

SUSPICIOUS SIGNS:
EFFECTS OF NEWSCASTER SCRIPTS, SYMBOLS, AND ACTIONS
ON AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF NEWS ORGANIZATION BIAS

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor John Petrocik

Professor James Endersby

Professor Mike McKean

Professor David Webber

Professor Catherine Holland

To my father, William, who was the smartest man I ever knew...

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Preface: A Ribbon of Controversy

Immediately following the events of September 11, 2001, viewers began to see a surge of patriotic displays by television newsrooms around the country. The displays were not totally unanticipated, as similar displays had manifested themselves in the days of the first Gulf War. At that time, some anchors and reporters had donned red, white, and blue ribbons to show some sort of patriotic support. The movement was not widespread, and it came and went in the course of a few months. But it did foretell the conflict ahead over issues of newsroom ethics, public opinion, and political pressure.

As news director at KOMU-TV in Columbia, Missouri, I lead a unique newsroom that bridges the gulf between the academic and professional worlds. KOMU-TV is the commercial, NBC affiliate for central Missouri, but it also serves as the teaching lab for students learning television news techniques at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Despite the state ownership and the academic mission, the newsroom runs as much like a commercial, professional operation as possible. A small staff of faculty editors runs the newsroom. A dozen or so full-time staff members assist the faculty members. Students do the rest of the work—reporting, photography, producing, editing, and writing.

A local general manager, who answers to the chancellor of the Columbia campus, manages the station. As a faculty member as well as news director, I answer to both that general manager, and the dean of the School of Journalism. Daily management is left to the news director, as well as most long-term policies. In general, the campus is not involved in the operations of the station.

In late September of 2001, the newsroom was very busy with the 9/11 aftermath and all the coverage it had generated. The station had done well the day of the attack, as well as in the days that followed. It had set the local standard for covering not only the events going on in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, but also for giving local viewers the information they needed to see what in their lives has changed since the attacks. I had worked many long days overseeing the coverage, and had a lot much of this everyday work pile up. Among the tasks needing attention was an e-mail memo to the faculty, staff, and students reminding them of the station's unwritten policy of not wearing any adornments that would send personal messages or express personal opinions.

The policy was one that had been in place—in unwritten fashion—for my entire tenure as news director. Simply stated, newsroom personnel were not to wear ribbons, pins, buttons, or other items that would be used to send a message. The belief was that several ethical principles were at stake. Firstly, such items were out of place on newscasts because they put newscasters in the position of injecting personal opinions into the news presentations. No matter how universally accepted or noble those opinions might be, it is not the role of the journalist to exhibit them on the air. Secondly, patriotic or other symbols serve the purpose of making the anchor or reporter wearing them somehow newsworthy or noticeable for their own sakes. Many journalists believe that this is not their role.

On September 17, after seeing the proliferation of patriotic pins and ribbons that had been springing up on network and other local newscasts, I distributed a brief e-mail. It stated:

“This probably won't be a popular decision for some of you, but I need to remind everyone that our news broadcasts are not the place for

personal statements of support for any cause--no matter how deserving the cause seems to be. This includes the little red, white, and blue ribbons that a lot of people are sporting these days. Our job is to deliver the news as free from outside influences as possible. And while it seems that there could be no one who would object to us wearing such symbols, you might be surprised. And it also sets a precedent where countless other causes would want us to wear their symbols as well.

I could go on with more reasons, but let me just say this. Leave the ribbons at home when reporting or anchoring for KOMU News. What you do on your own time is up to you, though I would urge you to consider the fact that you are always 'on the clock' in terms of being known as a reporter and representative of the station." (Woelfel, Sept. 17, 2001)

The e-mail went to approximately 300 faculty, staff, and students, all with ties to the KOMU-TV newsroom. The response from those originally addressed was negligible. One weathercaster disagreed with the directives of the memo, but agreed to follow its instructions. The rest of the recipients agreed the notion of not displaying personal opinions on air was nothing new to them. That consensus arose from a consistency in teaching within journalism education. Common journalism curriculum provides students with the ethical framework from which they can draw their own conclusions about the proper actions to take when faced with pressure to conform. This memo did not conflict with that ethical framework.

But it was soon to become apparent that it did conflict with what many outside the newsroom thought the journalist's role should be during times of national crisis—particularly those in political positions in the state of Missouri. Shortly after the e-mail went out to the KOMU group, it ended up in the electronic inboxes of a number of Missouri state legislators. The first e-mail from that group inquiring about the memo arrived on September 21. A state senator wrote to see if the memo had indeed come from the newsroom. After receiving confirmation it had, that particular senator never raised the

issue again. But by the following Monday, the legislators who were writing had become much more aggressive in their approach with me. A Republican state representative from Kansas City, Matthew V. Bartle, was the first to issue a threat to the funding of the University of Missouri. He wrote (in part):

“It is more than a little troubling that in your rush not to offend that you would ban the wearing of a symbol of compassion for those who have suffered immense tragedy. This is not a matter of journalistic even-handedness. This is a matter of simple decency and respect for our fellow human-beings.

As a member of the state legislature in Missouri, I am going to evaluating far more carefully state funding that goes to the school of journalism. If this is what you are teaching the next generation of journalists, I question whether the taxpayers of this state will support it.

By copy of this email to the Governmental Relations office for the University, I am hoping that the administration will look into this matter.”
(Bartle, Sept. 24, 2001)¹

By this time, one week after writing the original memo, a great deal of time each day was consumed by answering e-mails, phone calls, and letters regarding the policy. I made an attempt to respond to each correspondent as quickly as possible—particularly when that person seemed to have some mistaken impression regarding the purpose of the memo. Representative Bartle was among a growing number of people who misconstrued the policy to be for the purpose of avoiding any offense to viewers. That was never part of its intent. The reply to him was typical:

“As a Columbia native and Mizzou graduate, I'm sure you are aware of the School of Journalism's worldwide reputation for excellence. For nearly one hundred years, we have been teaching what we as a faculty believe to be the proper skills and knowledge for the working journalist--include training in ethics. The memo you cite is one of those lessons. Not all

¹ Note: All e-mails have been edited to correct typographical, spelling, and grammar errors. The text has not otherwise been shortened, nor the content altered, unless noted.

ethical decisions are popular with either the public or those who must exercise them. But it is a measure of the strength of the ethical position and the person who holds it to see if it can remain intact against prevailing sentiment. I'm sure you have encountered similar conflicts with the many ethical decisions one must make as an attorney--perhaps more than in any other profession.

I encourage you to do your research and find out how the School of Journalism actually does use the portion of its budget that comes from state appropriations. I think you'll be pleased with most of the lessons taught--even if you aren't in total agreement with the ethical responsibilities a journalist must carry. I think you'll also realize that the Governmental Affairs office at the University has no input into the academic freedom of the Journalism School faculty, or the editorial decisions made at KOMU-TV, KBIA-FM, or the Columbia Missourian.” (Woelfel, Sept. 24, 2001)

Bartle wrote back almost immediately. He questioned whether reporters were allowed to wear school colors, and if running advertising on the station should be considered as showing “allegiance” to capitalism. The he concluded his e-mail with this:

“When questioned on matters like this, it is not uncommon for journalists to sound the high tones of journalistic integrity. It sounds good and in many cases it is appropriate. In this case, however, journalistic integrity cannot conceal simple foolishness. Decisions like yours do immense harm to your profession. Decisions like yours cause the public to question the reliability and intelligence of journalists.

Like it or not, recipients of public monies must answer to the public. If the public disapproves of what is being done with their money, they have the right to direct funds elsewhere. I am sure that we will find that the KOMU news department is a recipient of public money.” (Bartle, Sept. 24, 2001, second response).

In fact, the KOMU-TV operation as a whole does not receive any public money. As a commercial television station, it is expected to earn enough each year to operate profitably and without state appropriations. In most years, the station profit is enough to fund other university programs, thereby actually reducing the need for some state

expenditures. The reply to Bartle addressed the additional concerns he outlined in his last e-mail, and invited him to come see the operation and its funding source:

“I would welcome you to come see our facility to find out the real lessons being taught within these walls. We have been voted again and again as the school that best prepares young journalists for television news careers. That success is something of which I am very proud. And the station's commercial success is something in which the University and state can also take pride. Our success in the market helps keep us financially self-sufficient and free from the need for any state appropriations that might leave the perception of having to answer editorially to state government. Heck, we even give some extra back to the University to pay its bills.”
(Woelfel, Sept. 25, 2001)

It would be unfair, however, to expect every state legislator to know the internal funding methods of each department the state operates. So I was ready to pass on the funding formula to each who wrote to question the policy. Rep. Bartle passed his exchange to a number of his colleagues. Representative Chuck Purgason, a Republican from Caulfield, wrote:

“Could you please let me know if the information that I have received is correct when it comes to your station and its policy on the American Flag? As a member of the budget committee in the state, I will certainly look into this policy when it comes to funding in the next legislative cycle if this information is shown to be true.” (Purgason, Sept. 25, 2001)

Representative Carl Bearden, a St. Charles Republican, also read the exchange with Bartle:

“I have read your response to Representative Bartle's e-mail regarding the display of patriotic symbols by journalists working at the various University media outlets. The response fails to indicate any basis for invoking Journalistic Ethics. In fact, the decision appears to be based more on someone's perceived political correctness than journalistic ethics.

If the School of Journalism is in fact more focused on political correctness issues than on true journalistic ethics, then I would contend that the well earned reputation of the program is in jeopardy. While the

Governmental Affairs office may not have any input, the University Curators and Administration must guard the reputation of the University and the School of Journalism from actions such as this one. I trust that as a result of this errant application of journalistic integrity, they will indeed review the decision.” (Bearden, Sept. 25, 2001)

Representative Bearden was the first to threaten going to the university’s governing board, the Board of Curators. It was no empty threat. The curators would indeed consider the policy soon.

By Tuesday, September 25, the e-mails were coming in large numbers—and not only from state legislators. The memo had been posted by an unknown party or parties on a number of bulletin boards and other web sites frequented by journalists. This set up a nationwide discussion of the pros and cons of the position. Also, all through this period, I was sharing the correspondences I was receiving from the legislators with my students via the same e-mail group to which he had sent the original e-mail. These digests of all the activity provided excellent material for classroom and informal discussions. But much as the original memo had found a wider audience, these e-mails soon made it into a story in the Columbia Missourian, the School of Journalism’s daily laboratory newspaper for Columbia. The newspaper ran the story on the morning of September 27, prompting local radio stations to make it the topic of conversation that morning. The newsroom was flooded with phone calls and e-mails from angry viewers demanding the policy change. Many also announced plans to ask their state legislators to seek some sort of retribution against the television station. So e-mail was pouring in from viewers and other journalists, as well as from the state leaders. Many of the e-mails were less than polite. Some called for my firing, while others suggested I look for work in Afghanistan.

“I am outraged at your decision to not allow the display of the flag or ribbons by on-air people. I guess when it comes to the real decision time people’s true colors show. This is a disgrace and a slap in the face of every victim of September 11 and their families, not to mention the US Service personnel that are going into harm’s way to protect your assets. I will not watch your station again under any circumstances.” (Bowling, Sept. 27, 2001).

“What the hell is wrong with you? It has been my experience and understanding that most people affiliated with Universities are tree-hugging hippie freaks, but what you have done by not allowing patriotic symbols on your news casts is just treason. I will never watch your news again and I will write all sponsors that support your show and boycott them. Unlike you, I am proud to be an American.” (Hoffman, Sept. 27, 2001).

“I was shocked when I heard of your e-mail to your staff. News people usually scream free speech, but now you are restricting speech. As a veteran I feel that every American has a right to show their support for our country. You claim that it is an ethical issue. Your station is the most biased station I have ever watched. You take positions against the death penalty. You speak out against pro-lifers. How can you say that you are trying not to take a position? I am glad companies are pulling their advertising from your station. I will encourage any company I do business with to do the same. I will also ask my representative to pull all funding from the school of journalism until major changes are made to your station. I will also encourage my friends and family to do the same.” (Jung, Sept. 27, 2001)

“I heard you on KFRU this morning and I think you are a coward for not allowing the anchors to display their patriotism. Maybe you should go live in Afghanistan.” (“Denise,” Sept. 27, 2001)

At the same time, the letters from legislators were also taking on a less professional and more aggressive tone. Republican representative Martin “Bubs” Hohulin from Lamar did not see any reason to mince words:

“Add me to the list of legislators appalled by your memo and the arrogant reply you sent to Rep. Bartle. The bulk of funding for the University comes from the taxpayers, of which we are their representatives. I would suggest you come down from your ivory tower in the make believe world of academia and sample the real world. We have no obligation to fund your part of the University, or any part for that matter. I too will be in

contact with the Government Affairs office. They do not control your 'academic freedom', but with no money, you could be a little less free.” (Hohulin, Sept. 25, 2001).

Interestingly, not all mail received was negative:

“For what it’s worth, I agree with your policy of not allowing on-air news staff to display support for any cause, even patriotic. During this time of uncertainty, tragedy, and talk of war, everyone relies heavily on newscasters to present unbiased news coverage. I tune in to a station to get the facts and I don’t want to feel, even in the slightest way, as though these facts might be tainted by a strong sense of patriotism, loyalty to the U. S. government or President Bush.” (Bromley, Sept. 27, 2001)

But those exchanges were the exception, not the rule, and many viewers did follow through and speak to legislators about the issue. That was evident in the e-mails still coming from those legislators, mixed in with all the mail from the general public. Representative Carl Bearden, in response to a School of Journalism alumnus writing in support of the policy, invoked his constituency:

“I continue to maintain the decision is a bad one. Feedback from a number of my constituents who pay the taxes that support the University system confirm that view.

Decisions have consequences. Although it is not my intent to call for an investigation of the issue, if the result of the errant decision made by station management is that closer scrutiny is applied to University funding, so be it. It is neither blackmail nor is it unreasonable.” (Bearden, Sept. 27, 2001)

Not all the feedback sent to legislators opposed the KOMU policy. Some e-mail included copies of a few letters sent to legislators by either their constituents or members of the university or journalism communities. These letters called on legislators not to punish the school for proper ethical actions:

“Mr. Bartle, to call state funding into question because you disagree with an inner-office ethical decision made by a semi-private media institution is in direct conflict with the principle of freedom of the press. You called the

decision "censorship of journalists," yet I find the threat of press-coercion by the state a much more menacing possibility than a TV station that is missing a few red-white-and-blue ribbons.

Which brings us to Mr. Purgason's statement about the need for the state to review the policy: Do you really think that the state has any right to question the ethical judgments of a news station that is funded by private advertising, not the state? Would you suggest that the United States Congress review ABC for making the same policy decision? (Which the national network did after the terrorist attacks.) I would argue that in order for the press to maintain its roles as a governmental watchdog and public informant, it must be free from review by the state. The suggestion of state-review is decidedly against the press's First Amendment rights.” (Mueller, Sept. 28, 2001)

But the mail and calls were running about nine to one against the policy. It is easy to imagine the correspondence from constituents to legislators was running at an even higher negative ratio.

With that constituent support, legislators turned their attention toward the university administration to see what could be done there. This left the School of Journalism and Chancellor's office to begin drafting their own responses to the approaching criticism.

At the School of Journalism, that action came in the form of resolution of faculty support for KOMU and myself. The decision to pass the resolution was not an easy one. Some members of the faculty disagreed completely with the decision. Others found it to be the correct policy for commercial newsrooms, but worried about limiting the academic freedom of students in a teaching environment. But nearly all agreed the threat of political and budgetary sanctions was wrong. After one meeting and some e-mail balloting, the School's faculty passed this resolution on October 2:

“A recent editorial decision made at KOMU-TV that prohibited journalists from wearing red, white and blue ribbons during their reporting and on-air appearances has ignited an important public debate.

The action at KOMU was taken as an effort to preserve a fundamental principle of journalism – editorial independence. The faculty of the Missouri School of Journalism supports the action and supports the right of faculty editors to make policy decisions in our newsrooms.

Preserving editorial independence is essential. Journalists best serve the people of this country by reporting independently and neutrally. It is a principle almost universally shared among those in the nation’s press corps, and it is something the public should expect and demand.

Such a principle is relatively easy to uphold in most circumstances and in most news coverage. The events of Sept. 11, however, are unprecedented in the working careers of our faculty and most of the nation’s press corps. Not since Pearl Harbor has our nation been directly attacked, and not since the War of 1812 has our mainland been attacked by foreign forces.

As journalists and journalism educators, we have struggled since Sept. 11 with how best to uphold the fundamental principle of editorial independence in the face of an attack on our nation. We are a diverse group of people with the same range of feelings and the same degree of patriotism present in the community and nation.

Many journalism organizations have taken the course KOMU has taken – striving to maintain complete independence even in such trying times. Others have openly displayed their colors by displaying the American flag on television screens hour after hour.

History fails to help us resolve this dilemma. Some of American journalism’s most revered figures, including Edward R. Murrow and Ernie Pyle, were open advocates of the Allied cause during World War II. Others of that era merely reported independently on the events of the day.

This debate provides an excellent opportunity for all of us – faculty, students and members of the public – to debate the fundamental role of journalists when their nation is under attack. Accordingly, we call on our Dean to convene one or more public forums so the serious issues involved can be adequately and openly debated. Topics to be discussed should include:

- The value of journalistic independence.
- The role of journalists when their nation is under attack.
- The relationship between professional journalistic activity and citizenship.
- The role of journalists in creating a civil and ultimately peaceful political society.

We believe it is important for journalists and the public to engage in a discussion of the issue of editorial independence and its importance in a free society.

We believe it is important that students, particularly those who disagree with decisions made in our newsrooms, feel empowered to voice their views.

We also believe that our many international students, some of whom have expressed concerns about our coverage and our "Americanized" view of the current worldwide problem, need a forum in which to explore those issues.

Finally, we urge that the forum include an examination of the scholarship of our field, particularly a critical examination of media performance during times of war, media coverage of international issues, and media coverage of conflict and crisis.” (University of Missouri School of Journalism, 2001).

Meanwhile, across campus, the Office of the Chancellor had been drafting its own statement of position on the matter. The office had been flooded with calls, letters, and e-mails from politicians, alumni, and supporters of the university. Most of those contacting the chancellor were vehemently opposed to the policy. Faced with either pleasing important constituents or the possibility of compromising the reputation of its exemplary School of Journalism, the office issued a statement that tried to do neither. In part it said:

“During this time of national distress, the news director of KOMU-TV, the University's television station, asked members of the on-air news team to continue to observe station policy that bars the wearing of any special insignia during a news broadcast including red, white and blue ribbons. This policy has been in effect for many years and is a common practice in broadcast journalism throughout this country to assure editorial independence. The University administration and the station manager were unaware of the directive. The station news operation, which is separate from KOMU's business operations, is responsible to our School of Journalism, and is charged with teaching skills and knowledge for working journalists, which also includes training in journalism ethics. In this regard, the station is a teaching laboratory. Other national news operations, including those of major TV networks, have currently carried

out a similar policy of not permitting personal insignia to be worn on air. The journalism faculty has voiced its support of the action and the ‘rights of faculty editors to make policy decisions in their newsrooms’ and further stated ‘it is important for journalists and the public to engage in a discussion of the issue of editorial independence and its importance in a free society.’

The station's news policy, when made public, has resulted in a number of letters, emails and calls to the University protesting it. MU deeply regrets that this policy has caused offense to KOMU viewers and other citizens. This was an action taken in the TV news room to assure editorial independence that did not in any way reflect a policy of the University. We are proud to be a state university--proud to represent our state at the national level in so many ways, and even more proud to represent the United States of America in international circles.” (Wallace, 2001).

The chancellor’s statement did not end the conflict. Instead, it angered some on both sides. Legislators were unhappy the chancellor did not take a stronger stand to change the policy. Representative David Levin, a Republican from St. Louis County wrote to the University system president--the chancellor’s superior--and continued to threaten action:

“Apparently you're suggesting Mr. Woelfel and the University are not accountable to the taxpayers and their elected representatives. I will support efforts to hold the University and Mr. Woelfel accountable. Accountability includes consequence for actions.” (Levin, 2001)

Journalism alumni were also unhappy with the statement from the chancellor. Most felt the wording said little to support the KOMU policy or me personally. Many said they had wished for the chancellor to have issued a strongly worded message of support, rather than one designed to placate the larger constituencies of the university. A few took time to write the chancellor with their complaints. This letter was typical:

“The decision by KOMU's news director not to allow its folks to wear patriotic ribbons on air was both brave and laudable. I am deeply disappointed that you could not stand in support of that decision.

I understand that you are facing political pressure from politicians who found the policy objectionable, and that you need to stay in good graces

with those folks to keep the university financially sound. But you owe it to the journalists you are training to stand up for sound ethical policies when they are enacted and not bow to what is politically correct.

As Disney and other large corporations continue to buy up our news outlets and the line between journalism and entertainment continues to blur, I was very proud to see Mizzou take the hard stand on behalf of good old-fashioned ethics. I was a political reporter for a decade and as such gave up the right to attend political rallies for my chosen party or to put signs in my yard for any candidates. It's just part of the job. KOMU's reporters can wear ribbons off the air. They aren't being deprived of any rights of citizenship.” (Barnes, 2001).

The question of just what official position the university would take on the matter reached the highest levels on October 10. The university’s board of curators met by conference call to vote on a resolution concerning the use of patriotic symbols by university students and employees. The board is made up of nine members appointed by the governor of Missouri. No more than five can be from one political party. Several members of that board were very unhappy with the KOMU policy and had complained to the dean of journalism school and the chancellor for some time. Ultimately, the board passed this resolution:

“WHEREAS, the extraordinary events of September 11 have forever changed the United States of America and the international community; and

WHEREAS, the University of Missouri community is profoundly saddened by the loss of so many lives to acts of terrorism and has responded with spontaneous and heartwarming expressions of personal support for those who have suffered the loss of loved ones and friends; and

WHEREAS, the American people have united in their commitment to uphold the principles of individual freedom and justice for all; and

WHEREAS, the University of Missouri remains committed to the free and open expression of ideas, and to the preservation of individual liberty, academic freedom and freedom of the press; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Curators has received numerous communications indicating the need to clarify and articulate University policy with respect to the display of patriotic symbols during a time of national concern over acts of terrorism against the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri do not preclude individuals from displaying patriotic symbols that express individual support for the United States of America, nor does the Board of Curators see any necessity to make such a modification in the Collected Rules and Regulations:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Curators encourages administrators and supervisors to extend wide latitude to individuals in the University community who desire to display symbols of their sympathy for those directly affected by acts of terrorism, or who desire to express their patriotism and love of the United States of America in appropriate ways, consistent with concerns for health and safety in the work environment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Curators further encourages members of the University of Missouri community to demonstrate the utmost respect for members of all cultures, religions and nationalities in keeping with the University's commitment to tolerance and understanding of divergent viewpoints; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary to the Board of Curators cause this resolution to be spread upon the minutes of this meeting.” (Board of Curators, 2001)

The resolution had little effect ending the controversy. Some of the legislators saw it as a statement calling on the chancellor to fire me if I did not change the policy. But the spokesman for the curators said the board believed the resolution would have no effect on newsroom policy or the employment of the news director.

Legislators remained unhappy with the outcome of the curators' resolution. But their pressure subsided at that point, though angry e-mails from viewers and others around the country just hearing about the policy did not. The legislators would have another chance to address the subject. Their next full session in Jefferson City began in

January 2002, and as soon as budget matters were taken up, the attacks on me, KOMU, and the University of Missouri resumed. In April, in the midst of approving the \$400 million appropriation the university would receive in the upcoming fiscal year, the subject of KOMU's ribbon ban was discussed on the floors of the Missouri House and Senate. Members of both chambers recalled the events of the previous fall and pointed to newsroom actions and those of the university administration, calling both not worthy of funding. One legislator even went so far as to say—while in session on the House floor—that he would like to punch me in the nose. That prompted long-time capitol regulars to announce that I was only the second person in modern times to be threatened with physical violence from the floor of the general assembly. Adolph Hitler was the first.

The actions on the floor brought a new round of attention—local and national—on our policy and the furor it had created. Some were astonished by the actions underway in Jefferson City. This journalist from Nevada was typical:

“I read with horror this evening about the "punishment" Missouri legislators have leveled upon KOMU and the University of Missouri for what they consider an unpatriotic decision last fall. While I believe, personally, cases may be made for and against your policy (regarding the wearing of American flag pins by your staff), I find the actions of your state's legislature to be 100 percent outrageous. Unfortunately, it appears KOMU cannot effectively act as an independent voice of journalism, nor as a training ground for those studying our craft -- at least, not without the threat of retribution. The people of Missouri should be ashamed of their elected leaders.

I hope you will continue your best efforts, there or elsewhere, to objectively inform your viewers.” (Shelley, 2002)

But others—mainly local viewers just hearing about the policy for the first time as the budget battle played out in the local papers, renewed their complaints that it was the wrong action at the wrong time:

“Is it possible that Patriotism is not out of style and that the problem with your readers and viewers is the very fact that the horrendous threat to our nation seems to be buried in the politically correct mind of those who might be out of touch with what is most important to us, our freedom.

Is it possible that in retrospect, a policy made by one individual reflects poorly on the majority of those in the School of Journalism, yet no one has the courage to correct the error for fear of being accused of not supporting the School? Could some in the legislature be correct in referring to the attitude of the school as arrogant to a fault?” (Chase, 2002).

Speechmaking over, it became time for legislators to decide if they would actually cut funding over the policy. Representative Bubs Hohulin called for a \$5 million cut. Those writing the appropriations measures deemed that figure too high, but they allowed \$500 thousand figure to be added by amendment. That amendment received early approval and stayed a part of the appropriations legislation until the waning days of the session. As the statutory deadline approached to approve the budget, senators cut the budget reduction aimed at the KOMU policy to \$50 thousand. Many in the room decided the half-million dollar figure was too high and would hurt too many programs at the university. And all acknowledged the cuts would not affect KOMU at all, due to its self-supported status, and most likely would have no impact on the School of Journalism.

Chapter 1: In Search of the Source of Perceptions of Bias

The events of late 2001 and early 2002 in Columbia, Missouri showed the current tension present in American media. Missouri legislators called for patriotism and “proper” conduct from Missouri journalists. Those journalists, in return, fought for independence from government pressure to affect content and presentation. That independence was seen as necessary to ensure a perception among viewers that the news is unbiased in its presentation. The original fear in the newsroom was that the wearing of patriotic symbols would give the impression to viewers the journalists has taken a side—not a pro-American side—but the side of the administration in power. Legislators made the fight something more—a struggle for independence from government control.

The American people are caught in a struggle of their own. They find themselves in the middle of a war of words over which media outlets are biased, which are mouthpieces for government policy, which pander to special interest groups, and if any are left which tell the “true” story. That was the landscape for viewers as the American media began the 21st Century. In 1985, 45% of Americans polled said the media were biased in some way. By summer of 2001, that number had risen to 59% (Kohut, 2001, p. 14).

The eight-month dispute in Missouri over the proper role patriotic symbols do—or do not—play on newscasts reveals a dispute that has been going on for much longer. Clearly, there is little agreement among politicians, the public, or even journalists regarding the impact and propriety of allowing symbols on air. All of the politicians who wrote opposed to the KOMU policy were Republicans. Does that make the display of

patriotism in the form of a personal adornment a conservative trait? If so, then it would be wrong for neutral journalists to wear such adornments. Among viewers, many who opposed the policy mentioned support for President George W. Bush, while many of those who supported the policy mentioned a distrust of the current administration. Does that indicate a perception of bias among viewers watching newscast that carry such symbols?

Along with the visual symbols, words are the basis of journalism—even on television. Just how the symbols, the pictures, the video, and the words fit together to tell the stories the consumers of journalism receive is at the heart of this research. The goal is to test possible causes for perceptions of media bias in viewers related to visual imagery and symbolism they see, related to the words they hear at the same time. It will probe the triggers necessary for viewers to perceive a presentation as biased, as well as what threshold those cues must cross to be noticed. And it will test those proposed cues across a range of issues, from consensual to divisive.

Dissertation Outline

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 surveys the development of the American media system from partisanship to independence, with an examination of the rise of impartial and unbiased reporting. The chapter chronicles the emergence of the American press from the British traditions, beginning with colonial times. From the development in America of a partisan press to the popular penny press, the evolution of the wants and needs of the consumers of American journalism began to shape what would become the worldwide standard of independent and impartial reporting in the last century.

Inexorably tied to the need for commercial appeal, this development of a sometimes sensational, sometimes controversial, and always-profitable media system is the root from which current journalist performance grows, and current satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with media standards exists. As the ability to measure audience wants and needs grew more specific in that century, so too grew the theories designed to explain media use and effect. Those theories made it possible to more easily understand the role media played in distributing policy and other governmental information to the people. With that understanding of the power of journalism came the first notions of bias. Before that time, the partisan nature of the press made bias impossible. Only with an impartial press was bias possible. The emergence of a perception of bias by media practitioners gives rise to the necessity for this current research. This chapter sets up the foundation for the need to understand the minute sources of perceptions of bias and how they have evolved into this century.

Chapter 3 helps develop the foundation for this research further by making the connection between media and politics by exploring the past century of literature on that relationship. The chapter begins with a review of the early recognition of effects media had on their audiences and how early research sought to explore the connections between media message and consumer behavior. While this early research centered on motion pictures and propaganda films, researchers eventually turned toward printed and broadcast news as a primary source for media effects on consumers. As researchers developed stronger theories for how media consumers use what they read, hear, and see to make political decisions, the potential effects of perceived bias in that presentation became more important. The chapter explores the most powerful of media effects in the

area of politics and public policy—agenda setting. Through a thorough examination of what is known about the ability of the media to tell people what to think about, the potential effects of perceived bias in story selection is explored. Additionally, an examination of the role of the media as the framers of debate shows the important role journalists can have not only in setting the public agenda, but shaping the way in which the important agenda items are viewed and discussed. This framing power, too, is subject to perceptions of bias by audience members. Closely related, the powers of the media to prime an audience to associate and remember important messages in groups, and to foster learning in audience members, give journalists that much more of a chance to introduce perceived bias in their messages. The chapter concludes with an examination of the literature of media effects on political behavior, where any perceived bias might have its ultimate effect on the political process.

Chapter 4 reviews the existing knowledge of the political beliefs and partisan interests of members of the news media. Delving into journalists' personal political beliefs is a surprisingly new pursuit. From the first large scale polling effort in 1976 through the most recent surveys of the mainstream press, the chapter examines the aggregate political makeup of the media and how it compares with the general public and elites in other occupations. Defining the political views of journalists is a first step to understanding the perceptions of bias seen by news consumers. The next step is exploring the evidence of actual—not perceived—bias in news product. The chapter reviews the major arguments for and against a liberal bias in American media, right up to the most recent studies of coverage during the current Bush administration. An examination of the effects of corporate ownership on media independence and a possible

conservative bias leads the chapter to the need to explore the rise of professional standards in media to attempt to stave off perceptions of bias and lack of independence. This last section of the chapter involves a review of the practices journalists employ to put forth an appearance of impartiality and unbiasedness in their coverage. The last section of the chapter ties those practices to basis of the ribbon debate—whether news consumers can perceive bias through certain actions of journalists, even where it does not exist.

Moving from the literature review of media bias and effects, Chapter 5 begins to establish the basis for the research asked in this set of experiments. The chapter describes the general population of central Missouri and how its demographic breakdown compares to a cross-section of the rest of the state and the nation. Missouri is often described as a state with an east and west coast (St. Louis and Kansas City), a rural middle, and, most importantly, a cross section of the political makeup of the nation. Boone County is often seen as a smaller counterpart to the entire state, with a sampling of the political spectrum of the state and of the country spread between its cities, towns, and rural areas. The chapter describes the demographic and electoral patterns of the county as a basis for its representativeness for this research. The chapter also explores the comparison of news consumers in Boone County to the habits of the rest of the nation. This comparison shows the relative media use of the potential subjects in the research and how their dependence on television news makes them good subjects for a study that centers on the perceived bias of local television news coverage of political and controversial matters. With subjects selected for the research, the chapter is able to compare their base demographic and ideological dimensions with the general population, giving a baseline of

prior beliefs before experimental exposure. Finally, the chapter develops a media trust index with which to compare the views of the subjects on the media to national survey data. This instrument is crucial to the cross-comparison of data from numerous national studies with varying question formats and scales of comparison. The media trust index (and its component parts—media fairness index, media accuracy index, and media balance index) will also serve as the primary unit of comparison across all experiments in the study. It serves as the common language by which all results in this work can be studied, and through which future research can be conducted.

As the research begins with the question of how symbols are perceived in the journalism context, Chapter 6 begins with a review of the research into symbols and how meaning is transmitted from sender to receiver. The focus is on both political and non-political symbols, with an emphasis on the intended message the receiver perceives, along with any noise that can alter or block that signal entirely. Turning to the use of symbols in political communication, the chapter first describes specific research into how the political communicator uses symbols. Then the focus turns to the mediated use of symbols and the role the transmission media play in delivering an altered message to the receiver. The use of the “story” as a symbol carrier becomes the main focus, leading up to the approach of the study. In that approach, the use of patriotism, abortion, and same sex marriage scenarios is supported with details on the currency and relevance of those subjects. An experimental design is described which involves the production of false “news breaks” that will allow the introduction of biasing political symbols into the news presentation, as well as the use of biasing language to increase the chance for a measurable experimental outcome. A measurement system involving a dozen

experimental groups and more than 200 subjects is described to show the scope and breadth of the experimentation. The chapter concludes with ten hypotheses to be tested, each connected to the original research questions and the literature supporting them.

Review of the experimental data begins in Chapter 7. Building from the professional norms of journalism, the chapter sets up the views of the media and their biases as seen by the experimental subjects prior to their exposure to the videotaped presentation. The subjects' views are compared to the broadly held views of the general public in the three defining areas of the study—fairness, accuracy, and balance. While the national polls show an erosion of trust in the media to deliver the news in an unbiased fashion, the local subjects are not as harsh as the nation. That is not to say the local subjects do not have a negative view of the media. The chapter outlines that view and the possible reasons for its negative status. Delving further into the causes of the perceptions of the media, the chapter explores any differences in the subjects based on ideology, as well as demographic differences in the subjects.

Evaluations of the post-experimental data begin with Chapter 8. The chapter focuses on the main hypotheses of the experiment—that subject perceptions of media bias will vary according to the level of symbolic and verbal bias introduced by experimental exposure. The subjects are described according to their distribution across experimental groups, and the results of the post-experimental perceptions of local media and national media bias are compared using the media trust index. The posttest perceptions are then compared to the pretest perceptions in order to determine the effects of the exposure to varying levels of bias. Those changes are compared across the three perception parameters—fairness, accuracy, and balance—with a separate analysis of

each. Finally, the chapter examines the apparent positivity effect that surrounds local television news and its newscasters and the effects it may have on the experimental outcome.

In much the same way Chapter 8 examines the effects of the experiments based on the degree of bias seen by the subjects, Chapter 9 examines the effects based on the issue seen by the subjects. The issues—patriotism, same sex marriage, and abortion are compared to each other through the pretest and posttest measurements of subject evaluations. Subjects' responses are once again compared for changes in perceptions of fairness, accuracy, and balance for each of the issues used in the experiments. This approach to evaluating the outcome of the experiments is necessary to try to explain as fully as possible to effects of the manipulation of the independent variables on the dependent variables. Looking only at the levels of bias for all groups defined cannot show the differences issues play in the receptions and evaluation of media messages, just as an evaluation of issues would not have given a complete picture. The chapter concludes with some conjecture as to the possibility of issue “fatigue” occurring at the time of the experiments with the subjects. That evaluation, along with the results of the issue comparisons, gives readers a clearer picture of all possible issue effects on the local audience.

The penultimate chapter moves beyond the degrees of bias and issues covered to examine the makeup of the subjects and how, after all exposures, that makeup could be responsible for the changes in attitude seen in some of the experimental outcomes. Chapter 10 concentrates on two apparently meaningful variables in the subjects—their ideology and their life experience. By once again analyzing the pretest and posttest

results with the filter of these ideological and demographic factors, it is possible for the experiment to begin to reveal some of the inertia of public opinion about their media sources and just how much force it takes to change that inertia and send consumer opinion down a different path. The chapter takes the earlier evaluation of the experimental results and divides the subjects differently to explore whether those in the middle could be the most affected by biases in news presentation. That analysis is repeated for both the ideological and experiential differences in the subjects.

Finally, Chapter 11 concludes the research by taking the findings and comparing them with the common journalistic practices in use today. The chapter gives guidance to journalists and readers concerning the impact of their words and images on the perceptions of local audience members regarding fairness, accuracy, and balance in newscasts.

Chapter 2: The Roles and Effects of Media in Politics

Was the furor over the lack of patriotic pins on the air of a small, local television station worth nationwide attention and all the threats and stubbornness? If the answer is yes, then the reason for the importance of this single, symbolic act must lie at the intersection of media and politics. For journalists to risk their livelihood to stand for their side showed a very strong conviction that the absence of the symbols was essential for political balance in their stories. And for politicians to respond with such passion showed an equally strong belief that patriotism is a universal good that cannot taint journalism with its display. The difference between the sides is their understanding of roles the media have to serve the public, and the effects media have carrying out those roles.

To state that media have effects on their various audiences is to state the obvious. The mass media came into being to inform, entertain, incite, enlighten, and imbue knowledge in the mass publics they addressed. From a time of infancy as the nation itself was being born, American media developed slowly and steadily as both an economic force and a tool for informing voters, shaping opinion, and setting the public agenda. After an adolescence that flirted with partisanship and prurience, media moved into adulthood at the dawn of the Twentieth Century. The ideal for the modern journalist was an impartial observer, nonpartisan, ethical, with the goal to perfectly inform the electorate of this complex democracy. But ideals can be hard to reach, and American journalism was no different. Media had its effects, though not always expected or desired. The origin of these effects—particularly those that cannot always be predicted, as with the

patriotic ribbons—bear witness to the changing perceptions of the audience members regarding the media they consume.

American Press Emerges from the British Model

The American experience of media was born of the British model that boasted more press freedom than ever seen before, but that still relied on monarchical control of the press that resulted in far more slant than what we would think of as press bias today (Aspinall, 1949, p. 33). The ruling king in England decreed that printing presses in the colonies would operate only with the consent of the ruling local governor (Martin, 2001, p. 36). Clearly the concern of the monarch was to control information critical of his reign, making sure it had no effect on readers to build doubt in his power to rule. In an early attempt to fight the built-in bias with an attempt at fairness, some publishers sought to abide by this rule, while also giving equal play to the various sides of any issue. An early printer himself, Benjamin Franklin summed up this approach to minimize effect in 1731:

[Printers are] educated in the belief that when men differ in opinion, both sides ought equally to have the advantage of being heard by the public; and that when truth and error have fair play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter. Hence they cheerfully serve all contending writers that pay them well, without regarding on which side they are of the question in dispute (Van Doren, 1941, p. 100).

Franklin's writes of the need for printers to uphold the responsibility of giving the public a full view of the issues it faces. Though perhaps more than Franklin was asserting at the time, the notion of complete information through the printed press can be seen as the foundation for the impartial press that would come later. But the colonial Americans would not live under the king's limits or Franklin's philosophy for long, soon seeking out ways to publish documents designed to incite colonists to reject the king's

rule and rise up to form an independent state. In the years following the victory of the British in the French and Indian War, colonists saw unjust taxation by the British to pay for the war as a means to bring about revolution. The colonial mass media, in the form of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and broadsides, worked to stir a passion in the early Americans that would help foment a revolt against British rule.

But that ability to print freely and bring about change did not happen naturally under British rule. The colonial courts had to first rule on the ability of publishers to print items critical of those in power. The landmark case that set those rights into case law involved *New York Weekly Journal* editor John Peter Zenger and his articles attacking New York Governor William Cosby. Zenger was jailed for criminal libel, but his trial brought a new standard to libel prosecution in both Britain and the colonies. Zenger's lawyer argued that the standard for guilt in a libel case should not be whether the defendant had published the critical material, but whether the material was true (Stempel, 2003, p. 2). Zenger's acquittal on the defense of truth set the standard that would allow early American journalists to begin seeing real effects with their writings.

An example of some of this early effect-seeking media would be Samuel Adams' *Journal of Occurrences*. Adams began the first news service with this journal, offering newspapers around the colonies a running diary of the deeds of British soldiers based in Boston. The listing of events was written in such a manner that American outrage could be its only effect (Streitmatter, 1997, pp. 7-9). Revolutionary publishing continued with the intent of driving readers to support the cause and drive the British from American shores. It should not appear that all printed matter of the day supported the revolution. Some in fact was printed by loyalists to the crown. But the newspapers found they had

the most readers when printing those accounts that called for revolt, not loyalty (Davis, 1992, pp. 47-8).

Following the war, the press found its new role as affecting change and supporting democracy to be one with which it was very comfortable. Editors and publishers saw themselves as the architects of the revolution and the protectors of the new democracy (Dooley, 1997, p. 62). Early American journalists saw themselves surpassing historians in the role of bringing about the noble effect of democracy and a new constitution, and even a worldwide rebirth of freedom:

Newspapers, originally, fanned that favored flame of Liberty, which first was kindled on the Columbian Altar, and from thence with unexampled rapidity has spread to the furthest bourne of Europe, illuminating the universe of Man in its progress, and giving freedom to myriads of lives (*Massachusetts Mercury*, 1793, p. 1).

The arguments for the formation of the new constitution and its government were once again, as in revolutionary times, argued on the pages of widely distributed publications. Newspapers played their role once again, publishing the strongest arguments in favor of the new constitution with Hamilton, Madison, and Jay's Federalist Papers. The strength of these arguments for the document came, in large part, from the strength of the newspapers that carried the essays. Pro-Federalist editors outnumbered their Anti-Federalist counterparts, and that gap grew as subscriptions to the Anti-Federalist publications dropped (Dooley, 1997, p. 49). Clearly, the press has its effect on the formation of the constitutional government we now have.

Despite the high ideals at stake in the debate over the form of the constitution, and the following years of editorial strife over how the government was operating, the language and approach used to gain effect with the readers was often far from the high

ground. Terms like “adulterer,” “traitor,” “vile,” and “dregs of society” were used regularly to refer to the people whom revere as the founding fathers today (Sloan, 1988, pp. 100-2). The use of these terms—ones that would appear far too severe today—came about because of the ongoing passion journalists and citizens felt for the issues of the day. Newspapers found themselves with the need to be strongly on one side of the major issues of the day, and not playing it down the center as Franklin had suggested seventy years earlier. For the common American, freedom in the press had come to mean, by the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, that those newspapers which agree with my point of view should be free to print anything they like, while those who support opposing views should be kept from publishing (Sloan, 1987, p. 84). It is a belief that will color the next few decades of journalism in America, and come back in strength some two hundred years hence.

The Rise of the Penny Press and Reader Appeal

In the Nineteenth Century, the elite and expensive newspapers of the revolutionary era, the newspapers that, through their partisan messages, had affected the political beliefs and voting behavior of many colonial citizens would find that the growing American population was becoming more literate and developing an appetite for a different sort of press. The traditional newspapers that had seen American through its colonial times and into the new constitutional era were expensive. Many cost five or six cents, and were clearly aimed at a moneyed elite that could afford such an extravagance (Mindich, 1998, pp. 16-7). As the population grew, readers wanted more than partisan political accounts. Crime news pushed political news from the front pages of the new

newspapers spring up in most major cities. They cost only a penny, far cheaper than their Eighteenth Century forbearers. This new “Penny Press” was able to capture the passion of the audience with more than just politics. In fact, they would not announce their own partisanship, often claiming to have none (Mindich, 1998, pp. 17-8). These claims came at a time when partisanship of the emerging middle class was powerful. Party identification came to be a very important factor for the political socialization of the newly enfranchised voters. So the penny press and its move from consistently-announced partisanship should not be seen as a depoliticizing of American. Instead, it can be seen as a real commercialization of journalism and a move toward mass marketing (Schudson, 1990, p. 69). That move will also help set up another era of mass effects.

Each successive presidential administration was working to hold onto newspaper support by issuing large government printing contracts to newspapers whose editors and publishers supported the president and his policies (Smith, 1977, pp. 56-60). This helped hold many papers to some sort of political tie. By the end of the Civil War, independent papers still numbered in the vast minority, often making up fewer than a fourth of all papers published in a state (Rutenbeck, 1993, pp. 41-2). More common was a newspaper that would switch allegiances to sway with the sentiments of voters—and newspaper buyers. In the highly competitive New York newspaper market, papers like the *World* would favor the candidate who seemed most favored by potential readers. The paper’s editor, Manton Marble, bought the publication, switched its editorial view from Republican to Democrat, but then announced the paper’s position was in the middle, and that he would be hiring a Republican to replace himself as editor (Rutenbeck, 1993, pp. 47-8).

Early Stirrings of an Impartial Press

Though the Nineteenth Century press was still very partisan, there were early signs here and there that the game of playing politics to garner readers would eventually end for the American journalist. A new word, “objectivity,” would find its way into the printer’s lexicon. As early as Civil War times, journalists began to develop rules about how they would go about their reporting (Payne, 1940, 251). By 1876, an early newspaper publishers’ association in Missouri, the Missouri Press Association, had written four rules its editors should follow, somewhat reminiscent of Franklin’s call for impartiality:

First: Allow no temptation to secure your consent to the publication of articles long or short, in prose or poetry, original or selected, which are demoralizing in their character....
Second: ...Give the substance. Omit the useless details....
Third: ...As preliminary to profitable writing, and as a preparation for it, much reading and study is essential. Much brain-work, and often exhaustive research and more exhaustive thought, all unknown and quite frequently unappreciated by those who read newspapers....
Fourth, and lastly: We are just entering upon the Centennial Presidential campaign...Great and singular perils and strong temptations to bitter words and partisan excesses, will environ the press. Let us illustrate a royal virtue by resisting them...while we are sometimes partisans we are always patriots—above all, that we are not only editors, we are gentleman (Banning, 1999, pp. 23-4).

Later, in the early part of the next century, national journalism organizations like the Sigma Delta Chi and the American Society of Newspaper Editors would follow suit, calling specifically for truth and objectivity in their codes of ethics (Banning, 1999, p. 25). But these came after a period of sensational journalism that highlighted the end of the Nineteenth Century. This “yellow journalism” period was more about luring readers with lurid reports than any of the four ideals cited in the Missouri Press Association code.

Not only were the most pandering stories developed for print, but reporters were regularly known to change facts in their stories to make them stronger, or even add fictional characters and quotes to purportedly factual stories, all for the sake of selling more newspapers (Ferre', 1988, pp. 193-4). This yellow approach did have audience effect—a continuation of the partisan press period. Critics of the day feared the sordid crime reports would actually turn young people to a life of crime, and backed the statement with statistics showing a rising delinquency rate among juveniles (*New York Times*, 1897, p. 3). More serious analysis did indeed postulate media effects on readers of the day. It was feared readers would become desensitized to crime, and those with criminal tendencies would be given a road map to criminal activity they could have never conceived on their own, along with a printed push to go commit those crimes (Ferre', 1988, p. 197).

But perhaps the reporter's own desensitization to the stories unfolding before him, along with a growing lack of respect for authority, led to the development of late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century journalists with a skeptical view of life in general, and a specific skepticism aimed at those in power—regardless of party. Buoyed by success with garnering readers through sensational accounts of war and crime, the reporters went after politicians with the same glee. That brought about a feeling of real independence amongst journalists, and the eventual birth of an era of public service in journalism. This approach served not only to protect journalists from the wrath of those in power they covered, but to also help deflect any criticism from readers who would question the excesses of the press in covering stories (Kaplan, 2002, p. 167).

So as the Twentieth Century progressed, the partisan press of the past remained often only on the mastheads of newspapers like the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, and in the opinion pages where editorials still took partisan positions. The news pages began to fill with journalism focused not on partisanship to build a nation or line the pockets of a wealthy owner, but on a new objectivity bent on ushering in an air of civic responsibility from which publishing profits could still be made. This was the first time it became important to reporters and editors to minimize bias in stories and try to find an impartial middle from which to report. The idea changed the very structure and practices of daily journalism. News agendas were no longer based on what those in power wanted covered. Even the structure of the story changed to highlight the “news” at the top, then go on to relate details (Kaplan, 2002, p. 192). The change forced political leaders and policy makers to change their approaches in courting and cajoling the press. As more and more people moved into the “profession” of journalism, the need for a coordinated approach to address reporter questions grew. Even presidents worked to try to come up with a plan to meet the growing news demand. Woodrow Wilson finally succeeded in centralizing much of the information coming from his White House through the use of the Committee on Public Information, the nation’s first official press relations bureau (Ponder, 1994, p. 265).

With the century underway, and a new, more independent press covering those in political power, the modern structure of mass media was in place. A biased approach was no longer acceptable in most newsrooms. Media effects had changed through the years, leading to the point where a strong media, at work for its readers, listeners, and

viewers, had become the people's eyes and ears in every room where politics was played out.

The Birth of a Scientific Approach to Communication and Media Theory

The maturation of media into a search for an unbiased approach that satisfied all readers coincided with the rising prominence of scientific inquiry into the sociology and other studies of how human beings associate and interact. The study of communication strived to find theories that would explain how the sender of information transmitted his data, how the receiver perceived that data once received, and what paths the data traveled to get between both parties. This research would allow scholars to understand structural bias in the transmission of communication, as well as perceived bias in the reception of that information by its intended and unintended receivers.

One of the earliest conceptualizations of that process came from sociologist Harold Lasswell. Lasswell (1948) described a simple model of communication as thus:

Who
Says What
In Which Channel
To Whom
With What Effect?

This model in question form captures the essential elements of communication theory as it analyzes the interaction of actors transmitting data. "Who" asks for a definition of the actor transmitting the data. The content of that data is important as well, so "Says What" defines it in the context of the message. Lasswell wanted to be sure the model captured the notion that there is more than one route for the message to take between sender and receiver, so "In Which Channel" places that variable into the verbal

equation. A receiver is equally important to have as a sender, if real communication is to take place, and “To Whom” acknowledges that idea. Finally, most communication research, and particularly that which examines political communication, focuses on the effect of that communication. The final fragment of the sentence applies that focus.

But applied to the search for bias in media communication, Lasswell’s model cannot tell the sender—journalists—if their messages are being perceived as being biased. Lasswell lacks a specific pathway for feedback to the sender from the receiver, short of just reversing the model. But at about the same time Lasswell introduced his model, Wiener introduced the concept of cybernetics with its intrinsic feedback mechanism. Wiener (1948) was a mathematician who strove to model how human beings and animals interact with their each other and their surroundings—including communication. Wiener saw all parties involved in communication as objects which interact through continuous loops of information, feeding back changing elements of that communication. This notion of a stream of information, two-way (or more), that continuously travels between actors and affects their actions can be applied to a theory of political communication in which political actors use the mass media as their information transmission path, or “channel” in Lasswell’s terminology, as well as another path from which they can receive feedback information from members of the public. In this model, the introduction of bias by the transmission path, the mass media, would have an effect on the message received by the public, and also affect the feedback information going back to the political actors.

Shannon and Weaver (1949) took a more complex view than the two previous models. An information source produces a message. That message goes to a transmitter,

which then send the message (or “signal”) along a “channel” toward a receiver. Along the way, noise is introduced that can alter or block the message. Finally, the signal reaches the receiver and arrives at its destination. The important contribution to the theory here is the way the system deals with noise. The authors suggest that the sender uses redundancy to make sure any part of the message altered or blocked by noise still reaches the receiver. In terms of the research of this study, that noise could consist of any political bias introduced by journalists in their mediation of the message as it is transmitted to the audience. The application of this notion of repeated messages, along with Lasswell’s concept of multiple channels, depicts a modern political communication system where bias and incomplete reporting appear as noise, and the use of differing media and approaches to messages accounts for the redundancy and multiple channels in the approach. Consider the political campaign using this model. The information source is the candidate. He transmits, through public announcement, a policy position. That signal is carried by the news media—print and broadcast—with each acting as a different channel. The noise sources along that transmission paths are the biases of the writers and reporters, their competence as journalists, the editorial policies of the various media organizations, misprints and mispronunciations, and many other possible errors in transmission. The receivers—voters—have redundant pathways through which they can receive the candidate’s signal. They process the differing messages received, and pass them on to the destination—their cognitive decision for choosing for whom to vote.

Models of Interpersonal Human Communications

Despite what seems like a good fit for political communication with this information theory model, there are those who argue that the work of Shannon and Weaver cannot be applied to direct human communication. Newcomb (1953) centers on personal communication and the attitudes senders and receivers have toward each other and the object at the center of the communication. The model incorporates the esteem the senders and receivers have toward each other and the strength that esteem adds to the messages sent between A and B. Put into practice when communication about an idea or object takes place, Newcomb sees the communication flowing more easily between actors who find themselves in mutual esteem. This has implications in the examination of political communication, both when those in power and the public share that mutual esteem, as well as when the media and their audiences do. If an audience sees a political leader improperly due to a bias in the media transmission of the leader's messages, the audience may lose esteem for that political leader. For Newcomb's model to work properly, it is the responsibility of the media to transmit messages without bias.

Working from Newcomb's model, Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr. (1957) devised an interactive system of communication that directly introduces the effects of news media as a participant in the exchange of messages. Far more complex than Newcomb's model, Westley and MacLean allow for infinite objects to be transmitted to a receiver. The objects can be events, ideas, or even people. A communicator has access to those same objects and can transmit them to the receiver after making alterations. But the receiver may employ an intermediary who intercepts objects and retransmits those objects to the receiver, altering them as well. That

intermediary represents the mass media acting to filter news (objects) that it can then retransmit to an audience (the receiver). An important feedback loop exists between the audience and the media in this model, as well as between the audience and the creators of the objects—newsmakers. The model describes the role of the intermediary as being a nonpurposeful intervener in the transmission of the objects to the receiver. This mirrors the goal of objectivity in the media. They intend to filter and pass messages without adding any personal bias or changing the objects to some personal end. But can the media be successful in being nonpurposeful in their transmissions? The model does account for those times when they, intentionally or unintentionally, are not. Because it allows receivers to send feedback to the intermediaries regarding the objects they are receiving. Furthermore, the model allows receivers to stop employing those intermediaries that do not continue to fulfill the receiver's needs. One weakness in this model, when applied to media, is whether the feedback loop is really as robust as the model suggests. Critics like Barron (1973) argue the media are resistant to meaningful access for feedback, and shut out most messages they receive from the audience (Barron 1973, p. 304). This view is consistent with the ongoing insistence from media that their messages are not biased, despite many studies that show the bias exists.

Osgood (1954) also modeled communication between individuals with a shorter route than previous theory. The source and transmitter are one in the same to Osgood, as are the receiver and the destination. This model differs greatly from the information theory model because the message contains meaning, rather than just raw data. Osgood's notion that the sender can change the message is important for any examination of bias—intended or unintended. It speaks directly to the newscaster effect central to this research:

When individual A talks to individual B, for example, his postures, gestures, facial expressions and even manipulations with objects (e.g. laying down a playing card, pushing a bowl of food within reach) may all be part of the message, as of course are events in the sound wave channel (Osgood 1954, p. 2).

This model is crucial in supporting any claim that the message itself contains the biases visually or aurally introduced by the message sender—the newscaster or journalist.

Additional models from about the same period further refine the flow of information between sender and receiver. Schramm (1954) introduced the “field of experience” each party has in common with the other is the place at which the signal transmission takes place. Within this shared experiential space, the sender can transmit a message that the receiver can fully comprehend. Applied to political communication, that concept supports the “humanization” of the candidate with a myriad of shared experiences with the common person. The visual of a photo opportunity are a way to place that political actor into a familiar shared space with the voter—a factory, a ball game, a hospital.

The Role of the Journalist—Independent or Power Broker?

As broadcasting—and particularly television—emerged as a power media force in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, media theorists also emerged with competing theories of how the print and broadcast media affect audiences and the workings of government and politics. Theories multiplied as quickly as satellite television channels, leaving a well-examined, if somewhat cluttered field of study for anyone trying to determine the roles media play in society and how those roles affect their audiences.

Some see media as pawns of the state system in which they were operated, while others see them as more independent entities that independently help support the host system.

An early and important work on the role of media postulated “four theories of the press” defining the role the media play in linking the public to those in power. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1963) defined all media interactions with society and government as either authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility bearing or Soviet-Communist in nature. Under the authoritarian model, the media are controlled by the government and used as tools to carry out government policy and gather the support of the populace for those policies. Media ownership may be public or private, but the right to publish comes from a governmental decree. Control comes through the use of licensing of journalists and publishers, governmental permits, and sometimes censorship. No one is allowed to criticize the governmental structure or those in power. In contrast, the libertarian model permits criticism of the rulers, and opens that opportunity to any private interest financially capable of publishing. Here the role of the media is to discover truth and place a check on governmental power. Only blatant defamation and obscenity are banned. For a still freer media, Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm described a social responsibility model. Under this system, the media are open to anyone with something to write or say. Ownership is usually private, though government will run some media in the public interest. The mission for media is to inform and raise the level of debate on important topics. The only limits placed on media forbid serious invasions of privacy. This form of media is found in Twentieth Century America at the center of this research. The final form of media is the Soviet-Communist form. The media here have a clear governmental role. Ownership is public, with media run by government officials

themselves. The media exist to keep leaders in power, and any criticism of those leaders or their policies is strictly forbidden (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1963).

If the social responsibility model is to represent the modern media experience in this United States, then it is necessary to see how bias would alter the operation of its ideal type. Providing information and raising the level of debate are noble causes, but too general as statements of purpose or effect. Information is only as valuable as its quality, accuracy, and timeliness. All media could be said to provide information. The question to examine here is whether the social responsibility model, with its lack of external controls, leaves no one able to determine if the information provided is accurate, unbiased, and indeed able to raise the level of debate. Again, debate may arise over any sort of information. But for democratic machinery to operate properly, it must be lubricated by messages that are distributed free from bias and slant. The social responsibility model does not account for the introduction of impure information nor a way for citizens to reject what they find to be unfair and biased.

Merrill (1974) addressed the possibility of a biased press by depicting the range of media systems from authoritarian to libertarian to be much more of a continuum than a dichotomy. He saw press systems as being able to be pushed more toward one side or the other by governmental and popular pressures. Those pressures can come externally, through government censorship and control. But they can also arise internally, through the improper editorial policies that allow personal biases to make their way into the messages transmitted. Ultimately, Merrill fears the American system is sliding downward toward more control and less freedom for the press (Merrill, 1974).

Following Merrill and Gurevitch (1982), Altschull (1984) returns to the four theories approach, as well as Merrill's models, ignore the reality of media members as agents of power. Altschull finds the earlier theorists too concerned with East-West conflict and threats, and blind to the evidence that no media, under any system, can ever be free. Instead, he argues, there are three competing models of media as agents of economic, political, and social power. Altschull suggests a market/capital model, a Marxist/socialist model, and an advancing/developing model. Market model media work to support capitalist doctrine through informing the public, keeping a watch on government, and seeking truth. The market media are free from outside control and work toward objectivity and serving the public right to know. But in the Marxist model of media, the press works to educate workers and help form a class consciousness. The press is free to an extent, but controls exist to be sure that free press takes the proper form and approach. This model works as an agent for power by supporting state desires to indoctrinate the public to its way of thinking and to demand support for the policies in place. Finally, the developing model sees media as a governmental partner seeking beneficial change and peaceful existence. The media are free, but subservient to the needs to keep the nation vital and strong. To that end, a national level press policy guides the activities of the media. Ultimately, Altschull sees similarities across the three systems. As agents of those in power, the media always mirror the views of the powerful. Even though each system claims press freedoms, those freedoms are narrowly defined in the context of the society and its powerful actors. Keane (1992) agrees, citing five types of control exercised in all political systems—including democracy—in order to maintain media as a tool to serve the powerful in times of crisis: emergency powers of censorship,

secrecy of armed forces, lying, state propaganda through advertising, and indirect control through corporate ties (Keane 1992, p. 17-22). And in all these models and systems, media claim to serve their audiences, though they really serve those in power (Altschull, 1984).

But what Altschull and Keane fail to incorporate in their views is that the media are often agents of power in their own right—perhaps unintentionally—yet still agents who wield power to alter messages and change information. Critics of media bias point to the persistent biases they see in media presentations and the uniformity with which those biases are found across many media outlets. Those critics argue the media has the power to alter messages from those in power or those seeking power, which lessens the leaders' power and adds to control by the media. Kellner (1981) argues the capitalist theory as it stands cannot account for the contributions modern media, and particularly television, make to the demise of capitalism. News programs show disintegration of economic interests around the world. Kellner suggests television causes confusion in the mind of viewers over which economic and political systems actually work (Kellner 1981). And with the fragmentation of the television audience at the end of the Twentieth Century, the power of television to support one political system seems even less potent. Still the connections between the ruling elites and media elites seem to be supported by strong evidence. Gans (1979) found newsroom leaders often supportive of the status quo and the governmental/press system in place. But the findings did not show an economic self-interest among newsroom elites. Instead, Gans found an overall acceptance of the existing system and a desire to improve it as a whole (Gans 1979b). Earlier that same year, Gans suggested journalists shared eight “enduring values” which helped give the

American media its push toward supporting the status quo capitalist system. Gans identified those values as: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, order, and leadership (Gans 1979). The parallels between these values and those most would consider to be the core of the American capitalistic/democratic model are striking. More importantly perhaps, a closer examination of the shared values of journalists would go beyond Gans' values and include many that would be seen as core liberal values. If Gans argument that shared values of journalists help support the status quo through story framing that supports those values, then it must be considered that shared liberal values would add a similar dose of liberal values to news framing. Dreier (1982) showed the value of responsible capitalism to be very strongly correlated within both sets of organizations (Dreier 1982). Koch (1990) argued that the media are an instrument of those in power and daily show that the wrongs of society are rare and unique, and always found out by those in charge. Governmental actors use the media to build and reinforce legitimacy with the electorate. Koch considers unbiased, objective news to be a myth through which the audience is made to believe those in power are responsive, responsible, and resolute in their actions.

American Press Freedoms and the Cause of Bias

The particular case of “free” media in western democracies deserves closer examination. Today, we see this freedom as one of the founding values of American democracy. And in those founding times, the virtue of a free press was expounded upon as if the notion came from heaven. Consider the works of Tunis Wortman, writing in support of this cause in 1800:

Who, alas! is aware in how eminent a degree the vices and crimes of the multitude, are attributable to the abuses and corruption of political institution? Shall it then be said, that the ages which are to come, must derive no friendly lesson from of the experience of those that have passed? Shall no corrective be administered to the follies and wretchedness of society? Knowledge is the only guardian which can prevent us from becoming the vassals of tyranny and the dupes of imposture (Wortman 1800, p. 30).

Because of this heritage, citizens of the United States consider their democracy to be foremost among the free press states of the world. But many Americans were shocked to see the Reporters Without Borders ranking of press freedom that place the United States rank 22nd among the 167 nations ranked, falling behind even former Soviet republics in eastern Europe (Reporters Without Borders, 2004). Americans see the First Amendment to the Constitution as guaranteeing an almost immeasurable freedom for American media to report unfettered by any governmental influence. But the freedoms in this country have evolved over time, and have never come as an absolute. Levy (1960) was the first to suggest that the intent of the framers was to prevent prior restraint of newspaper printing—and nothing more. More specific still, some hold that the First Amendment was to bind the government from committing an even more limited action—federal licensing of printed materials before publication (Georgetown Law Journal 1973, p. 6). Court cases broadened the reach of the amendment over the years, although the United States Supreme Court did not extend it to the states in case law until 1925 (*Gitlow v. New York* 1925), and didn't lay the foundation for a reporter's privilege to keep sources confidential until 1972 (Barron and Dienes 1979, p. 425). With these increasing freedoms came more power for media to determine policies and act according to their own assessments of fairness and balance. The constitutional protections of freedom guaranteed a certain freedom from external criticism for biased practices.

Sloan and Schwartz (1988) describe four schools interpreting the source of constitutional freedom for media. The Nationalist School held sway throughout nearly all the nineteenth century. Historians in this camp wrote of the freedoms in terms of their fulfillment of the natural rights of the individual moving him toward an ideal type for mankind. This analysis relied heavily on the notions of America as a laboratory to explore the utmost in freedoms (Sloan and Schwartz 1988, p. 161). Bias was not a concern in the rush to build a publishing industry and form a nation. Back in the earlier years of that nation, nineteenth century courts saw press freedom cases not as constitutional matters, but instead, as extensions of common law cases—and of far less lofty concerns than the Nationalists imagined. Early publishers worked to make their cases from an institutional standpoint—and one supporting their right to make money publishing—claiming that they alone held a position in society that would allow them to act as “watchdogs” of the government, representing the people where they could not represent themselves. This view is consistent with Sloan and Schwartz’s description of the Progressive School of the first half of the twentieth century. Progressives viewed press freedoms as a tool the founders established to protect the commercial interests of the new nation and thereby preserve their personal financial interests by maintaining the status quo (Sloan and Schwartz 1988, p. 163). Again, the interests of the press superceded any external concerns for the job that they did protecting those commercial interests, whether biased or not. This view contrasts with the latter twentieth century belief that the media “work” to help the individual gain knowledge and power in relation to the government (Gleason 1990, pp. 4-5). That view is often touted when speakers want to stress the theoretical role of the journalist and the media in representing the people.

Here, the notion of an accurate and unbiased press is implied. If the public is to gain knowledge and hold power over the government, a fair representation of that government and its actions must be presented. This view relates closely to the Professional School that developed post-World War I. Scholars were looking for a non-libertarian view of media freedom, and found it in a number of treatments. Levy was part of the body of literature building here, all of which questioned the grand assumptions of ideal liberty and attributed the American experience instead to a conglomeration of smaller contributing factors (Sloan and Schwartz 1988, p. 169). And finally, a fourth, rather new school, founded at the height of the cold war, suggests our version of media freedom stems from the benefits this view had for those in certain political positions of power at the time of the revolution. This Neo-Libertarian view incorporates many of the early criticisms of the pure freedoms model, though it gives journalists a less high place among the reasons for our freedoms.

Journalists, for their part, hold on to the claim of being an important—or in some cases, indispensable—part of American government. Pulitzer Prize winner Clark R. Mollenhoff, then the Washington Bureau Chief for the Des Moines Register, put it like this:

Ours is a profession that gives us the opportunity to be a strong voice and a strong force for good government. We can mold good public officials into better public officials by demanding top performance. We can make bad public officials toe the line or risk exposure and ouster (Mollenhoff 1968, p. 190).

That statement plays well with journalism meetings and in the classroom, for it speaks to a power journalists have to make government better. Here again, the notion of an unbiased press is only assumed at best. In fact, critics could argue that Mollenhoff's

notion of the role of the press gives license to leave balance behind and to be advocates for certain policies and practices. That is a far cry from any implied impartiality.

Gonzalez (1992) would argue for a need for an advocate press because of its existence thanks to a “positive” right, alien to the rest of the constitution. He finds the ability of this right for press freedom to be carried out hampered by the persistent political power of any regime that works against true democracy, and weakened because it must be enforced by the very same government it is designed to protect against (Gonzalez 1992, p. 10).

Dennis (1996) points out media freedom is fettered by many other legal guarantees and traditions, including libel and defamation laws, and the need for national security, and non-constitutional pressures, like media ownership, press policies, and clever manipulation of media take away even more freedom (Dennis and Merrill 1996, p. 11).

Some scholars have argued that the constitutional freedoms guaranteed for American speech and media should not even apply to all things. Sunstein (1993) suggests a two-tier approach where important political speech be given full freedoms, while a second tier of less important speech be given lower priority and therefore be open to regulation by government (Sunstein 1993, p. 130). Response to that notion brings criticism from those who would argue the tiers are indistinguishable if one examines issues based on usefulness in life, and not just being political in nature (Nickel 2000, p. 8). And journalists bristle at the notion that a bureaucrat would decide which speech is protected and which is not, leaving room in journalistic circles to call for more advocacy on the part of the press, and again, less impartiality.

Bridging the early printed press freedoms to today’s electronic media, one other limit on freedom appears. While the Bill of Rights was written at a time when the only

press was a printed one, the broadcast media arrive under strong government regulation. Citing the limited size of the electromagnetic spectrum on which over the air television and radio is broadcast, the federal government claimed the power to regulate to preserve that spectrum and exercised that power through the Communications Act of 1934, a power the Supreme Court upheld in 1943 (*NBC v. United States* 1943) and again in 1969 (*Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC* 1969). Some scholars, like Barron (1967) have argued that the media are essentially the same, regardless of the scarcity of their delivery medium, and should share the same constitutional protections—including being free from licensing. But others feel the intrinsic differences between the makeup of the media are served by regulating them differently. Bollinger (1976) claimed a completely free print media could work as the framers intended as a watchdog and safeguard on governmental action, while a partially regulated broadcast media could do a sufficient job with minimal governmental intervention. In fact, the engine of commercial competition between them should do more than enough to offset any effects of the government licensing (Bollinger 1976, pp. 32-3). But that remains an uncomfortable position for scholars who still envision the perfect freedoms they feel the framers intended. They continue to call for a modern reinterpretation of the First Amendment, one that recognizes the changes new media have wrought (Powe 1987, p. 254). Others call for a reexamination of the notion of regulating media so that the corporate interests of the limited number of owners do not cause freedom of the media to infringe on freedom of the press. Lichtenburg (1987) makes her case that we can trust government at least as much as we can trust corporations, so it may be wise to consider allowing government to limit the actions of media-owning corporations in order to allow a diversity of ideas and true freedom of the

press to flourish (Lichtenberg 1987, p. 353). Lichtenburg would reach this balance through regulation of media structure, not media content. Graber (1986) concurs, citing many failures on the part of the “free” media to hold up their end of the constitutional bargain handed them by the framers. Graber sees media institutions as holding a place in society where their right to profit has been protected where few others have been. That special place deserves more from those holding it. Graber calls for the people to expect more from their media and the government to enforce it (Graber, 1986, pp. 274-5).

Perhaps media consumers are more capable now of taking Graber’s advice, thanks to advancing technology. In 1947, Martin asserted that press freedoms often begin with the right to start a publication without a government license, which equates to freedom to start an unregulated business. Martin saw that few citizens could take advantage of that freedom, unless they had millions of dollars at their disposal (Martin 1947, p. 140). But Martin’s critique rings less true in an age of personal on-line publishing, though established media still command far greater audiences. But citizens may be motivated to begin their own publishing, being often unimpressed with the job the media does “on their behalf.” Frequent complaints about media’s own inability to respond, just like government, lead audiences to distrust the media, too (Wolfson 1985, p. 5). This trend will be reviewed in depth in Chapter 4. But happy news consumers—perhaps unyet willing to begin their own news organizations—brings today’s journalism back to a point early in the nation’s history where partisanship may entice readers and viewers to change media habits. Might not a media outlet seen as biased and too liberal lead to demand for another outlet openly biased and conservative? Any perceived bias, no matter how

unintentional, leaves those offended audience members often looking not for the middle again, but for media on their “side.”

Theoretical freedom aside, it is important to return to the interdependency of the media and the government, which comes more strongly than just in shared values. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) suggested the mass publics would grow more dependent on media in times of crisis or conflict, and the media would in turn, grow more dependent on official and governmental sources. The commutative nature of media therefore builds public dependency on government through the media (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur 1976). Hindman (2004) tested that theory in the wake of one of the largest crisis events of modern times, September 11, and found overwhelming evidence that public support for the news media went up substantially, public support for political leaders went up substantially as well, and the relationship between approval for both grew stronger (Hindman 2004). A concurrent study though, examining the earlier media test of the first Gulf War, found more press independence from official government sources than recent studies would have suggested. Althaus (2003) claimed that despite all the government factors that would predict a lapdog press—strong executive, submissive Congress, and an easy villain in Saddam Hussein—media went further to find independent points of view. But this apparent independence was not total nor consistent, and Althaus suggests that journalist’s laziness and lack of knowledge about the topics they cover often allows “pushover” journalism still occurs with regularity (Althaus 2003, p. 404). Could this lazy approach to news, coupled with natural human emotion in times of crisis, open up the door for more bias in news presentation that goes unchecked by newsroom policies meant to ferret it out?

Bias producing or not, a cozy relationship with government may not be the worst association media members have—it may that with their own shareholders. A. J. Liebling wrote: “The function of the press in society is to inform, but its role is to make money (Liebling 1961, p. 4). Critics of the current state of the media, like McChesney (2003), claim the economic role of the media as a corporate revenue source make it impossible for them to maintain their role as the informers of society in an operating democracy. Smith (1978) one considered market forces to increase the likelihood of independence and impartiality in media. Now, he sees those market forces pushing out those twin virtues. Commercial pressures for broadcasts and publications to make more profit every year have driven all but the most staunchly stubborn editorial chiefs to allow commercial tie-ins and even downright endorsements in the editorial pages and air time. Beyond these abuses, major corporate media owners use editorial times to promote other commercial ventures within the company, often terming it as simply “synergy” (McChesney, 2003, p. 311).

Bennett (1996) sees this trend toward bowing to commercial pressures as doing more than just inserting commercialism into news pages and newscasts. The commercial pressures have changed the basic approaches to news that the media have used to fulfill their role as that democratic information provider. Bennett sees the pressure for commercial success changing the very nature of individual media messages. That trend is away from contextually strong, issue-oriented information and toward snapshot-like messages that emphasize features of personal characteristics over information that frames larger political questions (Bennett 1996, p. 382). And the lure of tailoring a news presentation to fit the political disposition of the largest audience persists. If the nation

swings right, economic models make a shift in editorial policy to the right perfectly logical. Common journalistic practices should prevent such a shift, but economic pressures may prevail.

Purists see the role of the media as one that can have positive effects on the levels of political information flow in the nation. Consider this call to action:

First, journalists are important, indeed crucial providers of certain categories of political communication; second, the public needs the political communication services of journalists, who will not only educate them politically, but will guard against politicians and government officials who might threaten democracy or act in their own interests instead of those of the public (Dooley 1997, p.127).

But neither the United States Constitution nor more than two hundred years of journalism history and practice can guarantee that the media in this country can carry out those duties without introducing bias into the messages they deliver. The history of the country tallies far more years in the partisan media column than in the impartial media list. And book after book of media theories fail to see media practitioners who often perform below the level of quality suggested by the ideal type. What exists is a structure that has no high impediment to the introduction of bias, and a public which is often unsure how the messages it is receiving have been altered since the time they left the original transmitter.

Chapter 3

The Effects of Media on the Political Process

The development of mass media from colonial American to the beginning of the Twenty-First Century came with change and evolution, not only in the effects the media had on their audiences, but in the understanding of those effects. Early studies were crude by today's standards, but were able to develop a basic understanding of those basic media effects. As media became more sophisticated, so too did the instruments to measure effects, and the theories built with those measurements. Important theories regarding the ability of media messages to influence salience of issues and the evaluative approach audience members took with those issues changed the understanding of how audiences use the information they get from the media. Political leaders began to understand the workings of mediated political realities, and set out to use that knowledge to craft their messages for the largest impact with the audience. But central to any use of the media to communicate political messages is the continuing threat of bias as a filter to distort the message. In each of the developments of media effects theory to follow, the specter of bias still looms as a possible distortion to the message. And these developing theories of media effects are necessary before examining any evidence of bias mixed amongst those effects.

Early Audience Effects Studies

Though there were clearly assumptions of media effects of political beliefs and behaviors from the beginning of the American experience, the first scientific studies of

those effects did not take place until following World War I. It was a time when the scientific tools were being invented that would allow quantitative measurement of the individual and his beliefs and behaviors. Sociology was maturing as a science, and the practitioners of social science research were turning their attention toward trying to answer many of the questions that existed about how and why men and women behave the way they do in a social setting. At the same time, a new medium with the apparent potential for great effects had arrived on the scene—the motion picture industry.

Researchers believed this new medium of moving—and later, talking—pictures would be very effective in motivating attitude and behavior change in its audience (Lowery and DeFleur 1983, pp. 33-4). Some were concerned about the violent or romantic content in even the earliest films. One researcher painstakingly cataloged movie content and found nearly seventy-five percent to be about love, violence, or sex (Dale 1935, p. 8). The effect that subject matter might have on children brought together sociologists, educators, and psychologists to develop an experimental series that would determine motion picture effects. Funded by The Payne Fund, a private philanthropic foundation, the study was the starting point for modern media effects research.

While the Payne Fund studies did not address political content and therefore, could not address the bias question central to this research, the series of experiments involved laid a framework for many studies to come that would address how all media—not just motion pictures—affect their audiences, including politically. The central media effects research topics were learning, emotional stimulation, attitude change, and change in behavior.

Payne Fund researchers began by examining whether audiences actually learn any information from watching motion pictures. Holaday and Stoddard (1933) found that the effects of motion picture information on learning were very high—higher than during laboratory-based memory experiments testing other types of learning. The researchers also found a “sleeper” effect that showed information retention was even higher six months after viewing the films (Holaday and Stoddard 1933, p. 128). Modern studies of information reception and learning from news have developed from this early study.

It is commonly accepted today that movies can bring about emotional responses in their audiences. But Payne Fund researchers worked to find the scientific linkage between motion picture content and emotion. Dysinger and Ruckmick (1933) tested both children and adults to see if the motion pictures they were viewing would generate any spark of emotion. The researchers pioneered the use of mechanical testing of response through the use of electronic sensors to measure galvanic skin response and breathing patterns of filmgoers. They found that both children and adults responded to motion pictures in physical way, though children were much more likely to have emotional responses. The researchers credited the difference to the ability of adults to separate movie fantasy from reality (Dysinger and Ruckmick 1933, pp. 110-9).

Attitude change is another staple of political effects research that got its start in the Payne Fund studies. Researchers focused then on the effects of motion picture content on changing the attitudes of children toward racial and social issues. Peterson and Thurstone (1933) studied the short-term effects of watching single films and multiple films, as well as long-term attitude change. The research showed significant attitude change for children watching single films, and also significant cumulative attitude change

for those who watched a series of films. They also found that the attitude change measured persisted over time extending into multiple months and even years. At least as interesting as the outcome of these experiments is the way in which they were conducted. The research developed a design that measured subject's attitudes before the experiment, then exposed them to the motion picture subject matter, and then retested the subjects again to determine attitude change. While lacking the use of control groups and other modern refinements, this pretest-posttest design became a standard approach to testing attitude change in all age groups. It is the basic experimental design on which this current research is based.

The final groundbreaking research from the Payne Fund studies involved studying motion pictures as the possible cause of what was seen as a rising juvenile delinquency rate. Though that research topic seems almost quaint by today's standard, the experiments laid a foundation for behavior change research that would address media's effects on political behavior. Blumer and Hauser (1933) did not use quantitative research as in the other Payne Fund studies, but took a qualitative approach of extensive interviewing of their subjects. The research showed that children used movie examples to guide their play, and fondly remembered that play into adulthood. Most significant of the research, it showed that the memories derived from early motion picture viewing had long term effects that affected the ways people dressed, ate, and socialized (Blumer and Hauser 1933, p. 141).

A successor to the Payne Fund study also looked at the effects of a developing form of popular entertainment—radio drama. In 1938, a young Orson Welles took part in a live radio adaptation of H. G. Wells *War of the Worlds*. The program was produced to

simulate a normal night of radio listening that is interrupted by strange reports that turn out to be invaders from Mars landing in New Jersey. Of the many listeners that evening, about a million believed it was a real invasion (Sparks 2002, p. 46). Along the east coast of the United States in particular, panic spread from city to city as listeners expected the Martian invaders to arrive at any time. CBS apologized for the trouble the next day—a Halloween eve broadcast that went wrong. But one thing went “right” in all the turmoil—researchers at Princeton University in New Jersey saw an opportunity to find out why a fake broadcast has convinced so many people it was real. Cantril (1940) found that audience members were quick to believe events depicted in the broadcast were actually happening because they trusted radio as a news source. The entertainment program sounded just like the actual radio news programs they were used to hearing, so they believed it was real, too (Sparks 2002, p. 46).

The results of the Payne Fund research, as well as that of the War of the Worlds broadcast, lead early researchers to believe that mass media were very powerful in affecting their audiences. The commonly held view was that media messages traveled in uniform ways to audience members and were directly received in the same way by those audience members. This theory of a direct delivery system, straight from media message into the heart of the audience member earned colorful names like the “Magic Bullet,” “Hypodermic Needle,” and “Transmission Belt” theories of mass media effect (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1982, p. 161). Critics saw the theory as defining the mass media message senders as too powerful, the audience receivers too homogenous, and the path in between too clear of obstacles (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, p. 20). But the notion of a powerful effect drawn from media messages acting on innate urges and emotions was

completely consistent with the science of the time, which saw human behavior shaped mostly by instinctive response to stimuli (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1982, p. 162).

Though never a formally stated theory, the magic bullet concept seemed to make sense. There was no scientific evidence present to contradict its outlook on media effects.

So the magic bullet theory, along with the Payne Fund and War of the Worlds study had begun the modern era of media effects research, but their areas of study were, for the most part, not that closely related to politics. Some of the Payne Fund attitude testing of children dealt with ethnic and social stereotypes—problems normally dealt with in the public policy setting. But the bulk of these studies were done to find the effects of entertainment media or direct propaganda on their audiences. It would be fifteen years after the Payne Funds studies before groundbreaking new research would be published that included data on how media consumption affects political and voting behavior.

The People's Choice: Media and Politics Examined

Three authors in 1940 set out with the simple, yet extremely important purpose of determining how voters made their minds on whom to vote. The results were far from simple. *The People's Choice* set the stage for a new use of survey research techniques to reveal the reasons behind voting behavior. The authors selected a single Ohio county as the setting for that survey research. Erie County was small (with a stable population of about forty thousand individuals), mostly white, and split fairly evenly between rural agricultural workers and a blue-collar workforce. It was located in a part of the state far

enough away from the big cities that they didn't dominate economy or the culture, but close enough that the national and local media from the cities reached the county.

If the location of the study was typical, the approach the researchers took was not. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) chose 3000 people from the Erie County voting-age population. This large sample was broken down into groups consisting of six hundred members each. These *panels* were the cores of the longitudinal research design. The entire sample of three thousand individuals were interviewed at May, the beginning of the presidential campaign season—at least in 1940. Then, the six hundred members of one single panel were interviewed six more times—monthly, right through the election. This design was different from earlier media effects research in that it tested changes over time in the same sample. But another difference proved to be even more important. In July, August, and October, three other panels of six hundred members each were interviewed at the same time as the main panel. These parallel interviews of three other groups provided a control to determine if the act of interviewing subjects would affect their behavior leading up to the time to vote. This use of control groups to measure and subtract for any experimental effect proved to be very important for future research. The differences between the main panel group and the three control groups were very small (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 159), meaning this approach would be used in future research on media effects.

Aside from a research method that was groundbreaking, the results shed first light on many facets of the voting decision process. Much of the study dealt with other factors affecting voting aside from media. The researchers found that the major predictors of voting choice were socioeconomic status, religion, rural-urban residence, occupation, and

age. In the end, these social predictors were summed up with the simple statement, “Different social characteristics, different votes” (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 21). The factors of socioeconomic status, religion, and rural-urban residence proved to be the strongest predictors of voting behavior and came to make up the index of political predisposition (IPP) for each voter. That put voters into one of six categories: (1) Strongly Republican, (2) Moderately Republican, (3) Slightly Republican, (4) Slightly Democratic, (5) Moderately Democratic, and (6) Strongly Democratic. The IPP called for someone who was rural dweller with a high socioeconomic status and who identified himself as a Protestant to be in category 1. At the other end of the spectrum, a city-dweller with low socioeconomic status who identifies as a Catholic would be in category 6. And members in each category correlated strongly with their predicted voting patterns (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 26).

Aside from these social characteristics, media influence was also part of the study. The study introduced three concepts that describe the effects messages received through mass media have when combined with those pre-existing social determiners of voting patterns. The authors describe these mediated influences as activation, reinforcement, and conversion. Activation describes the process by which media-delivered information arouses a desire to vote that is entirely consistent with the voting pattern predicted by the individual’s IPP. The process begins when some political information—what Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) refer to as propaganda—reaches the voter and is received. The reception of this media message brings on an increase in political interest. As that interest increases, the voter begins to pay more attention to other political messages around him, particularly those consistent with the IPP-predicted voting tendencies. This

notion of selective attention to only some of the political information available shows how the voter reinforces those IPP-predicted characteristics. Finally, the decision to vote come on this activated interest and selective exposure to the facts at hand.

Lowery and DeFleur (1983) point out that the mechanism of activation comes in conflict with the classical notion of a rational voter who weighs all costs and benefits with any political decision and makes his choice based on the decision that provides the greatest utility for that individual. Activation does not allow for the weighing of ALL differing points of view. Instead it shortcuts some options to make the process easier for voters.

If activation shows media's ability to take what would appear to be a non-voter and drive that person to research at least some of the issues at hand and make the decision to vote, what of the voters who already have a voting intention? The authors found that a continuing flow of propaganda from the voter's party helps to *reinforce* the decision the voter has already made about casting the ballot. The information comes over time, not all in one set period, and it serves the purpose "to secure and stabilize" support and eventual vote intention (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 215). The media-centered effect of reinforcement does not build more voters for a particular candidate, as activation can, but it does help guarantee that likely voters cast those ballots on election day.

If activation and reinforcement work to motivate partisans (as predicted by their IPP categories) to vote for a particular candidate, can media actually move voters to vote for someone not consistent with their predicted support pattern? The third media effect, conversion, is the power to do just that. But that power only works for a small percentage of the voters in any given area. Most have made up their minds and remain steadfast,

thanks to the reinforcement power of the media. Others are activated to make a vote that is consistent with the social framework in which they are making their voting decisions. That leaves a handful of voters not strongly affected by their IPP pre-determinants, and under pressure from conflicts within the framework (like being a rural-dwelling Catholic). These voters do not fall strongly into a voting predictor category, and could be seen as converting from one side to another in the lead up to the election.

This examination of media effects in Erie County also began with the assumption that the propaganda messages of the parties were spread across the population in a massive wave, too broad for anyone to miss. That view is consistent with the magic bullet theory that depicts persuasive media messages as a direct shot from party sender to voter receiver (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 120). Though the authors of this study did not plan to test the magic bullet theory, some of the results suggested the distribution of attention among voters to media messages was far from even. As the election approached and more and more political information was available to voters, those voters did not receive the information in increasing numbers similar to its distribution (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 121). In fact, the research found those voters who consumed a great deal of media-delivered political information in one medium, such as radio, also consumed the most in other media as well. These tended to be voters with high interest levels, those who had already decided, and those with high SES levels. These particular individuals came to play an important role in the final theory to arise from the work—the theory of two-step flow facilitated by opinion leaders.

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's concept of the two-step flow model was simple. They pictured information flowing through the media to opinion leaders—those

high SES individuals with high political interest who had already made their voting decisions—and from those leaders to the rest of the voting population. Those final recipients of information (coming from opinion leaders) were those who were not as likely to pay attention to media (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948, p. 151). Opinion leaders were successful in reaching the less interested voters because they were seen, not as sources of propaganda—which those voters might avoid, but as trusted individuals without a set political agenda. That distinction is an important one, because this early study seems almost naïve in its assumptions of the pure intentions of political leaders, opinion leaders, and the media. Though the work assumes a propagandistic purpose to information coming from political leaders, it sees that message as unaltered through the remaining steps in its flow to the voter. Therefore, the model does not account for bias or its effects on the voter.

The Limited Effects Model

Lazarsfeld picked up the notion of opinion leaders and their role in delivering political information again, and along with Elihu Katz, set down a systematic appraisal of the role of these individuals. Designed to further test the two-step flow model derived from the Erie Co. experiments, the authors chose the city of Decatur, Illinois for this study. Decatur had the right size population, a tendency toward the center in social, political, and economic areas, and was located in the Midwest. The subjects were all women, eight hundred in all, all at least sixteen years old. (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, p. 335-8). The authors took four approaches in a qualitative attempt to identify opinion leaders. The subjects were asked directly about whom they went to for advice regularly.

They were also measured for opinion change, and then asked if they had talked to anyone about the subject on which they had experienced the change. A third approach asked simply for a list of everyday contacts the women had with whom they would talk and converse. And finally, the subjects were asked if they themselves had given advice to others at any point recently (Lowery and DeFleur 1982, pp. 187-8). That final question, asking women to place themselves as opinion leaders, developed the mail sample for the research—six hundred ninety-three women who had claimed some position of opinion leadership over their peers. The study focused on fashion, movie selection, and shopping opinion leaders, and in those venues, women were quick to point out their own personal value to others in helping make decisions. But in the area of public affairs opinion leadership, women claimed that men were the main source of their own opinions (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, p. 276). This seems somewhat sexist in today's context, but was consistent with the post-World War II female role. Still, some women did claim to be a source for opinion formation, and they belonged to a group that was mainly of higher socioeconomic status. This was the main factor predicting opinion leadership in women. Other contributing factors were the number of social contacts a woman had, and to a lesser extent, her age, with younger women being more active as leaders. Carter and Clarke (1962) would later question the social contact evaluative dimension, as they found that watchers of educational television were often opinion leaders, but seldom had a large number of social contacts or “gregariousness,” as Katz and Lazarsfeld had suggested.

So the magic bullet theory, with its picture of global, widespread effects, gave way to a limited effects model that showed that mediated political messages were not bullets or needles, but instead were something much weaker—unable to penetrate the

selective perceptions of many voters. Klapper (1960) went so far as to say that there was no evidence of a cause and effect relationship between mass media exposure and any attitudes or behavior on the part of audience members, with any actual effects being very minor. This notion of limited effects from media gave rise to a new model and new ground for more research.

With a new model of limited effects with which to work, research became much more precise in its search for describing the impact of mediated political messages on voters and potential voters. McLeod and Reeves (1980) stressed there is no one media effect, or even a group of media effects. Though they were not specifically studying political media use, they found that there are four dichotomies of media effects possible to study. The first dichotomy follows basic economic theory in stating that all media effects happen at either the micro or macro levels. Micro-level effects happen at the level of the individual audience member. The Payne Fund studies or the People's Choice experiments would be examination of micro-level effects in mediated political communication. In contrast, macro-level studies examine the aggregate effect of media messages and delivery systems on whole communities or nations.

Another dichotomous division of media effects study involves the consideration of how content in the media affects audiences, compared to the medium itself. Sparks (2002) compares measuring the effect of television content on children's behaviors, versus the sedentary behavior pattern used to watch television.

McLeod and Reeves (1980) also challenged the long-held belief that media effects were always related to attitudinal change in the subjects. They believed that cognitive changes also took place as audience members used mass media. This is a major

jumping-off point for much research that delves into how media impact what we think about, not just how we act on those thoughts.

Finally, building on findings from the People's Choice research, McLeod and Reeves (1980) suggested that the findings by Lazarsfeld and company that much of the political information voters used helped to reinforce already held attitudes, not just change them, gave rise to a theory of opinion stabilization, and not just opinion change due to media exposure.

The limited effects model lays a foundation for research to come that questions what effects, if any, media messages have on their intended audiences. The research into perceptions of bias grows directly from the limited effects literature, as the measurement of media bias demonstrates very different perceptions from the same stimulus. The way the subjects and audience members receive the sent messages is key to understanding when those audience members see bias, and when they do not. Central to understanding those effects are the psychological and sociological explanations of media effects.

External Messages, Internal Effects

If the effects of media were limited, as the emerging data revealed, then by what mechanisms do political and persuasive media messages actually affect the behavior of individuals? Two models compete to explain the methods of effective persuasion via the mass media. The *psychodynamic* model relies on the ability of the sent message to somehow affect innate psychological attributes in the individual, motivating an action or change in actions on the part of the individual. The *sociocultural* model, by contrast, calls for persuasive messages to resonate within an individual's social context and motivate

action by either reinforcing or changing that individual's definitions of the proper action for those in his social setting.

Psychodynamic Model

The psychodynamic model is by far the more extensively researched and accepted of the two competing models. Some experiments have shown great ability under this model to affect behavior, particularly when using a message that includes a threat designed to cause a fear response (Kraus, El-Assal, and DeFleur 1966, p. 25). But, of course, not all attempts to persuade, even using fear, are successful. That resistance to attitude or behavioral change comes from the variables the message senders cannot control—individual differences in the personalities and psychologies of the audience members receiving the messages. So Rokeach (1973) and others suggested a modified psychodynamic model that places a person's internal value structure at the heart of persuasion. In this value change model, audience members who find their own values to be inconsistent with what they see as idea values will change their own values to reach the ideal. Media centered research (Sanders and Atwood 1979) shows mass media exposure to information that sets up a dissonance between a person's held values and what are depicted as the ideals can cause behavioral change in order to reduce or eliminate the dissonance.

Sociocultural Model

The sociocultural model differs from the psychodynamic in that it relies on the individuals desire to fit into a social norm, rather than be in congruence with a self-chosen ideal. Social pressure can be an immensely persuading power, and if the mediated messages can give audience members the impression that they are deviant from the

accepted norms, attitude and behavior change may take place to move oneself closer to that norm (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1982, p. 228).

Source Credibility

One final question especially significant to the current experiment revolves around attitude and belief change as it is related to the credibility of the source. The literature of psychology has extensively examined the benefits of credibility as well as the sources for perceptions of credibility. The literature points to credibility coming from the sources themselves, the message perceptions, the channels used to relay the message from the source, and the status of the receiver of the message. Though physical attractiveness of the source is often seen as a producer of higher credibility (Mills and Aronson 1965, p. 176), the literature points to a perceived similarity between source and recipient as a powerful predictor of high credibility (Feldman 1984, p. 149). More important, though, are the message variables that influence the credibility of the source. Pornpitakpan (2004) outlined twelve factors found in the message content that help increase the credibility of the source. The strongest of these seems to be from a source that presents a message incongruous with its own self-interests (Pornpitakpan 2004, p. 254). That is a difficult finding to apply to the study of bias in media sources, as those media sources should distribute their messages with no self-interest in the content of what they deliver.

News media believe themselves to be credible at all times—a perfect source of information. And while news media do not see their role as changing the minds of voters when delivering political news and information, those in charge of the news media outlets believe their credibility allows audience members to gather reliable information for

making voting and other political decisions. And studies in the effectiveness of information from credible versus non-credible sources on attitude and behavior change show that credibility does count. Hovland and Weiss (1951) tested audiences receiving the same message, but from two very different sources. In each of four experimental trials, one source was a media outlet with high prestige and credibility (a prominent medical journal, a leading U. S. nuclear scientist, etc.) while the other source was considered to be of low or unreliable credibility (popular magazine, Soviet newspaper, etc.). Though each subject read the same material, the sources were different for each pair. In three out of four cases, the subjects who saw their article attributed to the higher credibility source were more likely to change opinions than those who believed their article came from the lower credibility source (Hovland and Weiss 1951, p. 646). Further research by McGinnies and Ward (1974) confirmed this effect across multiple cultures. And Anderson (1971) suggests a credible source multiplies the weight of the message to the receiver. Research aimed specifically at judging media source credibility and its effect on the delivery of the message found similar results. Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1984) found the experts fared better than politicians as highly credible sources of information in stories. The authors were quick to point out that their study was not so much about media effects as source effects from appearing in media, but it is important to note that journalists themselves, when delivering editorial messages, fared equally as well as scientific or other experts, and far better than politicians.

But the mass media—particularly the news media—derive credibility from more than being a delivery vehicle for third party experts. Media members derive their own perceptions of credibility with the audience. Members for the media select stories, write

articles, collect sound and video, and process it all through individual editorial and creative approaches. Television has a built in trustworthiness (Andreoli and Worchel 1978, p. 62) that allows some leeway with audience members before credibility is lost. But the same threats to credibility to exist, and perceptions of bias in the audience will erode that credibility.

Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is perhaps the most widely researched of all the possible media effects. Much more is known about how media messages affect the motivations of audience members to move issues higher in their salience structure than with many of the other effects media can create. The agenda setting process, both from media to audience, and internally setting the media agenda itself, can shed much light on the possible introduction of bias into media content. Because while a message itself may be impartial and without bias, the selection of which messages to relay can tell much about the internal interests and possible biases of the journalist making the editorial decisions. The literature of agenda setting does much to reveal where those biases may be injected into the process.

Setting the Public Agenda

Bernard Cohen's (1963) one line definition is perhaps the most widely quoted sentence in all of media effects research:

The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. (Cohen 1963, p. 13)

Cohen's quote came a decade before the seminal work that would catapult agenda setting theory to the forefront of media effects research. But the notion that media messages can help set an agenda for attention and though goes back to before Cohen's summary of the effect. Long (1958) actually used the terms "agenda" and "setting" in his description of the power of newspapers to shape what people think and talk about:

In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with (Long 1958, p. 260).

Long's thoughts are echoed in the words of Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang the next year with their notion of a media that compels its audience to examine certain topics. The Langs see media presenting reports and other objects that actually force the attention of audience members to the issues (Lang and Lang 1959, p. 232).

But the work that gave the theory its names, as well as put an army of researchers to work testing its hypotheses came in 1972 when Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw introduced their theory of how the mass media tell audiences what to think about. McCombs and Shaw asserted "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues" (McCombs and Shaw 1972, p. 177). The authors directed their research toward political campaigns in general and chose the 1968 presidential campaign specifically on which to test their hypotheses. Randomly choosing registered voters from the Chapel Hill, North Carolina voter rolls (both men were professors at the University of North Carolina), McCombs and Shaw interviewed one hundred uncommitted voters regarding their views of what were the key issues in the upcoming election. At the same time, the authors reviewed and classified the

news coverage in the major newspapers, news magazines, and network television broadcast leading up to the election. When comparing what voters said were the major issues in the campaign and what issues received the most media coverage, the authors found a remarkably strong correlation between media attention and audience salience. And this strong correlation was present with both major (longer, more significant) and minor (shorter, less significant) stories in the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972, pp. 180-1).

McCombs and Shaw also wanted to test the power of selective perception versus the news media. If the commonly held theories of selective perception held true, than partisans would not expose themselves to the information media are carrying from candidates in the other parties. But if agenda setting were at work, those partisans would emphasize equally the positions of candidates in any part, so long as the news media had given them attention. Results of the Chapel Hill subjects showed a stronger relationship between news media attention and subject interest than between partisanship and subject interest (McCombs and Shaw 1972, pp. 182).

One other interesting set of correlations was amongst the news media members themselves. McCombs and Shaw found very high correlations in the coverage patterns of the various media analyzed. Accounting for the differing missions and strengths of print versus broadcast media, as well as any biases within certain media organizations (though the authors did not test for those biases), the correlation showed the media are very likely to find the same issues newsworthy during a campaign, thus adding strength to their collective agenda setting power.

The correlation strengths found in McCombs and Shaw's article had their own agenda setting function, focusing the eyes of many researchers on a field of research that would surely withstand more scrutiny in the search to refine this new theory. Correlation does not guarantee causality, and more research was needed to see if the messages chosen to be passed by news media were indeed the cause for the agenda the voters in Chapel Hill had chosen.

One such experiment took place in a controlled laboratory experiment, rather than at the same time a public campaign was underway. Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) took television newscasts and edited the content to further emphasize coverage of U. S. defense policy in the coverage. They brought in subjects, surveyed them about their base political issue saliencies, and then showed them newscasts for four days. A control group was surveyed and saw regular newscasts without the changes to emphasize defense. After exposure to their respective newscasts, the group that saw the defense-heavy newscasts ranked defense much higher as an important issue, while the group that did not see the altered newscasts did not (Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982, p. 852). Other issues covered normally in the newscasts showed no significant issue salience change.

Later, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) used a controlled experimental setting again to test agenda setting for a very limited set of policy positions. Three groups were shown news programs focusing on either national defense, pollution, or inflation. When tested after seeing the news programs over just a four-day period, each group expressed the most concern and interest in the topic which they had been shown.

While experimental studies were proving the strength of the agenda setting power of media at the laboratory level, other studies were comparing that strength across other

levels of analysis. Palmgreen and Clarke (1977) measured the ability of media to set the agenda on local issues, as compared to the national issue McCombs and Shaw had studied. They hypothesized that local issues would be less subject to salience manipulation because of “the greater ability of individuals personally to observe local political problems, the nature and strength of local interpersonal political communication networks, and the relatively heavier media coverage of national political issues.” (Palmgreen and Clarke 1977, p. 438). The authors examined newspaper and television content in Toledo, Ohio, cataloging both local and national political issues. They then surveyed voting age residents to gauge their salient issue positions. The results showed correlations at both levels, indicating agenda setting taking place at both levels, but the correlation levels for national issues (.82) was far higher than for local issues (.53) (Palmgreen and Clarke 1977, p. 445). Findings also showed stronger agenda setting power on local issues by newspaper coverage, but stronger power to set the national agenda with television network newscasts. At another level of dichotomy, the degree to which an issue is “abstract” to audience members has some bearing on the degree to which media coverage of the issue affects salience among voters. Yagade and Dozier (1990) suggest those issues that are abstract and therefore hard for members of the public to visualize do not carry the same agenda setting power when covered by media.

Evidence exists to show that agenda setting occurs for the personal characteristics of candidates involved in a political race, and not just the issues. Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban found effects on subject evaluation of the character of fictional politicians when media focused on those characteristics. But the research stopped short of showing any change in the overall salience of a candidate based on that sort of coverage. But research

into what is termed “second-level” agenda setting—the focus on candidate attributes and not issue positions—confirms media have an impact on building a character for candidate outside their issue positions, while at the same time increasing the prominence of that evaluation of character relative to the issue positions of the candidates. Golan and Wanta (2001) studied the 2000 primary race in New Hampshire and found that media attention to Republican candidates George W. Bush and John McCain carried significant content related to their character. But the positive media attention did not always lead to positive affective reactions to the candidates. The results were split evenly in that respect. Whether voter behavior is closely linked to second level agenda setting remains to be seen. McCain was pictured much more favorably by the media in the important personality characteristics, and won the primary in New Hampshire. But Golan and Wanta could not attribute the win to media favorability alone.

Setting the Media Agenda

If the evidence demonstrates a power of news media to set public agenda, then who sets the media’s agenda? Wanta and Foote (1994) studied the relationship between presidential issue importance over time and its relationship to network television newscast agendas. The authors found that, using time series analysis, they could show emphasis on certain issues by either the president or the network news, and then correlate that emphasis to a similar one in the other party. Across sixteen specific issues in four broad categories of public policy, the president appeared to influence news media agendas five times, the media appeared to influence the presidential agenda three times, and there appeared to be no agenda setting effect eight times (Wanta and Foote 1994, p. 445). Mermin (1997) found a similar circular agenda setting process at work in the policy

decisions leading up to the U. S. involvement in the Somalian crisis during the first Bush Administration. Mermin points out that President Bush was forced into acting to save his own image as the “new world order” leader, while the media had framed stories that supported Bush’s leadership in that area. Ultimately:

The lesson of Somalia is often thought to be that television has the “power to move governments.” This study has found that governments also have the power to move television. Television is clearly a player in the foreign policy arena, but the evidence from Somalia is that journalists set the news agenda and frame the stories they report in close collaboration with actors in Washington. In the case of Somalia, television turns out not to be the independent, driving force that much of the commentary on its influence would lead one to believe. (Mermin 1997, p. 403).

But King and Schudson (1995) analyzed the public opinion polls regarding Ronald Reagan’s popularity as president and compared them with the news media coverage corresponding in time and found a large disconnect between what people were actually saying they thought about Reagan and what the media was saying the public thought of him. The authors credit the difference to a skilled use of direct media elite contact by Reagan to set the agenda in his favor. This confirms earlier research by Graber (1971) showing a strong dependence on the part of campaign reporters in the 1968 presidential race to get most of their information from the campaigns themselves, and not to print or air much else. Fico and Freedman (2001) support that view with research into the governor’s race in Michigan. The authors found that the major sources for political stories on the race were the candidates themselves, their representatives, and the parties. Third party and impartial sources like pollsters and other experts were far less frequent contributors to the media source list, and therefore the media agenda. Berkowitz (1992) supports that approach, but suggests a dynamic model employing role theory to describe the actions of the media leaders. Under this theory, professional and social expectations

define the role the media will fulfill in taking agenda cues from political figures. And the internally defined roles are the most important in determining behavior. Journalists have a self-defined, professional role to bring back a story, which the political figures can fill. Policymakers know their role to provide stories, and do so by framing them in a way that meets the goals of the journalist. But some say the process is not as circular one, where the media sets the public agenda, then follow political or public interests to set their own agenda again. Instead, Behr and Iyengar (1985) suggest the media determine their own agendas based on the real state of things local, in the nation, and in the world.

Presidential news conferences, rising unemployment rates, and other perceived crises all determine what news people call news. The study reaffirmed the media's power to set public agendas, but also suggested further study to determine how other real world cues reach voters than through common media channels. In one such study, Edwards and Wood (1999) tested presidential and congressional power for setting the media agenda, but found no linkage. And both Roberts and McCombs (1994) and Boyle (2001) suggest political advertising drives much of the news agenda for both print and broadcast media.

Another source of the news agenda can come from public opinion polls. Gans (1979) addressed polling as an up and coming source for news ideas and as a gauge of the public's current interests in his search for what makes the pages and airwaves. But others worry the processing of relying to heavily on polls—which continue to become cheaper and easier to conduct—will short-circuit the traditional newsgathering techniques that allowed journalists to build their agendas naturally (Gollin 1980, p. 456).

Setting the Policy Agenda

Not all agenda setting research, though, has focused on media's impact on voters. Cook et al (1983) examined the impact a national television news program had on policy makers in the Chicago area, as well as voters. The research demonstrated the predicted effect of agenda setting on voters, and also identified a measurable effect on government policy elites and their determinations of what issues are most important, as well as their view of what citizens think is important. Interestingly, the same measure of policy elites, persons involved with advancing a specific public policy approach, showed no agenda setting power in the program aired. And the researchers stopped short of suggesting that any policy actually changed as a result of the one report that aired as part of the experiment. But long-term studies show a relationship between consistent media attention to a single issue and changes in public policy. Yanovitzky (2002) used the case of drunk driving and nearly twenty years of media attention to the problem. Increased media attention leads, as expected, to increased citizen awareness of the problem. But that awareness also translates into a "sense of urgency" among policy makers to address the problem (Yanovitzky 2002, p. 444). That urgency to act manifested itself, in the cases studied, in the form of legislation to change drunken driving laws. But when the media attention on the issue waned, so too did policy maker interest.

Despite multiple studies showing the impact of media coverage on voter and other level issue salience, not all research supports a powerful media dictating what its audiences think about. Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) found that the relative impact of agenda setting power of media is tempered by pre-existing interest in the issues being presented. The authors go so far as to suggest there is no real evidence of an agenda

setting function of the media at the individual level. They report that interpersonal communication is still a stronger source of issue salience than media effects for anyone with a network through which to receive political information. Shaw (1977) and later Wanta and Wu (1992), suggested that a combination of media attention and interpersonal communications about major issues has the strongest impact on personal agenda setting, and a higher frequency of those interpersonal contacts will have the largest effect on salience. MacKuen (1984) asserts voters are affected by media agenda setting power in varying ways, most dependent on the individual's ability to process media information, and at what speed (McKuen 1984, p. 387). Further still, the motivation of the subject to expose himself to information has some bearing, as does the potential benefits seen for taking part in the information gathering process. The research suggests it takes longer to mold the issue salience of those with lower interest and involvement in politics, and that the function of media agenda setting on those voters is quite limited, requiring candidates or issue advocates who wish to move the agenda with those voters to spend great deals of time to do so (McKuen 1984, p. 388). And Zhu (1992) suggests limits on the agenda setting power of media based on the individual's ability to only carry so much information on current issues at one time. Zhu considers it a zero-sum prospect where the gain of one issue in salience must come at the loss of another.

Complicating the agenda setting and other research on the effects of mass media is the "third-person effect." Davison (1983) describes this effect as the belief an individual has that persuasive media messages are likely to affect someone else, but not the individual himself. Davison conducted four experiments to test his theory of a third-person effect, asking subjects to evaluate the effect of media messages on themselves,

and then on others. In each case, the subjects stated they believed others would be more affected by the media messages than would they. Davison went on to operationalize third-person effect into another area of media studies important to this study—bias. Davison suggests voter perceptions of media bias (which will be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter) may be accounted for by audience members beliefs that others will be more affected by information about the other “side” appearing in an otherwise balanced story. They are sensitive that any information about their opponents will have a strong effect on other voters. Lasorsa (1989) found the same effect amongst viewers of the 1987 ABC-TV miniseries “Amerika,” where viewers worried this fictional look at what the United States would be like under a Soviet occupation. Viewers at both ends of the political spectrum worried the program would affect those opposite the, going as far as suggesting it would cause problems between the United States and the Soviet Union in real life. Tiedge et al (1991) conducted larger scale telephone surveys in Milwaukee and St. Louis to test third-person effects. The authors found nearly ninety percent of the respondents reported some level of third-person effects. Looking at the implications of such a high number, Tiedge and his colleagues worry that this strong perception of media effects could lead to an erosion of First Amendment freedoms due to worry about the manipulation of “other” voters. Testing the third-person hypothesis against actual media reports of a predicted earthquake in southeast Missouri in 1990, Atwood (1994) found that those who did not believe the earthquake prediction prior to the predicted date of occurrence exhibited higher third-person effect, stating others probably believed it would happen, while those who believed the prediction would come true showed first-person effect, often stating others probably didn’t believe. Across all

subjects, media credibility was low leading up to the prediction, causing more third-person effect with those who thought those medial reports were sensational and exaggerated. Neuwirth and Frederick (2002) introduced the concept of second-person effects to describe the view audience members have that media reports will affect them and others in the audience in a shared perspective. The authors claim this part of the equation has been overlooked, and should be part of the overall effects equation.

Finding Bias in the Media Agenda

First-person, third-person, or somewhere in between, agenda setting research continues in an attempt to determine just how far the effect of mass media goes in shaping the beliefs and behaviors of the electorate. Returning to the roots of his first study, Donald Shaw, along with Shannon Martin (1992) asked whether that agenda setting function might be responsible for realigning classical groupings of voters by interest, pushing them toward a new direction in their search for policy change. The see media as “social magnets” that are erasing the historical predictors of policy position of gender, race, age, level of education, and socioeconomic status (Shaw and Martin 1992, p. 912). Television drives the new engine of interest group formation, with frequent television viewing being a very strong indicator of issue salience change. The change is dramatic, as the authors predict, “We may in the future use issues to define groups” (Shaw and Martin 1992, p. 919). Shaw’s partner in the original study also contributed to this view of news media agenda setting power as a force for reshaping communities. McCombs (1997) developed a continuum of behavior patterns that journalists exhibit in the role of building community interest toward a common goal. At one end, where the journalist is quite passive, lies “professional detachment.” For these journalists, agenda

setting is a happenstance of their craft, not a goal to which they give effort. Further along the continuum, journalists who favor “targeted involvement” occasionally work to bring about some change in a specific area of public policy. McCombs cites investigative journalists as a good example. Further along still is the behavior of “boosterism,” where journalists work actively to advance a community as a whole, discarding traditional notions of impartiality. Finally, at the far end of the spectrum from professional detachment is “proactive agenda setting.” This is most commonly exhibited as what many call “public journalism.” This behavior puts journalists at the forefront of determining desirable policy and pushing it through to implementation. The increasing involvement of journalists in deciding what is desirable policy and advocating change to implement that policy goes beyond any definition of what impartial journalism should be.

Similarly, Weaver (1994) describes the agenda setting power of the “new” media—which popular writers Alter (1992), Balz (1992), Harwood (1992), and Turque, Fineman, and Bingham (1992) define as talk shows, MTV, toll-free telephone numbers, computer bulletin boards, and town hall meetings—to bring voters back from a level of alienation the political leaders and traditional news media have created over recent elections. But some research describes a more traditional top-down relationship between the “old” media and the new. Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) showed that electronic bulletin board traffic during the 1996 presidential campaign reflected the agenda set by the mainstream, traditional media. Time series analysis demonstrated a short term (one or two day) impact of traditional media on new media. Interestingly, the most traditional of media had the largest effect in the study. The *New York Times*—itself a major agenda setter for other media (Dearing and Rogers 1996, p. 33)—showed seven significant

correlations with content on electronic bulletin boards, while CNN (Cable News Network) showed only three—and all in one policy area (Roberts, Wanta and Dzwo 2002, p. 463). In terms of traditional media and their own new media counterparts, Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) showed there is a difference in the personal issue agendas of readers of the traditional *New York Times* and its online version. The authors associated the differences with the quantity of public affairs coverage in the printed and online versions. If news consumers continue to desert the traditional media for the convenience of new media, the future impact of media on personal agendas may need reevaluation.

Regardless of the future of agenda setting research, the current literature on the effects of the media has direct bearing on the this study. Wanta and Hu (1994) showed that media credibility is closely tied to its ability to reach voters and set the agenda. Voters who see the media a credible will come to rely more heavily on it for their political and other information. Conversely, those who perceive a media outlet as biased or partial to one side or another will steer clear of the outlet's output and will not experience any agenda setting effects from the content there. While one station or newspaper that loses agenda setting power will have no measurable effect on the public agenda as a whole, sweeping perceptions of bias and massive moves from traditional media to new or alternative sources of information (i.e. Fox News Channel or conservative talk radio) can create measurable shifts in public agenda away from the traditional focus of the established media and into new areas with different ideological slant.

Media as Framers of the Debate

Growing directly from the agenda setting literature is the theory of framing as another measure of the direct effect of media on the orientation and actions of voters. Though some like Scheufele (2000) argue that the framing approach should be viewed as a separate line of research from agenda setting, most include framing as a refinement of the agenda setting process, more focused on content than mere exposure (Gamson 1992). Media frames are “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, p. 143). These sorts of frames guide journalists as they work to put their creative input into the stories they write, print, and broadcast. But audience frames are different, serving as a guide for processing information received (Entman 1993, p. 53). Research in media effects often place us media frames as an independent variable measuring their impact on the dependent variable of audience frames (Scheufele 2000, p. 307). Iyengar (1987) described media frames at the network news level as series of episodic (associated with events) or thematic (associated with more abstract issues) depictions. Some of these frames were reflected in the audience frames of those who saw the television news programs. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997) found that audience members exposed to media frames begin to adopt the central information of the media reports into their own audience frames, to the exclusion of other information they had stored prior to the exposure. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997) found the power of media framing strong enough to make even a Ku Klux Klan demonstration palatable to television news viewers—so long as it was framed in free speech language. The same authors assert that the framing mechanism is one of bringing to the surface already held beliefs deep in the individual,

rather than changing those beliefs. The framing of a media messages changes the weight of the belief in the classic equation for attitude ($A = \sum v_i w_i$), where A represents attitude toward an object, v represents the value of belief about the object, and w represents the weight the belief holds in the attitude structure (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997, pp. 225-6). Framing increases the weight of the belief, and that increased weight multiplies to shift it higher in the individual's attitude structure. Consequently, belief change is not always present, though judgments related to the issue framed usually do show some difference in importance (Nelson and Oxley 1999, p. 1059). Druckman and Nelson (2003) tested framing power against prior issue knowledge. Their results supported the view that those who already had knowledge of an issue were more likely to show effects from media framing. Their study showed no persistent effect from the framing among those first affected, but the effect does demonstrate some longevity in other studies. Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, and Vig (2000) tested the persistence of belief weeks after exposure to a single newspaper article on a controversial subject. They found that the comments of subjects still reflected a shift in the belief matrix three weeks later.

One example of media framing of issues and how audiences receive the effects of that framing involves the public evaluation of benefits of policy changes for certain groups. Nelson and Kinder (1996) defined frames as "constructions" of a particular issue which help the audience decide what to think about it. Frames are a mechanism for elites, both media and political (through the media) tell the average citizen what is important.

Candidates understand the importance of news media framing in reaching individual audience frames, and they try to manipulate the media to align their own frames to the candidates' frames. Miller, Andsager, and Riechert (1998) examined the

news releases distributed by the Republican presidential candidates during the 1996 campaign. News releases are, of course, designed to obtain news coverage. And in each, following the language of framing, the candidates hope to achieve a positive depiction of themselves in the stories the news media tell. Media, as independent entities, develop their frames separately from the candidates, but use, in part, information received through news releases. The authors found that the candidates often framed themselves in very similar ways, with issue orientations that were often hard to distinguish. But the media separated the candidates in their own framing of the events, thwarting much of what the candidates were trying to do with the news releases. But Entman (2003) introduces the concept of cascading activation as applied to framing. He uses post-9/11 White House framing attempts to measure the ability of a high level elite (like the President) to affect media framing and public beliefs. Entman models a cascading network activation where the White House frames its communication with other political elites, those elites frame their communication with the media, the media create news frames based on the political frames, and the audience adjusts its beliefs at the bottom of the cascade (Entman 2003, p. 419). The model describes an amplification effect through the additional level of political elites, and that amplification affects the media. With the 9/11 context, the relative agreement of both Republican and Democrat political elites sent strong framing cues to the media. Those cues overwhelmed dissonant cues from fellow journalists suggesting a Saudi connection be explored by the media. It was not.

Finally, credibility—a central topic of this project—plays an important factor in framing as it does in agenda setting. Druckman (2001) tested the framing power of various media sources. High credibility media, like the *New York Times*, had a stronger

framing effect with its audience than low credibility media like the *National Enquirer*. The evidence showed a systematic approach of audience members to find a credible and believable source with whom they can trust their framing responsibilities. If perceptions of bias in the traditional media push the credibility of those outlets lower in the minds of a sufficient percentage of news consumers, then those traditional media will sink to the level of the tabloid press, leaving a void for new media to fill. As with the agenda setting discussion, large-scale dissatisfaction with perceived liberal media bias can push the audiences in a conservative direction, changing the framing analysis of the news.

Priming Audiences to Change Perceptions

Just as framing is closely related to agenda setting, so too, is priming. Priming is the effect media have on their audiences causing them to remember and associate thoughts with a certain candidate or other story object, and rank those thoughts in some order. Clearly any bias in the news presentation toward one particular ideology can have a major priming effect, moving the audience member in the same direction as the bias was slanted.

First described by Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Berkowitz and Jo (1994) define priming as occurring when:

People witness, read, or hear of an event via the mass media, ideas having a similar meaning are activated in them for a short time afterward, and...these thoughts in turn can activate other semantically related ideas and action tendencies (Berkowitz and Jo 1994, p. 45).

The effects of priming are often studied alongside agenda setting effects. The fine difference is that agenda setting cues audience members on what issues to think about and consider in their evaluation of candidates, but priming tells helps define how those

dimensions will be evaluated. Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan (2002) demonstrated this difference in the local issue setting. The group measured attitude change toward a park development in the city of Ithaca, New York. They found not only a measure of agenda setting in the populace that consumed mass media, but they also found priming had taken place to help those audience members rank the importance of certain portions of the policy proposal. In this way, the agenda setting had once again told people what to think about, but the priming had told them what to think.

Evidence exists that candidates use priming to help voters evaluate them in the way most favorable for their candidacy, even without the consent or knowledge of the mass media facilitating the priming content. Jacobs and Shapiro (1994) looked over private public opinion polls used by the Kennedy campaign in 1960 to determine what issues and images would be most favorable to the Democrat's White House run. As the authors point out, using a priming strategy takes advantage of the electorate's incomplete and inefficient use of campaign information. The approach used by Kennedy as depicted by Jacobs and Shapiro completes a feedback loop from the electorate to the candidate (through polling) to the media (through news releases and public statements) and back to the people (through newscasts and newspaper publication).

Mendelsohn (1996) sees the priming effect as a destabilizing force in Canadian elections because it emphasizes personal candidate attributes rather than traditional party and issue importance. And media in both Canada and the United States assist by depicting parties as unimportant in the electoral process. But Pan and Kosicki (1997) warn that giving too much weight to the priming effect of media would be unwise. Their study of priming effect on the George H. W. Bush campaign in 1991 and 1992 shows that

media priming is part of a much larger priming picture, where other sources of information add more to the priming equation. And another examination of that same campaign by Krosnick and Brannon (1993) credits news media priming of the role Bush played in leading the war inflated his performance ratings while the war was on, but left quickly at its end. And McGraw and Ling (2003) found priming on individual candidates does have an impact on voter evaluations of the candidate, but that priming effect does not occur in reference to groups, like feminists.

Priming analysis of media effects can be troubling to those who see bias in the media. Because priming seems to cross the line over just telling audience members what to think about, and enters into the arena of guiding those audience members into areas of how to evaluate candidates and issues (in the political setting), biased presentations appear to have the power to make major changes in the perceptions of candidates and issues.

Learning from Media

Agenda setting, framing, and priming all rely on information traveling from the transmitter—mass media—and into the receivers—audience members. Once there, does it persist? Is learning taking place when people consume the mass media—particularly television news? As this question was first examined, the amount of learning taking place among television news viewers seemed to be very limited. Patterson and McClure (1976) found television news to be next to worthless when it came to transmitting candidate positions to the voters. The pair found political advertising to be far more effective. Neuman (1976) found very limited unaided recall among network news

viewers, with many remember no stories at all and just a few remembering only one or two from an entire broadcast. But he is quick to suggest that his study was limited and more testing was necessary to involve real-world recall and use of televised news information. And Clarke and Fredin (1978) found while newspaper readers gained a preference for one U. S. Senate candidate over another based in part on media reports, television viewers showed no such gains. The unanswered question of learning from news turned back to another variation on the previously discussed two-step flow theory. News diffusion research emerged from that theory as an attempt to better explain how information reaches audiences and how it persists once there. Early studies showed many variables other than the news presentation itself were important to the ability of the audience members to learn. Gaziano (1983) cited educational level as the most important factor in learning, along with viewing time and story structure. Greenberg and Parker (1965) showed that viewers learn about high interest stories in an “S” curve pattern—first few know about it, then many learn quickly what has happened, then diffusion reaches a lower rate again. In this scenario, most learning takes place from television. But on non-crisis news, Funkhouser and McCombs (1971) found learning growing slowly and then leveling off over a longer period of time. And those who were more interested in the news topics held onto information longer after learning about it. These early studies and others pointed to seven factors of news diffusion that affect learning from television news content:

- 1) amount of coverage
- 2) the frequency of story repetition
- 3) level of interest among viewers
- 4) education level
- 5) level in interaction with social groups
- 6) socioeconomic/group status

7) pre-existing knowledge on the subject (Davis and Robinson 1986a, p. 41)

Tichenor, Donahue, and Olien (1970) refined these factors into a “knowledge gap” model of learning that works to explain why highly covered events remain unlearned by a large percentage of news consumers. The model centers on the difference in socioeconomic status among those consumers (as measured by education level) and states that those with higher socioeconomic status will gain knowledge at a faster rate than those with lower socioeconomic status, and that difference in rates will create a knowledge gap that will continue to widen over time. The authors stress that the lower SES consumers will not be uninformed, but that there will be a measurable difference between their level of learning and those with higher SES. They attribute the different rates to differing communication skills sets, differing levels of previously stored knowledge about the given subject, differing amounts of social contact through which stimulus can flow, differences in willingness to expose oneself to and retain information, and difference in news media selection, where printed media favors higher learning than broadcast media. One final note from the study suggests that the limited resources of the media force them on to other stories before the lower SES consumers can “catch up” and close the knowledge gap. But the desire to learn from news has also proven to be a factor in retention and learning. Eveland (2001) tested whether someone with the goal to learn when watching news would indeed learn more than those without the motivation. He asserts his cognitive mediation model places the motivation to learn with the news consumer. The consumer can engage the cognitive processes of news attention and elaborative processing to survey the news for information. This need to survey will result in higher learning as a side effect. Eveland (2002) modified his model to add an element of information processing as

a mediating process. This confirmed his notion that news attention and elaboration (or processing) are the driving factors to knowledge gain, and not the surveillance function.

A significant study applying psychological theories to the ways in which news consumers learn came through the application of schema theory. Graber (1988) defines a schema as “a cognitive structure consisting of organized knowledge about situations and individuals that has been abstracted from prior experiences.” (Graber 1988, p. 28). Schemata contain a general reference of facts and relationships between commonly encountered objects. They act to give people an expectation of what “normally” happens in a given set of circumstances. And the schemata also carry pre-made value judgments about the situations referenced. When a person encounters a situation that has a schematic equivalent—or is close to one—his mind plays out the expectations, making adjustments for the details of the particular situation. Graber claims schemata can be linked so that thoughts travel from one to another if they are of related material. The important aspect of schema theory is that the use of schemata allows people to work beyond their limited cognitive capacities to deal with incoming information. That information can be political, and the source of the flow can be the mass media. Applied to politics, schemata assist voters to decide what candidate and policy information to process and store, organize new candidate and policy information and fit it into existing schema, make educated guesses to fill in any gaps of information about political ideas or actors, and solve problems—including decisions to vote. Using a panel design that allowed her to work with twenty-one subjects over the course of one year, Graber was able to find strong support for an overall theory of schematic processing by her panelists, but at the same time note remarkable differences in the personal schema of each individual.

Aside from the internal processes and characteristics of the news consumers, the characteristics of the stories themselves can affect learning. In tests of both American and British viewers, Davis and Robinson (1986b) discovered the placement of a story in a newscast, as well as its length can change learning attributes. The lead story, as well as longer stories, persists in viewer memory longer than the others in the newscast. Clearly a bias in story placement (such as placing a story strongly associated with liberal issues as the lead story) can be an example of a structural bias in television news having a learning effect on the audience. If liberal biases place liberal stories higher in the newscast on a consistent basis, then the audience will learn more about those stories with the liberal slant than about neutral or conservative stories in the newscasts.

Subjective factors in the presentation of the news also proved to be correlated with learning, such as visual excitement and elements of surprise. Perse (1990) found that those motivated to watch local television news were receptive to learning from what they saw there, while those less motivated were not. The style of the news presentation matters to learning as well. "Tabloid" television news style has become more popular in recent years. It is characterized by Grabe et al (2000) as the use of music, sound effects, slow motion, flash frames as transitions between shots, and obtrusiveness of reporter's voice track. When tested against a more standard television news production format, viewers remembered more and learned more about the individual stories they viewed. These elements may stimulate the emotional centers of the brain, making recall more possible. Lang, Newhagen and Reeves (1996) found that negative stories seemed to arouse the same emotional reaction and were easier to recall. These findings are consistent with a "dual coding" theory of media reception that suggests the audio portion and video portion

of television news content are processed separately in the brain. Newhagen and Reeves (1992) were critical of previous research that always tested learning and memory from television news only by the written/verbal content. Their examination of memory over time measured for both visual and verbal information showed more learning and longer retention of visual images over time, but at the expense of the verbal content of the stories. And the lack of context with which television news viewers can evaluate information is often cited as an impediment to learning. Graber (1990) describes television news as a mass of sometimes unrelated content that can be difficult to sift through and sort for proper evaluation and storage. Brians and Wattenberg (1996) agreed, finding a weak association between television news content and learning, as compared to political advertising and newspapers, but positing the possibility for more learning if television's structural deficiencies are remedied.

Other theories compete with learning theory as to the direct effects of television on its audience. Cultivation theory, as described by George Gerbner and others, considers the impact television viewing has on its audiences and predicts that those audience members who watch more television content are more likely to share beliefs with the predominant view of the television content they are viewing (Potter 1994, p. 1). But its emphasis has been mostly on violence in entertainment television and not focused a great deal on news.

McQuail (1985) argues for a more sociological approach, where the analysis of media effects is framed not just in the attention of those sending the messages, but also in the sociological context of how the messages are generated, transmitted, and received, as well as the context in which the received messages are analyzed. There is as much power

in the receiver as in the sender, under this model. And the media channels themselves are not neutral pipelines; rather, they are complex social constructions that carry their own sets of norms, practices, and effects (McQuail 1985, p. 94). McQuail's analysis may not be part of the mainstream media learning literature, but his depiction of the media as more than neutral conduits of information is insightful for examining the effects of bias on learning. There seems to be ample evidence that the norms and practices of the media can introduce biases into the news product. If, as indicated, there are learning effects that emphasize one ideology over others, then the bias has a repetitive effect that can grow over time.

Media Effects on Behavior

With all the research centered on how audiences receive and process the information they receive from the mass media, what does it actually cause them to do? Can political behavior be prompted or modified by exposure to mass mediated political information? At the heart of this question lies the search for what causes citizens to take part in democracy. While a thorough review of that literature is outside the scope of this research, research into how media affect that participation have been numerous. Since information is part of the equation the rational voter uses to make his electoral choices, it would seem clear that media would play a role in promoting participation. But much of the literature has suggested media—particularly television news—does just the opposite. Michael Robinson (1976), at the height of the post-Watergate doldrums in American politics, suggests a “videomalaise” existed that stemmed from television’s constant

portrayal of government officials as corrupt and dishonest. Robinson summed it up like this:

The inadvertent viewer, through television, witnesses these images of the society, regarding them as essentially evil and indicative of sociopolitical decay. Unable or unwilling to reject the network reports, the inadvertent viewer may turn against the group most directly responsible for the conflict, against the social and political institutions involved, or against himself, feeling unable to deal with a political system “like this.” (Robinson 1976, p. 430)

The only alternative for this voter, said Robinson, was to remove himself from this corrupt system and no longer participate. Later research separated the videomalaise concept into two component parts: powerlessness and cynicism. Robinson’s view predicts that increased television news exposure will lead to a feeling of more powerlessness and more cynicism. Measuring those factors independently, Bowen, Stamm, and Clark (2000) found that television news viewership did lead to more of a feeling of powerlessness in test subjects, but not a higher level of cynicism. But the television viewers were no less likely to participate than newspaper readers, raising questions as to whether there is an overall media malaise, or that a feeling of powerlessness does not contribute to nonparticipation. Other research by Miller (1974) and Roper (1977) did find a relationship between increase television news viewing and a decline in political participation and general efficacy. But Leshner and McKean (1997), studying an off-year U. S. Senate race in Missouri, also found no increase in voter cynicism associated with high media use. And the study further contradicted the videomalaise hypothesis by showing television news as the “only mass communication channel that significantly predicts higher political knowledge levels” (Leshner and McKean 1997, p. 78). And Domke et al (1987) found a voter’s previous support for a

candidate *and* positive or negative media coverage—in print or on television—were the two strongest factors in predicting vote preference.

A theory that could be seen as connecting the powerlessness of the videomalaise concept with media-driven public opinion is the theory of the “spiral of silence.” Noelle-Neumann (1984) showed societies tendency to shun deviance pushes those with differing views into a fear of isolation if they reveal those views publicly. Those holding the minority view will continuously check the mass media to see if the majority view is still in power. If it is they will refuse to discuss their views with others, for fear of isolation. The media, setting its agenda in part from what it is able to gather of public opinion, hears less and less dissenting views, and reports more of the majority opinion. This drives the minority opinion deeper into the spiral from which he can never return to the majority, effectively eliminating his point of view from public discourse. An alternative view of this effect incorporates the notion of bias into the effect. If media bias props up a false view of the majority, while the real majority favors a different ideology, emerging media sources can arise to take audience from the traditional media, rather than let those un-served by the mainstream media fall into the spiral. Some would argue the increased popularity of right-focused media could be explained by this alternative view of the spiral of silence. The spiral empties not into ideological oblivion, but into a separate and growing circle of the displeased. This view would support McLeod, Becker, and Burns (1974) interpretation of the spiral, suggesting that voters pay attention to media reports to act as reinforcements to their own thinking, particularly the views of elites.

One theory of participation can be examined in terms of the concept of “social capital.” Putnam (1995) describes social capital as the building of connections in society

through which a network of partners can work to build a stronger civil society and Thomas (1998) calls it a social infrastructure “which a society gradually accumulates through the microlevel interactions of individuals” (Thomas 1998, p. 167). Media can act as agents to contribute to stronger social capital, or to take away from it. Moy and Scheufele (2000), examining the effects of media consumption on social trust, found that news media use is not related to either a decline or increase in political trust.

In fact, media can provide one of the tools to move citizens to action. Lemert (1981) described mobilizing information as a main source of motivation to act politically. Lemert defines mobilizing information as a fact or facts that helps people to move to action on information they already have in their possession. Lemert describes three types of mobilizing information: locational, identificational, and tactical. Locational mobilizing information gives audience members a time and a place for an action to take place. An example might a media report that gives the place and time of an upcoming political rally. Identificational mobilizing information describes a person or group so that they can act in reaction to that group. And tactical mobilizing information provides examples of behaviors that might be followed, such as a labor strike. While mobilizing messages exist in news reports all the time, they are not necessarily designed to start some form of participation. Lemert calls those specific messages, usually made up of one or more pieces of mobilizing information, mobilizing messages. Journalists may not want to issue these messages, seeing them as partisan or a useless detail. But at times, journalists consent to give these urges to political participation when the cause is either seen as large enough, or neutral enough to rise to the level of newsworthiness. On these occasions the journalists become “crusaders” of sort with the mission to change public policy for the

betterment of society. As with the concept of civic journalism, the media then move out of their role as impartial messengers of information to become an important part of the policy machine. As such, bias is a given. And if the side the media chooses to champion is not the side of all audience members, then perceptions of bias are sure to arise from coverage of the policies at hand.

Leff, Protes, and Brooks (1986) found the investigative reporter technique has a great deal of impact on changing the views of citizens regarding the depicted wrongdoing, but had limited impact on policymakers. But not all mobilizing messages are intentional. Page and Shapiro (1992) see the media as unwitting (or partially-witting) accomplices to the policymakers' plans to use deceit and misinformation to move public opinion in support of planned policies. They state:

Our findings that media-reported statements and actions strongly affect Americans' policy preferences, and that government officials can influence public opinion by controlling certain international events, raise important questions about democratic theory... The possibility that the public is systematically misled in its policy preferences also threatens the main thrust of our argument about the rationality of public opinion (Page and Shapiro 1992, p. 355).

The authors' final point is that the American public does act rationally on the information it receives from the mass media. But governmental motivations to support its own policies leads to deceptions fed to journalists as news. So the effect the journalism has on the citizenry is to get them to follow the wrong course, thereby supporting the government position. Bishop (2005) supports the assertion of Page and Shapiro and gives the example of the "Contract with America," the pledge by campaigning Republicans running for Congress in 1994 to make "common sense" changes in the America's public policy. Journalists were fed information in this case, not from public officials, but from

Republican pollster and strategist Frank Luntz that showed sixty percent support by Americans for each of the ten policy positions found in the “contract.” Subsequent scholarly reviews of independent public opinion research at the time of Luntz poll data showed that support to be non-existent. But no journalists did the same research work the scholars did, so only the Luntz information was reported.

Returning to the audience and why members would use a media with apparent flaws in its information flow, the tradition of Blumler and Katz’s (1974) uses and gratifications interpretation of how audience actively choose and use the media left many wondering if there was a model with less free will on the part of audience members. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) developed a dependency theory model, showing the public with much less free will in their media choices. The authors see the public growing dependent on the mass media, relying on it to tell them when to change their opinions. As that mass-mediated information continues to meet the public’s needs better and better, they grow even more depended on it, giving the media even more influence. And as times of crisis arrive, the reliance on the media for public opinion guidance becomes supreme. While those authors speak of all media, Nimmo and Combs (1990) explain it is television news on which the public has become increasingly dependent. As they say, “the logic of television has become the logic of much of the mass media” (Nimmo and Combs 1990, p. 26). Just how that logic is formed and how it is carried out is determined by the makeup of those who report, write, and edit televisions news—their knowledge, biases, and beliefs.

In conclusion, the literature of media effects is filled with opportunities for the personal biases of journalists or the structural biases of the institutions of journalism to

change the ways people think and act. While there is no magic bullet, the limited effects of media can be strong enough to change the salience of issues, change the way voters and citizens evaluate issues, and change the comprehension and retention of information about policies and policy makers. A perfectly neutral media adds no effect to the messages delivered to their audiences. But if bias exists in the media, it can enter the messages. But what bias does exist among journalists and their institutions? An examination of the evidence to answer that question is to follow.

Chapter 4: The Politics of Journalists

In his call for a new personality of journalism, Merrill (1996) calls for journalists to be “romantic, poetic, Dionysian, mystical, intuitive, emotional, subjective, personal, informal, directive, persuasive, humanistic, judgmental, and liberal” (Merrill 1996, p. 23). This “existential” approach is a far cry from how most journalists would describe themselves. Journalists consider themselves impartial, cold, unfeeling, and all business. But what are their real, political characteristics? And how do those characteristics affect the stories journalists write and publish. Many talk of a liberal bias in the American news media, though journalists defend their work as merely the questioning of authority. That question is central to this study.

All modern studies of the personal politics of journalists show their mean political leanings to be to the left of the general public, their audiences. As a result of that knowledge of the liberal ideological makeup of many journalists, further studies abound showing the result of that orientation is a news product that also emphasizes the left over the right. But journalists have blunted the sharpness of those arguments, using their professional standards and practices as a shield. They argue that the profession of journalism follows procedures that prevent the personal ideology of the journalist from coloring the story. An important element of those procedures is the eschewing of any symbols or signs that would belie one's personal prejudices or politics—such as the political label symbols at the center of this research.

The Political Makeup of the American Journalist

Despite the fact that a handful of journalists, through the performance of their duties on television or as high-profile print reporters, become celebrities in their own rights, the American public consumes a tremendous volume of news without knowing much about who produces it. Aside from the charges of talk radio hosts, very little is said about the politics of journalists, or even why they do the jobs they do. But just who the journalists who deliver our news each day are is a vital question. As Dennis (1996) states:

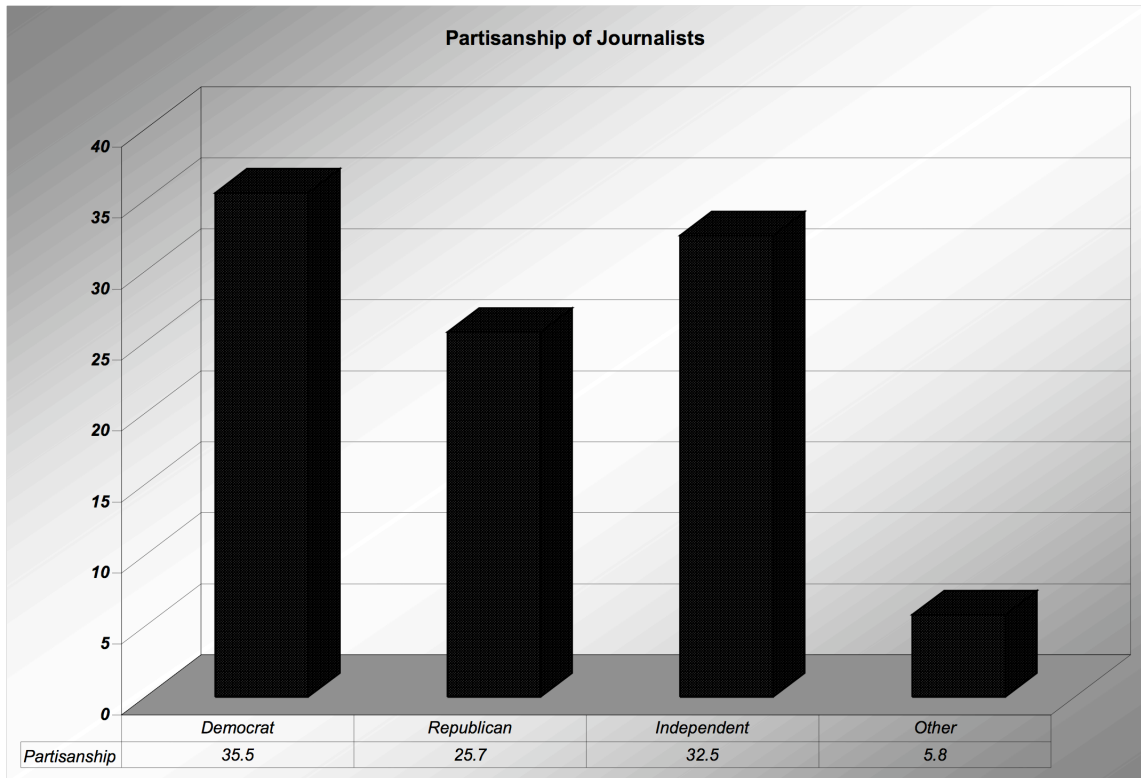
We do not worry much about a doctor's politics or religion influencing the kind of care we get, and we assume that even lawyers with whom we disagree on most things are capable of defending our interests in court. At the same time, we care greatly about the health and sanitary habits of those who work in restaurants and sausage factories. For such reasons, we should care about journalists and their news-processing practices. (Dennis 1996, p. xi)

But how to go about learning as much about those who grind out news all day as we do those who grind out sausage? One way is for those news grinders to tell us about themselves. Yet surprisingly few authors have gone about a systemic taxonomy of the working journalist in the United States. The first published work that relied on extensive journalist surveys limited itself to the depression-era Washington press corps. Roston (1937) asked the capitol reporters of the day to answer questionnaires about themselves and the jobs they do and the thoughts they have about those jobs. Much of the survey asked questions about education or demographic background, but some of the answers defined a league of men somewhat cynical about the system in which they worked and how much freedom existed aside from the freedom for publishers to make money. Twenty-five years later, Rivers (1962) went back to the same group to see how their makeup and views had changed. There were fewer men, more college degrees, but many

of the same attitudes overall. But those two works were focused on a tiny slice of the journalistic workforce, and did little to show the typical journalist, working outside the Washington beltway, or, of course, working in the myriad of media we have today.

The first major systemic survey of journalists working around the country and in more than just political reporting did not come until 1976, when John W. C. Johnstone and his colleagues published a volume that profiled reporters across the nation. The authors surveyed journalists in 1971 with a series of question about their personal backgrounds and beliefs. It was groundbreaking in many ways. First, it gave the first scientific definitions of just who is a journalist, and estimated just how many were at work in the United States—69,500 (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman 1976, p. 18). The demographic portion of the study showed U. S. journalists to be overwhelmingly white, male, Protestant, and living in the eastern part of the country. The study also showed, for the first time outside the Washington elite media, that the rank and file journalists of America were also overwhelmingly left-leaning. Figure 4-1 shows that a plurality of journalists identified themselves as Democrats.

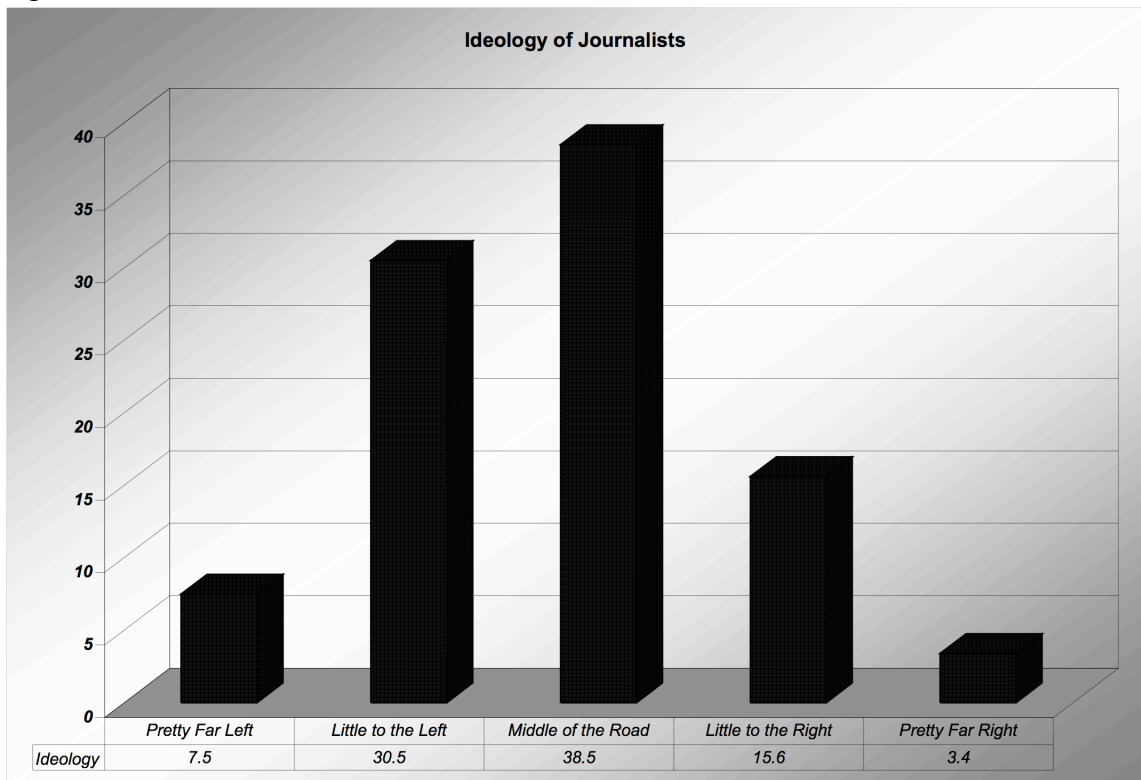
Figure 4-1



Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman 1976, p. 92

Some journalists are uncomfortable with identifying themselves with an organized party, so the authors also asked in which direction the journalist leaned politically. The results here, seen in Figure 4-2, show a much more liberal lean to journalists' self-identification.

Figure 4-2



Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman 1976, p. 93

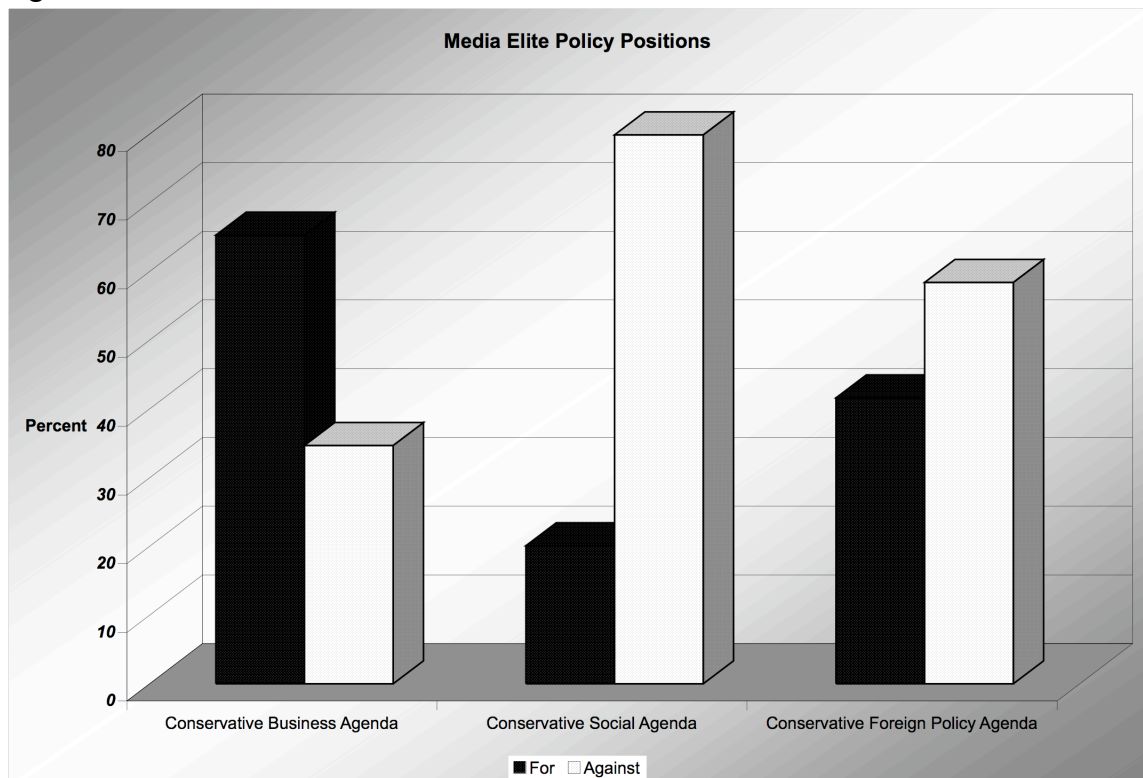
Grouping the division, 38 percent of journalists described themselves as left of center, while only 19 percent said they were to the right—a two to one margin (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman 1976, p. 93).

Five years later, S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman (1981) published a survey of media and business elites, in search of the differences in these two fields of endeavor. One of the main differences they found was in political views. While business elites leaned to the right in their political ideologies, 54 percent of media elites (defined as those in the major editorial roles of the Northeast’s leading newspapers) called themselves “left of center,” while only 19 percent considered themselves conservative (Lichter and Rothman 1981, pp. 4-5). But their self-confessed voting record told an even more lopsided story. When asked if for whom they voted in recent presidential elections,

81 percent said they had voted for the democratic candidate in each of the previous four elections. On the issues, Lichter and Rothman reported 90 percent favored legal abortion, 80 percent favored affirmative action as a remedy for unequal numbers of African Americans in the workplace, and most saw the United States as the cause of Third World poverty. But the media elite were far from socialists. More than 86 percent favored higher wages for more skills, 63 percent said less regulation of business would be good, and only 12 percent called for the governmental ownership of corporations.

An interesting pattern develops when comparing the overall tone of the social statements of the media elite with their views on economic policy. Figure 4-3 averages the major findings of each ideological dimension.

Figure 4-3

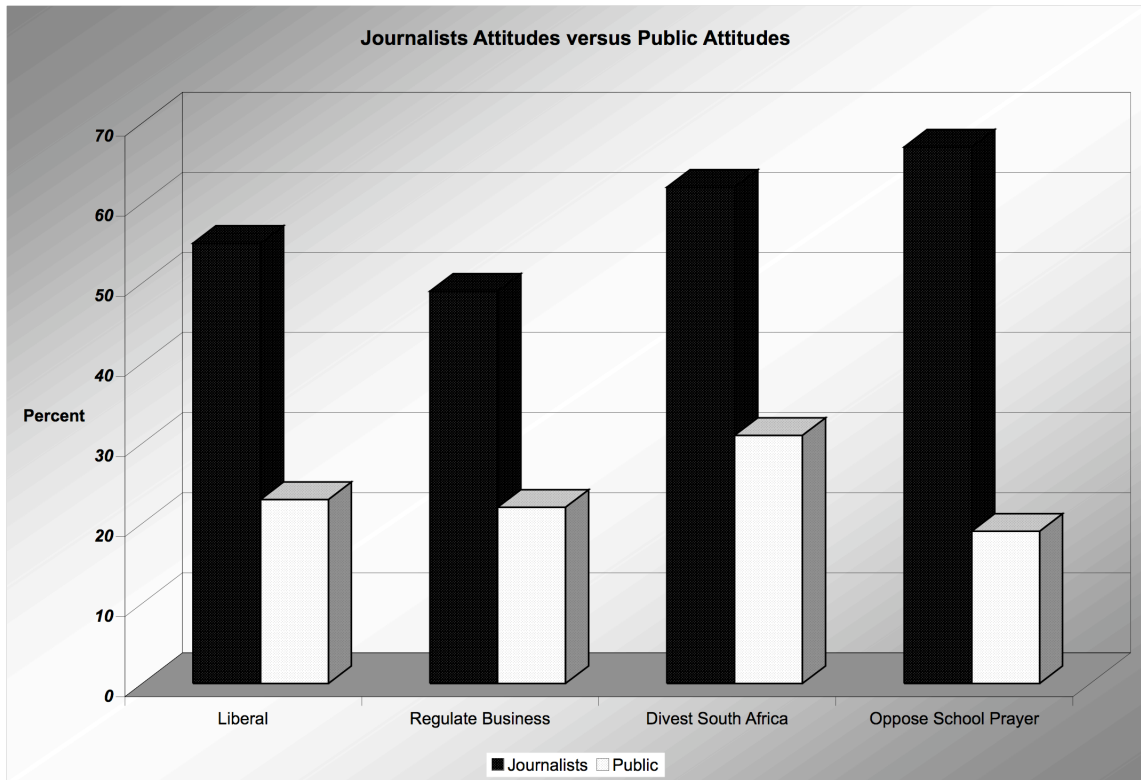


Source: Lichter and Rothman 1981.

The study ends with a new definition of the media elite as a new leadership group with the power to affect policy.

Academic research was far from the only way to shed light on the political makeup of the typical journalist as compared to his audience members. In 1985, the *Los Angeles Times* polled 2,703 newspaper reporters and editors across the country, as well three thousand members of the general public. The survey showed a wide split between the journalists who produce the nation's newspapers and their readers. Of eighteen political dimensions measured in the survey, journalists were more liberal in their positioning than the public on all but one. One of the most striking differences was on how the journalists labeled themselves. Fifty-five percent called themselves liberal, while only 23 percent of the public did the same. Journalists favored more regulation of business more than twice as often as their readers. On the controversial issue of the time, to divest American investments in South Africa to act as an economic sanction to end apartheid, a majority of journalists favored the action while only half as many readers—a definite minority—favored the same. And by a three to one margin, journalists disagreed with allowing prayer in schools, while the general public was three in one in favor of it.

Figure 4-4



Source: The Los Angeles Times August 12, 1985

The *Times* poll was weighted, however, to give more influence to larger circulation newspapers, so it failed to capture a snapshot of journalists working at the local level in many smaller communities. But a study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors published in 1989 showed similar results, even when not weighted for newspaper circulation. Twelve hundred journalists responded and 62 percent labeled themselves as a Democrat or liberal, while 22 percent called themselves a Republican or conservative, and 16 percent called themselves independent (Cunningham and Henry 1989).

In 1986, Lichter and Rothman continued their media elite research and returned, along with Richter's wife, Linda, with another volume that probed more deeply into how the personal beliefs of the journalists interviewed affected how they went about the job of

reporting the news. Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter (1986) once again relied on the nation's national media—based in the northeastern U. S. They did not survey local journalists or those across the country. In 1979 and 1980, they conducted interviews with 238 journalists from The New York Times, the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, U. S. News and World Report, ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS. Again, 54 percent called themselves politically liberal, while 17 percent called themselves politically conservative, down two percent from the authors' previous study. Their study showed a media elite that voted overwhelmingly Democratic, and when turning to nonpartisan sources, turned to liberal sources first on topics of welfare reform, consumer protection, pollution and the environment, and nuclear energy. Journalists were often twice and sometimes three times more likely to use a liberal source in one of these controversial stories as they were a liberal one. And the reason they gave for going to the liberals first and more often—they were more reliable sources (Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter 1986, p. 57).

Also in 1986, and again in 1991 and 1996, David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit replicated the Johnston study to determine how the demographic and ideological makeup of the American journalism workforce had shifted. They defined a *journalist* as anyone responsible for preparing, publishing, or transmitting news or other informational stories. These included full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, photojournalists, editors, and other news people, but did not include those involved with the technical production of the news (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 248). The population for the study consisted of all journalists working for English language, general consumption news media in the United States. That population excludes those working

for special interest or ethnic media. The authors chose just more than fourteen hundred subjects for the research, slightly oversampling minority journalists so that they could draw a clearer picture of the views of these minority groups. The journalists were asked to answer about ninety questions designed to generate a profile of their personal and professional backgrounds, as well as their ideological positions. The findings show a class of Americans unique in their background, ideas, and passions.

Working from the 1992 survey (published in 1996), its clear to see that, despite research showing television becoming the most relied upon medium for new, print reporters still make up the bulk of the U. S. journalist workforce.

Table 4-1: Full-time Journalists by Medium

Medium	Journalists	% of Workforce
Daily Newspapers	67,207	55.1
Weekly Newspapers	16,226	13.3
News Magazines	1,664	1.4
Television	17,784	14.6
Radio	17,755	14.5
News Services	1,379	1.1
Total	122,015	100.0

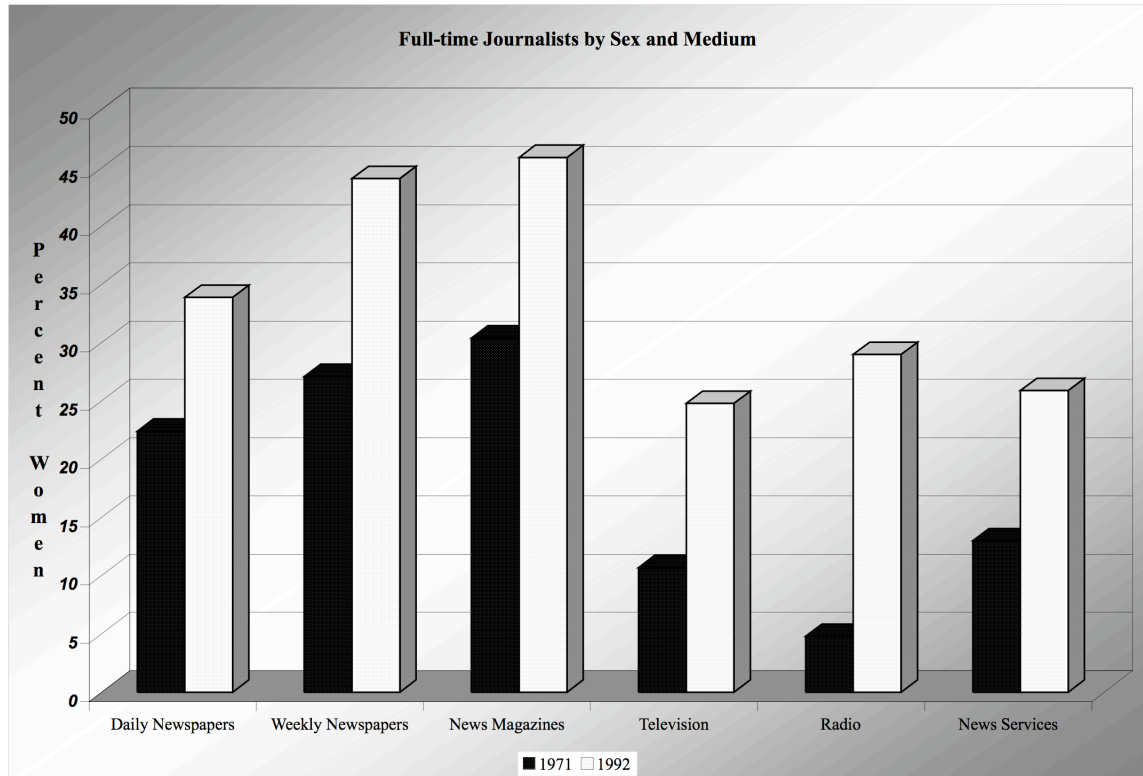
Source: Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 2

That total demonstrates a rise in the total number of journalists in the country since the Johnstone study of 1971 of more than fifty-two thousand journalists.

In terms of age, journalists are very much like the rest of the American workforce. In 1992, the median age for journalists was 36—so was the median age for the entire workforce. But at that time the business was more male than the rest of America’s workplaces. Weaver and Wilhoit report fully two-thirds of the journalism workforce is make, while the most recent U. S. Census bureau report available in 1992 showed men in just under fifty-five percent of jobs overall (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 8). But women

had made vast strides between the time of the Johnstone study and the 1992 survey, particularly in the broadcast media.

Figure 4-5

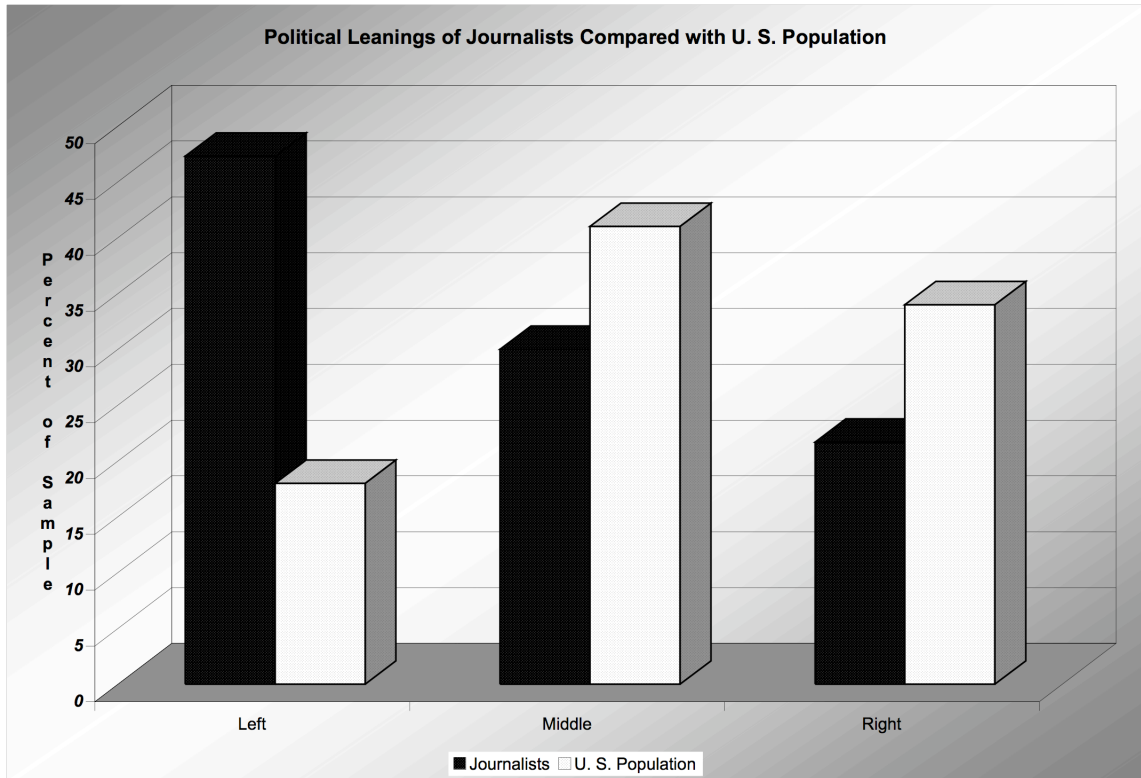


Source: Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman 1976, p. 198; Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 10

Racially, the journalist workforce in 1992 contained a far higher percentage of Caucasians than the general population. African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American journalists made up only 7.5% of the total U. S. journalist population for Weaver and Wilhoit’s study. That came at a time when nearly 25 percent of the population was a member of one of those minority groups. More recent, non-academic studies have shown the numbers moved much closer to mirroring the workforce through the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. The American Society of Newspaper Editors reports that in 2003, 12.5 percent of editorial employees at newspapers were minorities (ANSE 2003), while the Radio Television News Directors

Association reports in 2004 a 12.8 percent minority editorial workforce in television newsrooms, and an 11.6 percent figure for radio newsrooms (RTNDA 2004).

Figure 4-6



Source: Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 15; Gallup Organization poll July 17, 1992

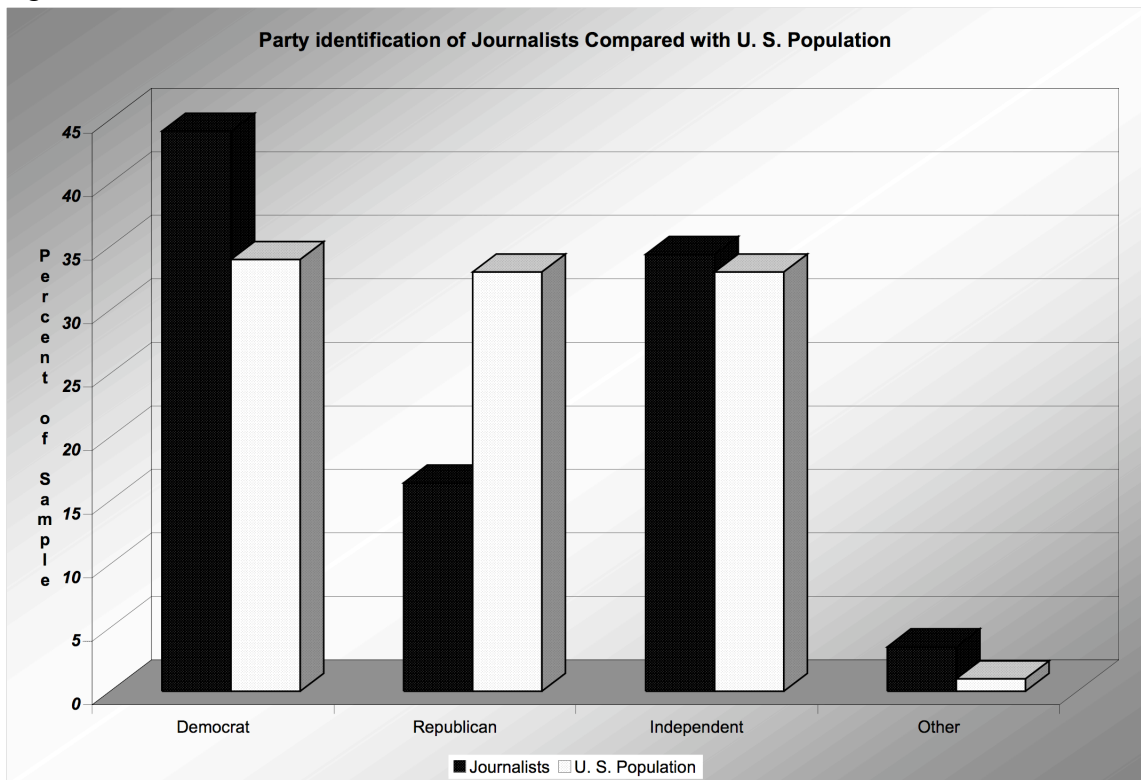
The demographics of the journalism workforce paint the picture of a subset of the population not too different from the norm. But the political profiles of the nation’s reporters and editors depict journalists in a whole new light. Weaver and Wilhoit gave journalists five options to describe their personal political views. Of those polled, 12 percent said they were “pretty far to the left,” 36 percent reported themselves as “a little to the left,” 30 percent called themselves “middle of the road,” 17 percent labeled themselves as “a little to the right,” and only 5 percent would call themselves “pretty far to the right.” Combining the categories to compare these results to a 1992 Gallup poll of

the entire U. S. adult population, the results show a media shifted left of center—and even further left of its audiences slightly right-wing views.

Similar studies show reporters with a consistent left lean in their personal political ideology. Hess (1981) talked with Washington reporters and found 42 percent called themselves liberal, while 19 percent said they were conservative. About half said there was at least some bias in the coverage coming out of Washington. And of those who saw bias, 96 percent said it leaned in the liberal direction. Later (1992) the same questions still had 42 percent of White House reporters calling themselves liberal, and 33 percent saying they were conservative—a higher percentage of conservatives than the full Washington press corps and the general journalism population, but still left of center and left of the American people to whom they report each night.

Party identification tells a similar story. Journalists report themselves to be independents more frequently than the general population, but those who do identify with one of the major parties do so nearly three times more often with the Democrats than with the Republicans.

Figure 4-7

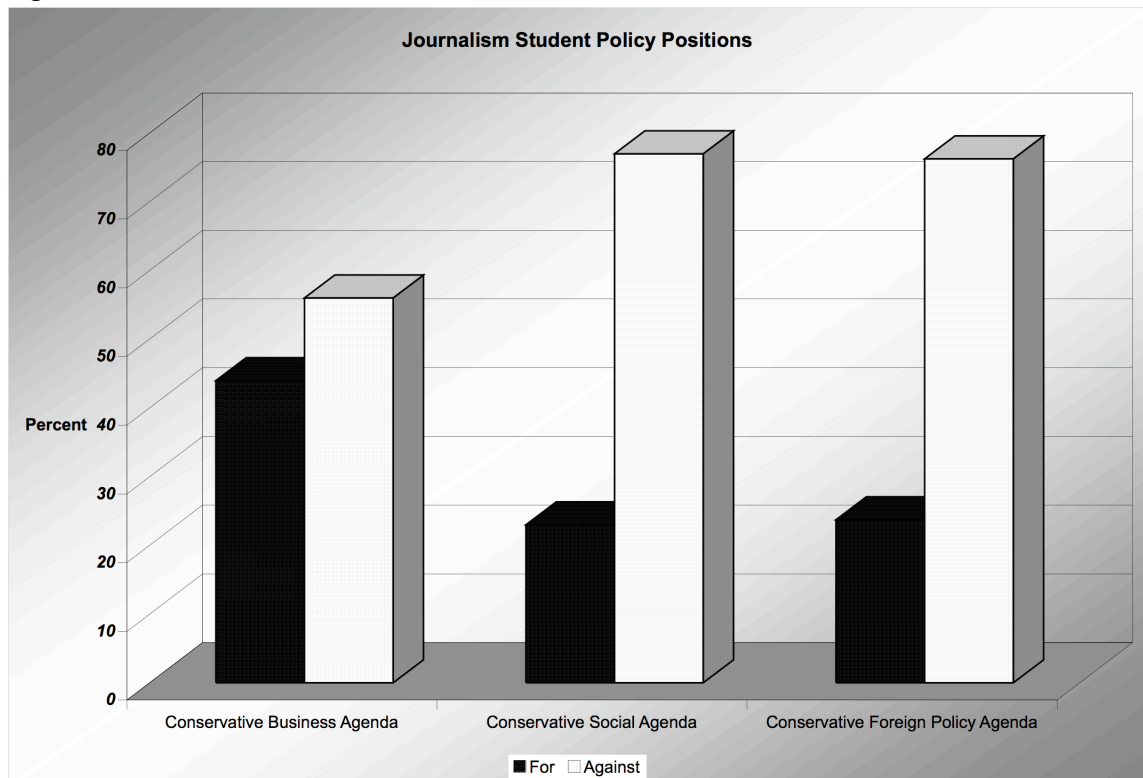


Source: Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 18; Gallup Organization poll July 6-8, 1992

Weaver and Wilhoit questioned whether education might play some part in the political leanings of journalists. They found that the percentage of journalists with a college degree had grown from 58 percent in the Johnstone study to 82 percent in their own study. And those who graduated with a degree in journalism, mass communication, telecommunications, or radio/TV had risen from 41 to 56 percent by 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 29). In the 1992 sample, another 40 percent had majored in liberal arts of some sort (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 39). Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter (1986) looked at the political views of journalism students at Columbia University. Eighty-five percent of those students said they are liberals, while only 11 percent said they were conservatives. In the previous presidential election of 1980, only 4 percent said they voted for Ronald Reagan, while 59 percent voted for Jimmy Carter and 29 percent cast

their votes for John Anderson. When asked to rate their positions on the same series of economic, social, and foreign policy positions as the authors put to media and business elites in their previous study, The students ranked liberal, not conservative—as the media elites had been, on economic issues, more liberal than the media elites on foreign policy issues, and showed about the same degree of liberal leaning on the social policy issues.

Figure 4-8



Source: Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter 1986, p. 47

But is a journalism or liberal arts education attributable for the difference in political views of journalists as compared to the rest of the population? This author's own work says it is not. Surveying undergraduates at the University of Missouri, this author (Woelfel 1990) found there was no significant attitudinal change through the process of journalism education, but that those attracted to the study of journalism tend to be intrinsically more liberal. This notion that journalists self-select themselves and bring

through that selection a certain set of innate characteristics has support in the literature. Kimball and Lubell (1960) found that high school newspaper writers intending to go on into the field of journalism were very motivated to join the profession as a way to be useful in making society better (Kimball and Lubell, 1960, p. 413). Bartley (1972) claimed that the typical person to pursue a career in journalism is “idealistic, interested more in the larger society, and politically liberal ... (and) is likely to come from among those situated well toward the idealistic extreme” (Bartley 1972, p. 11).

Weaver and Wilhoit might also capture part of the reason for a perceived liberal bias in their questions regarding the motivation for becoming a journalist. The most frequent response was an “early love for writing,” but the third most frequent response was a desire to “make a difference.” Journalists who answer the question like this specifically tended to want to right wrongs with their work (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p 53). Often, one of the defenses of journalists against charges of a liberal bias is a tendency to question authority, that some journalists feel runs counter to conservative trust and confidence in authority. Consistent with this desire to question authority, many journalists cited job dissatisfaction due to external political constraints on their reporting. Those constraints came from many sources, but journalists frequently mentioned government officials and record keepers as making it harder to publish the truth of what goes on in government (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 69). Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1976) saw a similar theme in their research, done at the height of the Viet Nam War era. Those authors saw two distinct “camps” among journalists with regard to what they saw their role to be. The older, more established journalists perpetuated the role as a detached, impartial, and objective observer to public affairs. But the younger journalists

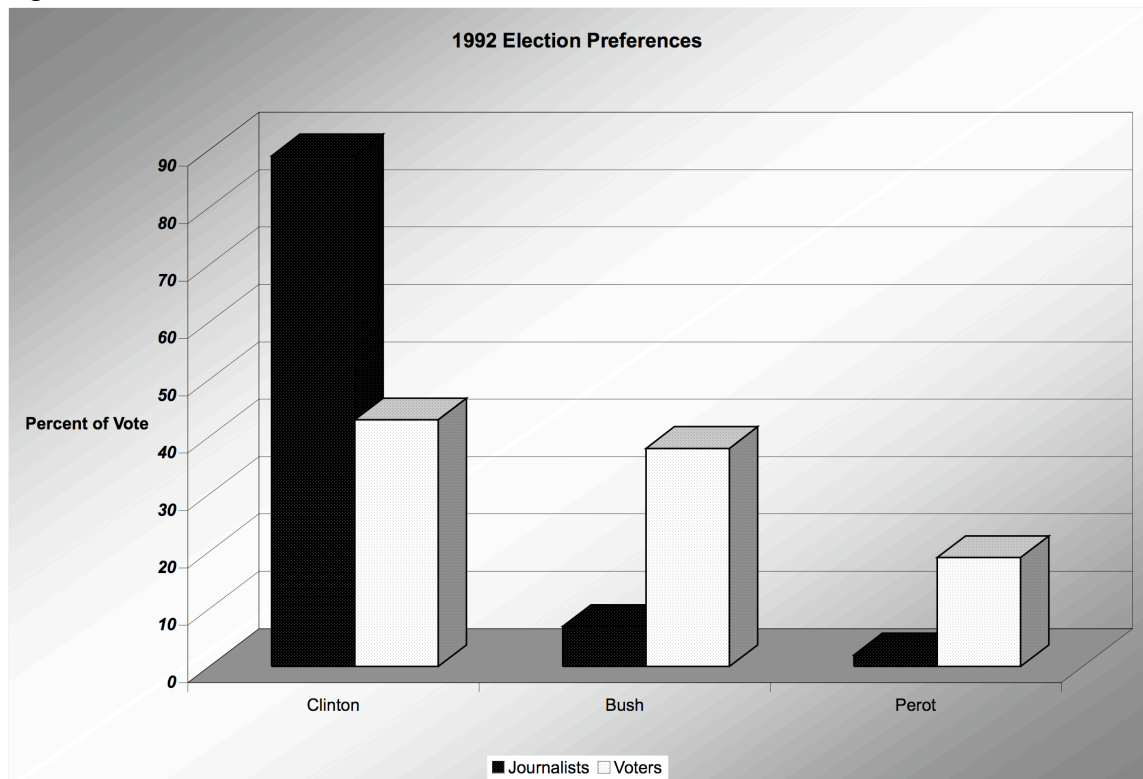
saw themselves as advocates for a larger “truth.” That mood carried through Viet Nam and into the Nixon/Watergate era. Both the Viet Nam War and Watergate became symbols for a powerful, conservative establishment pitted against an idealistic, liberal citizenry. And journalists of the day were often seen as part of the latter (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman 1976, p. 102). This adversarial role reached the forefront, and journalists professionally socialized in those and intervening years carry that mindset with them to work. Surveyed in 1992, fully one-third of journalists say investigating government claims is one of their primary goals (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p. 136). This is a change from the World War II era when the majority of journalists saw themselves, not as adversaries to government, but as neutral disseminators of information to the people (Bates 1995, pp. 30-31).

But not all reporters consider the government and political parties their adversaries. Some consider them their employer—at least before they became reporters. Bozell and Baker (1990) list 178 reporters, editors, and producers who at one time worked in political positions for Democratic administrations or in support of those administrations, while only 57 had held a similar position with a Republican administration. They find the pattern even more pronounced at the network news executive level. The same authors showed that journalists for mainstream publications who occasionally freelance articles for political publications do so fifteen times more frequently for liberal publications than they do for conservative one (Bozell and Baker 1990, pp. 81-5).

Since Weaver and Wilhoit, studies have not shown any significant change in the attitudes and beliefs of journalists. Rothman and Black (2001) revisited media and

business elites to find that the political patterns found twenty years earlier had not shifted. Journalists were still voting in an overwhelming majority for the Democratic candidate, with 76 percent voting for Michael Dukakis in 1988, and 91 percent for Bill Clinton in 1992. The Freedom Forum, examining the votes of Washington reporters and bureau chiefs in same election, found consistent numbers, with 89 percent for Clinton. Figure 4-9 shows the gap between those journalists and the general voting public in the 1992 election. The same poll found that 61 percent of those journalists considered themselves to be on the left, while only 9 percent saw themselves on the right.

Figure 4-9

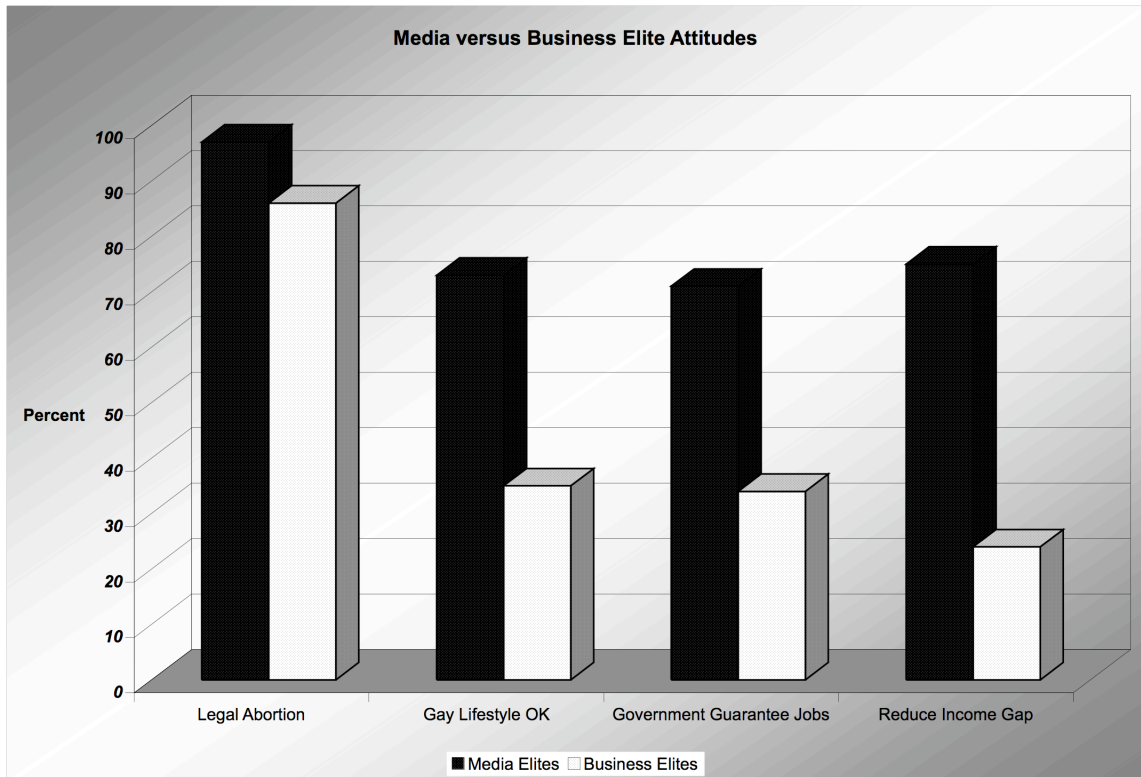


Source: The Freedom Forum 1996

Across ideological dimensions, media elites are consistently more liberal than the business elite, with its interest in profiting for shareholders. This is traditionally a more conservative group than the general public and would be expected to be to the right of

journalists. In fact, the same Rothman and Black study found journalist elites more liberal than their business counterparts in every respect. The split is—predictably—most apparent when the questions center on government policy to guarantee jobs or reduce income inequalities. Figure 4-10 shows the gap in elites.

Figure 4-10

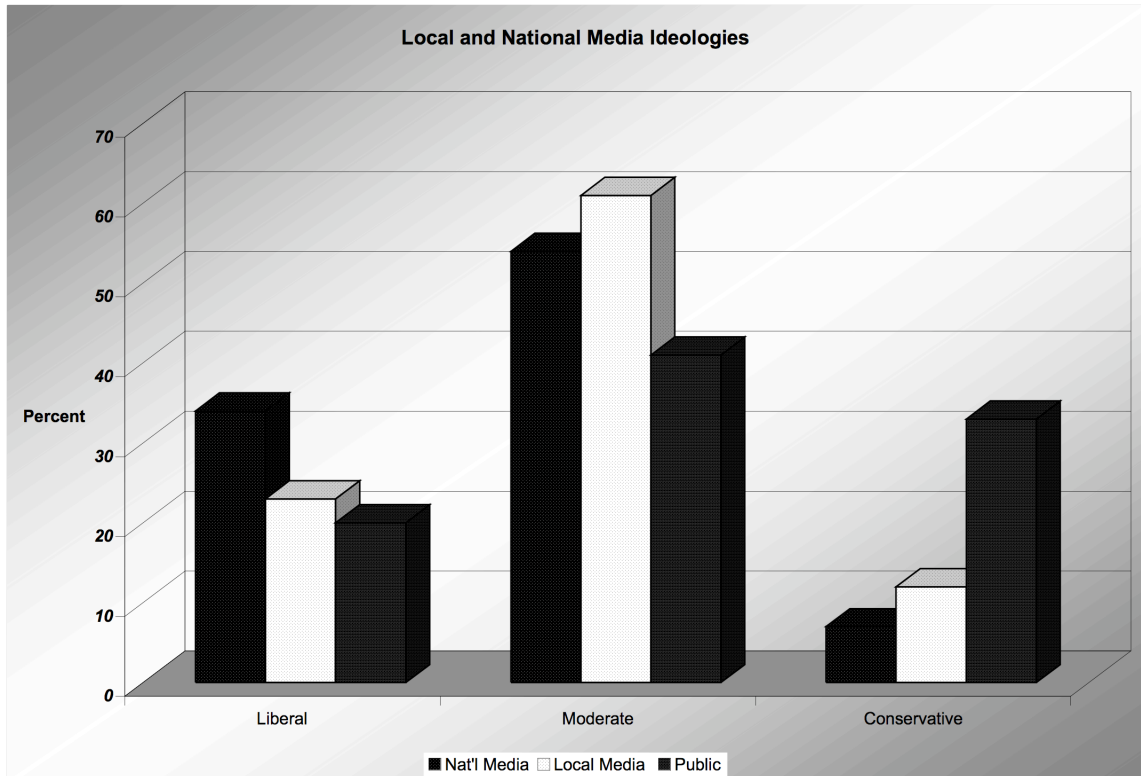


Source: Rothman and Black 2001, p. 83

The first major study of the 21st century shows journalists left-leaning views have not changed, meaning a new generation of journalists is ideologically aligned with those surveyed twenty-five years ago. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press polled 547 national and local journalists in early 2004 regarding their political views and attitudes. When asked to rate themselves on a liberal-conservative scale, national press journalists were still far more liberal than the general public, while local reporters were only slightly more liberal. Figure 4-11 demonstrates that comparison. That overall 34

percent figure for liberal journalists is up from 22 percent in the 1995 Pew poll, while the percentage of conservative journalists rose from four to seven.

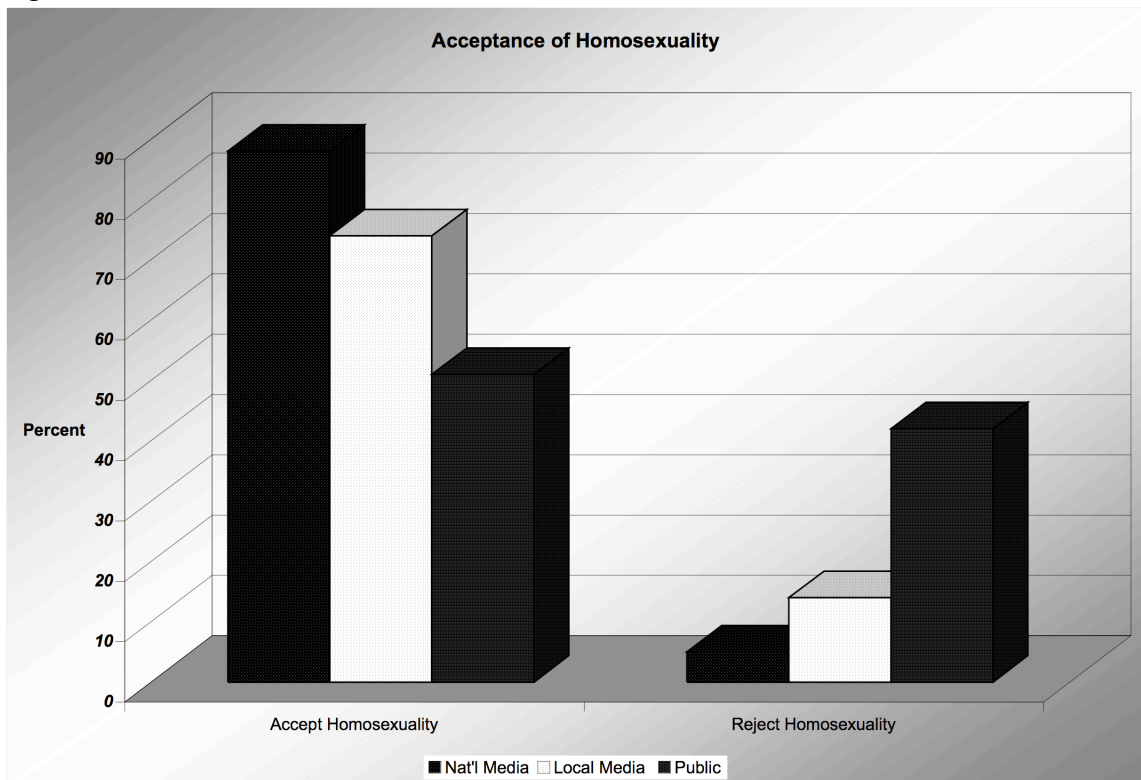
Figure 4-11



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004

On social issues, the Pew survey found journalists to be to the left of the public, with national journalists once again more liberal than their local counterparts. The most divided issue was on the topic of acceptance of homosexuality. While the general public only slightly supports the acceptance of homosexuality, the media members overwhelmingly accept it. Figure 4-12 shows the gap in beliefs.

Figure 4-12



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2004

The preference of journalists for the 2004 election is yet to be determined by researchers, but informal polling by other media shows the pattern of a left-voting media has carried into the 21st century. The New York Times polled journalists attending the Democratic National Convention in New York and found journalists there favored a Kerry presidency over another Bush term by a margin of three to one, and those in Washington for the campaign season picked the Democrat over the Republican by a measure of twelve to one (WorldNetDaily 2004).

Evidence of a Liberal Bias

It is clear the bulk of journalists working in the United States are ideologically to the left of the average citizen. Numerous studies over two generations of journalists have

shown this to be an ideological consistency. But is there an effect on the balance and fairness of the news these liberal journalists produce? Some on the right charge that the media elites are out of touch with their readers and viewers, unable to judge the value of NASCAR in the lives of everyday Americans (Coulter 2002, p. 205). But conservative critics say that is just one picket on the left-leaning fence standing between liberal journalists and news consumers.

With the impartial media being a 20th century invention, there was an acceptance of bias before that time. But as audiences and politicians began to expect fair treatment for all sides, the hint of a lean one way or another was suddenly a cause for alarm. The first references to a biased media centered around what may seem odd today—a conservative slant. Everette (1997) points out that Franklin D. Roosevelt called the press “200 percent Republican” and Adlai Stevenson was fond of talking about the “one-party press” (Everette 1997, p. 3). Both Democrats saw rampant right-leaning bias in the newspapers owned and run by big-business Republicans. But it was a Republican Vice President who put the modern model of media bias in place. Speaking in Des Moines, Iowa on November 13, 1969, Spiro Agnew called on the American people to demand more from a television news media than they were being given.

And the people of America are challenged, too -- challenged to press for responsible news presentation. The people can let the networks know that they want their news straight and objective. The people can register their complaints on bias through mail to the networks and phone calls to local stations. This is one case where the people must defend themselves, where the citizen, not the Government, must be the reformer; where the consumer can be the most effective crusader (Agnew 1969).

Nowhere in the speech did Agnew say the words “liberal” or “left” of “Democrat,” but the message was clear. He redefined the problem of bias in the media

from the right to the left in an instant. Strouse (1975) reports the media were “scared into inaction” (Strouse 1975, p. 108). Editorials stopped their criticism of the president and commentators followed suit. And this change came just one year after the majority of major newspapers endorsed the Nixon-Agnew ticket for reelection (Lee and Solomon 1990, p. 142). As authors and scholars began to look into the perceived bias in the news, their findings were a mixed bag. Efron (1971) took Agnew’s lead and fired off the first volley of shots across the bow of the media establishment. Her study proved to be a jumping off point for those to come over the next thirty years, citing a systematic and consistent liberal bias to the daily output of the news media. Cirino (1971) details a list of practices leading to bias, which foreshadows much future research. Cirino suggest journalists show bias when choosing sources, choosing stories to cover, by omitting details, in the selection of questions for interviews, by choosing placement of stories, in image selection, and of course, in the writing of the stories (Cirino 1971, pp. 136-79). But Cirino does not attack the media as being liberal in their bias. Instead, he charges the media have an agenda to carry out, mainly commercial and non-political, and that they alter and distort their stories to support this agenda.

Epstein (1975) describes a “bias for change” in television network news, which he believes can be perceived as a liberal bias by viewers. The need to show stories easily comprehended by audiences everywhere leads to an oversimplification of the details and a resulting appearance that most stories can be resolved by a change in which one side defeats the other (Epstein 1975, p. 205). Epstein sees the real problem for journalists to be in the structure of how they gather their facts and are subject to manipulation by the sources of those facts, and the demands of the medium for which they write. Patterson

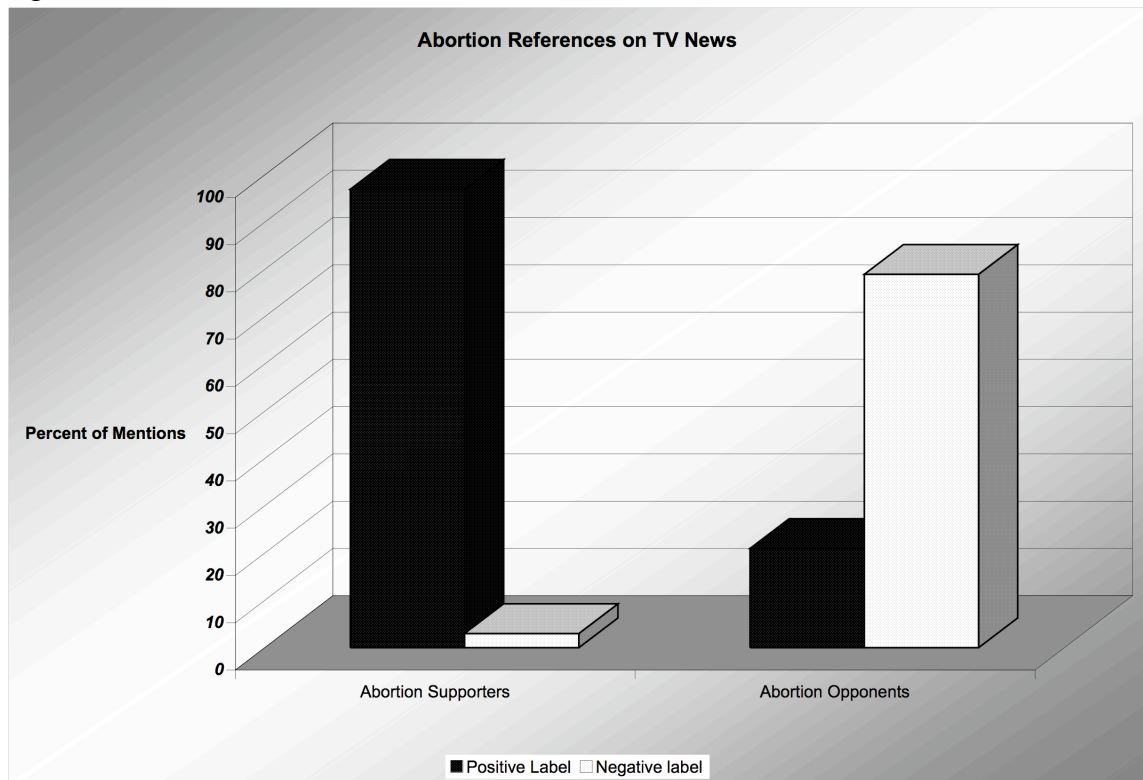
(1997) agrees with this “news as conflict” definition, particularly in the political arena. And Hatchen (2001) contends the journalist’s habit of magnifying the bad while nearly hiding the good forces the audience to see an increasingly depressing view of the world. There is an association of the media with the bad news itself, causing a feeling of uneasiness in just turning it on or opening the paper (Hatchen 2001, p. 115). Fallows (1996) has an even darker view. He describes journalists as portraying “American life as a race to the bottom” (Fallows 1996, p. 7). This brings distrust of not only the media, but Fallows says, of all institutions political, social, or commercial.

Kuypers (2002) details the processes of liberal bias in the news. It begins with “sandwiching,” a practice in which story objects of different ideology or substance are placed next to or within one another. This placement often causes unflattering comparisons between the two, usually to the detriment of the conservative point of view. The ratio of liberal to conservative sources is often uneven, with as much as fourteen times more liberal views than conservative (Kuypers 2002, p. 212).

Much of the discussion of the specifics of a liberal bias in the media starts with language. Critics say the words journalists use—or do not use—display their true biases to their audience. One word that often gives that clue is the word “liberal” itself. Bozell and Baker (1990) examined the language used in major newspapers to describe the political leanings of certain groups. The authors found the word “liberal” tacked on as a descriptor of groups like the Brookings Institution, the National Organization for Women, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights a tiny fraction of the time the label “conservative” is applied to the counterparts of the above mentioned organizations, the Heritage Foundation, the Concerned Women for America, and the Free Congress

Foundation (Bozell and Baker 1990, p. 101). On the controversial subject of abortion, each side has chosen a euphemistic name to help make a sympathetic point with the public. Those in favor of the right to a legal abortion call themselves “pro-choice,” while those opposed to the right to a legal abortion call themselves “pro-life.” But what do the news media call them? A study of the main network television newscasts in 1988 shows a large discrepancy in terms. Figure 4-13 shows the percentage of mentions with the positive term for each group (pro-choice or pro-life) compared with the negative terms (primarily “anti-abortion”). In all, 97 percent of mentions of those in favor of abortion rights used the term “pro-choice” while only 21 percent of references to those against legal abortion used their term “pro-life” (Bozell and Baker 1990, pp. 105-6).

Figure 4-13



Source: Bozell and Baker 1990, pp. 105-6

Another matter of word choice involved the economy. The term “Reganomics” was seen as a derogatory description of the conservative economic policies of the Reagan administration. But the National Conservative Foundation (1987) found that the use of the term in the major print media declines as the economy improved, thereby associating it only with the negative connotation but not the positive outcome.

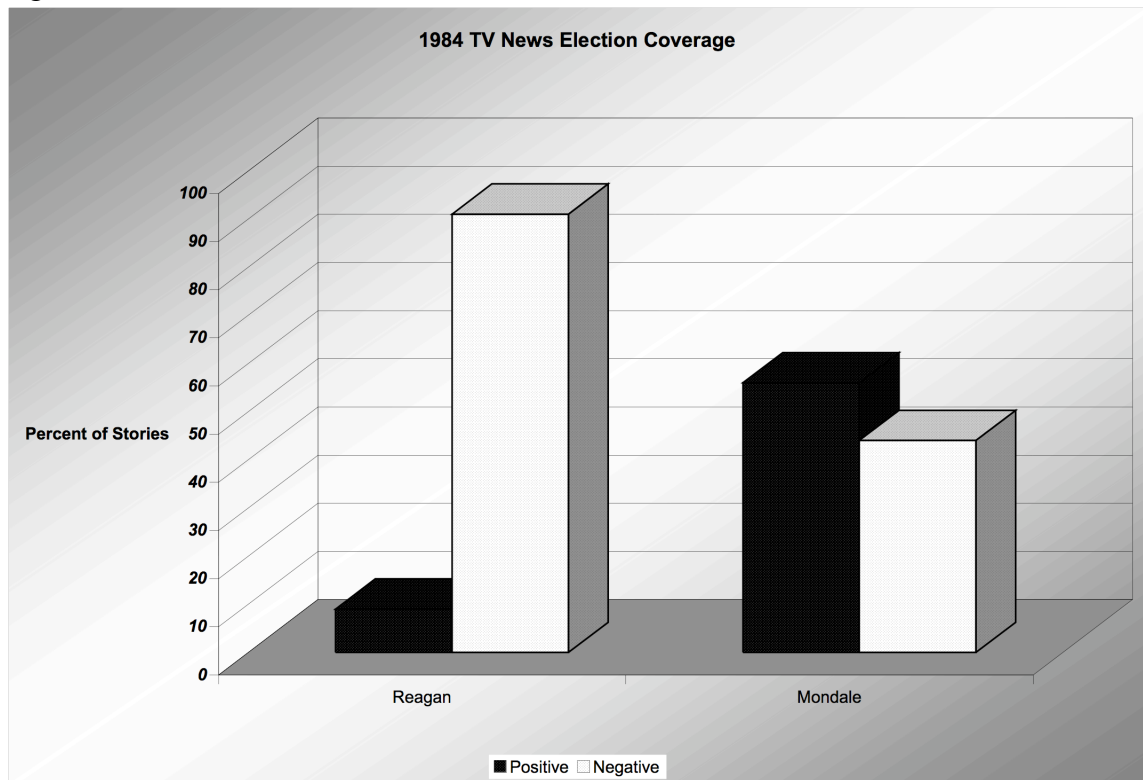
Not as controversial as abortion, but an important election and governing issue nonetheless, jobs and the economy are at the heart of any political discussion. Often, the success of a president’s administration is judged by the economy’s improvement or decline. But studies show a lack of news for the Reagan administration when its economy improved from 1982 to 1987. Smith (1988) looked at the numbers of stories done on the Reagan economy on network television newscasts. He found that negative stories

outnumbered positive stories five to one, and that as the economy improved, the number of stories overall dropped.

Critics say coverage of U. S. foreign policy can often show signs of liberal bias in the media. The National Conservative Foundation examined stories about human rights violations in July 1986 and found a strong tendency to look at those violations in U. S. allies first, rather than in those countries under Soviet control at the time. The study showed that out of about 199 minutes of human rights stories on the network news that month, 173 went to coverage of South Africa, a U. S. ally, and its fight over apartheid. The only two Soviet allies covered were Nicaragua and Afghanistan, which received only about ten minutes of coverage together (NCF 1986). Regarding the most covered Soviet leader ever, the media's fascination with Mikhail Gorbachev for many critics showed the liberal side of the media. Lichter and Lichter (2004) examined the way the media characterized Gorbachev versus Reagan at two of their summits. In both cases, Reagan received negative coverage overall, while Gorbachev received positive descriptions (Lichter and Lichter 2004, p. 5).

But at the heart of any charges of bias are examinations of the news content presented in and around elections, a liberal bias does seem apparent. Clancey and Robinson (1985) showed a huge split in the type of coverage Ronald Reagan faced for his reelection versus what his opponent Walter Mondale faced. Coverage of Reagan ran ten to one against him, while Monday was viewed favorably more than half the time. Figure 4-14 shows the magnitude of the difference.

Figure 4-14



Source: Clancey and Robinson 1985

Lowry and Shidler (1995) found Democrats Bill Clinton and Al Gore the subject of negative “sounds bites”—interviews in television news stories—in about 8 percent of interviews leading up to the 1992 election. But the Republican ticket of George Bush and Dan Quayle was on the receiving end of negative comments nearly twice as often at 16 percent of the time (Lowry and Shidler 1995, p. 38). A similar examination of the main visual in newspapers—the head shot—showed a strong liberal bias on the part of the Chicago Tribune in choosing what coders saw as negative and unflattering photographs of Bob Dole during the 1996 presidential campaign (Waldman and Devitt 1998, p. 308).

Comparing abortion coverage to election coverage can be difficult, as the level of analysis can be hard to match in so many different settings. But Groseclose and Milyo (2004) have tried to standardize comparisons across media and across issues by

employing an analysis of the Americans for Democratic Action ideological rankings for members of Congress. Under the liberal group's rankings, a perfectly liberal legislator would receive a score of 100, while a perfectly conservative lawmaker would receive a score of zero. Based on members' rankings, the authors rated the think tanks and other policy groups most often cited by those legislators. Then they scored television and print news content for the appearance of representatives of those groups. That gave an estimated ADA score for each media outlet. The results show only two of the twenty media sources scored ranked as conservative, while the other 18 ranks as most liberal. Table 4-2 shows the relative rank of each to the center, scored as 50.1 based on the mean of the members of Congress over the past 40 years.

Table 4-2 Media Ideological Scores

News Outlet	ADA Score	Ideology
Wall Street Journal	85.1	Liberal
New York Times	73.7	Liberal
CBS Evening News	73.7	Liberal
LA Times	70.0	Liberal
Washington Post	66.6	Liberal
CBS Early Show	66.6	Liberal
Newsweek	66.3	Liberal
NPR Morning Edition	66.3	Liberal
U.S. News and World Report	65.8	Liberal
Time Magazine	65.4	Liberal
NBC Today Show	64.0	Liberal
USA Today	63.4	Liberal
NBC Nightly News	61.6	Liberal
ABC World News Tonight	61.0	Liberal
Drudge Report	60.4	Liberal
ABC Good Morning America	56.1	Liberal
CNN NewsNight with Aaron Brown	56.0	Liberal
Newshour with Jim Lehrer	55.8	Liberal
Center	50.1	-----
Fox News' Special Report with Brit Hume	39.7	Conservative
Washington Times	35.4	Conservative

Source: Groseclose and Milyo 2004, p. 57

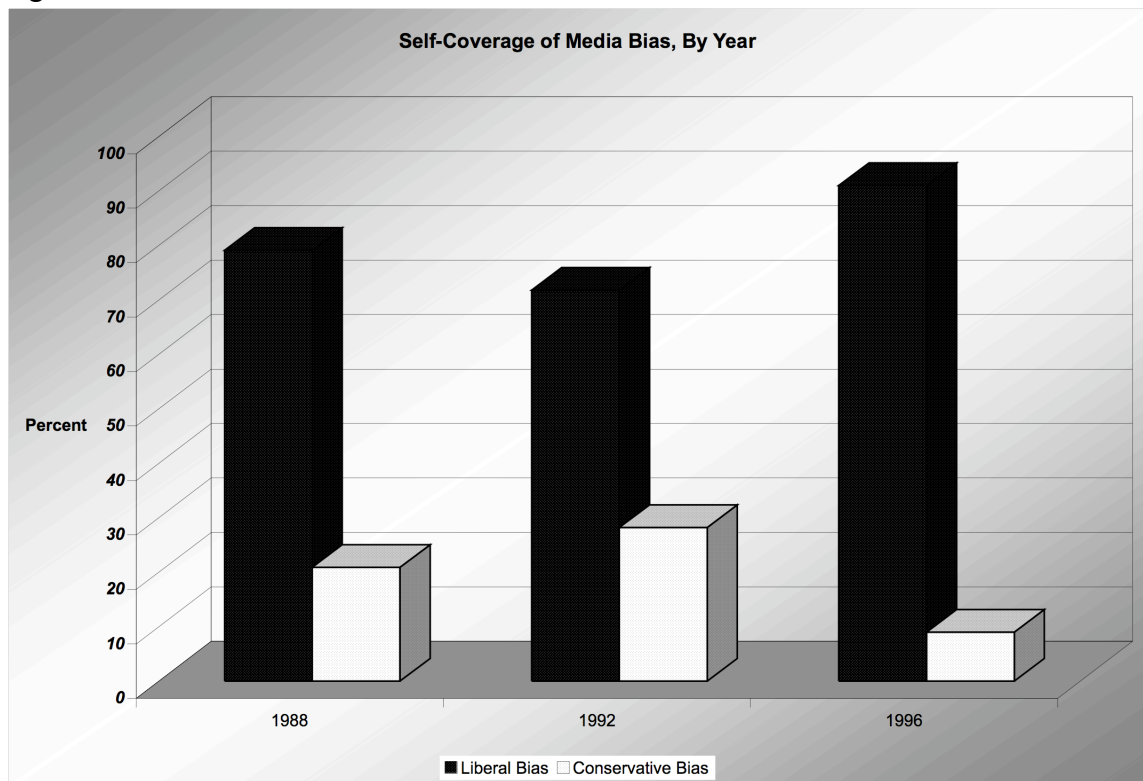
Some surprises in the findings include the *Wall Street Journal* as the most liberal publication, and the Fox News program *Drudge Report* also showing up as liberal.

Though not an academic study, and built mostly from personal anecdotal evidence, CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg grabbed the attention of scholars, reporters, politicians, and television viewers with his 2002 book entitled simply *Bias*. In it, Goldberg relates his insider view on the liberal bias at CBS News and the other national news organizations. It was not that the examples he cited were new. Most of them had been printed in academic and trade publications before. Goldberg cites unevenness in labeling sources, a slant to presidential coverage, and the tendency to overlook or even ignore stories that are part of the conservative agenda, like teen sex and abstinence. The real shock from the book came from who wrote it: a CBS News insider—a long time

reporter—speaking out about his own news organization. Interestingly, since then, the central tale of the book—a CBS story about presidential candidate Steve Forbes flat tax—has since been defined as not an example of bias, but rather, an example of a story that traveled outside the boundaries set for the media, and therefore subject to criticism (Jamieson and Waldman 2003, p. 170).

One final note on liberal bias from the inside—the reports the media say about themselves. Watts et al (1999) looked at media self-coverage of bias during the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections. Though the authors only finding of bias in actual coverage of the candidates tilted about 5 percent in Bill Clinton’s direction in 1996, Figure 4-15 shows the numbers of paragraphs devoted to examining bias in their own coverage run heavily in reporting a strong liberal bias.

Figure 4-15



Source: Watts et al 1999, p. 159

Liberals counter all the evidence pointing toward a bias in content brought on by journalists' political ideologies with an argument that the effects of the conservative ownership and business interests of the media far outweigh any influence individual journalists could have. Lee and Solomon (1990) invoke Dwight Eisenhower's warning of a growing "military-industrial complex" in their own warning of the increasing size of the media giants in the country. They cite General Electric—a military and industrial player in its own right—as a prime example of the reason to add "media" to Eisenhower's warning. Aside from a history as a large defense contractor, and even using Ronald Reagan as a spokesman in his pre-presidential acting days, Lee and Solomon say the influence of GE on the news division of its subsidiary NBC is quite direct. They cite the example of the corporate editing of an NBC Today Show story in 1989 that quoted from a federal investigation into faulty bolts GE and other corporations were selling to government for airplanes, bridges, and even NASA projects. GE demanded the news division remove this paragraph from the report:

Recently, General Electric engineers discovered they had a big problem. One out of three bolts from one of their major suppliers was bad. Even more alarming, GE accepted the bad bolts without any certification of compliance for eight years (Lee and Solomon 1990, pp. 77-8).

The reporter working on the story was shocked and claimed his news bosses were "overprotective of a corporate owner" (Lee and Solomon 1990, p. 78). But the authors say the conservative bias at NBC goes beyond protecting its owner—to promoting it. In 1987, NBC aired an hour-long special on the success of the nuclear power industry in France. The program looked at successes in operating the system that provides the French power, but glossed over the still troubling issue of disposal of nuclear waste. And the entire documentary aired with no mention that NBC's corporate parent was this country's

second largest nuclear energy vendor. And weeks later, when two nuclear power plant accidents injured half a dozen workers in France, NBC News did not report it (Lee and Solomon 1990, p. 78).

Harder to gauge than specific acts of boosterism on the part of media properties or re-editing of damaging stories is the self-censorship of stories reporters at corporately owned media never do. Former FCC Chairman Nicholas Johnson described the process of self-censorship as a learned behavior:

The story is told of a reporter who first comes up with an investigative story idea, writes it up and submits it to the editor and is told the story is not going to run. He wonders why, but the next time he is cautious enough to check with the editor first. He is told by the editor that it would be better not to write that story. The third time he thinks of an investigative story idea he doesn't bother the editor with it because he knows it's silly. The fourth time he doesn't even think of the idea anymore. (Lee and Solomon 1990, p. 98).

The chilling effect on reporters is obvious in this example. Certain stories—usually about advertisers or the corporate interests of the owners—are never done because the journalists know they will not run. A case in point may exist with ABC's *20/20* program. Its executive producer in the late 1980s was Mace Neufeld. Neufeld's wife was a publicist for the nuclear and chemical industries. Journalists working for ABC complained that Neufeld routinely rejected story ideas about nuclear power and only aired one that promoted the irradiation of food (Cohen and Solomon 1995, pp. 66-7).

It may be that the right has become better at giving the media what it wants. The changes in attention span and story length into the 1990s and beyond lead Lieberman (2000) to suggest the “liberal” media played right into the plans of the new conservative movement. Repetition is the key to getting a conservative message to the media and through it to the audience. Lieberman cites the privatization of Social Security as a

conservative issue that has been repeated for years. Foundation money from the Cato Institute and other sources allows for the repetition to continue for a long period. And as these groups rise in stature, then supplant the universities as idea generators (Lieberman 2000, p. 37). Lieberman suggests the new generation of journalists is more open to ideas of conservatism and have used their own suppositions of liberal bias to give the “other side” a stronger footing in the newsroom.

This notion of controlling the flow of information to newsrooms fits nicely with the propaganda model put forth by Chomsky and Herman (1988) in *Manufacturing Consent*. The model employs a series of “filters” in the hands of media ownership that control the information reaching the public and help to gather popular consent for conservative policies. The raw materials of news must travel through the filters and be manufactured into a final product. The filters begin with the ownership of the media outlet, continue through the controls of advertisers, travel through the waves of official sources common to news, face another filter of negative feedback from viewers and readers, and finally pass through the last filter of an anticommunist sentiment. At that point, the news is ready for consumption, but devoid of any substance that would harm the conservative power structure (Herman 1999, pp. 24-8). The Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG 1976) found an innate bias in the approach taken by British journalists in covering labor issues. Though the authors see the bias as systemic and not a personal or intentional effort, their findings proved to be the foundation for much of the systemic analysis of bias in the media.

Beyond all the evidence of a systemic conservative bias to the way the media report the news, liberal critics have one source of conservative news to which they

consistently point—the Fox News Channel. The Murdoch-owned, Ailes-run news network surpassed CNN during the Iraq War as the most popular on cable and satellite (Bauder 2003). The channel proclaims its slogan as “We report, you decide.” But liberals have decided the network is a mouthpiece for the right. And they may be right. Kull (2003) shows that Fox News viewers had more misperceptions about the Iraq War than viewers of any other network or print medium. When asked if Al-Qaeda links were present, weapons of mass destruction found, or world support for the war existed, 45 percent of Fox viewers had at least one misperception. PBS viewers and NPR listeners had the fewest misperceptions, at 11 percent (Kull 2003, p. 15).

Misperceptions and all, the public views conservatives as gaining ground in the control of the American media. Garin-Hart-Yang Research Group (2004) asked voters if conservatives or liberals have more power in the media today. Of all voters, 36 percent said liberals dominate, while 41 percent say conservatives do. But the poll splits along lines of ideology, as liberals saw conservatives more in control (58 to 18 percent) and conservatives saw more liberals at the helm, (51 to 29 percent). Moderates and Independents also saw conservatives in charge of more media (Garin-Hart-Yang 2004, p. 2).

Not all research falls on one side or the other of the bias question. Russo (1971) looked at the precipitating event for the Agnew speech, the Vietnam War, and found no bias against Richard Nixon in network news coverage on NBC and CBS in 1969 and 1970. He also found no change in the way the networks covered the war in the wake of the 1969 Agnew speech (Russo 1971, p. 542). Niven (2002) compiled coverage two presidents, 200 governors, eight mayors, and 266 members of Congress to examine

liberal/conservative biases in any news reports. Niven built a baseline of study that could be compared across all offices, national or local. He used common issues all the officeholders faced, rather than try to compare the different eras and public moods of varying election cycles. Niven applied his research method to unemployment policy for presidents, crime policy for governors and mayors, and the House banking scandal for members of Congress. In each of the levels of analysis, the front page appearance, length of articles, and prominence of the office holder in the articles is virtually identical. But more importantly, there was no statistical significance in the mean tone of the articles based on partisanship (Niven 2002, p. 93).

Academic research, summed across time, seems to point to a tradition of either unbiased coverage, or at least bias for both sides that evens itself out. D'Alessio and Allen (2000) compared fifty-nine presidential bias studies from 1948 to 1996 and found no statistical evidence of bias over the course of all the elections. And though some election coverage was pro-Republican and some pro-Democrat by individual election, the authors attributed those differences to random error (D'Alessio and Allen 2000, p. 133, 140).

The Power of Professional Standards

Many journalists lean left, a few journalists lean right, or as West (2001) points out, a confused audience sees evidence of both almost daily (West 2001, pp. 81-2). Does all this matter? Does how a journalist votes affect the way he reports? Or can professional standards, as Dennis (1996) suggests, hold off any hint of bias?

NBC correspondent Roger Mudd, facing a group of journalism students and educators in 1971, defined the role of the media as this,

What the national media, and mainly television, have done is to believe that their chief duty is to put before the nation its unfinished business: pollution, the Vietnam War, discrimination, continuing violence, motor traffic, slums. The media have become the nation's critics, and as critics no political administration, regardless of how hard it tries, will satisfy them" (Kristol 1972, p. 50).

The key phrases in that simple definition are "unfinished business" and "nation's critics."

Mudd's definition shows the heart of the argument that journalists must set an agenda for change for the betterment of society, and do so as representatives of all citizens, asking the necessary questions of those in authority, regardless of political party or position.

Evidence exists to support this view. Groeling and Kernell (1998) found an anti-presidential bias in the major television network coverage, based on coverage choices to emphasize a downturn in presidential popularity. But the study showed the bias existed through both the first Bush and Clinton administrations, crossing both Republican and Democrat party lines. A similar study of coverage of members of Congress who change parties showed that newspaper approaches to the stories are uniform regardless of the switcher's party affiliation (Niven 2003, p. 322).

The Vietnam War was in issue that split Americans and asked them to take sides as "hawks" or "doves." While the battle raged in southeast Asia to win the war, another raged at home to win the American people over to the side of the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Ultimately, historians say the two presidents lost the media war, bringing on the defeat in Asia. Media coverage of the war, especially on television, brought home stories and images a lot of people did not want to see. But was the media opposed to the war and did that affect the content of what they printed and broadcast? Hallin (1984)

investigated whether the American press became an “oppositional” media during the war. Hallin examined nearly 800 television news stories about the war, looking for a shift in the content of the coverage from slightly supportive to strongly in opposition. Hallin admits the news appears to get more critical as the war progresses. But a closer look at the data shows the media, on the most negative stories, following leads they could not ignore—the Tet Offensive, the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, or the My Lai massacre (Hallin 1984, p. 12). In addition, the media relied heavily on official sources, even at the height of the most critical coverage, giving those official sources credibility to continue to lead the war effort. Beyond those official sources, the opposition party in government was rarely quoted, and the system itself that led to the war was also given a pass by most reporters (Hallin 1984, p. 18-9). Steele (1995) found the same pattern in coverage of the first Persian Gulf War as reporters relied on official sources to provide a nearly endless stream of information and interviews for the voracious news appetite reporters were feeding at the time.

Helm (1988) also takes on Rothman and Lichter (1987) who blame bias in the news media for the strong reaction Americans developed to nuclear energy. Helm asserts the changes in public sentiment are real enough, but the evidence that the media caused those changes is nonexistent. Instead, he points to a declining trust in the United States in the institutions of science. But Rothman and Lichter (1988) counter with correlation data that shows the public mood on nuclear power declining as negative stories increase.

And what about a biased audience? Gunther (1992) examined the positions of the audience members relative to the stories they consumed and found a stronger perception of bias among those who were personally involved with the issue covered. Gunther

attributed some of that media distrust and skepticism to errors the journalists might make that only an expert on the subject would notice, but found no skepticism based on reporters political leanings or any perceived political bias, conservative or liberal (Gunter 1992, p. 161). D'Alessio (2003) confirmed Gunter's hypotheses and further showed that a preconception of both bias and inaccuracy is the most likely predictor of an audience perception of bias in the content they view. The evidence of a biased lens of perception by audience members does not specifically negate other charges of bias in media coverage, but complicates the measurement and validation of a real media bias. Neutral evaluations of content and presentation are made difficult by the preconceived notions of the viewer, and should a study produce no evidence of bias, would audience members accept these findings?

The hunt for a political bias at local television stations, McManus (1991) also came up with a mixed bag of bad journalistic practices, but little or no evidence of political or personal biases of the reporters making it onto the air. McManus observed several examples of what he termed violations of the rule of objectivity, but very few of these had anything to do with the reporter's personal feelings. Most McManus attributed to the organizational structure and pressures of the news stations and industry in general (McManus 1991, p. 27). Fuller (1996) claims a journalist putting "feelings" into a story, or covering them with the focus moving away from fact and more toward value is what has led to the impression of—and perhaps a real—liberal media. The values covered—and sometimes expressed—by reporters in stories are sympathetic to victims, those in the minority, and those without a voice. Often, those are also the causes to which liberals are

sympathetic. The association of the two leads to the public perceptions of bias (Fuller 1996, p. 35).

To develop an explanation for the way the media do what they do, generating the accusations of bias, even if some fall short of the mark, the literature on agenda setting is cited early in this research, but a return to the mechanisms of that function would be in order here. It is not the fact that the media can set the agenda that is important in the bias discussion, but rather, how they decide what it is they will set as that agenda. Since the 1950s, the media have been seen to perform the role of a gatekeeper, deciding which information will pass the news “gates” and which will not. The term “gatekeeping” comes from Kurt Lewin and his 1947 work on the social psychology of distributing food. But White (1950) borrowed the term and applied it to the function journalists use to narrow the nearly endless stream of news opportunities into a single newspaper edition or broadcast newscast. White saw the newsperson quite literally standing at the gate of information flow, deciding what few bits of news information would pass, and turning away all others. The model was simple, probably not too close to the complexities of the real life editorial situation, but established a starting point for future research. Westley and MacLean (1957) advanced the model with a feedback loop and a more realistic path from sender to receiver, with the gatekeeper planted right in the middle of the two vital units. The early models defined that a choice took place in the process of gatekeeping, but it was up to later models to describe the criteria for that choice. Galtung and Ruge (1967) worked to describe the mechanism of foreign news selection by listing the criteria of selection a journalist would use to determine newsworthiness. The authors see world events picture in the perception of the journalist, and then converted to a “media image”

that is what the audience sees. The authors suggest journalists use their perceptions of timespan, clarity, relevance, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, and sociocultural values of the gatekeepers to determine if the message is worth imaging and passing to the audience (Galtung and Ruge 1967, p. 65). Most important of those criteria, with respect to the possibility of a journalist's personal political views affecting the message that gets to the audience are the sociocultural values of the gatekeeper. Galtung and Ruge assert the perceptions of the gatekeeper act as a filter on the formation of the media image. It is therefore possible the values of the gatekeeper alter the message. Certainly journalists would suggest that their news values operate to cull the messages from the flow. Dimmick (1974) confirms that part of the gatekeeping equation and adds the element of uncertainty to the process. He asserts there are no exact rules of what gets through the gate and what does not, so the values of the gatekeeper come into play making that decision on an individual basis. Davison and Yu (1974) introduce the concept that journalists might use their own personal value sets to determine what is newsworthy, including their own political values. Davison points out, with most journalists being liberal, the implications for unbiased political news are obvious. Lester (1980), in her examination of the sociological construction of newsworthiness, finds that the instructions given reporters and editors are often vague and difficult to apply to specific news situations. She witnesses journalists inserting their own values in order to have enough information to make a news judgment decision. Without those personal traits to guide them, the journalists would be unable to make any newsworthiness decisions at all.

But arguing against this model of a lone journalist operating the all-important gate, later studies have shown the process to be group in nature, without the ability of one person to project personal beliefs into the process. Epstein (1973) first suggested this process for gatekeeping, showing that the “newsman” can exert his influence over the news agenda only so long before it is commandeered by the producer, the editor, or some other person with a stake in the news produced. The organization rules, and it has final edit on what gets through the gate. Berkowitz (1990) tested this theory in the local television newsroom and found the system to be very much a team effort, with no rigidly defined rules of what makes news, and no one individual able to force his values, consciously or unconsciously on the news product. In a study of the comparative strength of news routines versus individual exercises of a journalist’s news judgment, Shoemaker et al (2001) measured the news coverage generated by a series of bill in the U. S. Congress. The authors were able to demonstrate a significant correlation between the elements of the bills that were covered and a list of newsworthy characteristics determined by a poll of newspaper editors. But the authors could find no correlation between the any bills that received coverage and the personal characteristics of the journalists covering the bills, including education, work experience, ethnicity, gender, political ideology, or voting behavior (Shoemaker et al 2001, p. 240). Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) observed the same pattern with regards to the coverage of members of the U. S. Senate from 1972 to 1988. Routines of newsgathering—defined by the authors as access, succinctness and newsworthiness—drove most of the editorial decisions witnessed. The authors note more coverage of Republican senators and less of those

opposed to President Reagan and his policies. They attributed these discrepancies not to a sudden conservative bias in the newsrooms covering the Senate, but to the skillful manipulation of the routines of newsgathering by Republican strategists (Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992, p. 827-8). This same successful manipulation of the news agenda is apparent outside the walls of the Capitol as well. Danielian and Page (1994) show the ratio of “talking heads” on television skews heavily toward business interests, followed closely by special interest groups. It is the conclusion of the authors that the routine of news coverage could be at the heart of the inequity, as could the inequality in ability of those seeking an audience through the media. Even the coverage of protests is driven by a non-partisan bias—the biggest ones get the most coverage (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996, p. 494).

Still more evidence suggesting individual journalists—at least in the traditional media—have less and less control as isolated, personal gatekeepers, comes in the study of on-line and “new” media. Williams and Delli Carpini (2000) use the Lewinsky scandal to show that the traditional news powers not in control of what information flowed to the public. The authors suggest the internet provides the means by which news consumers can circumvent the traditional “gates” of the established media, and find the information they seek on their own. With the mainstream media gates knocked down, the authors point out “if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers” (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000, p. 62).

But Merrill (1996) makes it clear the bias exists. And while he claims it is not intentional, and merely part of the nature of asking a human being to tell a story,

Bagdikian (1969) returns us to the question those on the left and right will continue to raise, regarding that gap between the measurable, mechanical execution of news rules and the human, changing evaluation of news judgment,

The gatekeeper, though he seems to perform like one, is not a valueless machine operating in a vacuum. His decisions, resulting in the printing of most stories seen by the public, reflect his personal as well as his professional values and all the surrounding pressures converging on him (Bagdikian 1969, p. 107).

This analysis directly asks the question of whether a craft so connected to the human element can stay impartial and above any bias or slant. With the answer lies the evidence of the value and credibility of the journalists themselves.

The Issue of Trust and Credibility

Credibility is key for both policy makers and policy mediators. Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987) report that high credibility is directly correlated with the ability to influence public opinion change, both among presidents and TV news commentators. For journalists, credibility carries with it a financial benefit—those with high credibility are more likely to find ratings and circulation success than those with low credibility.

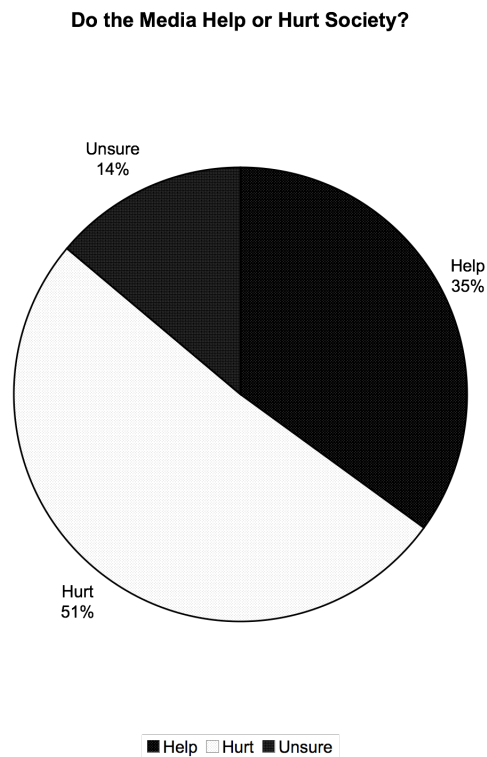
Moreover, the overall perception of the professionalism of the practice of journalism has a direct bearing on the trust of the audience (Liebes 2001, p. 295). And ultimately, journalists value the prestige the label of credible gives them and their employer.

Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee summed it up when he explained the worth of credibility to his newspaper, “The credibility of a newspaper is its most precious asset and it depends almost entirely on the integrity of its reporters” (Maraniss 1981, p.1)

But the polls tell a mixed, yet sometimes troubling, story about the relationship the press has with its public. At about the time Agnew made his speech, the television newscast was highly regarded, and twice as likely to be the first choice for news as the newspaper (Wamsley and Pride 1972, p. 436). But as far back as 1936, when asked if the press should be able to print anything about a public official, 42 percent said reporters should have some limits (Erskine 1970, p. 631). By 1969, shortly after Spiro Agnew made his charges against the press, a poll asking whether newspapers were fair when covering political and social issues showed a plurality of 45 percent who believed they were not, while television fared only a little better, with a plurality of 42 percent also claiming unfairness in coverage (Erskine 1970, p. 636-7). And when asked if they believed the Vice President's criticism of the TV networks was correct, 56 percent agreed (Erskine 1970, p. 638). Even post-Watergate, in a series of interviews done in five cities in 1979, some subjects were willing to allow government control of media. Immerwahr et al (1982) asked subjects if they agreed or disagreed with this statement, "The president has a right to close down a newspaper that prints stories he feels are biased and inaccurate. Agree or Disagree?" Twenty-two percent agreed the president should have that right. Asked further if there should be, "A law prohibiting television news stories that embarrass the president, the government or the country. Favor or oppose?" nearly a third of the subjects—29 percent—said there should be such a law (Immerwahr et al 1982, p. 182-4). In the late 1990s, Yalof and Dautrich found survey results showing a stronger feeling of support for general First Amendment rights, but still some reservations on the part of subjects to allow media to act in complete freedom. A 2002 survey by the Roper Organization asked if the media help society solve its problems or get in the way of

society solving its problems. Figure 4-16 shows the majority of respondents think the media is a hindrance on society, not a helper.

Figure 4-16



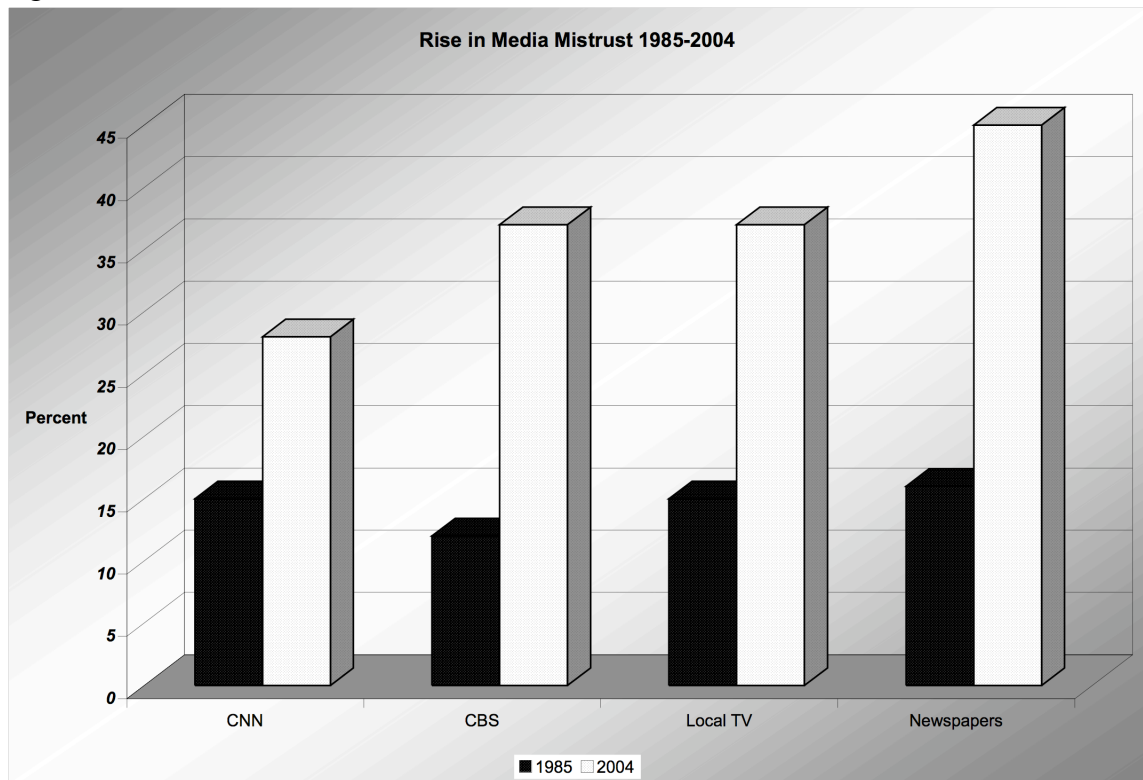
Source: The Roper Center 2002, Public Perspective July/August 2002

Some of the reservations concerned the newest tools in the newsgathering process—tools audience members have seen abused. When asked in 1999 if journalists should be able to use hidden cameras in their reporting, only 27 percent agreed they should. Only 29 percent said television networks should be allowed to project winners. Both of these tools evolved later in the newsgathering process, and both raised questions of whether the media act responsibly when they report the news (Yalof and Dautrich 2002, p. 65).

But those examples are abstracts, and when the question turns to specific news programs or news people, the credibility of the media to do a good job, despite being

critical of those in power goes up considerably. Robinson and Kohut (1988) examined Roper poll data to find that the audience for television news held the “hard” news program in high regard and believability. The authors found both the personality of the news presenter, as well as the reputation of the organization that employs that presenter were factors in that trust. Still, that personal nature of trust in journalists and their practices can turn in an instant, when those personal practices are revealed as distasteful to the audience. Fallows (1996) relays the episode of the television program *Ethics in America* on which television news anchors Peter Jennings and Mike Wallace were asked a hypothetical question of what they would do if they were with a group of enemy soldiers who happened to come upon a traveling group of American troops. When asked if they would warn the Americans, Jennings at first said he would, but changed his answer when Wallace emphatically declared that a shouted warning was not part of this obligation as a reporter—that he was there to cover the story, nothing more (Fallows 1996, pp. 10-6). The answer shocked the military men in attendance, the moderator, and clearly a great many people watching at home. The seeming lack of patriotism on the part of Wallace (and later Jennings) was unthinkable to many of the viewers of the program. It shook their trust in the personalities that bring them the news, as well as the structure of newsgathering itself.

Figure 4-17



Source: Pew Research Center June 2004

Some of the results of that growing mistrust are apparent in the twenty-year differences in media credibility. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press asked subjects across the country about what they believe that they see and hear in the news. The most negative answer—that they believe nothing they see or hear—has risen dramatically. Figure 4-17 shows the increase in mistrust across several media. The lowest of the group in 1985, CBS News rises from 12 percent to 37 percent, while newspapers rise from 16 percent to 45 percent total mistrust.

The polls and anecdotal accounts reflect a mix of reliance and uneasiness on the part of the public to accept what they receive from the mass media. The negative aspect of that feeling is part of an overall *media skepticism* that is present with many audience members. Cozzens and Contractor (1987) define the term as “the degree to which

individuals are skeptical toward the reality presented in the mass media” (Cozzens and Contractor 1987, p. 438). Those authors see this skepticism building over time through the maturation of the individual, and a tendency to take on the ability to discount all they see as reality. In addition, as audience members learn the economic and political motives of the media, they become more skeptical of the reality of what is presented versus what could be gained by altering that reality. Finally, conflicts between their own personal experiences and the experiences they see related in the media cause dissonance in their belief structure (Cozzens and Contractor 1987, p. 439). That last factor bears directly on the credibility of the media when reporting political stories. If an audience member’s personal experience with a candidate or issue differs from the way that candidate or issue is portrayed in the media, the dissonance is not likely to lead to opinion change in the audience members. Instead, it adds to the skepticism that audience member has about the mediator of the information. Gunther (1988) suggested that strong feelings about an issue might increase interest and lower credibility even further, but Stamm and Dube (1994) discounted that contention. Still, Gunter suggests that even a discounted media could have some bearing on public opinion. He depicts an audience member who has discounted media credibility, yet still see reports done there as either having a persuasive third-person effect on others, or mirroring public opinion of the others around her (Gunter 1998, p. 499).

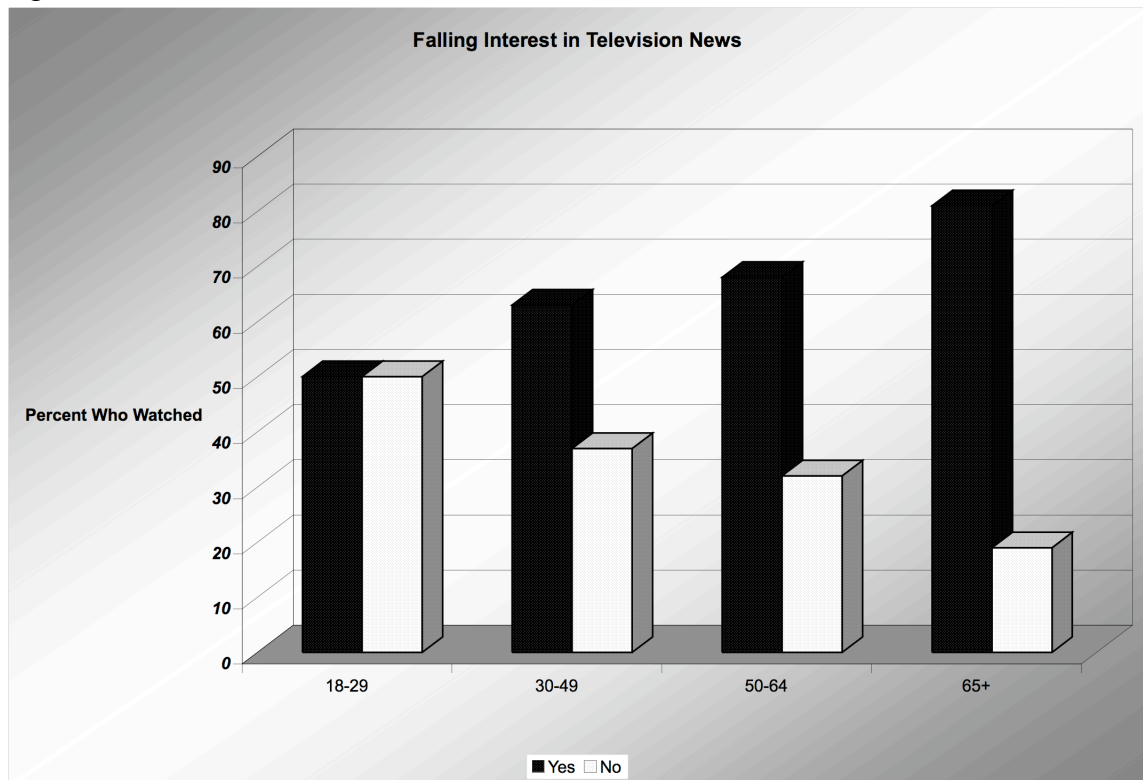
The pressure is on for the traditional news media to maintain credibility and reduce media skepticism to a bare minimum. New media information sources are gaining in credibility as they reach more audience members and provide less dissonance with regards to their political points of view. Tsfaty and Cappella (2003) suggest the trust is

gone from mainstream news and that many who consume it do so only because the new media is not available in the style or quantity they require (Tsfati and Cappella 2003, p. 519). The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2002) asked people if they were watching television for their news. Figure 4-18 shows that young people are increasingly not interested in television as a news source.

But the styles are multiplying, as is the quantity of alternatives available, meaning the mainstream media needs to address its crisis of credibility before it becomes the second choice for most audiences. Kurtz (2005) sees the arrival of the “blog” (short for web log, an online diary often focused on politics), as a replacement for traditional political reporting. And Sutter (2001) likens the liberal media to a cartel—successful in part because its members are limited in number by the costs of entering the business. Should the cost go down, as they are with new media possibilities, then the cartel may cease to exist (Sutter 2001, p. 449).

The crisis of credibility holds the key to the future for the journalist model developed a century ago. Conservatives predict a “meltdown” of a media that is too liberal to provide the information the public needs (Bozell 2004, p. 259). Liberals fear a return to the partisan press of old. The words, images, and actions of today’s media will decide which comes to pass.

Figure 4-18



Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2002

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return to the partisan press of old. The words, images, and actions of today's media will decide which comes to pass. And certainly a part of what makes up that decision will depend on the audience perceptions of their individual newscasters and their professional conduct on the air and on the job. One question to be answered is how far those journalists can go in expressing their personal ideology and convictions before those professional standards can no longer maintain an air of fairness and unbiasedness.

Chapter 5: Determinants of Subject Appropriateness and Measurement

Missouri voters seem to behave much like the American electorate in general.

Consider these results for presidential elections in the 20th and 21st centuries:

- Of the 26 presidential elections held, Missouri supported the Republican candidate 13 times and the Democratic candidate 13 times—an even split.
- Missourians supported the winning presidential candidate in 25 of 26 election. Only in 1956 did the state not pick the winner, voting instead to unseat incumbent Dwight Eisenhower in favor of Democrat Adlai Stevenson.
- The longest run for any party was five elections, with Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt winning all four of his elections in Missouri, followed by favorite son Harry S Truman. Republicans won three elections in a row twice—once from 1920 through 1928, and again in the Reagan-Bush years from 1980 through 1988.

Missouri boasts the best record in the country as a bellwether for the electoral tendencies of other forty-nine. And Missourians are often proud to point to the overall ability of its citizens to act as stand-ins for the rest of the nation. Missouri is described as a mix of north, south, east, and west, with racial and other demographic descriptors that reflect America as a whole (Suellentrop 2004). That mix provides the perfect setting in which to conduct a study that explores the perceptions of television news viewers, themselves a mix of all demographic characteristics. It is desirable to test assumptions of media effects on an audience that consists of representative individuals who have lived through a controversy over what is the appropriate role of the media in a time of crisis. And that representative nature to the audience makes the results of the study more generalizable to other regions and the nation as a whole.

Likewise, Boone County is a microcosm of Missouri, bringing together the diverse elements of rural and urban, highly educated and not, left and right, to form a tiny cross section of the nation's political strata. Beginning with their historic roots, both the

county and the state have proved to be fairly representative of the how the rest of the country views politics. And demographic analysis shows the county in particular strongly mirrors the much larger U. S. constituency in many ways.

Historical Roots of Centrality

The state's demographic centrality springs, in fact, from its geographic location. Missouri's beginnings as a gateway to western exploration, trade, and settlement brought immigrants from across the globe. Under Spanish and French rule, the territory prospered. Early Americans made their way to the area as well, bringing their diverse ethnic and political backgrounds (McReynolds 1962, pp. 13-28). After becoming a state in 1821, Missouri maintained its position balanced between east and west, but also between north and south. In the civil war period, Missouri exemplified the "border state," with neighbors and even family members fighting against each other (Karsch 1956, p. 40).

Missouri's political character was set in Civil War times. Those who sided with the north and Abraham Lincoln were Republicans. Those who sided with the South were Democrats. In Missouri state government, parties shifted power back and forth in the seventy years following the Civil War, until Democrats gained power and held it well into the 1970s (Leuthold 1994, pp. 2-3). Republicans gained ground through the rest of the century, and took complete control of state government in 2005 (Wagar 2005, p. A1).

Under the umbrella of Missouri's changing political face, there are distinct regions that maintain distinct party leanings. The cities of St. Louis and Kansas City remain heavily Democratic, while the southwestern part of the state is staunchly

Republican. But the central Missouri mix of rural counties and sizeable cities, along with the mainly rural areas of southeast and northwest Missouri, ride the fence between the parties. Agricultural interests support the party that supports them, through commodity pricing, import controls, and subsidies. And the more populated counties have seen a shift in their populations that balances them squarely between the parties (Leuthold 1994, pp. 3-4). Boone County is the perfect example.

Electoral and Ideological Similarities

Situated in the very center of the state, Boone County is to Missouri what Missouri is to the rest of the nation. Table 5-1 shows the Boone County popular vote for president in the elections since 1960.

Table 5-1: Boone County Presidential Popular Vote 1960-2004

Election Year	Popular Votes for Democratic Candidate	Popular Votes for Republican Candidate	Winning Party in National Election
1960	11,514	10,453	Democratic
1964	14,758	7,695	Democratic
1968	11,771	11,917	Republican
1972	13,666	17,488	Republican
1976	17,674	16,373	Democratic
1980	16,313	18,527	Republican
1984	19,364	26,600	Republican
1988	24,370	22,948	Republican
1992	26,176	19,405	Democratic
1996	24,984	22,047	Democratic
2000	28,809	28,421	Republican
2004	37,643	37,801	Republican

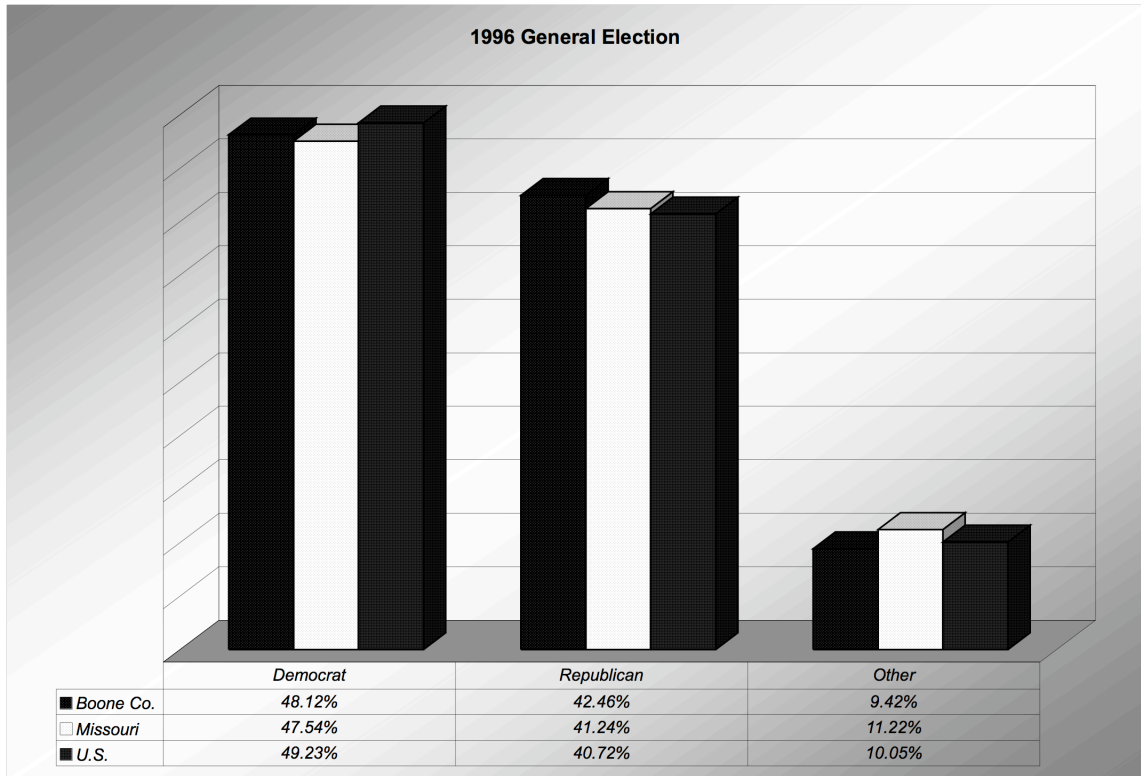
Source: The Official Manual of the State of Missouri, 1961-1997; web site of Boone County, Missouri.

The pattern shows a remarkable similarity to the voting record of the entire state. Boone County voters have sided with the winner of the presidential race in all but one of the elections since 1960. An examination of the last three presidential elections shows

that Boone County parallels national voting patterns even more faithfully than the state of Missouri has been able to do.

In 1996, Missouri and Boone County voters re-elected incumbent president Bill Clinton over two serious challengers. Figure 5-1 shows the Boone County vote counts for Clinton to be closer in percentage to the national figures than the Missouri vote percentages. Boone County voters were also closer to national percentages in their choice of Ross Perot and other third “party” candidates. Only on the Republican percentage of the vote did the entire state of Missouri come closer to the voting pattern of the entire nation than Boone County voters did.

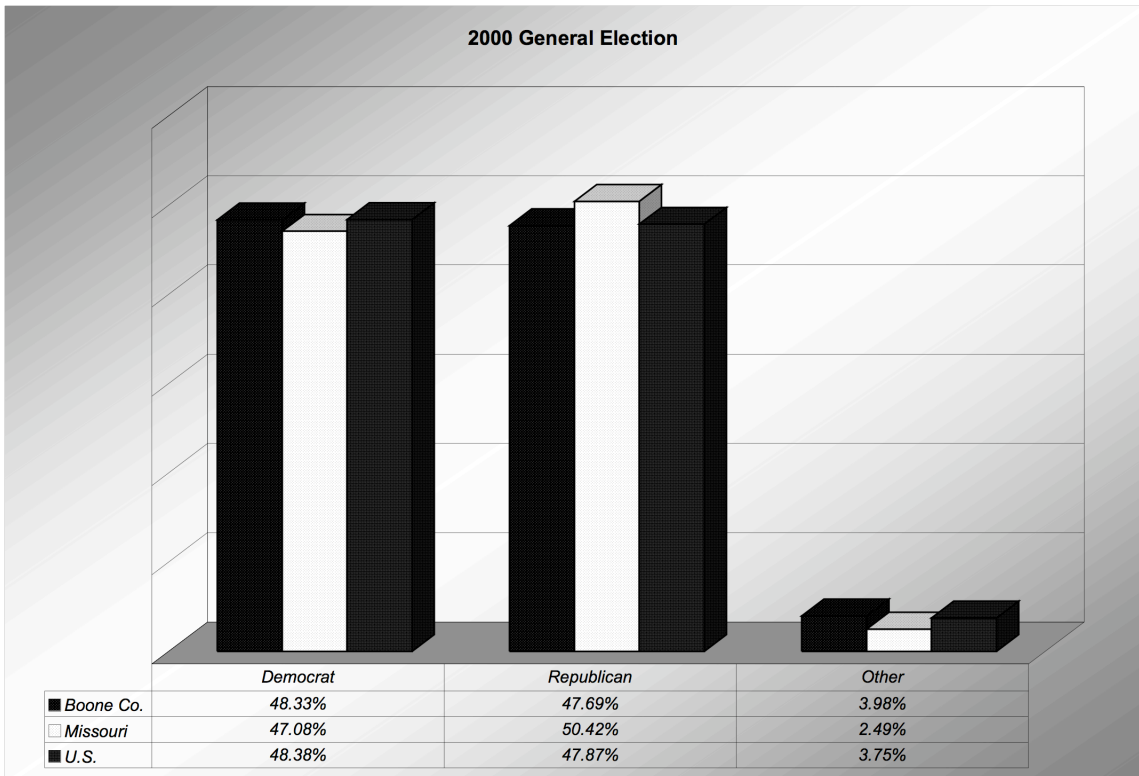
Figure 5-1



Four years later, the race again featured three main candidates. Despite the very close finish at the national level, Missouri and Boone County maintained their successful

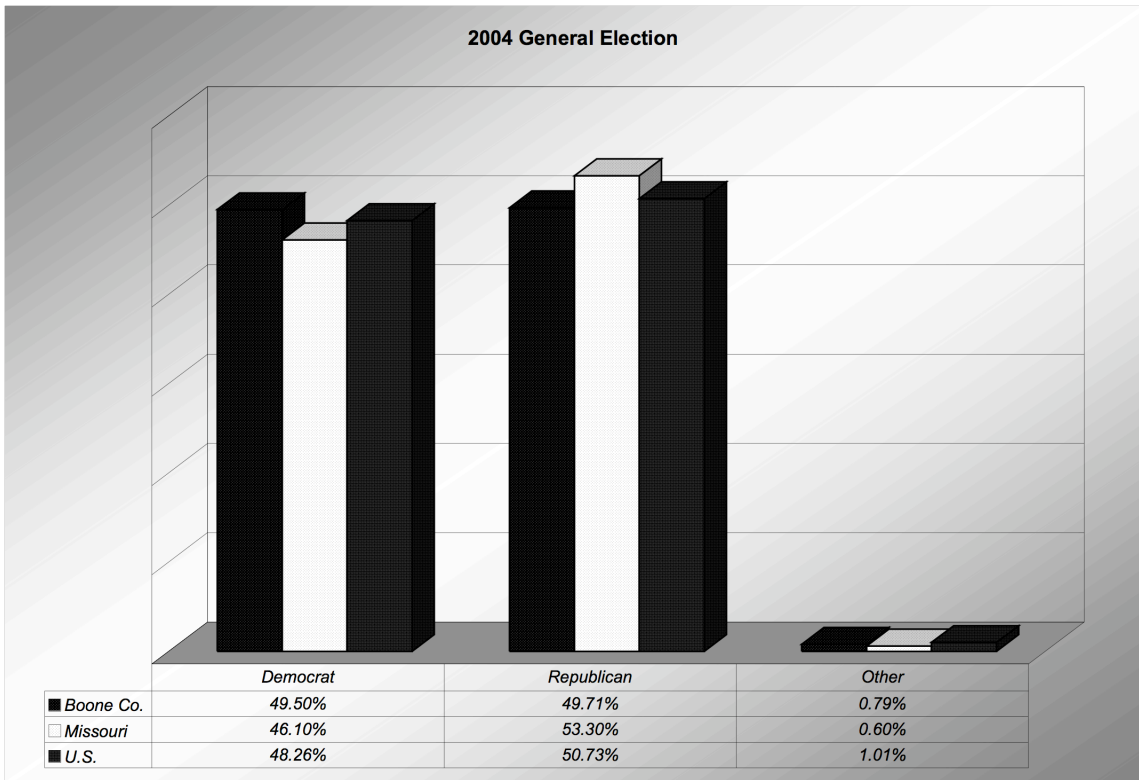
mirroring of national voting preferences. Figure 5-2 shows that Boone County was almost identical to the national voting breakdown for all three major candidates. Voters came within a quarter of a percentage point from matching the national popular vote percentages for George W. Bush and Ralph Nader. And in their choice of Al Gore, Boone County voters were just .05% off the national vote percentage!

Figure 5-2



Clearly, the margin of victory in the county popular vote had become razor thin. It would remain that way for the election of 2004, in which it was decided by only two tenths of one percent. As seen in Figure 5-3, for this last election, Boone County voters were once again far closer to the national voter preference than Missouri as a whole.

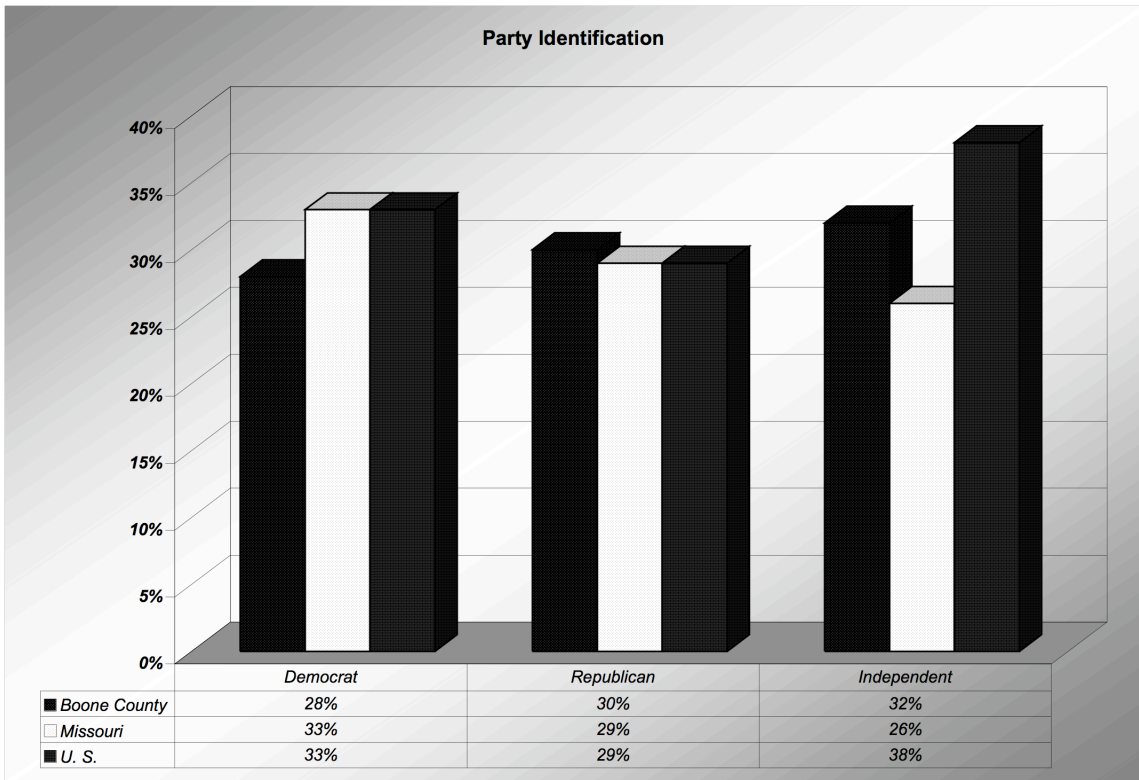
Figure 5-3



Missouri and Boone County do not require voters to register as members of a political party, but available survey data show the population identifies itself politically similar to the rest of the nation, though this party self-identification does not match as closely as election outcomes.

The biggest discrepancy between the national survey data and figures on local party identification is among those who consider themselves to be Democrats. Figure 5-4 shows three levels of party identification—national, state, and county. Missouri and the nation match exactly in terms of citizens who identify themselves as Democrats, but Boone County has a slightly lower percentage.

Figure 5-4



Source: The Media Audit 2004, Pew Research Center 2004, Annenberg Public Policy Center 2005

The county and the state are very close to the nation on those who regard themselves as Republicans. And while Missouri has a dearth of those who identify as independents, the percentage in Boone County is much closer to the national figure.

Demographic Characteristics

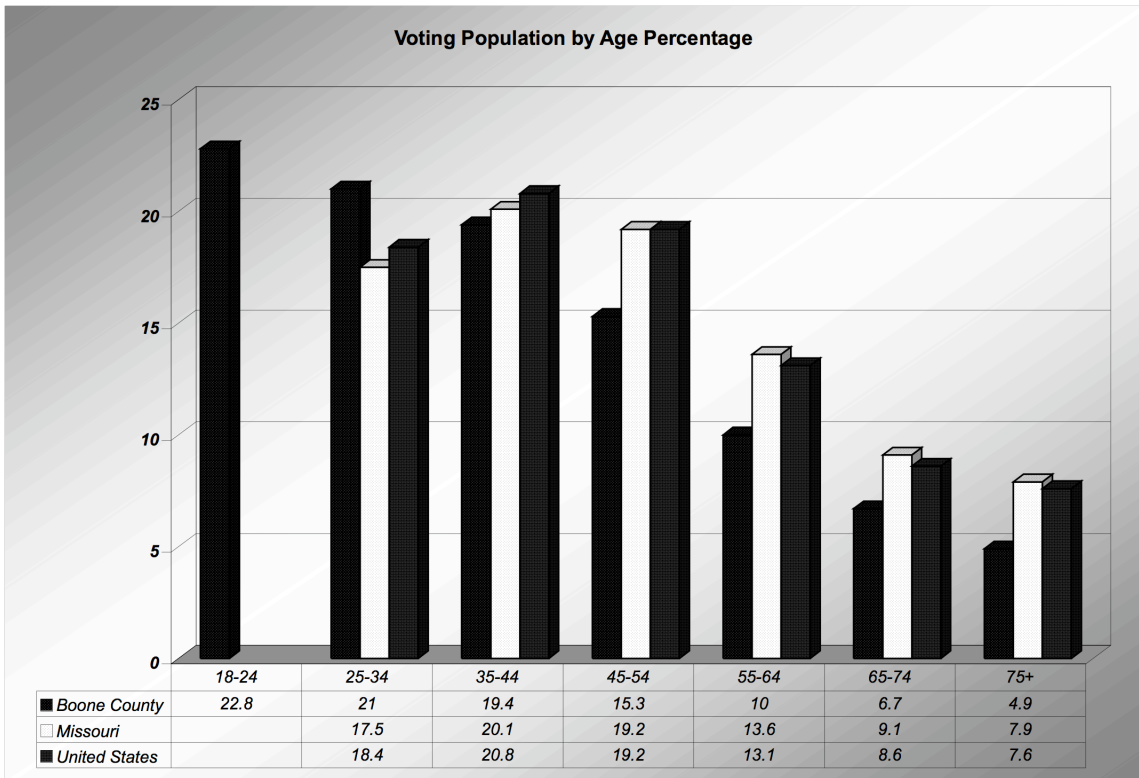
The study's validity and generalizability relies on more than just the political distribution of the subjects. Those subjects must be distributed over the full demographic spectrum. Analysis of both the Boone County population, and the subsequent sample which was taken from it, shows the sample selected is representative of the population as a whole. Across the demographic measures of age, sex, ethnicity, and income, the sample drawn for this study closely mirrors the Boone County population, and thus the

state and the nation. Only in the area of education level is the sample significantly skewed from being representative. Finally, the media habits of the subjects used in the study also fall in sync with the county population as a whole.

For the experiments conducted, a sample of Boone County residents at least 18 years of age was collected by the Center for Advanced Social Research at the University of Missouri. The sample of 242 subjects was drawn from the general population of the county, rather than from the student population at the University of Missouri, so that the results would be generalizable to the general population.

In Boone County, the population consists of 108,100 adults of voting age. Figure 5-5 shows the distribution of that population by age as compared with the rest of the state and the nation.

Figure 5-5

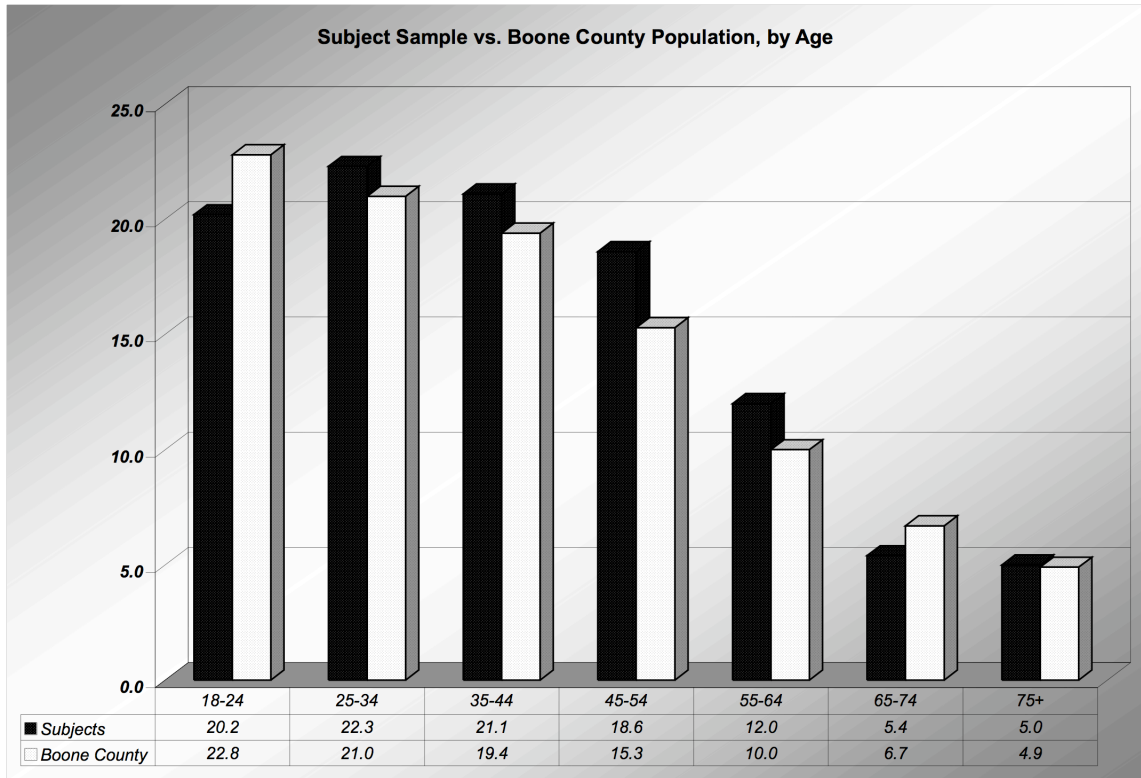


Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004; U. S. Census Bureau: The U. S. Census Bureau does not divide population estimates into an 18-24 range.

The totals for Boone County skew slightly higher in the younger adult years than the Missouri and United States population as a whole, and then fall off when compared to the U. S. Census Bureau numbers for the state and nation for older adults. The reason for the higher percentage of younger citizens in Boone County is the location of the higher education institutions there. This provided some concerns in building the sample for the experiments. With the largest city in Boone County the seat of three institutions of higher learning, the possibility of a younger-skewing subject pool was quite high. Figure 5-6 gives the distribution of the members of the sample compared with the Boone County population. In fact, the youngest age group, 18-24, is slightly underrepresented in the sample drawn for the experiments. The next four older groups do skew slightly heavier in

the sample. And at the high end of the age groupings, the sample draws more lightly than represents the entire population.

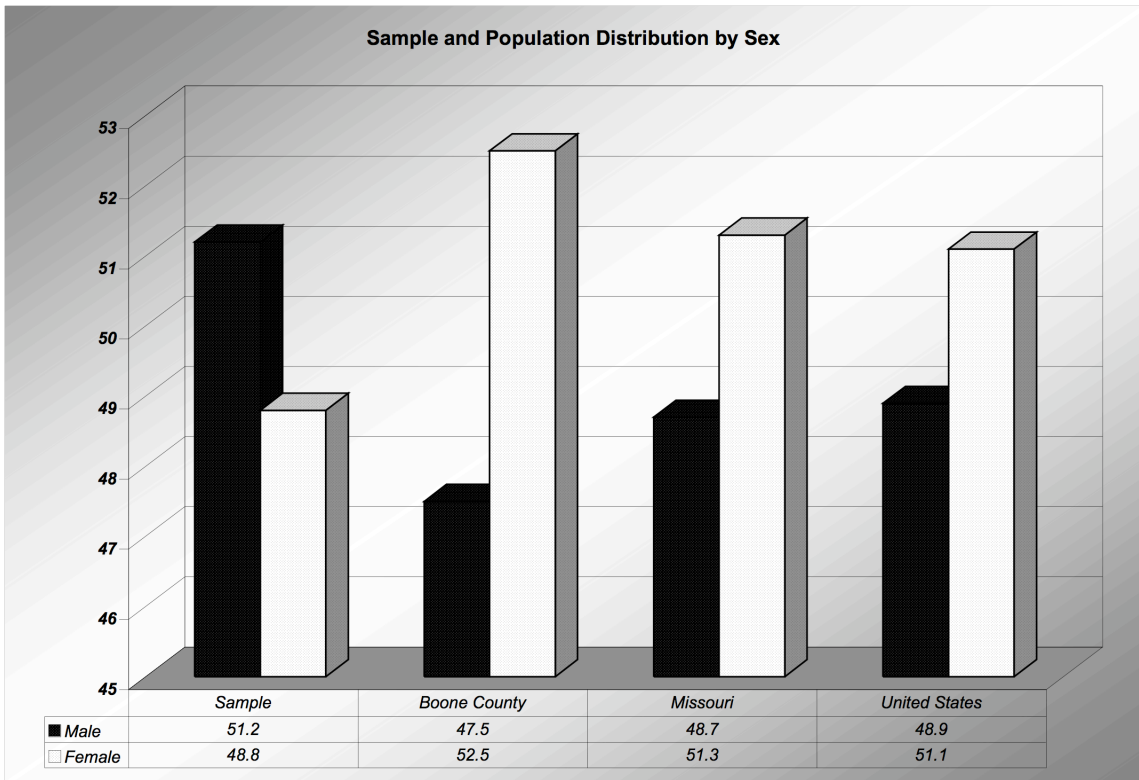
Figure 5-6



Despite the slightly younger skewing, each of the seven age groups represented in the sample never varies from the population by more than four percentage points.

A major split occurred in the sex of the subjects as compared to the populations of the county, state, and nation. In those populations, women outnumber men by a small, yet measurable percentage. But as Figure 5-7 shows, the sample was drawn with slightly more men than women.

Figure 5-7

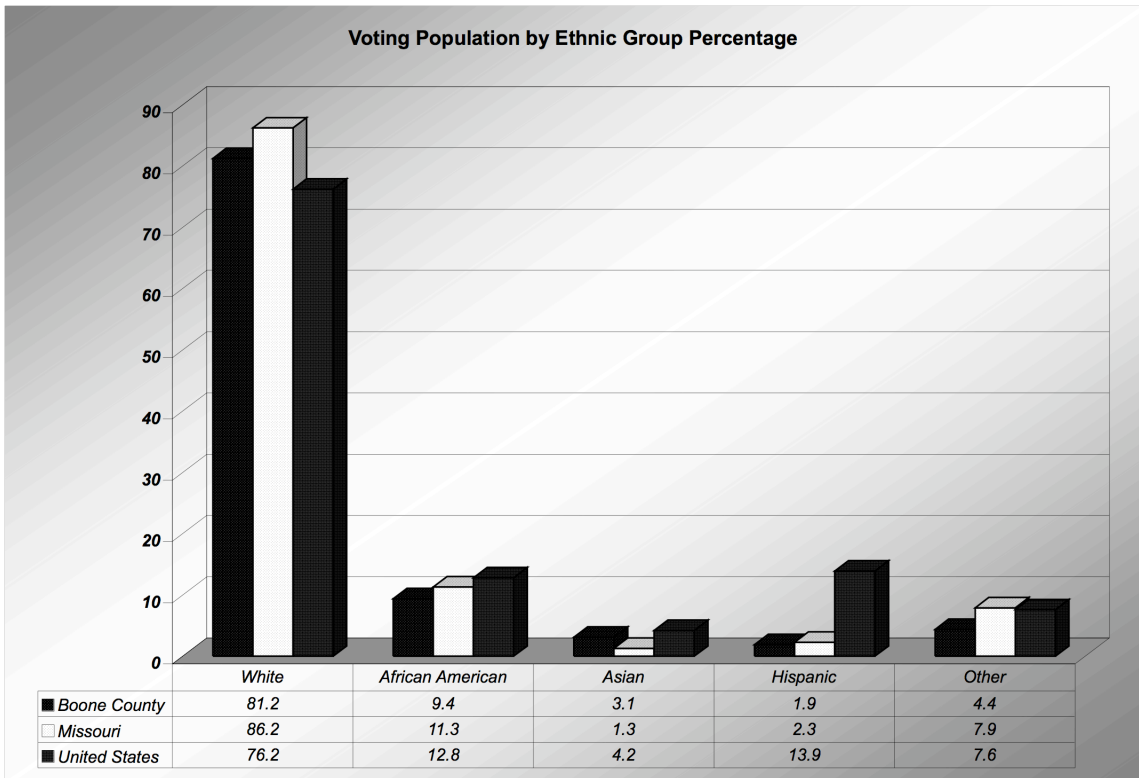


Sources: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004; U. S. Census Bureau 2003

The slightly heavy sampling of males in the study is difficult to explain. The experiments were conducted in the evening and on weekend afternoons, making them generally accessible to both sexes.

Midwestern states have not shown the same changes in their ethnic makeup as much of the rest of the nation has seen over the recent years. That difference leaves Missouri with a considerably higher percentage of Caucasians than found in the other states combined. But Boone County comes closer to matching national distributions of race on all but one category.

Figure 5-8

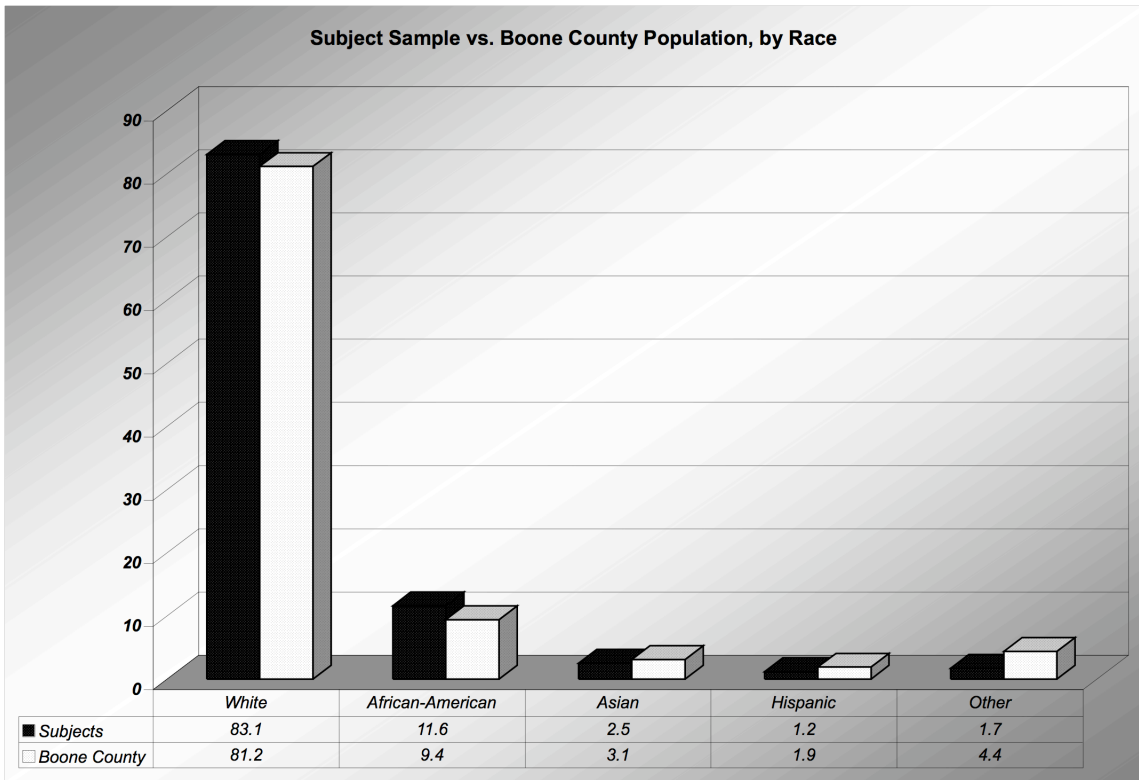


Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004; U. S. Census Bureau 2003

The difference is in the Hispanic population. While that population is just under two percent in Boone County, statewide numbers are similar at 2.3 percent. But across the nation, Hispanics totaled 13.9 percent and are the largest minority group in the country, surpassing African Americans. In Boone County and statewide, the African American population is still the largest minority group. The Asian population is lower statewide at 1.3 percent, and marginally higher nationally at 4.2 percent.

Figure 5-9 shows the sample drawn from this racial mix fairly well-duplicated the Boone County population.

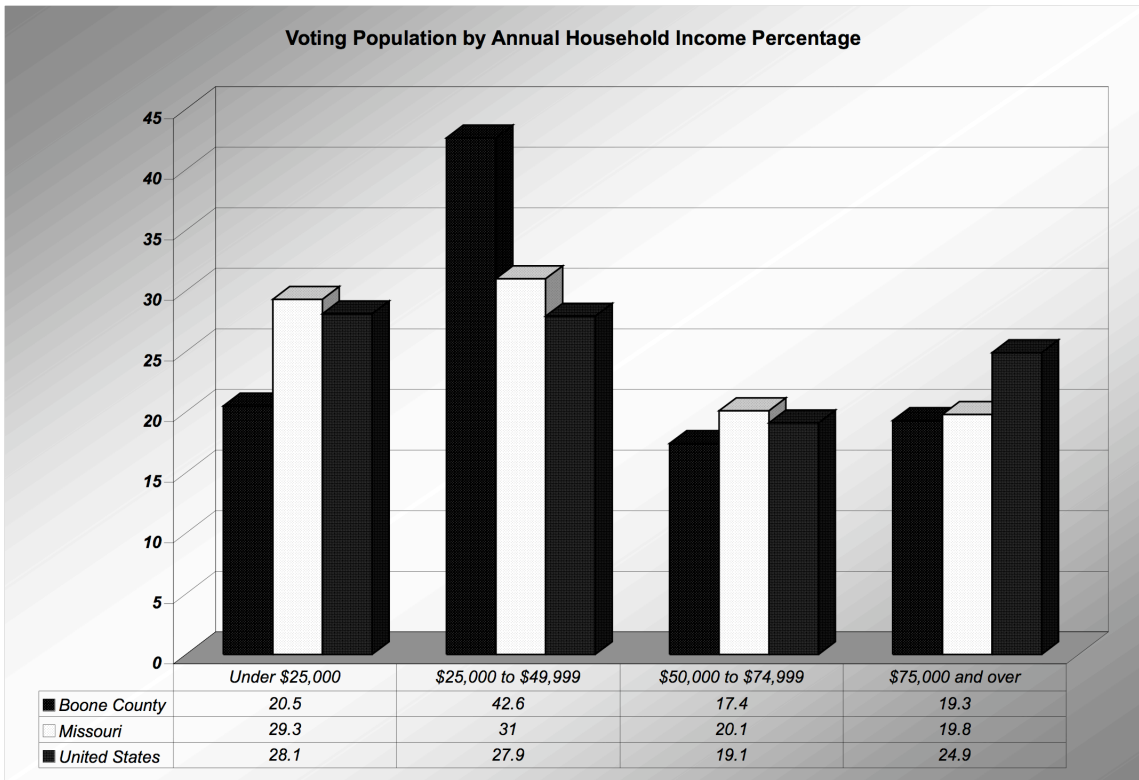
Figure 5-9



Subjects recruited for the experiments represented all racial groups within approximately two percent of their appearance in the general population. White and African American percentages in the sample were slightly higher than the population, while Asians, Hispanics, and those of other or mixed race were slightly underrepresented.

The last two demographic categories proved to be the hardest in which to capture the distribution found in the Boone County population. The first was household income. Household income in Boone County mirrors, though imperfectly, the rest of the state, but without showing the effect the inner cities play on statewide low-income averages. Figure 5-10 shows the income distribution.

Figure 5-10



Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004; U. S. Census Bureau 2003

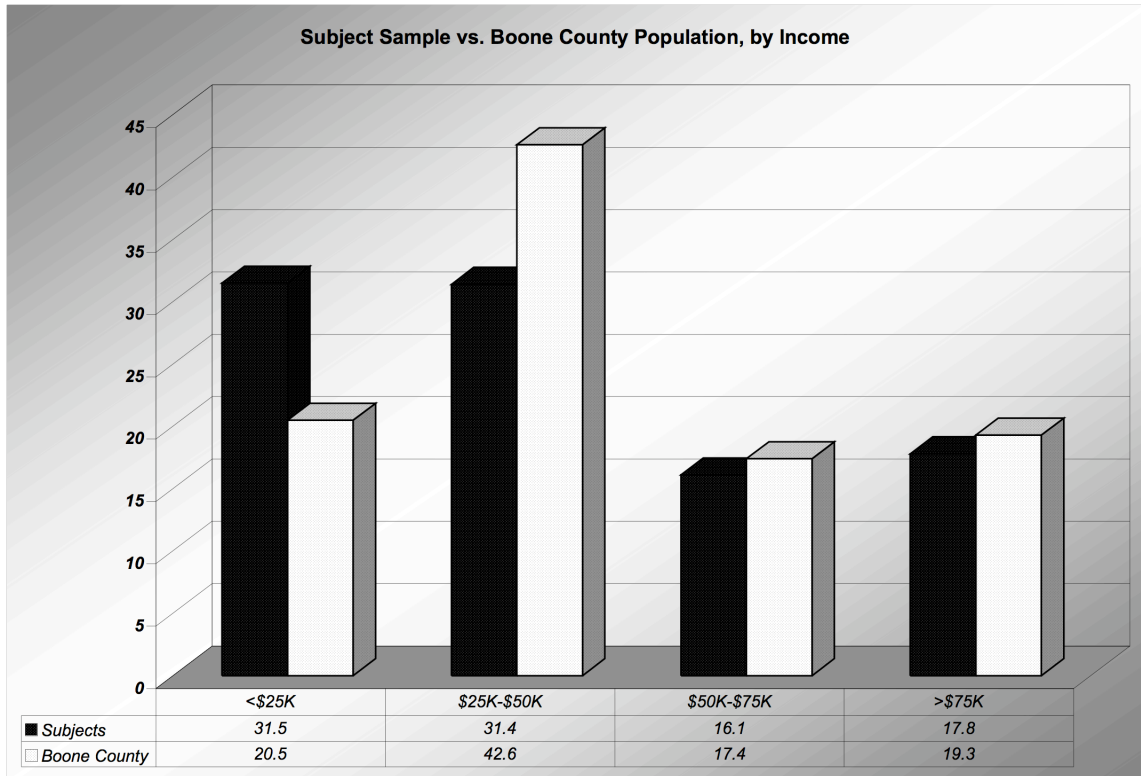
Statewide, the household income distribution above fifty thousand dollars per year is very similar to Boone County. The real difference is in the low and middle-income areas.

Boone County lacks the poverty found in the hardest hit areas of St. Louis and Kansas City, so the low-income totals in Boone County are nearly nine percent below the state average. That difference leaves Boone County with a middle-income bracket that is more than eleven percent higher than the statewide total. In the nation, the lowest income levels roughly match Missouri, as does the middle-income segment. In the upper middle class income bracket, Boone County once again comes close to mirroring the national average, while falling short of the national average of the highest income households.

For building the sample for the experiment, there was a large preponderance of lower income subjects willing to come to take part. Figure 5-11 shows the percentage of

those with less than a \$25,000 household income is more than 50 percent above its proportion in the population.

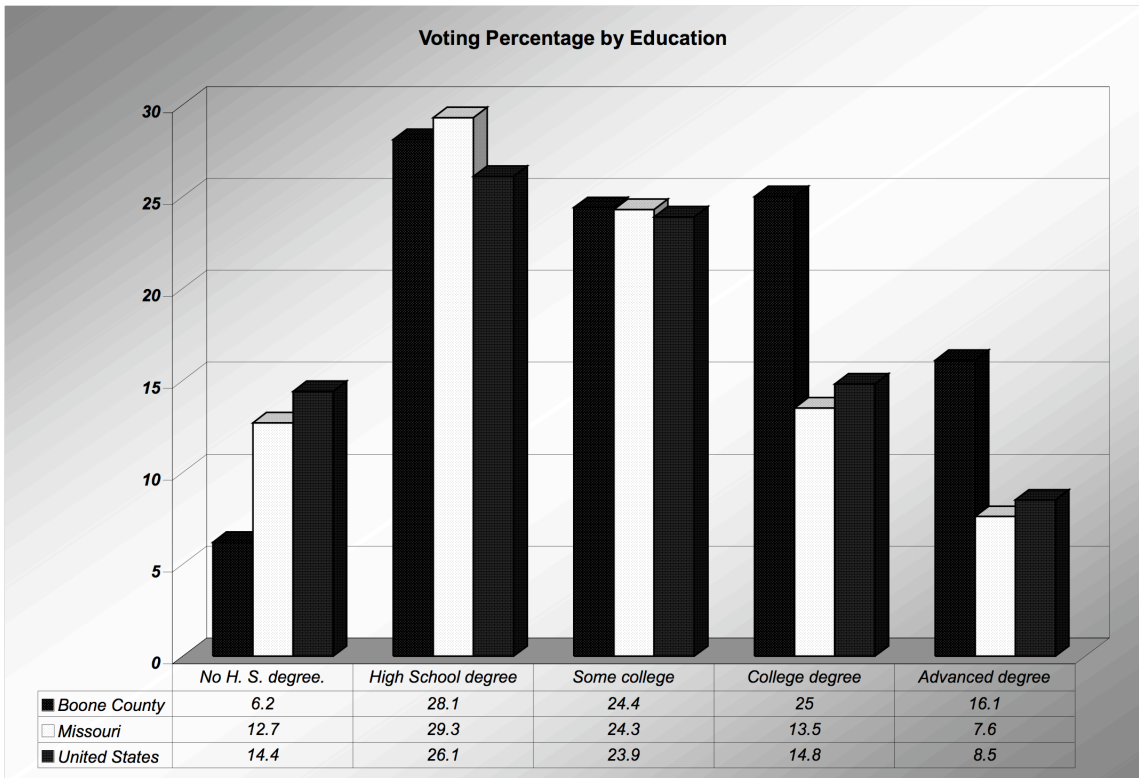
Figure 5-11



All three other income categories fall short of their corresponding portion of the population. One possible explanation for this skewing toward the lower economic categories is the monetary inducement offered to take part in the experiment. Each subject was offered \$15 to take part in the experiment. This nominal amount of money to induce participation was probably more attractive to those with lower household income.

Matching the subject sample to the population by education level also proved to be difficult. Despite its similarities in these other demographic measures, it is in the area of education that Boone County stands apart from Missouri and the country. Figure 5-12 shows the educational achievement of Boone County voting adults.

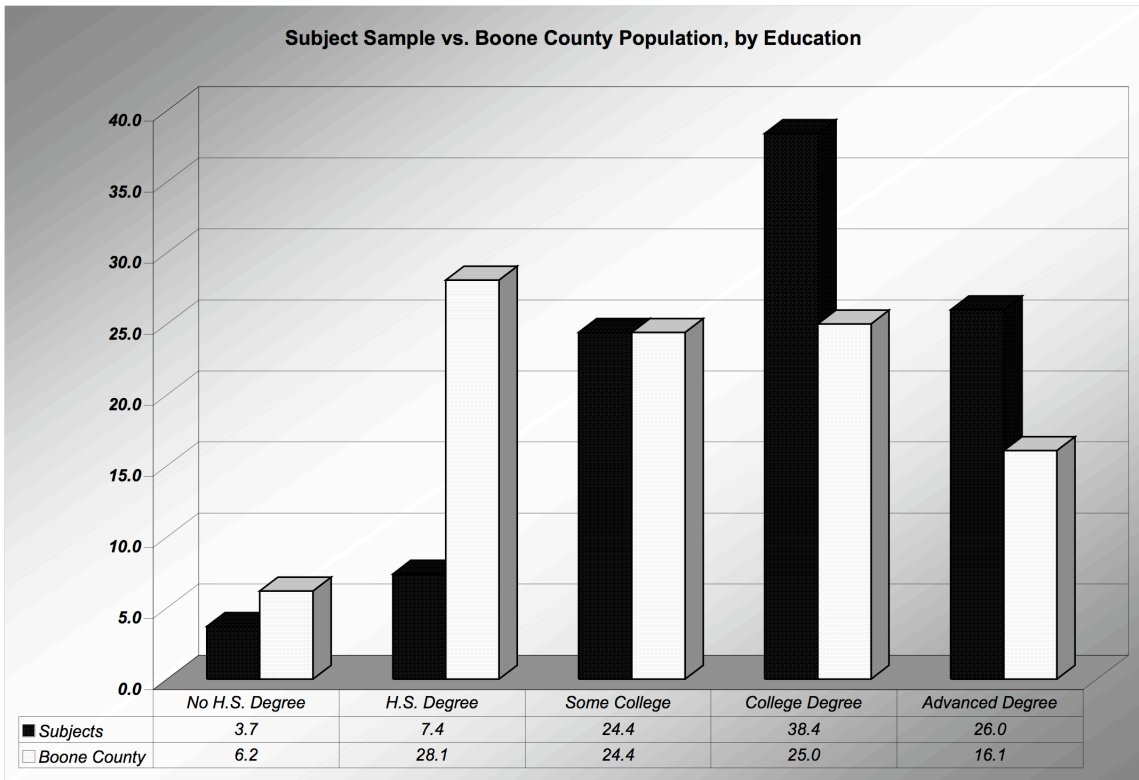
Figure 5-12



Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004; U. S. Census Bureau 2003

Boone County enjoys a well-educated population, due in part to the institutions of higher education located in Columbia. While the percentage of those with high school diplomas or who have attended some college is approximately the same in Boone County as it is in the rest of the state, college graduates are nearly twice as easy to find in Boone County as in the rest of Missouri. And those in Boone County with advanced degrees total more than double the Missouri average of 7.6 percent. Understandably, the percentage of those without a high school diploma is far lower in Boone County than the Missouri average. That difference was reflected in the sample drawn for the experiment. Figure 5-13 shows there was a heavy preponderance of those with college and advanced degrees in the study.

Figure 5-13



An explanation for securing an even higher percentage of subjects with college and advanced degree may come from considering the process for recruitment. As calls were made from a random sampling of phone numbers, those with all education levels were reached. But those with higher levels of education—in particular those with advanced degrees—may feel some commitment to assisting with academic research. They would therefore be more likely to agree to take part in the survey than those without the same feelings.

Media Habits and Perceptions

Two other non-demographic measures were used to compare the sample of subjects to the Boone County population. Since the study revolves around media use and perceptions, it was desirable for the subjects to be media consumers. Though media

consumption patterns were not part of the recruitment process, the demographic survey each subject took part in also measured those media habits. In general, the media habits of the citizens of Boone County show high consumption of local and national media. A majority of adults report reading the daily newspaper regularly. Table 5-2 shows self-reported daily newspaper readership in Boone County.

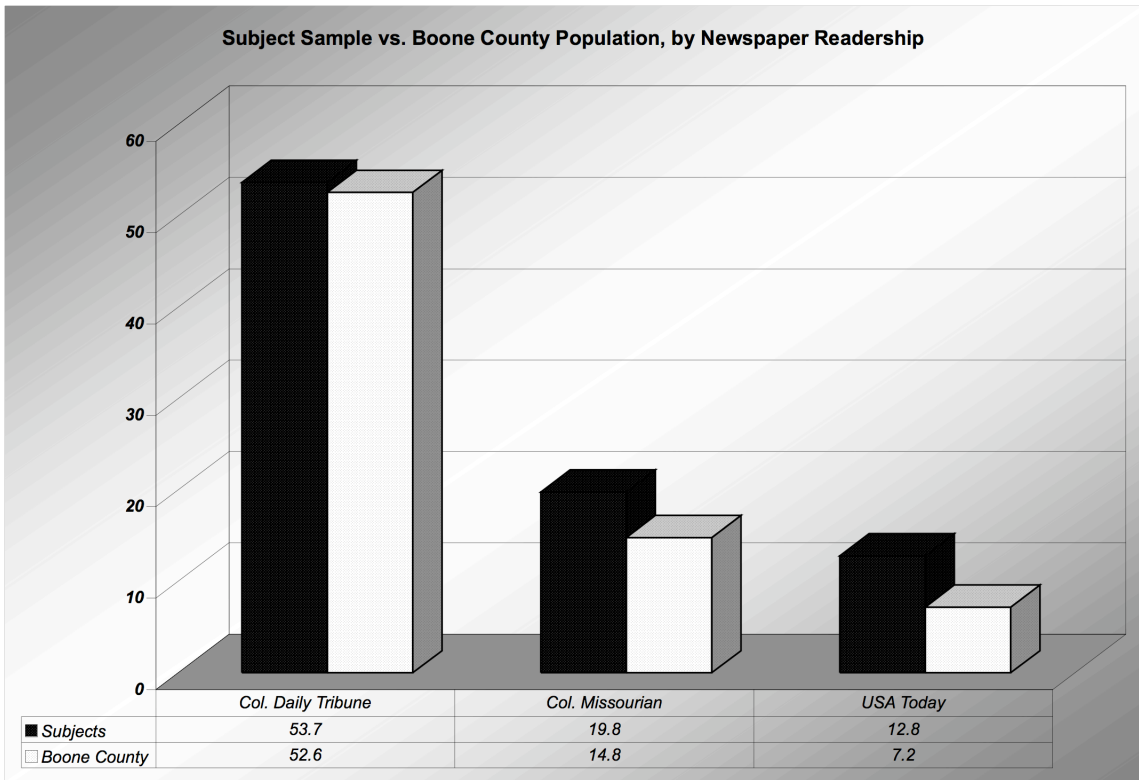
Table 5-2: Newspaper Readership Percentage in Boone County, by Age Group

Age Group	Columbia Daily Tribune	Columbia Missourian	USA Today
All 18+	52.6	14.8	7.2
18-24	29.6	11.3	2.4
25-34	39.6	11.9	6.6
35-44	64.8	13.8	9.5
45-54	63.6	13.9	11.5
55-64	76.9	19.4	9.3
65-74	68.1	18.1	8.3
75+	64.2	34.0	5.7

Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004

The mean of these readership pattern, compared to the subject distribution, shows those subjects consumed printed media in the form of local newspapers in much the same fashion as the general population.

Figure 5-14



In fact, the subjects report themselves to be slightly higher consumers of newspapers than the population as a whole.

Countywide, television consumption, as expected, is even higher. With the exception of Adults 18-24, more than 90 percent of persons in every demographic category report watching television on a daily basis. Television news viewing habits are also quite high. Of all adults, 67.8 percent report watching the early evening news daily, while 51.7 percent say they watch the late evening local news. Table 5-3 shows news viewing habits across day parts.

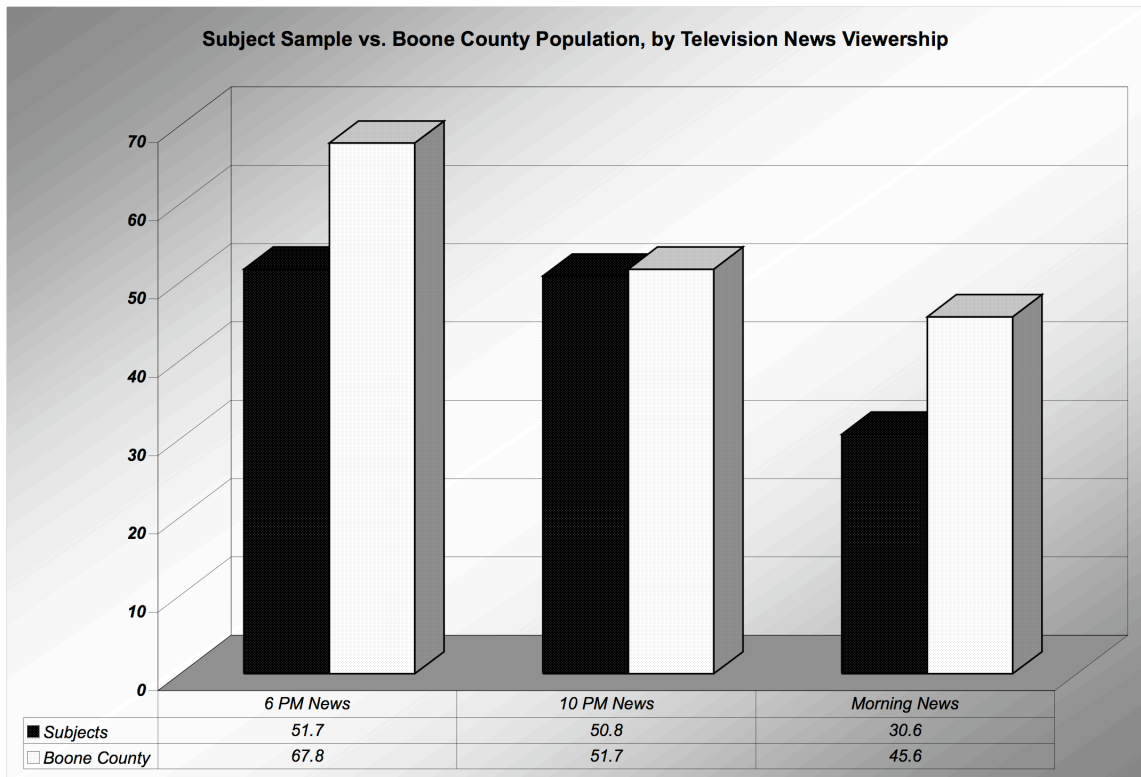
Table 5-3: Television News Viewership Percentages in Boone County, by Age Group

Age Group	Local Early Evening News (6:00 pm)	Local Late Evening News (10:00 pm)	Morning National News (7:00 am)
All 18+	67.8	51.7	45.6
18-24	62.8	42.9	43.3
25-34	63.4	46.3	42.7
35-44	62.4	58.6	44.8
45-54	69.7	57.6	47.3
55-64	78.7	67.6	43.5
65-74	81.9	41.7	54.2
75+	84.9	50.9	62.3

Source: The Media Audit of Columbia-Jefferson City, MO 2004

But for the sample, television news consumption habits ran counter to their trend with newspaper readership habits. Subjects reported a slightly lower use of television news than the mean Boone County figures. Figure 5-15 shows the pattern.

Figure 5-15



The subjects were only asked, however, about three particular news viewing times—two local and one national. These times match those asked in the Media Audit data, but do not capture other local or national news viewing times. It is also possible that the higher education level of the subjects participating in the study makes them less likely to watch television and more likely to read for news and entertainment.

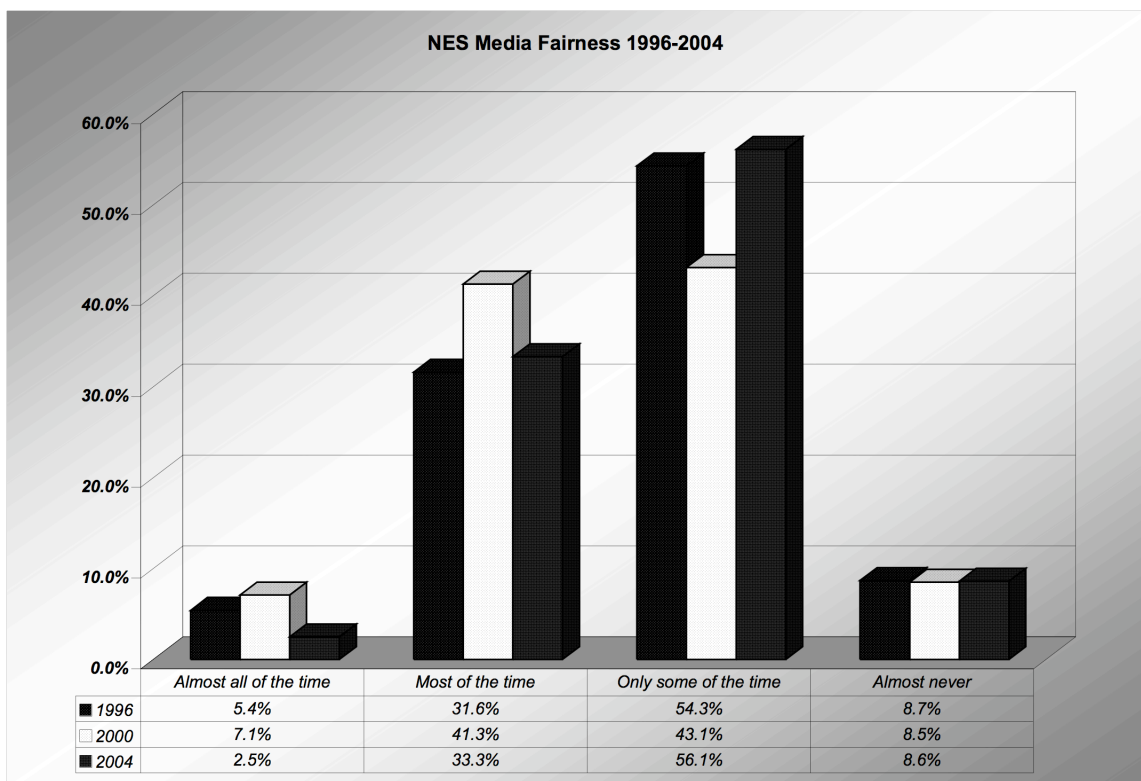
With those viewing and reading habits in mind, how do these subjects assess the job the media do for their audiences? That question leads to a new variable that will ultimately test the hypotheses presented herein. In building an overall index of media confidence, it is necessary to use divergent sources of data on how the media are perceived by readers and viewers.

Media Trust Index

Just as they collect demographic information with which we can better understand the voting and policy preferences citizens develop, large studies in political behavior often collect information about subject attitudes toward the media. The questions ask subjects to rate the media in terms of their fairness, their accuracy, and their balance in covering the issues. Some ask specifically about political issues, some ask the questions in a more general sense. It is possible, through the combination of the data generated by the major polling organization's media questions, to develop an overall barometer of the attitudes of the public toward the news media. This "media trust index" is useful in measuring changes in attitudes toward the media over time—including an experimental interval.

Regarding public perceptions of media fairness, the surveys conducted for the National Election Studies at the University of Michigan have included a media question on the presidential election year questionnaires since 1996. Subjects respond to the question “How much of the time do you think you can trust the media to report the news fairly?” Figure 5-16 shows the largest segment of subjects in each study reported they trust the media only some of the time.

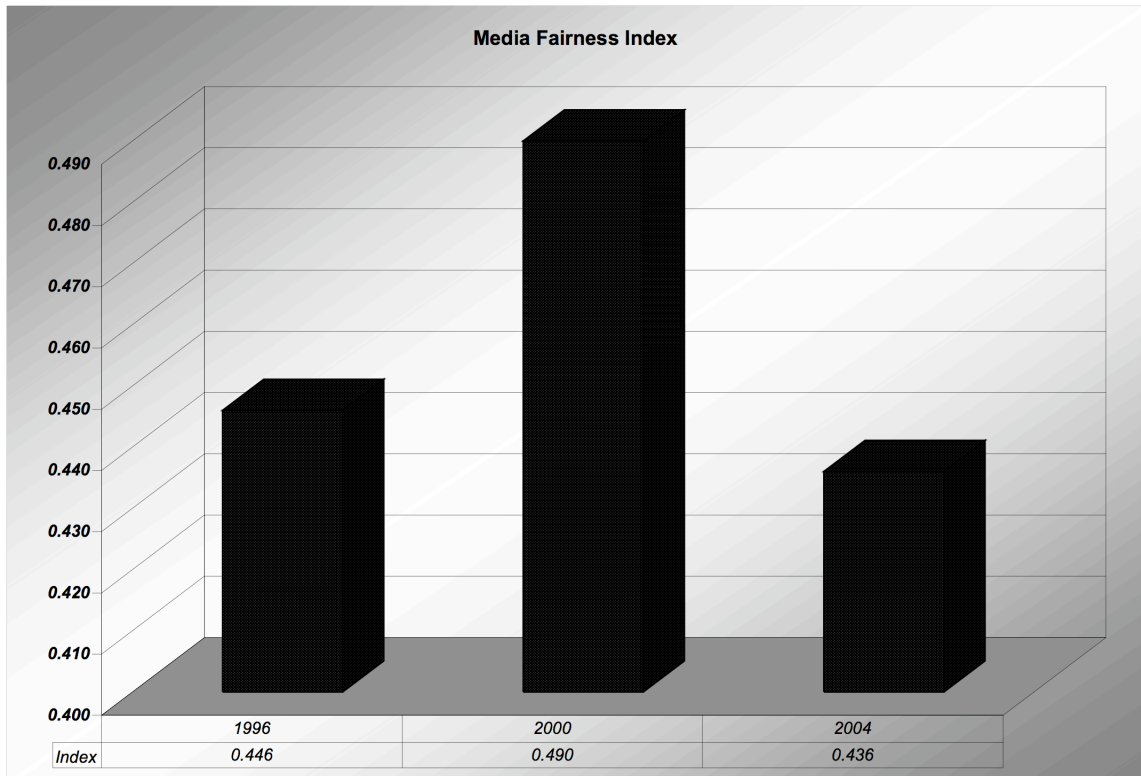
Figure 5-16



It is possible to see vague pattern that shows an increase in trust in 2000, as compared to 1996, and then a decrease in trust in the 2004 election. But if the data for each year is transformed into a single index by weighting each attitudinal scale by its corresponding percentage of respondents, subtracting 1 from that resulting index, and dividing the difference by the number of scale points minus 1, the final dividend gives an index of

media fairness comparable on a scale across years. Figure 5-17 shows a much easier to read comparison of the level of trust in fairness for NES subjects.

Figure 5-17

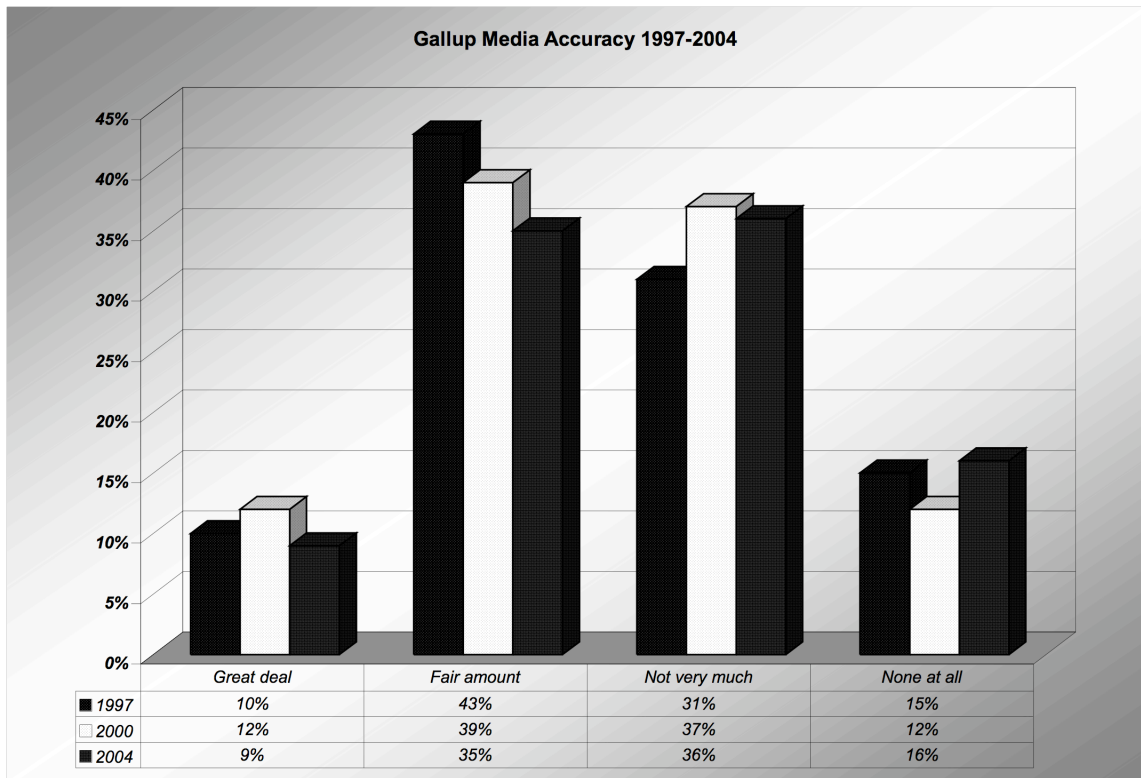


Clearly in this analysis of the data, the voters in 2000 were more satisfied with the job done by the media than in the other two election years studied in the National Election Studies. In all years, the index is below the .500 point, indicating an overall dissatisfaction with media performance in terms of fairness in all years studied.

While the National Election Studies ask about attitudes on media fairness, they do not address the issues of media accuracy or balance. To address the former of those traits, it is necessary to turn to another national study. The Gallup Organization regularly asks subjects in a nationwide poll for attitudes on media accuracy. In a poll done every years since 1997, subjects are asked to respond to this question, “How much trust and

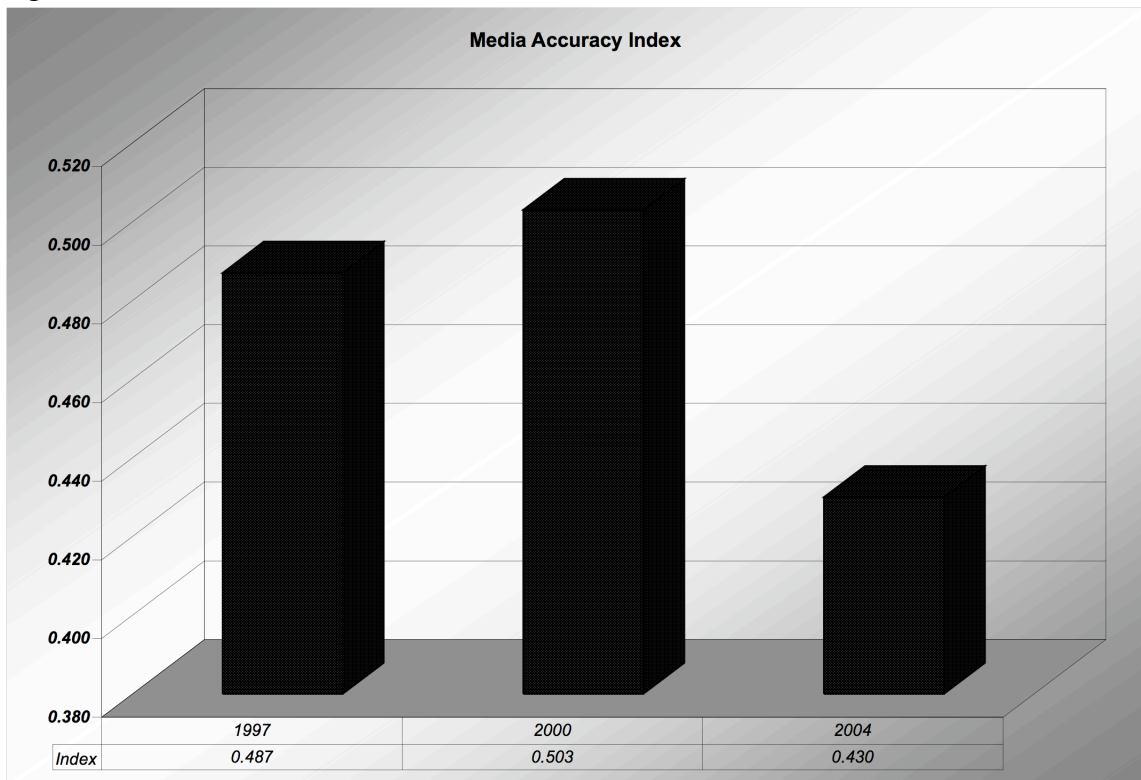
confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly?" The question asks about fairness as well as accuracy, but is the only national survey including accuracy as a component. Displayed in Figure 5-18, the trend across the three years surveyed is again difficult to easily pick out.

Figure 5-18



But when the data are transformed in the same manner as with the NES data, a definite trend is apparent. Figure 5-19 shows a similar pattern to what the NES data showed as the pattern of perceptions of media fairness over roughly the same time period.

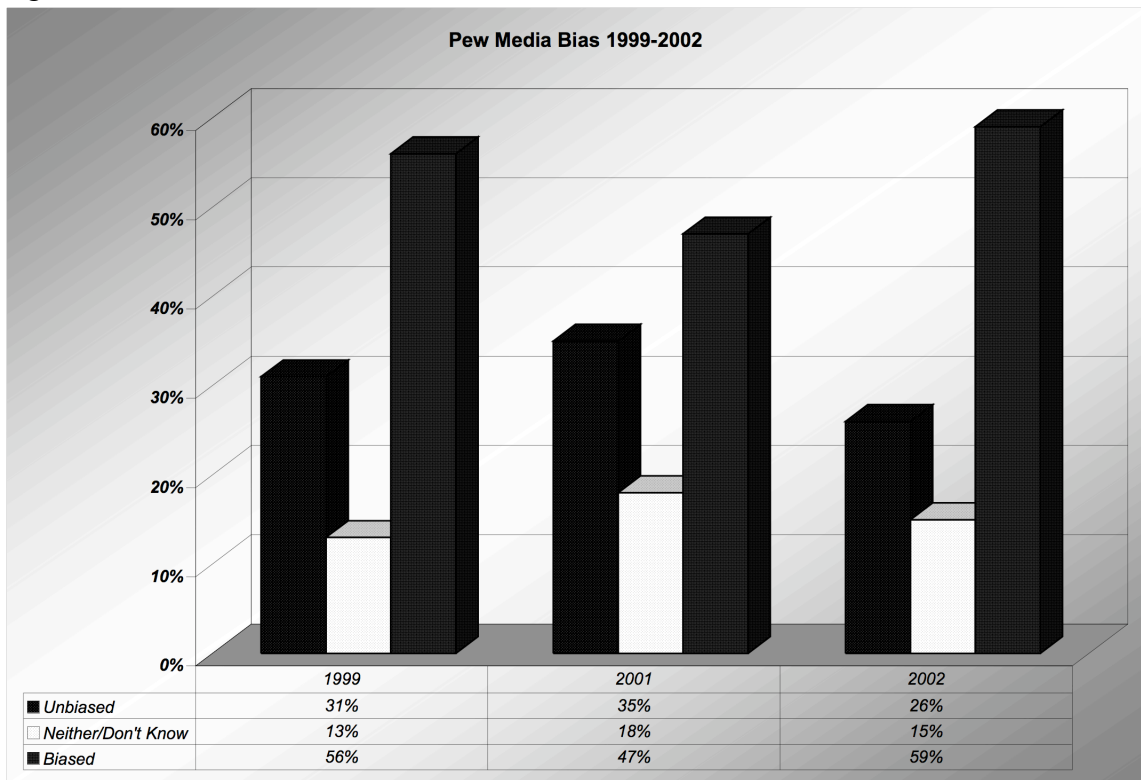
Figure 5-19



In both instances, subject perceptions of fairness and accuracy rose in 2000 and dropped somewhat sharply in 2004. And, because the index is based on the same 1.000 scale of transformed data, it is possible to compare the indices to each other.

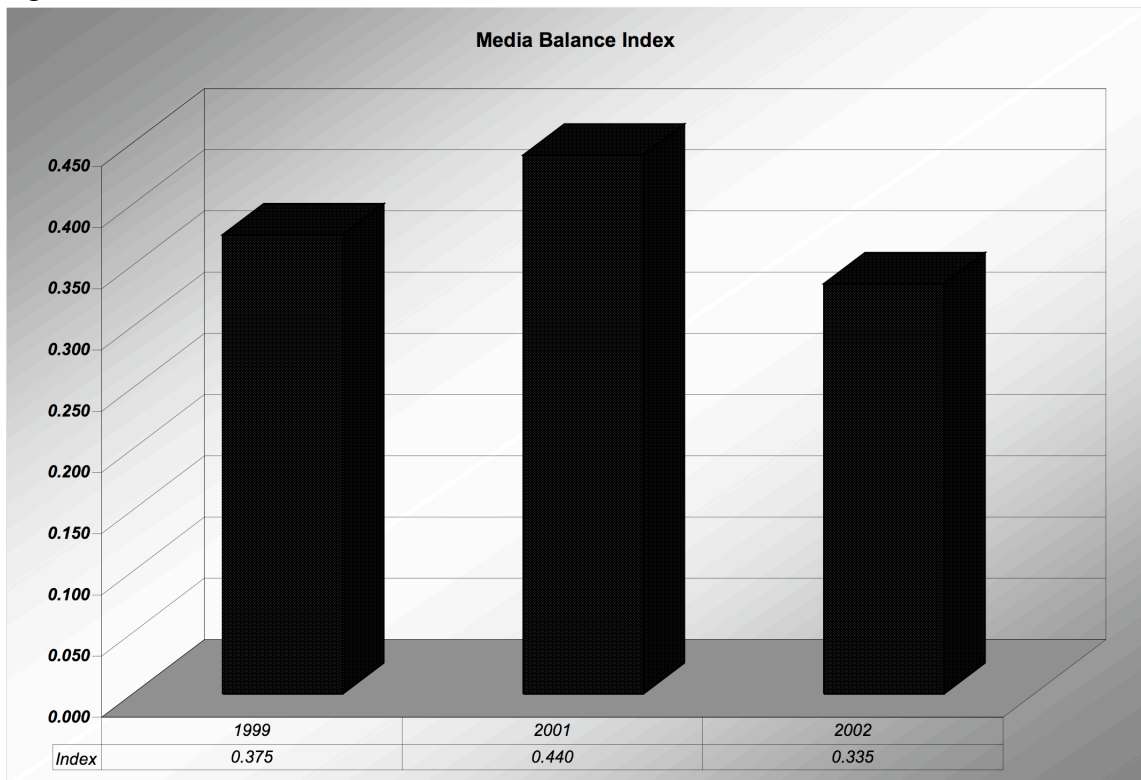
The final assessment of media trust is perception of bias. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has asked subjects about opinions on media bias since 1985. The three surveys closest in time to those previously used were in 1999, 2001, and 2002. Subjects were asked if they believed the media are biased in their reporting or careful not to be biased. Figure 5-20 shows the

Figure 5-20



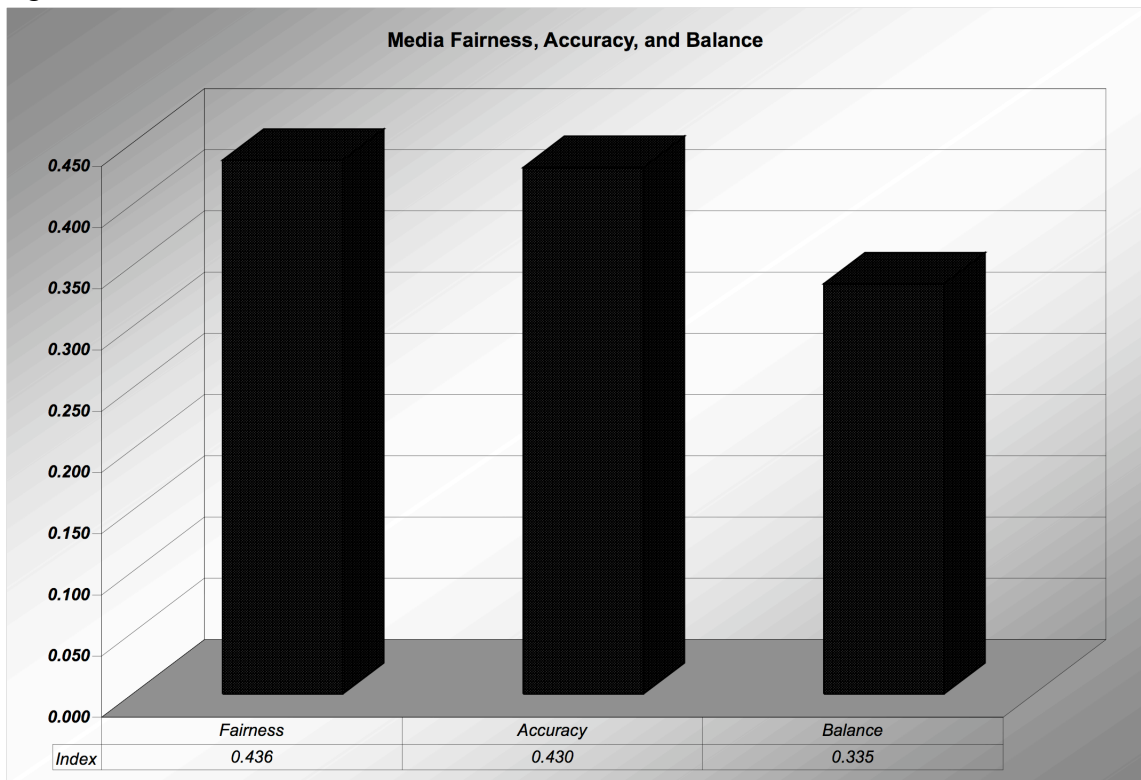
As with the other chartings of poll results, it is difficult to see the pattern across time. It appears that the perceptions of bias diminish somewhat in 2001, but climb to a new high in 2002. But a transformation of the data to match the same scaling as the other two studies reveals the true pattern across time. As with the other surveys, the middle year (2001 in this case) is the strongest year for media performance, with the last year (2002) being the weakest. Figure 5-21 shows the comparison in index form.

Figure 5-21



The uniform indexing of data from different surveys and different years also allows those data to be combined into the same figure to show relative strengths and weaknesses of the media in the three studied areas of fairness, accuracy, and balance. Using the most recent data from each survey, it is possible to produce a cross section of current national public opinion on media trust. Figure 5-22 displays the data from those latest surveys.

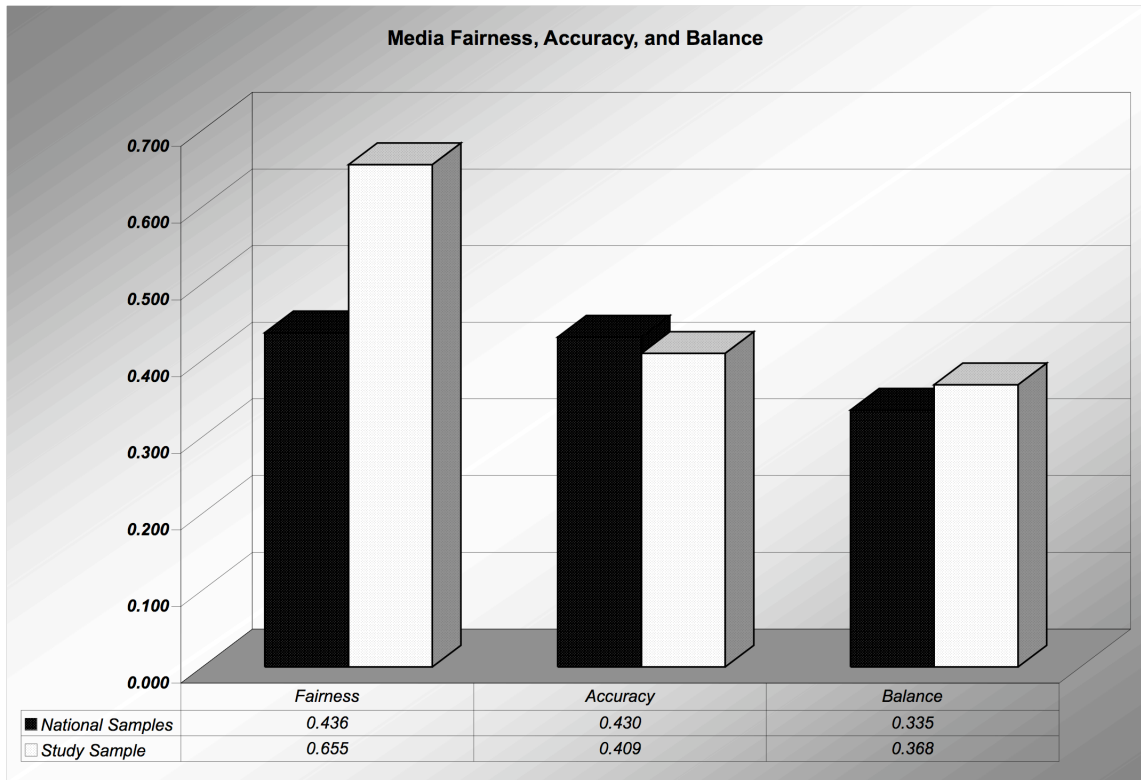
Figure 5-22



For this data, all fall below the midpoint of .500, which would denote a neutral opinion toward media. While fairness and accuracy are close to the midpoint, balance falls fairly far below, suggesting perceptions of media bias are strong.

Because of its uniformity, this index can also be compared to data about the subjects used for this study. All subjects were pretested during the recruitment phase with a series of question about their own political ideology and perceptions of media performance. Each subject was asked for an assessment of general news media fairness, accuracy, and balance. Those responses can be transformed to the same scale as used with the national data to give a comparison between the national voter sample and the local experimental sample. Figure 5-23 shows the comparison.

Figure 5-23



The comparison of study subjects shows an extraordinarily high proportion of study subjects rating media fairness as high, while the same subjects assess accuracy and balance at levels similar to national studies.

Finally, the index of each of the three assessments of media trust can be averaged into one media trust index. This final measurement can show movement across time and will prove useful as a dependent variable for measuring the impact of the experimental treatments on the sample groups. For the pretest subject full sample, the overall media trust index is .477, while the national studies produce a media trust index of .400.

The demographic and media behaviors of the sample of subjects drawn for the experiment are a close approximation of the Boone County adult population. With these subjects selected, it was then possible to begin experimentation to gauge their perceptions

of news products as the visual and written presentations were manipulated to test three areas of public policy.

Chapter 6: Research Methods and Hypotheses

The goals of the research have been to measure the effect of the use of imbedded messages on audience perceptions of newscaster objectivity, trustworthiness, and balance. Messages in news reports come primarily from the words the newscasters speak. But there are other messages in the form of visual symbols. This research combines written and spoken words, discrete visual symbols, and specific news video examples to measure subject response to each of those message carriers. The simplest of those embedded messages, presented in the form of a lapel button or pin, makes up the “soft” or least persuasive of the treatments. The addition of the use of biased language in the verbal portion of the newscasts example produces a “moderate” form of the treatment. Finally, the further addition of biased video to the lapel pin and verbal biases yields a “hard” treatment approach for subject exposures. All treatments manipulate the symbols—verbal or visual—that television news viewers encounter whenever they view the medium. And it is through the power those symbols carry that bias can be introduced into the messages.

The Richness of Symbols

Symbols are found more frequently than on television news or in the media in general. They are around us all day, every day. They direct our travel to work, control our activity on our computers, and guide our paths to dining, entertainment, and more. Symbols are the way we organize our lives and our relationships to the world in which we live. Their use helps define man as the “symbol-using animal” (Burke 1989, p. 70).

These symbols are not essential to maintaining life, but the very fact that they are here and that people use them to construct a reality, makes them an essential part of our connection to others (Firth 1973, p. 20).

So how do symbols come about? Some of the earliest work in the origin and purpose of symbols as a means of communication between people came from Edward Sapir. Sapir developed the notion of two types of symbols—referential and condensational. Referential symbols were those that came as direct substitutes for real world objects. As such, they hold commonly accepted meanings to act as another currency of idea exchange among people. But condensational symbols arise differently and, while they serve the same purpose to deliver meaning through communication among individuals, these symbols develop as an emotional output of the human mind, and not a mere representation of reality (Sapir 1934, pp. 492-5).

Elder and Cobb, in their study of the use of political symbols, found they arise for three reasons. First, human beings have a need for efficiency. Symbols can provide a short and wordless way to communicate sophisticated meaning easily and briefly (Elder & Cobb 1973, p. 20). Who could argue that the simple use of two fingers to make a “peace sign” during the Viet Nam war communicated volumes about the politics of the owner of the fingers? Secondly, the need for a common reference point in communications forces people to agree upon a common meaning for the symbols they use (Elder & Cobb 1973, p. 20). Clearly, we all must agree that a red light means stop, and a green light means go. Any variance from those accepted definitions can be disastrous. And finally, Elder and Cobb see that groups, particularly disadvantaged ones, create symbols to help define and place themselves in a higher profile among the general

population (Elder & Cobb 1973, p. 21). The now-familiar symbol for a disabled person's parking space has taken on new social context and elevated that group to a higher level of awareness with the public. Each of these reasons for using symbols has bearing on the study at hand. The use of a flag pin on one's lapel provides an efficient way of sending a message. But what exactly is that message? Common meaning may be hard for some to agree upon when viewing the pin wearer. Does he wear it as a patriot in support of the country—or does he wear it mockingly as some did with flags across the seats of their pants during the Viet Nam war era? Does the flag show he supports the war against terrorism—or does it show support for the American service people he wants to see brought home immediately? Does the flag show support for the current administration and its policies—or does it ask for an alternative to bring back American values. Common meaning can be difficult to find when symbols take on the role of political communication.

Sharing Meaning through Symbols

The idea that symbols are a shortcut for people to use to find a common *meaning* during communication is crucial to the discussion of whether bias can arise from the inconsistent understanding of what symbols represent. Murray Edelman emphasizes the difference between information and meaning, arguing that the two are not only different, but also often at odds. Meaning, according to Edelman, is about order and the ability to comprehend information—too much of which is available to our minds. Without common meaning and the symbols that make it possible, the processing of information would become too big a burden for most of us (Edelman 1971, pp. 31-33). Symbols allow

our minds to take issues with a large information base and process them as if they were much smaller and more manageable (Moles 1968, p. 63).

But the common meaning need not be universal in its understanding. Instead, the understanding group is usually smaller. Different nationalities and ethnic groups view certain gestures and symbols in their own ways as funny, rude, or evoking any number of responses. None of these responses would necessarily be generated in another culture (La Russo 1977, p.163).

Researchers in semiotics also look at a three-part explanation for why symbols gain common meaning. They see the symbol itself, the concrete object or notion it stands for, and the perceiver of the symbol all to be essential elements in deciding what a given symbol means (Siegel & Carey 1989, p. 18). In this way, the elements of the triad of connected symbols, objects, and individuals need to be examined together, and cannot be pulled apart for microexamination. If that would happen, the meanings break down as the triad dissolves. Edelman reinforces that notion that symbols and the people who perceive them are inexorably connected. He argues that since symbols have no intrinsic meaning, they can bring out a “concentrated form” of both meanings and emotions in the group that accepts a common meaning of those symbols. The individual and group are key, as Edelman emphasizes, “The meanings, however, are not in the symbols. They are in society and therefore in men.” (Edelman 1964, p. 11).

It is in men (and women) as individuals that the processing of symbolic information occurs. Often that processing results in an emotional response from the receiver of the symbolic information. It could be argued that symbolic communication is really the communication of ideas and not emotion. Emotion is generated by the

combining of the known meanings associated with the symbols and the reaction of the mind and body to those symbols in the receiver (Buck 1984, pp. 335-6). As this study examines three issues that can generate a great deal of emotion in citizens, this theory of how meaning and emotion interact is very important. The flag of one's nation is a very powerful emotional symbol. It can lead soldiers in battle to their deaths, make citizens cry as it passes by in a parade, and exhilarate athletes entering international competition. Likewise, the symbols for and against abortion and gay rights come with powerful emotional elements that, in some cases, make up more of their meaning than the non-emotional components. Each of these symbols generates a reaction in the receiver of the message.

Those reactions, unlike the symbols that have a shared and agreed upon, yet still non-intrinsic meaning, are built in to our minds and bodies. They arise despite or even against our will as a result of a certain stimulus. Because the notion of the "spontaneous" communication is built upon the foundation that these are internal feelings manifested on external symbols, they cannot be disguised, pretended, or falsified (Mead 1934, p. 16).

Smith takes this classification of symbols even further with his theory of the symbolizing process. He sees four uses of symbols in human thought processing. First, symbols allow us to remember or conjure up absent people, places, or things—building a sense of history and being grounded in it. Second, the common understanding of symbols allows for shared experience of those memories and representations. Third, symbols are not restricted only to the tangible. Crucial to the study of political symbols, Smith finds the symbolism in use when representing "freedom" or "honor" to be very important.

Finally, the first three uses of symbols help build a total culture of symbols which is shared by members of a common community (Smith 1990, pp. 9-10).

It is necessary to step aside from the common definitions of the term “symbol” to say for the sake of this research what symbols are *not*. Though any research in the area of symbolic communications would have to classify the spoken and written word as symbols themselves (Pranger 1968, pp. 157-8), this examination of the use of patriotic symbols will interest itself only in nonverbal symbols. In fact, that distinction is important in examining a field such as journalism where both verbal and nonverbal communication takes place. There is in fact, according to Chase, a “tyranny of words” in our approaches to examining human communication that masks much of the underlying value and impact of nonverbal cues (Chase 1938, p. 46). Lacking the use of verbal speech with words, animals exhibit their reliance on simple symbols all the time (Hayes 1994, p. 176). By stripping away the preponderance of spoken communication using words as symbols, it becomes easier to see the pervasiveness of nonverbal symbols in human communications.

Symbols and Language in Political Communication

It is through this non-verbal power of symbols that this examination of the relative power of that non-verbal messaging will be explored. It seems clear that the power of symbols in television presentations—even unintentional—will have an impact on the understanding taken from the program by the viewers.

With a basic understanding of how symbols come about and how they help the human mind process information, the role of symbols in politics is a subset of that larger

issue. The study of symbols falls under the general field of study in political communications. Research in this field is seen as crucial to understanding the relationship between the political power holders and the general public. That relationship is based on the use of symbols as an intermediary between the political power structure and the public, where symbols help create a “pseudo-environment” that stands between the public and the actual environment to which the symbols refer (Lippmann 1949, p.10). Parties and their icons act as symbols, for instance, without which often participation and interest decline (Schaffner, Streb, & Wright 2001, p. 25). Some would go as far as to say there is no reality of political life without that which is created by the use of symbols and other forms of political communication (Nimmo & Combs 1983, p. 4). And the roots of that use of symbols for political communication shares the common elements found in all symbolic communication.

Early research in political communication moved through several theories that left much to be desired. The mechanistic approach saw communication as a “bullet” or “hypodermic” process that had political speakers shooting or injecting needed communications directly into the public receiver (Fisher 1978, p. 74). In this framework, all information was sent in a similar manner and understood in a similar manner by its recipients. Aberrations in experimental data using the mechanistic approach soon gave rise to intrapersonal theory that could better explain the differences seen when a group of observers heard the same political message but received it differently. This theory held that even though each of us might be exposed to the same communications data, we would use our differences in upbringing, education, and personality to process it differently (Smith, 1990, p. 2). But people do not receive political information in a

vacuum—nor do they process it there. Instead, they talk among family, friends, and neighbors and add these external stimuli to their processing of the information. The significant theories of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet introduced us to this social framework wherein groups such as opinion leaders, mass media, and others mattered in the flow of information to and from political leaders and the people (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1948).

The specific use of non-verbal symbols for political purposes arises in the use of the “icons” of politics. These include the nation’s flag, its colors (in our American instance, red, white and blue), or other emblems of power, such as the presidential seal (Bennett 1980, p. 252).

When examining that flow of information through symbolic interpretation, the limitations that symbolic use puts on the perceiver are significant when considering the patriotic symbols themselves. Edelman develops the notion of “constriction of perception” that can come about when symbols are used. Since symbols often depict a very black and white view of a much more complicated set of values or option, their use can limit the field of view for the symbol’s perceiver to consider all alternatives (Edelman 1977, p. 145). Important to this research would be the example of the wearing of a flag. Since that would be perceived by many to be a show of patriotism and support for the nation, does the absence of a flag denote lack of patriotism? The use or lack of use of symbols can often give viewers a quick reference to distinguish the “bad guys from the good guys” (Sears 1993, p. 114). Edelman emphasized this simplification and need for reassurance in the public—reassurance provided by the use of symbols to depict good and bad (Edelman 1964, p. 15).

This hunger for symbols to simplify a complicated world into easier to digest portions starts at a young age—perhaps as early as pre-school (Corbett 1991, p. 220). Classical conditioning in school and by peer groups directs children how to perceive symbols in many cases before they are even able to read the written word (Sears 1983, p. 124). These early childhood predispositions toward the meaning of certain patriotic symbols are very likely to become central to the individuals political core and stay there throughout life (Hyman 1959, p. 7). Once established, these predispositions toward symbols do persist through the rest of life. According to the symbolic politics view, these early experiences (through adolescence) with symbols develop their sets of predispositions that do not change much for many people in the future (Sears 1993, p. 123).

Recognizing that the predispositions are in place in the typical adult new consumer, one must then ask how the processing of information is affected by the internal symbolic cues. The symbolic processing theory shows that there is a strong affective response to symbols that at the same time both transcends and undercuts thoughtful appraisal or previous knowledge of the subject in which the symbols appears. This affective response is something political candidates count on their advertising to evoke, and it does prove effective in the campaign communication research (Sears 1993, p. 133). This repeated evocation of responses by a given set of symbols develops a “habit” of response that is very consistent over time, and moves the perceiver farther and farther from the original source of the emotion toward the symbol, leaving only the history of responses on which to base future responses.

Ultimately, symbols lead to the formation of images about candidates, leaders, and other political institutions. The media play a role in transferring the symbol to the intended (and unintended) receivers and making that image creation possible (Nimmo 1974, p. 48).

The Mediation of Political Communication

With an audience of potential voters just full of preconceived responses to symbols, what exactly is it the media transmit to those open, waiting minds? Before answering that question, it is important to examine the *how* of the transmission from the media selection perspective. Harold Lasswell said communication requires simply a sender transmitting a message through a selected medium to a receiver, all with an effect in mind (Lasswell 1948, p. 37). Television is now most often the medium of choice for that transmission—both for media consumers and the political leaders trying to reach them. A national poll taken in January 2002 asked for respondents' primary sources for news about national and international events. Eighty-two percent cited television as one of those sources, while only 42 percent said newspapers were among their choices of information providers. Even in this age of internet-fast news retrieval, only fourteen percent listed that source among their regular sources for news consumption (Roper 2002). That comfort with having news delivered by television is not a product of September 11 or any other 21st century news event. After the birth of television news in the 1950s, infancy, childhood, and adolescence were compacted to a very short time. By 1963, television had become Americans' favorite source for news (Nimmo & Combs 1983, p. 25). And why not? Television is a passive medium, to which only a minimal

amount of attention must be directed at any given time. That lack of active viewing is not without its consequences, though. Television news viewers often miscomprehend what it is they are watching—sometimes at alarmingly high rates (Jacoby, Hoyer & Sheluga 1980, p. 80). Television also breeds insensitivity to go along with its passivity, since the sheer volume of tragedy to which a viewer is subjected each year is enormous (Davies, Bathurst, & Bathurst 1990, p. 112).

As the American public became more and more enamored of television, then the effect of this medium on that public became more and more pronounced. The mass media—lead by television—began to step in to relay information in easily digested bits so that people could continue to update with knowledge and belief sets. But as the media took on a greater and greater role, then a dependency grew for the public to use the media almost exclusively for learning about society's events (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur 1976, pp. 3-21). And as television grew among the media, its power to control the agenda and the style of news grew right along with it (Altheide & Snow 1979, p. 10). The very nature of television news is that it gives a bare minimum set of facts from which the viewer can learn about the story. Nimmo and Combs call it an “acquaintance medium” and not a source from which the public can draw deep understanding or knowledge of the subject being covered (Nimmo & Combs 1983, p. 45). But the newer, more data-rich Internet is not climbing to be a replacement that will awaken American news consumers for their torpor. Research on its ability to prompt users to become more active participants in the democratic process says it still lags far behind television as a source for information (Bimber, 2001, p. 64). And an increasingly narrow targeting of tightly-defined news information for a particular market of news consumers on both the internet and television

is leading to less and less exposure to divergent or challenging points of view (Mutz & Martin 2001, p. 111).

Communicating with Stories

Television news' style of storytelling began to affect the stories told. First and foremost, television news has an almost insatiable hunger for pictures, for video. It cannot tell stories well without the visual element. And many decisions on coverage are based on pictures available (Woodward 1997, p. 83). Once those stories are chosen, television's impact as an agenda setter is well documented—particularly for those who are not deeply interested in world or even local affairs (Iyengar & Kinder 1987, p. 63). Television news is able to generate the highest levels of audience interest when it tells stories—no matter how complicated—through the example of a single person (Jamieson & Campbell 1983, p. 18). While this approach makes the story easy to digest and certainly helps tell even the most complicated issue in terms of its effect on the individual, it nearly completely moves the story out of its historical, social, and economic context (Bennett, 1983, p. 8), and very often out of its political context as well (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar 1993, p. 4). This sort of “humanization” approach leads to an episodic framing of stories, where only small parts are told at any given time, often lacking the context of the larger issues that would be more properly framed in thematic terms (Iyengar 1991, p. 73). This episodic framing also emphasizes events over issues as the subject of stories—another factor in pushing the historical and political context of issues to some back burner of the news stove (Gamson & Modigliani 1989, p.23).

The act of stripping the context from television news stories to humanize or otherwise make them better stories to tell introduces the possibility of the addition of bias to the message. The choices reporters and editors make to tell the story better can change the subtle meaning of the messages sent. Imagine a reporter working on a story about the governor proposing cuts in state Medicaid funding. The reporter decides to humanize his story around a person who stands to lose coverage. The choice of that central character does much to add context—perhaps false context—to the message sent to viewers. Should the reporter choose a black, single mother as his central character, viewers may see the governor as someone unfair to that minority group. But the true context of the cuts may be something entirely different. Perhaps most of the cuts will actually affect retirees or part-time workers. That true context is lost from the story and lost by the viewers of the story.

Decisions on storytelling technique that affect the mediated messages of context are made daily by reporters and editors with no thought as to how those decisions affect the underlying messages of their stories. These reporters and editors have a commitment, in most cases, to telling the truth and getting facts correct. But they often add visual and symbolic messages to stories without thought to the changes those messages will make in the way the audience receives the message.

This unintended stripping of historical and political information by television comes at a time when that very same medium has contributed to a perceived decline in the general public knowledge on such issues. The rise of television as an entertainment medium meant vast numbers of hours are often spent by school-aged children in front of it—often times many more hours than spent in front of their teachers at school (Graber

1989, p. 184). There have been “golden” periods when entertainment programs strived to open discourse and discussion about important social and political issues within the confines of their fictional teleplays, but those attempts usually end lighter fare dominates the ratings (Lichter, Lichter & Rothman, 1991, p. 5-8). Still, the growth of television as our dominant form of time-consuming entertainment has taken much time away from newspapers, or even general conversation with friends and neighbors about what is happening in government and society. This lack of well-rounded intercourse on the issues of the day has left people with television news often as their own source for political information (Robinson & Levy 1986, p. 211). Limited political information often then leaves the viewer more susceptible to the nonverbal and symbolic images they receive from television. This susceptibility manifests itself in the form of more openness to the emotional appeals of symbols, while often ignoring the intellectual information that goes along with, or even contradicts, the emotional dimension (Sullivan & Masters 1993, p. 327). Beyond this weakness, the narrative form of the media often leads to a need to accept the status quo of the institutions and their power, and to ignore possibly newsworthiness therein to make “room” for the narrative approach and its rather bulky frame (Hanson 1999, p. 7).

The use of symbols on television news carries with it the responsibility of examining not only the intentional messages being relayed as part of the broadcast, but also those unintentional or unconscious messages that may also be embedded in the main message. The symbols we come to see on television news become part of the political images that legitimize and support the status quo (Bennett 1983, p. 34). A disproportionately high exposure to repeated symbols not directly connected to the

message may actually alter or mask the intended message (Lasswell, Lerner, & de Sola Pool 1970, p. 20). It is that position in the status quo that this study will test.

Approach of the Study

The symbols and messages tested have been placed in neutral television content, consisting of various sets of visual and written messages designed to show bias on the part of the news anchor and organization. One set concentrates on an issue that enjoys much consensus with the population—patriotism in the wake of September 11, one set concentrates on the generally divisive issue of legalizing gay marriage, and one set concentrates on the extremely divisive issues surrounding abortion rights.

The relevance of patriotism to this study has been established, but the significance of the gay marriage debate and the abortion rights fight are also clear. It is quite possible the issue of gay marriage was the deciding one in the 2004 campaign for the U.S. presidency. Despite a nation at war and disappointing economic news, a strong plurality of voters polled about why they voted the way they did cited “moral values” as the reason they can their vote for George W. Bush (Burkeman 2004, p. 1). A strong sense of their moral outrage came from court decisions and the general push to legalize same-sex marriage in a number of states (Law 2004, p. 1). The desire for some sort of marriage between couples of the same sex is not a construct of the 21st century, however. Churches such as the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association perform ceremonies joining same-sex couples. But these ceremonies are not marriages and have not been recognized as legal in any state. And early movements in the 1970s saw court

cases go against gay marriage in a number of states (Swan 1997, p. 111). At the federal level, Congress in 1996 passed the “Defense of Marriage Act,” which stated, in part:

“In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife (Defense of Marriage Act 1996).”

The measure passed with a wide margin and was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. Clinton signed the bill under pressure from conservative Christians during his race for re-election, and even ran advertising on Christian radio stations celebrating the signing of the legislation (Rimmerman 2002, p. 76). Some faiths are more tolerant of homosexuality and guaranteeing equal protection for gay citizens—such as Roman Catholics (Gallup and Castelli 1987, pp. 62-3), but the lopsided margin of victory, as well as the support of a Democratic president, reflects more than just conservative Christians being against gay marriage. Overall public opinion stood firmly against legal marriage for people of the same sex (Gray 1996, p. 1). The same year the Defense of Marriage Act vote was taken, the percentage of Americans supporting gay marriage, fell to 28 percent (Niebuhr 1996, p. A18). Media coverage of gay issues had grown through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and the same-sex marriage and domestic partnership debates of the 1990s (Rimmerman 2002, p. 112). Demonstrations were common to see on television, and the spectacle of lines of gay men and women assembling to marry in Boston and San Francisco in 2004 was just too good for the television news medium to pass up. While many would have rather not witnessed it, the language and symbols of gay marriage were splashed across the nightly newscast. In fact, the “Focus on the Family” conservative

Christian organization routinely sent material to its supporters portraying media members as manipulated by and even supportive of the gay rights movement (Herman 2000, p. 143-4).

The effect of this prevalence of gay rights stories and images bears investigation. The political effect of media coverage of the issue raises questions of the role the media played in bringing the issue to the forefront of the 2004 campaigns, and to the meaning viewers took from newscasters' choices of video depicting ceremonies, as well as the ways in which the stories were written.

The fight over abortion rights has been a common part of American political discourse since the *Roe. V. Wade* decision legalized abortion across the United States in 1973. The Texas case shattered previous legal precedent and set up a hierarchy of interest the courts must consider when hearing abortion cases—first, a woman's privacy; second, a doctor's professional rights; and third, the interest of each state in protecting the wellbeing of its citizens (Stetson 2001, pp. 251-3). The court decision carried the issue of abortion rights to the center stage of policy debate—even when voters have been in general consensus on the issue. Some pollsters found that Americans considered themselves split two ways—for legal abortion or against it (Craig & O'Brien 1993, p. 262). But when probed about the specifics of why a woman would seek an abortion, the split is not so black and white. Presented with a pregnancy occurring from rape, a badly deformed fetus, or a threat to the mother's life, more than 80 percent of those polled find abortion acceptable. It is only on those abortions performed for to end pregnancy as a convenience that the population splits, with half in favor and half opposed to abortion for those reasons (Petrocik 1996, p. 3).

With the population generally decided on where it stands regarding abortion over the last thirty years, rhetoric and symbols have been the tools those on the polar ends of the debate have used in their fight to move Americans more strongly into support of legal abortion, or away from it altogether. The language used by supporters of legal abortion has the procedure performed on a “fetus,” while opponents of abortion call that the “unborn child” (Woliver 1996, p. 7). Even the names of the groups on each side of the debate are an attempt to evoke positive feelings toward the cause. The “pro-life” element feels no one can be against “life,” while the “pro-choice” side knows it is central to the American way of thinking to always have a “choice” (Luker 1984, p. 17). This rhetorical setting makes an abortion element to the experimental research ideal. The role of the mass media in shaping public opinion on abortion policy is often defined by the success proponents of one position have using language and symbols. And those with success in framing their position in the proper language have the upper hand in the policy discourse (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 17). Often it is the way in which the complex details of the abortion policy debate are presented that affects attitudes the most (Jaffe, Lindheim & Lee 1981, p. 99). Television is a medium where the voice, words, and symbols of each side are foremost, and though television newscasters work to portray the issue in the most balanced light of all journalists (Marsh & Chambers 1981, pp. 145-6), the possibility that television’s ability to relay symbols and words in an unintentionally uneven fashion deserves a closer look. This study takes part of that symbolism—the word “life”—and uses it in the news context to measure the influence it has on perceptions of fairness and balance as perceived by viewers.

Experimental Design

The use of a controlled, cross-sectional experiment of descriptive proved to be an efficient way to produce generalizable results for comparison. The approach allowed the identification of any relationship between the variables and helped measure for correlation or cause—if any (Rosenthal & Rosnow 1991, p. 17). Through the use of controlled exposure of a simulated television news content to a series of small experimental groups made up of a representative sample of television news viewers, it was possible to test for the effects of the cues sent by newscasters to their audiences—whether intentional or unintentional. The classic experimental design consisted of a pretest to determine a baseline for the dependent variable to be studied, an experimental exposure of randomly-selected subjects to a treatment, a randomly-selected control group not exposed to the treatment, and a posttest of all subjects to determine any effect on the dependent variable (deVaus 2001, pp. 47-50). A modified pretest-posttest experimental design with two levels of control groups was used for this research. This approach allowed for the most accurate measurement of both treatment effects and experimentally-introduced effects (Smith 1991, pp.187-90). The population from which the samples were taken is adult residents of Boone County, Missouri. Structured group questionnaire sessions were used to collect the data. This approach allowed more rapid collection of data than individual questionnaire interviews, while keeping the subjects focused on the research subject and limiting the amount of time necessary to conduct the experiments (Morgan 2002, p. 147). Experimental groups of about twenty people (or multiple small groups totaling about 20) were assembled for the experiments. Phone callers from the Center for Advanced Social Research at the University of Missouri made phone calls to

recruit participants. All selected were adults, eighteen years of age or older, residing in Boone County. During the recruiting process, the subjects answered a short slate of questions to measure the political orientation and existing view of the media of the group member. The questions were used to qualify the subject for the experiments, but to paint a picture of the subject taken significantly prior to the experimental exposure so as to minimize any measurement effects.

Subjects then assembled in twelve experimental groups, each exposed to a different experimental treatment. Nine of the twelve groups watched a short videotape to begin the experiment. Realism is key to external validity of the research, so subjects were lead to believe what they were viewing actual television news and other programs (Aronson & Carlsmith 1968, p. 25). To give the experimental treatment that realism, the tape viewed consisted of half of a segment from the NBC News program “Dateline NBC,” a short commercial break, a “news break” during which the actual experimental exposure took place, another short commercial break, and then the remainder of the Dateline NBC segment. That Dateline NBC segment was a non-political feature on art theft. The commercial were likewise non-political.

Some of the content of the “news break,” however, was political. Variation in the contents of the tapes came in the use of the independent variables of various newscast content representing a particular stand on one of the three test issues. Three different levels or styles of presentation for each issue was used. The first presentation style was the “soft” presentation, consisting of a subtle visual clue in the form of an anchor lapel symbol. The second presentation style was the “moderate” presentation, consisting of story content that is written in a biased fashion toward a position on the issue. The final

presentation style was the “hard” presentation, consisting of a visual reference to actual anchor participation on one side of the issue. This same series of presentations were presented to additional groups for each of the other two issues studied. The news break was consistent across all tapes, using the same anchor and the same basic set. Then, for each issue set, a fourth group acted as a control saw a video presentation that consists of the same elements as the other groups, but without the local news break content. The Dateline NBC program had only a break with commercials.

Following viewing the video, each group member was asked to complete another questionnaire. The standard questionnaire format is a valuable way to measure the attitudes of subjects in a uniform, consistent fashion. A successful questionnaire gathers the information needed to verify the study’s hypotheses, compels respondents to answer truthfully, and minimizes the risk of error (Malhotra 1999, p. 32). Successful questionnaires must gather the empirical evidence sought, without confusing or boring the subjects (Folz 1996, pp. 79-80). The questionnaire for this research, with approximately 25 multichotomous questions, was designed to measure any change in attitude toward the media based on the tape the group had just seen. The questions were attitude scale measurements, best suited for measure consistent subject opinions about the reviewed material (Oskamp 1977, pp. 54-55). The questions did not require great recall on the part of the subjects, which can lead to subject fatigue and disinterest in the process (Bradburn, Rips, & Shevell 1987, p. 157). Instead, the questions focused on subject opinions easily recalled and addressable by the answer scale. Analysis used the Likert scale model of interval measurement, which allows statistical analysis of the attitudes measures by the questionnaires (O’Sullivan & Rassel 1995, p. 274). Different

questionnaires were presented to subjects based on the particular ideological subject the tape had addressed, and measured subject feelings toward the dependent variables of balance, truthfulness, and trustworthiness on the part of the media. The order of the questions took the subject through a logical review of what he/she just viewed, without confusing or boring the subject (Bradburn & Sudman 1988, pp. 153-4). Questionnaire results were then subjected to an analysis of variance statistical test, looking for significant differences in the effects of various treatments on viewer perceptions of news media bias, so as to test the hypotheses. Internal validity of the experiment is crucial if it is to reveal correlation or causal relationships. This validity will be maintained by guarding against testing, instrumentation, and selection effects, among others (Cook & Campbell 1979, pp. 51-68).

Members of the control group for each issue category who saw the videotape presentations without the local news break answered the same questionnaires as the other subjects in the same issue experiment treatment.

Beyond those subjects who assembled to watch the videotapes, an additional control group of subjects was asked the recruiting questions by phone, but not asked to come to the experiment. Instead, those same subjects received a call at the time the experiments were taking place, asking the same post questionnaires. Table 6-1 describes the entire experiment.

Table 6-1: Experimental Group Schematic

	Treatment A – Soft Message	Treatment B – Moderate Message	Treatment C – Hard Message	Treatment D – No Message (Control)
Issue 1 – Patriotism	Anchor w/flag lapel pin	Anchor reads patriotic story	Anchor leading patriotic rally	No video
Issue 2 – Gay Marriage	Anchor w/rainbow lapel pin	Anchor reads story favorable to gay marriage	Anchor leading rally supporting gay marriage	No video
Issue 3 – Abortion	Anchor w/pro- life lapel pin	Anchor reads pro-life favorable story	Anchor leading pro-life rally	No video
Issue 4 – No Video (Control)	No video – calls only	No video – calls only	No video – calls only	

At the completion of the experiments, questionnaire results were subjected to a multivariate analysis of variance statistical test. These tests described the statistical strength of any change in the dependent variables based on the various treatments (Tacc 1997, p. 38). The tests revealed any significant differences in the effects of various treatments on viewer perceptions of news media bias to test the hypotheses.

Hypotheses of the Study

For the research, the tests attempted to prove a series of ten one-sided, alternative hypotheses, as each hypothesis will be supported by a movement in one direction away from the null hypothesis (Montgomery 1984, p. 21).

The hypotheses tested are:

Hypothesis 1: Newscasts and/or newscasters displaying the “soft” message on any issue will be perceived as the most accurate.

Hypothesis 2: Newscasts and/or newscasters displaying the “soft” message on any issue will be perceived as the most balanced.

Hypothesis 3: Newscasts and/or newscasters displaying the “hard” message on any issue will be perceived as the least accurate.

Hypothesis 4: Newscasts and/or newscasters displaying the “hard” message on any issue will be perceived as the least balanced.

Hypothesis 5: Subjects viewing any of the patriotism treatments will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be more loyal to the United States government.

Hypothesis 6: Subjects viewing the “hard” patriotism treatment will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be the most loyal to the United States government.

Hypothesis 7: Subjects viewing any of the gay marriage treatments will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be more biased in favor of gay rights.

Hypothesis 8: Subjects viewing the “hard” gay right treatment will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be the most biased in favor of gay rights.

Hypothesis 9: Subjects viewing any of the abortion treatments will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be more biased against abortion rights for women.

Hypothesis 10: Subjects viewing the “hard” abortion treatment will find newscasts and/or newscaster to be the most biased against abortion rights for women.

The literature suggests the more potent the symbols used in the experimental newscast, the greater the effect viewing those symbols will have on the viewer. Symbols can transmit more complex or higher-level messages simply (Bennett 1983, p. 41), so the simple symbols used in the earliest part of each experiment have the power to transmit messages about the newscaster and his positions. Viewed spatially, voters do notice the difference between themselves and their perceptions of media outlet placement on the ideological axis—particularly conservative viewers (Ognianova & Endersby 1996, pp. 17-20). So the symbols do not represent fixed points of reference for viewers—they will shift depending on viewer perceptions and the context in which they are found (Bennett 1983, p. 42).

The ultimate goal of the research is to find the levels of actual bias inserted into news content and presentation that generate a perception of bias within audience members. Those with different demographic background and political ideologies, as well as varying levels of media trust, will react differently to the bias stimulus. Finding the threshold of bias perception for each of these groups will be enlightening for political scientists and journalists alike.

Chapter 7: A Kinder General View: Subjects Perceptions of Media Fairness, Accuracy, and Balance

The concepts of fairness, accuracy, and balance in the media have become standards by which media organizations believe they should be judged. But more importantly, it now appears some members of the public have gone from a position of general trust to begin to use the same criteria to determine which members of the media are doing a good job, and which are not. There appears to be no universal agreement on which media organizations do a fair, accurate, and balanced job of gathering and reporting the news. The differences in perception are visible in national surveys on the issue, as well as in comparisons with the local subjects used for this research. In fact, just what makes up a fair, accurate, and balanced approach to the news is a matter of some dispute. This chapter will examine the perceptions of viewers regarding fairness and other trust elements on television news, and whether those news consumers think of fairness, accuracy, and balance in the same way media leaders do.

Differences in perceptions by media audience members stem from ideological differences, varying abilities to process mediated data, and the type of media consumed. If this research is to shed light on how media practices influence the perceptions of fairness, accuracy, and balance as judged by the general public, then it is necessary to begin the examination of the experimental data with a comparison of the local subjects views to the national views on media. The local subjects' ideological views, as well as their demographic characteristics will serve as comparison points for their respective positions on media. To serve that purpose, this chapter will analyze the subjects' pretest perceptions of media performance, looking for outlying positions that might be particular

to Boone County and its residents. The analysis will look specifically for the representativeness of the local audience to serve as test subjects for the entire nation. Clearly, in a study of perceptions on political news coverage, the subjects' ideological positions will be an important comparison point. That analysis will utilize the subjects' self-defined ideological position, along with corroboration of other ideological measuring sticks, to determine if ideology plays a role locally in media trust. Additionally, subjects' ideological differences in sex, race, age, income, and educational level will serve as factors of comparison to determine if those differences play a part in media trust evaluations. Understanding the differences subjects bring to their evaluations of the media as defined by their sociological differences will help isolate the effects of the research.

Defining Fairness, Accuracy, and Balance—Journalists' View

The search for a common understanding of the job media members should do is not new. The codes of ethics of major journalism organizations specifically and generally invoke the concepts as an intrinsic part of any reputable journalism organization. The Radio Television News Directors Association, which represents broadcast and other electronic journalists, demands both fairness and balance in reporting in its code of ethics. The code states, "Professional electronic journalists should present the news fairly and impartially, placing primary value on significance and relevance" (RTNDA 2000). The code goes on to call for accuracy as one of the six guiding principle broadcast journalists should hold close, "Professional electronic journalists should pursue truth

aggressively and present the news accurately, in context, and as completely as possible” (RTNDA 2000).

The Society of Professional Journalists, representing primarily the print journalists in the nation, also calls for the three principles to guide its members. The preamble to its ethics code focuses on the principles as essential to quality journalism:

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice (SPJ 1996).

Many journalists strive to take seriously the ethical principles of the two organizations—many do not. The difference is central to this research and often leads to differing perceptions of the media among viewers and readers.

Perceptions of a Flawed Media System

Studies frequently show a decline in the public evaluation of the media in general when evaluated for fairness, accuracy, and balance. The Project for Excellence in Journalism shows a precipitous drop in regard for the media over a seventeen-year period ending in 2002. Those who found the media to be accurate dropped from 55 percent to 35 percent. Specific questions about fairness in the last two presidential elections showed a 13 point shift among audience members toward rating the media to be less fair to Democrats, and a 19 point shift toward less fairness toward Republicans (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005). The most recent studies of fairness, accuracy, and balance show that audiences rate the media in general at less than 50 percent across the

board. For the 2004 National Election Studies, researchers asked respondents how much of the time they could count on the media to report the news fairly. Just fewer than 36 percent said most or almost all the time. But 65 percent said they could count on media fairness only some of the time—or none of the time at all (NES 2004). Likewise, in 2004 when the Gallup Organization asked citizens if how much confidence they had in the news media to report the news fully and accurately, 44 percent said they could trust the media, while 52 percent believed they could trust what they read and saw very little or none at all (Gallup 2004). Finally, in its most recent survey on media attitudes in 2002, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press asked about perceived balance in the media. Only 26 percent of those responding said they thought the media were careful not to be biased, while 59 percent disagreed (Pew 2002).

Mixed Local Perceptions

Seen as a whole, the national view of the news media in general is not flattering. And the local subjects in this study share many of the same negative feelings toward the mass media in general as has been measured recently among the national population. To make the local measurements, all subjects were asked a short pretest questionnaire during the recruiting process. The questions probed their feelings about the media in general, as well as their ideological positions. Three questions asked specifically about subjects' views of the media's ability to be fair, accurate, and balanced. Subjects could choose responses along a four or five-point scale, rating the media performance as well as the strength of their feelings about that rating.

Table 7-1: Local and National Views of Media Bias

	Local	National
Fairness (Index)	(0.651)	(0.436)
Very Favorable	10	3
Favorable	88	36
Unfavorable	13	65
Very Unfavorable	2	9
Accuracy (Index)	(0.416)	(0.430)
Very Favorable	4	9
Favorable	21	44
Unfavorable	42	52
Very Unfavorable	17	16
Balance (Index)	(0.365)	(0.335)
Very Favorable	5	NA ¹
Favorable	21	26
Unfavorable	54	59
Very Unfavorable	25	NA ¹
Media Trust Index	(0.477)	(0.400)

¹The Pew Center study measured subject responses on a three-point scale, and therefore measured the direction of opinion, but not the intensity.

Table 7-1 shows the difference in the response between the national and local subjects is startling. Subjects responded to the question “Do you think newscasters report the news fairly?” with the choice of four responses—just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, and almost never. These were the same question and responses presented in the 2004 National Election Studies that produced the national results. But despite the same question and possible responses, the local subjects held a far higher regard for the fairness of the news media in general than did the national subjects. There is no obvious cause to which one can attribute a large, positive local bias toward media. And in fact, no such bias appears to be evident on the other media evaluation dimensions.

Probed for their perceptions of media accuracy, subjects responded to the statement, “Newscasters get the facts straight.” Twenty-one percent of local subjects agreed with that statement, while twice as many disagreed. Seventeen percent strongly disagreeing.

That group most strongly in disagreement with a view of media accuracy nearly exactly mirrors the national subjects' response at 16 percent. And those with negative perceptions of accuracy overall total 42 percent—10 percent less than the national survey, but far closer than the perceptions of fairness.

The question of balance also matches local and national opinion very closely. Local subjects reacted to the statement, “Newscasters are careful not to be biased.” Twenty-one percent agreed with the statement locally, while 54 percent disagreed. Nationally, 59 percent perceived media members lacking balance. Locally, 25 percent strongly perceived that bias. The strongest national perceptions are not available because the most recent study available, the 2002 Pew Center study only allowed respondents a positive, negative, or neutral response to a question about media balance.

Comparing Across Different Formats of Questions

Because the local subject perceptions are measured using questions formed from national polling data, the fairness, accuracy, and balance dimensions come with different attitudinal scales. To reformat the results for cross comparison, it is possible to use the standardization procedure discussed in Chapter 5. The procedure involves taking the data from each question set, local and national, and transforming into a single index by weighting each attitudinal scale by its corresponding percentage of respondents, subtracting 1 from that resulting index, and dividing the difference by the number of scale points minus 1. All measures of perception are then shown as a percentage between 0 and 1 on a consistent scale, with 0 being the most negative evaluation, and 1 being the most positive (see appendix for a complete description of the transformation). Comparing

the resulting indices in Table 7-1 alongside percentages of response generates a snapshot of the general attitude toward the media for both local and national survey groups.

The comparison of indices shows great similarity between the local and national sample except across one dimension—fairness. For the local subjects, fairness is seen as reasonably high, nearly two-thirds of the way up the scale. One way to explain its high magnitude could be the four-point scale used to assess opinions on that category only. The scale was chosen to match national surveys asking the same question, but biases the responses to the positive or negative because of the lack of a central or neutral response as found on the five-point scale used for the other questions. But while this difference might explain variation between the local fairness index and those indicating accuracy and balance perceptions for the local subjects, it cannot explain the difference between the local fairness index and the national fairness index. Subjects used the same four-point scale for both measurements. Perhaps the perception that rural and Midwestern residents are more likely to be less harsh in their evaluations plays some part here. Those who live away from the big coastal cities have a reputation to be more easygoing, more neighborly, and more friendly. People can anecdotally describe a kinder attitude from these non-urban subjects, but could it explain the higher rating on fairness? That is unlikely. If Midwestern attitudes were responsible for large difference in the perceptions of media performance, then those great differences in perceptions should be evident across all questions. They generally are not. There is some slightly positive difference in perceptions of accuracy and balance demonstrated by the local subjects, but not on the scale of the difference found on the fairness questions. It seems likely the “Midwestern difference” could explain the 3 percent difference shown in the balance question, but not

the large difference in perceptions of fairness. And this explanation falls short explaining the slightly lower evaluation of accuracy among local subjects.

General Dissatisfaction Across Subjects

Aside from the surprisingly high local fairness evaluation, the perceptions of media performance fall well below the .500 level. The index calls for a score of 1.000 if all subjects found media to be doing absolutely perfectly, while a score of 0.000 would indicate a perception of an absolutely imperfect performance. The midpoint of .500 would indicate a mean perception of neither a good nor bad performance. Since all but the local fairness index falls below .500, the mean perception for both groups is that media do an inadequate job of providing fair, accurate, and balanced coverage of the news. The finding is consistent with the decline in media satisfaction recorded by most research in the age of television news. When presented with a question on the performance of abstract or unnamed media members (“Do you think *newscasters* report the news fairly?”), subjects often give a more negative response than they do when asked about specific media members. The abstract questions conjure images of the general offenses of the media, while questions on specific members of the press bring to mind qualities and personality of that individual. Thus the negative perceptions of the media seen nearly universally in the national studies, as well as the local pretest results, reflect this non-personal attitude on the media. This difference between abstract general media perceptions and specific individual evaluations becomes more important in the posttest analyses.

Ideological Differences are Minimal

While the composite perceptions of the subject groups showed some minor differences from national surveys, how would the group differ within and between its own members? This study revolves around predicted ideological differences in stimuli and response of subjects; therefore it is logical to examine the initial differences ideology correlates with among local subjects. Would conservatives and liberals define fairness, accuracy, and balance in the same way? This is an important question if there is to be an understanding of the differences in perceptions between viewers of different ideological backgrounds. If the opposites ends of the spectrum define fairness, accuracy, and balance in substantially the same way, then a common set of questions will yield similar perceptions by members of both ideological groups.

To begin, ideology of local subjects was determined by three questions asked in the recruitment pretest questionnaire. First, subjects were asked to place themselves on a seven-point scale from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. Next, subjects were asked to give an opinion on the responsibility of government to provide services to its people. Subjects could prefer fewer services than are now provided, more services, or maintaining the current level of services. Those who chose fewer services were coded as conservative, while those who asked for more services were designated to be liberal. Finally, subjects were asked to react to two differing roles of government, and to select the proper role. One statement said simply, "The less the government, the better." Subjects who chose this role for government were categorized as conservatives. The other statement relayed the opinion, "There are more things government should be doing." Those who chose that statement were placed in the liberal designation. Results of

the three questions showed a strong ability to determine this crude level of ideology on all three measurements. In those cases where not all classifications were in agreement, the two matching classifications prevailed.

Using these measures to divide the conservatives from the liberals allowed the comparison of the frequencies along ideological differences. Table 7-2 shows the percentage of subjects varying from the neutral position on the respective evaluative criteria.

Table 7-2: Liberal and Conservative Views of Media Bias

	Liberal (N=110)	Conservative (N=78)
Fairness		
Very Favorable	13	4
Favorable	71	90
Unfavorable	14	6
Very Unfavorable	3	0
Accuracy		
Very Favorable	5	4
Favorable	19	18
Unfavorable	23	27
Very Unfavorable	18	14
Balance		
Very Favorable	5	7
Favorable	18	13
Unfavorable	23	29
Very Unfavorable	27	30

The results show remarkable similarities in perceptions of media in general by subjects from both ends of the ideological spectrum. Somewhat contrary to expectations, conservatives actually gave the media a higher rating on fairness than did liberals. But the difference is not a great one. And more importantly, it does not show the two ideologies evaluating media in opposite directions, which would show a difference in the basic understanding of fairness by each group. The perceptions of accuracy by each

ideological group are almost identical, again showing a similar basis on which to judge accuracy, regardless of ideological point of view. And while conservatives were slightly less likely to find the media balanced in their approach, the difference is not large and, as with the evaluations of fairness, shows the evaluation is done the same way by both groups. Comparing only the extremely positive or negative opinions in does not separate the ideologies either. Both liberals and conservatives were far more likely to rate media performance extremely negatively than they were to rate it extremely positively. The fairness dimension once again stands apart from the perceptions on the other two dimensions. No conservatives held an extreme negative view in relation to fairness, but 4 percent had the extreme positive view. Three percent of liberals held the extreme negative view, but 10 percent more had the extreme positive view. Since nearly all subjects chose the safer central position when evaluating media fairness, it may be that the subjects as a whole do not understand exactly what “fairness” is in terms of media. Without a clear notion of what fairness is, it is difficult to get emotionally connected to the topic to develop a very strong opinion about. Since those strong opinions are seen on both the accuracy and balance dimensions, we can assume a better subject understanding of those terms.

Those stronger feelings about media accuracy and balance tip toward the negative. Both liberals and conservatives line up in greater numbers with very unfavorable views of accuracy than very favorable views. Thirteen percent more liberals and 10 percent more conservatives see the media doing a very bad job with accuracy than doing a good job. Even more strongly, 22 percent more liberals and 23 percent more conservatives perceive the media doing a very bad job with balance than see it doing a

very good job. The very similar percentages contradict the commonly-held notion that conservatives are the strongest critics of the news media and its perceived liberal bias, while liberals sit back and enjoy the bias to their benefit. In fact, both ideological groups among these subjects are equally discontented with the performance of media as a whole.

Ultimately, the ideological comparison of the results shows a great consistency between the ends of the political spectrum regarding the role of the media in doing their jobs. Conservatives and liberals generally agreed on the quality of the work of the media. That agreement showed similar agreement on how the reporting should be done. And the fact that both groups rate the media highly on fairness shows some agreement between how journalists define fairness and how the audiences—regardless of ideology—do as well.

A Developmental Difference in Critical Thinking

The pretest comparisons of the subjects based on their ideology show a similar thought pattern in their approach to critical analysis of media performance. Regardless of political beliefs, the subjects shared common complaints about the media, as well as a standard view of the media role in delivering the news. That shared analytical perspective not only produced similar pretest views of media performance when comparing subjects of differing ideological perceptions, but showed a common view of media when broken down by sex, age, and income as well. The numbers of subjects falling into the non-white racial category was too small to produce any meaningful analysis. But it was possible to demonstrate a difference in the view of the media when analyzing subjects based on their educational level. Here, it was possible to find

statistically significant differences in perceptions of media fairness and balance when comparing low education and high education subjects.

Subjects were divided into two groups—those who had attended college and those who had no college experience. But unlike the previous comparisons of pair of subject groups, the split by educational level shown in Table 7-3 yields some fairly large differences in perceptions of media performance. Those with no college educational experience are considerably less critical of media performance than those with at least some college education. The non-college subjects are more than four times as likely to view media fairness very favorably, more than nine times as likely to view media accuracy very favorably, and nearly three times as likely to give the same high marks to media balance. The relative differences are not as strong at the other end of the scale, where the views of media are fairly similar. Only in their analysis of balance in the media were the non-college educated subjects kinder—about half as likely to rate the media very unfavorably on balance.

Table 7-3: Educational Level and Views of Media Bias

	Non-College (N=27)	College (N=215)
Fairness		
Very Favorable	30	7
Favorable	63	81
Unfavorable	0	12
Very Unfavorable	7	1
Accuracy		
Very Favorable	19	2
Favorable	11	19
Unfavorable	15	26
Very Unfavorable	15	17
Balance		
Very Favorable	11	4
Favorable	22	16
Unfavorable	26	30
Very Unfavorable	15	26

The results vary greatly from the pattern seen with comparisons of other groups, both ideological and demographic. Admittedly, the non-college subjects make up a small portion of the overall sample (N=27). But the differences between the groups were still statistically significant. This result is counter to all the other groups seen in among the subjects.

This notable difference could stem from the nature of a college education as opposed to high school education. College students are expected to question the status quo, challenge what is presented, and focus on an aggressive critique of the material they see in class every day. High school students are much more likely to accept facts as presented, not having the in-class training to question those facts. That is not to say that all the high school-educated subjects accepted the news as it is presented. A sizeable percentage rated the media unfavorably in the categories of accuracy and balance. One could argue that the differences in education level merely enabled the higher educated

subjects to make ideology a more salient factor in their evaluation of media. But two facts argue against that supposition. First, as shown earlier in the chapter, the differences in perceptions due to ideology were not significant. Second, if those with low education level are removed from the analysis, the ideological differences in those subjects remaining do not contribute to a significant difference in media views. This leaves the more likely explanation to be that those subjects who attended college received the training to be more critical consumers of news. That training would allow them to perceive poor performance more easily and to convert those experiences into meaningful analyses of the overall ability of the media to remain fair, accurate, and balanced. Those who did not receive that additional training would be less likely to perceive and express negative perceptions of the media.

Comparisons between National and Local Perceptions

The pretest perceptions of the media by local subjects are similar to the national survey results in both the direction of the opinion and the strength of it. The percentage of favorable opinions of the media across all three evaluative dimensions is largely below 50 percent, both locally and nationally. The exception falls only on the questions of fairness, where the lack of a neutral evaluation on the scale forced a more positive result. But in spite of that artifact of the survey, local subjects have a perception the news media are more fair than the national polls (which used the same scale) would suggest is the commonly held belief. Eighty-seven percent of local subjects found the news media to be fair, while only 35 percent felt the same way nationwide. While a difference that large does not seem to show similarity between the subject sample and the general population,

a look at those with the most unfavorable view of the media in each group tells a different story. Those who felt the media did the worst job on fairness measured 9 percent in the national poll, and 2 percent in the local sample. That difference is much smaller than seen with those less passionate about their view, and somewhat blunts the difference between the two groups.

Comparing Subjects by Media Trust Indices

One final method to use for evaluation of national and local difference, as well as difference between and within the experimental groups, is to compare those groups using the media fairness, accuracy, balance, and overall trust indices developed in Chapter 5. This standardized mean of all respondents allows single number comparison of the relative perceptions of each group and subgroup. Those indices above .500 show a mean positive attitude toward that evaluative dimension, while those below show a negative attitude. The strength of those attitudes becomes more apparent as the indices approach the fully positive index of 1.000, or the fully negative index of 0.000.

The indices in Table 7-4 show that nationally, perceptions of media fairness are negative, while the local sample is fairly positive. That is, in part, an effect of the four-point scale used for that question. Perceptions of media accuracy and balance are negative over all, and both consistent with national data. The far right column gives the overall media trust index for each group, showing that both local and national data define a media audience critical of its performance. Local subjects are less negative than studies show the nation to be. Following down that rightmost column, conservatives and liberals in the local subject groups share virtually identical views of media performance, while

those with only high school education rank the media far more favorably in the job they do than those who attended or graduated college.

Table 7-4: Media Trust Indices

	Media Fairness Index	Media Accuracy Index	Media Balance Index	Media Trust Index (average of fairness, accuracy, and balance indices)
National (published survey data)	.436	.430	.335	.400
Sample (all subjects from pretest questionnaire)	.651	.416	.365	.477
Conservative Subjects Pretest	.657	.426	.345	.476
Liberal Subjects Pretest	.644	.423	.375	.481
Non-College Subjects Pretest	.716	.509	.472	.566
College Subjects Pretest	.644	.406	.355	.468

The patterns present show some differences, particularly with the perceptions of fairness. But there is a remarkable similarity in the views of the local subjects with those found in repeated national studies. This shows the generalizability of the local data to a larger application. But it also shows the common ground Americans share in perceiving and evaluating the media messages they receive. Acknowledging differences in taste and regional availability, it is still possible to assert that the local subjects and all Americans

view the same aggregate media. They receive similar messages and see similar flaws in those messages and the way in which they are processed and delivered.

Evaluation of Effect of Subject Differences

What effect could the differences among experimental subject and the national perceptions have on the outcome of these experiments? The primary source of the differences among local subject groups comes from the random assignment of subjects to relatively small groups. Each experimental group consisted of approximately twenty subjects viewing a single exposure and treatment approach. Approximately 60 subjects took part in each exposure range. With groups of that number, the random assignment of approximately 240 subjects cannot erase all variations in demographic differences. Opinion grouping differences will also form in each subgroup.

Any differences in the anticipated results could point to experimental effects worth noting and evaluating on their own. But beyond the experimental effects, differences in perceptions by individual subjects, once correlated with pretest attitudinal differences, could reveal perceptual or other screening processes that affect each subject's evaluation of the media product.

One other effect to observe is how the differences between the national media perceptions and local subject perceptions will appear in the posttest outcomes. The composite media trust index for the nation shows a population less pleased with the job the media do than the local subjects would appear to share. While the 8 percent difference in the index is not particularly large, it does show a direction in which local subjects seem to lean regarding their views of the media. Midwestern values and customs could make it

more difficult for subjects to be critical of what they perceive. And the effect of watching an apparently local newscaster may be the biggest influence to produce a more positive opinion of the news media than the abstract evaluation given at the national level and in the local pretest. Surveys of opinions about local news and newscasters rank them far higher than any general view of the news media in which local institutions and journalists are not cited. The Radio Television News Directors Foundation asked local news viewers to evaluate the television news they watch in terms of fairness and balance, as well as overall credibility. Those polled rated the local news as 85 percent fair, with 20 percent finding it very fair (RTNDF 2000). Despite asking question mirroring national polling, the local survey yielded figures far higher than the 36 percent finding the media fair and 9 percent finding the media very fair in the latest National Election Studies poll. Fifty-five percent in the RTNDF poll find local television news to be balanced in its coverage (RTNDF 2000). The 2004 NES poll puts that percentage at 26 percent.

The combination of a local subject group more likely to evaluate journalists in a positive manner, combined with the appearance of a “local” newscaster delivering the news, may cloud the perceptions subjects have of the manipulated news content they see. While the local subjects are a reasonably good duplication of television news viewers everywhere, the experimental differences may introduce additional elements to be considered in the final evaluation of the outcome of those experiments.

Chapter 8: Viewer Perceptions of Media Bias Across Exposures

At the heart of this research is the question of whether visual or verbal cues about the opinions of newscasters will be perceived by viewers and influence their trust in media. That trust can be measured through perceptions of fairness, accuracy, and balance in news presentations. Studies show consumers have overall negative views of the news media in general, though there are more positive evaluations of specific members of the media. The base judgments individuals make on the media exist as a latent structure of evaluation, able to serve as a starting point for perceiving new media messages. Commonly accepted theories of perceptual screening expect new information will have little effect to change consumers' views of media performance. Most are not finely attuned to changes in content that will signal subtle bias. Therefore the challenge of the experiment is to determine at what level—if any—a biased message will break through the perceptual screens and have the ideological force to change the inertia of individual set perceptions.

The precipitating news media memo featured in Chapter 1 sprang from a belief that some television news viewers would perceive a small lapel pin as a sign of the ideological position of a newscaster. That belief assumes a very sensitive perception on the part of those viewers to focus on that symbol amidst all the other visual and auditory information present in a television news presentation. If professional norms in journalism are to call for no outward symbols that might be perceived as ideologically biased—no matter how small—then is there experimental data to show that such an edict is at all effective in portraying a perceivable image to the viewers? If that data exists,

then viewers are much more sensitive to ideological clues than most research predicts. This chapter will explore at what level the subjects were able to perceive the bias inserted in the news presentation, and what force was necessary to break through the inertia of their latent beliefs about the news media to allow them to more negatively evaluate newscaster performance than they would normally be likely to do.

Random Assignment of Subjects to Exposure Groups

Pretest examinations of the local subjects show most demographic differences are inconsequential to the evaluation they have of media performance. Only level of education impacted the ability of subjects to think critically and question the performance of the media. With that analysis complete, it was possible to turn to examining the effects of written and visual bias in the presentation of the local newscaster. Subjects were randomly assigned to exposure and treatment groups or a control group. There were three exposure groups (soft, moderate, and hard), three treatment groups (patriotism, gay marriage, and abortion), and control groups for each treatment group as well as another control group not actually brought to the experiment. In all, subjects were divided between those thirteen possible groups for assignment.

Random assignment of the subjects to the groups does not necessarily ensure that the groups will come to the experiment with the same preconceptions of media performance. But an examination of the pretest responses divided by exposure group allows any pattern of bias in group assignments to be apparent. Table 8-1 shows the favorable and unfavorable percentages for each of the exposure groups of approximately 60 subjects each.

Table 8-1: Pretest Media Views by Exposure Group

	Soft (N=61)	Moderate (N=60)	Hard (N=61)
Fairness			
Very Favorable	5	5	15
Favorable	87	88	72
Unfavorable	8	3	12
Very Unfavorable	0	3	2
Accuracy			
Very Favorable	2	0	8
Favorable	20	17	15
Unfavorable	22	31	23
Very Unfavorable	12	15	20
Balance			
Very Favorable	3	0	7
Favorable	15	20	16
Unfavorable	29	30	28
Very Unfavorable	17	30	30

Statistical *t*-testing shows the views are not different across the exposure groups. For favorable ratings, the soft and moderate groups are within just a few points of each other on all three ratings dimensions. The hard exposure group appears to rank the media more favorably on all three dimensions, with the largest difference found in its perception of fairness. But the difference is not significant. Among the unfavorable ratings, the moderate and hard exposure groups come with similar perceptions of the media. The soft group seems less likely to rate the media unfavorably in the areas of accuracy and balance than the other two exposure groups, but once again, there is no statistical significance to the difference.

In all, the exposure groups received a random distribution of subjects and the assignment of those subjects did not load any one of the exposure groups with any preponderance of subjects with extreme attitude positions about the media.

With the pretest perceptions of the subjects providing a starting point, it is possible to begin to examine perceptions of the impartiality of news brought on by the experimental manipulation of the newscast content. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of twelve experimental groups for the in-person experiment. Each of the three treatments (patriotism, gay marriage, and abortion) had three exposure levels (soft, moderate, and hard), plus a control group. Approximately 20 subjects were assigned to each group. Subjects in each group saw a videotape that consisted of a segment of a non-controversial Dateline NBC segment on art theft. The NBC segment was identical for each group. But within that segment, subjects in non-control groups also saw a local news break. That news break was presented differently to each group. Those in the soft exposure group heard the news presented in what most journalists would perceive to be an unbiased fashion. But they saw a lapel pin on the anchor sympathetic to one controversial story in the news break. Those in the moderate group also saw the same pin, but heard the controversial story written in a somewhat biased fashion, favoring one side of the conflict. And those subjects in the hard exposure group saw the pin, as well as the newscaster participating in a rally with one side in the controversial story. That group also heard a news script severely biased toward the same side.

After viewing the videotape segments containing the newscast variables, the subjects answered a questionnaire concerning their perceptions of fairness, accuracy, and balance in the video they had just seen, and once again about the media in general. The hypotheses of this experiment predict that all subjects would evaluate the newscaster more negatively due to the consistent introduction of a lapel pin to add bias to each experimental exposure. Those subjects who saw the “soft” exposure would see no more

bias in the reporting, as the verbal communication for that exposure level was presented in an unbiased manner. The hypotheses call for those who saw the “moderate” exposure level to find the newscaster more biased, due to the lapel pin, as well as the introduction of some biased language in the writing of the report. And finally, the hypotheses predict those who saw the “hard” exposure level tapes would find the newscaster the most biased, thanks to the pin, the biased language in the written presentation, and the additional video of the newscaster participating in a rally supporting one side of the issue.

Differences in Perceptions of Newscaster by Exposure Level

Subjects ranked the fairness, accuracy, and balance of the stories on either a four or five point scale, with the highest ranking being the most favorable. The opinions of each like exposure level across all treatment groups were combined to increase the total subjects in each subsample. The standardization procedure introduced in Chapter 5 was used to prepare the data for comparison across differing scales. The procedure involves taking the data from each question set, and transforming into a single index by weighting each attitudinal scale. The process yields a mean score—between 0 and 1—that allows for comparison of the different questions. Means closer to 1 indicate more positive reaction to the question, while those approaching 0 indicate a more negative reaction (see appendix for a complete description of the transformation).

Those standardized results for the comparison of exposure levels appear in Table 8-2, which allows a quick comparison on the positive or negative rankings of the newscaster by exposure level.

Table 8-2: Media Indices by Exposure Level

	Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness	
Control	.600
Soft	.633
Moderate	.583
Hard	.580
Accuracy	
Control	.630
Soft	.640
Moderate	.550
Hard	.640
Balance	
Control	.483
Soft	.558
Moderate	.445
Hard	.388

Comparing first the outcomes of perceptions of fairness, there appears to be a slightly more negative perception of the newscaster as bias increases in the exposures. Those subjects who saw the soft treatment appear to find the newscaster more fair than those in the control group. And those in the moderate and hard exposure groups appear to find the newscaster increasingly less fair. But the differences are not statistically significant for subject groups of this size.

The perception of accuracy seems to present more of a puzzle for analysis. It is important to note that though the presentations were biased in all exposures, there were no inaccuracies or factual errors in any of the exposures. All news presented was accurate. The control, soft, and hard exposure groups all give approximately the same assessment of the accuracy of the presentation, while the moderate exposure group appears to find the presentation less accurate. But again, there is no statistical significance to those different figures.

The perceptions of balance are most interesting, because the set appears to exhibit the predicted pattern of response from subjects. Of those non-control subjects, those in the soft exposure group has the highest mean perception of balance at .558—the only non-negative perception of balance among all the groups. Those in the moderate group has the next highest mean, and those in the hard exposure group had the lowest mean at .388. The relatively small size of each exposure group leaves these differences just barely falling short of statistical significance however.

The results seem tantalizingly close to showing a measurable impact of the bias material on the perceptions of viewers. Perhaps a larger sample of subjects participating in each part of the experiment would have shown significant results. Or repeated trials with the same subjects over a longer period of time may have helped the effects of the bias penetrate the perceptual screens of the viewers. In fact, the lack of results—despite an overwhelmingly biased presentation in the cast of the hard exposure groups—shows the power of the subjects previous beliefs to deflect the effects of a single exposure that largely runs counter to those beliefs.

The local newscaster used for the experiment was a person not known to the experimental subjects, so there was no personal, prior perception of his fairness, accuracy, or balance within the subjects. But there appeared to have been a strong, positive reaction to him personally seen in the data.

Change in Perceptions of Fairness from Pretest to Posttest

The lack of a statistically significant difference in newscaster perception between exposure groups begs a deeper examination for changes brought on by the bias exposure

level. Comparing the change in mean perception of bias between pretest, which measured core levels of bias perception in media in general, to posttest perceptions of the newscaster and of the media in general could show some change brought on by the varying levels of bias.

In Table 8-3, three comparisons can be made to determine any effects from the different levels of experimentation in which the subjects took part. A comparison of the leftmost and center columns shows the effects of each level of exposure on the aggregate subject view of the media in general. Experimental hypotheses predict the posttest indices in the center column will be lower than their corresponding pretest values in leftmost column, due to the bias introduced by the experiment in the form of the lapel pin and biased language and video used. Only the control group should remain unchanged since those subjects saw no biased presentation. Likewise, initial expectations predict a comparison of leftmost column pretest indices to corresponding values in the rightmost column would see the same decline. This comparison would relate the pretest perceptions of media in general to the perceptions subjects have post-testing of the newscaster they saw in the videotapes during the experiment. Finally, a comparison of the posttest index values in center column to those in rightmost should show similar values. The subjects' posttest perceptions of the media in general (seen in the center column) should not differ greatly from their posttest perceptions of the specific experimental newscaster shown in rightmost column.

There appears to be a sizeable drop in index values from pretest to posttest regarding the media in general. Table 8-3 shows the change in indices compared across

pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 8-3: Change in Indices: Fairness

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Fairness			
Control	<i>-.066</i>	<i>-.036[†]</i>	<i>+.030</i>
Soft	<i>-.084</i>	<i>-.024</i>	<i>+.060</i>
Moderate	<i>-.077</i>	<i>-.067</i>	<i>+.010</i>
Hard	<i>-.104</i>	<i>-.087</i>	<i>+.017</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

Beginning with an examination of the control group changes, it is clear that counter to the expectation of no change in the control group perceptions, there was in fact some decrease in evaluation of fairness from pretest to posttest. That change was less than with most of the other exposure groups, but does run counter to expectations. Since the control group saw only the Dateline NBC portion of the taped presentation, one can assume the change in assessment was based on that program alone. Though the Dateline program was chosen for its lack of controversial or political content (it depicted the problem of art theft around the world), subjects seem to have found it less fair than their ideal, as was measured in the pretest. It is also possible some experimental effects took place, which focused subjects on negative perceptions of fairness more than they had been at the time of the pretest. In the posttest phase, subjects had a slightly more positive view of the Dateline NBC newscaster's fairness than of media in general. But the Dateline NBC newscaster was not the same as in the local experimental videos. This result does show, perhaps, the added luster an individual brings to viewers' perceptions. Both of those effects will be discussed in more detail below.

Looking beyond the control group to the experimental exposure groups, there is a slight pattern to confirm the expectations of the experiment. In the change from pretest perceptions of general media fairness to posttest perceptions, there appears to be a trend for the change to be more severe as the bias introduced into the experiment becomes more severe. All three exposure levels appear to show greater decreases in perceptions of trust than the control group showed. But the moderate exposure group actually runs counter to expectations, showing a slightly smaller decrease in fairness perceptions than the soft exposure group.

A more-expected pattern is present when viewing the change from pretest perceptions of fairness of the media in general to posttest perceptions of the local newscaster seen in the experiment. Though the soft exposure group had less of a drop in its perception than the control group, each of the three experimental exposure group reported a drop in perceptions of fairness that increased as more bias was added to the experiment. As expected, the hard exposure group showed the biggest decrease in perceptions of fairness.

Looking beyond the individual changes in mean perception, it is possible to see the harshest post-experimental views of media fairness come with the hard exposure group. Across all measurement dimensions those subjects display the most negative perception in nearly every case—even if the overall perceptions of the subjects move in the positive direction. This consistency among hard exposure group subjects lends some credence to the hypotheses calling for the harshest evaluations to arise from the group. But perhaps a better question to ask of these results is this—why did not all the subjects find the hard exposure video to be unfair? The newscaster wears a pin supporting one

side of the issue, he reads news copy that supports one side and attacks the other, he appears at the event being covered working with protestors on his side, and he makes a blatant appeal at the end of the newscast to support that side. There appears to be some pressure for subjects to reject what they are seeing as being meaningful in their evaluation of the fairness of the newscaster and media in general. It remains to be seen if that same apparent pressure will exist in all exposures. But that effect may be tied to the local newscaster himself.

Change in Perceptions of Accuracy from Pretest to Posttest

While the pattern of change in perception of fairness following some predicted patterns, the case was entirely different regarding perceptions of accuracy. As stated earlier, all the stories shown subjects, no matter how biased, were accurate. But because most critics of the news media lump accuracy in with fairness and balance when finding bias, accuracy was tested alongside the other two.

Table 8-4 shows there was actually no decrease at all in perceptions of accuracy from pretest to posttest (the apparent negative change in the moderate group is not statistically significant). Instead, in all but one group of subjects, the evaluations of the local media *improved* over those made of media in general in the pretest phase (significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics).

Table 8-4: Change in Indices: Accuracy

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Accuracy			
Control	<i>+.140</i>	<i>+.225</i>	<i>+.085</i>
Soft	<i>+.125</i>	<i>+.195</i>	<i>+.070</i>
Moderate	<i>+.190</i>	<i>+.160</i>	<i>-.030</i>
Hard	<i>+.160</i>	<i>+.217</i>	<i>+.057[†]</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

The trend begins with the control groups where, despite the lack of any local newscast in their experimental experience, the subjects increase their view of media accuracy in each comparison from pretest to posttest and among posttest elements. These subjects instead saw only the Dateline NBC portion of the experimental video. It may be that they found, on average, the NBC program to be very accurate—more so than their common view of media. In fact, one would expect the network program to be free from factual errors.

And while the same could be said for those in the three exposure groups—that the Dateline NBC portion of the tape colored their opinions of accuracy in the experiment—it appears the local segment also had some bearing. Subjects received instructions to give opinions on that local segment. Yet they still rated that local newscast as more accurate than they did the newscasts in general as asked about in the pretest. For the initial measurement of change of attitude from pretest to posttest, the perception of accuracy goes up between 12.5 and 19 points, with no particular trend in that change correlating to the exposure levels of the subjects. The change of opinion from pretest general media view to posttest specific newscaster goes up even more, between 16 and nearly 22 percent. As with the less negative change seen in measuring views of fairness, this higher level of positive change may be due to the likeability of the newscaster used for the

experiment. And finally, the difference in opinion from local newscaster to news in general, both posttests are mixed. One group of subjects, those seeing the moderate exposure level, found the local newscaster less accurate, while the other two groups found him to be more accurate.

If the reason for the increased perceptions of accuracy among almost all the subjects are not to be attributed to the Dateline NBC program, then what could be the cause for the nearly unanimous change in perception from pretest to post. It is once again possible to suggest that some experimental effect is at work in the change in attitudes. As noted when evaluating the change in the control group members' views of fairness, the impact of asking people to come to take part in an experiment must certainly focus them on the task at hand and make them re-evaluate their views of media. The pretest caught them by surprise, but even with some time passing between pretest and the administration of the experiment, the "assignment" of taking part in an experiment focuses the subjects on the task. Then, when confronted with the Dateline NBC program (which appeared accurate in every way) and/or the local news break (which, while biased, was also accurate in total), the many of subjects found that they saw news presentations that were more accurate than those the conjured from thin air at the time of the pretest. Then, a quick question on accuracy evoked horror stories. But the pretest offered nothing horrible in terms of accuracy, and those earlier views softened.

Perhaps the most interesting observation to arise from the comparison of the changes in perceptions of accuracy is that the subjects seem to be able to detach their perceptions of bias in fairness from their perceptions of accuracy. Despite finding the local news less fair than their views of the news media in general, the bulk of the subjects

were able to find the local news more accurate than those common, pretest perceptions. This severability of perceptions shows at least the first two elements of the fairness-accuracy-balance triad are artificially connected. Television news viewers do not tie the two characteristics together so closely that they are unable to find one element lacking, while the other is sufficient in their minds. Their views on the third element of that triad will determine if the three are linked at all in viewers' minds.

Change in Perceptions of Balance from Pretest to Posttest

The change in perceptions of subjects regarding balance in the news media presents perhaps the most puzzling change of all. While the decrease in perceptions of fairness was predicted by the hypotheses, and the increase in perceptions of accuracy is explainable through the actual accuracy of the news presentations, the change in views of the subjects and their perceptions of balance is not so easy to explain. Table 8-5 shows the change in indices compared across pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 8-5: Change in Indices: Balance

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Balance			
Control	<i>+.095</i>	<i>+.105</i>	<i>+.010</i>
Soft	<i>+.102</i>	<i>+.160</i>	<i>+.058</i>
Moderate	<i>+.120</i>	<i>+.120</i>	<i>.000</i>
Hard	<i>+.125</i>	<i>+.030</i>	<i>-.095</i>

†Significant at the .10 level of α

Much like the findings of changes in perceptions of accuracy, most of the subjects actually improved their view of the news media and the local newscaster subsequent to seeing the experimental videos. The change between pretest and posttest perceptions of the general news media went up fairly consistently across the control and all experimental groups, ranging from a 9.5 to 12.5 point increase. This change is consistent with some of the similar shifts seen on the other two dimensions of the fairness-accuracy-balance evaluation criteria. There once again seems to be an experimental effect that, by focusing the attention of the subjects on the media for the time between the pretest and posttest, focuses them on the specific, more positive work done by journalists in that brief period. The focus on those specifics balances some of the “horror stories” subjects had in their minds at the time of the pretest, leaving them with a slightly more positive feeling on the media in general. This focus on what the media are doing correctly would explain why there is a fairly consistent positive change among both the control and experimental groups. It would argue that it cannot be due to the experimental videos with the manipulated content, which the control groups’ subjects did not see.

The change in perception regarding the local newscaster, however, appears to show more than just the experimental effect of a focus on more positive aspects of media. All the assessments are once again more positive than the pretest notions regarding media balance. But the control is somewhat of a midpoint, while the soft exposure subjects found the newscaster to be more balanced, and the hard exposure group found him to be less balanced. When compared to the change for the media in general, as seen by the subjects posttest, the local newscaster exceeded the general media perceptions for the soft group, is the same for the moderate group, and drops nearly ten percent for the hard

exposure group. This difference in perceptions of the local newscaster as compared to media in general would tend to indicate a harsher evaluation of balance from the subjects regarding the performance seen in the experimental videos. The soft exposure group saw the newscaster present a balanced account of the news. They find him likeable, and reflect that in their aggregate positive evaluation of his abilities, as compared to their perceptions of media in general. The moderate group saw a somewhat less balanced presentation by the local newscaster, but his likeable nature mitigates their criticism of his handling of the content and he ends up evaluated much the same way as the general media. But the hard exposure group does not let the newscaster's personal charm overwhelm the grossly unbalanced presentation it sees. Subjects in that group were able to separate their views of the general media from this specific performance by a single newscaster, finding the general media better in balancing the news than they did in their hasty, pretest evaluation, but finding this local newscaster substantially less balanced than their revised general view.

The balance measurements show up as an interesting amalgam of the fairness and accuracy examinations. While the groups were consistent in their more negative evaluations of the fairness dimension across all exposures, and more positive across all exposures when perceiving accuracy, the split between positive and negative on the balance question shows that there appears to be a threshold at which preconceived notions of media trust aspects must be reconsidered. The subjects were able to forgive what they saw in the local newscast if it did not push the limits of what they would consider to be balanced coverage too much. But as the bias reached its maximum, they had to rate the local newscaster more harshly than the media in general. Again, the effect

of the local newscast content was severable from the effect of the experiment on the view of the media as a whole.

The Positive Image of Local News

Across the control and exposure groups, after experimental exposure, the local newscaster often has a higher media fairness index score than the media in general.

Table 8-6 highlights those differences. Of the twelve experimental groups, five gave statistically higher perception scores to the local newscaster than they did to the general media in the post-experimental test, while only one group gave a lower score.

Table 8-6: Positive Change in Perception of Newscaster

	Posttest Change in Mean Perception of Newscaster Compared to General Media
Fairness	
Control	+.030
Soft	+.060
Moderate	+.010
Hard	+.017
Accuracy	
Control	+.085
Soft	+.070
Moderate	-.030
Hard	+.057 [†]
Balance	
Control	+.010
Soft	+.058
Moderate	.000
Hard	-.095

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

This difference could be another indicator of the latent feelings the subjects bring with them to any newscast viewing session. Studies cited earlier show the positive power of local news when compared to national news. And though this newscaster was

unknown to the subjects watching the experimental videos, he was reporting on local stories (roads in Boone County, water problems in Boonville, etc.). That connection with the local issues could have connected this newscaster to the favorite local station of the subjects, and thus transferred some of their positive perceptions of that local station to this fictional newscaster.

So it seems apparent that the human reaction of subjects to the newscaster who appeared in the experimental videotapes had some effect on subjects' perceptions of his competence. As presented in the previous chapter, research has shown that television news viewers are more fond of their local newscasters than of television news in general. When given the choice to rate newscasters, local people always rate higher than national figures, or the news in general. Consistent with those findings, subjects seemed to be fond of the newscaster seen in the experimental videotapes. Therefore, they appear to have evaluated him more highly than anticipated, considering the bias introduced in the script and video with which he was performing. This personal reaction to the presentation was not necessarily foreseeable in the planning of experiments to run and variables to test.

Exposure Group Differences

Analyzing the differences in media perceptions across all exposure groups is not a clear-cut proposition. The expectations of decreasing media trust with increasing instances of visual and written bias did not materialize as clearly as the hypotheses predicted. Table 8-7 shows the entire matrix of media trust indices are a jumble of highs and lows.

Table 8-7: All Media Indices by Exposure Level

	Column 1: Pretest Perception of General Media	Column 2: Posttest Perception of General Media	Column 3: Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness			
Control	.636	.570	.600
Soft	.657	.573	.633
Moderate	.650	.573	.583
Hard	.667	.563	.580
Accuracy			
Control	.405	.545	.630
Soft	.445	.570	.640
Moderate	.390	.580	.550
Hard	.423	.583	.640
Balance			
Control	.378	.473	.483
Soft	.398	.500	.558
Moderate	.325	.445	.445
Hard	.358	.483	.388

The soft exposure level was intended to test the lapel pin effects by comparing a non-biased newscast to subject expectations, with the only variable to be the lapel pin worn by the newscaster. It was expected that the pin would cause viewers to see the newscaster as less fair, less accurate, and less balanced than their ideal type, as measured in their pretest and posttest general evaluations. In fact, there was no reduction in the evaluation of the newscaster due to the introduction of the pin variable when compared to the control groups (which did not see the pin). In fact, the local newscaster is regarded more highly than the media in general by subjects in most exposure groups across all three evaluative criteria. The lapel pin alone appears to have had no negative effect and could possibly have had a positive effect on the subjects' evaluation of the newscaster. Interestingly, subjects in the soft exposure groups did change their perceptions of the media in general more negatively in the evaluation of fairness. But perceptions of

accuracy and balance were higher posttest for all in the soft exposure groups. This, once again, could likely be due to a positivity effect of asking subjects to focus on media performance for the experiment itself, thereby erasing some vague notions of poor media performance, and replacing them with specific examples of at least adequate performance.

The moderate exposure groups appear to begin to show the effects of the experimental video on the subjects' opinions of the media. While the attitudes about general media accuracy and balance still rise as compared with their pretest levels—most likely due to the same experimental effects as the soft exposure groups—the evaluations of general media fairness appear to drop for all three evaluations. It is possible the positivity effect seen with the soft exposure subjects is overridden by the biased language used in the moderate presentations. It is important to note, however, that the stories in each exposure group contain no inaccuracies. Rather, they are contrived to be unfair and unbalanced. So perceptions of accuracy proper should not be affected by the videotape exposure. Still, there is the possibility of guilt by association if the subjects have begun to perceive the newscaster as lacking the journalistic skills to remain fair and balanced.

The subjects in the hard exposure groups appear to have reached the point that the biased presentation does cross the threshold between what they will accept as trustworthy journalism. There is fairly clear evidence in the fairness evaluation that the effects seen among the hard exposure group subjects shows they not only found the local newscaster less fair, but also attributed some of his sins to the media in general. There was no such effect in terms of accuracy, however, which remained evaluated as high among the hard exposure group subjects. In the evaluation of balance, though, it was seen

that the newscaster received poorer marks than the media in general, showing that the subjects did see a difference between the two, even though the balance rating posttest remained higher than pretest in that one evaluative area.

One final way to reveal the effects of the experiments, in spite of small sample and other camouflaging factors is to combine all posttest measure to yield a single index for each exposure level. Since the accuracy of the stories presented was not manipulated, those scores can be left out of the calculation. The resulting single indices are seen in Table 8-8.

Table 8-8: Single Comparison Indices

	Posttest Mean Perception by Exposure
Fairness/Balance	
Soft	.566
Moderate	.511
Hard	.504

These indices show, by combining as many of the posttest perceptions of manipulated content as possible, that the predicted change in perception appears. The aggregated moderate exposure groups yield a index lower than the soft exposure groups do, and the hard exposure groups give the media a slightly lower score than the other two groups. This is the predicted outcome of the experiment. It is interesting to note, however, that all three combined indices are still above .500, meaning the overall impression of media fairness and balance is still a positive one, even if ever so slightly.

Pretest Media Views versus Post-Experimental Effects

The unexpected positive changes pretest to posttest, the lack of negative change in the most biased presentations, as well as the positive perception of the local newscaster

could be attributable to experimental effect or a well-researched effect found in local television news research, or could demonstrate measurement of two different variables by the experiments. In regards to the changes in the control group perceptions, when questioned during the recruitment phase of the experiment, the subjects were asked their opinions on the media before being asked to take part in the video phase of the experiment. Subjects were simply asked to answer some questions about their views on government and the media. The subjects were unable to take time to prepare for the interview, give more attention to media content, or contemplate their feelings on the state of media performance. The answers they gave to the telephone interviewers were their instinctual reactions, not tempered by time or thought. This mental state produced responses that displayed the latent perceptions of the news media. These impressions, on the average, were quite negative, built from a history with the media.

But once asked to participate in person for the experiment, the subjects let those core feeling about the media remain at rest, and viewed the tapes without preconceived ideas. This approach yielded lower evaluations in some cases, higher in others, as compared to the pretest. But subjects had no conscious association between the two measurement events. So the comparisons between pretest and posttest perceptions of media do not yield predicted results because they, in terms of the reference perspective of the subjects, do not measure two points in time on the same variable.

While it is impossible to control for that effect, as well as the positive feelings toward the newscaster in these limited experiments, the data in this chapter appear to indicate the experiment would yield the expected results if it were possible to measure only for them. Future experiments into this topic may produce more meaningful results

if it is possible to measure the views of the subjects on the same issues of media performance, rather than across different issues.

Chapter 9: Do Issues Matter? Change in Perceptions of Media Trust by Issue

Analysis of the subject reactions to varying levels of bias in the newscast presentation were blunted by local newscaster popularity and perceptual screening that deflected much of the negative perceptual change. Perhaps the issues covered on the local news breaks did not reach a high enough salience to register on the subjects' collective consciousness. But the examinations in the last chapter were done by combining all three issue areas covered in the experiments—patriotism, gay marriage, and abortion. If those issues were analyzed separately, would there be a difference based on issue salience? This question can make the experimental data more meaningful by soliciting more information about how the subjects reacted to the bias among certain issue areas. Those areas, ranging from consensual issues to very divisive ones, help define the range of reaction subjects exhibit. It is possible to evaluate the individual issue effects separately by combining exposure levels, but dividing all subjects by issue examined.

Most who involve themselves in politics like to think that issues matter. It is comforting to believe that voters and viewers alike consider salient issues differently than those that do not matter to them, and allocate their attention according to some hierarchy of needs and desires that might be brought about by political attention to those issues. If this view is consistent with reality, then the substance of the issues used in this experiment should affect subjects differently. Those that are more controversial should split the subjects groups, leaving some subjects seeing bias while others do not. But those

that are commonly held in the same regard among subjects should not see that difference in opinions.

But this approach to analysis is not without its pitfalls. First, television news is often devoid of many ideological details and positions. It is, but its very nature, a simple telling of simple stories, with pictures and sound to match. Television reporters run toward fires and car accidents—and often run away from complex policy stories with big ideas. Therefore, viewers do not relate seeing strong issue content on television very often. Add to that the increasingly obvious evidence that the trust viewers have in local newscasters—even those they have not seen before—counteracts a lot of faults they would find in news coverage. So while important issue and policy stories might rise higher on an individual subject's personal salience structure, the role of television news and its likeable presenters will work strongly to erase any perceptions of bias from the viewer's perceptions.

Patriotism: A Non-Issue?

When determining the order of issues, but consensual to divisive, patriotism appears a good place to begin. It may be difficult to call it an issue at all. But the story used in the news break centers on the recital of the pledge of allegiance in school, so that can be considered the issue for that set of subjects. Bias was added to this experiment with the flag lapel pin of the newscaster, the script that gave a favorable description of pro-pledge protestors, and the involvement of the newscaster in the pledge rally. Expectations of attitude change among subjects who see this video are low, since reverence for the American flag, support of the pledge of allegiance, and patriotism in

general are common beliefs held by most Americans and therefore, most of the subjects. That common view gives rise to the expectation that there will be little difference in attitudes between the pretest and posttest evaluations the patriotism subjects give. For if the subjects see no harm in displaying patriotic symbols on their lapels, or requiring children to recite the pledge of allegiance in schools, there is an intrinsic lack of motivation to see a newscaster who exhibits the same behaviors as biased. At the same time, those subjects who do not see the call to support the pledge in schools (those in the soft and moderate exposure groups), there is no stimulus there to see bias either. So the difference between those groups should be minimal, and the mean difference of all groups, pretest to posttest, should be minimal.

Gay Marriage: Unpopular, But Not Divided

Just as images of patriotism and the pledge share a common meaning to many, gay marriage also lines up many citizens on the same side of the line. Public opinion polls show many people oppose legal, same-sex marriages. In states where there has been a popular vote to allow same-sex marriages, a large majority of voters have said no to the legal right. That majority consistently sees same-sex marriage as wrong, and does not see gray areas. Conversely, those in favor of setting up the legal framework for same-sex marriages see no gray area either. They are typically in favor of that legal right, and have no reservations or limits on it outside those also placed on opposite sex couples.

Because of this preponderance of people on one side of this issue, this issue should take on similar, but opposite perception changes as the patriotism issue. The newscaster calls for legalizing gay marriage, and thus most subjects should find him at

odds with their position on the issue. This is the opposite case from the patriotism stories. This predicts a lower index score for fairness and balance for the newscaster than seen for the patriotism treatment. Accuracy is once again not manipulated in the experiment, and should not show the same effects as the other two dimensions.

Abortion: The Sides Divide

Moving away from the relative agreement found in majorities which support displays of patriotism, and oppose gay marriage, subjects in the final group of experiments saw bias surrounding an issue that has been controversial for most of their lives. For more than thirty years, the legal status of abortion has been the subject of lawsuits, political debate, and divided public opinion in the United States. People differ in their opinions of whether abortion should be illegal, but those differences are not black and white. As stated in Chapter 6, there are mitigating factors that can move opinion from an anti-abortion stance to one of permitting the procedure. Those factors include the health of the mother, birth defects in the fetus, of a pregnancy that results from rape or incest. So while a person may consider themselves anti-abortion or “pro-life,” that seemingly solid position can change if presented with one of these factors.

This middle ground in which the issue position depends on the specific circumstances of the case, rather than on a dogmatic following of an immovable belief muddies the water for this experiment. Those subjects who see the newscaster wearing a pro-life lapel pin or supporting anti-abortion protestors may be able to evaluate that support in different ways. If they see the protestors as a group wanting to end abortion on demand as a birth control option, then there are many who would feel the same way. But

if they see those same protestors as a force to put an end to abortions to save mothers' lives, or end a pregnancy following incest or rape, the numbers on that side of the issue would be very small. Because of the possibility that subjects may read the intent of the protestors differently, it is possible to assume that there will be a stronger change in attitude pretest to posttest than seen with the patriotism or gay marriage subjects, yet not so much change that there is a drastic shift caused by either the "Pro Life" lapel pin or the biased news copy or video. This ambivalence in the message sent by the protestors and the newscaster will split the groups, allowing more of an effect to show in media trust evaluations than in the other two treatment groups where the message is much more unequivocal.

Random Assignment to Treatment Groups

Before beginning the analysis of subject perceptual change, it is important to measure the distribution of subjects by treatment group to assure random distribution. Subjects were randomly assigned to the patriotism, gay marriage, or abortion treatment groups. Pretest measures of the subjects' set views of media show, in Table 9-1, that subjects of any one set of beliefs were not overly represented in any one treatment group.

Table 9-1: Media Views by Treatment Group

	Patriotism (N=81)	Gay Marriage (N=80)	Abortion (N=81)
Fairness			
Very Favorable	9	10	9
Favorable	79	80	78
Unfavorable	12	6	13
Very Unfavorable	0	4	2
Accuracy			
Very Favorable	4	6	1
Favorable	16	22	16
Unfavorable	28	22	24
Very Unfavorable	15	17	20
Balance			
Very Favorable	4	8	3
Favorable	15	19	17
Unfavorable	37	24	27
Very Unfavorable	22	22	30

When compared by exposure groups, the distribution of the subjects across the various treatment groups does not produce wide variation in their pretest attitudes on the media. For subjects in all three groups, the issue of fairness is very similar for both the favorable and unfavorable views. The groups all show similar trends of having lower favorable and higher unfavorable percentages on all three evaluative dimensions. And statistical testing reveals no significant difference within any of the treatment groups. In all, a very low percentage of subjects in all three groups had very favorable evaluations of the media during the pretest phase, while a sizeable percentage held more unfavorable views—especially in the areas of accuracy and balance. Percentages were uniform across groups.

Differences in Perceptions of Newscaster by Issue

The exposure level analysis in Chapter 8 showed the unique role of the local newscaster to provide a starting point for analysis. The subject responses regarding his fairness, accuracy, and balance provide a clear insight into the effect of the experiment. Table 9-2 shows the standardized media indices for the newscaster across the evaluative dimensions of fairness, accuracy, and balance. It has the same structure as Table 8-2, showing the indices in simple column format. After the control groups, the most consensual issue (patriotism) is located at the top of the table, while the least consensual issue (abortion) is listed at the bottom. This give the table the structure of running from most consensual to least consensual as the reader moves down the rows.

As in the earlier table, a rough picture of the nature of the data regarding the newscaster is visible with a quick glance at the table.

Table 9-2: Media Indices by Issue Consensus

	Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness	
Control	.600
Patriotism	.630
Gay Marriage	.623
Abortion	.540
Accuracy	
Control	.630
Patriotism	.603
Gay Marriage	.663
Abortion	.565
Balance	
Control	.483
Patriotism	.483
Gay Marriage	.530
Abortion	.380

The analysis shows a clear and statistical difference between subject perceptions of abortion coverage by the newscaster and all the other treatments. For each evaluative criterion, the abortion subjects rated their newscaster the least fair, accurate, and balanced. The difference is significant for each treatment grouping.

The findings here are different that seen in the exposure groups. There, the apparent popularity of the newscaster outweighed the differences in inserted bias for enough of the subjects to blur any difference based on exposure. Here, when dividing the groups by issue, the newscaster does not seem as important. In fact, the lower mean perceptions of the abortion coverage does seem to support the expectation that the coverage of the two heavily one-sided issues was seen as less biased than the coverage of the more divided issue.

Differences Across Issue Groups Post-Experiment

With the role of the newscaster differing from its effects in the exposure level studies, it is possible to turn to the overall matrix of indices resulting from pre and post experimental tests. Table 9-3 holds all the indices for all issue areas.

Table 9-3: Media Indices by Issue Consensus

	Column 1: Pretest Perception of General Media	Column 2: Posttest Perception of General Media	Column 3: Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness			
Control	.636	.570	.600
Patriotism	.660	.580	.630
Gay Marriage	.660	.610	.623
Abortion	.650	.520	.540
Accuracy			
Control	.405	.545	.630
Patriotism	.410	.570	.603
Gay Marriage	.448	.633	.663
Abortion	.403	.528	.565
Balance			
Control	.378	.473	.483
Patriotism	.305	.480	.483
Gay Marriage	.415	.500	.530
Abortion	.360	.450	.380

Examining the patriotism group first, it is possible to see that across nine opportunities for measurement, those who took part in this experimental exposure to the manipulated newscast gave the news media higher index ratings than the control group in five of the nine instances, neutral in one of those instances, and lower in the remaining three. The subjects viewing the patriotism experiment ranked the media consistently higher on fairness at every measurement point, both pretest and posttest. Accuracy was also higher with this group on all but its evaluation of the local newscaster. And the evaluation of balance was mixed, with the pretest much lower than the control group, but the posttests the same to slightly higher. This general tendency for the patriotism subjects to see the media performance more favorably posttest is somewhat consistent with expectations that the consensual nature of the patriotism debate will make it difficult for the subjects to find bias in the presentation.

The subjects who saw the gay marriage subjects did not follow the predicted pattern. It is quickly evident that group of subjects was exceedingly positive in its evaluations, rating the media higher than the control abortion groups on each of the nine measurement opportunities, and higher than the patriotism group on seven of nine opportunities. The range of positivity runs from just less than 2 percent up to nearly 9 percent.

The subjects viewing the abortion experiment were much more negative than both the control subjects and the patriotism subjects. Of the nine measurement opportunities, the abortion subjects scored the media lower than both the control and patriotism groups on eight. Only on their pretest evaluation of general media fairness did the abortion group subjects rank higher than the control group.

So patterns relating to the type of treatment subjects saw are hard to make out amidst the data present. The fact that those in the abortion treatment groups were harsher critics of the local and general media than those in the other groups does support the assertion that the split nature of the issue raised its salience among the subjects.

With those general differences in mind, some expected, some surprising, it is possible to examine the statistical significance of each difference, as well as its individual meaning in terms of fairness, accuracy, and balance by isolating those evaluative areas and looking at the changes within.

Change in Perceptions of Fairness from Pretest to Posttest

An analysis of the change from pretest to posttest may show that the apparent lack of a newscaster effect among the issue treatments may not actually exist. Table 9-4

displays the media fairness indices for the three possible changes in subject perception. In the table, those changes appear individually in three columns. The leftmost column shows the positive or negative change from pretest attitudes of the media in general to posttest attitudes of the same general media. A negative score means the subjects, on average, found the media as a whole to be less fair, accurate, or balanced after taking part in the experiment. The center column subtracts the pretest general media index from the posttest local newscaster index. This yields a comparison of the subjects' aggregate prevailing media view as compared to the local newscaster they just saw. A negative score here shows a group's mean opinion that the local newscaster's trust fell below their overall media expectations. Then the rightmost column shows the posttest index value of the local newscaster minus the posttest score the subjects gave the media as a whole. A negative score here would indicate a mean decrease in trust for the newscaster versus the media in general, even after experimental exposure.

The subjects consider the media to be rather fair when asked during the pretest questioning, but lower their assessments considerably after exposure to the experimental videos. Statistically significant changes, as determined by *t*-test are in italics.

Table 9-4: Change in Indices: Fairness

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Fairness			
Control	<i>-.066</i>	<i>-.036</i>	<i>+.030</i>
Patriotism	<i>-.080</i>	<i>-.030</i>	<i>+.050[†]</i>
Gay Marriage	<i>-.050</i>	<i>-.037</i>	<i>+.013</i>
Abortion	<i>-.130</i>	<i>-.110</i>	<i>+.020</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

As seen in the examination of treatment level differences in Chapter 8, there is a significant dip in perceptions of fairness among most subjects after they have seen the experimental videos. Only the gay marriage subjects did not experience a significant change. This runs counter to the expected outcome that those subjects would show a decrease in trust since the issue was presented favoring the position that is opposite what the majority favors. The largest drop in perceived fairness belongs to the abortion group, which exceeded the drops in perceived fairness of the control and patriotism groups. Abortion group subjects saw their perceptions of media fairness drop 13 points from pretest levels when considering the performance of the media in general, 11 points when considering the performance of the local newscaster seen on the tape. Patriotism group subjects were not as harsh in their assessments of the local newscaster, with no significant change in their opinion of him, but they did exhibit an 8 point drop in their feelings toward general media performance. The control group outcomes are identical to those examined along with the treatment level analysis. The pattern of decrease remains perplexing, as those subjects saw only the Dateline NBC and commercial portions of the video presentation, and did not see the local newscaster or any local news content.

The fact that the abortion group, and not the gay marriage group, was the most volatile supports the assertions at the beginning of this chapter regarding a split view of the issue. Among the subjects randomly selected to take part in the abortion group, the abortion issue does somewhat divide the group. Posttest survey questions not used in the examination of fairness, accuracy, and balance perceptions show this tendency. When subjects are asked to react to the statement, “Newscasters give the true facts about abortion,” the breakdown of opinions leans toward a general feeling that newscasters do a

poor job reporting about abortion. Fifty percent disagree with the statement, 18 percent agree, and 31 percent neither agree nor disagree. Further, when asked to respond to the statement, “Newscasters report about alternatives to abortion,” fully 53 percent disagreed, while only 18 percent agreed. The abortion subject group appears to be stacked with people against legal abortion and critical of the job newscasters do. Therefore, a newscast segment biased against abortion generated the strongest perception change in terms of fairness. That could come—not from a disagreement with the position of the newscaster—but from a higher level of salience for the issue itself. These subjects share a great deal of consensus on issues of patriotism. They see their neighbors sharing those same views. So the patriotism issue does not have much daily salience to them. Likewise, while the majority is opposed to gay marriage, that issue does not reach them on a daily basis either. But many of these subjects share the feeling that the news media is doing an inadequate job of covering the abortion issue correctly. So when presented with an abortion story, they pay closer attention to it and are more willing to give a meaningful evaluation of the job the newscaster (and media in general), do. In fact, those questions measuring general media performance are likely to be measuring *past* performance of the media as much as (or more than) the short experimental exposure.

A question asked of subject regarding gay marriage may support another possible cause for abortion to be more negatively viewed than the gay marriage. When asked to react to the statement, “Newscasters have overblown the gay marriage debate,” 50 percent agreed, while only 30 percent disagreed. This shows a certain “news fatigue” among the subjects to the topic of gay marriage. Perhaps they had seen too many stories and heard too many reports about the subject. It may be that many of the subjects did not

feel as affected by this topic as they did potentially by the abortion debate. This may have created a lower interest level that lead to less opinion change through the experimental cycle. This theory would support the relatively higher change on the patriotism topic as well, if more felt affected by the pledge of allegiance in schools issue.

Perceptions of Accuracy

As the examination turns to changes in perceptions of accuracy, the same pattern seen when examining the exposure level difference emerges. Rather than seeing the evaluation of media and newscaster accuracy drop after seeing the experimental videos, the perceptions of the subjects shows a significant increase across most comparisons. Table 9-5 shows the change in indices compared across pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 9-5: Change in Indices: Accuracy

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Accuracy			
Control	<i>+.140</i>	<i>+.225</i>	<i>+.085</i>
Patriotism	<i>+.160</i>	<i>+.193</i>	<i>+.033</i>
Gay Marriage	<i>+.185</i>	<i>+.215</i>	<i>+.030</i>
Abortion	<i>+.125</i>	<i>+.162</i>	<i>+.037</i>

The upturn in perception of media and newscaster accuracy is as puzzling in this examination as it is in the exposure group data. As with that data, the most likely determinant of the change is that the stories seen, as biased as they are, are completely accurate. There are no factual errors or misrepresentations in any of them. This is true of

the Dateline NBC stories the control group saw as much as of the local newsbreak stories. The accuracy present in those stories, combined with the increased attention subjects were asked to pay to the stories could explain the positive change in opinion.

As for differences between the different issue groups, there really are none to compare in this analysis. All increase about the same percentage from pretest to posttest, both in terms of general media and the specific newscaster. The within posttest change in each issue grouping is not significant and cannot be compared with one another.

Perceptions of Balance

While there may be some factual anchor on which to pin the perceptions of increased accuracy perceptions of subjects, once again the perplexing matter of an increased perception of balance arises. Table 9-6 shows the change in indices compared across pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same issue group at the .05 level of α as determined by t -test are shown in italics.

Table 9-6: Change in Indices: Balance

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster	Difference in posttest perceptions of general media and local newscaster
Balance			
Control	<i>+.095[†]</i>	<i>+.105</i>	<i>+.010</i>
Patriotism	<i>+.175</i>	<i>+.178</i>	<i>+.003</i>
Gay Marriage	<i>+.085[†]</i>	<i>+.115</i>	<i>+.030</i>
Abortion	<i>+.090</i>	<i>+.020</i>	<i>-.070</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

Once again, all issue areas showed a positive, yet sometimes slight, increase in perception of balance of the general media from pretest to posttest. The strongest of those increases occurred with the patriotism group, while the other two issue groups improved

at about the same level as the control group. The good showing by the media and newscaster among the patriotism group could support the theory that the consensual issues would produce less negative attitude change among the subjects. In fact, the data present suggests it presented so much less negative attitude change it ended as a reasonably strong positive change. On the pretest, subjects were asked to recall their perceptions of news media balance with no prior warning. Those who would end up in the patriotism test group rated the media the lowest of all groups, with a Media Balance Index of .305. But those same subjects, seeing a demonstration of patriotism by the local newscaster, changed their opinions of the news media the most, raising it more than 17 percent. At the same time, those in the other issue groups began with somewhat higher opinions of news media balance at the pretest stage, and then raised those opinions a marginally significant amount after watching more controversial stories than did the patriotism group.

The Effect of Issues in Subject Matter on Viewer Evaluation

This chapter attempted to show that the dependent variable effects predicted in Chapter 8 would be greater among those issue sets that were more controversial. The results of this chapter show that the effect of controversial material on perceptions of bias is present in some cases, but is not clear-cut in its effects.

The answer to the lack of significant change—or change in an unexpected direction—may lie with subject personality and human nature. These are not factors to take lightly. The two previous chapters argued that human reaction to the newscaster who appears in the experimental videotapes had some effect on subjects' perceptions of

his competence. Subjects seemed to be fond of the newscaster, and therefore evaluated him more highly than anticipated, considering the bias introduced in the script and video with which he was performing. At the same time, subjects seemed to rate his accuracy lower than media in general, an apparent effect of his young age. Both of these are personal reactions to the presentation, not necessarily foreseeable in the planning of experiments to run and variables to test.

The selection of subject matter for this experiment was not random. Three issues were selected to test variations in the controversial nature of the ideas presented, as well as the ability represent the issue both visually and in written form. Those differences in the issues chosen could affect the outcome of the experiments in the manner found.

The first of the issues that could generate the observed outcome is the patriotism issue. This is not a controversial issue. It was included to test the original genesis for the research, regarding the propriety of newscasters wearing patriotic pins and other regalia on the air. It is highly unlikely that a large percentage of the subjects viewing the patriotism experiments were opposed to the wearing of the flag pin (as seen in all exposure levels) or the participation of the newscaster in the patriotism rally on the capitol steps (as seen in the hard exposure group). It is highly likely the subjects agreed with all that was said in each script—even those that would rate as improper, unbalanced, and entirely unfair by most journalists reckoning. The relatively high scores the patriotism treatment earned from subjects are entirely consistent with the consensus the issue shares with most people. Beyond that consensus, and far less measurable, there is a “feel good” aspect to seeing the flag of your country, hearing about people fighting for it

and the Pledge of Allegiance. That feeling can affect the outcome of the experiment as strongly as the carefully controlled variables can.

If an issue so widely embraced as showing one's patriotism and bring on a higher evaluation of media performance, than how can one as seemingly unpopular as gay marriage do seemingly the same thing? The answer could lie with the approach taken by the fictional protestors seen in the story, as well as the newscaster's role in their protest. The gay marriage issue really came of age during the course of conducting this experiment. From the state vote in Missouri on gay marriage in August 2004 to the run up to the presidential elections and the Republican focus on this issue, newscasts were filled with angry people on both sides of this issue, aiming to shout down their opponents. Those in favor of gay marriage saw hate-filled religious zealots leading the charge to deny gay couples the simple civil right afforded heterosexual partners. Those opposed to gay marriage saw an immoral lifestyle being shoved down the throats of America's cities and states. These images seem to support the "topic fatigue" argument made earlier in this chapter. Additionally, in sharp contrast to the stories aired on newscast in 2003 and 2004, came the stories as played out in the experimental video. Protestors rallied in an orderly fashion, asking for a legal change in Missouri's statutes. There was no shouting, no graphic displays, no loud demands. And though, based on the outcome of Missouri's gay marriage vote in 2004, very few taking part in the experiments would support gay marriage, most of the subjects also seemed not to object to the subject being covered in the way that it was. That satisfaction was reflected in the attitude change of the subjects who saw the gay marriage experiments.

But the reaction to the abortion experiments was neither supportive nor accepting, as seen with patriotism and gay marriage. Subjects reacted negatively to the subject matter of the reports. They found media performance of the local newscaster to be consistently unfair, inaccurate, and unbalanced and perhaps, through guilt by association, newscaster in general were also given lower evaluations than pretest levels. The reason behind this reaction may lie in a combination of the reactions to the patriotism and gay marriage experiments. First, though not as widely embraced as the American flag, most Americans (and Missourians) have a position on abortion that would allow it in many circumstances—rape, incest, the health of the mother are just a few. If the bulk of the subjects fell in line with these majority views, then the protestors depicted are on the opposite side of the issue. But that alone would not lead to the negative evaluations. Those were possibly evoked by the combination of the issue running counter to the position of most of the subjects, as well as the protests being all too familiar to those subjects. Abortion protestors, unlike gay marriage protestors, have been a regular sight on the news for more than a generation. There is no newness to their arguments, as one might find with the gay marriage protestors. And quite possibly the combination of being on the wrong side of the issue, while at the same time boring the subjects with an old argument proved to generate enough negative feelings in the subjects to earn the poor evaluations.

Chapter 10: Ideological and Experiential Effects

Patterns have emerged from the data presented in the previous chapters, patterns that show a different level of effect on those subjects in the center. For all subjects, changes in the independent variable of the video exposure had slight to no impact on the outcome of the experiment, as did the subject matter depicted in those videos. But for those subjects at the extremes—right or left, high or low—those effects did not assert themselves as strongly as was predicted by the experimental hypotheses. A much stronger “inertia” effect appeared to come from preset notions of media performance, learned over time, as well a similar learned pattern of trust and respect for local newscasters. However, those subjects in the middle of most experimental groups—those without strong ideological or other set preferences—did seem to exhibit more of an effect in the dependent variables. The ideological centrists then, are an interesting group to study further. They come to the experiment without strong ideological views. In fact, they seem to arrive without many pre-existing views at all. So, unlike those subjects at the stronger ends of the ideological spectrum, they are more able to be swayed by what they see.

This assumption is based on the notion that ideology and the degree of experience with media exposures may “set” the perception levels of the subjects. It is possible to expect those with certain ideological views to have perceptual screening in place that would deflect some unexpected media effects, while emphasizing others. And those with long experience as media consumers would have an established expectation of performance by the media. A perceptual screen similar to the ideological variety could

remove dissonant media messages before the subject can acknowledge them. But centrist subjects may lack many of those screens, leaving them more open to experimental effects.

A Three-Way Analysis of Ideological Effects

In contrast to the conservative-liberal split in Chapter 7, subjects for this analysis are assigned to the conservative, middle, or liberal group for analysis. First this allows the analysis to isolate subjects who are more strongly conservative or liberal and measure their reactions more fully. And more importantly, the addition of a “middle” group allows the analysis to isolate those subjects to see effects particular to them. Subject positions are determined by the self-defined ideological identification from the pretest, combined with the other ideological screening pretest questions to verify the self-identification. Subjects were asked to place themselves on a seven-point scale, with 1 being the most conservative and 7 the most liberal. Two additional questions asked subjects to give their opinions of the proper role and size of government. Those who preferred a small, limited government were also assigned to the conservative group, while those who preferred a larger, more powerful government were grouped with the liberals. Those subjects who had conflicting answers were placed in the group which matched two of their three answers. And those who were in the middle of two or more of the assessments went to the centrist group.

Subjects who fell into the conservative ratings were assigned to the conservative group (N = 79), those who were roughly in the center ideological went into the centrist

group (N= 59), while those in the liberal range were assigned to the liberal group (N = 104).

The results of the examination of the ideological variables are shown in Table 10-1. A score of 1 is the most positive. The media fairness, media accuracy, and media balance indices are shown for each ideological group. The analysis begins as in prior chapters with indices for the local newscaster. This rating measures most closely what subjects saw in their videotape presentations. All subjects from all experimental groups are combined to show the ideological differences in an aggregate manner. Those who did not see the experimental videotapes are omitted from the specific opinion analyses.

Table 10-1: Media Indices by Ideology

	Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness	
Conservative	.561
Centrist	.655
Liberal	.594
Accuracy	
Conservative	.602
Centrist	.661
Liberal	.606
Balance	
Conservative	.434
Centrist	.521
Liberal	.466

The analysis clearly supports the supposition that the centrists are those who will demonstrate the real difference in the effects of the experiment. The statistically significant higher index, when compared to both conservatives and liberals, indicates a more positive perception of media performance in each case. Though there appears to be

a slight difference between them, conservatives and liberals are not different from each other by any statistical test.

Why A Softer Center?

The assumption for the outcome of this analysis was that, due to the overall conservative approach the newscaster took on two of three treatments, the liberal subjects were most likely to rate media performance more negatively post experiment, the conservative subjects less negatively, and the centrist subjects fall in between. But in fact, the data point to a wholly different outcome. Why would those centrist subjects see such a rosy picture of the media after the experiment? And why would conservative and liberal subjects rate the media about the same?

The likely answer to the second question may help with the first. Those subjects further to the ends of the ideological spectrum carry with them an internal history of media interactions filtered through their own political point of view. While the conservative subjects may have, on average, seen news presentations during the experiment that were more sympathetic to their point of view, it is very likely their lifelong experience with news media bias has been—in their own perceptions—just the opposite. Studies show a widely-held belief in a liberal media bias, supported by the party identification and voting pattern of many journalists. In addition, conservatives often have specific stories with which to support that view. Likewise, liberal subjects may have seen what they perceived as a more conservatively biased news presentation during the experiments, which ran counter to their general perception that the media do a fair and balanced job. So, conservatives come to the experiment with a fairly negative sense of

media trust and are slightly buoyed by the experience. Liberals come with a somewhat neutral view of media performance and are affected slightly negatively by the experimental exposure. Thus, both groups of subjects end up at nearly the same level of media trust post-experiment. But not so for the centrists. By definition, they come to the experiment less cued to political biases in media output—they are simply less interested and passionate about ideological differences perceived in media performance. Ideological bias is both less noticeable and less important to them. That lack of discernment carries into the experimental setting, where the subjects would be far less critical of bias in the presentation. This puts them in a position where the positivity factors discussed earlier can have more of an effect. The attention of the experiment, the likeability of the newscaster, and the generally solid performance on all but the test story helps build a more positive view of the media during the experiment. That improved view becomes evident in this analysis.

Perceptions of Fairness

An analysis of the individual bias indicators across all three measurement areas reveals more detail of the ideological differences in subjects and how they perceived the media performance. Of particular interest is the difference between subjects' pretest notions of media fairness, accuracy, and balance, and their perceptions of the local newscaster in the test videos. That change can tell the most about the impact of the experimental exposures and how successful they were to move the subjects from their long-seated beliefs on media performance. If there is a great deal of negative change in the perceptions of the newscaster, then the subjects are more easily swayed to change

beliefs than has become apparent. But if the change is minimal, then the now-predicted belief inertia is holding their perceptions steady through even the most outrageous examples of bias.

Beginning with changes in the subjects' views on the fairness of media, there appears to be a sizeable drop for all subjects, regardless of ideology, in index values from pretest to posttest regarding the media in general. Table 10-2 shows the change in indices compared across pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same ideological group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 10-2: Change in Indices: Fairness

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Fairness		
Conservative	<i>-.082</i>	<i>-.080</i>
Centrist	<i>-.085</i>	<i>-.006</i>
Liberal	<i>-.068</i>	<i>-.050[†]</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

All subjects had a decrease in perception of general media fairness, but the indices are similar enough that there is little difference between the ideological groups and their changes in attitudes pretest to posttest on the media in general. But the change from pretest general to posttest newscaster-based perceptions is more interesting. Conservative and liberal subjects had, statistically, about the same drop in trust for the local newscaster. But the centrists had no significant change.

These analyses came with all treatment groups taken in aggregate, so that conservative, centrist, and liberal subjects have their views averages for the final media fairness indices. But since two of the scenarios lean right (abortion and patriotism), and

the other (gay marriage) leans left, some ideological effects may cancel each other out in the final analysis. So leaving the centrists out, and building two new, super-ideological groups of all but the most central subjects, it is possible to compare conservative and liberal subjects' views on their respective issues. Table 10-3 shows the relative change in indices pretest to posttest for those groups of ideologues. With the additional weak conservative and liberal leaners included, the ideological groups separate considerably on the aggregate issues. Significant differences between indices in the same ideological group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 10-3: Change in Indices by Subject Ideology

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Fairness- All Issues		
Conservative	<i>-.120</i>	<i>-.071</i>
Liberal	<i>-.050</i>	<i>-.039</i>
Fairness- Conservative Issues		
Conservative	<i>-.093</i>	<i>-.085</i>
Liberal	<i>-.144</i>	<i>-.091</i>
Fairness- Liberal Issue		
Conservative	<i>-.190</i>	<i>-.119</i>
Liberal	<i>+.040</i>	<i>+.053</i>

But even more interesting is the difference in opinion change when the separate ideological groupings are examined on the liberal and conservative issues separately. Statistically significant differences between the pairs are shown in bold. Conservatives remain negative in their opinion change on both the conservative and liberal issues, but

that drop in media trust is greater on the liberal issues. And liberals show the biggest change of all. While exceedingly negative in their view of media performance in the conservative issues, the liberal subjects actually shift significantly positive in their perception of media performance on the liberal issues. This difference between the ideological groups reveals effects the aggregate analysis masked. That revelation can help explain how media views in general shift little in the case of crises of bias, while individual views can shift wildly. On a national scale, individual opinion change is often drowned out by the sheer size of the audience reaction to the good or bad job the media do.

Perceptions of Accuracy

As seen in prior chapters, all subjects, on average, statistically improved their view of media accuracy from pretest to posttest. Table 10-4 shows that trend held true with subjects regardless of their ideological perspective. Conservatives and liberals changed their views about the same extent. But the centrists were much kinder to the local newscaster and media as a whole, significantly increasing their perception of accuracy following the experiments.

Table 10-4: Change in Indices: Accuracy

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Accuracy		
Conservative	<i>+.117</i>	<i>+.187</i>
Centrist	<i>+.211</i>	<i>+.269</i>
Liberal	<i>+.142</i>	<i>+.178</i>

This view can again be divided more dramatically by ideology to show the effects of the various experiments on subjects of the same and opposite views. Table 10-5 divides

subjects as before by leaving out the most centrists subjects and combining the strong and weak leaning partisans into their own groups.

Table 10-5: Change in Indices by Subject Ideology

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Accuracy- All Issues		
Conservative	<i>+.129</i>	<i>+.177</i>
Liberal	<i>+.162</i>	<i>+.214</i>
Accuracy- Conservative Issues		
Conservative	<i>+.141</i>	<i>+.140</i>
Liberal	<i>+.080</i>	<i>+.147</i>
Accuracy- Liberal Issue		
Conservative	<i>+.164</i>	<i>+.218</i>
Liberal	<i>+.210</i>	<i>+.230</i>

In this analysis, while the differences pretest to posttest are statistically significant for each comparison, the differences between ideologies are not. Statistically significant differences between the pairs are shown in bold. There appears to be only one measurable difference in perceptions of accuracy based on the ideology of the subject in conjunction with the ideological leaning of the experimental exposure. As noted in other examinations of the perceptions of accuracy, the experimental material did not contain any inaccuracies. And the subjects are perceiving none.

Perceptions of Balance

The final individual analysis of the elements of media trust once again reinforces the notion that the centrist subjects have a less critical view of media bias. As with the measurements of perceptions of accuracy throughout this study, all subjects found the media and the local newscaster to be more balanced, on average, after experimental exposure. Table 10-6 shows that trend once again. Significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by t -test are shown in italics.

Table 10-6: Change in Indices: Balance

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Balance		
Conservative	<i>+.081[†]</i>	<i>+.091</i>
Centrist	<i>+.165</i>	<i>+.164</i>
Liberal	<i>+.101</i>	<i>+.081[†]</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

Conservative and liberal subjects exhibit approximately the same change in attitude as each other. The mean evaluation of general media accuracy within each group rose by about 10 percent from pretest to posttest periods. The local newscaster appears to enjoy about the same increase in positive perceptions by subjects in those groups. But once again, the centrists show the largest increase in positive evaluation of both the media in general and the local newscaster, nearly twice the increase shown by the two other ideological groups.

When dividing subjects by ideology for comparison across liberal and conservative issues, strong differences once again emerge in Table 10-7. Statistically

significant differences within the same ideological group are shown by italics, and between the pairs in the same comparison group are shown in bold.

Table 10-7: Change in Indices by Subject Ideology

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Balance- All Issues		
Conservative	<i>+.131</i>	<i>+.099</i>
Liberal	<i>+.085</i>	<i>+.085</i>
Balance- Conservative Issues		
Conservative	<i>+.141</i>	<i>+.141</i>
Liberal	<i>+.130</i>	<i>+.036</i>
Balance- Liberal Issue		
Conservative	<i>-.071</i>	<i>-.089</i>
Liberal	<i>+.190</i>	<i>+.210</i>

While the change from pretest to posttest remains significant for each ideological subgroup, the more interesting perception change between conservatives and liberals once again surfaces. Liberals are roundly positive in their attitude change toward the media in general and the newscaster for both the conservative and liberal issues. But the conservative subjects flip their view between the conservative and liberal issue experiments. When viewing the two experiments with a conservative slant, the conservative subjects found the news media and the local newscaster to be more balanced than their pretest perceptions. But when viewing the liberal issue experiment, those conservative subjects found the media and newscaster both to be significantly less balanced.

Throughout all the individual analyses of the factors of media trust, the centrists rate the media more positively than their counterparts further to each end of the ideological spectrum. With the centrists removed from the analysis, the ideologues return to seeing some differences based on their ideology. This consistent demonstration by the centrists of a less critical evaluation of the media, even after seeing stories clearly politically biased in their presentation, does seem to confirm that those centrist subjects are far less sensitive to the ideological content of their news—even when the topic is political itself. This concept leads to the conclusion that media are hard pressed to please viewers who bring stronger ideological views to their news consumption, no matter on which end of the spectrum those views fall.

Experiential Expectations

Unlike with the ideological differences, pretest analysis showed there was some difference in media perceptions based on educational level. Those subjects who did not attend college were far more positive in their evaluations of media performance on the pretest. The development of critical thinking skills that is encouraged in the college setting helps make those who take part in higher education much more critical consumers of many “products”—including mass media output. Those who do not develop those critical thinking skills as fully often will accept what is presented, rather than question it. The pretest phase bore this theory out, with those without higher education being far less critical. In the posttest phase, the expectation is that those with college education would be more perceptive of bias inserted in the news break content, and more likely to critically analyze that content and attribute lower perceptions of fairness, accuracy, and

balance to the newscaster and the news media. Those who do not have the more sophisticated critical thinking skills will be less likely to notice the bias, and less likely to connect what they see in the newsbreak with poor newscaster or news media performance.

For the experiential analysis, differences in the actual content of the news break should not make a difference in degree of outcome. Therefore, the combined analysis of all exposure and treatment groups should detect subtler changes than those that might be masked in the ideological part of the experiment due to the direction of the bias in stories. That could lead to an easier finding of statistically significant results in the experiential analysis.

Experience Matters—In Part

Because people gain in their ability to be more discerning as they age and achieve more education, the common sense expectation is that the most experienced subjects would be the most critical of the three groups. Those subjects have longer experience as media consumers and can put that experience to use more quickly evaluating what they see and hear. Conversely, the subjects with the least experience should be the ones who, on average, are the least critical of media performance. By the same reasoning as used with setting expectations of the more experienced subjects, those low experience subjects have much less media consumption experience and may approach what they see in a more naïve, accepting manner. Those subjects in the medium experience group would then fall somewhere in between the high and low groups.

To test those assumptions, a new variable describing differences in the educational and experience was developed, combining the age and education demographics of the subjects. Those adult subjects under the age of 35, except those with advanced college degrees, were placed in the low experience group (N = 78). Those subjects aged 55 and older, or with advanced college degrees went into the high experience group (N = 79). All others went into the middle experience group (N= 85).

Using this new division of subjects, the results were analyzed for changes pretest and posttest. The results show that a division of subjects by life experience—age and education—produces a less critical center, just as when subjects were divided by ideology. Table 10-8 shows the differences in the mean post-experimental evaluation of the newscaster those subjects in the low, medium, and high experience groups. The table displays the corresponding media fairness, media accuracy, and media balance indices for each experience group, as well as for the control subjects. All subjects from all experimental groups are combined to show the experience differences in an aggregate manner.

Table 10-8: Media Indices by Experience

	Posttest Perception of Newscaster
Fairness	
Low Experience	.554
Medium Experience	.628
High Experience	.608
Accuracy	
Low Experience	.584
Medium Experience	.648
High Experience	.621
Balance	
Low Experience	.448
Medium Experience	.538
High Experience	.412

The only statistically significant difference was in the evaluation of media balance. There, the medium experience subjects were not only significantly more positive in their evaluations of the media than the other subjects, but were the only group to give a positive score. All other experience groups yielded an index below .500.

Once Again, A Softer Center

As seen with the analysis of the ideological differences in the subjects, those in the middle of the experience spectrum appear to be the least demanding of the subjects when it comes to their expectations of media fairness, accuracy, and balance. Among the ideological groups, the softness in the middle could come from a lack of political motivation to be actively involved in things ideological. For those subjects in the middle in terms of life experience, the explanation for their kindness to the media may come from a similar source. While the most experienced subjects appear to have been able to bring their educational and life experience more critically to bear on the media

performance they were viewing, the medium experience subjects did not share the same capabilities. Likewise, while the low experience subjects lacked that ability as well, their negative evaluations of media and newscaster performance could stem from a lack of sophistication as viewers and listeners that leads to a more skeptical approach to news consumption. In the same way that a wealth of life experience can bring on an educated skepticism, a dearth of life experience can bring on a dogmatic skepticism that manifests itself in much the same way. Those with less formal education have not learned to be skeptical consumers of news in an organized fashion. But their lack of formal education does not prevent them from being skeptical in their own way. Often, the trappings of those things established are not to be trusted. Whether it be government, big business, or the traditional media, these monolithic institutions cannot be fully relied upon to present the truth.

Those subjects in the middle of the experiential spectrum suffer, in a way, from a lack of skepticism both formal and dogmatic. These subjects have received enough education, formally or otherwise, to lose a distrust of the established order. But that education has not carried them far enough to be skeptical in an organized, logical manner. This position in the middle ground between ignorance and sophistication leaves these subjects more likely to find the news media as a whole, as well as what was presented in the experimental exposures, to be adequate. These medium experience consumers are not as selective as their more experience counterparts, nor as suspicious as their less-experienced cousins. And somewhere between selectivity and suspicion lies satisfaction.

Perceptions of Fairness

Turning to the individual evaluative criteria across all measurement points reveals some further insights into the differences subject experience had on the experiments' outcomes. Table 10-9 shows the change in indices compared across pretest and posttest questions. Significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics.

Table 10-9: Change in Indices: Fairness

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Fairness		
Low	<i>-.095</i>	<i>-.096</i>
Medium	<i>-.074</i>	<i>-.050</i>
High	<i>-.075</i>	<i>-.017</i>

While all groups showed a statistically significant drop from pretest to posttest in their evaluations of the news media in general, and all but the high experience group did the same for their change in perception of the local newscaster compared to pretest views of the media, there is no difference based on experience in terms of the magnitude of that change. But the fairness dimension should be the easiest to evaluate for the subjects, because the bias in the video presentations for the experiments is so obvious to even the most casual viewer. The negative change in evaluations of fairness is expected across all groups. The added skepticism of the low experience groups and the added sophistication of the high experience groups could not decrease the perception of fairness any more than the experimental conditions could.

Just as a division of subjects by personal ideology and treatment ideology yielded an analysis that saw the finer points of the differences in perceptions at differing ends of

the political spectrum, a similar division of subjects by age and educational experience was also by insightful. The subjects were split first by education, with those who had not graduated from college in the low education group, and those who had college or graduate degrees in the high education group. The subjects were also divided based on their chronological age, with those under 45 in the “Young” classification and those 55 and over in the “Old” classification. Those 45 to 54 were intentionally excluded from the analysis to magnify the differences in the groups and to try to even the numbers in each subdivision.

Table 10-10 shows the results of the analysis, displayed as the difference in indices for each comparison. Those differences between pretest and posttest evaluations that are statistically significant are indicated in italics, while those significant differences between the young/old subdivisions are shown in bold. In judging fairness, the trend is generally to find the media and the newscaster less fair after viewing the experimental video. But those old subjects with low education actually found both the media and the newscaster significantly more fair after the experimental exposure. There is no significant difference between young and old subjects with high education.

Table 10-10: Change in Indices by Subject Experience

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Fairness- Low Education	-0.053	-0.017
Young	<i>-0.085</i>	<i>-0.052</i>
Old	<i>+0.111</i>	<i>+0.139</i>
Fairness- High Education	-0.096	-0.066
Young	<i>-0.131</i>	<i>-0.100</i>
Old	<i>-0.112</i>	<i>-0.078</i>

This analysis does indeed reveal some hidden differences not seen when analyzing the data with the combined “Experience” variable. The overwhelming reversal in perception by the older, low education subjects helps support the prediction that the younger subjects would be more skeptical. They appear to be so for this variable, while their older counterparts may have lost some of that skepticism, without at the same time gaining the sophistication other, more educated older subjects may possess.

Perceptions of Accuracy

Other analyses have not shown then measurement of perceptions of accuracy by the subjects to offer another measure of bias. The early assumption was that since the presentations were by and large accurate, the questions relating to accuracy might be able to tap a deeper level of skepticism in the subjects. In fact, those differences as predicted earlier appear to be visible in Table 10-11. Significant differences between indices in the pretest to posttest comparisons at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test are shown in italics, while statistically significant differences between experience levels are shown in bold.

Table 10-11: Change in Indices: Accuracy

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Accuracy		
Low	<i>+.117</i>	<i>+.187</i>
Medium	<i>+.211</i>	<i>+.269</i>
High	<i>+.142</i>	<i>+.178</i>

While all groups rate the media and local newscaster more favorably following the experimental exposure, the medium experience group does change its mean opinion the

most positively. Its members rated the general media 50 percent higher than the high experience group, and nearly twice as high as the increase the low experience group saw. The pattern is similar for the local newscaster.

Why would the medium experience subjects find the media and newscaster so much more accurate than the other groups after seeing the experiment? The answer may lie with the other groups. Remembering that there were no inaccuracies in any of the reports, all groups should have seen the experimental video as accurate. And they did. In fact, all saw the accuracy there as enough of a stimulus to improve their opinions of the accuracy of the media in general, not just the local newscaster. But the high and low experience groups gave the media (and local newscaster) a less positive evaluation than the medium experience group. Perhaps the bias seen in the news presentation raised some logical doubt about overall accuracy that appeared in the evaluation of accuracy. Those with stronger analytical skills—the high experience group—should have been most likely to make the leap from finding plentiful bias to assuming inherent inaccuracy. In the same manner, among the low experience subjects, that same observation of bias may have raised enough healthy skepticism about the motivation of the media among enough subjects to keep the evaluations from improving quite as much as the medium experience subjects saw. Those medium experience subjects, with neither a basic skepticism nor a trained analytical approach to doubt, were able to give credit for an accurate report without questioning either motivation or basic skill levels of the media and the newscaster.

As with the comparisons for the fairness dimension, the division of the experience variable back into its age and education components yields additional details for analysis.

Table 10-12 shows those comparisons in the same fashion as Table 10-10.

Table 10-12: Change in Indices by Subject Experience

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Accuracy- Low Education	<i>+.162</i>	<i>+.181</i>
Young	<i>+.131</i>	<i>+.165</i>
Old	<i>+.227</i>	<i>+.291</i>
Accuracy- High Education	<i>+.166</i>	<i>+.202</i>
Young	<i>+.158</i>	<i>+.166</i>
Old	<i>+.183</i>	<i>+.282</i>

All groups of subjects rate accuracy higher after experimental exposure. But, just as with fairness, the older subjects in the low education group are much less critical of the media and the newscaster than the others. Their perception of both the newscaster and media in general is significantly higher than the younger subjects. In fact, the older subjects with the higher education also lean toward this trend. There is statistical significance in the difference between their evaluation of the newscaster and the younger, more highly educated subjects, though the change in perception for news in general falls just short of significance.

As with the older, less educated subjects for fairness, there appears to be a lack of both sophistication and skepticism in the viewing habits of these subjects. They are generally accepting of what they see on television, and pleased with the work done by both the newscasters and the news media in general.

Perceptions of Balance

Finally, subjects in their respective groups were asked to evaluate the balance of both the news media in general and the local reporter. In this analysis, the lowest experience subjects were significantly less critical than the medium and high experience subjects. Table 10-13 shows the significant differences between indices in the same exposure group at the .05 level of α as determined by *t*-test in italics.

Table 10-13: Change in Indices: Balance

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Balance		
Low	<i>+.147</i>	<i>+.106</i>
Medium	<i>+.098</i>	<i>+.107</i>
High	<i>+.073</i>	<i>+.087[†]</i>

[†]Significant at the .10 level of α

The difference here may be once again due to the higher experience group members' abilities to be more discerning of the media performance and to evaluate that performance in a more generalizable way to the other skills the media possess. But low experience subjects may have a more difficult time deciding what "balance" is as it relates to what they have seen, and may rely on other factors to influence their evaluations.

Interestingly, there were no statistically significant differences between the posttest view of the media in general and the posttest view of the newscaster. Unlike the positivity seen for him in other segments of the experiment, subjects saw his balance as basically the same as the media in general.

But the subdivision of the experience variable did yield some additional significant differences. Table 10-14 shows those differences.

Table 10-14: Change in Indices by Subject Experience

	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of general media	Change in pretest perception of general media to posttest perception of local newscaster
Balance-		
Low Education	+ <i>.116</i>	+ <i>.086</i>
Young	+ <i>.147</i>	+ <i>.109</i>
Old	+ <i>.146</i>	+ <i>.167</i>
Balance-		
High Education	+ <i>.117</i>	+ <i>.112</i>
Young	+ <i>.086</i>	+ <i>.039</i>
Old	+ <i>.174</i>	+ <i>.250</i>

In three of the four evaluative areas, the older subjects were, once again, kinder to the media and the newscaster than the younger subjects. Interestingly, this analysis shows the high education, older subjects as the most kind. Their changes in evaluation were significantly higher than the changes of the younger subjects. The change in newscaster perception among the older, low education subjects is also significantly higher than the younger subjects. That change is much more expected than the one recorded among the more educated subjects. The other analyses of fairness and accuracy seemed to confirm the hypothesis that the older subjects with less education were happy with the status quo and not selective in their news habits. But the older subjects with more education should have exhibited a more sophisticated taste in news presentation. Likewise, they should have been able to define “balance” in some way that would allow them to evaluate the experimental videos negatively. This appears not to have happened. One possible explanation is the newscaster positivity factor discussed in previous chapters. There was, across all groups, a certain fondness for the local newscaster. That fondness could not have come from prior experience with this newscaster, since he was not known on local television at the time of the experiments. Older subjects, however, may find great appeal

in his youthful appearance and good looks—perhaps like a child or grandchild would have. This effect might help explain why the newscaster evaluation would increase more than the general media evaluation for the older, less educated subjects.

Experimental Effects and Experience

In addition to the data considered above, there is one other consideration that comes when dividing the subjects by life experience. The most experienced subjects may have reacted to the process of the experiment much differently than the others due to their personal experiences with media. Seeing those local stories that played before and after then experimental political story may have evoked years of good—or bad—memories of local media performance. If those memories were good ones—as research shows they often are when it comes to local television media—they could have transferred some of that positive feeling to the experimental news product the subjects were viewing, giving them an overall more positive evaluation of the news media than they displayed during the pretest questioning. Also, as noted in the changes in perceptions of balance, they appear to have found a young man with whom they are comfortable. His evaluation is uniformly positive, suggesting that he was seen as an ideal newscaster in the eyes of the more experienced subjects. Perhaps he reminded them of someone they had admired before. Perhaps he just fit the stereotype of a good anchorman. With either possibility, as well as others that could conjure positive evaluations, the local newscaster may have benefited from the years of positive local television news viewing experience these older subjects brought to the experiments.

Content or Contempt?

This analysis of the data, both from ideological and experiential perspective, seems to show that the subjects who came to the experiment with a more sophisticated or suspicious view of the media were more negative in their evaluations, while those who came with a simplistic set of analytical skills or disinterested point of view were more positive.

This evaluation is consistent with the common understanding of the perceptual screening most people use when viewing political or other information that could potentially come in conflict with their previously held beliefs. Those perceptual screens are strong, and the likelihood of one exposure changing personal opinions is low. The lack of strong changes in opinion among the subjects—even those who saw the most biased of newscast presentations—is also consistent with this notion of a perceptual screen preventing the subjects from experiencing drastic opinion changes.

The data show an interesting predicament for news media practitioners. Those news consumers willing to pay the most attention to the media messages are least likely to receive it in the way intended, paying little attention to any message that might break through perceptual screening. Those least educated or least attentive seem to be the most likely to receive the messages fully, though the processing of those messages will be less than sophisticated.

Chapter 11: A Fleeting Frame in a Lifetime of Moving Images

Should a tiny piece of metal and paint, less than a quarter of a square inch in size, have caused worries over media bias from one coast to the other in the fall of 2001? The dispute started over the wave of patriotism that spread across the nation in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Some journalists, including this author, worried the wearing of an American flag lapel pin by on-air newscasters would send a strong signal of bias to some viewers—bias of support for the current administration and its developing policies to deal with terrorism. Journalists did not want viewers to think they had taken an ideological side in public policy and discourse. Critics argued that didn't matter, that the showing of patriotism through the display and use of the American flag was what was important. Those critics wanted the media to take a side—the American side—in the growing worldwide conflict over how to deal with 21st Century terrorism. And they wanted media viewers to know which side their newscasters were on.

But what no one argued at the time is that the viewers might not notice the flag pin at all—at least not in terms of how they viewed the impartiality or bias of their newscasters. Journalists assumed viewers watched the newscasts with fierce intensity—picking up every subtle detail of visual and written information. Those journalists—the good ones, anyway—craft each word of their stories as if they are as valuable as gold. News photographers—again, the good ones—compose each shot of video like a masterpiece. And newscasters give birth to each word like children, sending them out to the unseen audience for each to be received, recorded, and remembered. But television news viewers have a different way of watching the news. They come to the screen with

preconceived notions of what they will see. Some picture a liberal media elite transmitting messages that must be filtered and processed before they can be received. Others see a source of news that has already been “processed” by people they trust—their local news team. But very few—perhaps none—are scrutinizing every image and processing the details right down to, well, a lapel pin.

So while journalists may object and politicians may insist, that lapel pins are proper attire for newscasters, this research has set out to see if a pin can make a difference in how newscasters are perceived and trusted. Beyond that, this research has looked at the larger question of just what it takes to move newscaster trust in one direction or the other. Through visual and verbal clues, the examination has focused on the power of news to break through perceptual screens and reach the core of the viewer.

Isolated Exposures

This research has shown that viewers experience the media as part of a continuum of media experience, not as a finite viewing experience. Those subjects who came to the experiments had spent their lives up to that point receiving media messages via newspaper, radio, billboard, internet, skywriting, and yes, television. It is safe to say the experience was not a new one for a single participant. The act of sitting down in front of the television and turning one’s attention to a news broadcast is as familiar to most as sitting before a parent, teacher, or clergyman. That familiarity brings with it the ability for people to know what they are seeing from the moment it appears on the screen. The conventions of a newscaster sitting at a desk, reading stories, talking to other newscasters reading stories from the field, and returning to the studio again is one understood by

nearly everyone. There are no mysteries to unravel for the television news viewer—no program to follow so one can know the rules of the game. This saves time for news consumers, because they know what to expect when they watch. But there's a price to be paid for this familiarity. For those who watch regularly become lulled by the sameness of the product and find themselves prone to inattention and intellectual shortcuts. Those shortcuts are ways for viewers' brains to fill in what is about to happen. The crime occurs and the police officer gives the details. The missing child returns and the parents gush their thanks to the television cameras. The Republican makes a policy statement, and the Democrat derides him. These scenes, replayed over and over on the television news, steal its dramatic power. Who carefully reads every word of a book he has already read before?

Beyond the familiarity of the news broadcast, each viewer has a system of perceptual screens that work on all media. These screens block out some messages that are dissonant with respect to one's belief structure, and let others through in a filtered manner. Politically speaking, the screens work to reinforce our trust and confidence in the politicians we support, and to block any messages that would shake that confidence. Likewise the same system of screens passes along messages that reduce members of other parties and ideologies in our eyes, keeping them from gaining stature and trust. It is a powerful system that is well understood in the literature of political science.

Along with those perceptual screens, television news viewers bring to the nightly newscast another set of beliefs surrounded by a screening mechanism. In this case, the beliefs are those carried by the news consumer about the quality of the newscasters they view and the trust—or distrust—they have for them. A long time newscaster on a popular

local station can be like an incumbent politician. The newscaster sits at the center of a system of trust and confidence. Long time experience with him and his newscast builds a strong belief in the fairness, accuracy, and balance of what he tells the viewer. Challenges to that position of trust in the form of competing newscasters from other stations trying to win new viewers are met with a bristle of perceptual screens. The “incumbent” newscaster has an incredibly high chance of retaining viewer through any challenge by the competition, just as a long incumbent politician has a very high change of re-election against all challengers.

But the television newscaster is not the perfect news delivery system. Each is human, and backed by a team of human assistants. They make mistakes, sometimes get it wrong, and sometimes insert their own personal biases. Over a length of viewing, news consumers notice this as well. Distrust can build and grow over time if a viewer perceives bias in the newscast. But this research has shown it is not an immediate process.

Short-Term Attitude Change Toward Media

This experiment explored the process whereby news consumers view and assimilate what they see in typical television news content. Each subject had a brief exposure to biased news material. Brief is the key word here, as the longest exposure—to the lapel pin in each scenario—lasted no more than four minutes for any given group. The exposure to the more severe bias—the manipulated script and video content—was much shorter. It was less than a minute for each group. That exposure had to counter, with many of the subjects, decades of experience with the mass media, including local television news. For the typical subject, those experiences had been overwhelmingly

positive before the experiment took place. Even those who came with a sense of a biased media—usually in the liberal direction—had previous good experiences with local news in most cases. So room after room full of subjects brought years of positive experiences with local television news they found to be fair, accurate, and balanced to bear on the few minutes of television they watched in an experimental setting. The weight of all that media experience gave those previously held beliefs a lot of inertia to remain right where they were when the subjects arrived.

In the experiments, the subtle clues that might suggest bias were routinely rejected. The flag pin, worn to promote patriotism for those hearing about the pledge of allegiance, the rainbow pin worn to promote gay marriage for those hearing about same sex marriage, and the pro-life pin worn to promote the anti-abortion agenda for those hearing about the abolition of abortion all had the same effect on the subjects—none at all. Perhaps the exposure was too short; perhaps the pins were consistent with what the subjects had seen on the newscasters before. Or perhaps, even with the higher than usual attention the subjects were paying to the news breaks, they were unable to associate the lapel pin on the newscaster with the controversial story being presented in the newscast. Particularly on those exposures where the stories themselves were presented in an unbiased fashion and only the lapel pin gave the visual cue of bias were there no effects seen.

Those exposures that combined the lapel pin with news copy written in a biased manner seemed to have no real effect either. Clearly, the lapel pin itself could not bring about a perception change in the subjects. And combined with bias in the news writing, the effects still seemed too subtle to make a difference in how the subjects would rate the

newscaster and the news media in general. It is possible the subjects just accepted a single story (the only one in the newsbreak that was manipulated was the controversial one on patriotism, gay marriage, or abortion) that was a little slanted in one direction. This was probably consistent with most subjects television news experience where at least part of the time the stories are not perfect, not covered right down the middle. So it can easily be expected that the subjects, bringing their viewing experience to the table, saw nothing so terribly out of the ordinary in those moderate treatments that they had to change their preconceived views of the job the news media does—especially the local media.

It was only with the most severe example of bias—the actual participation of the newscaster in a public demonstration that exhibited an ideological point of view—that some of the subjects sat up and took notice. It is important to note that only *some* of the subjects noted this blatantly biased activity and presentation. For the others, the screens held their places and kept the overall perception of news media trust about where it had been before the experiment.

These results show that single exposures of bias carry very little weight in the mind of the news consumer. The “true” picture each viewer has of the news media outlets that come into play everyday is really a motion picture. Its first frame is recorded at the time the consumer begins to watch news to obtain a view of the world. Those initial impressions mean a lot, settling into an expected pattern over time. Each successive exposure adds another frame to the consumer’s internal epic, adding additional information to the overall view, but not changing it in its own fleeting time. Just as one could drop a single frame from the wrong film into another movie and most of the

audience would not notice, the same is true of news exposures. The viewers do not respond to subliminal messages. In fact, this research suggests they hardly respond to the blatant messages.

Possible Research Problems

The research is, like any other, subject to experimental error. It is possible the subjects did perceive bias from their very first glimpse of the lapel pin, yet the instruments did not record it. The sample size for the experiment is limited. Just shy of 250 people took part, with small groups of only 20 or so seeing each of the experimental treatments. Demographically, the numbers of subjects from any one age or educational group are also small. Too few minorities took part in the study to give any meaningful analysis to the role race plays in perceptions of media bias. Larger numbers of subjects could have yielded more significant results on many of the analyses where none were found.

The analysis also attempted to test three types of story content for differing effects. With the exception of some ideological differences of subjects affecting some outcomes, the content has not show itself to be significantly different in affecting perceptions of bias. More study on one content area might yield more effects. Likewise, multiple exposures would likely have an additive effect on those subjects, particularly those in the ideological or experiential middle, driving them to see more bias over time.

The addition of more subjects or the focusing of the experiments on repeated instances of bias may have revealed what these experiments did not detect—a sensitivity to media content connected directly to perceptions of bias. The results that suggest

ideology does not play a role in perceiving bias are surprising ones. The accusations of a liberal news media are increasingly more common, with those on the conservative side adding to an already long list of trespasses by self-sworn impartial journalists. Those on the left have added to their accusations of a right-leaning media, citing both increasing corporate interests in the media, as well as a growing exhibition of on-air patriotism—the very impetus for this research. Dividing the subjects' posttest results by ideological grouping did yield some small perceptions of bias when viewing those issues that leaned the other way political. The right-leaning bias in two of the three experiments did just a little to please conservative. And the one issue liberals where liberals saw an agreeable bias did move conservatives to react a bit stronger than the rest. But even the ideological differences between the two points of view were not enough to allow the bias in these presentations to change long-standing belief structures. In fact, pretest measures seemed to suggest both ideologies shared some common ground on media performance and expectations of what makes up fair, accurate, and balanced reporting.

Lessons for the Politicians and Journalists

At the beginning of this research, politician and journalists were on opposite sides of a fight over what makes a good journalist. The politicians—many of them, at least—believed a patriotic journalist was a place to start. Journalists believed that the outward showing of patriotism could only be a start down the road to a perception of bias that could undermine their longstanding role as an impartial watchdog. They stressed that any physical sign that could be taken to mean a siding with one point of view or ideology could only be taken as a sign that the newscaster was not as fair and balanced as possible.

One could surmise then, from this research, that the politicians had it right and the journalists had it wrong. The experimental evidence seems to demonstrate that if the newscasters had worn the lapel pins in the days following September 11, then very few viewers would have considered them to be biased or wrong in their actions. The experimental evidence shows that the subjects were, as a group, quite tolerant of the addition of lapel pins on the newscaster—even when that pin blatantly took the side of one of the controversial issues the newscaster was covering. So when the politicians argued that the flag lapel pin would not have much of an effect in transmitting a perception of bias to news viewers, they were right. But they were right for the wrong reason. It is not the type of pin the newscaster wears that makes it fail to draw out a perception of bias. The flag is not a nobler symbol than a rainbow or pro-life pin—not in terms of this research’s findings. The reason the flag pins could not have coaxed calls of bias post-September 11 is that they were not the norm before that time. Studies showed few newscasters wore the pins prior to the terrorist attacks. Many now no longer wear them. The exposure of the audience to the flag lapel pins was fleeting. It was only a small part of that larger media consumption picture. This research suggests anchors have a great deal of freedom—for a short time. Many viewers would write off any apparent biases that conflict with their long term perceptions of the newscaster as just aberrations. Some others would see it as confirmation of a bias they already perceived in the newscaster. In the case of a lapel pin, unless that worn symbol was associated with increased bias in the words and pictures accompanying the newscaster’s appearances, and unless those biases were present for a longer period than just a momentary exposure, the

evidence here points to no real shift in perceptions of bias among the bulk of media consumers.

Journalists, though, should not try to claim any victory from this research either. Viewers do not hang on every word, every picture they see on television. They are distracted by other stimuli, divorced from any real engagement with the newscaster and his message, and distant from the messages themselves. Journalists would be wrong to think that the smallest things they do are magnified to bigger than life-sized when captured by the television camera and shot through the ether to their ultimate destinations. But they would also be wrong to think that, over time, none of it mattered. The relatively positive impressions held by the subjects in this experiment of television news—especially local television news—were built from many years of exposure to media messages perceived as generally fair, accurate, and balanced. In fact, the general agreement by subjects of different ideologies and demographic characteristics about the job the media do shows that journalists have done at least an adequate job of training their audience members on what to expect quality journalism to be.

What Are Journalism's Real Threats?

But there are dangers for journalists in ignoring thoughts of ethics and remaining unbiased. The work of generations of journalists before them gives reporters of today the foundation from which they work. While that foundation has its cracks, it still supports a system of reporting that is widely accepted by people in this country regardless of their ideology, socioeconomic background, or personal beliefs. That foundation was built by a myriad of decisions about what was the right way to report, and what was the wrong way.

As in this experiment, few of those individual decisions made much of a difference in the overall impression news consumers had of the media. But as a collection of decisions, they have had a collective power to shape what Americans think of journalism today.

Moving from the macro to the micro then highlights the other concern for journalists. While the overall impression of the media remained relatively strong despite the experimental exposures, there were changes at the individual level. Some subjects reacted a great deal to what they had seen. But their individual changes in perception were masked by the aggregate lack of opinion change in most of the groups. Likewise, though subjects came to the experiment with a relatively positive view of the local media, some individuals among them were completely unhappy with the news they receive from television. These outliers were also masked by the larger sense of aggregate satisfaction. The signals sent by media are received by individuals, not groups or viewers or subjects. Each individual receives the signal in a slightly different manner, based on prior media experience and those internal perceptual screens. If journalists find that consumers are, even as individuals, changing their opinions from positive to negative, then a ground swell can occur that will result in ever lower perceptions of media trust. Some would say it has already begun, as evidenced by the rapid rise in popularity of the so-called “new media.” While others say that popularity is driven by the on demand aspect of the availability of the news product, some insist that this new media vehicle is one way around the stranglehold the traditional media have on news distribution. And to bring the argument full circle, most of those critics are conservatives who see the traditional media as a liberal institution that blocks the distribution of unbiased news reporting.

Further Study with the Media Trust Index

The main analytical variable used in this study, the media trust index, has potential for longitudinal study that would help reveal more patterns of media trust over longer period of time. A historical analysis of public opinion polls regarding media performance—particularly in the areas of fairness, accuracy, and balance—would yield interesting results to show the trends in media trust over the last 10, 25, 50 years or more. Because the index is easily calculated from any format of question, it is suited to compare varying survey instruments done at different points in time. Scholars and journalists alike would probably anecdotally expect a decreasing level of media trust in the modern journalism era. Calculating the media fairness index, media accuracy index, and media balance index, and combining them into the overall media trust index for those years would but hard numbers to the anecdotal evidence.

Future experimental study could use the same media trust index to compare long-term change in attitude toward media with repeated exposure. A single group of subjects, subjected to repeated exposures of the same media bias, could more readily yield the results expected in this research. The subjects would see repeated newscasts employing the same newscaster presenting the news of the day. Through repeated exposures to the same bias—perhaps a lapel pin once again—the subjects would have time for adjustments to their previously held beliefs to take hold. Different groups of subjects could see different levels of bias, each one adding more blatant and obvious signs of lack of balance and fairness. The numbers of exposures needed to change opinion significantly could be record for each level of bias exposure. It is through this sort of

running study over a considerable period of time that the media trust index measurements could show how viewers really change their opinions about television news.

The Real Ribbon of Controversy

This research began with the furor surrounding the banning of flag pins and red, white, and blue ribbons from the air in an attempt to ensure perceptions of unbiased reporting. That beginning led to the discovery of the real ribbon of controversy, the ongoing ribbon of media experiences viewers weave as they spend a lifetime in front of their television sets. The ribbon is woven from each individual experience consumers have watching the news, judging its fairness, accuracy, and balance, and recording those judgments in the fabric of the ribbon. The longer the ribbon is woven, the stronger its threads become. Individual instances of bias cannot break the ribbon or cut its fabric. Only through repeated exposures to unexpected stimuli carrying biases messages does the ribbon start to unravel. The unraveling develops slowly, and can be repaired through a return to the old norms that brought on the baseline level of media trust. Or it can continue if the level of bias changes permanently, resetting the pattern of the ribbon to a new and different one.

This research did not succeed in unraveling the ribbon most subjects brought with them to the experiments. They carried it out looking much the same as it did when they carried it in. A single exposure could only stretch and bend the ribbon a bit before it returned to shape.

Appendix

Recruiting Questionnaire—All Groups

When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative, or haven't you thought much about this?

- EXTREMELY LIBERAL
- LIBERAL
- SLIGHTLY LIBERAL
- MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
- SLIGHTLY CONSERVATIVE
- CONSERVATIVE
- EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE
- DON'T KNOW
- HAVEN'T THOUGHT MUCH

Do you think the government should provide fewer services, many more services, or continue providing services at the present level, or haven't you thought much about this?

- FEWER SERVICES; REDUCE SPENDING
- MORE SERVICES; INCREASE SPENDING
- CONTINUE AT PRESENT LEVEL
- HAVEN'T THOUGHT MUCH ABOUT THIS
- DON'T KNOW

Which of the following two statements is CLOSER to what you believe about the role of government?

- THE LESS GOVERNMENT THE BETTER
- MORE THINGS GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE DOING
- DON'T KNOW

How do you feel about the statement: "The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society."

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON'T KNOW

How do you feel about the statement: “This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON’T KNOW

How much of the time do you think you can trust the media to report the news fairly?

- JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
- MOST OF THE TIME
- ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
- ALMOST NEVER
- DON’T KNOW

How do you feel about this statement: “The news media usually get the facts straight.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON’T KNOW

How do you feel about this statement: “The news media are careful not to be biased.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON’T KNOW

How do you feel about this statement: “The news media are too sympathetic to victims.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON’T KNOW

How do you feel about this statement: “The news media provide criticism that improves government and industry.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY
- DON'T KNOW

Post Questionnaire-Patriotism Treatment Groups

1. *Do you think the newscaster reports the news fairly?*

- JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
- MOST OF THE TIME
- ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
- ALMOST NEVER

2. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster gets the facts straight.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

3. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is careful not to be biased.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

4. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is too critical of the United States.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

5. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster provides criticism that keeps political leaders from doing their jobs.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

6. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster provides criticism that keeps the military prepared.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT

- DISAGREE STRONGLY
7. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster protects democracy.”
- AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY
8. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is unpatriotic.”
- AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY
9. Do you think newscasters report the news fairly?
- JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
 - MOST OF THE TIME
 - ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
 - ALMOST NEVER
10. How do you feel about this statement “Newscasters get the facts straight.”
- AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY
11. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are careful not to be biased.”
- AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY
12. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too critical of the United States.”
- AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

13. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps political leaders from doing their jobs.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

14. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps the military prepared.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

15. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters protect democracy.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

16. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are unpatriotic.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

17. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too sympathetic to victims.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

18. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps legislators responsive to their constituencies.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

19. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are supportive of the gay lifestyle.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

20. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support traditional marriage and family values.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

21. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters have overblown the gay marriage debate.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

22. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are not critical of doctors who perform abortions.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

23. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support equal rights for women.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

24. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report fairly on the pro-choice movement.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

25. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters give the true facts about abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

26. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report about alternatives to abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

Post Questionnaire-Gay Marriage Treatment Groups

1. Do you think the newscaster reports the news fairly?
 - JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
 - MOST OF THE TIME
 - ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
 - ALMOST NEVER

2. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster usually gets the facts straight.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

3. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is careful not to be biased.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

4. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is too sympathetic to victims.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

5. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster provides criticism that keeps legislators responsive to their constituencies.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

6. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is supportive of the gay lifestyle.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

7. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster supports traditional marriage and family values.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

8. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster has overblown the gay marriage debate.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

9. Do you think newscasters report the news fairly?

- JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
- MOST OF THE TIME
- ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
- ALMOST NEVER

10. How do you feel about this statement “Newscasters get the facts straight.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

11. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are careful not to be biased.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

12. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too critical of the United States.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

13. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps political leaders from doing their jobs.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

14. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps the military prepared.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

15. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters protect democracy.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

16. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are unpatriotic.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

17. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too sympathetic to victims.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

18. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps legislators responsive to their constituencies.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

19. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are supportive of the gay lifestyle.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

20. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support traditional marriage and family values.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

21. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters have overblown the gay marriage debate.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

22. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are not critical of doctors who perform abortions.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

23. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support equal rights for women.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

24. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report fairly on the pro-choice movement.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

25. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters give the true facts about abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

26. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report about alternatives to abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

Post Questionnaire-Abortion Treatment Groups

1. Do you think the newscaster reports the news fairly?
 - JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
 - MOST OF THE TIME
 - ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
 - ALMOST NEVER

2. How do you feel about this statement “The newscaster gets the facts straight.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

3. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is careful not to be biased.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

4. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster is not critical of doctors who perform abortions.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

5. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster supports equal rights for women.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

6. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster reports fairly on the pro-choice movement.”
 - AGREE STRONGLY
 - AGREE SOMEWHAT
 - NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
 - DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
 - DISAGREE STRONGLY

7. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster gives the true facts about abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

8. How do you feel about this statement: “The newscaster reports about alternatives to abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

9. Do you think newscasters report the news fairly?

- JUST ABOUT ALWAYS
- MOST OF THE TIME
- ONLY SOME OF THE TIME
- ALMOST NEVER

10. How do you feel about this statement “Newscasters get the facts straight.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

11. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are careful not to be biased.”

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- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
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12. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too critical of the United States.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
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13. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps political leaders from doing their jobs.”

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- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
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14. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps the military prepared.”

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- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

15. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters protect democracy.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

16. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are unpatriotic.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

17. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are too sympathetic to victims.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

18. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters provide criticism that keeps legislators responsive to their constituencies.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

19. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are supportive of the gay lifestyle.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

20. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support traditional marriage and family values.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

21. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters have overblown the gay marriage debate.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

22. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters are not critical of doctors who perform abortions.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

23. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters support equal rights for women.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

24. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report fairly on the pro-choice movement.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

25. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters give the true facts about abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

26. How do you feel about this statement: “Newscasters report about alternatives to abortion.”

- AGREE STRONGLY
- AGREE SOMEWHAT
- NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- DISAGREE SOMEWHAT
- DISAGREE STRONGLY

Patriotism Group – “Soft” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.

<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Road video</p>	<p>BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.</p> <p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN WAS COVERED BY SIGN-BEARING PROTESTORS TODAY.</p> <p>EACH YEAR AT THIS TIME, LEGISLATORS HOST A "RALLY DAY" ON THE MARBLE STEPS.</p> <p>THIS YEAR, GROUPS CAME TO ASK FOR SUPPORT FOR EVERY TOPIC UNDER THE SUN.</p> <p>THE LARGEST GROUP CRIED OUT FOR BETTER FUNDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.</p> <p>BUT MANY PROTESTORS ALSO ASKED MISSOURI LAWMAKERS TO REQUIRE THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE IN SCHOOLS AND MAKE FLYING THE AMERICAN FLAG AT ALL PUBLIC BUILDINGS MANDATORY.</p> <p>AN EQUALLY VOCAL GROUP WANTS THE LEGISLATURE TO BE SURE FREEDOM OF SPEECH INCLUDES THE RIGHT NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN PATRIOTIC DISPLAYS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Patriotism Group – “Moderate” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.

<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Road video</p>	<p>BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.</p> <p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN TURNED INTO A STAGE FOR FREEDOM.</p> <p>IT WAS THE ANNUAL RALLY DAY, AND WHILE MANY OF THE REGULAR PROTESTORS WERE THERE, ONE NEW GROUP MADE A NOBLE TRY TO SHOW THEIR PATRIOTIC SPIRIT.</p> <p>EVERYDAY MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WERE THERE TO ASK GOVERNOR HOLDEN AND STATE LEGISLATORS TO MAKE A BRAVE MOVE TO REQUIRE THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE IN SCHOOLS AND THE FLYING OF THE AMERICAN FLAG AT ALL PUBLIC BUILDINGS.</p> <p>GROUP LEADERS HAD TO OVERCOME RUDE SHOUTING AND GESTURES BY LIBERAL, ANTI-WAR PROTESTORS.</p> <p>BUT IN THE END, THE PATRIOTIC GROUP FELT LIKE ITS COMMON SENSE MESSAGE GOT THROUGH.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Patriotism Group – “Hard” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>School video</p>	<p>PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR.</p> <p>THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT.</p> <p>ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW.</p> <p>NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Pump/casino video</p>	<p>THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE.</p> <p>THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT.</p> <p>SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL.</p> <p>THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES.</p> <p>BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Clinic construction video</p>	<p>THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT.</p> <p>CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY.</p> <p>THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES.</p> <p>THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.</p>
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin	BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.

Road video	<p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...AND A STORY I GOT TO BE INVOLVED IN PERSONALLY.</p> <p>I JOINED REGULAR PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE AREA WHO SHOWED UP AT THE ANNUAL CAPITOL RALLY DAY TO WORK TOWARD SOME REAL PATRIOTISM FROM OUR LEGISLATORS AT THIS IMPORTANT TIME WHILE OUR NATION IS AT WAR.</p> <p>I WAS HONORED THE GROUP ASKED ME TO ASK AS EMCEE FOR ITS RALLY.</p> <p>MY FRIENDS THERE TELL ME THE FIGHT FOR THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND FLYING THE AMERICAN FLAG WON'T BE AN EASY ONE, THANKS TO A LOT OF LIBERAL, ANTI-WAR SENTIMENTS IN JEFFERSON CITY AND ACROSS MISSOURI.</p> <p>BUT AFTER MEETING THESE PEOPLE AND HEARING THEIR COMMON SENSE MESSAGE, I'M OPTIMISTIC MISSOURI CAN DO THE RIGHT THING AND PASS THIS LEGISLATION.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
Single news anchor on set wearing a red, white, and blue lapel pin	THANKS FOR WATCHING. I'LL BE BACK IN A HOUR. AND REMEMBER, LET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE KNOW YOU SUPPORT AMERICA.

Gay Marriage Group – “Soft” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin	BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.

<p>Road video</p>	<p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN WAS COVERED BY SIGN-BEARING PROTESTORS TODAY.</p> <p>EACH YEAR AT THIS TIME, LEGISLATORS HOST A "RALLY DAY" ON THE MARBLE STEPS.</p> <p>THIS YEAR, GROUPS CAME TO ASK FOR SUPPORT FOR EVERY TOPIC UNDER THE SUN.</p> <p>THE LARGEST GROUP CRIED OUT FOR BETTER FUNDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.</p> <p>BUT MANY PROTESTORS ALSO ASKED MISSOURI LAWMAKERS TO MAKE GAY MARRIAGES LEGAL IN THE STATE.</p> <p>AN EQUALLY VOCAL GROUP WANTS THE LEGISLATURE TO JOIN PRESIDENT BUSH'S CALL FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL BAN AGAINST SAME SEX MARRIAGES.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Gay Marriage Group – “Moderate” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin	BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.

<p>Road video</p>	<p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN TURNED INTO A STAGE FOR JUSTICE.</p> <p>IT WAS THE ANNUAL RALLY DAY, AND WHILE MANY OF THE REGULAR PROTESTORS WERE THERE, ONE NEW GROUP MADE A NOBLE TRY TO CHANGE BIGOTED LAWS.</p> <p>EVERYDAY MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WERE THERE TO ASK GOVERNOR HOLDEN AND STATE LEGISLATORS TO MAKE A BRAVE MOVE LIKE IN MASSACHUSETTS AND SAN FRANCISCO AND LEGALIZE SAME-SEX MARRIAGES.</p> <p>GROUP LEADERS HAD TO OVERCOME RUDE SHOUTING AND GESTURES BY RIGHT WING PROTESTORS.</p> <p>BUT IN THE END, THEY FEEL LIKE THEIR COMMON SENSE MESSAGE GOT THROUGH.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Gay Marriage Group – “Hard” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin School video	<p>PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR.</p> <p>THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT.</p> <p>ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW.</p> <p>NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.</p>
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Pump/casino video	<p>THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE.</p> <p>THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT.</p> <p>SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL.</p> <p>THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES.</p> <p>BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.</p>
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin Clinic construction video	<p>THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT.</p> <p>CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY.</p> <p>THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES.</p> <p>THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.</p>
Single news anchor on set wearing a	BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE

<p>rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Road video</p>	<p>CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN. THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD. ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE. BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...AND A STORY I GOT TO BE INVOLVED IN PERSONALLY.</p> <p>I JOINED REGULAR PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE AREA WHO SHOWED UP AT THE ANNUAL CAPITOL RALLY DAY TO WORK TOWARD SOME COMMON SENSE LEGISLATION TO LEGALIZE SAME SEX MARRIAGE IN MISSOURI. I WAS HONORED THE GROUP ASKED ME TO ASK AS EMCEE FOR ITS RALLY. MY FRIENDS THERE TELL ME THE FIGHT WON'T BE AN EASY ONE, THANKS TO A LOT OF CLOSED AND BIGOTED MINDS IN THE LEGISLATURE AND ACROSS MISSOURI. BUT AFTER MEETING THESE PEOPLE AND HEARING THEIR COMMON SENSE MESSAGE, I'M OPTIMISTIC MISSOURI CAN DO THE RIGHT THING AND PASS THIS LEGISLATION.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE. CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY. HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER. THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. I'LL BE BACK IN A HOUR. AND REMEMBER, LET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE KNOW YOU SUPPORT SAME-SEX MARRIAGE.</p>

Abortion Group – “Soft” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.

<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Road video</p>	<p>BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN. THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD. ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE. BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN WAS COVERED BY SIGN-BEARING PROTESTORS TODAY. EACH YEAR AT THIS TIME, LEGISLATORS HOST A "RALLY DAY" ON THE MARBLE STEPS. THIS YEAR, GROUPS CAME TO ASK FOR SUPPORT FOR EVERY TOPIC UNDER THE SUN. THE LARGEST GROUP CRIED OUT FOR BETTER FUNDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS. BUT MANY PROTESTORS ALSO ASKED MISSOURI LAWMAKERS TO BAN LEGAL ABORTION IN THE STATE. AN EQUALLY VOCAL GROUP WANTS THE LEGISLATURE TO JOIN PLANNED PARENTHOOD'S CALL TO BROADEN ACCESS TO LEGAL ABORTION IN MISSOURI.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS. THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE. CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY. HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER. THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Abortion Group – “Moderate” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a rainbow lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.

<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Road video</p>	<p>BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.</p> <p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...THE STATE CAPITOL LAWN TURNED INTO A STAGE FOR JUSTICE.</p> <p>IT WAS THE ANNUAL RALLY DAY, AND WHILE MANY OF THE REGULAR PROTESTORS WERE THERE, ONE NEW GROUP MADE A NOBLE TRY TO CHANGE UNJUST LAWS.</p> <p>EVERYDAY MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WERE THERE TO ASK GOVERNOR HOLDEN AND STATE LEGISLATORS TO MAKE A BRAVE MOVE AND END LEGAL ABORTIONS IN MISSOURI.</p> <p>GROUP LEADERS HAD TO OVERCOME RUDE SHOUTING AND GESTURES BY LIBERAL PROTESTORS.</p> <p>BUT IN THE END, THEY FEEL LIKE THEIR COMMON SENSE MESSAGE GOT THROUGH.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. WE'LL SEE YOU IN ONE HOUR.</p>

Abortion Group – “Hard” Treatment - Video Script

Video	Audio
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin	HELLO. I'M MIKE STRAUB AND THIS IS NEWSBREAK
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin School video	PARIS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WILL CLOSE ITS DOORS AT THE END OF THIS YEAR. THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTED TO SHUT IT DOWN AFTER STATE BUDGET CUTS AND DECLINING ENROLLMENT. ALMOST ONE-HUNDRED AND FORTY, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH GRADERS ATTEND PARIS JUNIOR HIGH NOW. NEXT YEAR, PARIS ELEMENTARY WILL EXTEND FROM PRE SCHOOL THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, WHILE HIGH SCHOOL WILL START WITH SEVENTH GRADE.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Pump/casino video	THE WATER IS SLOWLY COMING BACK ON FOR RESIDENTS IN BOONVILLE. THE CITY'S ASKING EVERYONE TO BOIL THEIR WATER THREE TO FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THEY DRINK IT. SINCE A PUMP FAILURE THURSDAY, CITY WORKERS HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET THE WATER SUPPLY BACK TO NORMAL. THE ISLE OF CAPRI CASINO STAYED OPEN DURING THE WATER EMERGENCY, BUT SWITCHED TO DISPOSABLE CUPS, PLATES AND UTENSILS IN ITS RESTAURANTS TO AVOID WASHING DISHES. BOONVILLE PUBLIC WORKS OFFICIALS SAY THE WATER SHOULD BE SAFE TO DRINK FROM THE TAP TOMORROW AFTERNOON.
Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin Clinic construction video	THE FORMER NOWELL'S GROCERY STORE ON WORLEY STREET WILL SOON BE HOME TO THE NEW COLUMBIA-BOONE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT. CONSTRUCTION CREWS SAW AWAY AT THE FIXTURES FOR THE NEW FOUR MILLION DOLLAR FACILITY. THE BUILDING DOUBLES THE SPACE THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS IN ITS CURRENT DOWNTOWN OFFICES. THE NEW DEPARTMENT WILL OPEN IN LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE.

<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Road video</p>	<p>BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESIDENTS WHO LIVE ALONG HIGHWAY 7-63 ARE A LITTLE CONCERNED WITH A NEW MO-DOT PLAN.</p> <p>THE PLAN WOULD WIDEN THE ROAD TO FOUR LANES STARTING NORTH OF 1-70 AT BIG BEAR BOULEVARD AND CONTINUE TO PRATHERSVILLE ROAD.</p> <p>ONE BOONE COUNTY COMMISSIONER SAYS MO-DOT NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT ITS PROPOSAL TO FIT THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE.</p> <p>BUT, MO-DOT AND THE CITY OF COLUMBIA SAY THEIR MAIN CONCERNS ARE TRAFFIC FLOW AND SAFETY.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Protest video</p>	<p>TURNING TO NEWS FROM JEFFERSON CITY...AND A STORY I GOT TO BE INVOLVED IN PERSONALLY.</p> <p>I JOINED REGULAR PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE AREA WHO SHOWED UP AT THE ANNUAL CAPITOL RALLY DAY TO WORK TOWARD TRYING TO CHANGE SOME OF MISSOURI'S UNJUST LAWS THAT ALLOW LEGAL ABORTION.</p> <p>I WAS HONORED THE GROUP ASKED ME TO ASK AS EMCEE FOR ITS RALLY.</p> <p>MY FRIENDS THERE TELL ME THE FIGHT WON'T BE AN EASY ONE, THANKS TO A LOT OF PEOPLE ACROSS MISSOURI WHO DON'T SEE HOW WRONG IT IS TO MURDER UNBORN CHILDREN.</p> <p>BUT AFTER MEETING THESE PEOPLE AND HEARING THEIR COMMON SENSE MESSAGE, I'M OPTIMISTIC MISSOURI CAN DO THE RIGHT THING AND PASS THIS LEGISLATION.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p> <p>Old cabin video</p>	<p>AND FINALLY, THE OLDEST HOUSE IN COLUMBIA WILL NOW HAVE A NEW ADDRESS.</p> <p>THE 186-YEAR OLD CABIN AT STEPHENS LAKE HAS TO BE MOVED PIECE BY PIECE.</p> <p>CREWS WILL REBUILD IT AT NIFONG PARK BEHIND THE BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.</p> <p>HISTORIANS ALREADY HAVE BIG PLANS FOR THE CABIN AS AN EVENT CENTER.</p> <p>THE CITY WANTS TO MOVE THE CABIN WITHIN 90 DAYS...AT A COST OF UP TO 75 THOUSAND DOLLARS.</p>
<p>Single news anchor on set wearing a pro-life lapel pin</p>	<p>THANKS FOR WATCHING. I'LL BE BACK IN ONE HOUR. AND REMEMBER, LET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE KNOW YOU SUPPORT BANNING ABORTION IN MISSOURI.</p>

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