

Every major news event brings about a massive, and often controversial, amount of media coverage. Reporters and writers spill out articles upon articles about international perspectives, comparisons, different viewpoints, public and private response, and more recently-discovered, previously unimaginable issues and questions, and within a week or so, the public starts to complain about the extraneous details and the dramatic overplay. Not soon after, there on the front page of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal is media coverage about media coverage.

Like any “disaster” or “national crisis” or “resonating tragedy,” the Columbia incident has garnered an incredible amount of attention. But recently, the concern and criticism of the technicalities and securities of NASA management and science has been overshadowed by a newer focus; the story has changed – from what happened with the astronauts and the space shuttle to how the public does (and *should*) react to such a calamity. We read stories about what others are feeling, and suddenly, we feel as if we should be feeling the same way. Newspapers and magazines, with their seventeen pages of extensive and in-depth coverage, are letting us know how and when and why to be sad. We are influenced and manipulated by the outpouring of remorse and sorrow for the Israeli astronaut, and by now, we know more about the lives and goals of the fallen space soldiers than we know about our neighbors. Images, biographies, intimate descriptions, embellishments, and home videos make us forget to question why the ratio of media coverage of drama versus technological safety is so lopsided. Press coverage is no longer simple and straightforward; it has progressed to being complex and subjective. Catch a

glimpse of an Arab newspaper and there will be no doubt that they care nothing for the Israeli sentiments. Read a paragraph in the Chinese news and one will quickly realize that they're using our disaster as a lesson of what not to do with their growing space program. Skim through the front page of the American news and you'll see reporters reporting on other reporters' confusion between the spectacular and the significant.

This same situation occurred with 9/11. And if one thinks back to the numerous news stories of the past years, it seems as if a general trend is followed – we start with the facts, proceed to the hypotheses and analyses and comparisons, and elaborate with the dramatic. But perhaps, media coverage is just a reflection of human nature. We do, after all, appeal to the senses and emotions. We wouldn't care about Columbia or Challenger or 9/11 or the D.C. snipers if we couldn't relate or empathize with the forlorn and fallen, the scared and terrorized, the confused and flustered. And yet, it still seems wrong when people are forced (or slyly encouraged by the press) to lament for shuttle itself, to worry about the future of the national space program, to recognize the apparent religious symbolism of the falling pieces down to Palestine, TX, to quickly survive and surpass this disaster only to move towards a seemingly inevitable war for no reason.

It all makes me wonder slightly if I should trust what I read.