

Fairness, balance and bias



Whose truth do you trust?

You already know the story



But do you **really** know?

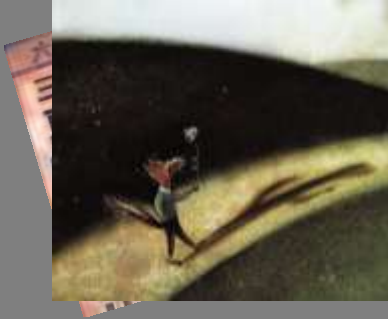


"It all started with a cup of sugar and a sneeze."

- Alexander T. Wolf



Fatal sneezes and temper tantrums



What is missing?



Seriously, can we handle the truth?



Three questions today



- How do we know if a news report is fair?
- How do we know if a news outlet is biased?
- What's the difference between news media bias and audience bias?



Housekeeping,
announcements & notes

Last week's Quick Quiz

1. Photo captions and credits help you determine verification and accountability.
2. Photos provide direct evidence (verification) and emotional content, and they powerfully attract eyeballs.

Your questions and comments ...

- ❖ "Why would you take the blood out of a picture? It's almost falsifying what actually happened." - Ryan Noonan
- ❖ "Can cartoons be considered biased or too crude, or do they have creative license?" - Rebekah Sherry
- ❖ "Shouldn't it be mandatory to write if a photo has been enhanced or altered?" - Nicollette Durchhalter
- ❖ "How often do newspapers, magazines, etc. try to pass off a picture as real?" - Jake Acto



"My Life As..."

Foreign correspondent
Roxana Saberi, Al Jazeera America

Monday, Oct. 20

8 p.m. SAC Auditorium
Doors open 7:45



After this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Distinguish balance from fairness and news media bias from audience bias.
2. Explain why unexamined public acceptance of charges of news media bias might be unhealthy in a democracy.
3. Use specific events and examples to illustrate news media bias and audience bias.
4. Explain the difference between news judgment (a professional mindset characterized by attention to drivers, mission and market in selecting stories) and news media bias (unethical pursuit of political or social goals)
5. Explain Cognitive Dissonance AND several coping mechanisms we use to reduce the discomfort it causes.

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What is **FAIRNESS?**

An informed electorate is the bulwark of democracy

Since January 2009, your
federal income taxes have . . .

- A) Gone down
- B) Stayed the same
- C) Gone up

86 %



An informed electorate is the bulwark of democracy

What do most scientists believe about
climate change?

- A) It is occurring
- B) Views are evenly divided
- C) It is not occurring

45%



Misinformation and the midterm election




www.worldpublicopinion.org / University of Maryland Study

Misinformation and partisan news outlets

“Most scientists think climate change is not occurring.”

Watch Fox News	PERCENTAGE WHO AGREE
rarely	30%
once a week	45%
almost daily	60%

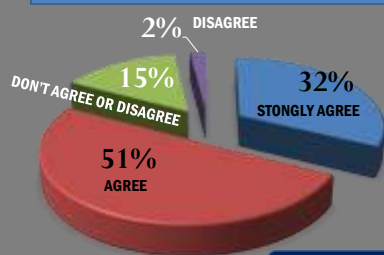
What the public sees

- 74% say news organizations tend to favor one side in dealing with political and social issues
- 50% believe the media has a liberal slant
- 22% believe the media has a conservative slant

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press
2009 SURVEY: PRESS ACCURACY RATING HITS TWO DECADE LOW

What students see

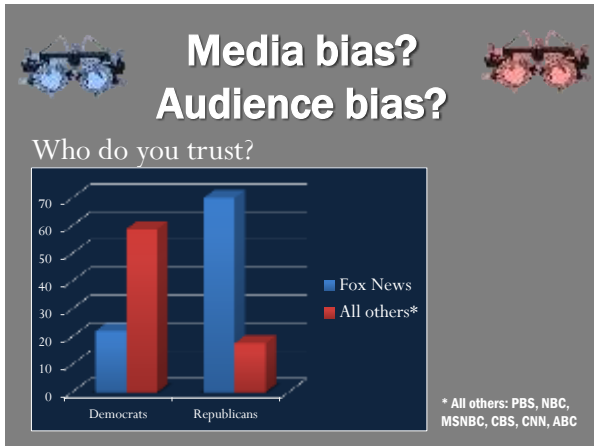
“Most news outlets exhibit bias”



Response	Percentage
Agree	51%
Strongly Agree	32%
Don't Agree or Disagree	15%
Disagree	2%

83% either agreed or strongly agreed. No respondents strongly disagreed.

SOURCE: 2014 NEWS LITERACY REALITY CHECK SURVEY



What's the difference between
fairness and **balance**?



Can providing **balance** be **unfair**?

Amanpour Moral Equivalency.wmv

The massacres in Bosnia

Definition of **balance**

Main Entry: **balance**

Pronunciation: \ˈbɑ-ˌlɒn(t)s\

Function: noun

Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Vulgar Latin **bilancia*, from Late Latin *bilanc-*, *bilans* having two scalepans, from Latin *bi-* + *lanc-*, *lans* plate

Date: 13th century

Equality between the totals
of two (or more) sides of an account.
Balance is a quantitative measurement.

What is **balance**?

Obama, congressional leaders still deadlocked on shutdown

(Reuters) - President Barack Obama met with Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress Wednesday that did little to break the stalemate on avoiding a government shutdown.

After more than an hour of talks, House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner said Obama refused to negotiate, while House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid accused Republicans of trying to hold the president hostage over Obamacare.

Reid said Obama had made a deal with the Republicans to avoid a shutdown, but Boehner said the deal was not enough.

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"The president reiterated one more time that he will not negotiate," Boehner told reporters after the White House meeting. "All we're asking for here is a discussion and fairness for the American people under Obamacare."

Reid said Democrats were willing to discuss any ways to tackle the budget after a temporary funding bill is passed. "We're through playing these little games," he said.

Is **balance** the same as **fairness**?

OliverClimateCrowd.mp4

Can providing **balance** be **unfair**?



Should Holocaust deniers get equal time?

"Think twice"

A silent minute to absorb the material



Fair language

- “Right-to-Life” vs. “Anti-Abortion”
- “Pro-Choice” vs. “Abortion rights advocate”
- “Ruthless” vs. “Tough”
- “Admitted” vs. “Said”
- “Gay marriage” vs. “Marriage equality”

Fair language?

THE NEW YORK TIMES
Partial shutdown clips Obama's wings

Republicans stage latest political theater

Fox News Says It's Not a 'Shutdown,' It's a 'Slimdown'

MSNBC's Ed Schultz calls Glenn Beck fans 'dumbass' while pitching Obamacare

Fair Presentation



- Avoids prejudicial photos
- Presents photos and other visuals that are appropriate to the report

Fair presentation



Fair, unfair – or biased?



School bus methadone bust

busted.wmv

Definition of **bias**

Main Entry: **¹bi-as**

Pronunciation: \ˈbī-əs\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle French *biais*

Date: 1530

A predisposition that distorts your ability to fairly weigh the evidence and prevents you from reaching a fair or accurate judgment.

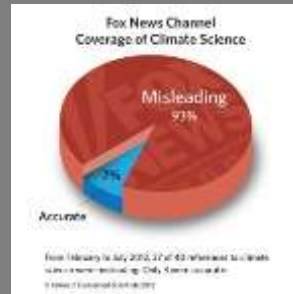
The News Literacy definition

Bias:
a pattern
of unfairness

How to spot bias

- Look for evidence of a pattern of unfairness over time
- Compare a variety of news outlets, especially when searching for bias by omission
- Take note of the self-interest of those alleging bias

Bias is a *pattern*



Not an event

Common flaws in "bias" claims

The news media is biased

Generalizations are, generally, unprovable. ☺

TV reporters follow the lead of the talk show hosts on their network

Reporting routinely contradicts talk show assertions

Editorials determine the angle taken by print reporters

Reporting routinely contradicts editorials

News judgment or bias?



Is heavy news coverage of same-sex marriage legislation evidence of bias?

News judgment or bias?



Opinion journalism or media bias?



Bias or something else?



“Why aren’t more women dying in Chicago?”

News judgment or racism?



LaToya Figueroa and Natalee Holloway:
Differences in coverage

Pivot Point

Every other row pivots to the row behind to discuss in groups of four

Bias in the news



Bias in the news?

Wash Post now
Arizona governor vetoes controversial anti-gay bill
slide to view

WSJ now
Arizona governor vetoes religious-freedom bill.

Bias in the news?

FOX NEWS

"It's astounding the White House cannot distinguish between news and opinion programming," Fox's Clemente said. "It seems self-serving on their part."

"What I think is fair to say about Fox -- and certainly it's the way we view it -- is that it really is more a wing of the Republican Party," said Anita Dunn, White House communications director, on CNN.

As for Dunn's complaint about Fox News' coverage of the Obama campaign, a study by the Pew Research Center showed that 40 percent of Fox News stories on Obama in the last six weeks of the campaign were negative. Similarly, 40 percent of Fox News' stories on Obama's Republican opponent, Sen. John McCain, were negative.

Journalism critics claim
a monopoly on clear optics



What do you think?

Is individual objectivity realistic?
Is organizational objectivity
more realistic?



Journalists submit to the discipline of
Verification, a newsroom system of
aggressive peer review and a code of
ethics that defines **I**ndependence
and demands transparency-based
Accountability.

So...
whose
truth
do
we
trust?



Codered.wmv

Social scientists say he's right



Perception
is flawed.
Memory
is unreliable.



Facing facts
may require you to resist human nature





Harmony



Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance

Dissonance causes anxiety, stress, even actual pain.

The human brain does things to avoid dissonance.

Your brain cares more about harmony than truth.

Coping with cognitive dissonance

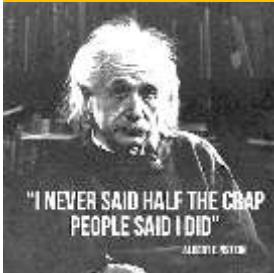
SELECTIVE DISTORTION AND RETENTION



People distort (or forget) incoming information that disagrees with their point of view.

Coping with cognitive dissonance

SOURCE AMNESIA



The information is retained, but we forget if we heard it from CBS News or some wacko on talk radio.

Coping with cognitive dissonance

CONFIRMATION BIAS



We pursue information that confirms our point of view.

This is your brain ...

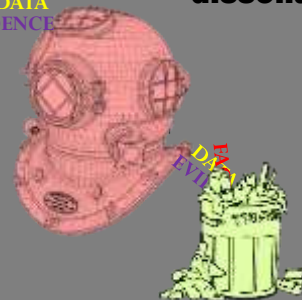
FACTS DATA
EVIDENCE



This is your brain . . .

on cognitive dissonance

FACTS
DATA
EVIDENCE



The News Literacy Challenge

For the rest of the semester, actively seek out columnists, news outlets and reports that

CHALLENGE
your views.

What are your biases?



"Project Implicit"
Homework
Step #1



The stronger the emotion,
the harder it is to accept
a different viewpoint:



- Politics
- Race and Gender
- Social Issues
- Religion