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PREFACE

We were in the middle of planning a cross-cultural study in the winter of 2003 on what children find funny on television, when the prospect of a war in Iraq became a reality. Suddenly interviewing children about humorous television became deeply inappropriate. More urgent issues were emerging: an escalation of an international crisis that eventually led to a war that would have a global effect. We exchanged a few anxious e-mails, talked over the phone and quickly agreed: studying humor on television can wait; studying the role of media in children's lives at times of war cannot.

So this is how this book came about. An initial collaboration between the two editors—Dafna Lemish in Israel and Maya Götz in Germany, together with Ellen Seiter in the United States, led to a comparative study of the way children in three very different political climates learn about the Iraq War from the media. We eagerly searched for other researchers who might be engaged independently in similar projects in other countries. Several of them were able to join us in Munich in June 2004 at a special research workshop, sponsored by the International Center Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) of the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation. Results of initial projects were presented during these three days along with the sharing and debating of ideas. The meeting concluded in a panel presentation of various applications of such research to the hundred plus participants from around the globe who were participating in 2004 Prix Jeunesse International Festival (a bi-annual meeting of producers of television for children).

This book presents some of that original work as well as that of other researchers who have since joined us. Although coming from different countries and scholarly backgrounds and perspectives, often disagreeing about theory and the interpretation of findings, we all share a deep commitment for the well being of children and a desire for media that cater to their needs and benefit their growth and development.

Editing this book took us personally through our own political views and anxieties over the atrocities of our times and the sense of despair and hopelessness that often accompanies them. Yet we have learned how crucial

the media can be in helping children to make sense of their lives and the world around them, and their potential for peace building, as well. We are indebted to our colleagues in this project for keeping us inspired and motivated as well as for their valuable enthusiasm and cooperation. This book is clearly a joint effort.

We are grateful to Barbara Bernstein of Hampton Press, to Brenda Dervin, the series editor, for seeing the value of this book from the start, and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. We thank them for guiding the book production professionally and efficiently.

We are deeply indebted to two of our colleagues, who are also our personal partners, and who have escorted this book from inception to birth with their personal as well as professional support. More specifically, we thank Peter Lemish for his theoretical insights and editorial proficiency, and Ole Hoffman for his technological expertise and ingenuity.

But most of all, we thank the many children, television professionals, and educators who have shared with us their ideas and innermost concerns regarding the infiltration of war and conflict into their lives. This book is dedicated to their dreams of a world without war and violence.

Dafna Lemish and Maya Götz

INTRODUCTION

Studying Children and Media at Times of War and Conflict

Dafna Lemish

Maya Götz

WHY STUDY CHILDREN AND MEDIA AT TIMES OF CONFLICT AND WAR?

In an increasingly global world, even crises and catastrophes that take place in countries thousands of miles away become part of children's daily lives when there is exposure to the news media. News reports from the conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, the former Yugoslavia, to name but a few, as well as events such as the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the bombings of Madrid and London transportation systems, and suicide bombers in Israel, have all been at the center of world media attention. The sad truth is that war and conflict are an everyday reality for many children all over the globe, either directly or in mediated forms. That violent conflicts have always had detrimental effects on all humans, children included, is self-evident. The physical effects (death, injury, famine, infectious disease, relocation, sexual abuse, etc.), the psychological effect (fear, stress, bereavement, posttraumatic reactions, desensitization to suffering, maladjustment, etc.), or even the distant threat of such have proved to have deep and lasting effects on children, even following incidental encounters (Leavitt & Fox, 1993).

In her compassionate reflections on the pains of others, Sontag (2003) discussed the meaning of visual portrayals of the sufferings of other people in faraway zones of conflicts viewed mostly by the privileged and often safe audiences. In her critique, she offered the following observation:

Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience, the cumulative offering by more than a century and a half's worth of those professional, specialized tourists known as journalists. Wars are now also living room sights and sounds. Information about what is happening elsewhere, called "news," features conflict and violence—"If it bleeds, it leads" runs the venerable guideline of tabloids and twenty-four-hour headline news shows—to which the response is compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view. (p. 18)

What is the meaning of this technological and social development? Children hear about, see, and must cope with these troubling, often frightening events that were once the preserve only of adults. They have to endeavor to assimilate the fragments of information they receive from the media and try to make sense of them. They have to deal emotionally with the sufferings of others and with gruesome portrayals of atrocities. Children at various ages, developmental levels, media competencies, and personal life experiences have varying skills and cognitive schemes, as well as interests in and experiences with which to make sense of news reports. Clearly they develop a picture of the events as a function of their personal life history and the media offerings available to them. However, the social-political-cultural environments as well as adult mediation at home and in the educational system also influence them.

Although psychologists and educators have been investigating how children develop their comprehension of war, conflict, and peace for several decades now, they have barely paid attention to the crucial role that media may be playing in children's war-related knowledge, attitudes, and world-views, as well as its possible contribution to mobilizing participatory democratic processes of engagement in social change among children and young people (Raviv, Oppenheimer, & Bar-Tal, 2005). Among the few studies conducted, a series of studies in the United States and Canada in the latter part of the 20th century revealed that the mass media, especially TV, were the primary source of information and learning about war and peace, according to the testimonies of high school pupils (Covell, 2005; Vriens, 2005). Similarly, the media were found to have a central role in children's acquisition of information regarding the violent conflict in Northern Ireland because many of them have not been affected directly by it (McLernon & Cairns, 2005). Aside from these findings, few studies have been conducted of the role media play for children at times of war and conflict.

The purpose of this book is to start filling this scholarly void. It offers a collection of articles that present the wide range of issues regarding the role of media in the lives of children who had to deal with war, particularly with the war in Iraq, which has become a central focus for many countries in the world in the Spring of 2003. Of particular interest is the focus on children growing up in coalition countries (e.g., United States, United Kingdom), in European countries critical of the war (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands), and in a country expecting to be directly effected by the war (e.g., Israel). Although the central case study at hand is the war in Iraq, the book extends the discussion to other conflicts and terrorist attacks. Unfortunately enough, it seems that the conceptual and empirical discussions offered in the following chapters may be illuminative for future-armed conflicts, as well as other social crises.

Media Dependency at Times of Crisis

War time, armed conflict, terrorist attacks, and catastrophes all present a period of crisis when members of communities around the world experience a heightened sense of chaos, lack of control over their lives, a great need for information about their world, as well as assistance in making sense of it and assurance that a better future is in sight. Daily routines are disrupted, and dependency on the media, particularly TV, becomes cardinal—as it becomes a central source of information and sense making as well as serves to advance a feeling of social integration (Blondheim & Liebes, 2003; Katz, 1992, 2005; Peled & Katz, 1974). Just like adults, children too become more dependent on media during a time of conflict: They are confined more to their home; they find themselves in a more news-oriented family situation than during more peaceful times, their parents may be less inclined to control their viewing at times of crisis, and, similar to all other family members, they have their own, somewhat different needs for information, interpretation, reduction of uncertainty, and relief of tension.

At times of crisis, news media adapt to the situation and are often characterized by typical manifestations of crisis coverage, such as: the lack of clarity of much of the coverage due to a form of information fog, misinformation, and presenting conflicting pieces of information regarding present and future developments. This situation of lack of credible information creates fertile ground for the spread of rumors. Further, for reasons of national security, various forms of censorship as well as different types of limitations are imposed by military officials on the free flow of information, all of which can contribute to viewer confusion. At the same time, live unedited coverage of chaos at the scene of violent events, such as scenes of suicide bombings, often results in the broadcast, often repeatedly, of gory pictures of injury and death that impose themselves on unprepared viewers, includ-

ing children. Experts and commentators who are busy trying to explain the unknown during such a time of uncertainty often contribute to the intensification of anxieties, rather than the other way around.

As the main source of information on current events, TV news presents many complicated cognitive challenges to adults and children alike. Through the news, children are presented with a variety of complex issues, in both verbal and graphic forms, about the familiar and the foreign, the domestic and the international. News reports are characterized by brief items, numerous cuts, and changes of scenes, with no breaks or time for reflection between them. Audiovisual segments of the reports are often mismatched, with the visual often distracting from the verbal output, occasionally even contradicting it. The reporters' mode of speech is fast and makes use of many unfamiliar acronyms and concepts, the soundbites are brief, and there is much use of other stimuli such as of voiceover, natural sounds, computer graphics, and statistics and charts (Cohen, 2005). Conflicts, in particular, are characterized by complexity of the issues, including the intensity of the coverage of violence and the lack of sensible solvability (Cohen, Adoni, & Bantz, 1990).

Although these pose demanding cognitive challenges on the average news viewer, it makes it particularly difficult for a younger one to engage with and make sense. What then are the roles media serve for children at times of conflict and war, and how are they different from the familiar everyday ones? What research questions need to be addressed by scholars of children and media?

Intersections of Children, Media, and War

There are various intersections for the discussion of children, media, and war that we offer in the following pages, stemming from two complementary positions: child-oriented and a media-oriented. Embarking from a child-oriented focus, there are at least three central points of departure for research: We can examine children as unique meaning-making audiences, characterized by their developmental stages and specific social contexts. Reception studies of their reactions to conflict-related media texts explore their knowledge and understandings of the background for the conflict, the participating sides, the political moves, the developments and consequences, and the like. In addition, they explore children's emotional reactions (such as fear, sadness, anger, hatred) to media coverage of the events. Past research from this perspective examined children's reactions to the Gulf War as well as several other crises, such as the Kennedy Assassination, the Challenger space shuttle disaster, terrorist attacks, and other major news events (e.g., Atwood & Donnelly, 2002; Cantor, Mares, & Oliver, 1993; Cohen & Adoni, 1980; Hoffner & Haefner, 1993; Seigel, 1965; Smith, Moyer-Guse, Boyson,

& Pieper, 2002; Wober & Young, 1993; Wright, Kunkel, Pinon, & Huston, 1989). These studies can also be understood in light of the tradition of research on the more general role of news media in the political socialization of children and their growing into citizenship (e.g., Atkin & Gantz, 1978; Buckingham, 2000; Chaffee & Yang, 1990; Conway, Wyckoff, Feldbaum, & Ahern, 1981; Robinson, Chivian, & Tudge, 1989).

A second focus of study within this perspective concentrates on children as producers of media texts in relation to war and conflict: The letters they write to Web sites, their own videos and news reporting, the feedback they provide to adult producers, their ideas for more engaging and helpful news reporting for children, and the like (e.g., Carter, 2004; Carter & Allan 2005a, 2005b; Children Now, 1994). These studies assist us in understanding how children position themselves in relation to the public sphere from which they are usually excluded and contribute to the ongoing debate over children's disengagement from political and social issues (Buckingham, 2000).

Finally, there is the concern of children as images in conflict-related news reports: What forms of childhood are typically represented in war stories, and how are they conflated with issues of gender, race, and class? What is included in the portrayals of the victimization of children (e.g., war-related hunger, disease, bereavement, sexual slavery, and the like)? Are the portrayals of suffering by children in war and conflict used to invoke sympathy and mobilize audiences to take political actions? Are they exploited by media that are interested primarily in increasing audiences and, if so, what are the wider social and political consequences? What form of agency is assigned to children as fighters in armed forces and terrorists organizations, as activists in resistance or peace movements, as political beings?

Unfortunately, this latter issue has not been studied very much to date; in this respect, our collection of articles does not contribute to this field. For this reason, it is worth expanding on this point. One of the few studies completed in this domain dealt with media coverage of Palestinian children. Aqtash, Seif, and Seif (2004) found that children have little access to dominant international media even in relationship to a story that receives high media coverage, such as the Middle East. Further, in Israel, there have been several critical commentaries raised in the media and public symposia with regard to the exploitation of children in the media on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. One such opinion column (Caspi, August 22, 2005) suggested that children have been recruited, as in the case of the Jewish settlers in the Palestinian Occupied territories, as well as in the Intifada, the Palestinian national uprising, as a means to achieve various goals—livelihood, demography, ideology, and the like, and that parents as well as the media cooperate in such cases.

The second perspective—a media-oriented focus—offers two complementary lines of investigation. First is the study of the perspectives of pro-

ducers regarding what children expect and need from the texts they produce for them at times of war and conflict in order to cope with the situation as well as to be informed and knowledgeable. This can be inferred from a content analysis of special news and entertainment programs for children as well as from studying the producers directly about their opinions, expectations, decision-making processes, production policy, and the like (e.g., Matthews, 2003; Messenger-Davies, 2001; Walma van der Molen & Vries, 2003).

A second role that producers of media for children have is in not only reacting to existing situations out of their control, but also in initiating peace-building media interventions in an attempt at making a difference through developing, for example, TV programs that foster mutual understanding and tolerance for difference, countering social stereotypes, and the like. *Sesame Workshop* has been a leading force in producing such programs for preschoolers (e.g., Cole, Arafat, Tidhar, Zidan, Fox, Killen et al., 2003; Cole, Richman, & McCann Brown, 2001; Killen & Fox, 2003; Shochat, 2003), but others have done similar work as well.

The Outline of the Book

The purpose of this book is to assemble, for the first time, a collection of contributions that focus on the intersections between children and media at times of conflict and war. Although all of the participants in this collaboration are located in the Western world, and thus bring with them a particular worldview, they are anchored in diverse epistemological and research traditions. As a result, this book offers a heterogeneous collection of chapters, differing from each other not only in content and method, but also in delivery style: Readers will find chapters that follow academic styles of presentation coming out of the quantitative tradition, qualitative case-study analyses, as well as accounts of critical analyses of media texts. In doing so, we hope that this diversity serves to highlight the many ways available for exploring this fruitful and important field of study.

The first two sections of the book follow these two major orientations. Part I is devoted to the perspective of the children regarding the war in Iraq, based on a variety of studies in different countries and employing diverse methodologies. The first three chapters present the results of a study coordinated simultaneously in three cultures where children were given the opportunity to express their views through personal interviews and drawings at the onset of the war in Iraq and the role media had in shaping them. Maya Götz (chap. 1) presents the results of her study with German Children, as well as a small group of Iraqi immigrant children, Ellen Seiter (chap. 2) with American children, and Dafna Lemish (chap. 3), with Israeli children. Taken together, the chapters demonstrate the heavy reliance children had on news reports and the role they had in embracing children into

the hegemonic perspective offered by their cultures: American children mostly perceived the war as a personal battle between the two leaders—George Bush and Saddam Hussein; German children adopted the position of strong objection to the war; and Israeli children domesticated the war into their general understanding of the Israeli–Arab conflict. The American case study conducted over time also demonstrates how children's perceptions change as the general media discourse becomes more open and diverse.

These chapters are followed by Juliette H. Walma van der Molen and Elly A. Konijn (chap. 4) self-administrated survey of Dutch children that investigated more specifically the emotional effects of exposure to news about the Iraq War. They demonstrate in their chapter that fears, worries, anger, and physical reactions to the war as presented on TV screens were considerably higher in children who identified with and experienced more empathy for the victims of war than in children with lower levels of identification or empathy, even when important background variables were controlled for. The results are discussed in relation to the scientific and public debate about the negative effects of realistic media violence.

The two additional chapters in Part I highlight the active role children played when given the opportunity to discuss their reactions to the war on European TV channels' Web sites devoted to children. Peter Nikken and Maya Götz (chap. 5) monitored and analyzed the postings of children in three web portals of German public TV stations and two Dutch ones who invited children to react to the events during the first week of the war. Here, too, they found that children were strongly influenced by the major discourses in their respective countries, and thus the content of the German postings was much more adamant against the war than were those of the Dutch children. They also highlight the importance of providing children the opportunity to be involved in contemporary social and political debates, and they argue that the Internet provides an easily accessible and efficient tool for political involvement for children. Similarly, Cynthia Carter (chap. 6) analyzes the discussion on board postings on the Web site of *Newsround*, a BBC news program for children in the UK. She explores particular examples of online discussions about the war in Iraq, as well as some more recent ones concerning the London bombing, to argue the desire that children have to be informed, to be allowed to voice their views, and not to be shielded from the harsh aspects of reality.

Altogether, Part I of the book argues that, contrary to common views, children are far from being naive, ignorant, and indifferent to the world around them as some previous studies would have led us to believe. Rather, they have great curiosity about the major events taking place in the wider world, are highly motivated to be better informed, and are eager for their views to be heard and considered.

Part II concentrates on the perspective of the media—the professionals in charge of making TV for children, as well as the content of the texts they

produce. Petra Strohmaier (chap. 7) provides results of an international survey of producers' perceptions of their responsibilities and roles during the war in Iraq and the practices they adopted in trying to help children around the world. Torn between a desire to offer children a safe haven from the tension and fear aroused by news reports and their sense of a need to keep children informed, they developed different strategies. In addition, an analysis she offers of a few European case studies demonstrates how these were translated into specific program formats.

Maire Messenger Davies provides (chap. 8) an overview of several news programs about the Iraq War produced for children in France, Germany, Israel, Sweden, and the UK. Examining both content as well as structural aspects of the programs, she finds both similarities and differences among the various programs, as well as between children and adult news reporting. Overall, she argues that children's news tries to remain consensual, assumes an unrealistic and overall pacifist position by children, avoids the portrayal of violence and any form of reporting that might be considered stressful, and treats children as a homogenized social group devoid of personal and social differences.

Peter Nikken and Juliette Walma van der Molen (chap. 9) studied the specific news items and various consolation strategies used by Dutch and German news producers during the first week of the war in their attempts to help children cope with the fear evoked by the news coverage. Once again they demonstrate that producers of the two countries adopted different strategies in presenting the news to children with pro and con arguments for the war and in their approaches to distressing material, echoing the general public discourse in the two cultures. Despite the differences, however, their conclusion is that producers in both countries took their responsibilities quite seriously in offering children a responsible coverage respectful of their audience.

Dafna Lemish (chap. 10) takes an in-depth look at the roles that directors of three children's TV channels in Israel assigned themselves in preparation for a unique situation of a war that might or might not affect them in the weeks of uncertainty before the break of the war in Iraq. Her interviewees revealed the special preparations they made for the case that the country will be once again attacked by Iraqi missiles and children will be confined to their homes and their shelters. Special measures were taken to assure continued broadcasting under missile attacks, as well as experimentation with special productions and innovative production formats. Their views of what TV can provide children at a time of major crisis illuminate the potential of the medium to be a lot more than a vehicle of entertainment.

Finally, Peter Lemish (chap. 11) widens the scope of the debate by applying conflict resolution constructs to analyze programs produced in several deeply conflicted regions in the world: former Yugoslavian countries, Israel-Palestine, Colombia, Philippines, among others. Selected from

among entries of quality TV programs made over the last decade to the *Prix Jeunesse International Festival*, these programs offer a diverse view of producers' approaches to the presentation of conflicts and their resolution to children. He argues that, although few producers have actually made programs about conflict and war, the constructs presented as well as the collective research corpus demonstrate the rich array of subjects that exist to assist viewers in understanding the political conflicts taking place in their own and others societies.

Overall, then, the second part of the book presents a great diversity in the awareness, responsibility, and practices of producers of TV for children in many countries. Clearly, media professionals are in and of themselves citizens of their own countries, and are they greatly affected by their own national contexts and discourses regarding war and conflict.

The final part of the book examines various efforts at intervention by those committed to the well-being of children at times of war and conflict. Megan Pincus Kajitani (chap. 12) analyzes the advice offered by experts on U.S. airwaves and newspapers to parents concerning children's exposure to news of the war in Iraq. The overall recommendation was to shield children from the events and to prevent their exposure to the media. This protective stance can be understood in light of the media panic phenomenon that assumes strong negative effects of media on children and the perception of childhood as a period of great vulnerability. This approach stands in clear contradiction to the roles assumed and strategies applied by producers of children's TV news in Europe, as described in the previous chapters, thus emphasizing again how much our views of childhood and media are grounded in specific cultural contexts.

Emily Moyer-Guse and Stacy L. Smith (chap. 13) follow with a study of the strategies parents use in the United States to reduce their children's news-induced fears, a central concern of much of the debate over the harmful effects of exposure to news coverage of war and catastrophes. Their survey revealed that parents often use inappropriate strategies with their younger children, employing cognitive strategies rather than the more age-appropriate physical strategies to comfort them.

The final two contributions in the book relate to various productions of *Sesame Street* devoted to peacebuilding in the Middle East. Alaina Bremick, Jennie Lee-Kim, Melanie Killen, Nathan Fox, Amiram Raviv, and Lewis Leavitt (chap. 14) first describe the Sesame Workshop-produced, media-based intervention projects conducted in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, as well as Jordan, followed by results of the evaluations they conducted as social developmental psychologists. Focusing on the ways in which viewing the shows facilitated social and moral understanding in young children, they present evidence that such interventions are developmentally powerful, in that the themes and content are appropriately related to children's social worlds of peer relationships, friendship, autonomy, conflict resolution, and

moral judgments. Moreover, their findings indicate that viewing the shows increases children's focus on friendship and prosocial reasoning, even among children from different cultural backgrounds, and ones in which there is a great deal of conflict and strife in the adult world.

Finally, Yael Warshel's (chap. 15) case study focuses on the reception of Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim (Israeli and Palestinian *Sesame Street*) by Jewish-Israeli children at a time of conflict and bloodshed. She argues that young elementary school children are much aware of the political situation they are growing up in, yet they favor a program that offers them a vision of a better world and that gives them hope and release of tension. She argues for the need to consult children's opinions and views when developing peace-building TV interventions and for a greater respect of their developing civil skills.

These four chapters taken together advance the argument that the complicated relationships between children and media at times of war and conflict can be mediated by preplanned interventions, both on the individual parental level as well as the more long-term planning of employing media for peace building and deep social change.

We conclude the book with an overview of the results presented in the chapters and a consideration of their implications for the development of better media for children and media at times of conflict and war, as well as for improving media literacy skills and civic awareness and involvement.

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