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Deconstructing the “War of All Against All”: The Prevalence and Implications of War Metaphors and Other Adversarial News Schema in TIME, Newsweek, and Maclean’s

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Keywords: *Hobbesian “war of all against all”, Maclean’s, mass-mediated communication play, news discourse, Newsweek, North American commercial news magazines, peace and conflict resolution, perpetuation of social conflict, TIME, war metaphors*

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**DECONSTRUCTING THE “WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL”: THE
PREVALANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF WAR METAPHORS AND
OTHER ADVERSARIAL NEWS SCHEMA IN *TIME*, *NEWSWEEK*, AND
*MACLEAN’S***

Michael Karlberg and Leslie Buell

Abstract

This study examines and critiques the discursive construction of a Hobbesian “war of all against all” in North American commercial news magazines. The prevalence of war metaphors and related adversarial news schemas is documented over a twenty year period, from 1981 to 2000, through an analysis of TIME and Newsweek, along with their Canadian counterpart Maclean’s. After documenting the pervasiveness of these discursive constructs, the paper discusses the underlying causes and potential consequences of these patterns in commercial news discourse. The paper concludes by asserting that this discursively constructed “war of all against all” is highly problematic and unsustainable in an age of increasing social and ecological interdependence. Accordingly, scholars who are interested in peace and conflict resolution would do well to take into account the role that news discourse and other forms of mass-mediated communication play in the perpetuation of social conflict.

Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth-century political philosopher, described the natural human condition as a *bellum omnium contra omnes* – a war of all against all (Hobbes 1968). Over three centuries after Hobbes offered this assessment, humanity still appears to be engaged in a war of all against all – at least when viewed through the prism of North American commercial journalism. On television and in the pages of the print media we have become familiar with “the war on poverty,” “the war on drugs,” “the battle for the White House,” and many other metaphorical wars. But how prevalent are these war metaphors and related interpretive schema in North American news media? And what are the causes and potential consequences?

This study uses discourse analysis to examine the social construction of a metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines. To date, no systematic effort has been made to measure the prevalence of war metaphors and other adversarial news schema in the news media. Other peace researchers, such as Galtung (2003), have critiqued “war and violence journalism” and articulated alternative models such as “peace journalism.” Yet this work tends to focus on the way in which actual war or violent conflict is covered by the media, rather than the way in which metaphorical war and metaphorical violence are constructed by the media. On the other hand, Lakeoff and Johnson (1980) have examined the

conceptual metaphor “argument is war,” and discussed the way it structures human perception and behavior, but not in the context of the media. Similarly, Hartmann-Mahmud (2002) has critiqued the use of war metaphors in political rhetoric and public policy agendas, but again, not in the context of the news media. Tannen’s (1998) examination of war metaphors in the media offers a thought-provoking critique, but it relies on anecdotal examples rather than systematic analysis of media content. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) have provided a more systematic analysis of war metaphors in the news media, but only in the context of partisan politics and election campaign coverage. Likewise, Clement (1987) has provided a valuable but even narrower case study of journalistic war metaphors surrounding a US-Soviet cold war summit.

Closely related to these studies of war metaphor, Condit (1994) has critiqued the journalistic practice of framing public debates as simple “two-sided” oppositions, and she has offered constructive alternatives to these news formulas, using abortion coverage as a case study. Likewise, Richards (2000) has critiqued the practice of framing news stories as metaphorical “fights” between two opposing parties, and she has also offered constructive alternatives, using a dispute between a monastery and a forest company as a case study. Finally, scholars such as Rubenstein, Botes, Dukes, and Stephens (1994) have developed an even more refined prescription for media coverage of conflict, grounded in the theory and practice of conflict resolution.

Many of these studies offer insights into the problematic nature of war metaphors and other adversarial news schema in the media, and some articulate constructive alternatives, yet they still provide no empirical data regarding the actual prevalence of these interpretive news frames. This study seeks to begin filling this gap by measuring the prevalence of war metaphors and related adversarial news schema in North American news media. Toward this end, we analyze the American news magazines *TIME* and *Newsweek*, along with their Canadian counterpart *Maclean’s*, over a twenty year period, from 1981 to 2000. After documenting the prevalence of these discursive constructs in North American news magazines, we discuss the causes and consequences.

Media Discourse

Media content is a form of public discourse. In contemporary cultural studies, the term *discourse* refers to complex and widely shared systems of representation that influence and reflect the ways that we think about, talk about, and act in relation to a given subject (refer, for example, to discussions in Hall 1997; Foucault 1972; O’Sullivan et al. 1994). Discourses play a role in constructing our social reality. They serve as the productive scaffolding of human culture and consciousness – enabling and constraining the ways we collectively think, talk, and act.

Discourse analysis is an emerging methodology that studies the relatively tangible traces of discourse, such as spoken, written, or visual texts, in order to provide insights into the relatively intangible phenomena that they shape and reflect,

such as human culture and consciousness. Underlying the methodology is a social constructivist epistemology that traces back through philosophers and theorists such as Gergen (1999), Foucault (1980), Berger and Luckmann (1966), Geertz (1973), and Wittgenstein (1974), all of whom contributed to a recognition that language and discourse not only reflect social reality but also construct it. Discourse analysis is thus a method for “ascertaining the constructive effects of discourse through the structured and systematic study of texts” (Phillips and Hardy 2002, 4).

Although discourse analysis focuses our attention on texts as material manifestations of discourses, discourses transcend individual texts. Discourse analysis therefore focuses on bodies of texts, as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they are produced, in order to understand what kinds of meanings and social practices a given discourse generates and how such meanings and practices are maintained over time. As Phillips and Hardy explain,

Texts are not meaningful individually; it is only through their interconnection with other texts, the different discourses on which they draw, and the nature of their production, dissemination, and consumption that they are made meaningful. Discourse analysis explores how texts are *made* meaningful through these processes and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning. (2002, 4)

Toward this end, discourse analysis draws on a wide range of theoretical models and approaches (refer, for example, to van Dijk 1997, 1997). In the study that follows, two related approaches are central. The first is metaphor analysis and the second is news schema or news frame analysis.

Metaphors and cultural codes. Metaphors are powerful discursive constructs. More than mere poetic flourishes, metaphors are primary vehicles for associative thought – which is a requisite of higher order human cognition. Stated simply, metaphorical thought involves using one thing as a model for understanding another. Sometimes metaphors function on a conscious and intentional level, but often they function on an unconscious level. As Lakeoff and Johnson explain:

Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature... The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. (1980, 3)

In this regard, metaphors are among the most basic constituents of *cultural codes*. The term *cultural codes*, as it is used here, refers to widely shared rules of correspondence – or structured relationships – between the elements of a cultural system (Hall 1997; Eco 1976; Fiske 1982; Turner 1990). On the most basic level, codes structure the relationship between signifiers and meanings in any given language. On a more abstract level, codes also structure the associative relationships between different concepts, as in the case of metaphorical thought, as well as the relationships between concepts and social practices. Cultural codes thus

establish structures of human consciousness as well as structures of social organization. Some codes are learned or constructed through conscious effort and others are internalized or produced in a largely unconscious manner. Regardless of how they are transmitted and how they emerge, cultural codes establish rules of correspondence, or conventions, through which thought, talk, and action become mutually intelligible within a shared culture. Metaphors help to shape and reflect such cultural codes (refer to discussions in Gannon 2001; Danesi and Perron 1999).

News schemas or frames. Metaphors often become the defining *schema* or *frame* through which a news story is constructed. A *schema*, in this sense, is a model or organizing framework through which an issue or event is interpreted (Piaget 1973; Baddeley 1976). The term is generally used to explain how “established ways of understanding, or ways of structuring experience, are used to makes sense out of new situations... (as) the new is made to fit the pattern of the familiar” (O’Sullivan et al. 1994, 276). For instance, if the public is already familiar with the metaphorical construction of *argument as war* (Lakeoff and Johnson 1980, 4-5), then journalists can employ this schema in their coverage of any new public policy debate that arises and the stories will be easily understood.

A *frame* is a closely related concept that is now widely employed in the analysis of media content. The term *frame* was originally used in the early 1970s as a psychological concept describing how individuals include, exclude, and organize experience (Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974). The concept was later imported into media analysis to describe how news media organize or construct reality (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978). In brief, a news frame can be defined as “a central organizing idea for news that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (Tankard et al. 1991, 5).

Frames, of course, serve an unavoidable function in news. They allow journalists and citizens to organize and make sense out of an almost infinite universe of potentially available information. They become problematic, however, when the same routine frames are uniformly employed throughout the media – which tends to be the case, as media analysts like Cappella and Jamieson (1996) have documented. In theory, different journalists and different media outlets could provide diverse interpretive frames that offer contrasting insights into complex issues and events. Such frames would be valuable resources for democratic deliberation. In practice, however, different journalists and media outlets tend to repeatedly recycle highly formulaic news frames “that reconstitute the world in similar ways” (Dunwoody and Griffin 1993, 24).

For instance, one of these formulaic news frames appears to be what Richards (2000) calls the “fighting frame,” which is used by journalists as a template for reporting controversy and conflict. This frame, as Richards found in her case study of a Nova Scotia forestry dispute, “positions one side against another, excluding the likely possibility that there are several sides in any given dispute, simplifying the complexities of the issue, and often exacerbating conflict” (2000,

479). Indeed, the study reported below was designed to measure the prevalence of these, and related, adversarial news frames in North American news magazines.

Methods

This study examined 20 years of *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and *Maclean's* magazine, from 1981 to 2000. Every issue of every year was analyzed. All articles, editorials, and letters to the editor containing three or more paragraphs of text were counted and examined by scanning (i.e., quickly reading) the first three and last three paragraphs, along with any accompanying headlines and captions. Exceptions were made for articles in the arts, leisure, and entertainment sections, along with advertisements and cartoons, which were not included in the study because the study's focus was on public affairs stories.

All articles were coded according to four related categories that were determined in advance. The categories were *War/battle framing metaphors (WM)*, *Political campaign references (CR)*, *Other adversarial news schema (OA)*, and *Actual war/military references (AW)*. For each article, the applicable code was recorded, along with key phrases from the article that supported the coding decision. The logic behind each category, as well as the protocol for recognizing each category, was as follows:

War/battle framing metaphors were the main focus of the study. Articles were recognized and coded as WM when phrasing in the text conjured up an image of a military battle or campaign between two organized groups. Vocabulary that we searched for included phrases such as “war of...” or “war on...” and “battle of...” or “battle on...” In addition, we searched for other war-related terminology that included, but was not limited to, words such as combat, invasion, conquest, retreat, ambush, assault, attack, out-flank, surrender, trenches, defenses, arsenals, embattled, and so forth – provided these terms were used in conjunction with other related terms that collectively conjured up a metaphorical image of war. (Articles about terrorism that employed war terminology, but were not actual territorial disputes between armies or states, were classified as WM rather than AW; articles about the "Cold War" were coded WM unless reference was made to actual military confrontations or issues, in which case they were coded AW.)

Political campaign references were included when the term *campaign* was specifically used in the context of a political election. The reason for this is that the term was originally a military term before it was employed metaphorically as a schema for understanding partisan political elections. (*Campaign* comes from the French *campagne*, which denoted open country suited to military maneuvers; hence the term came to denote military operations.) Using the term in a political context thus constitutes a war metaphor – albeit one that has become so familiar that it is seldom consciously recognized as such. For this reason, we coded CR separately from WM because it constitutes a special case of WM. However, when the term *campaign* was used in contexts other than political elections, it was coded either WM or AW, depending on the nature of the story.

Other adversarial news schema was a category containing stories or references that constructed public issues and events as simplistic two-sided

confrontations – but not through war metaphors. OA stories were recognized by their reduction of complex and multifaceted issues down to simple confrontational dualisms – polarized conflicts and binary oppositions – whether physical, verbal, or ideological. This category was included because it constitutes a close cousin of the WM frame (i.e., it is a product of similar journalistic norms and it raises similar concerns about social consequences). OA vocabulary that we searched for included phrases such as “the right versus the left” or “liberals versus conservatives”; constructs depicting only “two sides to the issue” as well as “winners and losers”; and polarizing labels depicting “pro-x” and “anti-x” groups where x is the issue of the day. We also searched for terminology that included, but was not limited to, words such as fight, confrontation, opposition, antagonists, and adversaries – provided these terms were used in conjunction with other related terms that collectively conjured up an image of simple two-sided conflict. The OA category did not, however, include references to open-ended competition between multiple individuals or groups, such as in a free market economy.

Actual war/military references made up the final category. AW articles included all articles about or with references to actual wars or battles, as well as articles about or with reference to armed forces, military spending, military preparedness, military strategy, military history, the arms race, the military-industrial complex, arms sales, military coups, armed guerilla warfare, etc. This category was included in part to provide a comparison between the prevalence of actual war stories and metaphorical war frames. It was also included because actual war stories contribute to the overall construction of the metaphorical war of all against all in mainstream commercial journalism.

In cases where articles contained more than one category, the category that was most dominant or prevalent within the article was coded. Finally, intercoder reliability was tested by having two coders independently code every issue in 3 randomly selected years from each magazine.

Results

For *TIME* magazine, 20,799 articles were examined across the twenty-year period from 1981-2000, which is an average of 20 articles per issue or 1040 articles per year. *War/battle framing metaphors* were found in 17% of all articles examined (avg. = 3.4 articles/issue or 176.8 articles/year); *political campaign references* were found in 6% of all articles (avg. = 1.2 articles/issue or 62.4 articles/year); *other adversarial news schema* were found in 11% of all articles (avg. = 2.2 articles/issue or 114.4 articles/year); and *actual war/military references* were found in 13% of all articles (avg. = 2.6 articles/issue or 135.2 articles/year). For a summary of results by year, see Table 1.

TI ME	8 1	8 2	8 3	8 4	8 5	8 6	8 7	8 8	8 9	9 0	9 1	9 2	9 3	9 4	9 5	9 6	9 7	9 8	9 9	0 0	A vg
% WM	1 5	1 1		1 5	2 1	1 9	2 0	1 2	1 7	1 5	1 1	1 2	2 1	2 5	2 5	2 1	2 1	1 8	1 2	1 3	17
% CR	3	1	6	3	1	6	8	1	1	1	3	2	5	4	3	3	1	3	7	6	6
% OA	6	2	5	6	3	2	7	5	4	0	3	6	1	5	4	0	7	6	2	4	11
% AW	1 7		1 8	2 1		2 9	2 0	2 1	1 8	2 9	1 5	1 1	1 6	1 6	8 8	6 2	2 1	1 3	7 7	5 5	13

Table 1. Coding results for *TIME* magazine, by year (1981-2000).

For *Newsweek* magazine, 22,882 articles were examined across the twenty-year period from 1981-2000, which is an average of 22 articles per issue or 1144 articles per year. *War/battle framing metaphors* were found in 15% of all articles examined (avg. = 3.3 articles/issue or 171.6 articles/year); *political campaign references* were found in 7% of all articles (avg. = 1.5 articles/issue or 80.1 articles/year); *other adversarial news schema* were found in 9% of all articles (avg. = 2 articles/issue or 103 articles/year); and *actual war/military references* were found in 10% of all articles (avg. = 2.2 articles/issue or 114.4 articles/year). For a summary of results by year, see Table 2 below.

News week	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	A vg
% WM	17	25	10	6	5	16	5	8	14	6	4	24	25	14	12	32	24	13	14	27	15
% CR	1	6	7	1	2	4	2	2	2	31	2	25	2	1	6	16	6	3	8	19	7
% OA	3	3	8	3	6	17	2	6	11	6	4	3	24	5	10	16	13	10	5	15	9
% AW	5	7	10	7	17	11	15	13	8	8	12	17	14	8	9	7	9	11	7	8	10

Table 2. Coding results for *Newsweek* magazine, by year (1981-2000).

For *Maclean's* magazine, 19,217 articles were examined across the twenty-year period from 1981-2000, which is an average of 18.5 articles per issue or 961 articles per year. *War/battle framing metaphors* were found in 14% of all articles examined (avg. = 2.6 articles/issue or 134.5 articles/year); *political campaign references* were found in 6% of all articles (avg. = 1.1 articles/issue or 57.7 articles/year); *other adversarial news schema* were found in 12% of all articles (avg. = 2.2 articles/issue or 115.3 articles/year); and *actual war/military references* were found in 10% of all articles (avg. = 1.85 articles/issue or 96.1 articles/year).

For a summary of results by year, see Table 3 below.

Maclean's	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	Avg
% WM	14	4	12	7	11	11	16	7	12	11	12	10	17	9	20	23	25	14	18	30	14
% CR	5	2	3	1	6	7	7	8	6	4	2	11	4	6	8	5	12	8	2	12	6
% OA	26	5	5	11	7	9	13	10	14	2	23	5	7	3	9	19	4	25	13	24	12
% AW	10	3	6	7	13	3	9	6	10	11	38	13	4	9	13	3	1	14	10	9	10

Table 3. Coding results for *Maclean's* magazine, by year (1981-2000).

Within the twenty-year period there were no significant upward or downward trends for any of the categories in any of the magazines. Normal variations in the occurrence of any given category from year to year within each magazine could be attributed partly to changing historical context (e.g., the occurrence of a political campaign, the eruption of a war, or the emergence of an acutely controversial public policy debate), partly to journalistic and editorial idiosyncrasies that varied from year to year within each magazine, and partly to intercoder variations. The intercoder reliability, however, was generally very good for a study of this type, averaging 92% overall. Broken down by category, intercoder reliability was 86% for *war/battle framing metaphors*; 90% for *political campaign references*; 96% for *other adversarial news schema*, and 96% for *actual war/military references*.

It should also be noted that there appears to be little difference between American and Canadian news constructions, as the average occurrences of each category in Tables 1, 2, and 3 demonstrates (i.e., TIME: 17%, 6%, 11%, and 13% respectively; Newsweek: 15%, 7%, 9%, and 10%; and Maclean's: 14%, 6%, 12%, and 10%). The overall combined averages for all three magazines were as follows: *War/battle framing metaphors* characterized 15% of all articles; *political campaign references* characterized 7% of all articles; *other adversarial news schema* characterized 11% of all articles; and *actual war/military references* characterized 11% of all articles.

Taken separately, these percentages may not appear very noteworthy. When they are aggregated together, however, the results are striking. In this regard, the first three categories can actually be understood as subsets of a single formulaic news frame that routinely reduces complex public affairs stories into simple and dramatic binary oppositions through the use of adversarial metaphors. Overall, 33% of all articles examined in all magazines conformed to this formulaic news frame –

which we call the *Adversarial Metaphor Stories*. When actual war stories are aggregated with these adversarial metaphor stories, we can see the sum total of all articles about actual wars as well as metaphorically constructed wars, confrontations, and contests – which we call the *War of All Against All Stories*. Overall, 44% of all articles in all magazines fell into this category, as illustrated in Figure 1.

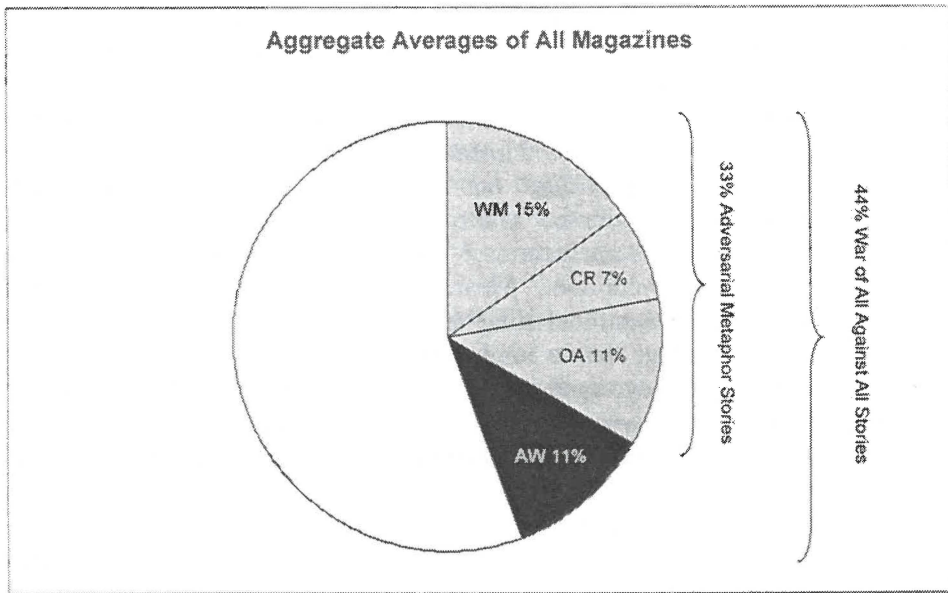


Figure 1: All Magazines, aggregated results.

In addition, it should be noted that the actual occurrence of war metaphors and other adversarial news schema was likely higher than our findings suggest. Our results were conservative for two reasons. First, as detailed in the methods section above, the study only examined articles that were three or more paragraphs long, yet when the articles were substantially longer, only the first three and last three paragraphs were examined. This approach enabled us to detect the majority of war metaphors and other adversarial news schema (which tended, according to a pilot sample, to occur most frequently in headlines and at the beginning and end of articles), while also enabling us to maximize the sample size. However, spot checks demonstrated that some additional war metaphors and other adversarial news schema could be found in the mid-sections of longer articles. Therefore a more thorough reading should have yielded even higher occurrences.

The second reason that these results were conservative is that the scanning methods employed in coding all articles required coders to spend a maximum of 30 minutes per magazine issue – which meant that coders were quickly skimming, rather than closely reading, each article. Again, this allowed us to maximize the sample size still achieving reasonably accurate, if not slightly conservative, results. Not surprisingly, spot checks demonstrated that some additional war metaphors and

other adversarial news schema would have been found if more careful readings were possible even for the first three and last three paragraphs of every article.

Finally, coders recorded key metaphorical phrases as they coded, which are presented below in an illustrative rather than exhaustive manner, due to the overwhelming length of an exhaustive list. For instance, coders found that during the last two decades of the twentieth century, North America was metaphorically engulfed in "culture wars," "gender wars," "class wars," "propaganda wars," "environmental wars," "abortion wars," and "race wars" – not to mention "car wars," "star wars," "air wars," "fare wars," "price wars," "ad wars," "cola wars," "banana wars," and even "diaper wars." Furthermore, various groups were allegedly engaged in a "war against feminism," not to be confused with the "war on terrorism"; and a "war against STDs," not to be confused with the "war against SUVs" – all which coincided with the "war on drugs," the "war on crime," the "war on poverty," the "war on homelessness," the "war on parents," the "war on families," and "the war on childhood." Meanwhile, other skirmishes were fought in the shadow of these larger wars, including the "battle over social security" and the "battle over the Bible." The "battle for the White House" was fought repeatedly during the period of our study, as was the "battle for the flag" and the "battle for public opinion." Finally, between the ongoing "political battles," "budget battles," "tax battles," "spending battles," "labor battles," "ballot battles," "bureaucratic battles," "custody battles," "turf battles," and "border battles," it was easy to lose sight of the "prime time battles" and "ratings wars" fought between media conglomerates over who got to cover which skirmishes within this war of all against all.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is not to suggest that social conflicts should be glossed over by simple "feel-good" media coverage. As Rubenstein et al. (1994) points out, social conflicts warrant media attention. Democratic societies cannot address conflicts effectively if democratic publics are not aware of them and informed about them. However, when complex conflicts are reduced to simple binary oppositions – through metaphorical wars and fights – publics are not adequately informed. As Tannen explains, "framing news as a fight between two sides often results in needed information not getting out – and even in false information getting spread" (1998, 30). Moreover, such simplistic formulas grant a public audience to only the most extreme and irreconcilable voices and views within a conflict, thus shaping the course and outcome of the conflict.

When polarized debate is sought, those with the greatest expertise are often rejected or refuse to take part because they resist slotting complex issues into a simplified debate format. Those who are willing or eager to cloak their moderate expertise – or lack of it – in fiery capes are given the platform instead. When this happens, the entire society loses. (Tannen 1998, 47)

For these reasons, the consistent patterns of news discourse identified in this study raise significant concerns. In short, we might ask ourselves if the war of all against all that is projected by our commercial news media is a just or sustainable war in an age where social and ecological problems defy simplistic solutions born of binary oppositions. Moreover, what are the causes and consequences of these patterns in news discourse? Given that the metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines is a cultural construct, the concept of *cultural codes* provides a useful framework for answering these questions. As discussed earlier in this paper, cultural constructs are learned and transmitted through *cultural codes*, which are widely shared rules of correspondence, or structured relationships, between the elements of a cultural system. Cultural codes give structure to human consciousness as well as to human social organization. Cultural codes therefore have *psycho-structural* and *socio-structural* expressions, and we need to look at both to understand the patterns of news discourse identified above (adapted from Ross 1993).

The term *psycho-structural* refers to culturally contingent structures of human consciousness (i.e., internal structures of the human mind). These include culturally shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and response tendencies that are acquired through processes of social learning. The term *socio-structural*, on the other hand, refers to culturally contingent structures of social organization (i.e., external institutional structures). These include political, economic, legal, and other social institutions or arrangements, such as structures of authority, relations of production, systems of resource distribution, and divisions of labor. Of course, these two dimensions of culture need to be understood dialectically. Both are inseparably related and mutually informing. Nonetheless, they serve as useful analytical categories because they highlight the way that cultures shape, and are shaped by, the interior world of the human mind as well as the exterior world of social organization. As Ross (1993) demonstrates in his work on culture and conflict, culture cannot be understood adequately without reference to both.

These analytical distinctions provide a useful model for explaining the social construction of a metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines. On the one hand, war metaphors and related schemas must, to some degree, reflect the psycho-structural make-up of significant numbers of people within North America. This includes journalists and editors who routinely draw upon such schemas to construct news stories. It also includes the news-reading citizen/consumers who continue, quite literally, to “buy into” such constructs as valid and useful representations of social reality. On the other hand, war metaphors and related schemas must also reflect the socio-structural pressures and constraints of North American institutions. Among these institutions are ad-revenue-dependent media organizations (such as *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and *Maclean's*), whose primary economic function is to manufacture audiences, through the construction of spectacle, in order to sell their attention to advertisers (Debord 1990, 1977; Smythe 1981; Jhally 1987). No less important are the partisan political organizations, legal adversary systems, and other social institutions – including lucrative recreation and entertainment industries – that routinely structure human activity as two-sided

contests between diametrically opposed adversaries. These social institutions provide much of the raw material that commercial media then selectively amplify in order to construct the spectacle of a war of all against all. From an economic standpoint, such spectacle is a relatively inexpensive and thus highly profitable way to manufacture a mass audience that can be sold to advertisers.

The metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines thus derives from deeply embedded cultural codes, which structure the patterns of human thought and social organization just described. This is not to say that the social construction of war metaphors and other adversarial news schema lacks any biological foundation. Clearly, human beings have the biological capacity for all manner of adversarial conflict, including war. This capacity has been expressed in various forms throughout history and it continues to be expressed in various forms today. However, undue attention to adversarial conflict obscures the equally (if not more) important human capacity for cooperation and mutuality.

In this regard, though the Hobbesian view of human nature has dominated Western social and political thinking in recent centuries, a new consensus is emerging regarding human nature. Across all fields of human study – biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, etc. – the emerging consensus is that humans have the genetic capacity for both competition and cooperation, or adversarialism and mutualism (refer, for example, to discussions of this theme in Ross 1993; Seville 1987; Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin 1987; Howell and Willis 1989; Becker 1976; Collard 1978; Hammond 1975; Hollander 1990; Margulis and Fester 1991; Margulis 1998; Zamagni 1995; Lunati 1992; Axelrod 1984; Bergstrom and Stark 1993; Samuelson 1993; Casti 1994; Simon 1990; Rushton 1982; Frank, Gilovich, and Regan 1993). Accordingly, which of these capacities is more fully expressed is a function of culture.

This is where the construction of a metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines should raise some concern. What might be the consequences of naturalizing adversarial expressions of human nature in the media? The media function as an important socializing institution through which we learn what it means to be human. Furthermore, our perceptions about what it means to be human influence our social norms and social behavior. As Zamagni explains, there is growing evidence that “our beliefs about human nature help shape human nature itself, in the sense that what we think about ourselves and our possibilities determine what we aspire to become” (1995, xxi).

Of course, the commercial media are not the only socializing institutions that shape our perceptions of human nature and normal social behavior. Yet, in our hyper-mediated society, most people rely on the commercial media as their primary source of news about the world around them. Moreover, *cultivation theory* suggests that over time, repeated exposure to a consistent and pervasive stream of media representations can influence human perceptions and behavior in a collective and cumulative manner (Morgan and Signorielli 1990; Weimann 2000). This is because cultures are cultivated through the “stories” we repeatedly tell about ourselves.

If one of the primary narrative devices in contemporary news media is the war metaphor, along with other closely related adversarial news schema, then *normative adversarialism* (Fellman 1988; Karlberg 2004) may well be a cultivated value in North America. Furthermore, cultivation theory suggests that processes of cultivation can reinforce and sustain existing cultural perceptions and behaviors once established, as well as diminish the rate at which anti-social perceptions and behaviors are mitigated by other cultural forces, such as pro-social trends in parenting and education. Of course, cultivation effects are extremely difficult to empirically verify, and this study was not designed to test for such effects. However, when the results of this study are viewed through the lens of cultivation theory, they raise important concerns about the consequences of the metaphorical war of all against all in North American news magazines.

Other concerns also present themselves. For instance, from an epistemological perspective, if most news stories reduce complex social issues down to simplistic two-sided conflicts, does this tend to constrain the public's capacity to think about issues in a complex and multi-faceted manner? Does it result in a developmentally arrested culture, stuck somewhere around the stages of basic dualism in William Perry's (1970) scheme of intellectual development, or reflecting S. I. Hayakawa's "Two-Valued Orientation" (1939)? Assuming that the social construction of reality theory has any validity, the answer to this epistemological question would have to be a qualified *yes*. We qualify this answer because the commercial news media are clearly not the only matrix within which epistemological development occurs. However, many other North American institutions appear to cultivate similarly dualistic modes of thought and perception. The most notable example of this is the mode of oppositional debate that characterizes decision-making in our political and legal institutions, and is still valorized as a model for critical thinking in many educational and academic settings. In the context of this larger culture of binary oppositions, war metaphors and other adversarial news schemas in the media would appear to reinforce widespread constraints on cognitive development within a population. At the very least, they do little to encourage the development of cognitive complexity.

Given the increasingly complex nature of the problems that contemporary societies face, this epistemological matter should be a cause for serious concern. Reducing multifaceted problems down to binary oppositions may have been a reasonably effective epistemological strategy in simpler times. However, our technological and reproductive success as a species has transformed the conditions of our own existence. The increasing complexity of the social and ecological problems we now face as members of a global community leave such epistemologies impotent at best and perilous at worst.

Consider just one example: One typical news construct that prevailed throughout the 1990s was "the war in the woods" over old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest. The alleged opponents in this war were "loggers" versus "environmentalists." The alleged stakes were "jobs" versus "the environment" (sometimes simply "jobs" versus "the spotted owl"). These simple dualisms provided the framework for regular news stories that reduced significant and

complex public policy issues, involving numerous stakeholders in a global community, down to localized battles between chain-saw-slinging-blue-collar workers and tree-hugging-hippie radicals. In these stories, the multi-national forestry companies and their shareholders and lobbyists were rendered virtually invisible; as were the national and international consumers of wood and pulp/fiber products; as were the trades-people and professionals who earned their livelihood working with those products; as were the native communities whose traditional hunting grounds, fishing watersheds, and sacred lands were often at risk; as were the recreational users and visitors of the forests; as were the large segments of the public who valued the forests for aesthetic and spiritual reasons even though they seldom had opportunities to visit them; as were the many other stakeholder groups including, perhaps most notably, large numbers of *environmentally-conscious and concerned loggers* who had no local tenure over the land they worked, no say regarding the clear-cut harvesting techniques they were employed to practice, no say over the publicly-subsidized concentration and mechanization of a forest industry that was increasingly putting them out of work even as it was moving land tenure and harvesting techniques further and further along what many observers consider to be an economically and ecologically unsustainable path.

Why care about such simplistic media renderings? After all, a cynic might say, “it’s just the media; we can’t expect them to delve into such complexity, and no one takes them seriously anyway, right”? Wrong. Modern democratic systems are premised on the theory that the media play an essential role in processes of democratic communication that can lead to informed public opinion which in turn can influence public policy through electoral processes and other means (refer, for example, to discussions of this theme in Hackett and Zhao 1998; Yankelovitch 1991; Keane 1991; McQuail 1992; Habermas 1994; Curran 1996). Yet how can any informed public opinion emerge regarding such significant public policy issues when much of the public’s only access to information about such issues is through a media lens that routinely reduces them down to simple but dramatic confrontations between two diametrically opposed caricatures? Clearly it cannot (refer to discussions in Richards 2000; Condit 1994).

Moreover, the extent of the media’s influence on our understanding and perceptions of a given issue tends to be inversely proportional to the amount of direct experience we have with that given issue. As Potter explains:

If a person’s knowledge structure is composed primarily of information only from the media, then this structure may be dominated by media-stimulated generalizations and internalizations from the media world. In many topics, we have no choice but to rely primarily on media information. This is what makes the media such a powerful socializing influence – we [often] cannot check out the media’s information by comparing it to information from other sources such as real life... This is true of almost all news content. (2001, 308)

There are, of course, other intervening variables, such as interpersonal communication networks, education level, and so forth, which also affect the extent

of media influence on perception (refer, for example, to the discussion of this theme in Jeffres 1997). Yet when the vast majority of the voting public has little direct experience with issues such as the economy or ecology of forest practices in the Pacific Northwest, then their understanding of the public policy issues involved is partially, if not entirely, dependent on media representations of those issues.

Returning to the metaphorical war of all against all, our concern is not with media coverage of conflict, but with the simplistic polarizing templates that tend to be used to cover conflict. For all of the reasons discussed above, the patterns of news discourse identified in this study raise significant concerns. The metaphorical war of all against all that is projected by our commercial news media is neither a just nor sustainable war in an age where social and ecological problems defy simplistic solutions born of binary oppositions. Given that these patterns in media discourse reflect and transmit underlying cultural codes, we need to ask ourselves whether these cultural codes, which emerged under very different historical conditions, will prove adaptive or maladaptive in the age of heightened global interdependence that is approaching. In this regard, all who are interested in peace and conflict resolution would do well to turn their attention to the role that news discourse and other forms of mass-mediated communication play in the perpetuation and exacerbation of social conflict.

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