*Beverly Ann Deepe Keever*

## De-escalating Media Language of Killing: An Instructional Module

*Kurzfassung*: Aufbauend auf einschlägige akademische Forschung und die erste umfassende Dokumentation von Gewalt im Weltmaßstab, bezieht sich der vorliegende Aufsatz auf eine web-basierte Ressource, die unter www.toda.org ins Internet gestellt wird. Gegenstand und Ziel dieser beiden Produktionen sind die Rolle der Medien für die Herstellung einer Kultur der Gewalt und der Versuch ihrer Eindämmung. Der vorliegende Aufsatz und die begleitende Internet-Ressource beschreiben den Ansatz von Professor Emeritus Glenn Paige, dem Autor des Buches Nonkilling Global Political Science, das in 25 Sprachen übersetzt wurde. Darin plädiert er dafür, der unangemessenen Verwendung einer Sprache des Tötens in den Medien sowie - alternativ dazu - der Verwendung von Euphemismen, welche Gewalt beschönigen oder vertuschen, größere Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken und entgegenzuwirken. Paiges Argumente und der vorliegende Aufsatz münden in 5 Empfehlungen für künftiges Handeln.

*Abstract*: Harnessing substantial academic research and citing the first comprehensive summary of violence on a global scale undergirds this online article that elaborates on a companion web-based resource to be posted at www.toda.org. These twinned online productions examine the role of the media in producing a culture of violence and seek to curb its extent and effects.
This article and the accompanying webcast describe the approach of Professor Emeritus Glenn Paige, author of *Nonkilling Global Political Science*, which has been translated into 25 languages. He urges greater media awareness about the importance of: avoiding the inappropriate use of the language of killing and, alternatively, avoiding the use of euphemisms to gloss over or cover up examples of violence. Paige's arguments and this online article suggest five recommendations for future action

## Introduction

This article elaborates on a companion web-based instructional module that examines the role of the media in producing a culture of global violence – and that seeks to curb their extent and effects.

The twinned online productions – this article plus the web module – form a small part of the campaign by the Peace Journalism Research Project funded by the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research. The companion webcast is to be posted as a resource at http://www.toda.org.

The Peace Journalism Project also aims to explore positive potential for representations of conflict to create space and opportunities to consider and to value non-violent responses.

The 20th century was burdened by a legacy of mass destruction and violence "inflicted on a scale never seen and never possible before in human history", Nelson Mandela writes in *World Report on Violence and Health.* This Report is the first comprehensive summary of violence on a global scale. It was published by the World Health Organization in 2002.

Besides violence made possible by new technologies and what Mandela calls the "ideologies of hate", the *World Report* catalogs and explicates causes of day-to-day violence around the world, in six regions and in more than 100 specific countries along a number of indicators, such as gender and income. It also lists numerous other resources and websites.

The 372-page Report, as well as a summary, abstract and related materials, is available online. It states that "over 1.6 million lives are lost each year and countless more damaged in ways that are not always apparent" because of violence.[1]

In recommending ways for primary prevention, the *World Report* calls for media campaigns to "change attitudes, behaviour (sic) and social norms".[2] One such media intervention that has already begun to enact the Report's recommendation is the BBC's World News Service with its season of programming about "Violence Begins at Home".[3]

However, this instructional module takes on a wider purpose. It is designed as a resource to raise awareness – especially among working journalists, future communicators and citizens worldwide – about the importance of:

- avoiding the inappropriate use of the language of killing and, alternatively,
- avoiding the use of euphemisms to gloss over or cover up examples of violence.

This resource lays out a practical, foundational way to help professional and student journalists as well as citizens using everyday clichés and language to develop what Lynch and McGoldrick call "a critical self-awareness".

Thus, rather than research or concepts designed to develop new theory or to add to existing ones, the author here seeks to harness that vast amount of academic scholarship so as to encourage more critical and creative thinking about curbing the language of killing as a step toward mitigating the so-called culture of global violence.

Because of the increasingly significant role the news media have in determining the framing of killings and conflicts, Lynch and McGoldrick argue, "journalism needs some workable form of *reflexivity*, analyzing and addressing its own role in shaping discussions and creating realities. Without this, it is fated to collude and conceal".[4]

Although this instructional resource is designed for use with college students, it may also be enlightening for citizen activists, community groups and non-governmental organizations. And although this resource talks of written and spoken words, the principles are equally and even perhaps more relevant to still or moving visuals, including photographs, videos, illustrations and cartoons, as evidenced by the worldwide controversy over a Danish newspaper's publication of a cartoon that Muslims worldwide found so offensive it led to violence.

This webcast also includes suggestions for media literacy assignments that may sharpen the awareness of students of all ages in a number of settings. This English-language version may be subtitled by others into other languages and localized by using the *World Report's* statistical data on six regions (Africa, Americas, South-East Asia, European, Eastern Mediterranean, Western Pacific) and on more than 100 countries.

This webcast is based on a presentation made to advanced students in the Global Communication course by Professor Emeritus Glenn Paige. A UH political scientist, he has worked for the past three decades to promoting nonviolence through the writing of his self-published book, *Nonkilling Global Political Science*. It can be printed on demand through amazon.com

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1. http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/index.html, accessed April 2, 2006. Mandela's remarks are in the foreword. The lives' lost quote is by WHO Director-General Gro Harlem Brundtland in the preface; neither page carries a number.
2. Ibid., 249.
3. http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/violence, accessed April 2, 2006.
4. Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, *Peace Journalism* (Gloucestershire, UK, Hawthorn Press, 2005), xvi.

or is available for free online.[1]

Within three years his book was translated into 25 languages, making it accessible to persons in countries of three billion population. Technology permits the diffusion of this book but the reason for its rapid spread globally is the nonkilling idea, Paige tells students, adding, "The logic of killing is running out of steam".[2]

In his book that students were assigned to read, Paige says, "Language reflects and reinforces lethality, contributing to a sense of naturalness and inescapability". The mass media of communication provide "vicarious learning for lethality and desensitization of the value of human life", Paige states, by elaborating, "No people in history have had so many lethal images imprinted on their brains".

But, he adds, "however harmful to civil society, violent media socialization is useful for a state in need of professional patriotic killers".[3]

**De-escalate the Everyday, Inappropriate Language of Killing**

Paige begins his presentation by examining everyday language and clichés that exemplify unthinkingly or unnecessarily the word *kill*. He then solicited alternative language from the class. A young woman *dressed to kill* thus became a young woman dressed to thrill. A manly *ladykiller* was re-worded to mean *lady charmer*. Referring to the word *ladykiller*, Paige interjects: "Too many males do that, so why use that type of imagery?"

Paige gives as an example the inappropriate use of the word *kill* to describe a successful play in volleyball. To study more deeply Paige's idea, two of University of Hawai`i's volleyball stars, who were enrolled in the course, initiated a research project to find out whether omitting the word *kill* from the volleyball vocabulary in the United States would be possible or even beneficial. UH volleyball stars Kanoe Kamana`o and Kari Gregory explained their findings. They concluded that although their teammates and coach thought the language change was unnecessary, local radio broadcaster Scott Robbs had years ago voluntarily de-escalated violent language in his play-by-play accounts of the games. Instead of *kill*, he localized a new expression of *to crush the coconut.*

However, even when volleyball as a Western sport was imported into South Korea, the word *kill* did not follow it, as another student, Jae Sun Lee, who was born in South Korea, explained. Her observation suggests that comparative analysis of vocabularies of inappropriately violent words could usefully be studied, especially in sports, which is becoming more global, popular – and often violent.

Others disagree, however. They argue that reducing the amount of violence in the media will not solve the problem of violence in society.[4] Exemplifying this perspective, another student, Bryan Moe, researched a different sport and its language. He found that even without a violent vocabulary, basketball still was often a violent sport in the United States.

Bryan makes a good point that could be extended to consider about suicides. Suicide is rarely covered in the U.S. and other news media because of the fear of copy-cats. Yet globally it outranks both wars and homicides as causes of violence-related deaths. As the BBC reports, "Every 40 seconds one person commits suicide somewhere in the world".[5]

Citing statistics from the *World Report* about causes of violent deaths, Paige says that 50 percent die from suicide; 30 percent from homicide and 20 percent from war. "More people kill themselves than kill another", Paige points out. The need for more research and critical self-awareness is suggested by this paradox of the predominance of suicide despite media silence about it[6] or of the eruption of violence – such as in sports – even when no violent vocabulary is often used.

Sports page writers often use the language of lethality, Paige observed, as he looked at an across-the-top-of-the-page ar-

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1. http://www.globalnonviolence.org, accessed April 2, 2006.
2. Paige's 75-minute presentation on Sept. 8, 2005, University of Hawai`i, which was videotaped and audiotaped, made to 40 upperclass students enrolled in the Global Communication course (Communication and Journalism 475). The class included international students from Japan, South Korea, Israel, Australia and Nigeria.
3. Quotes are from pages 13-15 of Paige's book.
4. For an exposition of this perspective, see James W. Potter, *The 11 Myths of Media Violence* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2003).
5. From BBC website cited above.
6. In a personal communication with this author received on Dec. 19, 2005, Jake Lynch, referenced in an earlier footnote, observes, that "the most significant lacuna in media coverage may be about the human and psychological cost of inequality, alienating structural and cultural aspects of society", which, for example, all too often is left as the subject of "mere lip service" in the reporting of economic policies.
   For a poignant account of suicide attempted by males as young as 8 years old in Micronesia, see Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2005), 216–227.

ticle with its 8-column headline: "'Bows Annihilate Aztecs". Conversely, military officials often use sports imagery to obscure their potential destructiveness, he noted, when they refer to their own exercises as *war games.*

He advised trying to make violent language more animated and exciting because the language of violence is used to spark emotion, which plays on people's fears and aggressiveness. Conversely, he noted, killing that is really going on is often covered up as *peacemaking*.

Paige advocates the media to operate from the presumption that a nonkilling society is possible and that they contribute to or inhibit that possibility. A nonkilling society is one that avoids the killing of or threats to kill human beings or that abandons weapons used for killing humans or for maintaining or changing conditions of society. The purpose of a nonkilling society is to save lives, Paige explains, adding, "You can't save life by killing".

Paige maintains that the value of his approach is two-fold. First, it is *measurable*; the number of humans killed can be counted. Second, it is *open-ended*; it advocates no set remedy. Instead, he says, his approach invites creative thinking and solutions in all facets of life and at all levels of institutional governance.

## Quote Accurately and Explain Violent Language

But, he warned, the media also need to quote accurately words of violence when violence erupts or is urged by the public or leaders. The expression to "Kill the Pigs" was hurled at police in Los Angeles during the 1980s Watts riots, Paige explains, and had to be accurately described. Such is also the case of words used by public officials and figures, no matter how violent those words may be. But then one should examine the conditions and reasons for the use of lethal language.

One violent remark that media-circumnavigated and then stunned the world in 2005 was conservative Christian minister-televangelist Pat Robertson's call for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez because of his nation's policies. But, because of that violent remark given wide circulation in the media, even conservative columnist Cal Thomas called for Robertson to resign, adding with some embarrassment, "I'm sure the non-Christian world is having a fine time ridiculing this latest example of un-Christ-like behavior".[1] Robertson publicly apologized later.

## Expose and Critique Euphemisms

On the flip side, however, the media need to expose and critique euphemisms. Paige gives as an example the term of *collateral damage* often used by U.S. officials to gloss over or cover up civilian deaths caused by bombing raids or other wartime actions.

He inspected a sheath of newspaper clippings that he has collected over the decades. One shows high-flying U.S. warplanes flying in formation; the Air Force nicknamed them "Blue Angels". "Angels don't kill", he observed. But instead of critiquing the military euphemism, the headline writer for the Page 1 news story localized the planes into the standard lingo of Hawaii, calling the warplanes "Birds of Paradise".

Paige's observations are amplified in a chillingly descriptive article titled "The Banality of Evil". In it, author Edward Herman explains that "Doing terrible things in an organized and systematic way rests on 'normalization.'" He elaborates on normalization and the mainstream media's role in it:

"This is the process whereby ugly, degrading, murderous, and unspeakable acts become routine and are accepted as 'the way things are done.' There is usually a division of labor in doing and rationalizing the unthinkable, with the direct brutalizing and killing done by one set of individuals; others keeping the machinery of death (sanitation, food supply) in order; still others producing the implements of killing, or working on improving technology (a better crematory gas, a longer burning and more adhesive napalm, bomb fragments that penetrate flesh in hard-to-trace patterns). It is the function of defense intellectuals and other experts, and the mainstream media, to normalize the unthinkable for the general public."[2]

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1.   Cal Thomas, "Salvation won't be found on the TV set", *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 31, 2005, All.
2.   Edward S. Herman, "The Banality of Evil", accessed April 1, 2006 at http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/ BanalityEvil_Herman.html. The author is grateful to Jake Lynch for recommending that parts of this insightful article be included here.
     For more insights on the significant role of language in framing our everyday reality, please see *Metaphors We Live By* written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Their example of the "conceptual metaphor" that "Argument is War", evidenced: "He attacked every weak point in my argument" or "His criticisms are right on target" or "He shot down all of my arguments". Their evidence presented on page 4 also echoed many of Paige's examples.

## Four Principles of Nonkilling Journalism

What are the implications for the media of thinking a nonkilling society is possible?, Paige asked. Would they look for different stories? Would they find different information or communicate it differently?

Partially answering his own questions, Paige then recites the four kinds of information that people need to know in order to make decisions about a less violent society. These are:

1. the causes and incidences of killing, with his describing these as "absolutely essential"; how many people have been killed and why;
2. the causes of nonkilling and explanations on why people don't kill;
3. the causes of shifting from killing to nonkilling and vice versa; what causes a shift or change from one condition to another;
4. the characteristics of a nonkilling society, or, as Paige exclaims, "the most exciting" kind of information. Report and seek out evidence of human creativity to realize conditions of nonkilling in ever aspect of society: politics, security, economics, art, sciences, religions and media.

In addition, for a more complex, reflexive exercise, news media reports should be assessed to determine whether they explain the cause(s) of violence and whether one can deduce an explanation from the way violence is represented in them.[1] This exercise would reveal that all too often, Lynch and McGoldrick assert, war journalism is the dominant discourse that provides no framework for alternative thinking or remedies. These co-authors go beyond this analysis of news products by also advocating study and change of the structural factors that influence, if not determine, the shape, omission or marginalization of news.[2]

Therefore, Paige sets forth, the four principles of nonkilling journalism and other media are:

1. report the killing without euphemisms and inquire into its causes,
2. report the nonkilling – why people don't kill – and report human creativity,
3. report causes of shifting from killing to nonkilling or the reverse,
4. report the characteristics of a nonkilling society.

## Critical Self-awareness, News Analysis Exercises

Paige's four principles laid the foundation for this critical-thinking exercise: handing in at least three examples each of 1. violence in the media, 2. non-violence in the media, 3. the shift from an act or process of violence to non-violence or vice versa and 4. recommendations for professional journalists and other communicators.

The students' search produced some fascinating examples. One international student searched the web and found an example of the ultimate euphemism: German Nazi use of "final solution" to mask the massacre of millions of Jews during World War II and to the "de-lousing facilities", or gas chambers, used to implement the Holocaust.

Despite the heavy emphasis given by the U.S. news media to the war in Iraq and the many other easy-to-find journalistic reports of violence, several students found small articles with tiny headlines reporting on successful movements toward peace in Indonesia, Korea and in the beginnings of the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Another student's example of a shift from violence to non-violence was the newspaper account of a pregnant woman in Hawaii who was beaten and left for brain-dead; she was kept alive on life support until her child could be born and adopted by her relatives.

Suggestions for creating nonkilling were also made through the students' research and critical self-awareness. Curbing violence in sports entertainment could include not only changing violent vocabularies, one student wrote, but also focusing more on the "spirit of humility and sportsmanship by players, staff and fans". Building sportsmanship and fair play was once emphasized as a fundamental goal of youth athletics.

A beneficial shift in media reporting, especially in visually oriented television and webcasts, might also result if a rule or policy or code of practices was put in place that for every article, story or broadcast that showed violence, a non-violent one must also be shown. "This would create a more rounded media experience, also would allow the public to learn about a focus positively on non-violent people, events and stories", the student wrote. Although controversial, and perhaps un-

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1. The author is appreciative of this insightful recommendation made by an unidentified peer reviewer of an earlier draft of this article.
2. For an excellent elaboration of their proposed future remedies and opportunities, see the epilogue of their *Peace Journalism* book, cited above, 227–232.

constitutional under U.S. law, the proposal might voluntarily be adopted by some news leaders – or at least get them to thinking about new approaches in their news output.

Another shift from violence to non-violence reported on by students is already sweeping Hawaii and is spreading to the United States in the form of Korean soap operas distributed with English subtitles on cable television. "Unlike American and other Western soap operas", one student wrote about South Korean productions, "they don't allow plotlines that include violence, as it would contradict their cultural values". As international films, videos, webcasts and television become more readily available globally through rapidly changing technology, viewers will have more options to select productions less violent than are so predominately available in some localities.

## Conclusion: "Human Violence Is a Curable Disease"

As the speed, reach and impact of the news media increase so dramatically and globally commensurate with the increased levels of worldwide violence, this resource module suggests several concrete, next-step recommendations.

First, intensive, widely available workshops should be organized and disseminated widely to sensitize busy headline writers and news producers about *why* and *how* they can de-escalate the language of killing in their productions, whether on the sports, business or editorial pages or in their news packages.

Second, more cross-cultural perspectives on violent or conflict-ridden events should be offered as a means to open up alternative constructions of reality for various audiences.

Third, key news leaders, including play-by-play sports broadcasters, should be solicited to drop or urge dropping the violent clichés and other commonly used expressions in their work, much as feminist scholars succeeded in minimizing the use of sexist language.

Fourth, news decision-makers should re-evaluate what might be called their "strategic silence" that routinely omits coverage of suicides, the world's most prevalent kind of killing.[1]

Lastly, to expose some structural factors tilting the news toward violence, media owners should be pressed to disclose their business interests and interlocking directorships with other powerful institutions, especially those related to the military-industrial-intellectual complex that feeds and sustains some violence and that makes profits from the weapons of killing.

These recommendations are offered as part of a much larger campaign to curb global violence. The conclusion of the *World Report* and of his book, Paige states, is that "Human violence is a curable disease". Like polio, Paige argues, violence can be cured with proper research, training, resources and implementation.

More explicitly, the *World Report* explains: "Despite the fact that violence has always been present, the world does not have to accept it as an inevitable part of the human condition. As long as there has been violence, there have also been systems – religious, philosophical, legal and communal – which have grown up to prevent or limit it. None has been completely successful, but all have made their contribution to this defining mark of civilization."

And, the *World Report* offers hope and a roadmap. "Violence can be prevented and its impact reduced, in the same way that public health efforts have prevented and reduced pregnancy-related complications, workplace injuries, infectious diseases, and illness resulting from contaminated food and water in many parts of the world. The factors that contribute to violent responses – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed.

"Violence can be prevented. This not an article of faith, but a statement based on evidence. Examples of success can be found around the world, from small-scale individual and community efforts to national policy and legislative initiatives."[2]

Both the *World Report* and Paige's book call for accelerated research, programming and implementation. Both exhort media to play a heightened, constructive role. Paige says, "We are going to eliminate human killing on the globe just the way we put a person on the moon".

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1. The quote is from Richard Lentz, "The Search for Strategic Silence", research paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Norman, Oklahoma, August 3–6, 1986.
2. *World Report*, 3.

Brundtland, World Health Organization Director-General Gro Harlem, preface (no page number), *World Report on Violence and Health,* www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/index.html , accessed April 2, 2006

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*On the author*: Beverly Ann Deepe Keever, Ph.D., is a professor of journalism at the University of Hawai'i, where she was awarded the Regents Medal for Excellence in Teaching. She served as co-editor of *U.S. News Coverage of Racial Minorities: A Sourcebook 1934–1996* (Greenwood Press, 1997). More recently, she wrote *News Zero: The New York Times and The Bomb* (Common Courage Press, 2004). Before teaching, she worked as journalist, covering the Vietnam War for seven years successively for *Newsweek*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and other publications. Her coverage of the besieged outpost of Khe Sanh in 1968 was nominated by the *Monitor* for a Pulitzer Prize in international reporting.
For a career bridging the profession and professorate, she received in April 2003 an award from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Alumni Association.".

*Address*: School of Communications, 2550 Campus Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822–2217. eMail: bkeever@hawaii.edu.