You Know The Story...

What is missing?

Balance, Fairness and Bias
What’s your opinion?
“Most news outlets exhibit bias”

Your Results

- Strongly Agree: 50.97%
- Agree: 20.97%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree: 2.23%
- Disagree: 50%
- Strongly Disagree: 25.81%

25.81% 50% 20.97% 2.23%

“63 percent of respondents said news articles were often inaccurate and only 29 percent said the media generally ‘get the facts straight.’”

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

-Chapter 7-
Balance, Fairness and Bias

“In which our hero, (you) wrestles with the meaning of balance, the wisdom of fairness and the subtleties of bias...”
Shattered Glass Viewings:
Available on Blackboard, on Netflix, at the Library and at on-campus screenings to be announced
Three Questions Today:

• How do we know if a news article is fair?
• How do we know if a news outlet is biased?
• What’s the difference between news media bias and audience bias?
Balance, Fairness and Bias

“Why Aren’t More Women Dying in Chicago?”

What’s the Difference Between Fairness and Balance?

Key Definitions

Balance: Equality between the totals of the two (or more) sides of the account. Balance is more technical; a quantitative measurement.
What Is Balance?

Can Balance Be the Opposite of Fairness?

Should Holocaust Deniers Get Equal Space?

Is Balance the Same as Fairness?

Should Climate Change Doubters Get Equal Space?
Key Definitions

Fairness: Marked by impartiality and honesty. Free from self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism. Being fair to the evidence.

Finding Fairness
- Obvious effort to include relevant perspectives
- People, Organizations get to respond to negative charges
  - Avoids loaded words
  - Avoids prejudicial photos/presentation
- Provides context and transparency.

School Bus Aide Busted Dealing Methadone

Fair, Unfair, or Biased?
Key Definitions

Main Entry: *bias* (ə)
Pronunciation: (bəz)
Function: noun
Etymology: Middle French *biais*
Date: 1530

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

• Look for a pattern of unfairness over time
• Compare a variety of news outlets especially to search for a bias by omission
• Evidence is the essence of a credible conclusion.

Bias in the News
A Pattern of Unfairness?

Mistake or Bias?
Where's Obama?
Common Flaws in “Bias” Claims

• “The news media is biased” is an over-generalization. Some outlets, maybe.
• Opinion Journalism by an organization doesn’t necessarily prove there’s slant in the news coverage.
• Guilt by association is a fallacy.

The stronger the emotion, the more likely bias will be charged:

• Politics
• Race and Gender
• Social Issues
• Religion
Choosing a story to cover is not de-facto proof of bias.

"Speech is powerful. It can ...inflict great pain. We cannot react to that pain by punishing the speaker. As a Nation we have chosen a different course - to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate."
More Language Landmarks

• “Right-to-Life” vs. “Anti-Abortion”
• “Pro-Choice” vs. “Pro-Abortion”
  • “Ruthless” vs. “Tough”
  • “Admitted” vs. “Said”
• “Islamic Community Center” vs. “Ground Zero Mosque”

Working with...
And against human nature

PoGo: We have met the enemy and he is us

Brain.wmv
Cognitive Dissonance: Democratic Brains vs. Republican Brains

Selective Distortion & Retention
People tend to distort (or forget) incoming information if it does not match their point of view.

Source Misattribution
When they do remember sources, people may selectively attribute comforting information to a more respectable source.
Responses to Cognitive Dissonance

Confirmation Bias
We tend to pursue information that only reflects our point of view.

Responses to Cognitive Dissonance

Peer Influence on Perception
Our perceptions of things like size or distance can be impaired by group pressure.
News Bias vs. Audience Bias

Does Being More Informed Guarantee That You Will Be a Less-Biased News Consumer?

The War in Lebanon, 1982

A belief among partisans that news reports are painting them in the worst possible light.

People who are deeply involved in one side of an issue or another are quicker to spot and remember aspects of a news story that are negative.

The best-informed partisans are the most likely to see bias.

“Hostile Media Effect”

Voters on the State of the Economy

The American economy had a major downturn starting in the fall of 2008. Do you think that now the American economy is:

Starting to Recover? 55%

Still Getting Worse? 55%
**Voters on Scientists’ Views of Climate Change**

Do you think that MOST SCIENTISTS believe that:

- Climate change is occurring **45%**
- Views are evenly divided
- Climate change is not occurring

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**Voters on Income Tax Levels**

Since January 2009 have your Federal income taxes:

- Gone Down
- Stayed the Same
- Gone up **86 %**

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**Misinformation and the 2010 Election**

University of Maryland Study
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 independence, and demands transparency-based accountability.

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Warnings to News Consumers

• Recognize Your Own Bias
• Test Your Assumptions Against Evidence

Habit of Savviest News Consumers:

• Challenge Yourself: Go Outside Your Comfort Zone

Today's Key Lessons of News Literacy:
- Don't judge the news media on the basis of one news outlet or story. Don't judge one outlet on the basis of one mistake. Look for patterns.
- Stay Open to Information That Challenges Your Previously-Held Beliefs and Assumptions

Previous key lessons...
- Know what neighborhood you're in
- In the News Neighborhood, differentiate News from Opinion
What are your biases?

Project Implicit

Balance, Fairness and Bias

Is this what college women really do on Spring Break?