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The Process Model, the Verbiage of the Mass Media, and the Stagnation of New Public Policy: An In-Depth Analysis of the Terri Schiavo Case

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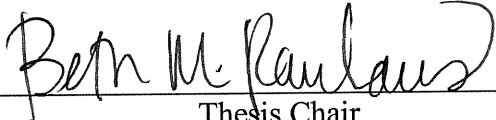
The Process Model, the Verbiage of the Mass Media,
and the Stagnation of New Public Policy:
An In-Depth Analysis of the Terri Schiavo Case

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the University of North Georgia
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science in Political Science
With Honors

Matt Caudell
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Honors Program Graduate

Thesis Committee:



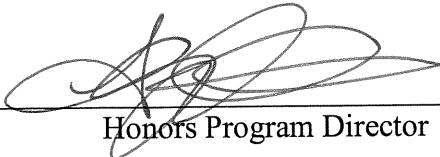
Thesis Chair



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Committee Member



Honors Program Director

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Introduction

Though tragic, the case of Florida's Terri Schiavo offers an unprecedented case study. The instance's unique circumstances provide one with a valuable and illustrative example of political theory and the complexities of public policy formation. The Terri Schiavo case gripped the attention of the public on a national level. According to Terence Smith, "76 percent of the public polled (said) that they (were) following (The Terri Schiavo case) either very closely or somewhat closely" (Cosgrove-Mather, 2005). However, despite national media attention and the infamous case's lengthy court proceedings, the Terri Schiavo saga failed to make any legitimate national policy changes. The following research will discuss how public policy's Process Model, despite the case of Terri Schiavo and subsequent national concern, as well as "media malpractice," contributed to the stagnation of euthanasia legislation on a federal, state, and local level, and analyze what progress, if any, the mass media has made in their coverage of Schiavo nearly two decades after their initial coverage began. Though Terri Schiavo's case can only be applied to the first half of the utilized theoretical model, the insight this application provides is certainly valuable nonetheless.

History

Early one cold February morning in 1990, Terri Schiavo's wellbeing took a catastrophic turn. At the young age of 26, Schiavo suffered from what the Terri Schiavo Hope and Life Network refers to as a "mysterious cardio-respiratory arrest for which no cause has ever been determined" ("Terri's Story"). At the time of the incident, Schiavo had not executed a living will or designated power of attorney. Several months later, following her admission to the hospital, Schiavo was diagnosed by Dr. Garcia J. DeSousa to be in a persistent vegetative state.

On June 18th, 1990, four months after the incident, the court appointed Terri's husband, Michael Schiavo, as her legal guardian. Terri's parents, Robert and Mary Schindler did not object to the court's decision. Eight years later, after almost a decade of failed rehabilitation efforts, Michael Schiavo, as Terri's legal guardian, petitioned to have her feeding tube removed. Schiavo's petition was met with opposition by the Schindlers and, after reviewing both arguments, Judge Richard Pearse suggested denying Michael Schiavo's petition to remove the feeding tube, citing that Schiavo's request may have been influenced by his potential inheritance upon her death.

In January of 2000, Michael Schiavo again petitioned to withdraw life support. The 2000 court case was heard by Judge George Greer in Pinellas-Pasco's Sixth Judicial Circuit. Over the course of the hearing, Michael Schiavo, along with his two siblings, testified that Terri had told them in the mid 1980's that she would

not want to be kept alive in the event that life support was needed. Her parents, on the other hand, argued that their daughter was a devout catholic and would never want to give up faith so easily. Judge Greer found Schiavo's testimony to be convincing and ruled that Terri's feeding tube be removed.

On April 21st, 2001, Florida Suncoast Hospital removed Terri Schiavo's feeding tube. Nearly three days later, new evidence emerged, raising suspicion of Michael Schiavo's testimony in the case heard the year before. The evidence was the result of a private phone conversation had between Terri's father and Michael Schindler's ex-girlfriend from 1991 in which she claimed that, "(Michael) had no idea what Terri's wishes were" ("Timeline," 2015). Sixty hours following the removal of the feeding tube, Judge Frank Quesada, finding the newly presented evidence to be credible, issued an injunction requiring Florida Suncoast hospital to resume Terri's nourishment.

Following this bizarre turn of events, media saturation of the situation intensified. According to a Tyndall Report, prior to Judge Quesada's decision there were "fewer than ten (online) references a day to Terri Schiavo." Following his decision there were "more than 4,000 every day" ("The Schiavo Case ", 2005). The same report stated that CBS, NBC, and ABC all devoted 22 minutes of their 60 minute nightly broadcasts to covering the Schiavo saga.

In 2002, Judge Greer heard Terri's medical evidentiary trial. Following the trial, Greer ruled in favor of Michael Schiavo and once again ordered that Terri's

nutrition be halted, and set October 15th, 2003 as date for the removal of the feeding tube. On that day, hundreds of people gathered outside of the hospital in which Terri resided. By the end of the day, “at least 180,000 signed a petition to Governor Jeb Bush of Florida to invoke Florida's Adult Protective Custody statutes based on allegations of neglect” ("Timeline"). Five days later, an emergency session of the Florida Legislature was held in which both the House and the Senate passed “Terri’s Law,” a law giving Governor Jeb Bush the authority to reinstate Terri’s nutrition. One year later, Judge Baird of Florida’s 6th Circuit court ruled that “Terri’s Law” was not constitutional and ordered the removal of Terri Schiavo’s feeding tube for a third and final time.

The Schindlers scrambled to make final attempts to plea for their daughter’s life. Both the Florida Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court denied to hear the Schindler’s appeals. On March 18th, 2005, Terri Schiavo’s feeding tube was again removed. Fourteen days later, after two weeks of no food or water, Terri Schiavo died from severe dehydration and malnutrition.

Literature Review: Reoccurring Themes from Research

Medical jargon, the Process Model, the role of the media, the role of ethics, and the role of government sources were all themes that rematerialized while conducting research. The following is a brief summary of themes and relevant available literature.

Public Policy Theory: The Process Model

A 2007 Gallup poll of approximately 1,000 adults (though the statistics are approximately eight years old, it is unlikely that the results are not still fundamentally representative of public opinion as there was little variation in responses over course of the six year study) found that Americans are relatively evenly split with regard to the acceptability of doctor-assisted suicide (**Table 1**). With almost half of the population in favor of the practice, it is difficult to understand why there is no discussion regarding public policy. To help better understand this phenomenon, the Process Model is utilized.

*Table 1. 2007 Gallup Poll: Moral acceptability of doctor-assisted suicide.**

		Morally acceptable	Morally wrong	Depends/ not an issue/ no opinion
May 10-13, 2007	Overall	49%	44%	7%
Partisan views	Republicans (including "leaners")	39%	54%	N/A
	Democrats (including "leaners")	59%	36%	N/A
Churchgoers' views	Attend weekly	23%	71%	N/A
	Attend almost weekly/ monthly	45%	48%	N/A
	Seldom/ never attend	67%	24%	N/A
May 8-11, 2006*		50%	41%	8%
May 2-5, 2005*		49%	46%	5%
May 2-4, 2004*		53%	41%	6%
May 5-7, 2003*		45%	49%	6%
May 6-9, 2002*		50%	44%	6%
May 10-14, 2001*		49%	40%	11%

* Opinion Polls/Surveys - Euthanasia

The Process Model can perhaps be described best as public policy as a result of political activity (McCool, 1995). This model is a visual representation of how public policy is created. It's, according to scholar Paul Cairney (2016):

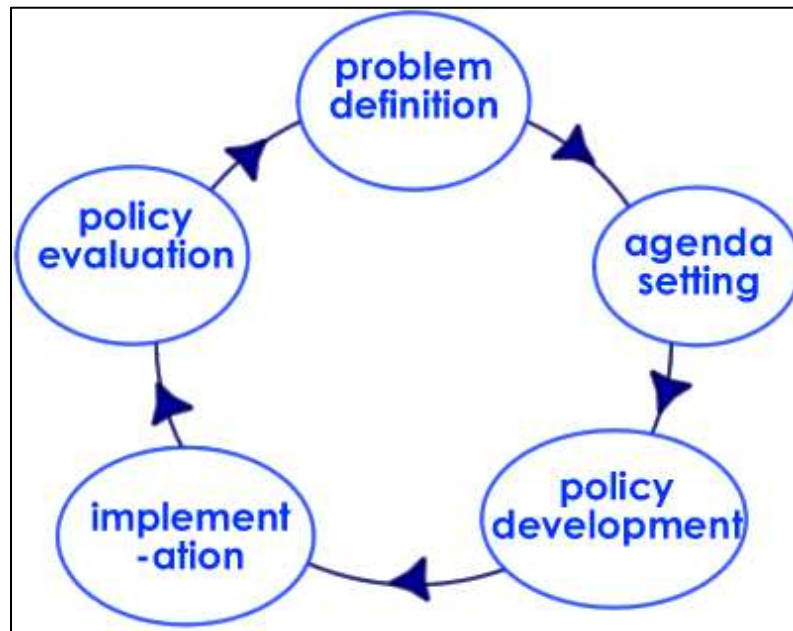
A cycle (that) divides the policy process into a series of stages, from a notional starting point at which policymakers begin to think about a policy problem to a notional end point at which a policy has been implemented and policymakers think about how successful it has been before deciding what to do next.

The Process Model is cyclical and relies on stakeholders to create policy, implement the policy, and then evaluate the policy (**Model 1**). At its core, the Process Model identifies key actors/stakeholders. Scholars from Oxford refer to these actors as “individuals, groups, (or) organizations that have a stake in” the outcome of a policy or are directly impacted by the influence of potential legislation (Trousset, "Degrees of Engagement"). In the context of this case study, the American public (i.e. voters), euthanasia interest groups (The Terri Schiavo Life and Hope Network, The American Medical Association), and both state and federal legislators are stakeholders.

Continuing laterally with the process, the subsequent step is identifying a problem, a relatively minute phase by comparison. In this context, Cairney (2016) describes this stage as “(an issued) that require(s) government attention, deciding

which issues deserve the most attention and defining the nature of the problem. In this case, the issue is that there is no federal legislation addressing euthanasia in the United States.

*Model 1. The Process Model**



*Reference 81: *Public Policy Model*

The subsequent step is for the actors/stakeholders to set an agenda. The media plays a chief, necessary role in this step. According to political scientists, “there are discrete gates through which political information passes (Williams & Carpini, 2004).” Agenda-setting research has repeatedly demonstrated that “exposure to news can affect citizens’ perceptions of the most important problems facing the nation (Pingree, 2013).” Psychologists and political scientists alike have

documented the effect that the media's news coverage can have on an issue.

Psychologists hold that “agenda setting is a variant of priming, in which news coverage of an issue makes that issue come to mind more readily in an automatic process of knowledge activation” Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Takeshita, 2006; Tsftati, 2003). This step, however, is not where the theoretical model ends.

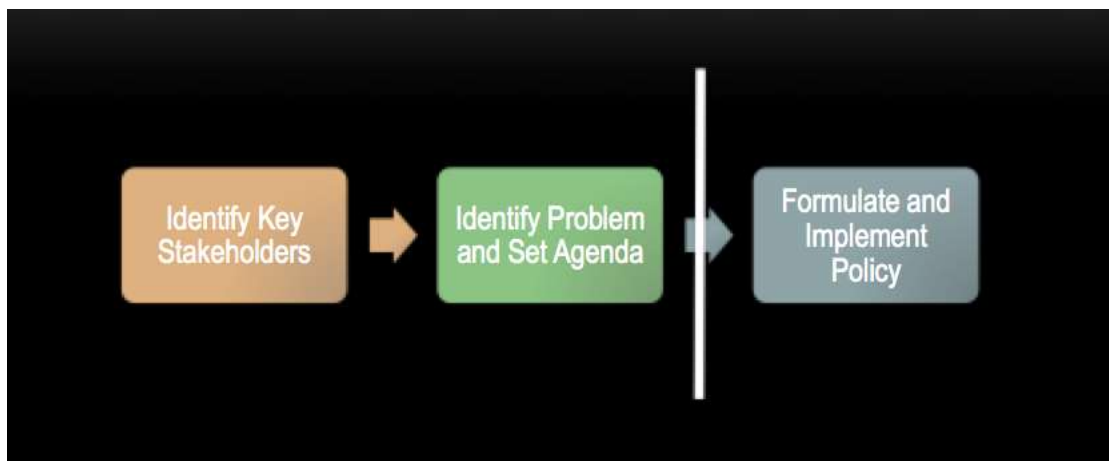
The final step for our case study is the formulation and implementation of policy. Cairney (2016) describes this step as “setting objectives, identifying the cost and estimating the effect of solutions, choosing from a list of solutions and selecting policy instruments” and “ establishing or employing an organization to take responsibility for implementation, ensuring that the organization has the resources (such as staffing, money and legal authority) to do so, and making sure that policy decisions are carried out as planned.” Currently, no euthanasia legislation is active in the United States on a federal level. This is where progress in the context of the Process Model has seemingly halted (**Model 2**).

Scholars have outlined the important role that the media plays in the formulation and implementation of public policy (Nesbet & Hugh, 2006):

Power in policy making revolves in part around the ability to control media attention to an issue while framing an issue in favorable terms. These two characteristics of media coverage both reflect and shape where an issue is decided, by whom, and with what outcomes.

The Process Model can only be applied to the case of Terri Schiavo in part. The entire model cannot be applied because the model has stalled before and policy was developed or implemented. Because of this, we cannot move on to the final step of policy evaluation.

Model 2. The Process Model Stall



Public policy creation is a complex process, a fact that is highlighted in the case of Terri Schiavo. Aside from the literature concerning the process model, there were several additional schools of thought that reoccurred during this research. Medical jargon, the role of the media, the role of ethics, and the role of government sources were all themes that rematerialized while conducting research.

Persistent Vegetative State

Euthanasia is a superficially taboo subject of discussion in the realm of American politics. For this reason, the Terri Schiavo case is especially valuable. Few, if any, other cases have led to such varied public opinion on such a massive scale. Nearly the entirety of the euthanasia literature published over that past 20 years has been directly grounded in the case of Terri Schiavo. A case study by Joshua Perry, Larry Churchill, and Howard Kirshner (2005) was the first to introduce a reoccurring theme of Terri being in a persistent vegetative state (PVS). That is, she was unaware of herself and her environment and was deemed to be non-cognitive and incapable of conscious experience (Coleman, 2005). According to one source, PVS is characterized by “periods of wakefulness with no apparent awareness or response to any stimulus” (Koninklijke, "The Terri Schiavo Case in a Comparative Perspective"). Dr. Joseph J. Fins noted that, “(Schiavo) could breathe without a ventilator. (She was) in a vegetative state, not brain-dead, and that distinction makes all the difference” (Grady, 2014).

Many of the articles and other publications to be used in research made mention of PVS and grounded their research on the media’s lack of understanding of the diagnosis, a mistake discussed later in depth.

The Role of Media in the Terri Schiavo Case

A concept that constantly reemerged while evaluating literature was the concept of the media's role in the formation of public policy. The media has long been referred to as the "gatekeepers" of knowledge for the American people. As in all topical news, the media reports heavily and densely on an issue at the height of its relevance. The Terri Schiavo case undoubtedly was, at the time, an all time high for the discussion of euthanasia practices. The media reported forcefully for weeks, acting as the sole source of information on euthanasia for many citizens. However, many scholars (Racine, 2008; Kenny, "An Ethics of Caring") argue that the media could potentially be to blame for the stagnation of euthanasia policy/reform.

According to a recently published journal, broadcasters were allegedly guilty of "inadequate explanation of end-of-life issues, insensitivity to stakeholders, (and) inconsistency in terminology" (Kenney, "An Ethics of Caring"). In fact, that same study completed textual analysis for over 1,500 media sources in Florida from 2005 and found that "neutral medical terms, such as 'persistent vegetative state (PVS)' and 'inserted a tube,' were used almost interchangeably (used) with judgmental language such as 'half-life,' 'interfered,' and 'starved to death'." Scholars have stressed the importance of fully understanding PVS when forming a general opinion on euthanasia. The study went on to further mention that "terminology was often imprecise, such as in the use of "life support" and

“sustenance,” which don’t identify accurately a particular care or treatment” (Kenney, "An Ethics of Caring").

The American Academy of Neurology textually analyzed 1,141 articles published from 1990 to 2005 from a sample comprised of publications from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Tampa Tribune*, and *St.-Petersburg Times*. The study analyzed how the various sources described Schiavo's neurologic condition. Surprisingly, only 34% of articles accurately referred to Terri Schiavo as being in a persistent vegetative state. Other articles referred to Schiavo as being “brain dead” or in a “coma” instead of being in a PVS (**Table 2**). This research proved that portions of the media were woefully ignorant and/or misinformed of the medicine behind the case. So much so in fact, that 71 of the articles, 6%, contained language explicitly refuting the PVS diagnosis (Racine, 2008).

Scholars agree that the media should always strive to report news in an unbiased and professional manner, just as they should have done in this case. However, most academics have come to the conclusion that when “facing daily and even hourly deadlines at the end of Terri Schiavo’s life, journalists seemed overwhelmed by the volume of voices clamoring to be heard” (Kenney, "An Ethics of Caring and Media Coverage of Terri Schiavo"). This fault is likely to blame for the oftentimes chaotic, ill-informed reporting.

This research is compiled of both secondary data and primary data. Textual analysis was conducted for the purpose of this research to determine what

changes, if any at all, the media made when referring to Schiavo during 2014, the year that marked the 10-year anniversary of her death. That primary data will be later discussed in depth.

Table 2. Description of Schiavo's neurologic condition in print media coverage*

Description of neurologic condition	Affirmation (%)	Refutation (%)	Equivocal (%)
Persistent vegetative state	392 (34)	71 (6) ¹	28 (2)
Brain damage	316 (28)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Vegetative state	148 (13)	17 (1) ²	5 (0)
Severe brain damage	145 (13)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Coma or coma-like*	106 (9)	18 (2)	0 (0)
Brain destroyed	82 (7)	7 (1)	0 (0)
Permanent vegetative state	26 (2)	8 (1) ³	0 (0)
Brain is gone	23 (2)	2 (0)	0 (0)
Brain injury	23 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Irreversible brain damage	20 (2)	2 (0)	1 (0)
Extensive brain damage	18 (2)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Brain death	12 (1) ⁴	16 (1)	0 (0)
Minimally conscious state	10 (1) ⁵	4 (0)	6 (1)
Irreversible vegetative state	9 (1)	2 (0)	1 (0)
Critical brain damage	5 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Massive brain damage	4 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)
Permanent unconsciousness	4 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Devastating brain injury	3 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Severe irreparable brain damage	3 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Drastic brain damage	2 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Irreversible coma*	1 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Permanent brain damage	1 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Persistent coma-like state*	1 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)

*Reference 82: American Academy of Neurology

The Role of Ethics in Research

Yet another theme that emerged while analyzing literature was the concept of ethics in the Terri Schiavo case. An obvious point of discord over the course of the hearings was whether it was ethically right to remove Schiavo's nourishment when she had no living will. Most scholars (Gostin, 2005; Gellman, 2005, 2012) agree that this was an ethical choice and was the right thing to do, morally speaking. The University of Washington's Tom Preston (2006) argues "the use of a feeding tube inserted directly into the stomach constituted artificial treatment" and that Schiavo's "treatment prolonged biological life but (would not have) lead to a cure (nor) restore (her) health." Other scholars agreed that removing Schiavo's nutrition was ethically sound, arguing that though the probability of a patient in a persistent vegetative state for three months recovering was 1%, the probability of recovery for a patient in a persistent vegetative state for 6 months or more was 0%. Terri Schiavo was in a persistent vegetative state for over 15 years (Joshua, Chirchill, and Kirshner, 2005).

Many religious scholars (Rosner, 2005; Shannon, 2005), however, argue that because of Schiavo's roots as a devout Catholic, she would not have condoned any euthanasia-centered practices and the decision to remove her sole source of nutrition was not only unethical, but also inherently wrong. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that she would rather have died peacefully than for her parents to assume the "financial and emotional burden of her care" (Gostin, 2005; Gellman,

2005, 2012). Regardless of one's moral reasoning, all scholars can agree on one thing: ethics play a major role in the public's formation of an opinion on right-to-die legislation.

The role of ethics in creating public policy is difficult to factor in to a theoretical model. The process model does not account for ethical impasses and therefore does not help to explain the extent to which ethics can impact the creation and implementation of public policy.

The Role of Government Sources in Research

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2005) recently analyzed national survey data from the period of federal intervention and a poll conducted several months later. After reviewing the data, a trend emerged that suggests that presidential and congressional actions in Schiavo's case were associated with a decline in approval for the president and congressional leaders (Haider-Markel, 2007).

Other than the aforementioned study, few to no governmental research documents were available when researching euthanasia or the Terri Schiavo case. This research relies heavily on scholarly articles and other forms of information. The lack of governmental publications is largely due to lack of discussion among the major players in American politics. Currently, the United States, as well as many legislators, has taken no formal stance on the role the government should

play in situations where euthanasia is an option for terminally ill patients, and it is still widely debated amongst politicians, political parties, and states.

Methodology Used in Research

For this purpose of this research, textual analysis is the most suitable approach when analyzing how the Process Model relates to the case of Terri Schiavo. According to researcher Robert K. Yin, scholars use the case study investigative method when “contemporary real-life situations ... provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods” (Yin, 1984). In this research, the Terri Schiavo case was the “contemporary situation” that was heavily examined and public policy’s Process Model was the theory used to analyze the event. Content analysis was appropriate for this research because it replicates the methods used in the original 2005 study and allows for a comparison to be made. Additionally, this research is unique in that it is applying a theoretical model to explain a relationship between a specific major event and the extent of policy creation that followed. Few, if any, scholars have published any literature evaluating the relationship between euthanasia legislation and the case of Terri Schiavo using the Process Model. Other research designs would not have been appropriate given the case’s specific nature.

The unit of analysis for social research can best be defined as, “the what or whom being studied” (Babbie, 2013). The unit of analysis for this compilation of

research is the case of Florida's Terri Schiavo. Schiavo's case was the first, and practically only of its kind. The public nature of the case allows for in-depth analysis of the events that transpired and makes it possible to directly apply political theory to better understand the relationship between the case and the lack of public policy enacted following the cases conclusion.

Data were almost entirely collected from specifically selected scholarly sources. Scholarly, peer reviewed journals were used in this research, as well as newspaper articles referencing Schiavo from two national newspapers and two local newspapers. Sources were carefully chosen and the research within the publications was thoroughly examined before being applied to this case study. When examining research, factors such as the time frame in which data were collected, the population from which data were collected, and the size of the sample from which the data were collected were all considered.

Textual analysis and time series analysis were both major sources of evidence for this case study. Textual analysis was implemented to examine how newspaper articles from specified years (1990, the year Schiavo was first admitted to the hospital, to 2005, the year of Schiavo's death, as well between 2013 and 2017 (2015 was the year marking the 10 year anniversary of Schiavo's death)) referred to Schiavo's condition. Four newspapers were specifically selected to be analyzed for this research. Two national newspapers (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*) were chosen to demonstrate how the case was being

described nationally, and two regional newspapers (*The St.-Petersburg Times* and *The Tampa Tribune*) were selected to express how the case was being written about at a local level.

For the primary data collected for the purpose of this research print media coverage of the Schiavo case was retrieved from the LexisNexis Academic database and content analysis was used to examine the text of articles describing Schiavo's neurologic condition. The accuracy of claims about PVS was assessed.

On LexisNexis, the headlines of every newspaper article in the database that was published between January 1st, 2013 and December 31st, 2017 that included the term "Schiavo" were selected from the database. 1277 results returned from the initial search. The search parameters were restricted to include only newspaper articles that were published in the United States. This restriction brought the number of relevant newspaper articles to 688. Each of the original news outlets were then applied as a filter on the search results, resulting in a dramatic decrease in relevant articles (for example, when the Tampa Tribune was applied as a source filter, the number of relevant articles dropped from 668 to 47.) The sources were then reviewed and specific sources were then dropped from the sample if they were not relevant to this study (for example, several articles written for the Tampa Bay Times were obituaries for Floridians with the last name Schiavo and were included in the initial LexisNexis search results. They were dropped from the

article compilation and resulted in only 42 relevant Tampa Bay Times articles as opposed to the original 47 results that LexisNexis returned).

The careful selection process used to vet previously published research and news articles helps to validate the claims made in this study. The use of triangulation, defined by Norman Denzin (2010) as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon,” incorporates mixed methods (both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis) to strengthen the substance of this research. In an effort to reduce bias, information was collected from a plethora of scholarly sources, both in favor of (Gostin, 2005; Gellman, 2005, 2012) and against (Rosner, 2005; Shannon, 2005) the courts decision to remove Schiavo’s nutrition) as well as from the Terri Schiavo Life and Hope Network and from email correspondence with Bobby Schindler, brother of Terri Schiavo.

The sources and data used in this case study were selected for the purpose of better understanding not only the case of Terri Schiavo, but also how the media portrayed the case and subsequently how the public interpreted the case. Knowing how the public interpreted the Schiavo saga was crucial in understanding how the process model explains the failure to make legitimate policy changes.

Findings

The findings of this research are that the media is likely the most impactful determining factor in the creation of euthanasia policy. Because of the media's oftentimes ill-informed reporting, a lack of clarity among key actors created a stall in the policy making process. Data collected from numerous sources concluded that in Florida's case of Terri Schiavo, the media was guilty of what many scholars refer to as "media malpractice." Media outlets butchered medical jargon and misdiagnosed Schiavo for almost 15 years. A report from the American Academy of Neurology reported that articles published referring to Terri Schiavo as "brain dead" were written primarily by journalists and the mainstream media (Racine, 2008). The articles referring to Schiavo as in a persistent vegetative state were commonly written by medical professionals. As most Americans receive their topical information from the evening news rather than from recent medical journals, that's over a decade of inaccurate information being fed to the public.

As was previously noted, this paper implements primary data that was collected for the purpose of this research. Textual analysis was used to analyze how media sources, specifically, again The New York Times, The Washington Post, The St.-Petersburg Times and The Tampa Tribune referred to Schiavo's condition between the years of 2013 and 2017 (2015 was the year marking the 10 year anniversary of Schiavo's death). The results are surprising, and are as follows:

Though the articles written marking the 10 year anniversary of Schiavo's death were surprisingly sparse, each of the media sources used in the original 2005 study cited earlier in this research, specifically the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Tampa Tribune (now the Tampa Bay Times), and the St. Petersburg Times, wrote at least one article recounting the events of the Schiavo saga, and their coverage throughout the early 2000's. In the most recent stories written, most, though not all, media sources examined correctly described Schiavo's former medical condition, and one even acknowledged the misdiagnosis from the early 2000's.

One recent article from the Washington Post read, "not since lawmakers diagnosed Terri Schiavo's condition from the Senate floor has there been such medical quackery in the political realm" (Milbank, 2016). Additionally, articles from 2015 by Washington Post reporters described Schiavo as "a Florida woman who died in 2005 as her husband and family battled over whether to keep her alive despite her 'vegetative state' (O'Keef)," "the Florida woman who died in 2005 amid a protracted family dispute over keeping her alive in a 'vegetative state' (DelReal)," and referred to her as having be "diagnosed as in a "persistent vegetative state" (O'Keef).

An article by Clyde Haberman for The New York Times correctly diagnosed Schiavo when retelling the series of events for the early 2000's, "her brain was deprived of oxygen long enough to leave her in a 'persistent vegetative state'

(2014).” Even more recently, an article by the New York Times referenced Schiavo in an article detailing the presidential campaign of Jeb Bush. “The state (of Florida) fought to keep Ms. Schiavo, who was in a “vegetative state,” on life support, against her husband’s wishes (Burns, 2016)” and again in an article recounting the events of the 2015 Iowa Caucus, “Mr. Bush said that as Florida governor he ... fought to keep Terri Schiavo, a woman in a “vegetative state,” on life support (Gabriel, 2015).”

Schiavo was regularly referenced when describing decisions Bush made while acting as Governor of Florida:

“(Bush) had no problem when he was governor of Florida acting on his personal religious views to thrust himself into the agonizing decision of Terri Schiavo’s family to disconnect her feeding tube after she had been in a ‘persistent vegetative state’ for over a decade (Rosenthal, 2015).”

Unfortunately, the New York Times was not entirely consistent in the verbiage they used to describe Terri Schiavo. A 2015 article utilized language reminiscent of their early coverage of the saga, referring to Schiavo as a “a ‘brain-damaged’ woman who was at the center of a bitter dispute over end-of-life care (Herszenhorn).” The New York Times again misdiagnosed Schiavo in an article written the same year about the Justice Department’s civil rights agenda. That article simply described Terri Schiavo as “the Florida woman with severe ‘brain damage’ (and) on life support (Apuzzo).”

The national media sources examined in both the original 2005 study, and again for the purpose of this research continued to inaccurately refer to Schiavo's condition over a decade later, though the extent to which she was misdiagnosed was not as extreme.

Though the number of articles analyzed on a national scaled between 2013 and 2017 appears to be small when juxtaposed with the original study from 2005, it is just as, if not more accurate than the original study. The articles analyzed are not a sample size, rather the entire population of available material because fewer articles were written referencing Schiavo between 2013 and 2017 on a national level than was expected when this research was originally outlined.

LexisNexis returned 32 results for New York Times articles written between 2013 and 2017 referencing Terri Schiavo. After reviewing the articles, several were dropped as they were not relevant to this research (i.e., they were referencing other public figures with the last name Schiavo). Of the 25 relevant New York Times articles, ten correctly referred to Schiavo as being in either a "persistent vegetative state" or simply a "vegetative state." Six articles referred to Schiavo as being either "brain damaged" or "brain dead."

The Washington Post search returned 23 articles in the LexisNexis database. Of those 23, several were eliminated from being used in the population that was analyzed because they were irrelevant (i.e., they referenced another Schiavo). After the articles were reviewed, it was determined that eight articles were written

by The Washington Post referencing Terri Schiavo between 2013 and 2017. Of those eight, six articles briefly mentioned Schiavo but did not reference her medical condition. Of the remaining articles, one correctly described Schiavo as having been in a “persistent vegetative state” and one incorrectly referred to Schiavo as being “brain damaged.”

Out of the 33 relevant national newspaper articles that referenced Terri Schiavo’s medical condition, 11 articles correctly diagnosed her condition and seven articles misdiagnosed Schiavo.

Local newspapers were somewhat similar in their verbiage. The Tampa Tribune, now The Tampa Bay Times and owner of the St.-Petersburg Times wrote, “Schiavo collapsed into a coma and eventually went into a (persistent) vegetative state” (Girardi, 2015). In another article, the same newspaper wrote, “she (Shiavo) entered a ‘persistent vegetative state,’ according to medical experts” (Leary, Smith, 2015). A third article published from the Tampa Bay Times used the same verbiage to refer to Schiavo’s medical state (Smith, 2015).

Unfortunately, the Tampa Bay Times wrote several articles either misdiagnosing or not mentioning the Persistent Vegetative State with which doctors diagnosed Schiavo. One article, written in 2015 (“Some U.S. Wars”), described Schiavo’s condition as a “life-altering health event.” Another article referred to Schiavo as, “the brain-damaged woman whose St. Petersburg family

fought against the removal of her feeding tube” (Phillips, 2016). One political piece published in 2014 (Smith) even referred to Schiavo as “brain dead Terri.”

To be specific, the Tampa Bay times wrote exactly 42 articles referencing Schiavo between 2013 and 2017. Of those articles, 21 simply mentioned Terri Schiavo casually (usually in articles about the candidacy of Jeb Bush) and did not discuss her medical condition. The remaining 21 articles published by the Tampa Bay Times between 2013 and 2017 were relatively split in the language used to describe Schiavo’s medical condition. 10 articles referred to Schiavo either as having been in a “persistent vegetative state,” or simply a “vegetative state.” The remaining 11 articles continued to inaccurately refer to Schiavo as either “brain damaged” or “”brain dead.”

Limitations

This study is limited in that it is unable to fully utilize the Process Model in its entirety to understand and analyze the Terri Schiavo saga. The Process Model can only be applied to this case in part. The entire model cannot be applied because the model has stalled before and policy was developed or implemented. Because of this, we cannot move on to the final step of policy evaluation.

This study is further limited by potential confounding variables. The influence of specific key actors (e.g. religious figures) were not factored in to the

findings of this study. Though their influence is certainly relevant, it is beyond the scope of this research.

Application

This research suggests that the media sources analyzed in this study, generally speaking, made improvements in the verbiage used to describe the medical condition of Terri Schiavo. In 2005, only 34% of articles published referred to Schiavo as being in a persistent vegetative state. In the data collected for this study, 50% of news articles described Schiavo as having been in a persistent vegetative state.

This case study reinforced the belief that reliable, valid information is critical for the Process Model to produce implementable public policy. The first phase of the process is for key actors to identify the problem and to set and an agenda. This initial step likely can impede the progression of the model when stakeholders are ill informed. It is no doubt difficult for stakeholders to create an appropriate agenda when they do not fully understand the issue(s) at hand. In this case, the media misdiagnosed Schiavo numerous times while covering both her original saga and anniversary of death. By applying the Process Model as a lens through which we view the Terri Schiavo case, we come to the initial conclusion that policy solutions were not formed because no real agenda was ever created by stakeholders. These actors were unable to form an agenda, we can assume,

because some factor prevented them from doing so. This research strengthens the idea that accurate information is essential for stakeholders to form an agenda, and for the Process Model to subsequently produce implementable public policy.

Additional findings of this research indicate that, though Americans are aware that euthanasia is a critical issue in politics today, further literature needs to be created addressing the issue. Most searches for “euthanasia” in a scholarly article database returned publications addressing foreign euthanasia policy in the Netherlands and Australia and provided data that was not applicable for the purpose of this case study.

Conclusion

This research applied the policymaking process model to the case of Florida’s Terri Schiavo. By analyzing the data of a study conducted at the time of Schiavo’s death and comparing it to primary data collected for this research on the anniversary of her death, this research identifies the extent of the misinformation being presented to the public as a likely obstruction in the process of forming public policy. Among other inaccuracies, the media repeatedly misdiagnosed Terri Schiavo, referring to her as “brain dead” and in a “coma-like state.” The medical community has highlighted that Schiavo was in a persistent vegetative state, a diagnoses most reporters failed to mention (Racine, 2008; Kenny, “An Ethics of

Caring”). Outlets even went so far as to counter medical professional’s opinions asserting that Schiavo was “not in a persistent vegetative state”.

The media’s erroneous reporting has been identified as a likely source for the lack of euthanasia policy today. Public policy’s Process Model has several distinct, sequential phases. For the purpose of this research, the initial three steps were primarily examined, the first of which requires the public to identify a problem and to take action. Misperception on behalf of the confused public likely has decelerated the pace of progress, and is likely to blame for the lack of policy today.

Though the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Tampa Tribune (now the Tampa Bay Times), and the St. Petersburg Times did not feature as many stories as were expected to mark the 10-year-anniversary of the death of Florida’s Terri Schiavo, the few articles that were written offered valuable insight as to how the media’s verbiage has changed as time has progressed. Though a many articles were written misdiagnosing Schiavo, the several of articles published (both locally and nationally) correctly diagnosed Schiavo as having been in a persistent vegetative state. One article even acknowledged the mistakes that were made by the media in their early coverage of Schiavo’s case. Overall, the mass media has generally improved in the verbiage used when referring to Schiavo. It is important to note that, according to the data collected for this research, the number of articles

written referring to Schiavo as having been in a persistent vegetative state increased by nearly 50%. This is again, however, likely too little, too late.

It is essential that discussion continue on euthanasia policy. Scholars must strive to explore and research on the area in an effort to inform and educate. Specifically, as accurate public awareness of the topic increases, advancement in policy formation will follow. Most searches for “euthanasia” in a scholarly article database returned publications addressing foreign euthanasia policy in the Netherlands and Australia and provided data that was not applicable for the purpose of this case study. Future researchers could benefit from scholarship specifically applying the Process Model to euthanasia legislation, as well as scholarship that purposefully analyzes the degree to which the media influences legislation resulting from especially controversial events.

This function of this research is to further expand on and contribute to the available scholarly literature detailing the Terri Schiavo and it’s relation to euthanasia policy. This contribution will be unique in that it applies the theory of the Process Model to rationalize the connection.

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