

Conceptualizing the Spectrum of the Bereavement Discourse

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Abstract

This article presents the spectrum of the bereavement discourse, namely, how various social groups interpret the loss of their children's lives or the potential risk to their lives posed by their military service and translate it into public discourse, as a spectrum of attitudes. It is argued that this spectrum ranges from subversive to submissive approaches. Furthermore, within the confines of the declining casualty tolerance, two variables cumulatively determine the actors' choice of discourse: the level of enforcement of recruitment, ranging from conscription to voluntary recruitment, and the social position of the group to which the agents belong. Given that conscription brings powerful, high-status groups into the ranks who may be unwilling to make sacrifices for war, subversive responses are more likely to occur in conscripted militaries than in volunteer forces and vice versa. This article maps this spectrum and hypothesizes about its determinants.

Keywords

bereavement discourse, casualty sensitivity, collective action

This article presents the spectrum of the bereavement discourse, namely, how various social groups interpret the loss of their children's lives or the potential risk to their lives posed by their military service and translate this interpretation into public

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discourse, as a spectrum of attitudes. Therefore, the bereavement discourse is concerned with public voice rather than private mourning and with voices that can be collectively clustered as reflecting a group pattern rather than with individual voices. Thus, in such cases, the issue of resilience is less relevant. However, the attitudes of various groups to wartime losses are varied, creating a spectrum of attitudes. It is argued that this spectrum ranges from subversive to submissive approaches. Furthermore, within the confines of the declining casualty tolerance, two variables cumulatively determine the actors' choice of discourse: the level of enforcement of recruitment, ranging from conscription to voluntary recruitment, and the social position of the group to which the agents belong. Given that conscription brings powerful, high-status groups into the ranks who may be unwilling to make sacrifices for war, subversive responses are more likely to occur in conscript militaries than in volunteer forces and vice versa.

This article maps this spectrum by using examples from several societies and hypothesizes about its determinants. In the next section, I will identify the gaps in the literature on this issue. In the following sections, I will map the spectrum of the bereavement discourse and present hypotheses about its determinants.

The Missing Link

The casualty sensitivity syndrome, which refers to the declining tolerance for military sacrifice in industrialized democracies, became apparent mainly following the Vietnam War. Such sensitivity arises from several variables (whose relative impact is debated by scholars): (1) the extent to which the war is portrayed as successful in attaining its original goals (Gelpi, Feaver, & Reifler, 2009; Larson, 1996, pp. 10–12); (2) the definition of the war's goals relative to the level of perceived external threat, where the greater the perceived threat and the role of war in eliminating it, the greater the legitimacy for sacrificing human life (see Jentleson & Britton, 1998); (3) the public's views regarding the rightness of the war (Gelpi et al., 2009); and (4) increase in the log of cumulative casualties (Mueller, 1973).

The conventional argument maintains that this sensitivity may affect policy changes such as military redeployment and casualty aversion and is mediated by two variables: (1) shifts in public opinion (see, e.g., Boettcher & Cobb, 2009; Gelpi et al., 2009; Kriner & Shen, 2010) and (2) the initiation of collective action (see, e.g., Levy, 2012, pp. 117–126; Vasquez, 2005). Wars that are perceived as failures create a political opportunity that changes coalitions and alters the political environment in a manner that savvy activist entrepreneurs may read as an invitation to mobilize (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Both variables are mutually reinforcing. As Giugni (2004) argued about the American experience, at least in the area of military policies, only the combination of shifting public opinion and the joint effect of protest activities together with the protesters' collaboration with institutional allies in the public space can increase the government's level of responsiveness.

Nonetheless, the role of bereavement discourse is missing from this discussion. Why is this role important? Political discourse is a precondition for initiating collective action and shaping public opinion, for two reasons. First, the discourse matters for the production of meaning through which social actors fashion a shared understanding of the world (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). To make this new meaning understandable to others, collective actors endeavor to create frames that provide a compelling picture of the political problem—an unjustified or costly war in this case—and offer a solution. Collective action frames are thus “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Frames function as a tool for legitimizing the groups’ voice and favoring this voice over others when meanings are contested (Della Porta, 1999; Steinberg, 1998). Second, by creating a collective identity, political discourse helps create a shared social location, which is one of the critical determinants for successful collective action (Gamson, 1991, pp. 40–41). In sum, political discourse mediates general attitudes into politics.

As I will demonstrate later, antiwar movements may be organized around the theme of bereavement, with its potential and actual impact. In this situation, the subversive discourse of bereavement-motivated actors should be regarded as part of antiwar activity. As such, the bereavement discourse is worthy of study. Such a study should consider how social actors produce meaning, in this case, the meaning of war sacrifice. Given that, as students of casualty sensitivity argue, concern about the loss of life is affected by variables such as the success of the war, the level of external threat, and the rightness of military action, the interpretation of these variables is significant. Social agents use these interpretations to produce meaning, translate it into public voice, and develop a shared social location, in this case, of those bereaved by war or exposed to its risks. The production of meaning and creation of a shared social location help develop a bereavement discourse through which attitudes are translated into public opinion and collective action and may affect policies (In turn, public opinion and collective action may affect the discourse, but this discussion is outside the scope of my current study). Nevertheless, social groups vary in their general attitude toward sacrifice for war and the resulting reactions. Such variations require explanations.

While the theme of antiwar discourse is well developed in the discussions cited above, the theme of the bereavement discourse is not. Butler (2009) introduced the hierarchy of grief, the distinction between those whose lives are considered valuable and mourned (Western lives), and those who are considered ungrievable for the loss of their lives, such as enemy civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan, because they have never lived (p. 38). However, this hierarchy has not been extended to the distinction between different levels of grievability for Western victims and its political implications. Zehfuss (2009) tackled this issue in part by analyzing how fallen soldiers in Britain are grievable. Nevertheless, she did not offer any distinction between variations in grievability within the obituaries produced for killed soldiers and their

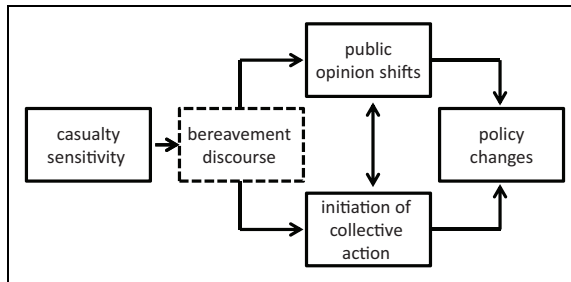


Figure 1. The missing link.

potential impact not only on justifying violence but also on limiting the risking of their lives. My analysis (Levy, 2012) of the case of Israel offered initial tools to map the bereavement discourse and its origins; however, I did not provide theoretical tools to analyze the determinants of the bereavement discourse from a comparative perspective.

In sum, this article partly provides the missing link by theorizing about the bereavement discourse to provide initial tools for explaining shifts in public opinion and the initiation of collective action that may affect policies. To accomplish this goal, we must take two steps. First, given the potential variations in the groups' attitudes, we should map the spectrum of the bereavement discourse. Based on this mapping, we can then hypothesize about the determinants of this spectrum. Figure 1 illustrates the missing link.

Methodologically, the goal of this article is to develop hypotheses about the spectrum of the bereavement discourse. To this end, and because the research about the bereavement discourse is underdeveloped, I use inductive theory making. Therefore, the first step is an exploratory mapping of the spectrum of the bereavement discourse. Such a map is not necessarily a true representation of reality, but it is an organizing device to explore that reality (Shields & Whetsell, 2017, p. 79). While this study is not a case study-based analysis, I use examples from the United States, Britain, and Israel to map the spectrum. I chose these cases for two reasons. First, these are the only democracies that are currently using force on a large scale, triggering significant forms of public subversiveness. Second, these countries have different cultures and models of recruitment. However, it is precisely this variety of cases that makes sense of the spectrum and helps us develop hypotheses about its determinants, namely, the conditions under which the involved actors select their response to bereavement. This is the logic of "the method of difference" in which "the analyst compares cases with similar background characteristics and different values on the study variable (that is, the variable whose causes or effects we seek to discover)" (Van Evera, 1997, pp. 23–24) to identify the determinants. To map the spectrum, I documented the main public voices that were heard during wars, particularly those representing collective actions. The discussion is about a discourse

Table 1. The Bereavement Spectrum.

Level	Response to Military Death	Examples
5	Aversion to war: challenging the war's justification or rightness	Israeli <i>Beaufort Family</i> ; American <i>Gold Star Families for Peace</i> ; British <i>Military Families Against the War</i>
4	Cost-centered discourse: equating costs to the mission's political and military logic	Israeli <i>Four Mothers</i>
3	Aversion to needless risks due to flawed military performance, but not questioning the reason for war and sacrifice	Bereaved religious Israeli parents following the Second Lebanon War, British parents of Royal Military policemen killed in Iraqi Majar al-Kabir
2	Passivity	Most lower class groups; German discourse; individuation of the sacrifice
1	Unquestioning readiness for sacrifice	Challengers of <i>Gold Star Families for Peace</i>

that may have policy outcomes pertaining to military deployment rather than cultural or long-term political implications such as the politics of memory.

The second step is to inductively infer theoretical hypotheses from the cases. Given that this is not a case study-based analysis and does not investigate the pathways through which the two variables create the specific type of discourse, they cannot be used to test the hypotheses. However, these hypotheses can set the stage for future empirical inquiry (for the methodological logic, see Van Evera, 1994).

Mapping the Spectrum of the Bereavement Discourse

In general, the legitimacy that societies grant to sacrifice for war has declined in industrialized democracies. As Smith (2005) indicated, with the rise of individualism in the post-Cold War era, in a period of diminished external threat, military death has gradually been stripped of its meaning and has heightened casualty sensitivity. Still, societies vary culturally in the extent to which they tolerate such sacrifice. Moreover, within the boundaries of the societal level of casualty tolerance, different groups have different attitudes to wartime losses, which vary based on ethnicity, gender, religiosity, and other categories.

Thus, bereavement-motivated actors construct a spectrum of the bereavement discourse ranging from subversive to submissive. The subversive bereavement discourse seeks to undermine the assumptions that support the mobilization for war. It can either challenge the war's justification and rightness or question its costs. At the other end of the spectrum, the submissive discourse accepts these assumptions either passively or supportively. In between these two extremes are attitudes that accept the reasons for war and the sacrifice it entails but challenge needless risks, particularly those caused by the flawed performance of the military. Table 1 illustrates the map of the spectrum of the bereavement discourse.

As the next section explains, subversive discourse is typically carried out by the members of the upper social groups. In Israel, this was the profile of antiwar actors. Politically, the First Lebanon War (1982) was the watershed event. In this war, Israel invaded South Lebanon initially in order to uproot the Palestinian minstate led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). However, the previously agreed-on war goals expanded, and the Israeli military was dragged into a war of attrition against Shiite militias in South Lebanon for three additional years.

This war marked a turning point, central to which was the erosion of the legitimacy for sacrificing, and spurred the parents of the fallen soldiers to take collective action against the army's operations. The catalytic event took place during the first week of the war, which claimed the lives of about 230 soldiers. Most noteworthy was the battle to conquer the Beaufort Castle, in South Lebanon, which claimed the life of six soldiers.

Several bereaved families formed a group known as the *Beaufort Family*. The parents could have interpreted the mission as heroic, as bereaved parents had in previous wars, especially as the Beaufort Castle symbolized the PLO's stronghold in South Lebanon. Instead, they viewed it as a futile operation and blamed the government for the deaths of their sons. "Do not use spears and the bodies of our sons to try to dictate who shall rule in Lebanon," wrote Yehoshua Zamir (1982), a bereaved father, to Prime Minister Menachem Begin a few days after his son was killed in the Beaufort operation. He and another bereaved father, Ya'akov Guterman, stood at rallies with placards that read, "Begin, [Defense Minister Ariel] Sharon, [Chief of the General Staff] Raful [Raphael Eitan]: You murdered my son." In sum, by ascribing the causes of war to illegitimate political intervention in Lebanon rather than the defense of the country, this group challenged the war's rightness and justification (Level 5 in Table 1).

This antiwar activity had clear ethnic and class characteristics. About 70% of the casualties in the first week of the war came from the secular middle class, with 20% of all casualties coming from the upper middle class. Since the 1980s, the Israeli middle class experienced an overall decline in the motivation to sacrifice. As a result, it was the most organized, wealthiest, and sacrifice-averse social stratum in Israeli society that created the infrastructure for the protest. Specifically, among the six Beaufort casualties, three were kibbutz members, namely, the elite, veteran cooperative farming communities, and a fourth was the son of an established Jerusalem family of journalists. The parents took advantage of their resources—organizational skills, money, motivation, and free time—to bargain with the state over the character of the missions that justified military death (Levy, 2012, pp. 51–53). The protest they sparked was one of the driving forces behind the unprecedented and extremely effective protest movement against the First Lebanon War. By questioning whether the war was justified, the group moved away from the hegemonic model of bereavement that hitherto justified losses without question and shattered the consensus that had placed bereavement above politics (Lebel, 2006).

Bereaved American parents also adopted a subversive tone in response to the Iraq War. While bereaved parents were not prominent in the antiwar protests against the Vietnam War, bereavement played a greater role in the Iraq War, leading to the founding of the *Gold Star Families for Peace*. In April 2004, Cindy Sheehan's son was killed in Iraq. Later, prompted by doubts about the grounds for the war and after the number of fallen had exceeded 1,000, she formed *Gold Star Families for Peace* with other bereaved parents. In August 2005, the group's members camped outside President George W. Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas to protest the war. Unexpectedly, *Gold Star* inspired thousands of people. It experienced a short-term success in garnering support and ignited policy debates largely by capitalizing on the vacuum in the peace camp that made Sheehan a powerful symbol of the peace movement (Toussaint, 2009, pp. 40–41).

Gold Star delegitimized the sacrifice for war, by saying:

We as families of soldiers who have died as a result of war . . . are organizing to be a positive force in our world to bring our country's sons and daughters home from Iraq, to minimize the "human cost" of this war, and to prevent other families from the pain we are feeling as the result of our losses. We are also hoping to be lifetime support for each other through our losses.¹

Sheehan even went further and declared unequivocally that her son's sacrifice was not "worth it," "It is . . . 'worth it'," she said, "to the other companies and individuals who have been enriched by feeding our children to the military industrial complex" (Sheehan, 2005). Furthermore, unlike the tone of typical antiwar movements, Celeste Zappala, a cofounder of *Gold Star*, also considered the lost lives of the Iraqis (Franklin & Lyons, 2008, p. 245).

Characteristically, as a social group imbued with the ability to challenge President George Bush's "politics of fear," this movement could potentially appeal to the Christian liberal middle class (Franklin & Lyons, 2008, p. 243) by offering alternative frames (Kaufman, 2007). Against this background, the mainstream supporters of the war were motivated to counter the movement by voicing a more consensual tone in the bereavement discourse, as detailed below. Ultimately, *Gold Star* failed to affect policies and disbanded in 2008.

The British *Military Families Against the War*, founded in 2003 by bereaved parents to campaign for the withdrawal from Iraq and an investigation of the war, sounded a similar but more moderate tone. In an open letter, the parents said:

Our loved ones gave their lives in the service of this country . . . When they went to that war they believed they were being sent to defend our country. They were told it was their duty to disarm the Saddam regime of its weapons of mass destruction . . . We now believe our prime minister, Tony Blair, misled the people of this country as to the true reasons for the war in Iraq . . . This is why we are calling for an independent public inquiry into the decision to go to war. We must restore accountability to public life.²

In other words, the parents utterly discredited the war because of misleading war aims. Reg Keys, a founder member of the group, a retired ambulance paramedic, whose son, Tom, was killed in Iraq in 2003, even tried to run against Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2005 in his constituency of Sedgefield but failed.³ The *Military Families'* campaign was part of a larger endeavor to direct the public's attention to the costs of war, by, inter alia, naming individuals killed as a result of what they regarded as an illegitimate war. However, given the small number of British casualties and the marginal status of the military in British society, the government was effective in suppressing the opposition (Ware, 2010). Obituaries for soldiers killed in action, moreover, help legitimate the war by erasing violence from the texts and by emphasizing the idea that the fallen soldiers have seemingly made a free choice (Zehfuss, 2009), thereby helping diffuse potential protest.

Moving down the scale from Level 5 to Level 4, the Israeli *Four Mothers* movement exemplified a more moderate manifestation of the subversive tone. Although Israel ended the First Lebanon War in 1985 by ordering a unilateral withdrawal of its troops from South Lebanon, between 1985 and 2000, Israel was dragged into a guerrilla war in the area against Hezbollah forces in the security zone that Israel still occupied as a buffer between Lebanon and northern Israeli towns.

In February 1997, two military helicopters collided en route to Lebanon and claimed the lives of 73 soldiers. In response, the middle-class-based *Four Mothers* movement was founded by four residents of the north, mothers of soldiers who were serving in Lebanon at the time of the helicopter accident. *Four Mothers* led the campaign to pull Israel out of Lebanon unilaterally and unconditionally. Rachel Ben Dor, the movement's founder, described her impetus to act:

On the night of the helicopter disaster I became forcefully aware of the terrible price we were paying in the Lebanese quagmire. I made up my mind that something must be done to stop the endless bloodletting. My assumption was that if these were the results, there must be something wrong with the means that we must call for a change, for improvement in the situation; and not accepting it as if it was preordained.⁴

In other words, the movement challenged the costs and compared them to the political and military logic of the specific mission in terms of not rightness but logic. Changing the "wrong means" was the goal. Unlike the protestors against the First Lebanon War, *Four Mothers* did not delegitimize Israel's presence in Lebanon or accuse the government of using the soldiers politically for unjust ends; instead, it focused solely on the military logic relative to the costs. Similar to the cost-benefit calculation offered by Larson (1996), the group questioned the extent to which the ends could be attained by other means, for example, a withdrawal that would discourage Hezbollah from fighting and thus reduce casualties. Ultimately, the campaign that *Four Mothers* initiated played a key role in shifting public opinion and driving the Israeli government to unilaterally withdraw the troops from Lebanon in

2000 or at least this achievement was later attributed to the group's actions (see Hermann, 2009, p. 166).

In the midlevel discourse between subversiveness and submissiveness (Level 3), actors focus on the criticism of the needless risks that could have been averted had the military's performance not been flawed. Such a discourse was used by bereaved religious Israeli families following the Second Lebanon War (2006), along with other groups. When Israel's aerial assaults failed to stop the rockets that Hezbollah was launching at Israel's northern towns, the army was gradually dragged into a ground operation, which resulted in more than 100 fatalities, but failed to stop the rocket shelling. Israel then accepted a UN-mediated cease-fire. Seemingly, for the first time in its history, the Israeli military had lost a war (see Makovsky & White, 2006).

Bereaved religious families were particularly prominent in the protest that emerged following this fiasco. They criticized the government for preventing the army from winning the war and for the military's ill-preparedness and poor performance. One father, Moshe Muskal, said,

[my son] went out to fight for his country and after falling, while the prime minister was making promises, we supported him because we thought it was right, because there were goals set . . . But now that the goals haven't been achieved . . . we want answers, and we want to know the source of the authority.⁵

Another father, David Einhorn, vowed,

There were many failures during the war . . . both the political and the military echelons . . . have to take responsibility . . . I have two younger sons, aged 15 and 12 . . . both of them will go into the army . . . We will continue to serve the state.⁶

In other words, the gap between the goals of the war and its ultimate achievements stood at the center of the protest, but the very necessity for the war itself was not questioned. For religious parents, their sons died for a noble cause—protecting the holy land of Israel. Religious people may also be more willing than secular ones to view death as a divine decree, part of the perception of military service as a divine service (Cohen, 2013) and of the role of faith in justifying death (Saka & Cohen-Louck, 2014, p. 150). Moreover, the bereavement discourse endowed these religious families with a special status, because in the wake of the decline in the motivation to serve among the secular middle class, religious groups viewed themselves as increasingly taking their place as the new service elite (see Lomsky-Feder, 2004).

Demands for inquiries into the military's flawed performance also fall into Level 3. One example is the struggle of bereaved British parents for an investigation into the deaths of their sons—six Royal Military policemen who were killed by a mob attack on a police station in the southern Iraqi town of Majar al-Kabir in 2003

(in which Reg Keys was bereaved as well). The parents blamed the military for following flawed procedures. Mike Aston, whose son Russell died in this attack, said:

The failings of certain individuals in the chain of command [...] got my son killed along with five other brave men and they deserve to answer for it... I feel sorry for other families with sons in the army having to operate under people of that calibre. It is pathetic.⁷

While such cases point to a decline in the parents' trust in the armed forces (Forster, 2006, p. 1053), the tone voiced in this case is similar to that of the religious Israeli parents cited above. Unlike *Military Families Against the War in Iraq*, these parents did not question the cause of war. Instead, they focused their criticism on the poor performance of the military command, which, for them, was accountable for their sons' deaths.

Passivity and the lack of a critical public voice (Level 2) are typical of the silent majority, especially, but not exclusively, of lower social groups. The American communities that suffered the highest casualty rates in the Iraq War were socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Although communities that have suffered many losses are significantly more likely to reduce their casualty tolerance in future military missions, they are also more likely to exhibit political apathy, because in such disadvantaged communities, the people possess fewer of the resources needed to engage in politics (Kriner & Shen, 2010, 2014).

A similar pattern of passivity is reflected in the German attitude to military casualties. An analysis of the response of the politicians and the media to six incidents in which German soldiers died on missions between 1993 and 2003 indicates German society's indifference to military casualties. Such indifference may arise from the society's learning to accept casualties as part of the cost of the country's taking part in global security missions or from framing the casualties as a purely military affair (Kümmel & Leonhard, 2005). Regardless of the reasons, the bereaved families remained mute in the bereavement discourse.

In Level 2, we can also classify the individuation of the dead, which has become part of the memorialization of war sacrifice. The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC, with its 58,000 names, is a prominent example.

Individuation may have two contradictory effects. When casualty levels are low, as is typical in the post-World War II-era, the media can present soldiers to the public and to decision makers as individuals, with names and faces, or in body bags. Increasing casualty sensitivity is the result (Ben-Ari, 2005; Dauber, 2001).

At the same time, the opposite result may occur. As a case in point, Stow (2008) cites the *New York Times* series "Portraits of Grief," which published the individual biographies of the New York City victims of 9/11. Stow maintains that this approach creates a "pornography of grief" that becomes the dominant mode of memorialization. Consequently,

What began as a tradition of naming the individual dead as a way of bringing home the enormity of national tragedy . . . has devolved into a self-defeating focus on the individual, both victim and viewer, that ultimately serves to erase the very thing it was supposed to remember, with the political now obscured by the personal . . . That the Bush administration was able to exploit the individual and collective grief of the American people to elide the differences between Iraq and Afghanistan and to connect the former to the increasingly amorphous “war on terror,” is, perhaps, evidence of the power of the grief-wrath of [the emotion of anger of] *ménis* to corrupt the careful and deliberate thought that democratic politics requires. (p. 238)

Thus, the individuation of death stimulates a discourse that may divert attention from the political implications of the loss to the loss itself. It is a kind of neglect (in Albert Hirschman’s terms as elaborated below) by means of political passivity and a corruption of deliberative democracy. Whereas Stow studied the impact of memorialization of civilian casualties, a similar picture emerges in the analysis of how the pornography of grief governs the media coverage in Britain of families bereaved in the war in Afghanistan and also corrupts the political discourse (White, 2009). Zehfuss (2009) also documents how obituaries help legitimate the war by erasing violence from the texts. By diverting the discourse to the loss itself and thereby blurring its causes, the two outcomes of individuation are not necessarily contradictory; sensitivity may coexist with neglect-generated militarization.

In this context, we can better understand situations in which, despite increasing public engagement in the casualty count, policy makers still have broad autonomy to engage in warfare (for a discussion from another angle, see, e.g., Gelpi et al., 2009). Paradoxically, moreover, highlighting the losses incurred by war may actually increase the tolerance for casualties among those who previously supported the mission by convincing them that pulling out would mean that the past sacrifice had been in vain. Such was the discourse concerning the Iraq War (Boettcher & Cobb, 2009).

Finally, Level 1 presents the strongest explicit support for the war and its costs. Here, the players are aware of the costs and consciously willing to bear them. Conservative challengers of the *Gold Star Families for Peace* such as the lobbying group, *Freedom’s Watch*, exemplified this pattern.

In its advertisements, women bereaved by the war expressed their conviction that their loved ones died in the name of fighting Al-Qaeda and terrorism (Franklin & Lyons, 2008, pp. 247–248). This submissive tone also arose from political mobilization. When President Bush met with grieving families, it was invariably the mothers who were in the spotlight. The meetings often ended with the president, “the patriarchal national leader,” paternally reassuring these women that their sons did not die in vain, and therefore, their motherhood had contributed honorably to the national cause. Mothers, therefore, remained faithful to the femininity of militarized motherhood (Repo, 2006, pp. 112–113), confirming their role as those who stay at home and out of politics (Franklin & Lyons, 2008, p. 243). In contrast, Sheehan’s actions

seemed to sunder the presumed natural connection between being a good mother and being a patriot (Franklin & Lyons, 2008, 244). The mothers' tone is best understood if we consider that the vocational American military draws its soldiers mainly from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and that conservatism is correlated with the lower classes.

Indeed, other mothers attacked Sheehan (Bumiller, 2005). Invoking the theme of free will, Debbie from Indianapolis, whose son returned to service after he had been wounded in Iraq, said:

I would never dishonor his actions by doing what this woman [Sheehan] is doing. What she's doing is not only dishonoring her son, she's dishonoring mine. . . . [Casey Sheehan] didn't die for nothing, he died in the United States Armed Forces. There's nothing more honorable than that. These kids volunteered, they were not yanked from their cradle by an evil government to send them someplace they didn't want to go . . . My son knew what was in store for him, and my son stepped up to the plate. (Kovacs, 2005)

Tammy Pruett, an Idaho woman whose husband and five sons fought in Iraq, also rigorously countered the theme of "dying for nothing." President Bush, in an attempt to offset Sheehan's protest, quoted Pruett:

I know that if something happens to one of the boys, they would leave this world doing what they believe, what they think is right for our country. And I guess you couldn't ask for a better way of life than giving it for something that you believe in. (Gordon, 2005)

Here, we see how the discourse of free will implicit in the notion of the vocational military is invoked to justify sacrifice. A similar pattern is evident in the British discourse, which helped cripple the potential antiwar discourse (Zehfuss, 2009, p. 13). Based on the mapping of this spectrum, we can hypothesize about its determinants.

Determinants of the Spectrum

As we can see, within the limits of the society's political culture, with its deeply rooted level of tolerance for sacrifice, different groups have different attitudes to wartime losses. Even in the same society, there are different collective responses to wartime deaths. The political culture creates the climate that raises or lowers the threshold for subversive voices and sets the boundaries of legitimate actions and "the cultural resonance of symbolic repertoires" (Williams, 2004, p. 109). However, just as different voices are heard within the same boundaries of the cultural environment, so too, the political culture cannot be regarded as the decisive determinant of people's responses to wartime losses.

Therefore, within the confines of the declining level of casualty tolerance in society, two variables cumulatively determine how the actors (the families and broader social networks from which the fallen soldiers or those at risk originate)

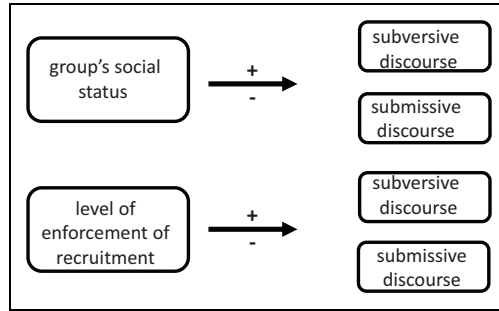


Figure 2. Determinants of the actors' response.

choose their discourse: (1) the level of enforcement of recruitment, ranging from conscription to voluntary recruitment and (2) the social position of the group to which the agents belong. Given that conscription brings powerful, high-status groups into the ranks who may be unwilling to make sacrifices for war, subversive responses are more likely to occur in conscript militaries than in volunteer forces and vice versa. Note that this argument is mostly valid in societies where the tolerance for military losses is in decline. When there is greater tolerance of such deaths, the barriers to subversiveness are too high to mount an effective antiwar effort. Figure 2 illustrates this argument.

Albert Hirschman's (1970) classic work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, on how people respond to dissatisfaction with organizations offers suitable tools for dealing with the conditions that promote the appearance of a subversive versus submissive bereavement discourse. In Hirschman's terms, bereavement-motivated actors (family members or collective actors who may be touched less personally) can choose from a repertoire of three responses when they face wartime casualties:

1. Loyalty—A submissive attitude that can be voiced publicly, arising from identification with and support of the military mission.
2. Neglect—A passive approach that typifies the silent majority, expressed through alienation, cynicism, apathy, or distrust (see Lyons & Lowery, 1986, who developed this concept by drawing on Hirschman).
3. Voice—A subversive attitude reflecting dissatisfaction with the cost of war and aimed at influencing the military deployment.

Hirschman's option of exit is irrelevant here. Any attempt to "break the rules," such as emigration, can be a kind of "exit vociferously" (see Laver, 1976), which seeks to raise voice. Alternatively, exit can be done silently, in which case it signifies neglect.

Accordingly, subversive responses are more likely to arise in situations of conscription rather than in volunteer forces for three reasons. First, conscription requires service from the willing and unwilling alike, while a volunteer force does not.

Consequently, a conscripted military includes citizens who are most averse to the sacrifice and are therefore most likely to raise their voice when the legitimacy of sacrifice is questionable (Vasquez, 2009, pp. 85–88). For example, protest against the dispatching of troops to Vietnam increased in the mid-1960s in Australia in tandem with the installation of a draft system (Vasquez, 2009, 341–358).

In contrast, in a volunteer system, free choice plays a major role in the decision to join the ranks. Typically, the service is more likely to attract those who support the mission ideologically or those who have fewer options in the labor market. Hence, they and their social networks conform submissively to the military's imperatives, while opting out from the beginning is the preferred option of those resisting military service or the policies it serves. Following Swidler (1995, p. 37), we can say that conscription is a kind of perceived form of repression, creating different kinds of social movements with differing tactics.

Second, conscription touches more powerful actors more directly than voluntary service. Thus, groups with political power, whose young members may form a critical mass in the ranks, are potentially much more politically engaged under conscription because of the vulnerability of their members to compulsory service (Vasquez, 2005). Furthermore, powerful groups are more inclined than lower class groups to engage in a subversive bereavement discourse for the reasons elaborated on below.

Consequently and third, in a conscription system, for moral and political reasons, the state officials pay more heed to the voice of potential conscripts and their social networks. Morally, it is the state that is responsible for those whom it has coerced to sacrifice, as opposed to enlistees in a voluntary force who have seemingly made a free choice (on Britain, see Zehfuss, 2009, pp. 431–433). For conscripts, military sacrifice cannot be presented as the result of free choice but as state-mandated sacrifice.

Politically, during the state formation stage of the 18th and 19th centuries, the reliance on a mass, conscript citizen army encouraged patterns of bargaining between the state and the groups that controlled the human and material resources needed for waging war. This bargaining resulted in the allocation of political and social rights to these groups, thereby subjugating the decision to go to war to the popular will (Tilly, 1997, pp. 193–215). Thus, a system of obligatory service increases the stake of citizens in the goals of policy and prompts legislators to play a more active role in foreign policy in order to better serve their constituents (Avant & Sigelman, 2010, p. 241). Furthermore, with a broader infrastructure for collective action, policy makers do not just respond to collective action and public opinion but also anticipate it if they fear that sacrifice will engender opposition from citizens with access to power (Vasquez, 2005). In turn, the state's receptiveness further encourages claims-making. In vocational militaries, these rules work in the opposite direction.

Manpower policies may reinforce or mitigate the impact of deeply instilled political and cultural values, reflected in the legitimacy of sacrificing. Against this

background, democracies have sought to immunize their militaries to protest informed by casualty sensitivity by phasing out the draft or increasing their selectivity within the limits of the draft system (see Vasquez, 2005).

Within the constraints of the societal and group level of tolerance of casualties and recruitment policies, the higher the position of the group in society, the greater the likelihood that the group will adopt a subversive discourse and vice versa. Note that the question is not the extent to which group members develop a subversive or submissive generic attitude toward wartime losses but the extent to which they adopt a subversive or submissive public discourse as a group.

High social status is correlated with access to resources and powerful social networks, which may be crucial for collective action (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004, p. 179). More importantly, high social status is correlated with a greater ability to adopt and express a critical outlook in general (Dowding & John, 2008, p. 294). In families from a lower socioeconomic level, one is more likely to grow up with the awareness of being at the mercy of the hegemony, which leads to keeping a low profile and adopting the compliance that this attitude entails (Libes & Blum-Kulka, 1994).

This link between subversiveness and social status is particularly valid when it comes to the bereavement discourse. The sacrifice discourse, which glorifies the fallen and the social networks from which they come to justify the loss, is a double-edged sword. If society depends on sacrifice as a way of defining the national identity and ensuring its cohesion, as Marvin and Ingle (1999) argued, then questioning the justification for death is almost a taboo subject. Furthermore, for the families bereaved by war, compliance with this taboo is a source of power. Through it, they are surrounded by the aura of national recognition, honor, and admiration. Naturally, they seek the comfort of knowing that the cause for which they are suffering is a good one (see Lebel & Ronel, 2005). Breaking this taboo is too costly. Families are caught in a sort of "honey trap."

Therefore, it is almost only bereaved families from high-status groups who have the courage to challenge hegemonic symbols, particularly, because these groups are more exposed than families from less powerful groups to the trends that increase the aversion to casualties. Among these trends are the diminishing size of families, which means increased parental and political resistance to military adventures that risk the lives of their children; the expectation that those of working age are needed to produce and pay taxes rather than to serve, and especially die, in an unproductive military; and the extension of civil liberties and rights, and the expectations of benefiting from them (Smith, 2005, pp. 500–503). In contrast, for disadvantaged groups, the military represents a significant avenue for the attainment of first-class citizenship (Krebs, 2006), increasing the propensity to adopt a submissive discourse or remain passive.

Seen from another angle, the bereavement discourse is a platform through which social groups can claim acknowledgment by a grateful society. Women in particular can leverage their role in raising soldiers to undertake legitimate political action

(Enloe, 2000). Mothers can overcome the cultural barriers that women face in voicing concerns about military-related issues by engaging in the republican exchange between military sacrifice, in the form of motherhood, and political rights, that is, republican motherhood. Other groups can also claim public acknowledgment. As the case of Australia in World War II attests, bereaved parents, widows, and limbless soldiers attempted to articulate a public language of grief designed to push society to acknowledge the legitimacy of their loss, an acknowledgment that would in many cases be translated into financial compensation. Therefore, protest revolved around these grievances rather than turning into attempts to delegitimize the war (Damousi, 1999). Thus, such claims increased the proclivity toward a more conservative tone. Unsurprisingly, if we take the United States as an example, the voice of bereaved families has almost been absent from the political scene in the past even when military policies were debated. Only in the case of Iraq were mothers in the forefront of the antiwar movement even if for a short period (Bumiller, 2005; Toussaint, 2009, pp. 40–41).

This theoretical framework makes sense of the spectrum of bereavement in situations where the general level of tolerance of casualties is in decline. In Israel, the increased sensitivity to casualties made the powerful middle class gradually averse to sacrificing for war. In the context of conscription, this combination of factors created a suitable infrastructure for the rise of a subversive bereavement discourse. *Beaufort Family* and *Four Mothers* are cases in point. Both groups successfully affected policies (Levels 4 and 5 in Table 1). In contrast, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries where volunteerism governs manpower policies, this infrastructure is more limited. Furthermore, if subversive voices do appear, they are more muted than in Israel and can be countered by invoking the theme of the “free will” of soldiers who volunteer for service, as the case of the *Gold Star Families* and the British counterpart, *Military Families Against the War*. In all of the cases, moreover, parents created a shared location with other parents. Nevertheless, in Israel, with its conscript army, this shared location encompassed a denser network than in cases with vocational militaries, whereas in the United States, parents divided their sense of belonging between those who supported war and those who objected to it (for a comparison between the United States and Israeli cases, see Levy, 2013).

In between (Level 3), we find the case of Israeli religious groups. As this group moved from the margins of the sociopolitical stage to the center (Hermann et al., 2014, p. 4), parents of religious soldiers participated in the bereavement discourse for the first time (Levy, 2012, pp. 99–100). They used their sacrifice to claim society’s acknowledgment of their contribution. Therefore, the parents blended submission with subversion. On one hand, they asserted their loyalty to the country, in contrast to the secular elites who were portrayed as less concerned about patriotism. On the other hand, they were also critical of the military and the government. They saw a clear linkage between the military’s withdrawal from Gaza and the dismantling of the Jewish settlements there a year before the Second Lebanon War

and the military's poor performance in that war (Levy, 2012, pp. 99–100). Thus, they neither went against the mainstream nor opted for passivity. British parents of Royal Military policemen reacted in a similar way.

It follows that the growing presence of soldiers from the lower classes and members of conservative and religious groups in the ranks of vocational militaries (as in Britain) or partly vocational ones (as the Israeli military has become since the 2000s) increases the likelihood of submissive voices. Under these conditions, a middle level of discourse between subversiveness and submissiveness may prevail.

Finally, passivity and the lack of a critical public voice (Level 2), neglect in Hirschman's terms, are typical of lower social groups. The most conservative tone is evident among those who are marginalized in terms of culture or gender such as lower middle class mothers in the United States (Level 1).

Conclusions

This study highlights the need to address the missing link in the role of the bereavement discourse. Political discourse is a precondition for initiating collective action and reshaping public opinion. Therefore, the bereavement discourse may be a component of the antiwar discourse that mediates between casualty sensitivity and the igniting of collective action and shifts in public opinion, both of which may lead to policy changes. Theorizing about the bereavement discourse is thus a precondition for explaining these variables when actors are motivated by bereavement.

I addressed two steps relevant to this endeavor. First, given the variations in the attitudes of different social groups, I provided an exploratory mapping of the spectrum of the bereavement discourse from subversiveness to submissiveness. Then and second, in hypothesizing about the determinants of the bereavement discourse, I demonstrated that when conscription is imposed in a society where tolerance for sacrifice is declining, a subversive bereavement discourse, especially among higher status groups, is more likely to occur than when service is voluntary, even in a society that is sensitive to casualties. Depending on their social status, bereavement-motivated actors vary in their attitudes toward actual or potential wartime losses, their production of meaning from military occurrences, and the shaping of a sense of shared social location. All of these variations place the actors on various positions on the bereavement spectrum.

One of the conclusions that emerge is that the spectrum of the bereavement discourse also affects the spectrum of risk to which the state exposes its soldiers and civilians. When a subversive discourse becomes the dominant response to wartime losses, the military (and its political supervisors) is more inclined to internalize the restrictions imposed on risking soldiers. Exposing soldiers from lower social groups and nationalist groups to greater risk, groups who typically situate their response on the submissive end of the bereavement spectrum, is one option. Phasing out the draft also serves this option. Risk aversion is another option. When the

bereavement discourse is more submissive, the military enjoys greater autonomy in risking its soldiers.

Having mapped the spectrum of the bereavement discourse and hypothesized about its determinants, this article lays the groundwork for identifying the conditions that encourage the appearance of a subversive discourse, which is the key for energizing an antiwar movement. Based on this framework, there are two venues for future research. The first involves testing the hypotheses by using an in-depth case study analysis that investigates the pathways through which the two variables promote either a subversive or submissive discourse. However, the theory proposed here is open to the possibility of equifinality, so the same outcome—the nature of the discourse—can result through different pathways (George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 235–236). The second deals with investigating the pathways through which the subversive bereavement discourse produces or does not produce results by being translated into public opinion and collective action in a way that determines the success of bereavement-motivated collective actors in affecting policies.

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