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# The War Next Door: Peace Journalism in US Local and Distant Newspapers' Coverage of Mexico

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The War Next Door:  
Peace Journalism in US Local and Distant Newspapers' Coverage of Mexico

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the relationship between proximity to a conflict and the tendency to use peace journalism rather than war journalism modes of reporting. In the context of the current drug war occurring in Mexico, articles from both local, border region US newspapers and from distant US newspapers were coded according to their usage of war or peace journalism frames. Analyses revealed that local newspapers utilized more peace journalism frames overall, and presented a less pessimistic and negative view of the conflict and parties. Distant newspapers, however, were more likely to showcase complexity of the conflict and many parties and people involved.

*Keywords:* Peace Journalism, Framing, Proximity, Mexico

## **Framing and Peace Journalism**

People rely heavily upon the news to learn about pressing issues around the globe, but oftentimes the press may not be providing the full picture. The news media does not simply mirror events but instead functions as a gatekeeper, and through selecting what information is shared, exerts influence of its own (Hackett, 2007, Tuchman, 1978). By highlighting particular elements through language choice, repetition or tying in meaningful cultural symbols, the framing of news articles can heavily impact people's perceptions (Chong and Druckman, 2007, Entman, 1993). The ways problems are explained, events interpreted and moral judgments cast, shape the viewpoint through which the public understands of a topic (Entman, 1993; Shah et al., 2002). Some argue that the role of media in actually igniting conflict has been exaggerated (Hamelink, 2008; Hanitzsch, 2004), while others contend that media framing is involved in the conflict cycle, impacting not only the public, but also the way governments respond to crises (Hackett, 2007; Spencer, 2005).

Galtung (1998) has addressed the power journalists hold, and coined the term "peace journalism" to describe reporters' responsibility to include new perspectives which diverge from the more typical conflict coverage which he calls "war journalism". Journalists can either take the "low road" (war journalism) or the "high road" (peace journalism) when writing about conflicts. The "high road" offers a more nuanced portrayal of conflicts, focusing on a peace rather than violence-orientation, truth on all sides instead of one-sided propaganda, voices of common people instead of elites, and a solution rather than victory-orientation (Galtung, 2006). Peace journalism empowers readers by providing impartial news and challenging conventional wisdom about how conflicts are presented (Peleg, 2007). It intends to alter the way media

frames stories by providing an all-sided view, reporting independent of the current societal discourse, and promoting conflict resolution (Kempf, 2002).

Hanitzsch (2004) and Loyn (2007) are amongst the most prominent critics of peace journalism. In their view, Galtung misunderstands the role and power of journalists. Hanitzsch (2004) questions the assumption that the media hold powerful, causal and linear effects on conflicts, and Loyn (2007) cautions that reporters should not be confused with peacemakers. While Loyn (2007) describes objectivity and truth as the main tasks for journalists, Peleg (2007) argues that peace journalism is more than just good journalism. Peace journalists recognize that it is impossible to avoid framing, yet they strive to use their role to promote fairness to all parties and accuracy in regard to the complicated nature of conflicts (Lynch, 2006; Peleg, 2007).

### **Framing of Latin America and Latinos in US Media**

In the US mainstream media, Latin America merits attention primarily when it causes trouble for the US. The majority of news is related to drugs, gangs and illegal immigration (Fukuyama, 2007), and coverage of conflicts surrounding the drug trade is largely scandal-driven and sensationalized, feeding into common misunderstandings (Payan, 2006). Specifically, the media often labels all people involved in drug trafficking as evil, oversimplifying a complex socio-economic issue and ignoring that traffickers are often motivated to escape economic hardship, not by a desire to inflict violence on others (Montiel, 2009). Branton and Dunaway (2009) also argue that geographic-proximity to Mexico may impact agenda-setting, and found that media outlets closer to the US-Mexico border had a larger amount of news stories relating to immigration, specifically its negative aspects.

While these studies show a general tendency for US media to report negatively about Latin America, they do not make use of the theoretical framework of peace journalism to capture

the differences in reporting frames more fully. In this study, we address the use of war journalism and peace journalism in covering the current conflict surrounding Mexico's government and drug cartels. Before turning to the details of our analysis, we will first summarize what is commonly referred to as the "drug war" in Mexico.

### **Mexico's Drug War**

In the last decade, Mexico's drug cartels have taken control of the market for illegal drugs in the US (Cook 2007). When President Felipe Calderón assumed office in December 2006, he launched a crackdown initiative to decrease the drug flow across the border, capture the most important drug cartel leaders, and destroy crop cultivation (Sabet and Rios, 2009). As of 2008, violence had doubled from previous years with an increase in assassinations of high-level officials, violent kidnappings, and use of more sophisticated weapons (Beittel, 2009). The rival cartels fight each other, while also actively targeting policemen, soldiers, and government officials to break Calderón's resolve.

A major problem in reducing the strength of the cartels is ubiquitous corruption in the police, military, and government (Carpenter, 2009). The cartels have taken advantage of many people's poor salaries, offering money and protection in return for their cooperation. In the meantime, the Mexican population suffers as the state is incapable of guaranteeing their safety or restoring order, and the police and military themselves have been accused of violating civilian human rights (Cook, 2007). The cartels spread fear by silencing journalists reporting about the conflict, and leaving frightening scenes in public places after their attacks. Calderón has vowed to maintain his military approach until the fight is won, but since the drug cartels have infiltrated the basic infrastructure of the country, many doubt force alone will bring an end to the conflict (Sullivan and Elkus, 2008).

The turf war between cartels already affects US border states, with violence from drug disputes spilling over onto US soil (Cook, 2007). Since the majority of Mexican cartels' drugs end up on the American market, the border region with its multiple trafficking routes is very fragile. A flow of immigrants pushed out of Mexico by the instability, and an opposite surge of easily obtainable US weapons smuggled into Mexico have also become increasing concerns (Shirk, 2011). The US has taken initial steps to address these issues through bilateral cooperation, joint military trainings, increased border patrol, and monetary aid (Beittel, 2009). Due to the involvement of the US and its close proximity to Mexico, US newspapers frequently report on the drug war.

### **Effects of Proximity**

Location of a media outlet often has an influence on the framing of news articles. Newspapers from larger, pluralistic communities have been found to frame issues differently than smaller, homogeneous markets (Griffin and Dunwoody, 1995), and smaller local media outlets often present news stories differently than the national media, particularly when an issue has a specific local importance (Hester and Gibson, 2007). Since US border states are likely to be most affected by any violent spillover, immigration surges, or drug and arms trafficking, framing of media coverage about Mexico's drug war will likely differ among various locations within the US

Not only is there more potential for the conflict to affect residents in border regions, but people living in these states have more contact and personal experience with Mexican people and Mexican culture in general. Texas, Arizona, and California have higher populations of Latinos (36%, 30%, and 36% respectively) compared to 15% in the general US population (US Census Bureau, 2008). Different lines of psychological research which investigate how proximity

between groups of people can impact their relations suggest that the increased proximity of Latinos (largely of Mexican descent) and European-Americans in the border region may lead to disparate outcomes.

One body of research suggests that increased proximity would lead to more positive relations between the ethnic groups. Many social psychological studies indicate that greater exposure to or interaction with people increases positive attitudes and fondness towards them (e.g. Kinder and Mendelberg, 1995; Newcomb, 1956). This general concept also applies to the realm of intergroup relations: A meta-analysis of intergroup contact studies showed that contact between members of different ethnic groups reduces prejudice toward the other group, especially among majority group members (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Although the original theory posits that contact between groups must include equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of the authorities or customs (Allport, 1954), the meta-analysis revealed that these were not necessary for some positive effects to occur (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). This reduction of prejudice results through decreased anxiety about contact, increased perspective taking or empathic feelings, and to a lesser extent increased knowledge about the out-group (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008).

Conversely, another body of literature suggests a negative effect of proximity on attitudes toward other groups. Groups in close proximity are often hostile because they are in competition for resources (Sherif and Sherif, 1953), and increases in prejudice are found when people perceive a zero-sum nature of available resources and social status (Esses et al., 2002). One explanation for these contradictory findings on the role of proximity and prejudice is that casual contact from simply living near another group does not reduce prejudice in the same way more

active, personal contact does, and this casual contact often instead leads to greater prejudice (Stein, et al., 2000).

More specifically, there are mixed findings about the effects of proximity on Latino and European-American relations. Within Mexico, Mexican and European-American intergroup contact as friends was found to directly lead to less social distance and higher evaluations of the out-group. Intergroup contact in the workplace led to these same positive outcomes but to a lesser extent and only when mediated through increased knowledge about the out-group (Eller and Abrams, 2004). In the US, some research reports no relationship between the population of Latinos in a county and European-American attitudes toward policies which support Latinos (Citrin et al., 1990). Other researchers present a more detailed story, finding that while a higher population of documented Latino immigrants in one's area increases support for less restrictive immigration policies, the population of undocumented immigrants decreases such support (Hood and Morris, 1998). Thus, there is a complicated relationship between the proximity of Latinos and European-Americans and its effect on intergroup attitudes.

### **Present Study**

Our study is designed to specifically explore how local US newspapers from border regions differ in their use of war and peace journalism from distant US newspapers far from the US-Mexico border. This issue is particularly pertinent because of the many ways the US is directly and indirectly involved in the conflict. Since Americans learn about this conflict from news sources, the way Mexico's drug war is portrayed can impact the readers' attitudes towards US policies in areas such as aid, immigration, and gun laws and can underscore the common fear of drug violence spilling into the country. Conversely, since these problems are more visible in

the border region and less pronounced in other parts of the US, this might influence the media framing of the different news sources.

The previously discussed theories regarding proximity were devised and tested on the attitudes reported by individual people; however, we believe proximity to a conflict and its people may have a similar influence on the way articles are framed in newspapers. The tone and details of conflicts presented by the media may influence the attitudes of the readers, and similarly the opinions of the people may partially dictate how the media presents certain news stories. We are not making an argument for the directionality of this influence, as it may certainly run in both directions. What we do argue is that the framing used in newspapers may mirror the attitudes of its readers, and that proximity to a conflict and its people may impact the framing of articles in a positive or negative way, similar to the previous findings on proximity of groups influencing the attitudes of individuals.

Drawing from these different lines of research, competing predictions arise for how proximity to Latinos and to Mexico may affect the framing of Mexico's drug war by border region news outlets. One body of research would predict that newspapers in close proximity to the US-Mexico border will present the people involved in a conflict in a positive light, since those in closer proximity may have more positive attitudes and less prejudice toward Mexicans and thus use more peace journalism frames than the distant news outlets. However, the different body of literature would predict the newspapers in close proximity may use more war journalism frames such as simple black-and-white explanations and fear-evoking sensational language than the distant newspapers since there can be increases in negative attitudes and out-group hostility when groups interact and are in close proximity. Therefore, we assume there will be a relationship between proximity to the conflict and newspapers' frequency of using war and peace

journalism frames; however, it is an exploratory question whether this relationship will be positive or negative.

### Methods

A content analysis of newspaper articles was conducted to test this research question. This study is based on the most similar systems design in which the goal is to investigate differences between texts that are proposed to be similar (Meckstroth, 1975). Articles were collected beginning from 11 December 2006 when President Calderón launched his initiative through 31 December 2009 when coding began.

Nine newspapers were selected; five to represent distant newspapers and four to represent newspapers in close proximity to the US-Mexico border. The local newspapers, read in regions near the conflict were *Houston Chronicle* (HC) (cir. 911, 564<sup>1</sup>), *The Arizona Republic* (AR) (cir. 472,200), *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (SDUT) (cir. 367, 402), and *Los Angeles Times* (LAT) (cir. 905,920). Both HC and AR have the highest circulations in their state, and while SDUT has only fourth highest circulation in California, all three of these newspapers are still among the top 25 highest circulated newspapers in the US (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011). The LAT is both close to the border and has very high circulation compared with the other local sources, holding the fifth highest circulation nationwide (highest in California).

The distant newspapers chosen were *The New York Times* (NYT) (cir. 1,645,152), *USA Today* (USAT) (cir. 1,784,242), *The Washington Post* (WP) (cir. 846,019), *The Plain Dealer* (PD) (cir. 403,229), and *Chicago Sun-Times* (CST) (cir. 400,506). The first three were selected because although they are far from the US-Mexico border, they are nationally-circulated and consequently included a fair amount of articles about Mexico's drug war. Most of the distant newspapers with only regional circulation reported little on the conflict. Therefore, we first

included PD, but since it did not include a large enough number of articles, we introduced articles from CST so that combined they would match the number of articles found in the other news sources. All newspapers have distinct ownerships other than the AR and USAT, which are both owned by the same corporation (Gannett Corporation).

In order to compare and control for political bias, we used Ho and Quinn's (2008) ratings of newspapers' political ideological leaning. The ratings are based upon the positions taken in each newspaper's editorial pages about Supreme Court cases. Newspapers receive a score from -3 to +3, with negative numbers indicating liberal views and positive numbers indicating conservative views. Three local sources (HC = -0.10, AR = -0.05, SDUT= 0.00), scored fairly neutrally, and LAT was slightly more liberal (-0.80). Four of the distant newspapers similarly scored within a one-point difference from the mean: the more liberal leaning USAT (-0.70) and WP (-0.75) and somewhat conservative leaning CST (+0.50) and PD (+0.20). The NYT represents the only exception with a high liberal score (-2.20). These scores will be correlated with the presence of war and peace frames to determine if political position is related to the use of these frames, and if so political leaning will be controlled for in further analysis.

The news articles were selected using LexisNexis database, with the exception of AR, LAT, and PD where we relied on their online websites. All articles which used the three keywords "drug", "war", and "Mexico" or "Mexican" were selected. Additionally, we removed short articles (less than 300 words) and editorials (intentionally opinionated). Since an unequal number of articles were found in each newspaper (38 articles in NYT, 22 in USAT, 35 in WP, 15 in PD, 7 in CST, 53 in HC, 31 in AR, 25 in SDUT, and 61 in LAT), 22 were sampled from each newspaper where possible, and all 15 from PD and all 7 from CST were used. Care was taken to ensure that the selected articles covered the entire time span.

Two independent raters coded all articles, treating the entire article as the unit of analysis. The source of publication was removed from the article before coding began to ensure impartiality. The articles were coded for war and peace journalism frames, using a slightly modified codebook from Lee and Maslog's (2005). The framing categories used for the analysis are described in the following section.

## **War and Peace Journalism Frames**

### **Presentation of the Conflict**

(1) *Focus on Here and Now vs. Focus on Causes and Consequences* - One of the characteristics of peace journalism is the in-depth analyses of the multiple causes leading up to the conflict, encouraging fuller understanding of events (Galtung, 2006). It also provides an outlook on how the conflict might influence the future of a country and its people, demonstrating the possible consequences of continuing hostilities. War journalism, in contrast, fails to offer this comprehensive picture, and instead simply reports on the most recent event without background or foresight (McGoldrick, 2006).

(2) *Problems/Difference v. Solution/Similarity* - War journalism frames articles in a way that is likely to further polarize and potentially escalate a tense situation by focusing on the problems and differences between the actors, ignoring similarities and solution strategies (Galtung, 2000). Conversely, peace journalism does not just focus on a conflict as a hopeless problem, but instead seeks common ground and aims to transform the conflict (Shinar, 2003).

(3) *Zero-Sum v. Alternatives* - War journalism paints a black-and-white picture, presenting a conflict as a zero-sum game where one party must defeat another for the conflict to end, and other solutions which may benefit both parties are ignored (Galtung, 1998). Peace

journalism presents alternatives to clear-cut victories, and reports on the win-win possibilities (Kempf, 2007).

(4) *Visible Effects vs. Invisible Effects of Violence* - War journalism focuses on visible violence, such as deaths and injuries (Galtung, 2000). Peace journalism instead details violence which is less noticeable such a cultural violence (e.g. hate speech, legends of war heroes) and structural violence (e.g. military occupation, economic injustice) which have the potential to destroy the society's culture, trust, and values (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005).

### **Presentation of Conflict Actors**

(5) *Elites vs. Common People* - War journalism represents the voice of the elites, and reports on conflicts as if the elites are the sole actors (McGoldrick, 2006). It centers on government officials (presidents, police chiefs, military leaders) or other experts (professors, CEOs), focuses on institutions and signed agreements, and largely ignores the rest of society (Galtung, 1998). In contrast, peace journalism gives common people (lower-rank police officers, teachers, community leaders, community members) a chance to speak up and be heard (Ross, 2006), and acknowledges that civilians on both sides often suffer the most in a conflict (Lowenberg, 2009).

(6) *Two-Party vs. Multi-Party* - Conflicts are rarely limited to only two parties or sides, but they are often simplified in this way by war journalism (McGoldrick, 2006). Peace journalism considers many actors, providing multiple voices in an attempt to present the varied interests of all involved (Galtung, 1998).

(7) *Labeling Parties as Good or Bad vs. Avoid Labeling Good and Bad* - War journalism conflict coverage often divides people into the "good" and the "evil", leaving one side relatively

blameless (Galtung, 1998; Tehranian, 2002). Peace journalism avoids this dichotomizing view, and points out positive and/ or negative attributes on all sides.

(8) *Partisan vs. Non-Partisan* - While war journalism often falls into taking sides, particularly with the side supported by official policy (Galtung, 2000), peace journalism refrains from reporting a one-sided view. While not legitimizing all goals, peace journalism gives many views fair space in a story (Loewenberg, 2009).

### **Specific Language**

(9) *Victimizing Language vs. Avoid Victimized* - War journalism often over-emphasizes the helplessness of some people, victimizing certain conflict parties by portraying them as powerless and weak. Peace journalism avoids this tendency and instead shows what has been done or could be done by the people, thereby providing an empowering view of those affected by conflict (Howard, 2004).

(10) *Demonizing Language vs. Avoid Demonizing* - In war journalism, emotionally charged language is used to describe the parties involved, demonizing some as evildoers (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Tehranian, 2002). In contrast, peace journalism is careful to refer to the conflict parties in the way they refer to themselves, instead of labeling the conflict parties with imposed and often unjustified terms (Howard, 2004).

(11) *Emotive Language vs. Avoid Emotive* - In war journalism, strong emotional language about actions and situations is overused. Conversely, peace journalism avoids overly evocative language that sensationalizes the conflict. It attempts to use neutral language, and only uses highly emotive words by their exact definition without exaggeration (Loewenberg, 2009).

### **Coding Procedure**

Based on these categories, a coding manual was produced to assess the usage of each war journalism and peace journalism frame in an article. Similarly to Lee and Maslog (2005), when the number of peace journalism frames was greater than the number of war journalism frames, the article was classified as peace journalism, and vice versa. When the number of peace and war frames was equal, the article was classified as neutral. Many of the frames were coded with a forced choice (either “war” or “peace” frames 6-11). However, some frames could be coded as fitting the war frame and peace frame equally, or as fitting neither frame at all (frames 1-5).

The two raters were trained and practiced the coding manual until they reached high reliability of approximately Cohen’s  $\kappa = .80$  on each framing category. Cohen’s Kappa is considered a conservative measure, taking into account the amount of agreement occurring by chance. Each rater was then responsible for coding 16 articles of the 22 articles from the seven newspapers which provided 22 articles, and thus 11 of the 22 articles from each of these newspapers were randomly selected and coded by both raters (following a similar procedure used by Dimitrova and Stromback, 2008). All of the articles from *PD* and *CST* were coded by both raters. Overall they agreed between 84% -95% on each of the different frames, with Cohen’s  $\kappa$  ranging from to  $\kappa = .69$  to  $\kappa = .82$  (Cohen’s  $\kappa$  of .60-.75 considered good, and higher than .75 considered excellent, see Fleiss, 1981).

### Results

Out of 176 articles, 67 (38%) were classified as war journalism-orientation, 94 (53%) as peace journalism-orientation, and 15 (9%) as neutral. Overall, distant newspapers had significantly more war-oriented articles (46%) than local newspapers (31%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 4.073, p = .044$ , and had a marginally significant fewer number of peace-oriented articles (47%) than the local newspapers (60%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 3.288, p = .070$ . Excluding the neutral articles,

we conducted binomial tests to investigate differences in the number of war-oriented and peace-oriented articles within newspapers at each level of proximity. Distant newspapers contained approximately equal numbers of war-oriented (49%) and peace-oriented articles (51%), which is not significantly different from chance (50/50 split). However, the border region newspapers included more peace-oriented (66%) than war-oriented articles (34%), which is significantly different than chance,  $z(79) = -2.80, p = .003$ .

Chi-square analyses tested whether the use of specific frames differed between local and distant newspapers and several significant differences were revealed. Often, local articles used more peace journalism when reporting on this conflict. Local newspapers were less likely to contain a problem-focused frame (67%) than distant newspapers (86%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 9.19, p = .002$ ; however, this did not give local newspapers a significantly larger focus on solutions (34%) than the distant newspapers (25%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 1.75, p = .19$ . For example, a problem-oriented CST article emphasized the high murder rates and corruption in Juarez, ending with a demoralizing quote from a local teenager: “‘I’ve seen dead bodies near my house, on the way to school, outside my work,’ said Jose Luis Chaves, 17. ‘It’s no longer weird to see dead people.’” Local articles also included significantly less demonizing language (15%) than the distant articles (31%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 6.34, p = .012$ , and less emotive language (51%) than the distant articles (71%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 6.89, p = .009$ . This NYT quote exemplifies an overly sensationalized tone: “Mexico’s drug violence seems to be *spiraling out of control* [emotive] with each mass killing followed by an even gorier one, and innocents increasingly falling victim to *traffickers’ ruthlessness* [demonizing]. Yet there is often a *sinister order* [emotive] to the chaos, as killers in Mexico’s drug war frequently leave a calling card with the bodies that spells out a motive for *the massacre* [emotive], or at least their version of it”. Local articles were also

less likely to dichotomize the parties into good and bad (42%) than the distant articles (59%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 5.114, p = .024$ . For example, this SDUT article does not dichotomize but points out negative aspects of both sides, valorizing no one: “The enemy is not only the cartels but the deeply entrenched culture of corruption that taints all levels of law enforcement.”

In other cases, distant newspapers used more peace journalism frames when reporting about the conflict. The distant newspapers were more likely to include common people’s views and actions (51%) than local newspapers (28%)  $\chi^2(1, N=176) 9.49 p = .002$ , and the local articles focused more on the elites (85%) than distant articles (69%),  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 6.34, p = .012$ . For example, this WP article offers a voice to a small Michoacán community, quoting their priest: “‘In most ways, we are richer than we were years ago,’ he said. ‘We harvest more crops. We have more to eat. But what are we missing? What we lack is peace in our communities.’” There was also a trend for distant papers to mention the multiple parties involved (70%) more often than the local papers (58%), who often framed the conflict as only including two parties,  $\chi^2(1, N=176) = 2.99, p = .084$ . The following quote from the WP mentions actors other than the government and cartels: “The problem is that for years we let this grow - the society is as much responsible as the government.”

To investigate the possible confounding influence of newspapers’ political leaning, political position scores were correlated with overall war-orientation and peace-orientation, and also with the presence/absence of each war and peace frame. Political position did not significantly correlate with war-oriented articles or peace-oriented articles, nor did it correlate with any specific peace or war frames with one exception: There was a negative correlation between the newspapers’ political position and use of emotive language, meaning more conservative news sources were less likely to use emotive language,  $r_b(176) = -.19, p = .01$ . We

then re-examined the impact of proximity to the conflict on emotive language, while controlling for the political orientation. The ANCOVA [between-subjects factor: proximity (local, distant); covariate: political position] revealed an overall significant model  $F(2, 173) = 4.95, p = .008$ , but with only a marginally significant main effect of proximity,  $F(1, 173) = 3.12, p = .079$ , and of political orientation,  $F(1, 173) = 2.74, p = .100$ . This indicates that while both proximity and political leaning are influencing the use of emotive language, neither holds particularly unique influence above and beyond the other.

### Discussion

In conclusion, newspapers in closer proximity to the drug war in Mexico included more peace-oriented articles than war-oriented articles, while distant newspapers used approximately equal amounts of both. Since local border state newspapers are less problem-focused, are less likely to dichotomize parties into good and bad, and use less demonizing and emotive language, they appear to offer a more balanced and neutral presentation of the conflict itself and the parties involved. This finding fits well with the psychological literature showing that proximity can increase positive attitudes towards a group of people, or in this case, local newspapers are associated with a less explicitly negative viewpoint of the actors and the situation. However, the results do not reveal a complete dominance of peace journalism frames by the local newspapers, as they also rely more on elites as sources of knowledge and are somewhat more likely to present the conflict as involving only two-parties. In these ways, local newspapers are oversimplifying the conflict compared to distant newspapers, and reflecting characteristics of war journalism. Therefore, the positive effects of proximity are limited to avoiding overtly negative framing in the news articles, but do not expand into a greater understanding of the many parties and common people involved in the drug war. One possible explanation for the differences in party

presentation is that newspapers further away from the border are likely to focus on the role of the US, thereby framing the conflict as involving multiple parties with varying interests. Border region newspapers may focus more on the actual events in Mexico, reducing the conflict to simply the Mexican government versus the cartels.

It is particularly surprising that the distant US newspapers use more demonizing and emotive language frames. Many of these sources are both prestigious and liberal-leaning, while this emotion-evoking language is more often associated with tabloid news than elite journalism. However, the restrictive use of emotive and demonizing language by local papers in this particular conflict is to be commended, since many people in the region are affected by the events just over the border, and sensationalizing the articles with emotional content could feed into prejudice or fear. Future research should investigate if demonizing and emotive language is more common in distant regions of neighboring countries in many conflicts, or if this difference is unique to US newspapers' reporting on Mexico's drug war.

Although we tried to mitigate potential problems by choosing nine different, well-established newspapers and relying on a methodological approach employed successfully in previous research, the study faces several limitations in regards to comparability of the newspapers, article prominence, and methodology. Firstly, border region newspapers may not be comparable with distant and often more widely-circulated newspapers in terms of writing complexity and thus might attract different readership. We tried to reduce this issue through choosing border region newspapers with the highest circulation in their areas and by including articles from smaller regional newspapers with the other distant newspapers. However, factors such as education level or socio-economic status of the target audience may influence the writing style. Another potential issue was that through collecting articles from online archives, it was

difficult to determine the prominence of the article within the original newspaper. Articles in the front of each section are often longer and more eye-catching, thus prominence of the article would be an important variable to consider if it could be accessed. Finally, our chosen methodology limits our findings to correlations and does not allow for conclusions about causation. Our study, as well as the majority of peace journalism research, used content analysis to investigate the framing of newspapers and to examine the actual information available to the public. However, experimental research should also be performed to rule out confounding variables and find the strongest predictors when articles will contain war or peace frames.

Our results, while exploratory, provide some practical implications for intergroup and conflict attitudes among readers of these articles. People tend to be more susceptible to agenda-setting when they have less experience with the political issue (Hester and Gibson, 2007). Therefore, people further away from the border may rely more heavily on the news as their source of information on Mexico's drug war, and may be more affected by the news stories they read than people in border regions. In other words, those who are more likely to be influenced by news stories are also receiving the more pessimistic and sensational perspective of the conflict. Specifically, the distant newspapers' use of more negative language frames can affect the reader by making salient already existent prejudices and cultural beliefs (Taylor, 2007), and problem-oriented frames promote messages of fear, increasing the expectation of danger in the environment (Altheide, 1997). Additionally, negative US media coverage of a country is more likely to influence readers' attitudes towards that country, while a positive coverage has less impact (Wanta et al., 2004). On the other hand, the finding that readers in border regions are presented with a more positive outlook on the situation is hopeful, as it may improve conflict-related and intergroup attitudes, even if it often comes with a more simplistic version of the

conflict. Future experimental research should investigate the differences in reader perceptions of a conflict after reading articles written using peace and war journalism frames.

These results, along with similar studies (e.g. Lee and Maslog 2005; Siraj, 2008) suggest that peace journalism is rarely an all or nothing affair. In this study, although close proximity newspapers contained more peace journalism-oriented articles, neither distant nor local newspapers can be categorized as following strictly war journalism or peace journalism reporting styles. Both local and distant papers have their strengths and weaknesses, and in reality a mix of war and peace frames within each article was most common. Instead of a strict set of rules, peace journalism provides a guide of how to judge the peace-orientation of a media source, and a set of themes which should ideally be covered by journalists working in the field.

As a final note, the high frequency of peace journalism overall is encouraging. Past research indicated that war journalism outweighed peace journalism when describing conflicts (e.g. Lee and Maslog 2005; Siraj, 2008), yet in this study, peace frames outweighed war frames. Although there were differences between local and distant coverage of the drug war, the higher levels of peace journalism-orientation in reporting on this conflict is an indicator that perhaps the war journalism-orientation is not as ubiquitous in all conflict settings and newspapers. Although much more research is necessary before this claim can be established, at least there is some evidence that more journalists are taking the “high road”, and thereby contributing in their own way to greater peace.

<sup>1</sup> These are circulation averages from April-September 2011 as reported by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Sunday circulations are reported for all except USA Today for which only average daily circulation was offered.

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