



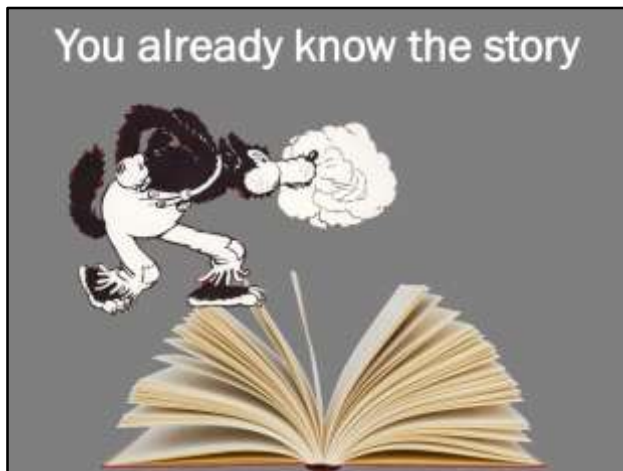
We have been telling you all semester to look for the news neighborhood when hunting for reliable information.

But, when Americans hear the phrase “News media” the next thing we think is “Bias.”

It’s an easy charge to make. Few will argue with you.

But if you’re going to assert that journalism is slanted, how do you prove it?

Today, we’re going right into the heart of the controversy so you can decide for yourself what is balance, what is fairness, and what is bias, both in the news media and ...inside your skull.



**ANIMATION: CLICK TO BRING IN WOLF. PIGGIES AUTOMATICALLY FLEE**

Let's start on familiar terrain.  
(NOW CLICK TO GET THE SCARED LITTLE PIGS.)

ASK: Why are these poor little guys running?

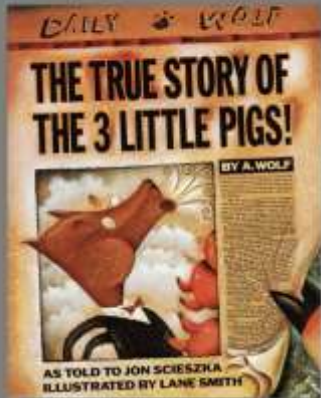
ASK: Who is this? (wolf)  
He huffed and...(puffed)  
And why was he huffing and puffing? (to blow the house down)

What did you learn about wolves from this story? What did you learn about pigs?

**(SPECIAL NOTE TO LECTURERS: YOU'LL TELL THE STORY BETTER IF YOU HAVE READ "The True Story of The Three Little Pigs," by Jon Scieszka, Viking, 1989, a million-seller)**



But do you **really** know?



The story of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf is a fairy tale that, as all fairy tales do, has bigger meanings.

So, the story has been told the same way for hundreds of years.

ASK: What's been missing from the story all these years?

Finally, a smart guy from Brooklyn, Jon Scieszka (Pronounced SHESS-ka like Fresca), thought hard about what he'd been told since he was a little kid and he went after the rest of the story...

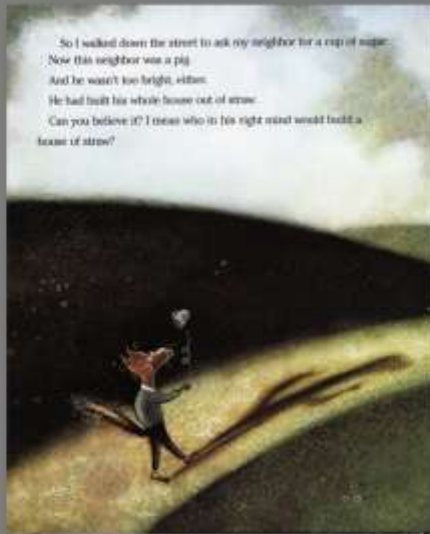
And in 1989, Scieszka convinced Viking Publishing to publish the wolf's side of the story...

Just because wolves eat cute little rabbits and deer and the occasional pig, people assume da worst.

What...you don't eat chickens and cows and pigs?

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

*- Alexander T. Wolf*



**ANIMATION: CLICK REPLACES THE CHALKBOARD WITH WOLF OUT TO BORROW SUGAR**

A Wolf... that's Alexander T. Wolf... told Scieszka the whole thing has been a terrible misunderstanding.

A. Wolf was baking his granny a birthday cake and didn't have enough sugar.

So he goes to see his neighbor, who is a pig.



**ANIMATION: SLIDE OPENS WITH WOLF HEADING NEXT DOOR FOR SUGAR  
CLICK 1= WOLF IN WRECKAGE. CLICK 2=DEAD PIG IN WRECKAGE. CLICK  
3=BAD WOLF HEADLINE. CLICK 4=FOREIGN COVERAGE**

This pig, he's kind of a flake...'built his house outta grass. The wolf knocks and that flimsy grass door falls right in.

He Yoo-Hoos in the door. "Little Pig, Little Pig, are you in?"

Still no answer. And right about then, bits of straw from the house tickle his nose and make him sneeze.

A really huuuuge sneeze.

**CLICK 1**And that stoopid grass house goes kablooney.

**CLICK 2**And in the middle of all that straw??? Dead pig.

Rude little porker had been home the whole time and got killed in the wreckage.

The wolf knows it'd be a sin to leave a whole pig there to rot. He has a role to play in the ecosystem and he does what wolves do.

But he still needs a cup of sugar for his Granny's birthday cake.

So, on he goes to the pig's brother up the road...And wouldn't you know it...another sneeze and a tragic fatality.

The smell of rotting meat can really drive down property values. Plus, hello? Ever heard of Trichinosis or Paragonimus? It's poor citizenship to leave pork lying around.

So Alexander T. Wolf does everybody a favor and cleans up that bacterial hazard: recycling.

A Wolf still needs that cup of sugar for his granny's cake, so up the road he goes.

The third pig also has an attitude. He says he won't give the wolf any sugar, but then he goes and says "*And your old granny can sit on a pin!*"

Getting up in the grill of A. Wolf is not very sensible. In fact, during the jailhouse interview, Mr. Wolf admits the pigs talking smack about his granny made him a little crazy.

**CLICK 3**

He was, he says, a nice guy provoked by piggish behavior. Only now, there is this photo and headline, BIG BAD WOLF, and it goes viral, with new versions of the story from all over the world.



ASK:

So, what was missing from the original story about the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs?

And how did Jon Scieszka set the record straight?

Seriously, can we handle the truth?



**Animation:** Slide opens with cute picture of wolf pup.  
Click 1=wolf pup fades, replaced by nasty-looking Feral Pigs.

A wolf can't get a fair shake from porcine news media outlets like the Daily Pig. They're biased, huh?

For instance: You never hear that the average North American wolf is only 79 pounds and starts out like this cute little pup.

(CLICK NOW) while the average North American hog is 250 pounds, with huge tusks and equal or superior intelligence to any canid. Three yearling pigs would be a good match for any wolf.

But The Daily Pig wrote this totally one-sided story and never even asked the wolf's side.

And then it went viral and even got made into a movie and you grew up fearing wild wolves more than wild pigs.

So, **that's** what is missing from the fairy tale of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf...**The wolf's side of the story.**

ASK: Is there a serious lesson we can learn from Jon Scieszka's re-telling of the fairy tale?



## 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?

Here's how we'll think about bias today, through these three questions



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 Acito

**EXTRA CREDIT**

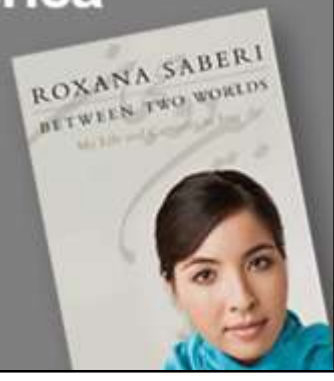


# “My Life As...”

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.

This slide intended for instructors as a focusing tool, but can be shared with students to prime them. Each lecture will include a slide like this with specific lecture outcomes that refer to course outcomes.

Here is what the syllabus declares students will be able to do if they successfully complete the course:

1. Analyze key elements of news reports - weighing evidence, evaluating sources, noting context and transparency - to judge reliability.
2. Distinguish between journalism, opinion journalism and un-supported bloviation.
3. Identify and distinguish between news media bias and audience bias.
4. Blend personal scholarship and course materials to write forcefully about journalism standards and practices, fairness and bias, First Amendment issues and their individual Fourth Estate rights and responsibilities.
5. Use examples from each day's news to demonstrate critical thinking about civic engagement.
6. Place the impact of social media and digital technologies in their historical context.

## 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?

Here's how we'll think about bias today, through these three questions



Journalists should always be fair.

## 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 %



**ANIMATION: CLICK BRINGS UP THE YELLOW, SHOWING WHAT VOTERS THOUGHT**

We spend a lot of time preaching that Democracy relies on the involvement of an informed electorate.

And we know political partisans spend a lot of time preaching that “The Media” misinform the electorate, through imbalanced, unfair, biased reporting.

Whose fault is it if the electorate is misinformed? What if the “facts” they are using to make up their mind aren’t actually true?

Let’s replicate a recent study of what voters knew when they picked a new Congress mid-way through President Obama’s first term.

(Lecturer: On each of these slides, take a rough straw poll, then click to show the % of 2010 midterm election voters who had the wrong information.)

From the beginning of Obama’s first term through Election Day 2009, what happened to your federal income tax rate?



# 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%

**ANIMATION: CLICK BRINGS UP THE YELLOW, SHOWING WHAT VOTERS THOUGHT (Of the wrong answers, but don't say that yet)**

What have you concluded about the debate among atmospheric scientists? Are most experts convinced the globe is warming? Are they evenly divided? Or, have the majority concluded there is no climate change?

(Lecturer: On each of these slides, take a rough straw poll, then click to show the % of 2010 midterm election voters who had the wrong information.)



## **ANIMATIONS: CLICK 1=TAX RATE CHANGE CHART POPS IN, CLICK 2=SLOW REVEAL OF CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH PIE CHART**

Now the study.

When researchers at the University of Maryland asked voters those basic fact questions on their way to the polls during the mid-term elections of 2010, many voters were flat wrong on important facts related to the ballot choices they were making.

55% thought we were in a recession still, when the economy had in fact turned a corner.

86% did not know their federal taxes had gone down since Obama's election.

Almost half, 45%, thought climate change is not occurring or that scientists are evenly divided on the question, when in fact the National Academy of Sciences, which is made up of thousands of scientists, has overwhelmingly concluded the climate is changing. The pie chart above shows the proportion of peer-reviewed reports that challenge the theory of climate change.

A majority believed other falsehoods: that Obama initiated the bank bailout and that foreign donors financed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2010 election crusade to elect Republicans.

We elected a Congress based on Misinformation?

## Misinformation and partisan news outlets

“Most scientists think  
climate change is not occurring.”

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

Those who were most misinformed? The heaviest viewers of Fox News and MSNBC...the two most partisan news outlets.

ASK: What is your assumption about the reason those people were most misinformed?

Write your answer down. We'll revisit this question all week long: Did FOX misinform those people? Or did FOX viewers hear only what they wanted to hear: keep the pedal to the metal, the atmosphere is fine.

## 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

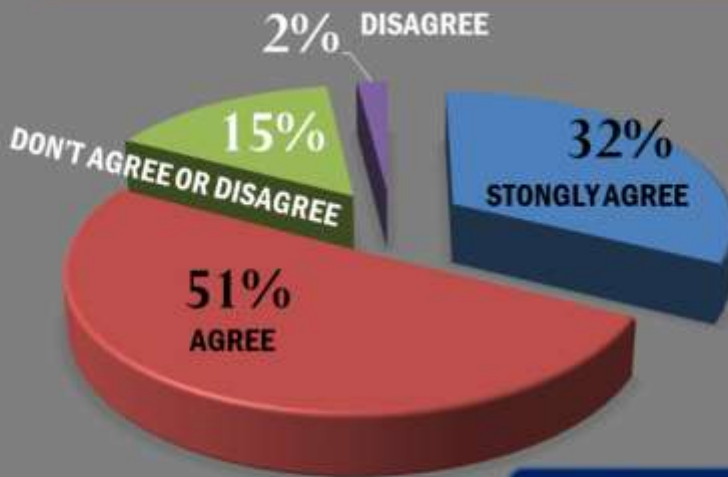
Is the News Media Biased, presenting a skewed vision of events?

Well, the public sure sees it that way. Look at these numbers. The last time the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press asked specifically about partisan bias, Americans reported they see a specific slant.

# What students see



“Most news outlets exhibit bias”



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

SOURCE: 2014 NEWS LITERACY REALITY CHECK SURVEY

(DIGITAL EDITOR'S NOTE: The graph above is fully editable and customizable. It was created IN PowerPoint. Double click on the pie chart, then on right click, select "edit data" and use your local numbers, if you do a survey in your class.)

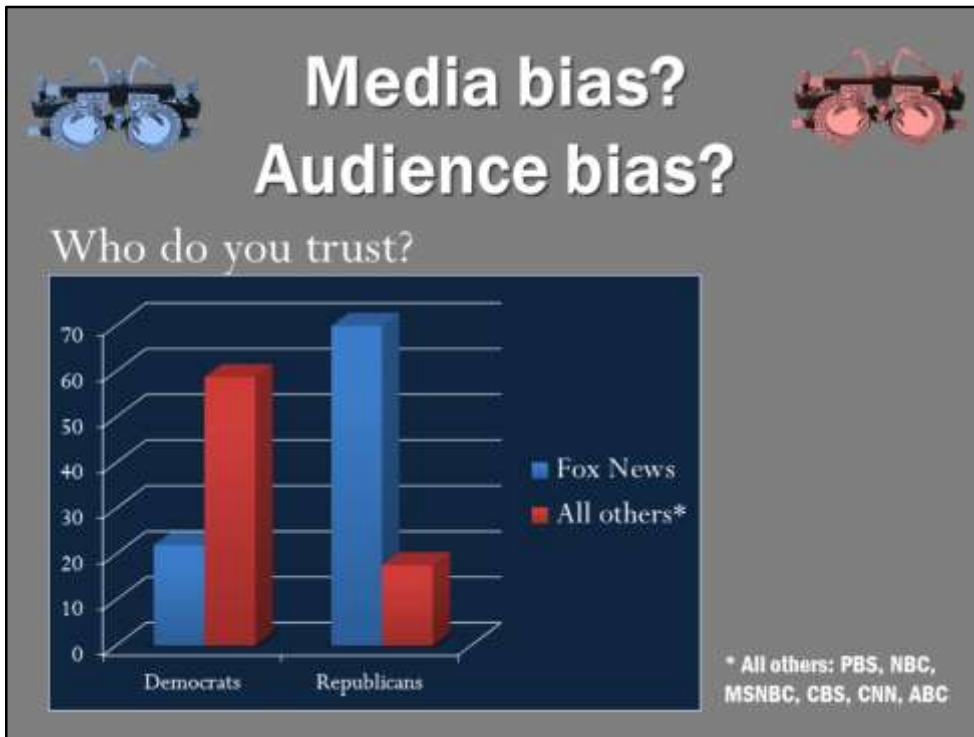
Here's what you and your classmates said at the beginning of the semester when asked if Most News Outlets Exhibit bias

Interestingly, Stony Brook students tend to see less bias in the news media overall.

ASK: Why would that be the case? Isn't bias a measurable constant?

ASK:

- If everyone agrees, then it's true, isn't it?
- Why should we care if there is bias in news reports?
- Why do you believe there is bias?
- What evidence do you cite?



What if we ask the general public to identify their own politics and then rate the political bias of news outlets? In 2013, a private firm called Public Policy Polling asked Americans which TV outlets they trust.

An average of 58.8% of Democrats trust most news outlets OTHER than Fox News, while only 22% trust Fox News. For Republicans on the other hand, it's flipped: 70% of them trust Fox News while an average of only 17.6% of them trust other news outlets.

PPP reports it surveyed 800 voters nationally from January 31st to February 3rd. The margin of error for the survey is +/-3.5%. This poll was not paid for or authorized by any campaign or political organization.

Public Policy Polling 2013:

<http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2013/02/4th-annual-tv-news-trust-poll.html>

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



Two ideals are often exalted with regard to news reporting.

Fairness.

Balance.

Ask: Do they mean the same thing?

In News Literacy, **balance** means that we don't just hear from each side, but each side gets exactly the same amount of space on the page, or length of time in a broadcast.



(Video is Christiane Amanpour at Stony Brook addressing a question about moral equivalency)

Would a “balanced” news report about the Bosnian Civil War give equal time to people who say reports of ethnic cleansing and military rape are all myths? That both sides are engaged in an immoral war?

Would that be balanced?

Would that be fair or unfair? To whom? (to consumers, to the evidence.)



## Definition of **balance**

Main Entry: **ˈbal-əns** 🗨️

Pronunciation: \ˈbɑ-lən(t)s\

Function: *noun*

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

Date: 13th century

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

Pay close attention now. This is a key definition in this course.

What is Balance?

(an equity, almost a mathematical equivalence).

ASK: When is it appropriate for a story to be carefully...point-counterpoint-rebuttal-rebuttal...balanced?

(Wrap their answers up with...)

*“A dispute between two sides when there is conflicting evidence, or points of view, and no definitive evidence to suggest one side is right.”*

# What Is **balance**?

## Obama, congressional leaders still deadlocked on shutdown

(Reuters) - President Barack Obama met with Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress on Monday to discuss a budget deadline that has shut down the federal government, but there was no breakthrough.

After more than an hour of talks, House 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 told Repu

As hundreds of thousands of federal employees faced a second day without pay, leaders of the House of Representatives and the Democrats on Monday made concessions that were quite meaningful, scaled back a h

Republicans have tried to pass measures that would under Obama and his Democrats

"The president reiterated what Boehner told reporters after asking for here is a discussion 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.

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.

"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.

**ANIMATION: CLICK 1=FIRST EXAMPLE OF OBVIOUS EFFORT AT BALANCE**

**CLICK2=SECOND EXAMPLE OF OBVIOUS EFFORT AT BALANCE**

Republicans blamed the Federal Government shutdown on the President. Democrats and the President blamed the Republicans.

So in a story where there is no consensus, you want a balanced report that reflects the range of options and opinions and allows you to make up your mind which is the chicken, which is the egg.

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

OliverClimateCrowd.mp4

So in cases like the Holocaust, a precisely measured “balance” could be inaccurate, giving undue weight to falsehood or unsupported assertions.

But what about scientific debates?

The majority of climate scientists have found that there is evidence the Earth’s climate is changing in unusual ways. And the majority conclude human activity is the cause.

So, should news reports give a balanced amount of time or space to those who say the climate isn’t changing at all or that it’s merely a cycle

Note this study: whether Americans accept climate change as fact can be affected by the words used in the questions they’re asked:

<http://environmentalresearchweb.org/cws/article/yournews/52172>

<http://www.ibtimes.com/2012-year-climate-change-wake-calls-967384>



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad calls the extermination of six million Jews during World War II "a myth" perpetuated by Zionists to generate support for the State of Israel.

Whenever a reporter prepares a story that focuses on or even mentions the Holocaust, should Holocaust deniers like Mahmoud be given equal time, equal space?

In the war crimes trial at Nuremberg, top Nazi officials did not deny what they had done. Physical evidence at the death camps and at the sites of massacres corroborated the testimony of witnesses.

Allied soldiers, liberating prison camps, saw it with their own eyes. Expecting a heroic place in history, The Third Reich kept precise and copious documents and photos and films of their systematic extermination of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and others. German official documents are the basis for the War Crimes Tribunal's estimate that Nazi Germany killed 6 million Jews.

Would a "balanced" news report about the Holocaust give equal time to people who say it is a myth?

Would that be fair or unfair? To whom? (to consumers, to

the evidence.)

While Germany destroyed some of the historical record at the end of the war and Allied bombs destroyed records of the Third Reich, Allied armies captured millions of documents during the conquest of Germany. Allied prosecutors submitted 3,000 tons of records at the Nuremberg trial.



ANIMATION: Click once to start the fade-out, fade-in, which takes one minute

*(Lecturer: At Stony Brook, we've become interested in the effects of silence in the classroom.*


*At summer workshops in 2013, we began breaking up intensive lecture or discussion sessions with a minute of silence. It made participants uncomfortable the first time, but over the course of a few days they became quite enthusiastic about pausing every so often to let ideas sink in or to simply reflect. We find it works well to ask a question and then call for a minute of silence.*

*This slide is built to fade to black and then come back, all in one minute.)*

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/8841649/Silence-is-golden-how-keeping-quiet-in-the-classroom-can-boost-results.html>

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec09/vol67/num04/Silence-Is-Golden.aspx>

# Definition of **fairness**

Main Entry: **fair** 

Pronunciation: \ˈfer\

Function: *adjective*

Etymology: Middle English *fager, fair*, from Old English *fæger*; akin to Old High German *fagar* beautiful

Date: before 12th century

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

That's why we offer you another concept:  
Fairness.

What might we mean by this definition: "Fair to  
the Evidence?"

Using this definition, a journalist is being fair to  
whom? (news consumer, or better yet: the facts)

It would be balanced to always call the Grand  
Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan when writing a news  
story about lynchings in the mid-Century  
Southern U.S.?

But would it be fair to the evidence to give equal  
space to their denials it ever happened?

## Finding **fairness**

- **Fair play**
- **Fair language**
- **Fair presentation**

If fair reporting is what you want...how do you check out the news for fairness?  
Here's a simple list to start with.



## Fair play

- **Obvious effort to include relevant perspectives**
- **People, organizations get to respond to negative charges**



*Here's what we mean by fair play:*

# Fair play?



When reporting on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, some looters were called looters and others were not.

The nature of each description, presents the image to you in a strikingly different way.

(You wouldn't notice it, probably, unless you were looking at multiple news outlets and they were taking different approaches to describing people who broke into stores and took supplies.)

## 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”

In the Opinion lecture, we suggested you pay attention to language that tells you when you're in the opinion neighborhood. ASK: In these pairings, how might a news organization's choice of these words be unfair...to the people written about...to the evidence...to the news consumer. particularly in a news report.

ASK: Who will react most strongly to one or the other term?

Why is that?

What does that suggest about bias?

# Fair language?

FOX NEWS FIRST

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

Okay, these are pretty obvious, but here's a spectrum of examples of language that demonstrate a lack of fairness.

## Fair Presentation



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

Fair presentation goes beyond where the information appears and what is emphasized in a newscast or in a written report.

It includes the selection of illustrations and visual journalism (photos, videos, charts & graphics)

## Fair presentation



Positive & negative photos of Beyoncé performing at the Superbowl

What kind of story would be fairly illustrated by the image on the left?

What about the one on the right

(Not every negative image is unfair or inaccurate)

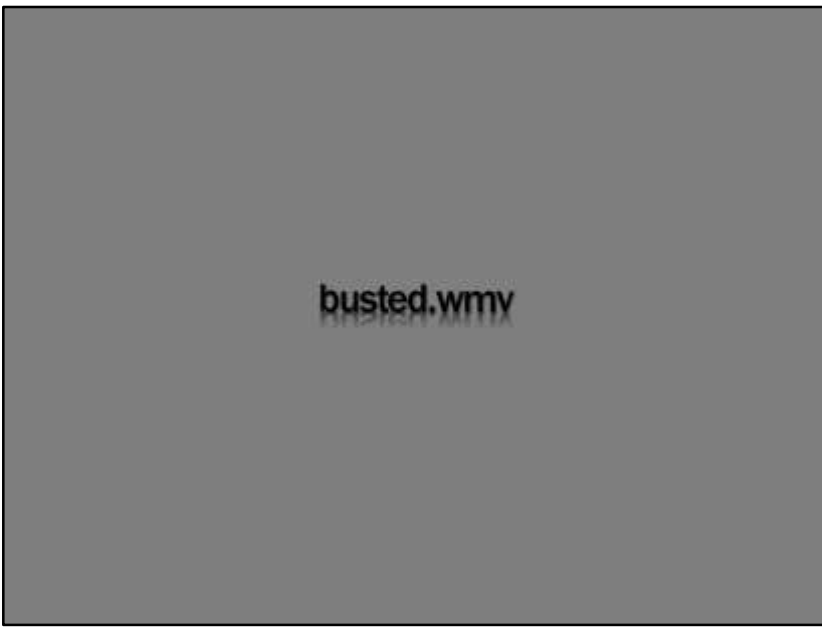
## Fair, unfair – or biased?



School bus methadone bust

Here's a local news report. As you watch, pay careful attention to what is included and what is missing.

Is it an example of Media Bias?



NEWSFELLOW: NEWS FELLOW: LINK (INSERT) VIDEO TO THIS SLIDE AND SELECT "START AUTOMATICALLY"

Is this report fair? Is it biased? Is it neither?

ASK:

- ✓ What would it take to prove FOX 5 is BIASED against the bus driver? (or in favor of the kid)?
- ✓ What are other possible reasons this particular story was unfair? (Sloppiness, bad editing, time constraints, etc.).



## Definition of **bias**

Main Entry: **1bi·as** 🗣️

Pronunciation: \ˈbi-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.**

It's tempting to attribute errors or unfair journalism to bias: "That journalist doesn't like that person, or disagrees with that idea." We can't look into someone's head and see bias.

But We can look at what they have done in the past to see if there is evidence of a predisposition.

*ASK: Is being unfair in a story the same thing as being biased?*

*When people say the news media is biased, is this what they mean?*

*What is the evidence?*

*Is bias the only conclusion you can draw from the evidence you have?*

## The News Literacy definition

**Bias:**  
***a pattern***  
**of unfairness**

So, for the purposes of this course, here's the definition of bias.

Bias is a pattern.

Bias is not an isolated event.

## 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

Just as we offer ways to find fairness, we offer ways to think and speak skillfully about bias. Bias is easy to allege, but without evidence, it amounts to little more than name-calling and you're better than that.

✓ Look for a consistent pattern of unfairness over time.

✓ Compare news reports from a variety of sources, especially to search for a bias by omission

✓ Take note of the self-interest of those alleging bias. Are they advocates for journalistic excellence, or are they, for example, paid lobbyists for BP complaining about bias in coverage of the Gulf Oil Spill?

## Bias is a *pattern*



Not an event

## ANIMATION: CLICK1= FOX DATA CHART AND LOWER HEADLINE

A reasonable charge of bias requires some data.

When UN Women's Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson spoke of fighting for women's rights in a speech at the UN in September 2014, the Daily Mail of London ran this story in its online edition, emphasizing in its headline what she wore and not what she said. It was, to say the least, an odd angle. So...can you conclude the Mail is a sexist publication, based on that example?

**CLICK.** For instance, A report from Scientific American on 9/22/2012 looked at six months of

primetime Fox News Channel and found that “in 37 of 40 instances, Fox News programs misled viewers about climate science—mainly, by broadly dismissing it. What manner of conclusion can you make based on that data? Is there a pattern?

<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/2012/09/22/fox-news-distorts-climate-science/>

<http://mediamatters.org/blog/2010/12/15/foxleaks-fox-boss-ordered-staff-to-cast-doubt-o/174317>



## **ANIMATION: THREE CLICKS. EACH BRINGS UP THE NEXT “FLAW”**

A credible assessment of bias must apply to a single news outlet or news report, not the entire “*news media*”. A generalization like that is untrue on its face. Impossible. What we call a “fallacy”

Another common fallacy is what we call guilt by association. If your brother does something illegal, does that automatically make you a criminal?

That’s analogous to people who say, for instance, that once an Editorial in a newspaper criticizes a politician, the whole newsroom staff adopts that view and acts on it. Again, an over-generalization that is easily knocked down, starting with examples like Newsday’s exposure of the lack of evacuation planning near Shoreham Nuclear Plant, which Newsday’s editorial page strongly supported.

That’s analogous to the weakest critiques of Fox News. Since Bill O’Reilly and other talkshow hosts on Fox are

conservative, the news coverage must be skewed to the right, critics often say. That's just lazy. Go do some research and prove your point. But the guilt-by-association argument is no argument at all. It's an unsupported assertion.

One bias you can easily prove in any newsroom: There IS a bias for stories about conflict and about change. DUH!

# News judgment or bias?



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

Depending on who you talk to, only three to five percent of the US population is gay. And yet the recent action by state courts and state legislatures has been national news.

ASK: Does this mean the News Media are biased against religious conservatives and biased in favor of gay marriage?

What kind of evidence would support a charge of bias in this case?

ASK: Are there any drivers in play that make this a legitimate news story in USA Today? How about on your local TV news?

(Conflict, Change, Human Interest, Proximity of gay community, Prominence of supporters or opponents, etc.)

<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-02-07/same-sex-marriage/52997090/1>





(Alternative to previous slide)

Climate change deniers charge that the news media demonstrates bias when it selects pictures of bears “stranded” on shrunken ice floes to dramatize the impacts of global warming.

Naturalists argue you could have photographed the same thing hundreds of years ago because the ice-pack has always calved icebergs and bears, being great swimmers, have always swum to small chunks to hunt and to play.

ASK:

-Is selection of an emotional photo like this a clear example of bias?

-What is the evidence?

-Break it down for me...What are the drivers that make this photo newsworthy?

# Opinion journalism or media bias?



The New York Times Editorial calls on Congress and the President to repeal the ban on recreational marijuana. Does that mean every news report will make the same point?



How about this example...

Everyone know what an obituary is?

True story: Two scholars looked at the obituaries published in the Chicago Tribune and found there were twice as many women dying as men...which would be bad news for our species, except that the vital statistics bureau's data showed women and men die off in approximately equal numbers in Chicago, the newspapers just choose to devote more attention to the deaths of men.

So why is it that the deaths of men (at age 72 on average at that time) were less newsworthy than the deaths of women?(age 79)

ASK: Is it bias? If so, what kind? Sexism? Classism? Job-ism?

What are other explanations for the imbalance? (reflects who got top jobs, what jobs were "newsworthy", fact that wife is around to memorialize hubby, but kids don't bother for Ma.)

**Whose bias** are reflected in those data?

So, in other words...bias is a complicated thing.



May 30, 2005, Natalee Holloway disappears on the final night of her five-day vacation with friends in Aruba. The high school senior's story gets saturation coverage on cable news channels, with CNN's Nancy Grace leading the way.

July 18, 2005, Latoiya Figueroa disappears shortly after a doctor's appointment in West Philadelphia. Her case gets no national coverage until angry activists beg Nancy Grace and other hosts to give a fraction of their attention to the disappearance of LaToiya.

“When black women disappear,” “Essence” magazine wrote in June of that year, “The silence can be deafening.”

The differential coverage over time is quantifiable and demonstrates clear bias...but on whose part? Is the audience...the ratings...partially to blame?

## Pivot Point

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

We have done this informally in years past, but now provide a slide to prompt short in-class discussions among students.

At appropriate moments, the lecturer will pose a question to the room and then ask students to pivot into groups of 4, discuss the question and prepare to offer answers to the whole room.

This will be clumsy until students learn the drill, but the idea is to break up the lecture with small-group work, if only to give students a chance to shift positions.

# Bias in the news



**ANIMATION:** Each click brings up the next headline. The Post makes no secret of its dislike for Hillary Clinton.

During the presidential campaign, Hillary was “angry,” the “strife of the party” making “desperate” claims about her delegate count. Then, after the “Super Tuesday” primary contests, they called her a “Super Loser” ...and when she campaigned on the claim that as President she would be able to handle bad men, they made this montage on page one. More recently, the Post decided the house she went looking for was...“Castle Clinton.” and that her grandchild is “Another Liberal Crybaby.”

ASK: What do you think?

Is that a pattern?

Could you compare the Post to other outlets and find similar words used?

Is there evidence enough to make a credible charge of bias?

## 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.

On any given day, different news organizations describe the same story with different words. Is this evidence of bias?



## Bias in the 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.

**ANIMATION: EACH CLICK BRINGS UP ANOTHER QUOTE.**

What about the Obama White House's frequent complaints about Fox News?

Given Fox's political orientation, it seems like a pretty solid charge of bias when the President calls Fox a dangerous distorter of the news.

And Fox's rebuttal doesn't really answer the charge.

So, What's the Evidence show? Back when the bickering started, The Pew Center analyzed the content of Fox News reporting on the 2008 presidential campaign. The research shows Fox News' reporting on Obama was no more negative than the reporting on his Republican opponent, John McCain

See what I mean? Bias is not easy to prove.



Journalism critics claim  
a monopoly on clear optics



What do you think?

What's interesting about the most common allegations of media bias is they come from people with an obvious self-interest: Mitt Romney's wife blames his defeat on media bias, Al Gore blames the media for America's lack of interest in fixing global warming.

When you hear the allegation of media bias, a mirror comes in handy. Ask the person complaining if they are able to be neutral and detached in looking at the coverage? Do they have evidence or do they have an axe to grind?



**(Animation: First click is a solitary reporter. Second click brings up the rest of the group of staff)**

It's not that journalists aren't biased. Certainly they are. But professionals take steps to limit the intrusion of personal bias.

Working alone, what are the odds this reporter can challenge his own assumptions and guard against his own bias creeping into a news report? Not great.

(2<sup>ND</sup> CLICK) Surround him with colleagues and reporters who are dedicated to neutrality, though, and the odds improve.

Journalists understand these human tendencies which is why they submit to the discipline of verification and embrace a checks-and-balances process by which the editing team challenges and shapes the final report.

As a craft, journalism has spent a great deal of time thinking about these questions, which is why codes of ethics exist: to police the neutrality of journalism.

In that way, the hope is that individual biases can be whittled and sanded off a story as a team of individuals – all with the goal of neutrality – brings their own experiences and biases to bear on ferreting out flaws and fixing them.



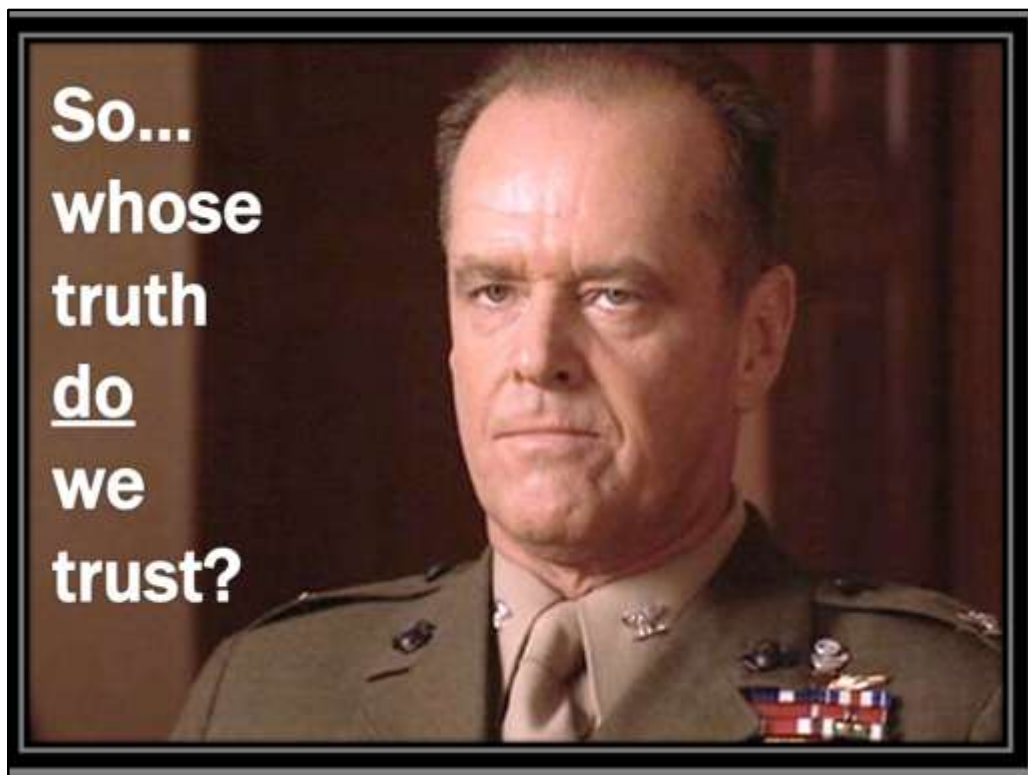
(Animation alert: The green letters rotate upon your 2<sup>nd</sup> click)

In this verification and editing process, reporters are transparent about their reporting, disclosing how they know what they know and disclosing any conflicts of interest that might compromise the integrity or Independence of the organization.

So the idea of Objectivity that some journalists refer to is not individual objectivity but this aspiration newsrooms have to guard their neutrality through a process of challenging each other's work until it is fair.

It's worth noting that in professional circles, journalists who flout this culture of neutrality quickly become pariahs.

(CLICK NOW FOR CRAZY V.I.A. ANIMATION)

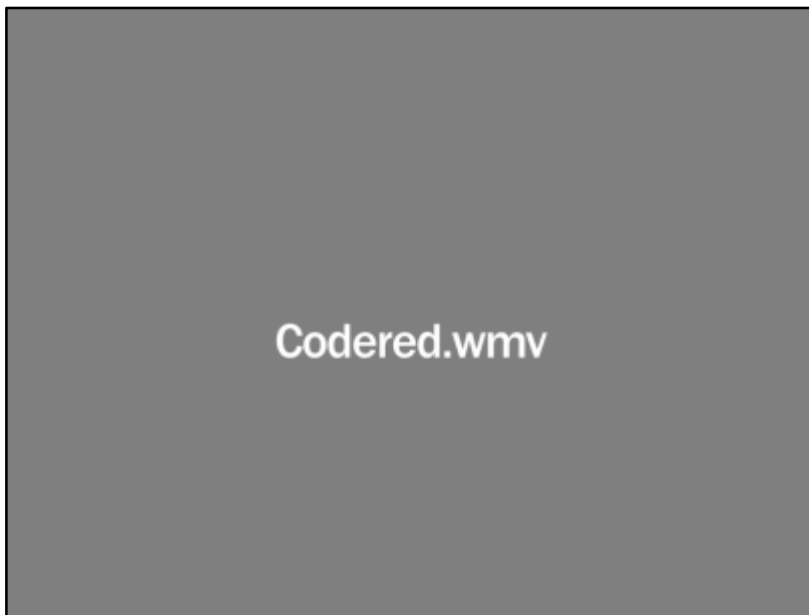


There's no code of ethics for news consumers.

But what if there were?

The first duty would be to seek truth, wouldn't it?

The Truth no matter what it is, right?



Click to launch Nicholson clip

It turns out, the screenwriters of Code Red may have been onto something.

There is a lot of evidence that we CAN'T handle the truth.

And that's what this week's homework is all about. It's all about you.

**Social scientists say he's right**



Social psychologists say we are, in fact, poorly equipped to deal with truth when it contradicts our beliefs.

**Perception**  
is flawed.  
**Memory**  
is unreliable.

Overcoming Audience Bias  
when Evaluating the News

Center for News Literacy

Nancy Franklin, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Cognitive Science, Stony Brook University

You were assigned to watch this video of Prof. Franklin.  
Did she say anything that surprised you?



**(ANIMATION: Opening image of happy chicken in pastoral setting. Click to bring up nervous “Chicken Run” characters who have discovered they are headed for slaughter. Click again to bring up photo of chicken crammed in to industrial pens)**

If, for example, you believe in animal rights and yet you also love Chicken McNuggets, you may prefer to think chickens live happy outdoor lives until it's their turn to take one for the team. And then you watched Chicken Run and started wondering if Chickens live their lives in fear of the slaughterhouse.

As an adult, you might have to force yourself to sit through a documentary film on the conditions at large-scale chicken farms. Chances are your first reaction will be that the film-makers skewed the information or that chicken farms aren't as bad as they look.

If we really search for reliable information, we often won't like what we learn. In that search, Pogo has it right: The enemy of knowledge might just be...US





# Harmony

AUDIO RUNS REALLY STRANGELY ON PPT.  
IF THE HARMONIOUS SOUND DOESN'T PLAY  
AUTOMATICALLY, CLICK ON THE SPEAKER ICON  
AND HIT PLAY

When new information fits in with all your pre-existing assumptions, there is harmony. Your brain literally feels that harmony.



# Dissonance

AUDIO RUNS REALLY STRANGELY ON PPT.  
IF THE HARMONIOUS SOUND DOESN'T PLAY  
AUTOMATICALLY, CLICK ON THE SPEAKER ICON AND HIT  
PLAY

When new information contradicts or challenges all or part  
of your pre-existing assumptions, there is dissonance.

## Cognitive dissonance

Dissonance causes anxiety, stress, even actual pain.

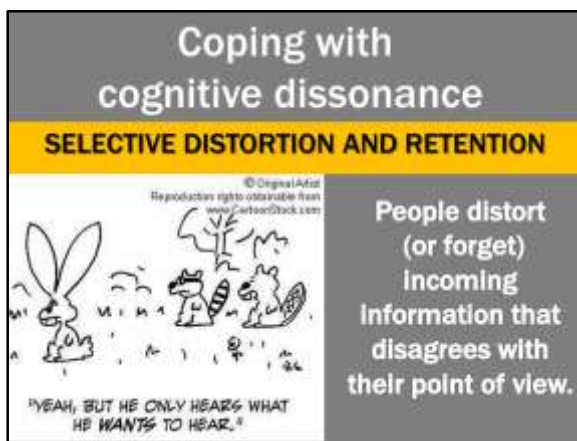
The human brain does things to avoid dissonance.

Your brain cares more about harmony than truth.

Have entire class read this slide together.  
Group Reading!

Our brain just wants to protect us! But often this is at the expense of truth seeking.

Important point. Our brains won't just act without us realizing when we experience cognitive dissonance, the brain will actually do things without us realizing when it **anticipates** cognitive dissonance.



Animation: Headline comes in automatically. Click once for term, second click brings up definition. Here are some of the more interesting...or scary...findings by researchers looking at Cognitive Dissonance.

Memory is not terribly reliable.

Much more can be remembered of recent events than those further in one's past. Worse, every time certain kinds of memories (episodic) are recalled, they are re-encoded within the hippocampus and altered a little. That's what we call transience and it's not that surprising.

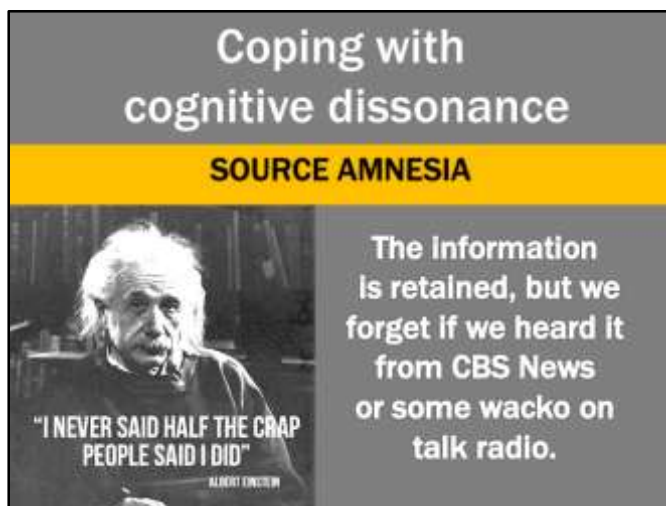
But to reduce cognitive dissonance, we tend to distort or shut out information that conflicts with our biases.

For instance, researchers at Towson and the University of Maryland found that when test subjects were asked to play the role of college admissions officers, they overstated the qualifications of applicants who agreed with their politics and understated those from the opposition party.

In this way we either warp new information to reinforce our beliefs or completely shut it out. People who think like me are smarter than those who don't...

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2010.00665.x/abstract>

D. Schacter. *The Seven Sins of Memory*, Houghton Mifflin, 2001



Animation: Headline comes in automatically. Click once for term, second click brings up definition.

**Source Misattribution:** Often documented by scientists, Misattribution involves correct recollection but incorrect recollection of the source of that information

I'm exaggerating, but let's say on a late-night call-in show, you hear some random caller say something that confirms your beliefs and within three days you're telling people you heard a Nobel Prize winner say it on CNN. If you haven't already learned this in Psych, you should know that perception and memory are easily influenced. We are not digital recorders.



Animation: Headline comes in automatically. Click once for term, second click brings up definition.

We prefer information that **confirms** our preconceptions, regardless of whether the information is true. We gather and recall information selectively and interpret it to suit our beliefs. So, when reading about some emotional issue like abortion or gun control or gay marriage, we go to sources that tend to confirm us. We interpret ambiguous evidence as supportive. Why? It pains us to admit we're wrong. But if we persist, confirmation bias can lead us into junk. It gives us overconfidence and the habit of shouting down dissent. You could argue confirmation bias is at the heart of disastrous business, military and social decisions.

Plous, Scott (1993), *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*,

# This is your brain ...

FACTS DATA

EVIDENCE



**ANIMATION: SLIDE OPENS WITH THROBBING BRAIN**

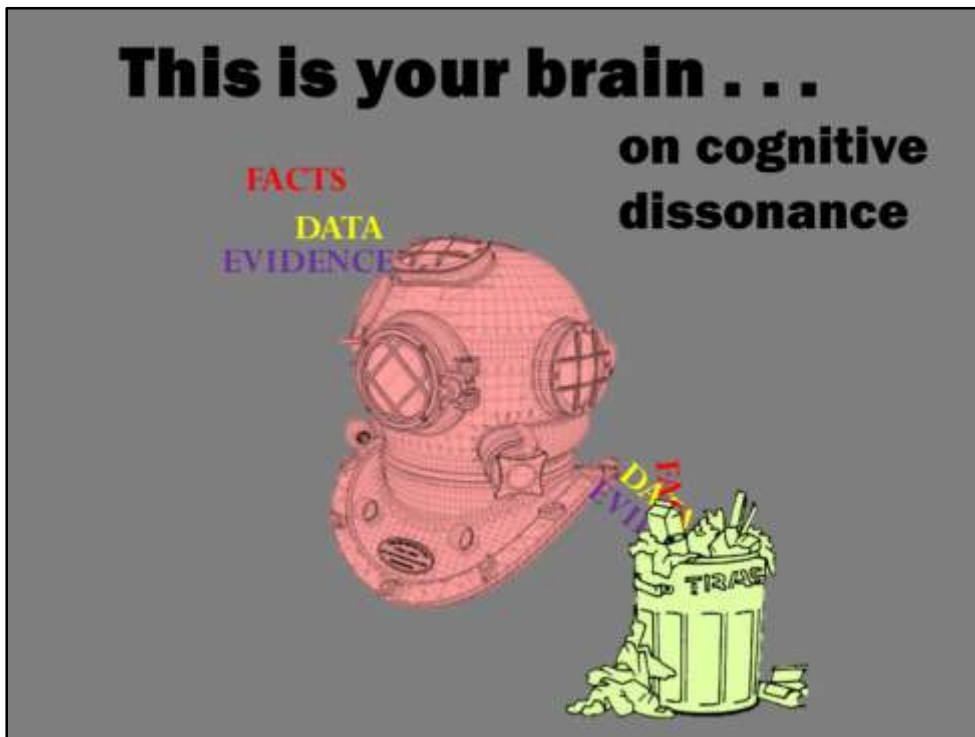
**CLICK1= FACTS SPLASHES IN (SOUND EFFECT, TOO)**

**CLICK2=EVIDENCE SPLASHES IN (SOUND EFFECT, TOO)**

**CLICK3=DATA SPLASHES IN (SOUND EFFECT, TOO)**

So, in other words, your brain is a beautiful porous, absorbent information sponge, **CLICK** taking in stimuli **CLICK** and memories **CLICK** and sorting them into related concepts.





**ANIMATION:**

**CLICK1= DIVING BELL COVERS BRAIN**

**CLICK 2, 3, 4, BRING IN FACTS, DATA AND EVIDENCE, WHICH BOUNCE OFF (WITH SOUND EFFECT) AND LAND IN THE TRASH.**

Think of Cognitive Dissonance as a diving bell that slams down on your head to block out the stuff you don't want to hear. The stuff that makes you uncomfortable.

Aaaaaah.

No more Facts, Data or Evidence that make you re-think your position.

Ignorance isn't bliss. True bliss is the self-satisfied feeling that you already know everything you need to know.

## The News Literacy Challenge

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

**CHALLENGE**  
your views.

Make the conscious decision to enter dischordia, to find sources and information that conflicts with your views.

# What are your biases?



## "Project Implicit" Homework Step #1

(ANIMATION: Images fade in. Project Implicit screen grab changes once automatically. )

Your homework this week includes an interactive online exercise, a short video that lays out several ways we react when new information challenges our existing beliefs and a short writing assignment.

To help you think about bias, we're sending you to the Project Implicit website to a kind of video game that pushes you to match words and by measuring your delays, it attempts to sort out how you feel about certain people or ideas.

You have a lot of options to test: race, gender, politics, age, size, religion. Pick a subject that interests you and keep track of what you learn.

Point of this isn't that it's a perfect measure of your implicit biases.

Our point is that this gets you thinking about how your own biases might affect your ability to absorb information.

One note, the methodology is well-documented and tested. The findings ARE meaningful, if not definitive. Don't freak out if you don't like what it tells you.

### **The Quick Quiz**

1. Bias is a \_\_\_\_\_ of unfairness.
2. Give an example of a story where balance makes a story unfair.
3. Write a question we can answer to clarify today's lesson ... or a comment that will help us improve our work.

**EMAIL OR HAND THE ANSWERS  
TO YOUR RECITATION INSTRUCTOR**

Every lecture, we'll stop and give you a quick quiz, just three questions.

This helps cement key lessons in your memory.

Plus, it helps us see if we explained things well.

And the third question is a chance for you to improve your own course.

We'll start lectures with a selection of your comments and suggestions.



hus endeth the Lesson

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



- Politics
- Race and Gender
- Social Issues
- Religion

The accusation of bias most often rears its ugly head on hot-button topics: Politics, race, religion and gender and social issues.

ASK: Why is that?

Issues that are emotional and personal, that generate strong feeling and partisanship, tend to cause people to see bias in anything that does not support their feelings and beliefs or praise the group that is central to their identity.