Balance, Fairness & Bias
Are Your Lenses Correct?

An Informed Electorate is The Bulwark of Democracy

Since January 2009 have your Federal income taxes:

A) Gone Down
B) Stayed the Same
C) Gone up **86%**

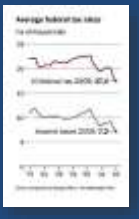
An Informed Electorate is The Bulwark of Democracy

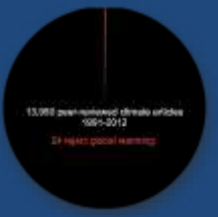
Do you think that most scientists believe that:

A) Climate change is occurring
B) Views are evenly divided **33%**
C) Climate change is not occurring **12%**

45% wrong

Misinformation and the Mid-term Election





www.worldpublicopinion.org / University of Maryland Study

Misinformation and the Election

"Do most scientists think that climate change is not occurring?"

(percent who agree with this statement)

People who rarely watch Fox News... 23%

Watch Fox once a week... 45%

Watch Fox almost every day... 60%

Misinformation and the Election

"It was proven the U.S. Chamber of Commerce was spending foreign money to back Republicans."

(percent who agree with this statement)

People who rarely watch MSNBC... 40%

Watch MSNBC once a week... 38%

Watch MSNBC almost every day... 60%

Misinformation and the Electorate

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

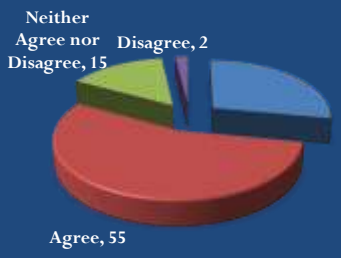
-2009survey

Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low

What's Students See

"Most news outlets exhibit bias"

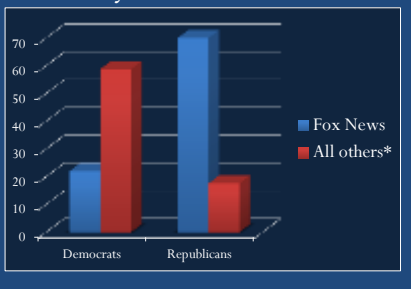
FALL 2013 REALITY CHECK



-Source: F2013 Reality Check Survey 769 respondents

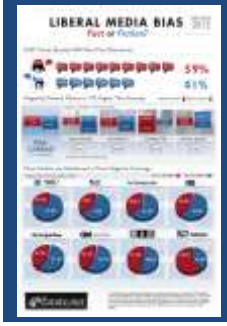
Media Bias? Audience Bias?

Who do you trust?



* All others: PBS, NBC, MSNBC, CBS, CNN, ABC

Scientific Consensus?



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?

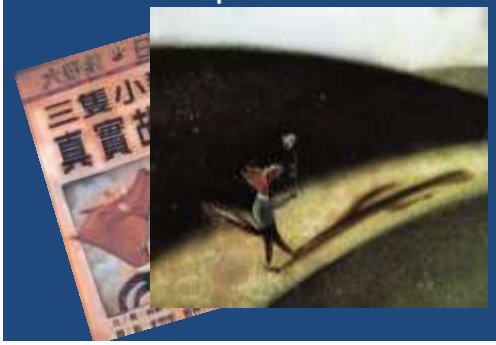
What's the Difference Between Fairness and Balance?

You Know The Story...

What Was Missing?

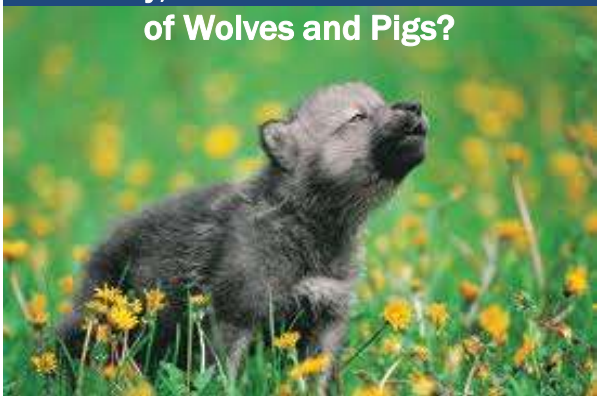
"It all started with a cup of sugar and a sneeze."
-Alexander T. Wolf

Fatal Sneezes and Temper Tantrums



What is Missing?

Seriously, What's the Balanced View of Wolves and Pigs?



Key Definitions

Main Entry: **¹bal·ance**
Pronunciation: \ˈba-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

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

What Is Balance?

Obama, congressional leaders still deadlocked on 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.

"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.

Can Balance Be the Opposite of Fairness?

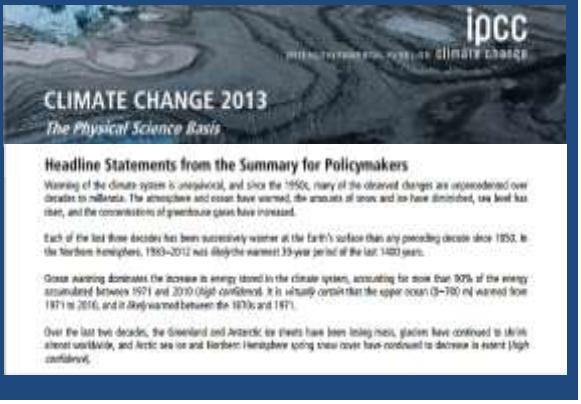
Should Holocaust Deniers Get Equal Space?

Can Balance Be the Opposite of Fairness?

Amanpour Moral Equivalency.wmv

The Massacres in Bosnia

Is Balance the Same as Fairness?



"We don't want to fall into this trap of what's called 'false balance,' where you take two positions that have completely different weight[s] of evidence and treat them as equal, so in no story am I sort of treating the climate denier position as equal to the mainstream scientific consensus."

- **New York Times** *science reporter Justin Gillis*

The New York Times

"Think Twice"

A Silent Minute to Absorb the Material

Key Definitions

Main Entry: **fair**
Pronunciation: \'fer\
Function: *adjective*
Etymology: Middle English *fager, fair*, from Old English *fæger*; akin to Old High German *fagar* beautiful
Date: before 12th century

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

Finding Fairness:

- Fair play
- Fair language
- Fair presentation

Fair play:

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

Fair Play?

Fair Language

- "Right-to-Life" vs. "Anti-Abortion"
- "Pro-Choice" vs. "Pro-Abortion"
- "Ruthless" vs. "Tough"
- "Admitted" vs. "Said"
- "Gay Marriage" vs. "Marriage Equality"

Fair language?

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

32

Fair Presentation:

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

Fair Presentation:

Fair, Unfair, or Biased?

School Bus Aide Busted Dealing Methadone

busted.wmv

What is Bias?

Main Entry: **bi·as**
Pronunciation: \'bī-əs\
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 evidence of a ***pattern*** of unfairness over time
- Compare a variety of news outlets especially to search for a bias by omission
- Take note of the self-interest of those alleging bias

The News Literacy Definition:

Bias:
a *pattern* of unfairness

Bias is a *Pattern*

Common Flaws in "Bias" Claims:

"The news media is biased."
(Generalizations are, generally, unprovable.☺)

"Editorials determine the angle taken by print reporters."
(Reporting routinely contradicts editorial page assertions.)

"TV reporters follow the lead of the talk show hosts on their network."
(Reporting routinely contradicts talk show assertions.)

News Judgment or Bias?

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

News Judgment or Bias?

Opinion or Bias?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

To Lead Is to Negotiate

GOP Begins Search for Broad Deal on Budget

Bias or Something Else?

"Why Aren't More Women Dying in Chicago?"

News Judgment or Racism?

LaToyia Figueroa and Natalee Holloway: Differences in Coverage

THE NEW POOR

Unemployed, and Likely to Stay That Way

THE PUBLIC EDITOR

Too Little for So Many, Even in The Times

It Can't Happen Here

Why is there so little coverage of Americans who are struggling with poverty?

Media coverage of poverty: Why 'so little'?

Hamptons McMansions Herald a Return of Excess

As Boozy Invaders Hit Beach, Hamptons Sound a Snooki Alert

Pivot Point

Every other row
Pivots to the row behind
To discuss in groups of four

Bias in the News

A Pattern of Unfairness?

Obama's War Against Fox News

"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.

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

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's Critics Claim
A Monopoly On Trustworthy 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 Independence, and demands transparency-based Accountability.

Conclusions

Are there examples of unfair news stories?
Absolutely

Is unfairness an automatic sign of bias?
No

Can a news outlet exhibit bias?
Yes, but it's easier to allege than to prove

Is the *perception* of bias as dangerous as bias itself?

Yes

Cognitive Dissonance

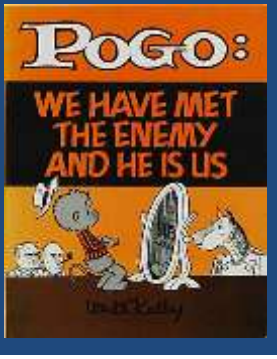
Media Bias

Audience Bias

You (Really) Want The Truth?

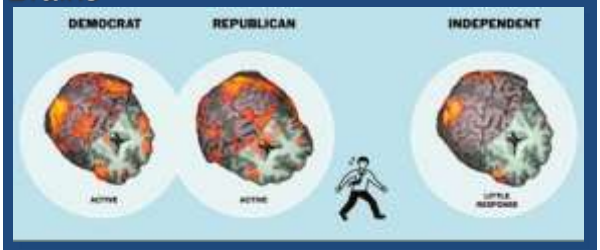
Codered.wmv

What About Our Own Biases?



Facing Facts
May Require You To Resist Human Nature

Cognitive Dissonance:
Democratic Brains vs. Republican Brains



Magnetic Resonance Imaging
"This is Your Brain on Politics"

The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

Brain.wmv

Responses to Cognitive Dissonance

Selective Distortion
&
Retention

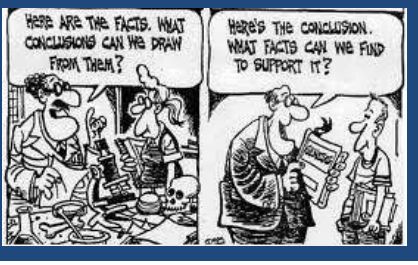
People tend to distort (or forget) incoming information if it does not match their point of view.

Responses to Cognitive Dissonance
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

Are Errors Evidence of Bias?

Responses to Cognitive Dissonance: Peer Influence on Perception

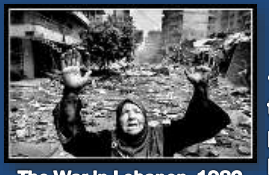
Our perceptions of things like size or distance can be impaired by group pressure.

News Bias vs. Audience Bias

The War in Lebanon, 1982

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

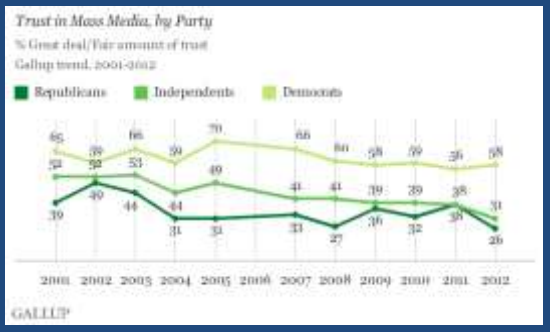
"Hostile Media Effect"



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.**

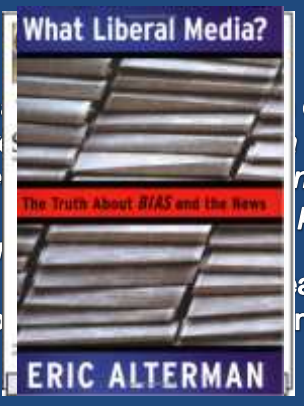
"Hostile Media Effect"



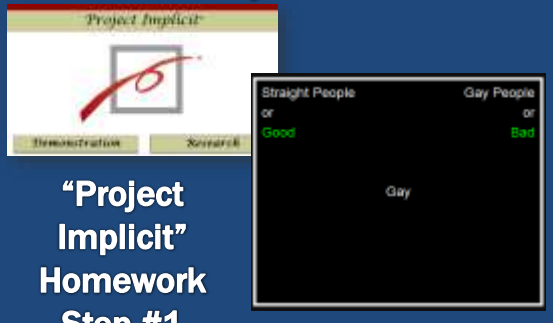
Yeah, Yeah…But What About Bias?

During Ob office,
"…positiv have
outweighe ne" -- 42
percent to percent
were neutr

arch.org
(a majo nization)

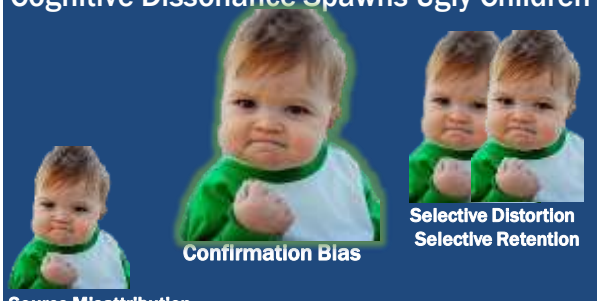


What are your biases?



"Project Implicit" Homework Step #1

Cognitive Dissonance Spawns Ugly Children



Confirmation Bias

Selective Distortion
Selective Retention

Source Misattribution

Watch the Cognitive Dissonance video
then do "Project Implicit" homework

Today's Key Lessons :

- ✓ Bias is a Pattern. Not an event.
- ✓ Your Mind May Not Be Open, After All.

After this lecture, students will 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)

These skills relate to course outcomes 3 & 4

Thus endeth the Lesson

Extra Credit Opportunity:

An Evening With Watergate Reporter

Carl Bernstein

October 15
SAC Auditorium
Doors Open 7:45 p.m.
Tickets, Free, SAC Box Office
News Literacy students and Journalism students only.

To receive extra credit, you'll watch "All The President's Men" in advance and answer a few simple questions about the film and Bernstein's talk.

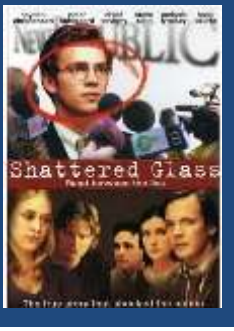
Digital Resource Center Extensions:

Whenever possible, we provide digital materials for use outside class to encourage solo work by students and accommodate a wider range of learning styles.

Extending <u>this</u> lecture:

Available in multiple languages, Project Implicit offers an anonymous way for students to probe their implicit biases as a way to understand cognitive dissonance.

Glasstrailer.wmv

Shattered Glass Viewings:

Available on Blackboard, on Netflix, and online.