filled a void that the American people had already been primed for, and there was, therefore, less resistance to dehumanization than there might have been under another set of circumstances.

7) In order to fit the schemae Americans had in their minds, and to make the issues at hand salient for news consumers, existing boundaries of ingroup-outgroup could not be questioned once put in place. Whether true or not, this school of thought was what executives relied upon when deciding how, or how not, to cover civilian death, and therefore contributed significantly to dehumanization.

All of these phenomenon collaboratively effected dehumanization, but they also effected in themselves societal qualities that fostered continuous silence. In this

way, I find that the two major consequences of silence were dehumanization and silence perpetuated.

The casting of Iraqi civilians as an outgroup is a product of all the reporting barriers listed in section one of this thesis. Their being casted as an outgroup enabled dehumanization, and no dehumanization can exist, by definition, without it being cast upon an outgroup.

This would not have been at all possible on a wide scale without American mass media complicity. Even when media companies could have selected an agenda-setting option and pursued reports of civilian death at times when the Iraq war was wildly unpopular, they still, overwhelmingly, chose not to. This thesis has tried to understand, so far, why those decisions were made. Here forward, it will examine the consequences of those decisions.

To examine dehumanization, this thesis will shift in its sourcing toward non-primary academic works and primary psychological-medical experiments. Diaries of war psychologists and U.S. soldiers were also examined for this portion of the thesis, and even when they are not cited, their testaments drew the boundaries for the arguments found throughout.

<u>Current Literature: The Absence of Concern</u>

Dehumanization has many components: Delegitimizing the enemy's history, culture, and political institutions; Disregarding the rationality and interests of the enemy and the opponent state; Promoting one's own self-identity and the value of one's own history,

culture, and political institutions while obscuring those of the enemy-other. These are but a few of the phenomenon that come together to dehumanize an enemy and allow for warfare, genocide, and other forms of mass violence. A key component of this process, and also this process's self-perpetuating result, is the dismissal of enemy civilian casualties as insignificant.

What I discuss in this section is dehumanization, but rather than the active and overt dehumanization described above, it is a dehumanization that results from tacit consent and silence. Like its active form, it is constantly reinforced by the individual's surroundings– in our case, by content Americans, by a non-investigative media, by a government assuring everyone that they are doing the right thing, and by critics calling us traitors against our state if we raise the question: *What are the consequences of our actions?*

What I call dehumanization through omission has its roots in other concepts which have already been developed. John Tirman, whose work *The Death of Others* serves as a basis for this research, spoke of an "absence of concern" among the American public in regards to civilian casualties, not just in Iraq, but in Vietnam and Korea as well. The absence of concern, I argue, is a product of a deeper psychological event– the decision, conscious or not, to not regard the death of others as important. This decision results in a lack of inquiry– an "absence of concern". This section of the thesis expands upon the absence of concern and engages the absence of acknowledgement, the absence of conscious thought of what war entails, and the complete absence of humanization.

There was certainly overt media dehumanization covering Iraq. Falcous and Silk

summarize the media environment quite perfectly in the abstract of their article

Manufacturing Consent:

> **…key themes of media discourse included public mobilization through jingoistic icons and**
> **'war' rhetoric; the vilification of culprits; omissions of reference to alternative culpable**
> **agents; exceptional support for President Bush and the political administration; neglect or**
> **manipulation of history to eliminate information that might undermine support for the 'War**
> **on Terror'; the uncritical acceptance of 'official' interpretations; and, strategies of**
> **censorship and intimidation of media dissenters[82]**

The animalization of Iraqis and Arabs in general has also been explored thoroughly.[83]

Animalization very frequently coincides with war and ethnic cleansing and is one of the

most visible manifestations of active dehumanization.

Although dehumanization through omission was at times overt, active, and even

malicious, there was, generally speaking, no great propagandist machine likening Iraqis

to rats, gooks, or any other such thing.[84] Active dehumanization does exist rampantly

among military forces, and no small number of civilians, but by and large it is absent in

the civilian population and among journalists. Rather, it is tacit, because no one even

talks about the Iraqi people in the first place. It is as if they are not there. How can their

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[82] Mark Falcous and Michael Silk, "Manufacturing Consent: Mediated Sporting Spectacle and the Cultural Politics of the 'War on Terror'" in *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* (2005, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 59-65)
[83] Although there is no monolithic machine of the sort, individual papers, journals, newsgroups and articles have effected overt active dehumanization through "animalizing" Iraqis. In some cases Iraqis actually were equivocated with rats, a specific comparison which generally precedes or coincides with war and ethnic cleansing. See, for example, *The Chain of Being: A Hierarchy of Morality* by Mark J. Brandt and Christine Reyna for an understanding of animalization-style dehumanization, and for that style applied specifically to the 2003-12 war, see *The vermin have struck again': dehumanizing the enemy in post 9/11 media representations* by Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills
[84] For an examination of overt racism, dehumanization, and media propaganda, refer to Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, *At War With Metaphor: Media, Propaganda and Racism in the War on Terror* (Lexington Books: New York, 2008)

suffering, their displacement and death, mean anything at all, when they are not even real to begin with?

Let me expand on one of those abovementioned phenomenon, the absence of conscious thought of what war entails. It has been well-established that the American home front, in the course of foreign wars, fails to realize the realities of what war is, what occurs in the course of conflict, and what it means for people on both sides. In Vietnam, this was an overwhelming reason why so many veterans had PTSD. In Iraq, it was an overwhelming reason why the suicide rate among U.S. troops was higher than the KIA rate. There is virtually no real understanding of *what war is* among Americans.[85] It is this absence of concern and realization which helps contribute to dehumanization– the overall dismissal of what war actually is, and what it means for the people engaged in conflict.

Tirman termed this "passive psychological denial". It is a denial which takes place, some have argued, because Americans are psychologically unable to cope with what is actually happening. As a result, they employ the "Just World Theory", where "The observers of those who suffer protect themselves psychologically by denying responsibility for the source of suffering". This denial can also involve a "blame the enemy" mentality, where victims of U.S. aggression are believed to have brought their own victimhood upon themselves. It also usually relies on the "frontier myth", clearly present in Bush's war rhetoric, where "freedom", "light", "good", and "democracy" are bringing civilization and stability to "tyranny", "evil" (or an "Axis of Evil"), and

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[85] Refer to *Achilles in Vietnam* by Jonathan Shay, a text about living with PTSD in America, for more on the disconnect between war's reality and civilian ideas of what war might be. This disconnect has more to do with common meetings and conversations, where veterans learn how naive civilians can be, than it has to do with any government policies or unemployment. Bursts of outrage, alcoholism, and a disillusionment with the choices of the U.S. Government are common among PTSD veterans, while Americans generally expect their "war heroes" to "believe in their country" in a blind manner, which is seldom possible for a PSTD-afflicted veteran to do.

"darkness".[86] These ideas have been used to construct war frames for generations, but they continue to appeal to an American audience. If nothing else, this is used as an excuse to perceive a war as necessary and then to disregard civilian deaths, displacement, and impoverishment as consequences so natural and necessary that they merit no discussion.

It is more than important that Americans, in the 2003-2012 Iraq War, decided that such death was actually *not* necessary, even though they were not aware of that death.

Korea and Vietnam have each claimed between three and four million civilian lives, far more than the military death tolls on either side of either conflict. Iraq may have claimed as few as 350,000, or as many as nearly two million. Factoring in sanctions and the Gulf War as well, an absolute bare minimum benchmark for the number of Iraqis killed comes in at around 950,000.[87] If the two million mark is correct, then these three are three of the five deadliest wars in the world since World War Two, the conflict in the Congo and the Chinese Civil War being the only two where death was more present. Americans, as Tirman points out, have had more than ample opportunity to discuss every aspect of war from every approach possible. But they have not. Instead, war in general is strangely absent as a discussion topic. As Tirman concludes, "We have altered the dynamics of death in wartime– more efficient killing, more civilians than soldiers dying– but we have not altered how we think about the human consequences of war." (2)

[86] For information on these points, refer to ed. Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2003); Joanne Esch, "Legitimizing the War on Terror: Political Myth in Official-Level Rhetoric" in *Political Psychology*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, 357-391 (International Society of Political Psychology: June 2010) ; John Tirman, *The Death of Others: The Fate of Civilians in American's Wars* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, England, 2011)
[87] Minimum estimate of death in Gulf War = c. 100,000; Minimum estimate of death in interwar sanctions = c. 500,000 (more reliable estimates at one million); Minimum estimate of death (using official and verified Iraqi government figures) = c. 350,000; 350,000+500,000+100,000=950,000

War takes place in the human mind. When we have separated us from them, moral self from diabolical enemy, we have established the only thing that is fundamentally necessary for any war. The home front, succumbing to this psychology in the absence of a real idea as to what war entails, supports the conduct of war. Let's put this all together, then: War takes place in the individual mind of the American citizen. The citizen who does not ask cannot know. The citizen who does not know cannot be held accountable. No blood can be on his hands, if there is no blood in his mind. Or, as Bilton and Sim wrote reflecting on the My Lai massacre: "The moral reality of war is not fixed by the actions of soldiers, but by the opinions of mankind."[88]– meaning that if there is no opinion, there is no moral reality, and so no moral obligation (or even thought) to act. The home front can remain passive, even if being passive requires a similarly passive dehumanization, and allow the military to proceed in its mission. That is the choice virtually every American makes whether or not it occurs as a choice actively made.

Why is there no blood in our minds? The answer, in addition to those outlined in section one, is that there is no blood in the minds around us. No one gives us reason to ask. They suggest we are unpatriotic to do so. They suggest that the U.S. forces are taking every measure to reduce civilian deaths, and that when death does occur it is a necessary cost of a just war. Everywhere around us, passivity is reinforced through omission and silence.

I review this because silence begets silence, silence causes silence, and silence arises from silence. Silence is an outcome and a consequence of silence as much as silence is the cause of silence. This is especially truer in the psychology of large groups, where

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[88] Bilton, Michael and Sim, Kevin, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books: New York City, 1993)

individuals frequently assume someone else is "taking care of things" and that if a silence exists, it is not concealing anything particularly dark.

There are other factors which enable and enhance the outcome of silence. Hetherington and Suhay have shown that Americans become prone to authoritarian-style government and policies when they perceive themselves as being under an immediate security threat.[89] I propose that this phenomenon capacitates and accelerates the process of dehumanization through omission by creating a public that is more than content not knowing a body count and a media encouraged not to discuss there being one. As a case and point, in the early months of 2004 it remained true that 2/3 of the American people preferred that information and reporting be controlled by the Pentagon more than by private media.[90] Unsurprisingly, the Pentagon found its interests to be in hiding and obscuring civilian death.

Such a national psychology not only enables silence, it empowers it, and as silence comes to us as a consequence, a deferral to military authority allows that silence to remain in place.

The reason why I have categorized this as a consequence of silence, rather than as a cause, is this: In the absence of this group deferral psychology, it is less conceivable, if conceivable at all, that the American people would have tolerated media silence or remained silent themselves.

At every point, then, as this thesis proceeds, keep in mind that dehumanization through omission existed in a world also full of active dehumanization, deferral to military

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[89] Marc Hetherington and Elizabeth Suhay, "Authoritarianism, Threat, and Americans' Support for the War on Terror" in *American Journal of Political Science* (Vol. 55, Issue 3, 546-560)
[90] ed. Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, *Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2003) 148-150

authority, emotionally salient pro-war propaganda, and general complacency with the hiding of facts in wartime. It did not exist in isolation and the research is not clear whether or not it even has the capacity to do so.

The remainder of this thesis examines the consequences of silence, but in doing so it also examines their psychological enablers. None of the concepts reviewed here existed in full isolation of the others. Silence is a product of networked psychology whereby coefficient influences strengthen the norm of omission to a degree greater than the sum of their individual parts. These parts are reviewed below:

SECTION 2-A: PERSONAL CONNECTION AND LIKE-IDENTIFICATION

The rule of thumb is that what is out of sight is out of mind. If we do not see something, do we know that it is happening? If no one tells us, how are we meant to know? If there is no picture, no words, no voice, then is there in fact any signal at all for us to receive? And if there is no signal then are we meant to presume for no particular reason that something may be happening that we do not know about? It is not logical that we would. It is a problem similar to the tree falling in the woods. Does it make a sound to us, if there is no one to hear the sound, no one to notice the tree is gone? There can be no outside interest in it, if there is no one to say "Look, this tree has fallen!" to those who did not see or hear it for themselves. This is the paradigm of Iraqi civilian death in the realm of the American public. It was, and is, simply beyond the range of what is heard, seen, and talked about.

Personal connection and like-identification are the most powerful psychological weapons against dehumanization. Those who reported on and published stories on Iraq were routinely unable to make such connections due to the manifold abovementioned causes of silence.

Of the still considerable number of professionals who did make such connections, their stories were overwhelmed by a mass media focus on American lives– a focus, in

fact, that was obsessively more focused on the cost in US Dollars than the cost in Iraqi lives.

And for those who were able to make personal connections, matters of business and objectivity required that they push aside their feelings and support their organization's decisions. While these individuals may not have dehumanized Iraqis in their own minds (and may even have been sympathetic), their obedience effected an equivalent level of dehumanization.

But the fact remains that the huge majority of American journalists were never able to like-identify with Iraqi civilians. Even journalists who recall having Iraqis come to them and sob about being tortured and beg them to write a story were not changed by these experiences as profoundly as other journalists in other wars in other circumstances.

To clarify the point: The two most potent psychological experiences that a war journalist remembers, and which are most likely to be remembered as "traumatic", are the following in this order: First, the belief that you yourself are facing imminent death (mock executions and comparable scenarios where death appears fully unavoidable); Second, speaking with a survivor of an atrocity who has lost everything meaningful in their life.[91] It is worth reiterating that speaking with such a survivor is ranked as more traumatic than witnessing the atrocity itself.

More than anything else except the immediate and personal reality of impending death, journalists recalled speaking with and interviewing individuals whose worlds had been shattered. A mother who may have lost all her children, her husband, and her home, and wandered around aimlessly without purpose or hope, literally wandering in the street and not knowing how to live, what to do or where to go. A father who had the same

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[91] Feinstein, 130

experience. People suddenly without jobs, homes, and families, who had once lived full and happy lives, and through no fault of their own had those lives shredded entirely until there was not even their own self left inside. There was a lingering numbness, and nothing else, in these experiences. Far more important than an actual atrocity is the somber realization that a man or a woman's life has been ruined forever. When the witnessing of an atrocity stands out as most impactful, it is often because witnessing such things is indicative of the fact that worlds are being irrevocably torn apart. To see a survivor standing alone, devoid of all purpose, devoid of family and home and job and a happiness, a fullness he or she had known only weeks before, and which through all the long and tortured years of his or her life he or she will never know again– that is the most haunting experience, and that is what triggers active humanization, the ultimate defeat of its inhumane opposite. That was what journalists recalled as the most haunting.[92]

In shorter words, as Feinstein states, the reason why these experiences have greater potency is that they reach the critical level "where sympathy for the survivors merges into personal identification with them", creating a breakthrough level of "emotional valence" which makes human non-recognition very nearly impossible, rather than probable. The situations above do not always cause this deep of a connection, but they have the ability to do so, and that ability is markedly less present in lesser experiences.

These connections, and so personal like-identification, are something uniquely lacking in the 2003-2012 US-Iraq war. American journalists did not meet these people, generally speaking. Most of their conversations were with frightened Iraqis surrounded

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[92] The sample size is drawn from English-speaking war journalists who worked in the following locations: Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Angola, Sierra Leone, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel, Chechnya, East Timor, Ethiopia, Eretria, Sudan, Congo, South Africa, Namibia, El Salvador, Lebanon, Iraq in the first Gulf War, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

by hostile American troops, people who were uncomfortable (to say the least) when it came to talking about real experiences and real feelings. This essay has already explored instances where appeals were made and denied, but most often those appeals were not made, and the voices which cause hearts and minds to change were not heard. Death remained outside of our worldview because its consequences were made invisible.

This is a problem specific to the second American-Iraqi war. As the sample size (see previous footnote) denotes, journalists recall much the same sort of experience no matter what the context. Only when journalists were denied these experiences did they become less important, because the experiences simply were not there to make an impact.

At no point in this particular instance is it even necessary for anyone's silence to be intentional.

Without reaching that critical mass of like-identification, journalists themselves remained distanced from the events they were covering and generally failed to understand the magnitude of their consequent silence. Without this intimacy, tremendous emotional and psychological distance was allowed to exist between journalists and Iraqi civilians. As Aday noted regarding the Gulf War, where civilian death was likewise underreported[93], "The dominant image of war actually became more distanced in Iraq as reporters got closer to the front". Even journalists who saw thousands of bodies did not photograph or videotape these instances. It should be noted that these reporters saw thousand of bodies; they did not hear thousands of voices and listen to thousands of stories about how those

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[93] Aday found in the Gulf War that for every 600 hours of television coverage, only one dead Iraqi face was shown, and that in 2003, for every ten live fire shows on Fox News, there was only one dealing with civilian death. Sean Aday, *The Real War Will Never Get On Television: An Analysis of Casualty Imagery In American Television Coverage of the Iraq War*, A Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association (March 18-20, 2004) in Montreal, Canada; Sean Aday, Steven Livingston, and Maeve Hebert, *Embedding the Truth: A Cross- Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War* in *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2005; 10; 3

bodies used to be living people. Such experiences would have likely been sufficient for a journalist of any sort to actively humanize the group.

When the Pentagon loosed censorship laws in 2003 (compared to its behavior in the Gulf War and Grenada), some individuals expected a return to investigative journalism. The material they received, however, was not discernibly different from the sort of overtly censored material they had seen in previous conflicts. Whether this was more a result of embedding, cultural biases, or executive decisions from the top of the media corporate ladder, the effect was one and all the same: An absence of reporting on the part of journalists, an absence of publishing on the part of editors and executives, and, above all, an absence of knowing on the part of the American people.

SECTION 2-B: INGROUPING/OUTGROUPING AND "SOCIALLY SUPPORTIVE AFFILIATES"

Emotional and psychological barriers in place between journalists and Iraqis did not stand alone. Concurrently, a shared identity took shape for journalists and the troops they were embedded with. This has been explored on the surface in the first part of the thesis, but it has tremendous impact on the socialization of American journalists in Iraq. What becomes important for this part of the discussion is that the development of this identity *caused* the distance between journalists and Iraqis to expand over time. This can help to explain Aday's observation on the Gulf War as well as give some reason to the under-coverage in the 2003-12 war. This argument and its subcomponents (below) is based on the psychological findings of Waytz and Epley (2012) and Choi and Bowles (2007)[94], with additional research aggregated from the many authors contributing to *The Social Psychology of Morality*, cited frequently in this section.

To show this causation, there are two different lines of thought that this paper needs to bring together concurrently, and each is rather complex. To clarify and get to the heart of it, here are the points:

A1) When an individual feels displaced, he or she is quicker to assume group identity

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[94] Waytz and Epley 2012: "Social Connection Enables Dehumanization" in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* vol. 48 (2012) 7-76 (Socially supportive affiliates and social inclusion-exclusion in perpetrating dehumanization) ; Choi and Bowles 2007: "The Coevolution of Parochial Altruism and War" in *Science*, Vol 318 (Growth of dehumanization in group behavior via diffusion of responsibility et al)

A2) As this individual becomes closer with the group and an ingroup identity forms, those outside the group grow further apart

A3) Being socially connected to the ingroup, whether new or not, creates perceived difference between the ingroup and the now-outgroup that did not previously exist

A4) As the ingroup bond grows, the drive to connect with others diminishes; the individual loses motivation to seek contact with or understand outgroups and so does not challenge barriers as they arise naturally or otherwise ("a full man is not motivated to search for food")

A5) As positive qualities become associated with the increasingly exclusive ingroup, outgroups are defined either by the absence of those qualities or by the opposite of them ("in-group altruism and out-group hostility evolve jointly")

A6) Group action allows for the diffusion of responsibility, which facilitates a greater likelihood of violent action going unchecked. In the initial phases of violence this is almost always attributed to group psychology, whereas if an individual were forced to accept responsibility, they would have to come to terms with another human's suffering. Statistically, acts requiring dehumanization are more likely to occur in group-group dynamics; Individuals, acting alone, are *very* unlikely to commit an act that dehumanizes another individual even at the end of this process

A7) "Socially supportive affiliates" provide emotional and psychological validity to a group's dehumanizing of another group once dehumanization has begun, which strengthens its force.

There is a caveat: "Socially supportive affiliates" *do not need to be from the same traditionally-defined ingroup*:

B1) Even though outgroup-ingroup dehumanization is the most general form, dehumanization can exist without group identity using only "social connection" psychology with like individuals.

B2) "Social connection does not rely on the presence of a group....but can be activated by merely thinking of one closely-connected other..." (A soldier, a supporter, a fellow American, especially in a foreign land, where expatriates' bonds develop in greater depth per experience than they do in those persons' native lands, these people can help to form groups)

B3) "Mere social connection absent of any meaningful group categorization can enable dehumanization" (ex., someone calls themselves a non-supporter of the war, but may be sufficiently "similar" to a veteran or a pro-war American that they do not humanize those on the opposite side of the conflict when not prompted to)

B4) Socially supportive affiliates do not even need to be in this expanded field of immediate social connection; their perceived support can encourage the status quo of group identity and dehumanization once it has been adopted

B5) This more distanced social connection still increases the willingness to harm or kill dehumanized others

The establishment of the above facts prove that increasing social connection inside a group leads to increased dehumanization of an outgroup– in our case, enemy-side

civilians. The fact that journalists became "ingrouped" with American soldiers, and that even when they did not they were still "socially connected" by the authors' criteria, means that humanizing Iraqi civilians was made more difficult and dehumanizing them was in fact made substantially easier, and was more or less handed to them. This applies most strongly to embeds, and to a much lesser degree to unilaterals, yet the phenomenon holds for both.

SECTION 2-C: A BRIEF REVIEW OF TRADITIONAL DEHUMANIZATION

This discussion gets deeper, but before proceeding it is necessary to review, in the briefest terms, what exactly dehumanization is. The reason for this review will become apparent as the argument progresses.

Mass dehumanization, as we now know it, primarily entails the conjunction of the following mechanisms:

1) The delegitimization, downplaying, and obscuring of another group's history and political culture

2) The glossing over of, ignoring of, or blunt dismissal of the rationale and thoughts of another group and

2b) The subsequent pretending that another group's actions are irrational or cannot be understood by "civilized" (humanized) peoples

3) A focus on the "sins"[95] of another group, and the overemphasis or dramatization of those sins, in cohesion with the downplaying or outright denial of one's own sins

3b) Similarly, the consequences of one's and one's group sins are obscured and made ambiguous through "moral disengagement"[96]

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[95] Ralph K. White, "Misperception in the Arab-Israeli Conflict" in *Journal of Social Issues* (Vol. 33;1, pg 190-221) Winter 1977.
[96] Gilda Hirschberger and Tom Pyszczynksi, "Killing With A Clean Conscience: Existential Angst and the Paradox of Mortality" in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil, Ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (American Psychology Association: Washington, D.C., 2012)*

4) The dual construction of the moral self-image and the "diabolical enemy-other" through "selective inattention", whereby only ideas that support dehumanization and delegitimization are welcomed into the realm of facts by the dehumanizing party[97]

5) The decline, and eventual absence, of empathy (a natural result of the above preceding efforts, as it becomes increasingly difficult to identify with the other when the above efforts are successful or become mainstreamed)

6) Constant positive self-reinforcement and positive reinforcement of like ingroups

7) When people are overexposed to a situation or similar set of events, they respond in a mechanical way with substantially less thought to the consequences of their actions than would otherwise be present; this is called "Response Disposition"[98]

8) "Response Salience"[99] increases to a point where actions undertaken by the dehumanized, normally understood to be unaggressive, are instead perceived by the dehumanizing group as aggressive and confrontational

9) Objectively aggressive acts are committed in the name of self-defense by the dehumanizing party in response to the above phenomenon and are not understood by the dehumanizing group as being aggressive

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[97] White, *Misperception in the Arab-Israeli Conflict*
[98] K.R. Scherer, E. Clark-Polner, and M. Mortillaro, "In the Eye of the Beholder? Universality and Cultural Specificity in the Expression and Perception of Emotion" in *International Journal of Psychology* (46(6) 401-435, December 2011)
[99] "Response Salience" is a set of factors which elicit a certain sort of response; as the salience changes, so does the response elicited; a response salience can be "low" and encourage diplomacy even when actors are rude or confrontational, or "high" where neutral acts are perceived by a hostile entity as disproportionately aggressive.

SECTION 2-D: TRADITIONAL DEHUMANIZATION APPLIED TO MEDIA SILENCE ON CIVILIAN DEATH IN IRAQ AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THAT SILENCE ON THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: THE NATURAL NEGATIVE MOMENTUM OF DEHUMANIZING PROCESSES

Although neither journalists nor the American people were traditionally defined "victims" in any of the instances examined in this thesis, there is one part of victim psychology that is more than relevant. One of the primary modes of dealing with victimhood is the redefinition of events so as to preserve the normative, logical worldview construct.[100]

A strict redefinition of events was not required for dehumanization to occur in this instance, but a sort of redefinition did contribute to it. Americans generally expect their media to perform the functions of watchdog, and indeed even a great many media professionals envision this as being their professional duty. The slight redefinition which did occur, occurred in the realm of civilian death: When Americans were not told about civilian death, in order to maintain their current views of the world, a just, normative, and logical world, where, by the status quo, the media functioned as watchdogs, they presumed that civilian death had not occurred. This was, and is, a product of natural public psychology fostered by media silence, and the only unique quality that allowed it to take place is that same media silence, rather than any peculiar quality of the American people. Psychology proceeded as we understand it; our media did not.

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[100] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and Irene Hanson Frieze, *Reactions to Victimization* (Plenum Publishing Co., 1983)

I noted that several of the above phenomenon have natural tendencies to grow in potency and salience unless there is something to challenge them. Sometimes this will not be the case at all, while at other times their growth will be accelerated. The level of growth is dependent upon the level of psychological resistance against dehumanization that exists in a society at a given time and in a given scenario. Where circumstances allow, a society can be immune to dehumanization. Importantly, that society will never be immune to the possibility for its resistance to be degraded until it reaches a point where growth in dehumanization can again begin and accelerate. There is nothing in human psychology to suggest that a society can be perpetually immune from the degradation itself, even if a non-degraded society can be immune to dehumanization so long as it remains non-degraded.

War, with all of its associations of imminent danger and the ingrouping-outgrouping that occurs in the mind as a response to that imminent danger, immediately primes a society for growth in dehumanization by way of the manifold psychological processes explored in the above sections. All of the processes this thesis looked at in the above sections can be thought of as degrading factors. They are factors, themselves evident of initial degradation, that, unless offered resistance, contaminate minds and through contamination lower the level of an entire society's resistance to dehumanization and propaganda.

Consider them point-by-point:

1) The delegitimization, downplaying, and obscuring of another group's history and political culture : There can be no successful and reliable counter to this process unless a counter-narrative exists where the history and politics of an outgroup appears valid and rational.

2) The glossing over of, ignoring of, or blunt dismissal of the rationale and thoughts of another group and

2b) The subsequent pretending that another group's actions are irrational or cannot be understood by "civilized" (humanized) peoples : Similarly, a successful and logical counter-narrative must exist that seeks to actually understand the rationale of the potential or supposed enemy-other in order for the obscuring of an outgroup's rationale to cease.

3) A focus on the "sins"[101] of another group, and the overemphasis or dramatization of those sins, in cohesion with the downplaying or outright denial of one's own sins AND 4) The dual construction of the moral self-image and the "diabolical enemy-other" through "selective inattention", whereby only ideas that support dehumanization and delegitimization are welcomed into the realm of facts by the dehumanizing party : Not only must there be a counter-frame that explains the "sins" of an enemy-other to be reasonable judgments, but there must also exist a) A counter-frame that explores positive aspects of that outgroup and b) A powerful and salient frame that exposes the moral shortcomings and historical blunders of the ingroup (for example, the line of action that educators in Germany eventually took to guard against a resurgence of genocidal thinking after WWII, with the goal of "mainstreaming" an acknowledgement of ingroup sin); This effort would hinder the ability to create a diabolical enemy-other and

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[101] White, *Misperception in the Arab-Israeli Conflict*

would require the moral self-image to be perceived as something capable of making

mistakes, rather than as a flawless entity.

5) The decline, and eventual absence, of empathy (a natural result of the above

preceding efforts, as it becomes increasingly difficult to identify with the other when the

above efforts are successful or become mainstreamed) : Empathy and understanding must

be goals of information dissemination if this erosion is to be countered, and all above

measures must be taken.

6) Constant positive self-reinforcement and positive reinforcement of like

ingroups : Counter to this, there must be a constant vigilance against moral wrong-doing

and past moral failures cannot cease to be considered as such.

7) When people are overexposed to a situation or similar set of events, they

respond in a mechanical way with substantially less thought to the consequences of their

actions than would otherwise be present; this is called "Response Disposition" : For this

reason, it is not enough only to remember the past moral failures of one's ingroup. One's

ingroup must actualize and come to terms with its current shortcomings in real-time. The

psychology of response disposition means that if only one event is recalled as immoral,

that event will lose salience over time unless other events, either more recent or for any

other reason more salient, are introduced very shortly after-the-fact or even as events

unfold.

8) "Response Salience" increases to a point where actions undertaken by the

dehumanized, normally understood to be unaggressive, are instead perceived by the

dehumanizing group as aggressive and confrontational AND 9) Objectively aggressive

acts are committed in the name of self-defense by the dehumanizing party in response to

the above phenomenon and are not understood by the dehumanizing group as being aggressive : Taking all of the above measures renders these final stages very unlikely, if even possible, to occur. Taking all of the above measures does not eliminate the possibility for conflict, but it does eliminate the possibility of dehumanization and so lowers the chance (and severity) of conflict accordingly.[102]

It is plain on inspection, then, that degradation continues unless a conscious effort against degradation occurs (or unless a society is resistant to degradation, but this seems to be exceptionally rare, and in either case resistance would be cultivated by the above measures).

Apply the same hypothesis to ingroup-outgroup coevolution theory:

A2) As this individual becomes closer with the group and an ingroup identity forms, those outside the group grow further apart AND A3) Being socially connected to the ingroup, whether new or not, creates perceived difference between the ingroup and the now-outgroup that did not previously exist : This means that so long as an event causes an ingroup to become more of an ingroup, momentum will encourage that ingroup to distance itself from outgroups (if the outgroups are not assimilated into the ingroup as a result of the event). As incidents of violence are the worst among such events, they tend to create the strongest ingroup bonds and, accordingly, the strongest ingroup-outgroup rivalries. The best counter to this would be for a group to know this in advance of an

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[102] In most scenarios. Noteworthy exceptions include the First World War, especially on the American front, where joining the side of England instead of Germany was a rational, rather than emotional, decision, and was therefore more immune to the abovementioned countermeasures (the great majority of wars, from the soldier's point of view, are emotional, and rational warmaking often exists only among elites)

event's happening and be able to act responsibly with that knowledge (consciously working to prevent distance from being created)

A5) As positive qualities become associated with the increasingly exclusive ingroup, outgroups are defined either by the absence of those qualities or by the opposite of them ("in-group altruism and out-group hostility evolve jointly") : An outgroup must be brought closer to the ingroup so that the sharing of qualities and the potential for like-identification becomes conceivable on a wide scale

A6) Group action allows for the diffusion of responsibility, which facilitates a greater likelihood of violent action going unchecked. In the initial phases of violence this is almost always attributed to group psychology, whereas if an individual were forced to accept responsibility, they would have to come to terms with another human's suffering. Statistically, acts requiring dehumanization are more likely to occur in group-group dynamics; Individuals, acting alone, are *very* unlikely to commit an act that dehumanizes another individual even at the end of this process : It must be recognized as the responsibility of every individual to participate in war and peace, or at the least a critical mass of individuals must understand that their negligence allows for crimes they deem immoral and unacceptable, and be urged to take action toward the correction of the errant behavior.

A7) "Socially supportive affiliates" provide emotional and psychological validity to a group's dehumanizing of another group once dehumanization has begun, which strengthens its force. : Socially supportive affiliates should exist for those working to create the counter-frame and for those working to bridge outgroup-ingroup divides for the best results. In their absence, success and even sustained counter-activity is less likely.

B4) Socially supportive affiliates do not even need to be in this expanded field of immediate social connection; their perceived support can encourage the status quo of group identity and dehumanization once it has been adopted AND B5) This more distanced social connection still increases the willingness to harm or kill dehumanized others : All of the above efforts must be inside the mainstream rather than in the marginal, not only because this will increase their salience, but because if they remain marginal they will not overcome degrading-factor socially supportive affiliates. Mainstream, in this case, does not mean predominant, but instead only means tolerated. In extreme cases, such activity must commence initially far outside of what is acceptable in the mainstream.

According to Haslam, Bastian, Laham, and Loughnan, "Moral action and moral judgment...depend on an appreciation of the humanness in others". Because there was no presentation of civilians as humans in Iraq, even a comparatively modest turn toward dehumanization went unchallenged. Because no real challenge to the frame of civilians as non-people existed, no moral judgment was made possible on the part of the American people.[103]

Furthermore, Haslam et al have found that when someone considers himself or herself to be human and recognizes another as equally human, that individual is not only incapable of committing violence against the other, but will act to prevent violence when presented with evidence that violence is impending. That Americans took no such action is already proof that widespread dehumanization existed in a sufficient level to allow for

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[103] Haslam, Bastian, Laham, and Loughnan, *Humanness, Dehumanization, and Moral Psychology* in ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, <u>The Social Psychology of Morality </u>(American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 2012)

nationwide negligence, but, more remarkably for the media-oriented argument this thesis

presents, it is testimony to the fact that American citizens were never or seldom presented

with information directly correlating American actions with mass civilian death or

impending disaster.

   That argument relies dually on the fact that overt animal-like dehumanization did

not exist as a prevailing frame, which in turn is based on the poll results cited in the

beginning of this thesis. Had Americans overtly, and in a majority or empowered

minority, animalized Iraqi civilians, then a presentation of their death would have had no

effect. The argument here is that such a presentation would have made a difference,

because the omissive dehumanization among the American people was received and

passively accepted by, rather than crafted and virulently espoused by, that group.

Another critical outcome of the abovementioned processes, and of the absence of those

processes' solutions, is the infrahumanization effect. Introduced originally by Leyens in

the aftermath of the Second World War, this process is where people ascribe more

humanlike qualities to ingroups than to outgroups, and in doing so create a divide that

widens naturally over time. The key realization here is that the widening of the gap is a

natural human relations process and does not require overt propagandistic campaigns.

Today, infrahumanization is the term used to describe the sliding scale of dehumanization

and the divides that occur as a natural result of dehumanization, corresponding to

respective points on the scale. Leyens found that these procedures are most remarkable

along divides of national identity.[104]

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[104] Online citation:
http://general.utpb.edu/FAC/hughes_j/Leyens_essentialism%20and%20attrib%20to%20ingroup%20and%20outgroups.pdf

Perceptions of agency have also been found to be closely correlated with dehumanization.[105] Increased agency is associated with a more humanized population. If agency is seen to increase, humanity increases, and vise-versa. Usually ingroups are associated with the highest level of agency. When people talk about bringing democracy to Iraq, or Iraq not being ready for democracy, then, it takes away from the agency of Iraqis in the mind of the audience, and therefore facilitates dehumanization. This, and similar "invisible" processes, facilitate dehumanization that is overpowering in its influence but yet remains outside of our conscious view.

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[105] Haslam et al

SECTION 2-E: THE TANGIBLE PRODUCTS OF NEGATIVE MOMENTUM AND THE RESULTS OF THOSE PRODUCTS

The real, tangible consequences of these processes complementing one another were and remain everywhere around us, and are surely not limited simply to mass media dehumanization of civilians through omission. Among the visible results of these processes are: Popular disinterest in the history and politics of Iraq or its people; Focus on dollar costs and dollar values more than on human costs and human values; A reservation against investing in the stabilization and growth of Iraq as a nation; A blank dismissal indicating Iraq is "not ready" for "civilized government"; A short popular attention span regarding the complexity of current Iraqi conflict; Categorizations of people and institutions in popular rhetoric that are associated with negative, delegitimizing emotions.

The extended results of the above original set of results includes: Poor governance choices inside of Iraq by Western-directed bodies like the CPA; Poor selection of Iraqi figures to be backed by Western power; Lost opportunity to analyze and correct deviant American behavior.

Media omission of civilian death dehumanized civilians living and dead alike by allowing all of these things to occur, and to continue, despite openings for media organizations to

challenge these psychological trends through the real discussion of important issues. In this way, media omission facilitated the mainstreaming of these negative outcomes and allowed for their more-or-less predominance in the median American mind.

All of this happened for a root reason no more complicated than Edmund Burke's famous 18th century warning: *All that is required for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing.*

If we reverse the reality, and suppose that mass media outlets had worked against the above trends, it would have required them to associate wrongdoing with American identity. This association is a natural result of one or a series of incidents where a group or individual, believing firmly in a worldview, is forced to understand that the worldview is not only incorrect, but has caused deep and irreparable harm to another humanized group or individual. Establishing that association would not only have required a greater level of investigative journalism. It would have required, also, a journalistic willingness to challenge a positive self-identity that the majority of people in America have powerful conscious and subconscious incentives to which to ascribe.

Because these factors naturally encourage dehumanization, omission, and the retaining of a positive self-identity at the expense of inquisition, a conscious and overt effort therefore would have been, and presumably will in the future be, required to break the process of dehumanization through omission and its correlated delegitimizing trends.

SECTION 2-F: BREAKING THE CYCLE

The implications of and recommendations included in sections 1-F, 2-D, and 2-E are the key to a route forward for media professionals that will successfully prevent the dehumanizing of civilians and, by extension, have the potential to make war both less likely in its occurrence and less fatal in its conduct.

There is nothing to suggest that any of the many problems outlined in this thesis are insurmountable. As Hirschberger and Pyszczynski say, "even in the context of violent political conflict, the influence of mortality salience on support for violent solutions to the conflict can be reduced by highlighting moral values that favor compassion and shared humanity...reminders of death also encourage greater adherence to fundamental cultural values, which in most cases includes sanctions against violence and encouragement of compassion".[106] Straub observed that when the caring and altruism traits were combined, the effect staved off dehumanizing processes in the individual's mind.[107] Rather than suggesting that we cannot break the cycle, then, all of this evidence points toward the conclusion that the only thing we need to break the cycle is to be always conscious of death as a product of our own actions, and to make those around us share in that awareness.

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[106] Gilad Hirschberger and Tom Pyszczynski, *Killing with a Clean Conscience: Existential Angst and the Paradox of Mortality* in ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, The Social Psychology of Morality (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 2012)

[107] Ervin Straub, *Psychology and Morality in Genocide and Violent Conflict: Perpetrators, Passive Bystanders, and Rescuers* in ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, The Social Psychology of Morality (American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C. 2012)

The nature and symptoms of the cycle of dehumanization through omission, where dehumanization results from and also causes omission, indicate, as previously mentioned, that only a directive, conscious, vigilant and overt effort can achieve the goal of preventing dehumanization in both its traditional and omissive forms. Nothing less will grant us this awareness.

Creating ingroup-outgroup distance in times of conflict relieves emotional distress. Insctinctively, and unless they consciously try not to, individuals will tend, therefore, to create distance and become emotionally uncaring. There are five prevailing mechanisms for establishing this distance:[108]

1) Avoiding information about and attention to the harmful action and the other's resulting suffering

2) Adopting an observer perspective

3) Justifying harm done

4) Suspending judgment about the meaning of events

5) Minimizing each step so that individual events and instances mean less than their actual importance

If our media efforts can emphasize information and the reality of suffering in wartime, engage the would-be observer as an active participant, irrationalize the doing of harm, and highlight the gravity of individual events, these mechanisms will fail, and ingroups will be markedly less able to separate themselves from outgroups.

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[108] Straub, *Psychology and Morality in Genocide and Violent Conflict: Perpetrators, Passive Bystanders, and Rescuers*

Both warmaking and peacemaking are products of people striving for morality, in one instance when the group has temporarily suspended its taboo against violence and in the other when the group remembers or reinstates that taboo. The path to peace, then, will be paved by recalling that moral and societal sanctions against violence deserve no exceptions.

Because peoples' greatest works and most difficult achievements are often motivated by a sense of insatiable moral direction, it is advised that those who are best able to break the cycle be educated on dehumanization theory, the group psychology of war, and the social psychology of morality. Although many of these individuals are aware of the incentives for silence outlined in the first part of this thesis, they are likely less aware, or less inclined to pay attention to, the real and disastrous consequences of fostering that silence.

The tendency to laden another individual or group with a disproportionate amount of blame for a moral qualm, and take that burden off of oneself, is the logical cause of this lack of awareness. To struggle against its effects, then, the awareness itself must first exist.

American mass media is "event-driven" and tends to deliver snazzy photos and exciting sounds without conveying any hard news. This sort of content will never be able to challenge the natural flow of dehumanization and its associated phenomenon. As unpopular as hard news is for the advertisers and for executives, their sacrifice is not

negotiable. There will either be real coverage of enemy-other humanness, and real discussions of enemy-other rational choices, history, and institutions, to the point where those groups cannot be considered less as enemy-others, or there will remain a naturally existing cycle of dehumanization through omission, where silence allows ignorance and apathy to prohibit responsible and informed decisionmaking in cases where huge numbers of human lives are on the line.

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