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"OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM" IN CHILDREN'S NEWS

A Comparison of Consolation Strategies Used by Dutch And German News Producers

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Since the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001, the news worldwide contains nearly daily reports on the international battle against terrorism. This situation has implications for the media guidance that parents and educators provide children because children are exposed to these reports and may well have a need to learn how to cope with the issues and implications of these events. For children's news producers, these violent and ever-threatening events present a special dilemma, too (Créton, 1994). On the one hand, the main goal of children's news reporters is to select topics on the basis of their news value, which does imply coverage of international violence. On the other hand, their policy must also be aimed at allowing their young audience to cope with such violence without becoming too upset. In the following analysis, a comparison is made between the efforts of the Dutch and the German children's news programs to inform their child audiences about the first week of attacks during the War in Iraq, which was called "Operation Iraqi Freedom," while trying not to upset them too much during their viewing. As an extension of Walma van der Molen and de Vries' (2003) earlier analy-

sis of consolation strategies employed by the Dutch children's news during the events of September 11, the present study describes how the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom was covered by the Dutch and the German children's news and how consolation strategies were applied during this international crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Television is by far the main source for children for information about human or political crises, fires, accidents, crimes, and war (Ball-Rokeach, 2001). As viewers, many children actively search for this kind of information (Walma van der Molen, Valkenburg, & Peeters, 2002). To meet these needs, many European countries have specific children's news programs whose mission is to report the news in a manner that is comprehensible to children, from the ages of about 8 to 14. These news programs, such as *Confetti* in Austria, *het Jeugdjournaal* in the Netherlands, *Karrewiet* in Belgium, *Logo!* in Germany, and *Newsround* in England, usually attract a significant number of child viewers and are generally well understood and recalled (e.g., Gunter, Furnham, & Griffiths, 2000; Walma van der Molen & Van der Voort, 2000a, 2000b).

During the first weeks of the war in Iraq, many children intentionally followed the attacks and the progress of the war (see Walma van der Molen & Konijn, chap. 4, this volume). However, even if children were not actively looking for information about the attacks on Iraq early in Spring 2003, it would have been hard for them to avoid exposure to the war because it was covered widely in news broadcast in countries all over the world. For many children, it was inevitable that they would be confronted with the violence in Iraq because the news was omnipresent and discussed widely, not only in the media, but also in the children's schools and homes.

Several studies have shown that media portrayals of realistic violence may heighten levels of immediate fear and worry (Cantor, 1998; Cantor & Nathanson, 1996; Smith & Wilson, 2000, 2002; Walma van der Molen et al., 2002) and the fear of being victimized (Sparks & Ogles, 1990). In addition, some children may even experience posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSDs) long after seeing TV reports of severe violent events, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the 1986 shuttle disaster, and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (Pfefferbaum, 2001; Pfefferbaum et al., 2001; Duggal, Berezkin, & John, 2002; Redlener & Grant, 2002). Such traumatic events may have particular impact on adolescents and older primary school-age children, who are able to grasp the seriousness of the real images on TV, as well as for children who have a special relationship with people involved in a devastating event.

In the case of the War in Iraq, it was expected that horrifying images would be readily available and, perhaps, broadcast during the news. Contrary to the Gulf War in February 1991, in the run up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, it was reported that *embedded journalists* would join the Allied Forces and be able to report from the actual battle fields. In addition, new techniques, such as cameras on army vehicles and cell phones with video facilities, gave journalists more possibilities to document the real threat and the actual violence of the war activities. Also, they would be able to present more about the physical and emotional consequences of the war, such as devastated buildings and Iraqi civilians fleeing, frightened, killed, or hospitalized. For the producers of TV news programs, and especially the producers of the children's news, these new kinds of reporting posed important questions concerning their capabilities to inform their viewers about what happened, to and by whom, why, and with what consequences. As a result, children's news producers, especially, found themselves having to consider that their viewers would be more susceptible to emotional reactions as a result of viewing news reports about events in Iraq.

GOALS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Main Goals

To date, only limited research has been conducted about how broadcasters of children's news programs select and produce news items. Maas (1991) reported that a range of precautions are applied to offset possible harmful effects of violent news, but producers do not use a formal or explicit plan to guide these strategies for children's news. Rather, as has been observed for general production and framing of children's news programs, producers and reporters intuitively apply certain strategies based on their overall understanding of how to convey information to children (Buckingham, 1997). The first aim of the study presented here, therefore, was to create a typology of how the war was treated by producers of children's news. A second aim was to verify which strategies are predominantly applied by producers of children's news to help children deal with emotionally upsetting events.

A third goal was to compare the treatment of the war and the consolation strategies applied by Dutch and German children's news. There are a number of reasons why these two countries are comparable. First, Germany and the Netherlands are quite similar socially and economically. In addition, there are several similarities in the way children are treated at school and in families, especially in the way they use the media (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). Furthermore, the languages and cultural contexts of both countries share much in common.

Despite these similarities, the two countries did differ, at the time the study was conducted, on at least one important issue: the public's general view and opinion of the legitimacy of the attacks on Iraq. Whereas public opinion and politicians in Germany seemed to be clearly against the American idea of initiating Operation Iraqi Freedom, an ambivalent point of view characterized Dutch society. Some Dutch politicians and opinion leaders openly backed the U.S. point of view, but other political parties and humanitarian organizations protested and argued that Holland should wait for the UN to take a stance. Many other persons in the Netherlands stressed their doubts and did not take an explicit stand in favor or against the war. Such debates and diverse points of view were held by adults as well as children in both countries (see Nikken & Götz, chap. 5, this volume).

Treatment of Operation Iraqi Freedom by the Children's News

Because different views regarding an approaching attack on Iraq were expressed in the debates taking place in Germany and the Netherlands in late 2002-early 2003, the present study specifically sought to determine whether and if so how these different points of view were represented in the children's news. On the one hand, it could be expected that in both countries a neutral, journalistic view would be expressed, with equal attention devoted to condemnation and justification of the war. On the other hand, in light of the general consensus in each society, it might be expected that the German news for children might report on the protests against the war more frequently, whereas the Dutch children's news might present a range of points of view.

Second, we also sought to identify the different types of arguments used to present views on the Iraq War. As presented by Nikken and Götz (see chap. 5, this volume), the many different arguments conceivable may be categorized, as relating to (a) the (false) intentions of the United States and/or George W. Bush, (b) the (false) intentions of Iraq and/or Saddam Hussein, or (c) the suffering of innocent civilians in Iraq. Because of the differential discourse in the two countries, we sought to determine whether the use of such arguments differed in the Dutch and German children's news.

Third, we set out to study whether the children's news personalized the war by presenting it as a conflict between the two most important state leaders in the Iraq conflict—Bush and Hussein. News reporting customarily devotes much attention to the speeches and formal actions of state leaders because their behavior and statements can easily be used as a symbol and explanation of a country's decisions and actions. Such images create a less abstract concept of international conflict and can make the war and the underlying intentions of the countries involved more understandable, especially for children.

Finally, our research focused on the emotional aspects related to reporting about the devastating effects of war. Here we wanted to know whether and to what extent children's news in both countries included concern and empathy with the suffering of the victims of war. Because children are more susceptible to being emotionally affected by reports about war and crime than are adults, one might expect that the children's news would refrain from an emphasis on the suffering of Iraqi civilians and the soldiers in Iraq. In addition, we were interested in the extent to which children's news paid attention to expressions of anger or indignation about the war by people living in the Netherlands, Germany, or any other country. Given that many persons in German society held a much more negative position against the war than in the Netherlands, we expected that the German children's news would devote more time to people expressing such anger.

Application of Consolation Strategies

Years of experience gained by the editors of the children's news from reporting on violence and wars have resulted, at least in the Netherlands (Maas, 1991), in several precautionary production strategies that may lessen children's fears and anxieties. Such consolation strategies were addressed in an earlier study about the attacks on September 11 (Walma van der Molen & De Vries, 2003). This study revealed that the producers of the Dutch children's news apply consolation strategies on three different levels, spanning from the macro, program level to the microlevel of the individual shot or sequence. Briefly, at the macrolevel, producers take direct action that seeks to advance viewer consolation when selecting and organizing the items to be broadcast during the program. They do so by either refraining from inclusion of violent news items that are too shocking or by alternating heavy and light news topics (the so-called sandwich formula). Although a kind of self-regulation is present in the former strategy, the intent in applying the latter strategy is that lighter or sometimes humorous news items will lessen the weight of the negative information in the violent news topics.

A second type of consolation strategy is applied at item level, such as having experts explain a situation, introducing personal accounts of children, or paying attention to the reactions of viewers. The assumptions underlying this strategy are, first, that when a message of relief is conveyed, either implicitly or explicitly, children may feel less anxious that similar violent events might happen to them; and, second, that they may learn how to deal with their emotional reactions from the positive examples of others. For example, experts who appear on the program, such as researchers or child psychologists, explain to children that they are not the only ones feeling afraid, angry, or sad by certain news events. In addition, they may emphasize the distance of events, the rare possibility that an event like this could

happen to a child, or even indicate some positive aspects of a shocking news event (e.g., by suggesting how children can help or do something beneficial). This kind of expert information is important because it recognizes, and so legitimizes, feelings that young viewers may be experiencing, it stresses the low chance for the child viewer being victimized, and it stimulates them to provide active input.

It might be argued that paying attention to personal accounts of children or to the reactions of the audience may enhance worries in child viewers because it can increase their empathy for victims. Alternatively, the presence of children's personal experiences may also function as a consolation strategy because it makes the news more tangible. To a child viewer, a shocking event may be framed with consideration for its emotional impact if it is commented on by someone of the child's own age. Further, such personal accounts often include positive endings and may restrict viewers fantasizing about what might have happened. Finally, in the same vein, presenting reactions by children may evoke consolation in child viewers because other children are shown trying to cope with their emotions, which may in turn establish a feeling of collective mourning (Créton, 1994).

The third kind of consolation strategy is applied at the microlevel of the individual shot or sequence; for example, avoidance of unnecessarily graphic violent footage, selection of distant camera angles, editing the sound to avoid screams or use of dramatic music, and avoidance of repetitive broadcasts of the same violent images. This third approach is important because many children refer to explicit depictions of violence or graphic portrayals when asked what type of news information makes them especially fearful (Walma van der Molen et al., 2002). Particularly younger children, who are more perceptually bound than children above age 11, are responsive to explicitly violent film footage. Thus, to lessen the chances of children becoming too upset, a useful consolation procedure at the microlevel is to avoid the most explicit scenes of violence, to show them at a distance, or to show intense images only once.

As in the study by Walma van der Molen and de Vries (2003), the present study conducted an analysis of the consolation strategies used by the children's news. However this study differed in that it compared the Dutch and the German children's news reporting on Operation Iraqi Freedom. We conducted the present analysis, first, because we wanted to verify whether the strategies were also applied in the case of the second War in Iraq, and, second, because the first study dealt with attacks that were different from the attacks on Iraq, both in their nature and in the immediacy of the reporting required. Indeed, Operation Iraqi Freedom actually started weeks before the first strikes on Wednesday evening, March 19, 2003, and continued daily. Therefore, the producers of the children's news had many opportunities to prepare the use of consolation strategies. This well may have resulted in different choices than the ones made during the first days after the totally unex-

pected terrorist attacks of September 11. In addition, we wanted to explore whether the strategies observed for the Dutch children's news could also be generalized to the German children's news.

METHOD

Sample

All of the original broadcasts made by the German and Dutch public children's news programs from the moment the war started and continuing for 1 full week were taped. In the Netherlands, this amounted to seven broadcasts from Thursday, March 20, to Wednesday, March 26. Each news program was broadcast in the early evening around 18:50 pm on the Dutch national public children's channel *Z@ppelin*. The total amount of program time recorded was 81 minutes and 50 seconds. Because the German children's news program *logo!* had no airtime during the weekend, there were only five original broadcasts during the first week of the war. These programs were broadcast by the public children's channel *Ki.Ka* around 16:50 pm. The total amount of time recorded was 46 minutes and 43 seconds. The programs in both countries target children roughly between 8 and 14 years of age and have a high market share among the target audience.

Both programs have a long tradition of broadcasting, and hence extensive experience presenting the news to children. In the Netherlands, the *Jeugdjournaal* has been broadcast since 1981, and the German *logo!* originated in 1988. In addition, both programs' main aim is similar—namely, presenting the news to children in as understandable a manner as possible. Based on the many national and international awards both programs have received as "the best television programs for the child audience," it would appear that these are well-respected, professional programs.

In terms of presentation features, both programs utilize relatively young (20–30 years of age), causally dressed news presenters. Different from regular news programs, the presenters in both children's news programs are never seated behind a desk, but rather sit on a sofa or stand informally in front of the camera to create an informal atmosphere. Finally, bright-colored lighting, graphics, leaders, and other visual techniques make for a lively and attractive atmosphere in both programs.

Procedure

The taped broadcasts were analyzed on several levels to determine how the War in Iraq was treated and how consolation strategies were applied by the children's news in both countries. First, each day's broadcast was divided

into items (i.e., reports on distinctive news items that were introduced, and often commented on shortly by the newsreader afterward). Subsequently, each item related to the war was divided into (a) sequences (i.e., item parts that form a minimal semantic unit in sound and image), and (b) individual shots (i.e., the pictorial material between two cuts within an item). The coding form constructed was used to analyze each unit of analysis. This procedure produced a detailed description for the entirety of the item, as well as the pictorial and verbal information. Following a review of the 12 broadcasts, this procedure resulted in a collection containing 35 Dutch and 35 German items of which 58 related to the attacks on Iraq (see Table 9.1 for an extended overview of the number of items, sequences, and duration related to the Iraq War for each broadcast day in Germany and in the Netherlands).

TABLE 9.1.
News per Day in the Netherlands and Germany: Number of Items and Sequences, and Duration in Minutes

DATE IN MARCH, 2001	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	26th	Total
NETHERLANDS								
Number of subitems	9	4	5	5	4	3	5	35
Number of Iraq items	9	4	5	3	3	2	2	28
Number of Iraq sequences	23	14	18	11	14	10	8	98
Length Iraq news	24'22"	8'57"	9'36"	6'18"	5'03"	5'34"	4'23"	64'12"
Total program length	24'22"	8'57"	9'36"	10'56"	9'23"	9'09"	9'27"	81'50"
GERMANY								
Number of subitems	10	6	—	—	6	7	6	35
Number of Iraq items	10	6	—	—	6	5	3	30
Number of Iraq sequences	16	10	—	—	11	9	7	53
Length Iraq news	11'52"	8'21"	—	—	9'10"	6'46"	3'41"	39'50"
Total program length	11'52"	8'21"	—	—	9'10"	9'09"	8'11"	46'43"

Note: Leaders and weather forecast are not included.

Measures

At the item level, determinations were made as to whether the news was reporting about or referring to the Iraq War. Items that did not deal with the war in Iraq in any way were not analyzed any further. The items that did deal with Operation Iraqi Freedom were analyzed according to length (in seconds) as well as the following five measures.

Stance Towards the War. On the level of sequences, it was established whether the war was presented in a favorable, unfavorable, or neutral point of view (both positive and negative at the same time, or not explicitly favorable or unfavorable). A favorable view could be a speech by President Bush or a presenter's comment explaining successes of the American soldiers. An unfavorable view could be a sequence in which Iraqi civilians are complaining about the war or images from the UN assembly condemning the war. Sequences in which experts explained both the advantages and disadvantages of the war or sequences containing footage of ruined streets and buildings in Baghdad without any comment, for example, were coded as neutral.

Arguments in Favor or Against the War. For every sequence, it was established whether the (un)favorableness towards the war in video or audio material was discussed using three potential types of reasons: (a) arguments about the intentions of the United States (e.g., Bush wants oil, Bush acts out of revenge, United States wants control of the oil market, Bush is a bad politician, United States delivered weapons to Iraq, or Bush wants power); (b) arguments about the intentions of Iraq (e.g., Hussein is a dictatorial leader, Iraq is a dictatorial regime, Hussein is a bad leader, Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction, or Iraq deserves a better, more democratic future); and (c) arguments about the suffering of civilians (e.g., people in Iraq are dying or wounded, children in Iraq are dying or wounded, buildings are being destroyed). The arguments were only coded if there was explicit use of an argument in favor, against, or in presenting an undecided stance regarding the war.

Presence of World Leaders. Each sequence was examined to see whether leaders George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein were mentioned by being either shown visibly or heard via audio.

Emotions. Each sequence was examined to determine whether either and/or both of two types of emotions were present in the visual and/or audio material: anger about the war and empathy with victims. The presence of anger was coded if someone explicitly mentioned experiencing that emotion or overtly acted according to this emotion. The measure of empathy

was determined to be present if attention was given to the suffering of the Iraqi people or the soldiers in the audio or visual material. Empathy could be coded if it was part of an argument for or against the justification of the war, but would also be determined to be present if no specific stand was taken in favor, against, or with both points of view taken at the same time.

Consolation Strategies. The German and Dutch news broadcasts were analyzed in regard to the use of consolation strategies at three levels: Program level—it was first determined for each day whether news items about the war in Iraq were included and what their quantitative status was in relation to other news topics. Also, a determination was made if specifically heavy news items were avoided. Item level—it was established whether experts, personal accounts of children, and viewers' reactions were included. Finally, at the shot level, it was established whether (a) violence was present and, if so, how serious and how detailed the violence was portrayed (very, a little bit, not at all); and (b) wounded people were present and how seriously wounded they were (very, a little bit, not at all). The length of these shots was determined, as well as the type of shot (e.g., very long, total, medium, close-up, very close-up).

RESULTS

Attention Given to the War

The Dutch and German news broadcasts for children from March 20 to 26 contained 104 minutes and 2 seconds of material devoted to the war in Iraq. As can be seen in Table 9.1, the first Dutch broadcast on March 20 lasted more than 24 minutes, much longer than a regular children's news broadcast, which lasts about 10 minutes. This particular program contained nine news items, all of which dealt with news about the war. Further, it even had no weather forecast, an exceptional omission for the Dutch children's news. The same, to a lesser extent, applied to the March 20 German news, which lasted about 2 minutes longer than the regular 10-minute show. As the week progressed, both news programs devoted less and less attention to the war in Iraq. Table 9.1 shows that, from Day 4 in the Netherlands and from Day 6 in Germany, news about Iraq was alternated with other news topics. The news about Iraq, however, never became nonsignificant in journalistic terms. In both countries, the news broadcasts opened every day with the latest facts about Iraq. On average, during the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom, slightly more than 4 out of every 5 minutes (81%) of the children's news broadcasting were devoted to the war in Iraq, both in the Netherlands and Germany.

Differences and Similarities Between the Dutch and German News Reporting on Iraq

Table 9.2 presents a profile of the kind of news reporting in Germany and the Netherlands with regard to Operation Iraqi Freedom. As can be seen in the table, both programs had a considerably different profile on 3 of the 4 measures. First, the stance toward the war differed greatly between the countries. In the Netherlands, a neutral point of view was given most frequently (70%). Reports and comments with an explicit positive or negative view amounted up to, respectively, 14% and 16% of all war reporting. In contrast, the German children's news did place strong emphasis on condemnation of Operation Iraqi Freedom or presented the war in a neutral way. There was hardly any attention devoted to presenting a favorable view on the war. The negative stance on the war was mainly present in the many reports about children condemning the war, but sometimes also underlined in the comments made by the presenters—for example, the one made following a report in which children objected to the war because of the victims: "Naturally, we are all hoping, too, that the war will be over as soon as possible, because the sooner the war stops, the less children and grown-ups will die" (*logo!*, March 20).

The Dutch and German children's news broadcasts also differed in the amount of time devoted to the three types of arguments applied to justify the war. In the German children's news, 28% of the Iraq reporting focused on the consequences of the war, including the suffering of innocent people and children. In the Netherlands, somewhat more attention was devoted to the argument that people are victims of the war (31%), but the Dutch broadcasts also strongly focused on the other types of arguments (i.e., claiming that Iraq had a nondemocratic government or that the United States had [false] economical reasons to start the war). The German children's news almost completely refrained from these arguments about political or economic reasons and primarily devoted attention to the humanitarian consequences for the civilians. A third difference between children's news programs was the presence of both state leaders involved in the conflict. During the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Saddam Hussein appeared significantly more often in the news than did George W. Bush. This applied both to the German and Dutch news shows. However, in the news for German children, significantly less attention was given to both state leaders than in the Dutch children's news broadcasts. The latter reported almost twice as many times about Bush and Hussein than did the German *logo!* program. As compared with the Dutch children's news, *logo!* not only more often refrained from politically and/or economically grounded arguments, but it also presented a less personalized view of the conflict between Iraq and the United States and the Allied Forces.

TABLE 9.2.
Profiles of the Dutch and German News Reporting on Operation
Iraqi Freedom: Distribution of Favorableness, and Presence
of Arguments, World Leaders, and Emotions in Iraq Reporting

	Netherlands % of time	Germany % of time	Total % of time
<i>Stance toward the war</i>			
Positive	14	2	9
Neutral	70	47	61
Negative	16	51	30
<i>Presence of arguments*</i>			
Suffering	31	28	30
Iraq is wrong	35	1	22
United States is wrong	26	0	16
<i>Presence of world leaders*</i>			
Hussein	52	20	40
Bush	29	10	21
<i>Presence of emotions*</i>			
Empathy	33	34	33
Anger	8	9	8

*Multiple measures possible.

The Dutch and German news programs for children did not differ in the amount of time devoted to expressing anger about the war (see last row in Table 9.2). About 8% of all war reporting broadcast involved people expressing anger or showing their indignation at the war in both countries. In addition, the children's news in both countries did not differ either in regard to expressions of empathy with the civilian victims of the war or the suffering of soldiers. During the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom, about one third of war reporting dealt with the suffering of people in the war both in the Netherlands and Germany. Sometimes the suffering was present in the form of a voice-over telling what happened in Iraq or as an intrinsic element of footage showing how the people in Iraq had to live in houses that were being bombarded or how they were being hospitalized. In other cases, the news presenters in the studio expressed the empathy. This was particu-

larly the case in Germany—for example, when the presenter said to the viewers: "Although much is uncertain, unfortunately it is sure to be the case that there are a lot of casualties" (*logo!*, March 21), or "Again, there have been very heavy attacks last night making the situation for the Iraqi people really bad. The images you will see now have moved many people deeply" (*logo!*, March 26). These emotionally laden comments by the presenters formed about 7% of all German reportage about the war.

Consolation at Program Level

During the first days of the Iraq War, the children's news programs did not apply the consolation strategy known as the *sandwich formula*. Table 9.1 makes clear that the first three shows in both countries (in the Netherlands on March 20–22 and in Germany on March 20, 21, and 24) were completely devoted to the news on Operation Iraqi Freedom. The producers in both countries did turn to mixing the Iraq news with other news stories during the latter days of our sample period. Attention to the war decreases from day to day, giving room to other lighter items, such as a child pigeon-fancier, children living in a foster home, and a child circus visiting Amsterdam. Expressed in percentages of the total time for each broadcast, in the Netherlands, from Day 4 to Day 7, the time devoted to the Iraq War decreased gradually from 64% to 50%, while in Germany it declined from Day 6 to Day 7 from 74% to 45%.

An important difference in consolation strategies applied at program level is noted when comparing the news topics addressed in the German program *logo!* and the Dutch *Jeugdjournaal* (see also the appendix for the individual Iraq-related news items per day). More than the German news, the news presented to children in the Netherlands did, in general, contain items with serious violent or frightening images from Iraq and the region. For example, on Day 4 of the war, Dutch children were told and shown American soldiers being held as prisoners of war by the Iraqi soldiers, and they were also presented with an intense emotional reaction by a mother of one of the POWs. That same day, the Dutch news showed footage of Iraqi farmers celebrating the shooting down of an American helicopter and the death of the soldiers.

Finally, during the whole week, the Dutch children's news made more use of news reporters residing in America, Kuwait, and Iraq, who showed examples of people expressing the fears about the consequences of the war for the people in these regions. For example, the American correspondent explained extensively how frightened American children were because their father or mother, or both, were fighting in the Gulf region. In addition, he said: "These children remember the attacks on September 11 very well and they are afraid that the War in Iraq will result in new terrorists attacks. That's

why these children are twice as afraid" (*Jeugdjournaal*, March 20). The producers of the German children's news refrained from such intense news items, did not make use of news reporters in other countries, and spoke more often about Iraq-related events in Germany in a consoling manner.

Consolation at Item Level

The Dutch children's news chose to present an expert almost every day. In some cases, these experts were in the news studio and explained different aspects of the war. In other cases, the experts were interviewed on location. On average, six experts appeared in almost one third (29%) of the Dutch children's news programs dedicated to the Iraq War. In the German children's news, three experts appeared: two journalists and a child psychologist. In all, these three experts appeared in 11% of the German news reporting on Operation Iraqi Freedom, considerably less than the Dutch children's news (see Table 9.3).

The second consolation strategy on the item level (i.e., paying attention to the personal accounts of children) was used by producers in both countries, but to a different extent. In the Dutch children's news, attention was

TABLE 9.3.
Consolation Strategies Applied by the Dutch and German News
During the First Week of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Percentages
of Iraq Reporting

	Netherlands % of time	Germany % of time	Total % of time
<i>Consolation at item level</i>			
Experts	29	11	22
Children's accounts	12	19	15
Viewers' reactions	4	2	3
<i>Consolation at shot level</i>			
Footage of violence	15	18	16
Footage of victims	2	2	2
<i>Additional consolation strategies</i>			
Graphics and animation	8	14	9
Presenters consoling	1	9	4
Reporters consoling	0	2	1

given to children at schools and in demonstrations or to children from Iraqi families living in the Netherlands or in Baghdad for 2 days only. These personal accounts together amounted to 7-1/2 minutes or 12% of all war-related reporting. In Germany, much more attention was given to the personal accounts of children. Only on the last day studied were there no interviews with German children in demonstrations, at schools, or with Iraqi children living in Germany. On all other days, special reports were made about the feelings of children in Germany. On March 25, the *logo!* reporter introduced such a report as follows: "Surely, for you at this time the war is a very important issue. But how do you cope with the fact that all of a sudden there is news about war, violence and attacks every day? With whom do you talk for example about fears and worries that, because of the war, are now roaming around in your head? We've asked some of you." Altogether in German programs, 19% of the children's news on Iraq conveyed the personal accounts of children. Thus, the German producers used this kind of consolation significantly more often than did their colleagues in the Netherlands.

The third consolation strategy applied at item level, paying attention to child viewer's reactions, was not used often and differed only moderately for the Dutch and German children's news. Only during the first days of Operation Iraqi Freedom did both news programs devote attention to what children wrote to the news programs' Web sites. This amounted to only 2% of the Iraqi War-related reporting in Germany and up to 4% of all war reporting in the Netherlands (see Table 9.3).

Consolation at Shot Level

The extent to which producers of the children's news in Germany and in the Netherlands did or did not apply consolation strategies within the news items, at shot level, is also depicted in Table 9.3. In the Dutch *Jeugdjournaal*, 15% of the visual reporting on Iraq was classified as possibly distressing because the shots included images of actual war violence, the threat of violence, or the result of violence. More intense images of violence were present in almost a third of the Dutch distressing footage, whereas a quarter of this material gave a detailed picture of the violence or the consequences (e.g., the report on Day 5 of three very frightened Allied soldiers who were being kept in prison by the Iraqis). However, the majority of the Dutch distressing material (54%) was only a little violent and not very detailed (62%), whereas the rest was not intense or detailed at all. In the German news reporting on Operation Iraqi Freedom, slightly more distressing images were presented to the child audience (18%). However, different from the Dutch news, there were neither very intense images of violence nor detailed pictures of the violence or its physical consequences. The German distressing material was at most only slightly violent (59% of all this footage), and

no detailed pictures of war-related violence were the case in 81% of the air-time. In most cases, the distressing material broadcast in Germany contained long shot images of the bombed skyline of Baghdad or showed rockets being fired from a distance. Thus, altogether, the German distressing violent material was less intense and detailed than the Dutch violent footage.

Footage containing images of wounded people was used minimally in both countries and to the same extent; only 2% of all distressing material showed victims in hospitals. In a qualitative sense, however, the German producers seemed to take a more cautious approach in comparison with their Dutch colleagues because they did not show any children. In the Dutch news, the producers often broadcast images of wounded children lying in hospital beds. In all cases, however, in both countries, no seriously wounded victims were shown.

Additional Consolation Strategies

Compared with the Walma van der Molen and de Vries (2003) analysis of the consolation strategies applied by the Dutch children's news in reporting about the events of September 11, four new consolation strategies were applied in reporting about the war in Iraq. As Table 9.3 shows, the producers of the German news predominantly used these new strategies. First of all, animations and graphics were often used to explain certain news events in the German *logo!*—for example, how German Airborne Warning and Control System (so-called AWACS) airplanes, stationed in Turkey, might be involved in actual war activities over Iraq, or how the Geneva Convention is to be applied to prisoners of war. In the Dutch news, static graphics were used, but only to show on a map of Iraq where the latest bombing and fighting had taken place. A second new consolation strategy, on the item level, was applied by the news hosts as they spoke directly to the child audience at home in a consoling manner (e.g., stressing that they too hoped that the war would not last long or that they empathized with the child audience and their feelings). The same was true, although to a lesser extent, in reports on German news broadcasts for children, where, for example, a voice-over or a reporter explained that children did not have to worry because Germany is far away from Iraq. In the Dutch news, the texts spoken by the presenters or reporters were much more formal and less emotional. Only at the end of the first Dutch news show did the presenter stress that children should do something entertaining that evening instead of worrying. Finally, a fourth type of consoling—not listed on Table 9.3, but nonetheless interesting—is the fact that on shot level the German news often used the same footage on different days when explaining the war situation. In the Netherlands, specific images were less often repeated. Instead, as far as we know, the Dutch news showed the latest facts from the battlefields in Iraq and the region every day.

DISCUSSION

There were three aims to the present study. First, we sought to ascertain how news about an extremely distressing event such as Operation Iraqi Freedom was presented to children. Second, we wanted to identify what producers of the children's news did to help their young audiences cope with the news through the use of consolation strategies. Finally, we were interested whether the treatment of the news about the war on Iraq and the application of consolation strategies coincided or differed for the children's news in Germany and the Netherlands.

Overall, the producers of the Dutch and German children's news applied significantly different approaches in reporting about Operation Iraqi Freedom. Actually, both news programs presented the conflict to the child audience from the view dominant in each country. This view was applied in the selection of news topics, the stance taken in regard to the war, and the presentation of arguments in favor or against the attacks on Iraq. However, in both countries, indignation about the conflict and the suffering of the victims of the war received equal attention. This having been noted, the German news producers did not locate such a concern within a framework of pro or con arguments regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom. Instead, they concentrated their programs on condemnation of the attack on Iraq. In contrast, the Dutch news informed their young audience about the horrific facts of the war and also related these facts to the ongoing debate about the war that was taking place in the Netherlands at that time. Apparently, the Dutch producers felt that social-political-economic arguments raised by Dutch citizens about America and Iraq were so important that they decided to incorporate them in the news for their young audience, too.

The different approaches to presentation of the war to children were also visible in the comments made by the hosts of both news programs. In the Netherlands, the presenters and reporters hardly ever expressed their own stance regarding the legitimacy of the war, whereas the German presenters and reporters regularly presented their opposition to the war—a position that may well have been in consonance with their child audience. Although we do not want to take a stand in regard to which of these approaches is preferred—the rather journalistic Dutch approach or the more educational German way of addressing children—we would like to argue that both ways have advantages when presenting a news story about such a relevant issue, as long as they are applied with professional integrity.

We expected that the news for children would use pictures of Hussein and Bush on a regular basis because such images are useful in simplifying the news to children. This expectation was realized in the Dutch *Jeugdjournaal* as it dedicated relatively frequent attention to both state leaders, but was less

obvious for the German children's news. Images and remarks about the actions of Hussein and Bush in the German *logo!* news were conveyed considerably less frequently. Again, however, this may relate to the actual social-political situation in both countries. In Germany, children and their families demonstrated against Operation Iraqi Freedom more than did their counterparts in the Netherlands. As a consequence, the German news focused more on children's—mostly negative—reactions against the war. In the Netherlands, however, there was a stronger political debate about the pros and cons of the war. This may have triggered the children's news in the Netherlands to explain the arguments between those in favor and those against the war and to pay more attention to Saddam Hussein and George Bush's actions.

With regard to consolation strategies, here, too, the producers in both countries applied different approaches, with the German children's news reporting on the whole more cautious than the Dutch children's news. Before Operation Iraqi Freedom started, it was expected that in this second Gulf War more horrific images would be available due to the presence of embedded journalists and modern techniques such as cell phones with video facilities. Nevertheless, the actual amount of distressing images turned out to be relatively low (about one fifth of all war reporting) and about equal to the amount of distressing images in the Dutch children's news report on September 11 (Walma van der Molen & De Vries, 2003). The type of distressing material in the Netherlands, however, was somewhat more disturbing and intense than in the German news. The latter producers decided to show the same images of a relatively quiet Baghdad skyline or of a rocket being fired from a marine vessel on consecutive days. Although from the point of view of consolation, this may have worked as an excellent desensitizing strategy because the regular viewer may have become accustomed to the emotionally laden images and was gradually less affected (Averill, Malmström, Koriat, & Lazarus, 1972). From a journalistic point of view, the use of old images when reporting on the actual war activities is questionable. Clearly, the producers of the children's news must make their own decisions on this dilemma each time they are confronted with possible distressing footage.

The more cautious approach in Germany was also reflected in the application of two new consolation strategies: (a) the use of graphics and animations, and (b) news reporters and presenters offering consoling comments. Graphics and animations were used regularly by the German news to explain difficult or distressing topics, whereas the Dutch children's news, (a) chose to show real images of frightened American prisoners of war, (b) showed and explained that dolphins that were looking for sea mines might be in danger, and (c) decided to ask many experts to explain the events around the war. A possible reason for the more conservative German

approach (i.e., symbolizing complicated information by means of less distressing animations with inserted drawings and stills and addressing the audience with consoling comments) might be that the German news was more focused on a somewhat younger child audience than the Dutch children's news, although formally both programs try to reach children in the same age bracket.

Another reason may be that the German *logo!* program is organized differently than the Dutch *Jeugdjournaal*. German producers are part of the children's department of the public broadcaster ZDF, and therefore may be more inclined to approach their audience pedagogically. Support for this explanation can be found in the information provided to educators by the *logo!* Web site. There it is explained that the German producers are careful not to show images that might frighten children in any way, how *logo!* psychologists and educators assist producers, and how a special team of graphic designers works to make everything comprehensible for young children (<http://tivi.zdf.de/tivi/erwachsene/index/00944/index.html>). In contrast, in the Netherlands, the children's news is part of the general news department and only shares air time in the public children's channel *Z@ppelin*. This explains why the Dutch news was able to make more use of international correspondents and presented more actual footage from Iraq. The producers probably had easier access to the international exchange of news material and to certain facilities such as direct satellite links with correspondents than did the German producers. Although it has a high affinity for children, the Dutch news production team does not include psychologists or educators, only professional technicians and journalists. In addition, because the Dutch *Jeugdjournaal* considers itself first and foremost a news program, rather than a children's program, producers claim that there has never been a taboo on any news subject. They feel that "refraining from specific news subjects because they would be too violent or frightening, would undermine the very ground of existence of the children's news. As long as a subject is news, the Dutch producers will inform children about that news in a way that children can understand" (Maas, 1991, p. 57).

Finally, above and beyond the differences between both countries in their reporting of the war and in the application of consolation strategies, the overall main conclusion of this study is that the producers in both countries did take their job seriously. At the outbreak of the war, much longer than normal children's news shows were prepared and broadcast in both countries. In addition, in the initial days of the war, entire programs were dedicated to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Instead of using the sandwich formula, which provides relief by means of lighter news events, the producers chose to present and explain the suffering in the war in as full and ethical a manner as possible. It was only 4 or 5 days into the war when the news producers made room for other news events. Further, if we are to judge by the

thousands of e-mails and reactions in forums and guest books submitted to the children's news-related Web sites in the Netherlands, Germany (see Nikken & Götz, chap. 5, this volume), and the UK (see Carter, chap. 6), a significant part of the child audience welcomed such a serious approach. It indicates that children's news programs may very well have an important role in developing the political awareness and empowerment of children, and that broadcasters at all times should budget enough air time for these informational children's programs.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF IRAQ-ITEMS PER DAY IN THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY

<i>The Netherlands—Het Jeugdjournaal</i>	<i>Germany—Logo!</i>
DAY 1, MARCH 20	
Introduction	Introduction
Report on what happened today in Iraq	Report on what happened today in Iraq
Report on Dutch children's reactions	Report on German children's reactions
Studio interview with war-expert (1)	Report on the aims of the war
Correspondents in Kuwait and America	Interview with journalist expert on Hussein
Studio interview with war expert (2)	Report on German children at school
Report on Iraqi children in the Netherlands	Report on frightened German children
Studio interview with war expert (3)	Report on security measures in Germany
Conclusion	Interview with psychologist
	Conclusion

DAY 2, MARCH 21

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	Introduction and report on today in Iraq
Correspondent in Kuwait	Comment by host on casualties
America-expert on Bush	Report on protests in Germany
Report on viewers' reactions	Report on war activities in Iraq
	Interview with news expert on images
	Host comments on viewers' reactions

DAY 3, MARCH 22

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	No broadcast
Interview with America expert on images	
Correspondent in America	
Report on demonstration in the Netherlands	
Report on viewers' reactions	

DAY 4, MARCH 23

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	No broadcast
Weapon expert explains Iraq versus United States	
Report on international demonstrations	

DAY 5, MARCH 24

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	Introduction and report on demonstrating children
Report on American POWs	Report on today in Iraq
Report on protests during the Oscars	Report on the use of images
	Report on Iraqi children in Germany
	Report on security measures during Oscars
	Conclusion

DAY 6, MARCH 25

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	Introduction and report on today in Iraq
Interview with humanitarian AIDS expert	Report on children's reactions
	Report on use of German AWACS airplanes
	Host comments on German politicians
	Report on German-American students exchange

DAY 7, MARCH 26

Introduction and report on today in Iraq	Introduction and report on today, included POWs
Interview with dolphins expert	Report on Geneva Convention Report on the use of dolphins by the United States army

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