



I AM MALALA:

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

THEME 7: *Malala and the Media*

For more information or to submit feedback
about the resource guide, visit malala.gwu.edu.

The Global
Women's Institute

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY



To expand the reach of Malala’s memoir—*I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*—and spread Malala’s message to young people and activists, the Global Women’s Institute (GWI) of the George Washington University (GW), in collaboration with the Malala Fund, developed a resource guide for high school and college students around the world. Building on the content of Malala’s memoir, the resource guide supports global efforts to mobilize women and men to address women’s and girls’ rights to an education.

Malala’s memoir opens the door to some of the greatest challenges of our modern world. It is about politics, education, culture, religion and violence against women and girls. It is a moment in the life of a young girl and in the history of a country. To do these broad themes justice, faculty from a wide range of disciplines contributed to the development of the resource guide.

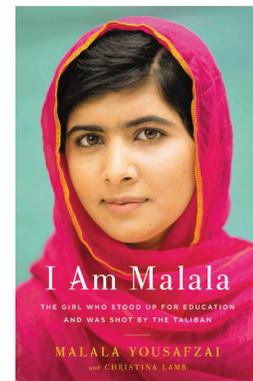
The resource guide challenges students to think deeply, share their experiences, and engage with their communities. Each theme is divided into 4 parts:

- **Part 1** is the narrative with learning objectives to frame the conversation and help plan lessons;
- **Part 2** lists the resources to help students and teachers deepen their knowledge about the theme;
- **Part 3** lists individual and group activities, including some to be done outside of class if students are interested;
- **Part 4** is the high school supplement intended to help high school teachers introduce and discuss some of the concepts and context that appear in the theme narratives.

Each part may be printed separately to be used by teachers or students.

THE EIGHT THEMES ARE:

1. **Memoir as Literature and History**
2. **Education: A Human Right for Girls**
3. **Cultural Politics, Gender and History in Malala Yousafzai’s *I am Malala***
4. **Religion and Religious Extremism**
5. **Malala and Violence against Women and Girls**
6. **Malala Leadership Essay**
7. **Malala and the Media**
8. **Global Feminisms: Speaking and Acting about Women and Girls**



**A Memoir by the Youngest
Recipient of the Nobel
Peace Prize.**

To learn how to purchase the
book, visit malala.gwu.edu.



MALALA AND THE MEDIA

BY SEAN ADAY & SILVIO WAISBORD

P A R T 1



Narrative

This discussion of Malala and the media seeks to make students aware of the complex yet patterned, way in which the press tends to cover social movements around gender and women’s rights, especially in the context of foreign policy issues. This narrative includes the following topics:

- Understanding Malala and the media
- Media influence: agenda setting and framing
- Background: media coverage of social movements
- Background: media coverage of foreign affairs
- Intersection: framing the Malala story

Understanding Malala and the Media

In the West, news coverage of Malala addresses several questions of interest to media scholars in various disciplines. Some key questions are: When and why did Malala become a subject of news attention? For how long? What is newsworthy about the story? What stories are told about Malala in the Western media? What aspects of Malala’s story and the issues and communities she represents get different amount of coverage? Addressing these questions helps us to understand the characteristics, strengths, and limitations of news about Malala. These questions matter because Malala is essentially a “news story” and a matter of media coverage for Western audiences. Their knowledge and their understanding about Malala as well as the multiple issues that she evokes are essentially mediated—that is, they are based on news and images provided by the media.

From this perspective, then, Malala can be reasonably considered a “news icon”—a point of attention of the media, which can be individuals, events, and places. A news icon functions as a gravitational center that holds media attention. Malala, then, became a news icon about various issues in the contemporary global world, including children’s education in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and around the world; violence, conflict, war, and terrorism; the conditions of girls in patriarchal societies; gender identity; and children’s rights.

Media Influence: Agenda Setting and Framing

There are two key concepts for understanding new media and its effects on public opinion and policymaking: agenda setting and framing. Agenda setting refers to the well-established power of the press to influence “what people think about,” even if it doesn’t seem to dictate what people think. In other words, media don’t appear to make people violent, but when the press runs a lot of stories over time about crime, people who read those stories are likely to say crime is an important problem, whether actual crime rates would suggest it is or isn’t. Scholars have found this connection between the media agenda and the public agenda in numerous studies over the past 40 years.

As opposed to agenda setting, which is about the quantity of coverage of an issue, framing is about how that issue is covered. Virtually every story has many different sides and potential storylines a journalist could choose to emphasize. Yet journalists often make patterned decisions to cover certain types of stories in one way rather than another. In the same way that looking out a window shows you only part of the picture, media frames similarly represent only one way of understanding a story. Political campaigns, for example, are typically framed in terms of their tactics, strategies, and personalities—who's winning and who's losing?—rather than in terms of issues. Research shows that how stories are framed often influences how audiences understand and think about the issues and topics being covered.

Agenda setting and framing are powerful concepts for understanding the nature of news coverage of Malala's story, why it was covered the way it was (and why alternative frames were downplayed or ignored), and what influence this might have on shaping public and policy discourse.

For example, we would expect that when media covered Malala a lot, the public and policymakers might be more likely to prioritize the issues raised in those stories. But here is where framing comes in. What aspect of the Malala story ended up being covered? The answer has implications for what type of information was conveyed and, at its essence, what "the story" really was.

The following research strategies could be adopted in order to study the Malala story from agenda setting and framing perspectives. First, to get at the agenda-setting question, one would want to literally count the number of stories about Malala that ran in the media. Here, however, some choices must be made. Which media are we interested in? TV, radio, newspaper, or digital? U.S., Western, Pakistani? How we answer those and other questions depends mostly on what audiences interest us. For instance, if we are interested in whether Malala made a difference in shaping Pakistani public opinion, we'd look at Pakistani media.

Framing works a little differently. Framing is about figuring out what aspects of the story were selected and prioritized in stories (e.g., by putting them in story leads, or headlines, or at the top of the newscast). It also often requires the researcher to categorize the frames. For instance, we may be interested in whether some media covered the story more substantively (or thematically, as it is sometimes referred to in communication research) or more superficially (or episodically). Perhaps even more important with a story like Malala's, we may be interested in knowing whether media were more likely to frame her story in terms of conflict in Pakistan and the local or global gender-based violence and women's equality, or in terms of terrorism.

Background: Media Coverage of Social Movements

Malala's story as a media story can be analyzed in terms of the opportunities and challenges it brings for social movements to get media coverage. It is not simply or only a story about a girl who was a victim of senseless violence after she defied the Taliban. Her remarkable story has multiple layers that speak to the interests of many social movements promoting women and children's rights, educational opportunities, gender roles, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in South Asia and the world. The issues that Malala represents suffer a "double invisibility": They rank low among top priorities across countries, and they are generally ignored by the media. These are the twofold challenges for most social movements: How do they get attention from the public and policymakers and become important in political/policy debates? How do they attract media attention to remedy the absence in the public sphere? Since the attack, Malala triumphantly became a global spokesperson for these issues. She is a news icon—a news peg for the Western and the global media to cover various issues.

Given her profile and the issues that Malala represents, it is worth considering arguments about how social movements are typically covered in the media. In contrast to political and economic elites, social movements generally lack institutional power to make news. What they say and do is less likely to make news compared with official and corporate sources who count on well-established newsmaking mechanisms to churn out information regularly and enjoy legitimacy as "legitimate" newsmakers in the media. Therefore, social movements need to rely on strategies to overcome their disadvantages and gain media attention. Put differently, unlike elites, movements are in asymmetrical relations vis-à-vis the media. They need the media more than the media need them.

Whereas some movements refuse to engage with the rules of the mainstream media, and prefer to rely on their own media platforms, others pragmatically try to obtain coverage to publicize their causes. Aside from conventional newsmaking strategies (e.g., press releases, planned events), social movements resort to protest and other forms of public theater as steps to get media attention. In opting for these actions, they consistently confront well-documented challenges that are remarkably similar across movements and countries. They are more likely to attract news attention when their actions offer elements of drama, conflict, and media-appealing personalities. Therefore, social movements are caught in a bind: They may get news attention if they offer visible elements that fit the news media's appetite for such content. If they lack those elements, they are less likely to get news attention. Coverage focuses on dramatic and conflictive elements and on leaders who have media charisma and other characteristics, thereby distorting the goals, practices, and organizations of social movements. Also, movements are more likely to get news attention when their actions fit typical news values such as geographical and cultural proximity, large size, and ongoing media narratives. These biases flatten the complexities of social movements and the issues they represent. Consequently, media coverage generally offers a simplistic view that reduces collective mobilization and social issues to a few images and stories.

Given these well-documented biases, it is worth asking whether news coverage of Malala confirms such conclusions or, instead, suggests important differences.

Background: Media Coverage of Foreign Affairs

Over the years mass communication researchers have consistently found that mainstream media tend to reinforce dominant sociocultural norms and values, confer status upon that which is covered (and thus relegate to "nonevents" that which is not), and make decisions about coverage that are heavily routinized and source driven. These conclusions are, if anything, even truer when it comes to media coverage of foreign affairs. In addition, severe budget cutbacks in U.S. news divisions since the early 1980s have led to a drastic reduction in the amount of international news available to American and Western audiences via the mainstream media.

In general, foreign policy coverage tends to be (a) ethnocentric, (b) elite driven, (c) uncritical of official and military claims, and (d) episodic (e.g., usually covering other countries when senior White House officials travel to or otherwise prioritize them). What does this tell us about media coverage of the Malala story? First, it suggests that international media, especially in the U.S. and other Western countries, are likely to frame her story through the prism of the foreign policy priorities and perspectives of the country where the media originate. In this case, that means that Malala's story becomes fused with the overarching story of the global war on terrorism. Second, it means that the broader social movement that has arisen around Malala, like other social movements before it, faces challenges in transmitting its agenda through the international mainstream media. That's because the media are likely to reinterpret the story for an international audience through the lens of their own ethnocentrically driven frames and perspectives. The questions then become: How did the Malala movement frame itself? How was the Malala movement framed in the press? And how did that framing differ based on the country's media we're studying?

Intersection: Framing the Malala Story

Previous research suggests that social movements have difficulty transferring their frames to mainstream media coverage of them and their issues. The question is, did this happen with the Malala movement, too? If so, in what way(s) and why? If not, why the exception in this case?

Based on what we know about coverage of social movements, gender-related issues, and international affairs, we might venture some hypotheses about media attention to Malala that are worth testing. For instance, we might expect that in the international media, Malala's story is likely to be only somewhat about gender-based violence and women's empowerment and a lot more about fighting terrorism. Why? Because those topics are the priorities of Western powers. Similarly, Malala's attacker is likely to be mainly understood as Taliban—an enemy of the West—more than as part of a larger, globalized patriarchal culture—an enemy of women and, ultimately, everyone. This would not only change the way international audiences understand why Malala's story is important and what lessons we can draw from it; it also has important implications for the movement itself. In particular, it creates an incentive to accept the war on terrorism framed as an entrée to the media coverage necessary to get one's broader message out. The challenge for the Malala movement, as with other movements, is to find a way to educate the world about that larger message about conflict, peace, access to education, and gender equality given these obstacles.



Resources

The following supplemental reading materials are suggested:

- Aday S., Livingston, S. & Hebert, M. (2005b). "Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10 (1), 3-21.
- Baum, M.A., & Groeling, T. (2010). *War Stories: How Strategic Journalists, Citizens, and Politicians Shape the News About War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bennett, W.L. (1994). "The News About Foreign Policy." In Bennett, W.L. and Paletz, D.L. (eds.). *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War* (12-42). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Carter, Cynthia; Steiner, Linda; & McLaughlin, Lisa (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Media & Gender*.
- Entman, R.M. (2004). *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World Is Watching*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Iyengar and Simon. "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion" (in Bennett and Paletz), (167-185).
- Jacky Repila. *The Politics of Our Lives: The Raising Her Voice in Pakistan Experience*, OXFAM GB.
- Robinson, P. (1999). "The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?" *Political Communication* (25), pp. 301-309.
- Wolfsfeld, G. (2004). *Media and the Path to Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller, J. and Chiu, D. (1996). "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945-1991." *Political Communication*, 12, 385-405.



Individual and Group Activities

These activities could be conducted as group projects or as individual research papers. Group projects make it easier to conduct cross-media and cross-cultural research, while individual papers develop skills necessary for academic/think tank writing and publishing.

Students will refer to the narrative in order to address the following tasks and questions:

- Develop research questions and hypotheses to test the agenda-setting and framing questions related to the Malala story.
- Develop a research design to test these research questions and hypotheses.
- Content analysis: Which media? TV, radio, newspaper, or digital? U.S., Western, Pakistani?
- Agenda-setting study: Count the number of stories about Malala that ran in the media.
- Framing study: Framing is about figuring out what aspects of the story were selected and prioritized in stories (e.g., by putting them in story ledes, or headlines, or at the top of the newscast).
- Did some media cover the story more substantively (or thematically, as it is sometimes referred to in communication research) or more superficially (or episodically)?
- Were some media more likely to frame her story in terms of gender-based violence and women's equality, or in terms of terrorism? And did this vary by the foreign policy priorities of the media organization's home country?



High School Supplemental Information Malala and The Media

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the news media influences stories you hear about?
2. Think about one news story and identify different perspectives that are being reported about the same event.

CONTEXT

Why is it important to understand how the media works?

In our modern society, we hear about events around the world as soon as they happen. We see pictures of war, natural disasters and personal tragedies and we read narratives about political battles and human suffering. It is important to realize that news stories are written, edited and produced by men and women with differing points of view on certain topics and that no one is truly neutral. Furthermore, certain news outlets cultivate a specific political perspective and are known to reflect a certain type of view. The more we are able to understand how stories turn into news events, the better able we will be to form intelligent and accurate opinions of what is going on in the world.

What makes a story newsworthy?

A story is considered newsworthy when the editors believe that it will appeal to a large number of people. A story can be newsworthy because of the event (i.e., a plane crash of the individuals involved such as celebrities, heads of state and other key political leaders).

Why does public opinion matter?

Public opinion refers to a group, or public, opinion on a newsworthy event of common interest. It is important in politics because, while elected officials may not be responsive to the concerns of individuals, they do pay attention to the opinions of large numbers of people. Public opinion, therefore, can influence laws that are passed and other important political decisions since politicians will generally want to satisfy the voters, who keep them in office. In general, public opinion is shaped by the way stories are communicated in the media.

KEY TERMS OR NAMES

Agenda Setting: Agenda setting refers to the well-established power of the press to influence “what people think about,” even if they do not seem to dictate what people think. In other words, media don’t appear to make people violent, but when the press runs a lot of stories over time about crime, people who read those stories are likely to say crime is an important problem, whether actual crime rates would suggest it is or isn’t.

Framing: Framing is about *how* that issue is covered. Virtually every story has many different sides and potential storylines a journalist could choose to emphasize. Yet journalists often make patterned decisions to cover certain types of stories in one way rather than another. In the same way that looking out a window shows you only part of the picture, media frames similarly only represent one way of understanding a story.

Media: The term “media” is used to refer to methods of communication that are used to distribute the news to the public. Traditionally, these methods have included radio and television, referred to as broadcast media, and newspapers as well as magazines, which are known as print media. In the past years, we have witnessed a rise in the popularity of digital media, including blogs and online newspapers. All of these forms have similar purposes, which is to communicate the news and public events to a large audience.

Foreign Affairs: The term “Foreign Affairs” refers to the sphere of activities that involve the relationships among different countries. Treaties among nations, assistance to developing countries, and international negotiations surrounding warfare and conflict are all considered to be part of a foreign affairs agenda. In every country, relationships with other nations are directed by a government agency; in the United States, this is the United States Department of State and in other countries the same agency is often referred to as a Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Men and women who represent their countries overseas are ambassadors.

Social Movement: A social movement is a long-term organized group action to bring about social or political change, which usually develops when groups do not believe that the government is accurately representing their interests. Social movements around the world have formed to advocate for and bring about change in civil rights, racial integration, greater political and social freedoms for women, labor rights, poverty, and other issues related to justice and equality.

Gender-based violence: In 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women offered the first official definition of the term "Gender-based Violence": *"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."*

Because gender-based violence has had a greater impact on women and girls, the term has become in many areas interchangeable with the term, "violence against women."

For more details on this topic, please see the theme, "Malala and violence against women and girls," in this guide.

We would like to thank Michele Clark, Larissa Warhol, Judy Rogers, and Fernanda Bianchi for their contributions to the high school supplement.

For more information or to submit feedback about the resource guide, visit malala.gwu.edu.