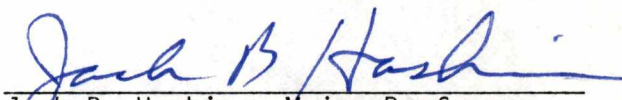
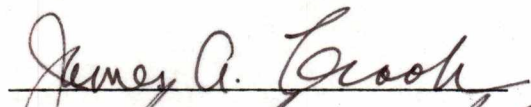
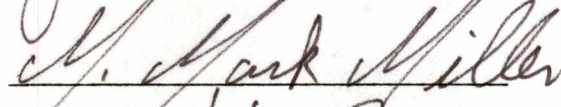
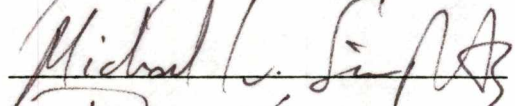


To the Graduate Council:

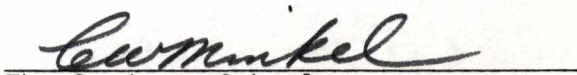
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert H. Bohle entitled "Negativism as a News Selection Predictor." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communications.


Jack B. Haskins, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Accepted for the Council:


The Graduate School

NEGATIVISM AS A NEWS SELECTION PREDICTOR

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert H. Bohle

August 1984

DEDICATION

To Sharon, Cameron, and Christopher,
for all the time we lost together.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether negativism in a news story is a significant predictor of story selection by journalists. Matched samples of journalists were given 10 news story leads. One sample saw a randomized list of positive and negative leads, while the other sample saw the leads in the same order, but the opposite positive or negative version.

Each subject rated each lead for importance, defined as whether he would select the story for tomorrow's newspaper. A 0-to-100 thermometer scale was used. All subjects also were presented all 10 pairs of positive and negative stories and asked to choose only one version for publication.

The hypotheses were that (1) journalists would rate the negative versions as more important than the positive versions in the split-sample test; (2) journalists would tend to select the negative version over the positive in the paired-version test; and (3) leads having the highest number of news values, as calculated by a news value additivity index, would receive the highest importance ratings from the journalists, and leads with low values, the lowest.

The first hypothesis was only mildly supported. Journalists rated the negative version more important on six of the 10 pairs, but only three showed significant differences. Overall, the difference between the versions was not significant.

The second hypothesis was more strongly supported. Journalists preferred the negative version over the positive in the forced-choice

situation nine times out of 10, and four preferences were statistically significant. The overall preference for the negative (63 to 37 percent) also was significant.

The third hypothesis was supported. News value additivity index scores and mean importance ratings correlated positively at +0.79 ($p < .001$).

Negativism does seem to play a part in the news selection process, though perhaps not as strong as hypothesized. Negative news may hold more information of value than positive and it may influence news selection based on that factor and not raw negativity. Further studies of on-the-job news selections may yield more helpful data.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.	1
1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.	3
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.	9
News Values	9
Influences.	13
Personal biases	14
Newsroom policy	19
Organizational structure.	21
News sources.	25
Influence of other journalists.	26
Situational variables	27
Summary	29
Negativism in the News.	30
Selection of negative news.	35
Summary	39
3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES.	41
Subjects.	41
Sample Story Leads.	43
Questionnaire and Rating Scales	46
Survey Administration	49
4. RESULTS	50
Hypothesis 1.	50
Hypothesis 2.	51
Hypothesis 3.	54
Demographics.	56
5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	66
Split-Sample Test	67
Forced-Choice Test.	71
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	77
Summary	77
Conclusions	79

CHAPTER	PAGE
LIST OF REFERENCES.	83
APPENDIX.	94
VITA.	101

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Demographics Summary.	42
2. Mean Importance Ratings of Postive and Negative Story Versions (Split Sample)	52
3. Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance, Mean Importance Rating by Story, Version.	53
4. Percentages of Positive or Negative Preference on Forced-Choice Measure	55
5. News Value Additivity Index Scores Ranked High to Low, With Mean Importance Ratings.	57
6. News Value Additivity Scores by Story Pair.	58
7. Demographic Analysis of Split-Sample Test Using Analysis of Variance	59
8. Demographics Analysis of Forced-Choice Test	64
9. News Value Additivity Index Differences Between Positive and Negative Versions with Forced-Choice Results.	75

INTRODUCTION

Trying to answer the question "what is news?" has kept journalists, media critics, and communications researchers busy for decades. Attempts at defining the characteristics of news have ranged from the classic "when man bites dog" to "what makes a reader say 'Gee Whiz'" to a variety of variables as defined by modern researchers. Clearly there is no universally accepted definition of news.

Nonetheless, journalists have attempted, at least roughly, to outline the characteristics of an event or issue that comes to be called news. To systematize their acceptance or rejection of an event as news, journalists long ago listed such necessary attributes as proximity, novelty, conflict, significance, human interest and so on. These attributes were termed "news values" in 1892 by Julian Ralph (Bohle, 1967), and lengthy discussions about the nature of these values have continued ever since. The generally accepted news values have been taught to journalism students as long as there have been journalism schools. Their use as determinants of news selection is reinforced on the job and then taught, often uncritically, to the next generation of journalists.

In recent years, complaints about an alleged negative slant of the news have come from a wide variety of critics. President Ronald Reagan blasted three network anchormen in April 1983 for concentrating on only the negative news about his administration. In a 1979 survey, seven of 10 Americans interviewed complained about too much negativism in the news (Yankelovich, 1979). A variety of content

analyses have indeed found a substantial amount of negative news in the media (Gieber, 1955; Hartung and Stone, 1980; Peterson, 1981; Singletary, 1976; Stempel, 1962; Swanson, 1955; and others). This apparent plethora of "bad" news seems to point to a widespread acceptance of negative news as being more newsworthy than positive news (Cohen, 1963). Negativism seems to have become a significant predictor of news selection by working journalists.

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Deciding what is news and what is not has always been a primary task of journalists. Confronted with a complex web of interlocking real-world events, journalists select and present to the public an orderly package of "news." Because an event is not news--and perhaps not even "real"--unless journalists see fit to call it such, understanding how and why journalists make these daily news selections is important.

Generally speaking, journalists are taught to make these decisions based on certain "news values." These values include such attributes of news as consequence, proximity, timeliness, rarity, interest, and so on. Judging each news story on the presence of these values, journalists select or reject the story for publication.

The selection of news should be viewed as a complex process. As such, it is difficult to slice off discrete parts for accurate study. News values are additive--that is, the more values present in an event, the more likely it will be selected as news (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Peterson, 1981). News selection based on news values also exhibits a complementarity principle. If an event is low in one value, an intense level of another value will make up for that lack and news selection may still occur (Galtung and Ruge, 1973).

But news values alone, even considering Galtung and Ruge's additivity and complementarity principles, do not explain totally

what Americans read in newspapers or see and hear on news broadcasts. Researchers have discovered and outlined many influences on news values that distort the seemingly simple process of selecting news based on the values present. Among the important influences are personal biases of journalists; newsroom policy; the organizational structure of the newsroom; gatekeeping by often out-of-touch, desk-bound editors; influential news sources; and other journalists, i.e., major newspapers or the wire services. News judgments also are affected by such day-to-day aspects of newsroom life as the size of a newshole, the nature of the news day, and whether a reporter uses a typewriter or a video display terminal. These influences should always be viewed as intervening variables during the news selection process--they themselves are not news values or news selection predictors. Theoretically, news selection could be made using only the common news values. Exercises similar to this are carried on in beginning journalism classes every term. Realistically, however, news selection is always influenced by these outside pressures.

The criticism in recent years about the negative slant of the media suggests that negativism may have become an important factor in the news selection process for a majority of journalists. Some researchers have even listed negativism as a separate news value, along with consequence, proximity, timeliness and so on (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Miller, 1977; Peterson, 1981). But, because negativism can be found in such a wide variety of news selections, it may be better conceptually to view negativism as an integral part of several

of the standard news values--especially "consequence"--and not as a separate value in its own right. In other words, to study a news value as a predictor of selection by journalists, one should not only measure the intensity--or level of presence--of the news value itself in the event, but also where the event lies in a continuum of positive to negative (Figure 1). For instance, an event with high consequence can have either positive or negative consequences for the reader. Stated differently, the news value can have a positive or a negative direction. If indeed negativism is as highly valued by journalists as many critics are saying, then a story that is high in consequence and negative (Story A in Figure 1) will be selected over a story high in consequence but positive (Story B in Figure 1). A recent study of news selection by The Times (London) staff found this to be true (Peterson, 1979). Using this approach, a story falling in quadrant III (low consequence, positive) would be least likely to be selected for publication, and a story in quadrant II (high consequence, negative), most likely. Applying a corollary of the complementarity principle--if an event is low in a news value, being highly negative will compensate and selection will occur--a story falling in quadrant IV (low consequence, negative) also would be selected frequently for publication.

Some journalists have claimed that an increase in "bad news" is not because of a penchant for negativism, but because of increased negative event in a troubled world. Fedler and Jordan (1982), however, found that crime, especially violent crime, was highly

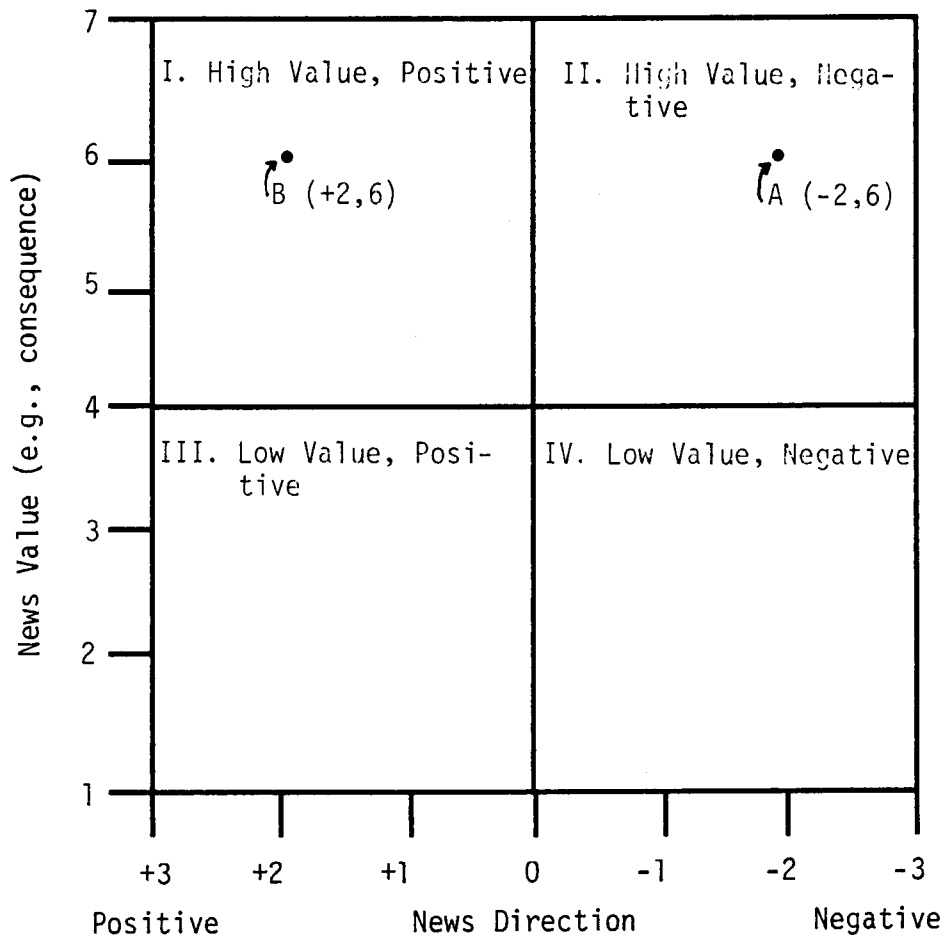


Figure 1. News Direction/News Value Grid.

overreported when compared to actual crime (see also Sherizen, 1978). This may be because journalists become desensitized to negative news over time (Haskins, 1981b). They process so much negative information on any given day that news must become increasingly negative for journalists to see it as such. Much in the same way that hospital emergency room personnel become inured to the blood and carnage they see routinely. Journalists become less sensitive to negative news than are their readers, who complain about all the "bad news" in the newspaper.

Another harmful impact of negative news is that high negative content in a newspaper can lead to a negative image of the newspaper and even of the community itself in the minds of readers (Haskins, 1983a). Because of the possible deleterious effects of negative news, studying the part negativism plays in the news selection process can have important and long-lasting consequences.

This study is part of a long-term research program on "bad news," begun in 1979 and coordinated by Dr. Jack B. Haskins. The purpose of this study is to test journalists' news selection decisions to discover whether they are attracted to negative news stories over positive, if all other factors are equal. The major hypotheses are:

H1: When asked to rate the importance of a positive and a negative version of the same story, journalists will tend to rate the negative version as being more important. For several reasons discussed later, journalists seem to believe that negative news is more important than positive. Because journalists try to publish the more

important stories each news day, the negative versions will be rated higher on a scale that rates the "selectability" of the story.

H2: When forced to choose between a positive and a negative version of the same story for publication, journalists will tend to select the negative. This may be true simply because negative information may be of more value to the reader than positive information (Anderson and Jacobsen, 1965; Sears and Whitney, 1973). Or journalists may prefer the negative because it tends to be less ambiguous, either because the story contains more precise facts than a positive story, or because the consequences of the story are less vague than those of a positive story (Galtung and Ruge, 1973).

Also, a secondary hypothesis:

H3: Stories that have many news values will be rated more important than stories with fewer news values. This follows Galtung and Ruge's "additivity" hypothesis. Peterson (1981) found the principle to work in a study of news selections by editors of The Times (London).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

News Values

Nearly any beginning reporting textbook will list news values that are to be applied in deciding whether an event is "newsworthy" or not. These lists nearly always include proximity, timeliness, prominence, significance, human interest, novelty, and conflict (Brooks et al., 1980, pp. 6-7; Doig and Doig, 1972, p. 9; Harriss and Leiter, 1981, pp. 29-33). Values such as sex, progress and disaster, and audience appear as well, but less frequently. In a 1977 review of the literature on news values, Singletary (1977) found that timeliness, proximity, consequence, prominence, human interest, and conflict seemed to be the generally agreed upon determinants of news. Earlier, Breed (1956) had named these as characteristics (but not as criteria for selection) of news, and also included mediated (the reporter is often not an eyewitness), superficiality, stylization (the inverted pyramid, etc.), prudence, and saleability.

A more recent study (Burgoon et al., 1982) included a survey of 489 journalists. Consequence, interest, timeliness, proximity, and prominence were listed most often as news values by the journalists. Consequence, the most cited value, was mentioned by only 41 percent of those surveyed. This inability of a majority of journalists to agree on news values stems, in part, from the fact that

although journalists can recognize news when they see it, they have a hard time defining it for others (Burgoon et al., 1982; Harriss and Leiter, 1981). According to one critic, news values are hard to define because they are little more than a "para-ideology," an aggregate of only partly thought-out values (Gans, 1979, p. 45). These values also change over time and, on a few issues, are flexible.

Breed (1956) long ago complained that journalists do not have a body of systematic theory and principles to use during their working day. Atwood and Grotta (1973), in a study of how beginning reporters learn news values, found little information as to their precise nature as they are used on the job. Reporters merely mimicked what other reporters turned in and selected news based as much on what they believed their editors wanted to see as on any application of news values.

Many reporters in the Burgoon study complained that too many intervening variables confounded the formation of a definition of news that can stand true on any news day. Gieber (1964) underlined this subjectivity of news by saying that "news does not have an independent existence; news is a product of men who are members of a newsgathering . . . bureaucracy." Agreeing with Walter Lippman's concept of internal "pseudo-environments," Schramm (1949) said that "news exists [only] in the minds of men." News, like beauty, is apparently not only in the eye of the beholder, it is too elusive to be accurately defined.

Some researchers have attempted to define news without using the classic news values approach. A common approach has been to create a dichotomous, either/or interpretation: news is either this or that, and sometimes both. News has been broken down into delayed and immediate (Schramm, 1949), complex and routine (Bird and Merwin, 1942), informational and human interest (Clark, 1931), important and interesting (Gans, 1979), hard and soft (Metzler, 1979), and the common "what people ought to know" and "what people want to know." All these dichotomies represent basically the same ideas. The first in each pair refers to information that people must have to operate safely and efficiently in society. When Schramm (1971) likened modern-day newspapers to town watchmen in traditional societies (who warned the town of impending disaster or opportunity), he was referring to this aspect of news. The second in each pair refers to the newer function of the media: entertainment.

A few researchers have outlined three determinants of news. Badii and Ward (1980) listed significance, normality (support of the status quo), and prominence. Significance is rather like the first, "ought to know" half in the above dichotomous approaches. Prominence has come to be an important determinant of news because of the second, "entertainment" half of each pair: people are attracted to information about prominent persons much in the same way that commoners in traditional societies were drawn to view royalty, even from afar and even on a rainy day. Miller (1977) also gave news a tri-partite division: reference to elites, unexpectedness,

and negativism. These were the best predictors of news in Miller's study, although not the sole predictors. Using these guidelines, Miller said that corruption in a high office becomes the "perfect" story, being high in each of the three areas.

In an unpublished paper on news values, Deppa (1983) proposed a more general definition of news: "Contemporary information that can be gleaned from surveillance of the environment that is relevant to the audience of a given medium." Deppa claimed that this definition is more useable than one using the classic news values because it works across time and cultures and thus can be used more easily for comparative studies.

One of the major findings of a study of the reporting of six women's issues was that new definitions of what is news--or news values--must be created (New Directions, 1983). The study, done by the Women's Studies Program and Policy of The George Washington University, also suggested that new techniques for gathering news be found. After studying coverage of the 1980 World UN Conference for Women, the researchers decided that reporters were missing the "real" news about women. In other words, the news values being used by reporters were not useful in identifying what was important.

Empirical data supporting widespread disagreement on the nature of news can be found frequently in the literature. For example, a study of major national newspapers found "profound differences" in news judgments (Hulteng, 1959). Also, in a comparison of the news judgments of newspaper editors and television news editors,

Sasser and Russell (1972) found no consistency in news judgment. Journalists are trained in journalism schools to use fairly standard lists of news values (given in the textbooks), but the actual judgments in the field apparently vary greatly. On-the-job influences must distort the classic news values.

Most news value studies have attempted to understand the journalists' news selection process by discovering the most parsimonious listing of news "values." With few exceptions, the data gathering has been content analysis. Because the classic news values have not turned out to be highly accurate predictors of actual news content in these studies, other researchers have gone beyond the news values themselves and studied influences that significantly distort news value usage.

Influences

Defining news by news value is apparently difficult, even by the journalists who must refer to them every day. A variety of on-the-job influences on news values have been examined. Sherizen (1978) pointed out that journalists' news judgments are influenced by (1) other journalists (see also Breed, 1956), (2) the wishes of the publisher (see also Breed, 1955b), and (3) the influence of the sources of news (see also Gans, 1979; Gieber, 1964; Molotch and Lester, 1974; and others). Gans (1979) outlined four ways journalists make judgments about events and select news. Only one has anything to do with news values themselves. The other three center on the

organizational structure of the newsgathering process (see also Tuchman, 1972, 1973); the event-oriented nature of most news; and other miscellaneous news determinants, such as economic, cultural, and ideological influences. These day-to-day influences underline the complaints of reporters in the Burgoon study, mentioned earlier, who said that daily pressures made it nearly impossible to create a definition of news that was good for every news situation. (Yet, most reporting textbooks still disregard the realities of the workaday world and list only the classic news values when discussing how journalists select news.)

Based on a review of the literature, the major influences on news values and the news selection process, however, appear to be: (1) personal biases and reality judgments, (2) newsroom policy, (3) the organizational structure of newsgathering, (4) the influence of the sources of news, (5) news judgments by other journalists, and (6) the size of the news hole on a given day and other situational variables.

Personal Biases

It is not unimportant to point out that a journalist is influenced by his own personal biases and reality judgments. Although it may seem to be an oversimplification to say that a journalist is influenced in news judgments by how he or she thinks, it certainly is true at a basic level. The important point is that no two journalists will ever think exactly alike, nor should they, when

facing a news event. Delia, O'Keefe, and O'Keefe (1982), in explaining their constructivist approach to human communication, said that all individuals approach reality through ongoing processes of interpretation. Different individuals use different "constructs" to interpret the world. These interpretive schemes control and channel their activity, even their communicative conduct. Thus, news decisions (e.g., of the "consequence" or "significance" of a news event) will differ when made by different journalists, even if all other variables are equal.

O'Brien (1983) said much the same thing when he pointed out that journalists do not report so much what is "out there," but what they think is out there, i.e., they report their own pseudo-environments. Thus, a reporter is said to be "objective" when his pseudo-environment matches a large number of readers' pseudo-environments. News bias, then, can be defined as when a reporter's pseudo-environment does not match a reader's or a group of readers' pseudo-environment.

Culbertson (1983), in discussing personal influences on news values, differentiated among three kinds of journalists: the traditionalist, the interpreter, and the activist. The traditionalist tends to prefer local spot news and uses the classic news values as important news determinants. The interpreter tends to prefer national news of an investigative nature and downplays local news. The activist tends to prefer international news of an investigative nature and also downplays local news. These personal beliefs may

overpower the classic news values and influence what news is selected or rejected on any given day.

Drew (1972) found similar divisions in the day-to-day work of reporters. He discovered that a reporter who sees his "role" in the community as adversarial, for instance, will pursue and publish many stories a reporter who sees himself as a community supporter will ignore. In other words, news is selected or rejected depending on how an individual journalist perceives his role in his community and/or in society as a whole. Olien et al. (1968) found these same role differences between reporters for metropolitan and small-town newspapers. The metropolitan reporter is more likely to pursue the "hard" story than is his small-town counterpart. The latter, because he perceives himself to be more of a part of the system he is reporting on, tends to de-emphasize the adversary relationship and emphasize the positive side of the news.

For instance, an editor's status in a community may lead him to downplay conflict or controversy, if that were to be perceived as damaging (Breed, 1956; Olien et al., 1968). Tuchman (1972), during a series of interviews with working journalists, cites one instance in which a reporter said that he needed to ferret out a few more quotes for "his" side of the story he was working on so that he would not have to editorialize overtly.

Journalists seem to be much more supportive of the status quo, as a whole, than is usually thought (Cirino, 1973; Fishman, 1980; Paletz et al., 1971). Former NBC anchorman John Chancellor once

claimed that journalists were members of the "extreme center" (in Gans, 1979). These personal opinions and beliefs of journalists influence news judgments more than the opinions of their editors or their readers--those for whom they are acting as surrogates (Flegel and Chaffee, 1971). Thus, contrary to the many studies of the editor as a highly influential gatekeeper, it may be that the first gate through which news must pass--that of the reporter--has the most influence on the news.

The training of journalists also leads to specific personal biases. In school journalists learn definitions of news as given by other journalists. These definitions are often based uncritically on the classic news values that every textbook lists and that the professors learned when they were in school or when they were working journalists. These news values may be far from what readers want to see in the news (Gieber, 1960). Readers seem to prefer connotative symbols, but journalists, preferring the concrete, the easily identifiable, tend to give them denotative symbols. To test the influence of the journalism teacher on student news values, Atwood and Grotta (1973) conducted tests at the beginning and conclusion of a reporting class. Eighty-four percent of the students increased their correlation with the professor's news judgment by the end of the class. It seems that new journalists are taught the ways of the old, regardless of what readers may want.

Objectivity, another attribute of the journalist learned in journalism school and strongly reinforced on the job, can be seen as

an important influence on the news selection process as well. In fact, a few researchers have considered objectivity as a news value. Striving for objectivity in news reporting implies a bias toward a belief in an objective world "out there" that can be described factually and equally well by a number of observers (Hémanus, 1976). Objectivity, when looked at in this light, is little more than another personal bias, another filter through which news must pass. Objectivity has been defined as separating facts from values (Schudson, 1978) or a lack of bias (Schiller, 1981). Actually, it should be said that objectivity is a lack of all biases except one: the belief in objectivity in an objective world. It is impossible to erase all biases because many--like objectivity--are tied to the basic reality judgments of the reporter as an individual. True objectivity simply does not exist, though journalists seem to pretend it does (Tuchman, 1972).

Objectivity arose in a predominantly commercial context: the news had to be made as value-free as possible so that it could be sold to as wide a variety of readers as possible (Schiller, 1981). But today, objectivity has become little more than a "strategic ritual" that reporters hide behind when anyone questions a story (Tuchman, 1972). When a reporter receives criticism, he can cite objectivity or newsroom procedure as why the story came out as it did, cleansing himself of any responsibility. Trying to achieve the impossible goal of objectivity actually can distort the news, as was cited earlier in the Tuchman study (1972).

Finally, journalists impose their own idea of significance, their own pseudo-environment or set of biases on a news event, rather than respond openly to it (Miller, 1977). This is how personal biases come to play an important part in the news selection process. The natural differences in how humans construct their world combined with a rather inbred method of teaching news values to beginning journalists make for a powerful influence on the news. Clearly, journalists do not simply apply the classic news values in a vacuum of personal biases, as one might infer from many reporting textbooks.

Newsroom Policy

Once the news has passed the filter of the journalist's personal biases, it also must be accepted as news by others in the newsroom. Breed (1955b), in his seminal article on the influence of publishers (as well as other journalists), in the newsroom, outlined the ways a publisher can control the news judgments of the journalists working for him. Breed concluded that, despite the fact that journalists may personally disagree with a publisher's policy, most follow it. In another study, seven of 16 editors admitted that they were sensitive to the wishes of the publisher when they made news decisions (Gieber, 1956). Journalists' news judgments, then, are often influenced more by the practicality of pleasing their employer than by news values (see also Atwood and Grotta, 1973).

Donohew (1967) found that publishers' attitudes in fact did correlate highly with the content selected for publication by their

editors. (Atwood [1973], interestingly enough, found that desk-bound editors were also the least able of newsroom employees to accurately predict reader preferences.) This finding supports Breed's contention that publishers have the power to influence and alter news judgments. Bowers (1967) found this to be true as well, especially with local news. This makes sense because publishers are really nothing more than local businessmen interested in keeping a good image in the community for their product. They naturally want to monitor what the paper is saying about the community.

Bowers (1967) also found that publishers of large metropolitan papers exert less control than publishers of small communities. This makes sense. Publishers of small papers, as well as reporters (see Olien et al., 1968), are much more visible in and connected to their community and are less likely to take an adversarial role.

Because journalists tend to be relatively value-less individuals (probably because of their belief in an adherence to "professionalism"), they tend to support the local bureaucracy, represented, in a sense, by the publisher (Cirino, 1973; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Paletz et al., 1971). In other words, when in doubt, support the status quo. Supporting the status quo, and thus the publisher, also happens because of the competitive nature of the journalism profession. A publisher can easily exert subtle control in a competitive newsroom, especially on beginning reporters, who are trying to move up or on. Because beginning reporters try to please their bosses, they tend to lean on the old bureaucratic structures in the

newsroom for a while (Pool and Schulman, 1959). They toe the line and follow the accepted ways of acting and of selecting and reporting the news (the editors' and the publisher's). This buys time for the long-term social control of the tyro to take place (Breed, 1955b).

Carrying the influence of the publisher one step further, Gieber (1964) looked to the community itself. He pointed out how news judgments can be altered by the community acting on the publisher or journalist:

The fate of the local news story is not determined by the needs of the audience or even by the values of the symbols it contains. The news story is controlled by the frame of reference created by the bureaucratic structure of which the communicator is a member (p. 178).

In the case of a publisher, this means that the amount of influence the business community has on him may alter the kinds of news readers get to see. What we see in the news each day is a reflection of the reality of those in power (Molotch and Lester, 1974), and those in power are mostly publishers, not journalists.

Organizational Structure

The very organizational structure of the newsgathering process alters the way news is reported. Most news is gathered in certain routine ways from regular places. These "beats" shape the news of the day by defining the kinds of news journalists "find" in their day-to-day work (Tuchman, 1973). Journalists tend to type stories based on where they find a story and how the source on the beat releases information (Carter, 1958). Journalists do not talk about

news, they talk of whether something is or is not "a story" (Epstein, 1981; Tuchman, 1973). An event becomes "a story" if it can be easily gathered and written according to newsroom procedure. The better an event fits the accepted criteria--which may be set by the publisher or by uncritical and out-of-touch editors--the better "story" it becomes (Tuchman, 1973). Many news decisions are even made before an event occurs (Epstein, 1981). An event's newsworthiness may be judged, in part, on how well it fits into the standard newsroom routine.

If an event does not fit the organizational structure of journalistic work, it almost literally does not happen:

. . . the techniques of journalism define what is considered to be real: what can be written about and how it can be understood. From the standpoint of audience, the techniques of journalism determine what the audience can think--the range of what is taken to be real on a given day. If something happens that cannot be packaged by the industrial formula, then in a fundamental sense, it cannot be brought to the attention of the audience (Carey, 1977, p. 81).

Police departments, according to Sherizen (1978), long ago understood how to get their point-of-view into newspapers:

The police supply reporters with a constant stream of useable crime and this information, fitting into the work requirements of the reporter, becomes the raw material from which crime news is written (p. 222).

The world is bureaucratically organized for the convenience of journalists (Fishman, 1980). The time restraints under which most journalists work allow little time for reporting outside the beat system. Journalists tend to cover meetings, rather than talk to individuals, because of the convenience. Concern for the "real" news

takes a back seat. Beats are not based on where the best news can be gathered, but on where the most news can be gathered quickly and easily. News becomes classified not by content of the news itself, but on "how-it-happens" (Tuchman, 1973). Thus, newsworthiness decisions often are made because of technique instead of the content of the event (O'Brien, 1983). This is rather like Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message": the method of delivery becomes more important than the content.

Another aspect of the organizational structure of newsgathering's effect on news judgments is what Fishman (1980) called the "phase structure" of certain events. The sequence of events of a news happening is seen as a continuum of events by a reporter. The reporter's perception of a news event is based on the bureaucratic phase structure, or by how the bureaucracy divides an event into manageable parts. A reporter covering a crime story, for instance, files stories at every phase of the event in its bureaucratic life, e.g., the arrest, the trial, the verdict, etc. The reporter also interviews only those persons involved in the bureaucracy--lawyers, policemen, judges, and so on--not necessarily the persons most closely involved with the event. The movement of the principals into a new phase becomes the news peg for another story on the subject. Stories based on information from outside the phase structure rarely are seen in the newspaper. Raw news is distorted by how a non-news-oriented bureaucracy handles an event.

Fishman (1980) lists nine ways that bureaucracies define the universe of reporters and distort the news values of an event.

Bureaucracies define (1) journalists' movements through a beat territory; (2) their exposure to a news source; (3) the meaning and relevance of what they are exposed to; (4) what occurrences are not worth seeing; (5) the permissible times at which events may be reported; (6) what constitutes a factual account, and, thus, what constitutes the very facts of the case; (7) what constitutes a suspicious account and, thus, what constitutes a matter to be investigated; (8) what constitutes errors and oversights, and, then, what constitutes their correction in news stories; and (9) what constitutes a controversial matter and, then, what constitutes the sides and terms of that controversy.

Fishman, agreeing with other researchers, found that the news values learned by journalists in college and on the job have little to do with what actually appears in the newspaper or on the news broadcast. The world seems to be bureaucratically organized to make journalists' jobs easier, and, because of this, journalists see the world as bureaucracies (representing the status quo) do. Sherizen (1978) claims that the reason the media like crime news so much is because a beat reporter can gather it so easily from the police bureaucracy and because there is a readily available spokesman: the police record and the police officers. News becomes not the reality of what happened; it is the reality of what the system allows the hurried journalist access to.

When an event happens also influences news judgments, aside from the aforementioned bureaucratic pressures. Some events happen at such a different time sequence from the usual publishing or

broadcast schedule that journalists may literally not "see" the event as news (Rock, 1973). A news item has a better chance of being selected for publication if its frequency matches the frequency of the media (Galtung and Ruge, 1973). The construction of a house, for instance, takes much too long for the media to see it as a story. If the house is destroyed by fire overnight, however, the timing better meets the daily news hunger of the media, and it becomes news. Thought of this way--that events become news according to bureaucratic phase structures and according to how well they match media output frequencies--new can be said not to distort the world, as some critics claim, but to reconstitute it (Tuchman, 1973). The news does not tell us about reality, the news is reality.

News Sources

In a sense, the bureaucracy-as-news-source is easy to see as an influence on news judgments. But, other news sources influence as well. The basic job of a professional news source (e.g., a public relations agent), for instance, is to get reporters into his frame of reference, to get reporters to view the world through the source's eyes (Gieber, 1960). A good public relations agent or event promoter, understanding the needs of a reporter on a busy beat schedule, can set up "pseudo-events": biased information in the guise of news (Boorstein, 1962). Because professional news sources believe their biased world view to be more important than the objective, "real" view, they prefer young, inexperienced reporters (Gieber, 1960).

The tyro is more easily manipulated into the source's desired frame of reference. The influence of the journalism school's classic news values pales next to the work of a good public relations agent.

Although police departments do not often engage in pseudo-events, they can be seen as "promoters" of crime news because they make it easily available to reporters (Molotch and Lester, 1974). Sherizen (1978), who lists source control as one of three important influences on news selection, showed that crime is generally reported from the source's (the police) point of view. Many reporters rarely go beyond the official, bureaucratic sources to gather information. So what gets into the paper is largely what the police want in the paper. Generally speaking, all good promoters of news--and not just the police--understand the influence of the organizational structure of newsgathering and try to increase the correspondence between their event and the needs of the media (Molotch and Lester, 1974). If an event fits newsgathering needs and the timespan reality of the media, then a source can exert a strong influence on what is selected for publication or broadcast.

Influence of Other Journalists

Other journalists--besides colleagues in the newsroom--influence the selection of news and distort news values. This influence usually runs from national to local and from large to small media outlets. Several studies have found evidence of pack journalism, a phenomenon in which a majority of reporters or editors follow the lead of one

or two elites (Cohen, 1963; Epstein, 1973; Fishman, 1980, among others). Schramm (1958) and Breed (1955a) found that editors for small papers tend to follow the judgments of editors from larger papers. Breed also found that reporters are influenced by what their colleagues are filing each day (see also Grey, 1966). In a move to reduce dissonance, journalists change their news judgments to match those around them, especially those seen as elites.

Wire services have been shown to be influential in several studies. A study using two differing versions of a stack of Associated Press stories showed this clearly (Whitney and Becker, 1982). Editors were asked to select stories for publication from the stack. Each stack had widely different percentages of local, national and international stories, yet the stories selected by each group closely mirrored the percentages in the original stack. Breed (1955a), Gieber (1955, 1956), and Stempel (1958) also found that editors tended to follow the news judgments of the wire services.

Although few cities today have competing newspapers, editors for competing newspapers make different news judgments, often based largely on what the other paper did on a given story. Borstel (1956) found that if a morning paper covered a story, the evening paper either did not cover it or it did so from a different angle. Regardless, news judgments were distorted and not based on news values alone.

Situational Variables

News judgments have been found to change on a day-to-day basis, partly because of changing newsholes and partly because of fast vs.

slow news days. Because advertising lineage varies independently of the news of the day, editors must deal with whatever space the ads have left. The availability of space affects judgments: what might make the paper on a slow news day would not on a day with more news (Casey and Copeland, 1957; Gieber, 1956; Grey, 1966; Sherizen, 1978). Another way to look at it is to say that the news of the day must be made to fit the available space, no matter what happened that day (Burgoon et al., 1982; Rock, 1973).

News judgments also vary depending on the deadline schedule of the paper. More news moves on the wire services between noon to midnight than midnight to noon (Buchanan, 1942). The news decisions of journalists working the different cycles will have to be different because of the differing availability of raw material. Editors also tend to make different news judgments about wire material as deadline approaches (Jones et al., 1961). If an event happens close to a deadline, it must have unusually strong news values to be selected for publication. Had the story moved earlier, chances for selection would have been improved--even with the exact same news values.

Video display terminals have changed news judgments by reporters and editors (Burgoon et al., 1982; Epstein, 1981; Seals and Deppa, 1983). Journalists surveyed in the Burgoon study said that editors could spend more time on stories with VDTs than with a blue pencil, but this meant less contact with the staff. This affects the previously mentioned result of desk-bound editors' news judgments (they are least able to predict reader preferences) and social

control of the newsroom (editors who spend more time at the terminal spend less time assimilating beginners into the accepted ways). VDTs do allow reporters to work on a story right up to deadline, which may also alter news judgment. But reporters have complained that newsroom policies and work flow have been changed to meet the needs of VDTs, not journalists (Burgoon et al., 1982). Even the kind of VDT and the ease of operation appear to affect news judgment (Seals and Deppa, 1983). A reporter or editor bogged down with a slow terminal will not make that tough on-deadline news decision.

Summary

The classic news values--proximity, significance, timeliness, rarity, conflict, human interest, and so on--are taught in journalism schools, but on-the-job influences, acting as intervening variables, distort these simplistic values. Predicting news selection choices by reporters and editors simply cannot be done based on the classic news values alone. Journalists cannot even agree on a list of news values, much less use them consistently in their work. The process of selecting news based on the values is distorted by personal biases of the reporter, social influences from within the news organization, attempts at objectivity, the structure of the news-gathering process, "when" an event happens, pressures from news sources, professional influences from other journalists (elites or wire services), the size of the news hole on a given day, the nature of the news day (fast or slow), and whether a VDT or a typewriter is used.

Negativism in the News

Media critics and members of the general public have been complaining about an increasing amount of "bad" news in the media for many years. Nearly 30 years ago, media criticism led Gieber (1955) to see if editors overplayed negative news. The media, these critics say, rarely call attention to the good things, forcing people to develop a negative view of life (Menninger, 1979). A survey in 1979 found that seven of 10 Americans interviewed believed that there is too much negative news in the media (Yankelovich et al., 1979). All the complaints point toward the use of negativism as an important characteristic as journalists select or reject events as "news." A newspaper columnist in 1964 admitted that "news is almost by definition bad news" (Childs, 1964).

Negativism in the news has been defined simply as "information about events, objects or other referents which are themselves generally considered to be unpleasant or harmful" (Haskins, 1981b). A factor analysis identified several categories of negative news, including international wars and disputes, life-threatening mishaps to individuals, and national economic troubles and frauds (in Haskins, 1981b).

Rather than consider negativism as a separate news value, as have some researchers (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Miller, 1977; Peterson, 1981), it may be better heuristically to study negativism as part of a positive/negative continuum or direction of a classic news value,

especially "consequence" or "significance" (see Figure 1, page 6). Thus, a "significant" story can be either positive or negative. A significant and negative story, according to the major hypotheses of this study, would be selected over a significant and positive story.

The additivity principle of Galtung and Ruge (1973) also works in this model. Just as a higher number and/or levels of presence of the classic news values in a story will lead to a better chance of selection, a higher number of values with a negative direction will greatly increase the chance of selection.

Galtung and Ruge's complementarity principle will work as well. A low number of news values will be compensated for by a high number of negative values or a high level of negativism on the consequence value, the one most often considered as negative or positive. This is why stories such as school bus crashes in Ecuador are often found in newspapers: the high negativity added by the deaths of children compensates for the lack of significance and proximity. Peterson (1981) found the presence of negativity in stories about Third World countries compensated for a country not being an "elite" (rather like the classic value of "prominence"), as well as for a lack of proximity to the reader.

"Conflict," one of the classic news values and one of several kinds of negative news, has been found to be a consistently used news determinant. A study of five metropolitan dailies found that 56.1 percent of all news paragraphs emphasized conflict over

cooperation (Cony, 1953). A study of television news editors found conflict to be a highly used news value (Buckalew, 1969). Conflict was one of three highly valued news determinants (with proximity and timeliness) in a study of 15 newspaper and three television news editors (Clyde and Buckalew, 1969). In a wide-ranging content analysis, conflict-oriented news was shown to have increased dramatically between 1939 and 1951 (Nixon and Jones, 1956). Supporting earlier cited studies that showed that big-city journalists take a harder line toward reporting the news than small town journalists, conflict news has been found more frequently in metropolitan papers than in suburban or rural papers (Olien et al., 1968). Conflict news is also found more frequently in papers in a competitive situation than in one-newspaper cities (Nixon and Jones, 1956).

Conflict is only one kind of bad news. Accidents, disasters, and other sorts of non-conflict negative news (e.g., bad economic news) also appear frequently in the media. These events fit the short time frame needed for journalists to see an event as news. Negative news tends to be "event" oriented (rather than issue oriented), and journalists have been found to be drawn to "event" stories (Gans, 1979). They are simply easier to cover. Fourteen percent of newspaper content from 1939 to 1950 consisted of news of wars, crimes, accidents, disasters, and fires (Swanson, 1955). The AP and UPI wires ran 33 percent bad news and 39 percent good news (Gieber, 1955). Pure bad news made up 31 percent of the content of Michigan dailies in 1961 (Stempel, 1962). Miller, Goldenburg, and

Erbring (1979) also found that 31 percent of newspaper content was negative and only 6 percent positive. Sixty-three percent was either balanced or neutral. Negative news was printed more often than positive in The Times (London) during a two-week period of study in 1975 (Peterson, 1981). Other studies, some dealing with photographs, have mirrored this approximation of one-third negative news in newspaper content (Hartung and Stone, 1980; Singletary, 1978). Television news content analyses have found negative news content ranging from one-third (Lowry, 1971) to one-half (Singer, 1970) to 60 percent (Haskins, 1983b).

Crime news, an obvious and highly studied form of negative news, has been increasing in media reports (Janowitz, 1976). Stories about crime tend to emphasize the violent, person-to-person crime and de-emphasize non-violent crimes and crimes to property, even though the latter category may occur more frequently (Dreschel et al., 1980; Fedler and Jordan, 1982; Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Jones, 1976; Roshier, 1973; Steadman and Coccozza, 1977-78). As an example, Sherizen (1978) found stories about murder and manslaughter were highly overreported compared to stories about larceny. Stories about crimes take up about 10 percent of the editorial space in newspapers, but stories about the issue of crime take up less than 5 percent (Cirino, 1978).

Not only do journalists tend to overselect negative news compared to actual negative news events, they also tend to give it prominent play. If journalists believe a story is significant (one

of the classic news values), they will display it more prominently by allowing it more space than the average story (Bush, 1960); by displaying it on the front page, perhaps with art and a large headline (Bush, 1960); or by presenting it early in a radio or television news broadcast (Lowry, 1971). The appearance of negativism in a story seems to be a guarantee that journalists also will find it significant and display it prominently.

Negative news has been given preferential display treatment in Southern California daily newspapers, appearing more often on the front page than good news (Stone and Hartung, 1979). Negative news photographs were more likely than positive to appear on newspaper front pages from 1939 to 1950 (Swanson, 1955). During three-month periods in 1950, 1960, and 1969, violent crimes were featured on the front pages of the Los Angeles Times and The New York Times twice as often as stories about organized crime and three times as often as stories about white collar crime (Cirino, 1978). Negative news has been found to appear usually during the first half of a television newscast (Lowry, 1971). Television news broadcasters also tend to give longer air time to aggression-related stories than to non-aggression related stories (Singer, 1970).

In summary, approximately one-third of editorial content in the American mass media is negative news and it gets preferential display treatment. This display preference underlines a judgment of significance or importance for negative news. Most evidence points toward a general belief among journalists that negative news

is more significant or important than positive news. That this is because "good" news has so little news value--and not because "bad" news is highly significant--is arguable. Negative news may well contain more information of value than good news (Anderson and Jacobson, 1965; Sears and Whiteney, 1973). But the fact that negative news is displayed more prominently than positive shows that an active decision has been made regarding its relative value.

Selection of Negative News

Journalists have been found to actively select negative news over positive. A study of news selection by editors at The Times (London) showed that editors preferred the negative version over the positive version of the same basic facts (Peterson, 1979). Journalists face a large universe of possible facts each day and select only a portion for transmission to readers. During their training, journalists learn to make these decisions based on what they believe their readers ought and want to know (Gieber, 1960). Generally, journalists are able to accurately assess reader interest (Atwood, 1970; Galow, 1973). Without entering into a chicken-and-egg argument about whether journalists actually overselect negative news or whether they are merely giving readers what they want, it is clear that journalists seem to be attracted to "bad news." One reason for this may be that people seem to prefer negative information over positive if a situation involves personal consequences (Anderson and Jacobsen, 1965). It seems to be more important to avoid negative

circumstances by getting "bad news," than to be prepared for positive circumstances by receiving "good news." Schramm, in his town watchman-as-media example, pointed out that the watchman would be more likely to deliver "bad news" that the townspeople could use to avoid problems than he would "good news" that the townspeople could use to make the most of an opportunity. In other words, it's better to know that the Huns are coming down the valley than to know that the weather will be terrific for planting.

Another reason for journalists' attraction to negative news may be the so-called "adversary relationship" between the press and government. This "watchdog" approach may lead journalists to expect the negative (Pool and Schulman, 1959). If your job description includes watching for wrongdoing from another party, then success means that you should find some.

Political campaigns seem to highlight bad news, especially for the leading candidates (Robinson, 1981). Journalists tend to concentrate their interest critically on the frontrunner. Other candidates also are critical--naturally--of their opponent, so stories about them usually include negative barbs. Another study found that political authority figures are presented in a negative light more often than in a positive light (Wamsley and Pride, 1972).

The largely modern phenomenon of "investigative reporting" may lead to a negative approach to the news. A former editor of the New York Daily News complained recently that investigative journalism focuses too much on government and is "confined mostly to wrong-

doing" (O'Neill, 1983) or to a negative aspect of the news. A 1976 survey found that a majority of journalists believe that investigating claims and statements by government is the most important function of the media (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976). A more recent study (Gray and Wilhoit, 1983) found that the figure has grown to 90 percent of working journalists. This increase in investigative journalism may account for some of the increase in negative news in the media in recent years.

Interestingly, several studies have shown that people in general--not journalists--are more reluctant to transmit negative news than good in face-to-face situations (Tesser and Rosen, 1975). This reluctance is called the MUM effect: Mum on Unpleasant Messages. Journalists, however, seem to be immune to this effect while on the job. Perhaps this is because journalists do not operate face-to-face, and this distance from the receiver--a sort of high-altitude bombardier situation--alleviates the pressure against delivering negative news (Haskins, 1981a). Perhaps too this is one reason why metropolitan newspapers have more negative news than small-town papers: the reporter is more "distanced" from his readers (Olien et al., 1968). Reporters also may not mind delivering negative news because they believe they are being objective. Their striving for emotional disengagement from the story leads them to notice the negativism less, or at least to ignore it.

Recent studies have gone beyond showing that journalists value conflict as a news value. Several researchers found a general

preference for negativism among journalists. Miller (1977) found negativism to be one of three powerful predictors of news selection (along with reference to elites and unexpectedness). Galtung and Ruge (1973) isolated 12 factors that lead to selection of an event as news. One of them was negativism. They outlined four reasons why negative news is preferred over positive:

1. Negative news better matches the frequency of daily newspapers and newscasts than does positive news (see also Rock, 1973).

This means that media coverage of disasters is usually superb and extensive, but media coverage of the precursors of disaster--long-term, underlying causes--is sparse, leaving society ill-equipped to take preventive action (O'Neill, 1983).

2. Negative news is easily agreed upon, i.e., there is no ambiguity among people that an event is "bad" (see also Jones and Davis, 1965).

For instance, a political candidate trying to please voters is positive and ambiguous: he may be telling the truth or he may be lying in an attempt to win votes. But a mistake or misdeed by that politician evokes a negative feeling that is not ambiguous: the wrongdoing is obvious to all.

3. Negative news is consonant with our troubled times and it fulfills some kind of latent need for bad news.

There is some interesting evidence that points toward a physiological need for occasional negative stimulation in the brain

Haskins (1981a). It may be that we actually need occasional negative news.

4. Negative news is more unexpected than good, both in the sense that the events themselves are more rare, as well as being less predictable. In our culture, progress, or constant change toward the better, is the norm.

Given a positive social norm, negative information is more likely to be thought of as unique, and thus more informative (Jones and Davis, 1965). Because the journalist, who like his neighbors has a positive social norm, is charged to look for the unique, "bad news" is selected more than the expected "good."

Thus, negative news--or a negative direction on a given "classic" news value--may be a significant predictor of selection by journalists partly because they are taught in journalism schools to value conflict as a news value, partly because reporters are under pressure to accept the standards of their profession--and one standard, objectivity, leads to a greater acceptance of the negative--and partly because negative news is easier to cover and less ambiguous, making it easier to justify as objective news.

Summary

The content of the American media contains more negative news than seems to be justified by actual events. Some studies have shown that, given a choice between a positive and a negative story, journalists will choose the negative version for publication. It

seems that negativism in a news story may be an important predictor of selection by journalists. Negativism can be most clearly studied not as an additional news value, but as part of a positive or negative direction of a news value. The additivity and complementarity principles of Galtung and Ruge (1973) work in this model. Multiple news values will lead to greater possibility of selection than will a single news value, and the absence of certain values will be made up for by very high negativism on the value(s) present.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

Professional journalists from two central Virginia daily newspapers were matched on sex, age and position (editor vs. non-editor) and randomly assigned to two treatment groups. Approximately 45 questionnaires were delivered to each group. One group returned 34 questionnaires and the other returned 32.

The overall sample of 66 compared fairly well with a national survey of journalists conducted in 1982-83 (Gray and Wilhoit, 1983). According to that survey, which included broadcast and news magazine journalists as well, the average age of the American journalist is 32. Sixty-six percent are male and 55 percent have a bachelor's degree. In the present sample, the average age was 36, 62 percent were male and 85 percent had at least a bachelor's degree (Table 1).

The randomization of treatments created two reasonably well matched sub-samples. A low response rate among females in Group II created somewhat of a "gender gap" between the two sub-samples (see Table 1). However, subsequent analysis of demographic data showed only a few minor differences based on any of the demographic variables studied, including sex.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICS SUMMARY

	Group I		Group III		Overall	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Sex						
Male	19	56	22	69	41	62
Female	15	44	10	31	25	38
Age ($\bar{x}$ in years)	37.12		35.59		36.36	
Position						
Editor	17	50	15	47	32	49
Non-editor	17	50	17	53	34	51
Educational Level						
High School	1	2.9	0	0.0	1	1.5
Some College	6	17.6	3	9.4	9	13.6
Degree	15	44.1	18	56.3	33	50.0
Post Grad Work	7	20.6	6	18.8	13	19.7
Grad. Degree	5	14.7	5	15.6	10	15.2
Degree Major						
Journalism	15	44.1	14	43.8	29	43.9
Related Field	8	23.5	8	25.0	16	24.2
Other Field	7	20.6	9	28.1	16	24.2
Not Applicable	4	11.8	1	3.1	5	7.6
Years in Present Position ($\bar{x}$ in years)	6.29		7.62		6.94	
Years of Full-Time Professional Experience ($\bar{x}$ in years)	13.21		12.31		12.78	

Sample Story Leads

To test the effect of one news value on judgments of story importance, that news value must be clearly isolated (Galtung and Ruge, 1973). For that reason, 10 pairs of story leads were constructed for this study. The "positive news" and "negative news" versions of the story lead were alike in every way possible--in some cases even word-for-word--except for the positive or negative direction of the facts involved (Figure 2; complete story leads in the Appendix). Creating mirror-image stories that were exactly equal in news value was more difficult than expected. Such factors as following or "bucking" a trend can add or detract from a story's relative newsworthiness. For instance, in story pair No. 2, the fact that SAT scores were up, against the trend, added newsworthiness to that version over the opposite version.

Because some kinds of news stories faced in a realistic news room situation do not have clear, mirror-image opposites (e.g., a fatal automobile accident), and because certain typical stories are good news for some people and bad for others, story topics of wide-ranging interest and consequence were selected. For clear separation of positive vs. negative, most story leads centered on numbers that could increase or decrease, meaning either good or bad news for the average reader.

By definition, the stories would fall at opposite positions of a good-bad news direction scale, but the stories were checked nevertheless. Using a news direction scale developed for the study of "bad

1. Drug use of city high school is up (positive) or down (negative)
2. SAT scores at John Marshall High School are up (P) or down (N), bucking or following national trend
3. Millions of elderly citizens face (N) or no longer face (P) poverty through failure or success of Social Security program
4. UN report shows that Third World child deaths are up (N) or down (P)
5. Recent financial news means good forecast (P) or bad forecast (N) for average American for next decade
6. South American coffee bean crop is up (P) or down (N), decreasing or increasing cost of coffee to American consumers
7. Violent crime in nation has decreased (N) dramatically, according to FBI statistics
8. Consumer Price Index for most recent month is up (N) or down (P) 3.2 percent
9. State utilities board accepts a 17.5 percent rate increase (N) or decrease (P), effective immediately
10. Safety program for local highway's "Blood Alley" is successful (P) or not successful (N), with accidents and deaths down or up

Figure 2. Story Summaries.

news" (Haskins et al., 1984), each story lead was checked for direction and intensity of direction by trained coders. All story pairs were clear opposites on the scale.

Story leads were used to reduce the amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire. News story leads are written to represent the content of the entire story. Hurried journalists must often make a news decision based on a lead alone, so using leads for this exercise was a reasonable way to keep the questionnaire short. Headline-and-lead combinations have been found to identify the content of stories as accurately as 84 percent (Haskins, 1960). Story leads for the present study were two or three paragraphs long.

The story leads were randomly assigned positions in the questionnaire. Then the positive version was randomly assigned to the questionnaire for treatment Group I or treatment Group II. Thus, both groups saw the story leads in the same order, but Group I saw the positive version of story no. 1 and Group II the negative version, and so on. The versions alternated throughout the questionnaires. Each group saw five positive and five negative versions.

This experiment can also be described clearly by using a notational system:

	t1	t2	t3
Pl _I	--	--	T1/T3/M1-3
Pl _{II}	--	--	T2/T3/M1-3

Legend:

Pl: sample of professional journalists

$P1_I$, $P1_{II}$: sub-samples of $P1$, matched on sex, age and position on newspaper (editor vs. non-editor)

T1: 10 story leads, 5 positive and 5 negative

T2: 10 story leads, 5 negative and 5 positive (opposite of T1)

T3: 10 story pairs (i.e., both positive and negative versions)

M1: importance rating

M2: forced-choice selection

M3: demographics questions

t3: June 1-21, 1984

Questionnaire and Rating Scales

The questionnaire had three sections: (1) the split sample importance rating of the positive or the negative version of the 10 story leads, (2) a full-sample forced-choice selection for publication of either the positive or negative version of the paired story leads, and (3) demographics questions (placed last) (Redding, 1982).

The overarching hypothesis of this study is that journalists prefer negative news over positive. This was measured two different ways, by the split-sample ratings of the versions seen separately and by a story-pair, forced-choice measure by all journalists in the sample. For both sections of the questionnaire, importance was defined as how "selectable" a story was for the next day's newspaper. Although journalists may disagree on the nature of news value (Burgoon et al., 1982), ultimately they decide the fate of a news

story (whether it is selected or rejected for publication) on its perceived overall value or importance to the reader (Gieber, 1960), or on its perceived influence on the lives of the readers (Charnley, 1976). Thus, journalists will apply a wide variety of standards when selecting or rejecting news stories. Rather than define importance in specific terms, this study wanted to measure how journalists reacted to stories on their own, without a researcher-biased definition given. This method would make it easier to see whether certain demographic variables had any effect on judgments of importance.

For the split-sample measure, a 0-100 thermometer scale was used to rate importance. The thermometer scale has been used successfully by Haskins (1960) and the University of Michigan Survey Research Center (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983). A pre-test of the thermometer news importance scale was administered to 11 professional journalists. Their test-retest correlation coefficients ranged from +0.818 to +0.954, making it a highly reliable measurement instrument.

Instructions for the importance scale were:

Rate each brief story lead on an importance scale, as illustrated by the thermometer below. If you believe a story lead to be extremely important and it must be included in tomorrow's newspaper, give it a score of 100. If you believe a story lead to be extremely UNimportant and it should not be included in tomorrow's newspaper, give it a score of zero. Otherwise, give each story lead a score between zero and 100 that best represents how important it is.

The illustration of the thermometer that accompanied the questionnaire included instructions that stories rated above 50 were "sure to be

included" in the next day's newspaper, and stories rated below 50 were "sure not to be included."

For the forced-choice measure, journalists were presented with both versions of each story. They were presented in pairs, in the same order as in the split-sample test, with the positive version placed first on every other pair. The journalists were asked to accept the unusual situation and select which version of the story was more important, using the same general definition of importance as given with the split-sample test (i.e., which was more "selectable" for the next day's newspaper). Interestingly, six journalists blatantly refused to participate in this test, usually characterizing it as a "set-up."

The final portion of the questionnaire gathered the following demographic information: sex, age (in years [only one journalist refused to answer]), present position (editor or non-editor), educational level, major field of study, years spent in present position, and number of years of full-time professional journalism experience.

The methodology for hypothesis 3, the news value additivity principle, involved the creation of an index score for each story based on the major news values found in the Burgoon study (1982): consequence, interest, timeliness, proximity, and prominence. These were the values named most often by the 489 journalists surveyed by Burgoon et al. For this index, negativity was added as a separate factor. Two points were awarded a story for a high value,

one point for a low value and no points for absence of a value. Scores could range from zero to 12 points for each story version. A story with many values and/or high presence of those values would receive a high additivity index score. Stories with few values and/or low presence of values would receive a low index score. The hypothesis states that a high positive correlation should be found between the news value additivity index scores and the mean importance ratings given to each story version in the split-sample test.

Survey Administration

The questionnaires were delivered to two newsrooms in June 1984. A cover letter explained that the journalists were taking part in a general news content survey. At both newspapers, an editor provided a list of newsroom personnel and assisted in the matching of the two groups on sex, age, and position. Two "waves" of reminder notices were sent by each editor. All completed questionnaires were collected after three weeks, edited, and entered into the computer for analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The significance level for all analyses was set at .05. In general, the overarching hypothesis that journalists prefer negative news over positive was supported, though not strongly. The additivity principle proved to be highly accurate in predicting news selection.

Hypothesis 1

(When asked to rate the importance of a positive and a negative version of the same story, journalists will tend to rate the negative version as being more important.) The hypothesis was only mildly supported. The mean importance ratings of the positive and negative versions of each story were compared using one-tailed t -tests. Because the hypothesis called for a story-by-story analysis, multiple t -tests were used as the major, and perhaps best, method of analysis (Kirk, 1968). With the level of significance at .05, there is a maximum chance of a Type I error of .5. Using a Bonferroni inequality calculation $(1-[1-\alpha]^j)$, the actual probability of a Type I error is .4 (Hays, 1981). An aggregate t -test for the overall positive and negative version ratings and a repeated-measures analysis of variance test were done as well.

The negative version was rated as more important on six of the 10 story pairs, but only three were statistically significant (Table

2). A fourth approached significance at $p < .075$. But, perhaps importantly, none of the positive versions came close to being rated significantly higher. The three significant negative story leads had small enough probability levels (.001, .003, .017) that the chances of a Type I error are very minimal. The aggregate t-test and the repeated-measures analysis of variance results (Table 3) showed no significant difference between the overall importance ratings of the 10 positive versions vs. the 10 negative versions.

The distribution of scores around each of the 20 means was normal or nearly so. None of the kurtosis or skewness coefficients indicated deviations from a normal curve. The standard deviations ranged from a low of 7.9 (Story No. 9, negative) to 24.95 (Story No. 4, negative). In general, the standard deviations of the positive versions were larger than the negative versions. Mean and median scores were most often within one or two points of one another.

Hypothesis 2

(When forced to choose between a positive and a negative version of the same story for publication, journalists will tend to select the negative.) This hypothesis was much more strongly supported than hypothesis 1. After discarding "equal" responses (not given as an option on the questionnaire) and the "no choice" responses, the percentages for each choice, positive version or negative version, were calculated. Significance was tested using the z approximation of the binomial. On 9 of the 10 pairs, journalists selected the negative

TABLE 2
 MEAN IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE
 STORY VERSIONS (SPLIT SAMPLE)

Story Pair No.	Positive Version	Negative Version	<u>t</u>	One-tailed Prob.
1	76.32	74.78	+0.43	n.s.
2	68.34	69.59	-0.31	n.s.
3	84.71	83.22	+0.31	n.s.
4	59.62	73.82	-3.28	.001
5	65.74	66.87	-0.22	n.s.
6	50.44	49.22	+0.21	n.s.
7	68.97	81.62	-2.91	.003
8	80.88	77.81	+0.85	n.s.
9	86.81	92.50	-2.16	.017
10	<u>64.06</u>	<u>70.88</u>	-1.46	.075
	$\bar{x} = 70.59$	$\bar{x} = 74.03$	-0.80 ^a	n.s.

^aAggregate t-test.

TABLE 3
 REPEATED MEASURES ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE, MEAN IMPORTANCE
 RATING BY STORY, VERSION

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Total	2455.27	19	--	--	--
Stories	2225.72	9	247.30	13.07	.000
Treatment ^a	59.24	1	59.24	3.13	.116
Error	170.31	9	18.92	--	--

^aPositive or negative version.

version more often than the positive. Four were significant and three others approached significance ($p < .055, .06, .07$) (Table 4). The one positive version that was selected more frequently than its negative counterpart also was statistically significant, but just barely. Overall, the negative versions were selected 63.3 percent of the time. The overall z -score was 1.987, which is significant at $p < .05$.

Two of the four preferred negative versions (Nos. 4 and 7) also were rated as being significantly more important than the positive version on the split-sample test. The other two preferred negatives were not. One of the negative versions that had been rated significantly more important on the split-sample test was not preferred significantly on the forced-choice test.

Hypothesis 3

(Stories that have many news values will be rated as more important than stories with fewer news values.) Based on a calculation of a correlation coefficient of the news value additivity index scores and mean importance ratings, this hypothesis was strongly supported. Each of the 20 story leads were coded for each of the important news values used for this study: consequence, interest, timeliness, proximity, prominence, and negativity. The maximum index score a story could receive was 12. The scores for the stories ranged from 3 to 10. The index scores and the mean importance ratings were compared using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGES OF POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE PREFERENCE
ON FORCED-CHOICE MEASURE

Pair No.	Positive Version	Negative Version	z
1	26% (n = 15)	74% (n = 43)	+3.65 ^a
2	61% (n = 35)	39% (n = 22)	-1.66 ^a
3	40% (n = 23)	60% (n = 35)	+1.52
4	24% (n = 14)	76% (n = 44)	+3.96 ^a
5	47% (n = 26)	53% (n = 29)	+0.45
6	25% (n = 14)	75% (n = 43)	+3.78 ^a
7	23% (n = 13)	77% (n = 43)	+4.05 ^a
8	39% (n = 21)	61% (n = 33)	+1.62
9	39% (n = 20)	61% (n = 31)	+1.57
10	<u>43%</u> (n = 23)	<u>57%</u> (n = 31)	+1.03
	$\bar{x} = 36.7\%$	$\bar{x} = 63.3\%$	$z = 1.99^a$

^aSignificant at $p < .05$ (± 1.645).

(Table 5). A Pearson's r of +0.79 ($p < .001$) shows a strong linear relationship between the news value additivity index and story "selectability." The additivity index scores of each story minus negativity also showed that each story pair was equal--or very nearly so--in news value (Table 6). The total index scores of the positive and negative versions differed by only one point (57 to 56), showing how equal in news value the two versions were, excluding the effect of negativism.

Demographics

Analysis of demographic variables was carried out in three parts: mean importance ratings were analyzed using analysis of variance, forced-choice responses were analyzed using contingency table analysis, and both importance and forced-choice responses were analyzed by newspaper. Although both newspapers are dailies, one has a much larger circulation than the other. Overall, few strong differences in response were found for any demographic variable or by newspaper.

Two-way analysis of variance by sex and age, sex and position, and age and position were used to analyze mean importance ratings. In Group I, a few effects were significant (Table 7), but only one was highly significant. On Story No. 7 (negative FBI crime statistics) age and position interacted significantly (6.621, .004). Young editors rated the lead much lower than young non-editors (56.56 to 89.38) and lower than the group as a whole. However, only three

TABLE 5

NEWS VALUE ADDITIVITY INDEX SCORES RANKED HIGH TO LOW,
WITH MEAN IMPORTANCE RATINGS

Rank	Story	AI	Importance
1	9 (N) ^a	10	92.50
2	3 (N)	9	83.22
3	7 (N)	9	81.62
4	9 (P) ^b	8	86.81
5	3 (P)	7	84.71
6	7 (P)	7	68.97
7	8 (N)	7	77.81
8	10 (N)	7	70.88
9	1 (N)	6	74.78
10	2 (P)	6	68.34
11	4 (N)	6	73.82
12	5 (N)	6	66.87
13	8 (P)	6	80.88
14	10 (P)	6	64.06
15	1 (P)	5	76.32
16	5 (P)	5	65.74
17	2 (N)	5	69.59
18	6 (N)	5	49.22
19	6 (P)	4	50.44
20	4 (P)	3	59.62

^aNegative story version.

^bPositive story version.

TABLE 6
NEWS VALUE ADDITIVITY SCORES^a BY STORY PAIR

Story Pair No.	C ^b	I	T	Prox.	Prom.	Sub- Total	Neg.	Total ^c
1 Pos.	1	1	1	2	0	5	0	5
1 Neg.	1	1	1	2	0	5	1	6
2 Pos.	1	2	1	2	0	6	0	6
2 Neg.	1	0	1	2	0	4	1	5
3 Pos.	2	2	2	1	0	7	0	7
3 Neg.	2	2	2	1	0	7	2	9
4 Pos.	1	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
4 Neg.	1	2	1	0	0	4	2	6
5 Pos.	2	1	1	1	0	5	0	5
5 Neg.	2	1	1	1	0	5	1	6
6 Pos.	2	1	1	0	0	4	0	4
6 Neg.	2	1	1	0	0	4	1	5
7 Pos.	2	2	2	1	0	7	0	7
7 Neg.	2	2	2	1	0	7	2	9
8 Pos.	2	2	1	1	0	6	0	6
8 Neg.	2	2	1	1	0	6	1	7
9 Pos.	2	2	2	2	0	8	0	8
9 Neg.	2	2	2	2	0	8	2	10
10 Pos.	1	1	2	2	0	6	0	6
10 Neg.	1	1	2	2	0	6	1	7

^aStories received 0, 1, or 2 for no presence of the value, some, or much.

^bColumn headings stand for consequence, interest, timeliness, proximity, prominence, negativism.

^cTotal news value additivity index scores (excluding negativity): positive = 57; negative = 56.

TABLE 7
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF SPLIT-SAMPLE TEST
USING ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Story Pair No.	F	Sig.	R ²
<u>Group I, Two-way Analysis</u>			
2 (Neg.) by sex, age			.164
Main Effects	2.431	n.s.	
Sex	0.001	n.s.	
Age	3.645	.039	
Two-way interactions	4.580	.019	
Overall (explained)	3.291	.018	
3 (Pos.) by sex, age			.177
Main Effects	2.175	n.s.	
Sex	4.292	.048	
Age	0.577	n.s.	
Two-way interactions	1.168	n.s.	
Overall (explained)	1.772	n.s.	
7 (Neg.) by age, position			.102
Main Effects	1.557	n.s.	
Age	0.602	n.s.	
Position	4.421	.045	
Two-way interactions	6.621	.004	
Overall (explained)	3.583	.013	
9 (Neg.) by age, position			.094
Main Effects	1.227	n.s.	
Age	1.778	n.s.	
Position	0.022	n.s.	
Two-way interactions	3.717	.037	
Overall (explained)	2.223	n.s.	

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Story Pair No.	F	Sig.	R ²
<u>Group II, Two-way Analysis</u>			
4 (Pos.) by sex, position			.239
Main Effects	4.438	.021	
Sex	1.709	n.s.	
Position	6.861	.014	
Two-way interactions	0.186	n.s.	
Overall (explained)	3.020	.046	
5 (Neg.) by sex, position			.265
Main Effects	5.231	.012	
Sex	10.373	.003	
Position	0.188	n.s.	
Two-way interactions	1.055	n.s.	
Overall (explained)	3.839	.020	
5 (Neg.) with sex, age			.305
Main Effects	4.263	.014	
Sex	10.394	.003	
Age	0.948	n.s.	
Two-way interactions	1.555	n.s.	
Overall (explained)	3.180	.023	
<u>Group I, One-way Analysis</u>			
1 (Pos.) with experience	3.32	.015	
Deviation from linearity	3.49	.013	
2 (Neg.) with education	3.15	.029	
4 (Neg.) with experience	2.72	.034	
Deviation from linearity	2.72	.030	

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Story Pair No.	F	Sig.	R ²
<u>Group II, One-way Analysis</u>			
4 (Pos.) with position	7.19	.01	
5 (Neg.) with sex	10.54	.003	
5 (Neg.) with education	3.29	.035	
Deviation from linearity	6.92	.014	

editors were in the lowest of three age groups (up to 30 years), so care should be taken in assigning meaning to the difference.

One-way analysis of variance of the remaining demographic variables (educational level, major, number of years in present position, and number of years of full-time professional journalism experience) again found few differences in response. Number of years of experience had non-linear effects on Story No. 1 (drug use is going down among local high school students) and Story No. 4 (Third World child deaths are increasing).

Group II had no significant two-way interactions. Position (controlled for sex) showed a strong effect on Story No. 4 (Third World child deaths are decreasing). Editors rated the story as much less important than did non-editors (51.33 to 66.94). Females reacted strongly to Story No. 5 (bleak financial picture for the decade), giving it an importance rating of 80.00. Males rated the story at 60.91.

One-way analysis of variance on the other variables found two interesting results. The strong reaction of females to Story No. 5 appeared even stronger ($F = 10.54, .003$). A strong linear relationship between educational level and importance ratings occurred on Story No. 2 (SAT scores at a local high school go down). Subjects with some college rated the story very important (91.00), whereas persons with a post-graduate degree gave the story a mean rating of only 56.

The contingency table analysis for the entire sample's responses to the forced choice test again showed only a few highly significant results. None of the relationships, as measured by Cramer's V , showed more than a moderate degree of association. Age and position had no significant effect on the responses.

The other major demographic variable under study, sex, affected choice on Pair 6 (coffee prices) and Pair 10 (highway safety program). In both instances females preferred the negative version much more than did the males (Table 8).

The other two strongest relationships between response and a demographic variable came on Pair 7 (FBI crime statistics). The number of years in the present position and the number of years of full-time journalism experience had fairly strong relationships with version choice. Persons with more than five years in their present position preferred the negative version 23 to 2, whereas persons with fewer than five years preferred the negative only 20 to 11. Persons with more than 10 years professional experience preferred the negative version 26 to 3, whereas persons with fewer than 10 years preferred the negative only 17 to 10.

Separating the subjects from the two newspapers and comparing their mean importance responses (t -tests) and forced choice responses (contingency tables) found no differences in any of the mean importance ratings and only one difference in the forced choice responses. The sex, age, and position proportions were nearly alike in the two subsamples.

TABLE 8
DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS OF FORCED-CHOICE TEST

Story Pair No. with (Variable)	Chi Square	Signif- icance	Cramer's V
1 with major ^{a,1}	3.90	.05	.26
3 with major ¹	4.90	.03	.29
5 with major ²	3.96	.05	.27
5 with experience ^{b,3}	4.03	.04	.27
6 with sex ⁴	4.06	.04	.26
7 with tenure ^{c,5}	5.86	.02	.32
7 with experience ⁶	5.59	.02	.31
10 with sex ⁴	4.96	.03	.30

^aBachelor's degree in journalism vs. all others.

^bNo. of years of full-time experience.

^cNo. of years in present position.

¹Non-journalism majors highly preferred the negative version.

²Journalism majors preferred the positive version, non-majors, the negative.

³Up to 9 years preferred the positive version, 10 years or more, the negative.

⁴Females preferred the negative much more so than did males.

⁵More than 5 years preferred the negative much more so than did those with fewer than 5 years.

⁶More than 10 years preferred the negative much more so than did those with fewer than 10 years.

The one forced-choice difference came on Pair 2 (SAT scores). The larger newspaper staff members preferred the negative version (30 to 10), whereas the smaller newspaper staff members preferred the positive (12 to 7). The associated chi square value is 8.31, significant at $p < .005$.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The many complaints about the abundance of "bad news" in the media have led many critics, both amateur and professional, to claim that journalists actually prefer the bad news story over the good. A wide range of content analyses have found the bad news content of the media to range from 30 to 60 percent. Some studies have found that journalists tend to "overreport" certain kinds of negative news, such as crime. In other words, the "pictures in their heads" of the environment they are reporting on seems to be different from what others see, and that difference has a negative cast to it.

Some previous research seems to indicate that negativism does indeed play a part in the news selection process (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Peterson, 1979, 1981), and it may even act as a "news value" that is a significant predictor of news selection (Miller, 1977).

The best way to test the effect of negativism on news selection is to present journalists with stories that differ only in the positive or negative direction of the facts involved (Galtung and Ruge, 1973). Journalists, however, rarely have to choose between stories that are identical in every way but one value (Peterson, 1981). Thus, the effect of negativism was measured two ways in this study.

First, split samples of journalists rated either the positive or the negative version of 10 story leads. Thus, no single journalist

was aware of an opposite version; he or she merely saw a list of 10 story leads. Second, journalists were forced into the unusual situation of having to pick either the positive or the negative version of the story. In general, the two different measurement techniques corroborated one another. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the forced choice results seem to more strongly support the hypothesis that journalists prefer bad news over good.

Split-Sample Test

On the split-sample test, three negative versions received significantly higher importance ratings. The story with the largest difference between ratings (59.62 to 73.82) was Story No. 4, which had to do with increasing or decreasing child deaths by starvation in the Third World. The negative version was highly preferred in the forced-choice test as well, 76 to 24 percent. Both versions of the story received fairly low importance ratings and additivity index scores, which makes sense. The story leads simply do not have the overall impact that other story leads in the list have. The positive version received the lowest additivity index score (3) of all 20 story leads.

The large difference between the ratings of the positive and the negative version can probably be explained by the complementarity principle of Galtung and Ruge (1973), which states that a very low presence of one or more news values can be compensated for by high levels of other news values and selection still can occur. In this

study, it is hypothesized that high negativity can be especially effective in compensating for other low values.

In the case of the Third World child deaths, the fact that the story has low proximity (among other values) is not compensated for in the positive version. In the negative version, however, the presence of negativity does compensate for the lack of other values and the lead was rated significantly more important.

The other strongest difference occurred on Story No. 7, which had to do with violent crime in the nation being either down or up (68.97 or 81.62). The negative version received one of the highest overall importance ratings. This apparent attraction to the negative side of violent crime supports earlier research that found violent crime overreported when compared to other crimes. The negative version also was overwhelmingly preferred in the forced-choice test, 77 to 23 percent. It does seem that journalists not only prefer stories about violent crime over other crime stories, they also prefer stories about increasing violence over stories about decreasing violence.

The third pair of leads in which the negative version received a significantly higher rating than the positive was Story No. 9, which discussed an immediate utilities rate increase or decrease. The difference between these two versions was not as pronounced (86.81 to 92.5) as with the other two pairs. The negative version was again preferred in the forced-choice test, but for this pair, the difference was not statistically significant.

The decrease in significance may be explained by the lack of violence. The first two story leads had to do with deaths of children or violent crime, both more highly negative news events than a utilities rate change. A utilities rate increase is indeed "bad news," but it is not as bad as murder, rape, and death.

The fact that the utilities rate stories received the highest two ratings of all 20 story leads perhaps can be explained by the fact that Richmond, Va., is renowned for its high utility rates. The news that rates were going up or down would certainly be big news for local journalists. In fact, both versions received higher importance ratings than a story about the collapse of the Social Security system (83.22), a story that one would think would be more important than yet another rate increase.

Comparing the results of the utilities rate story leads with those of Story No. 5, which reported a good or a bad financial picture for the next decade, illustrates the effect of ambiguity--or the vagueness of the facts of a story--on the importance rating. Galtung and Ruge (1973) pointed out that journalists are taught to shun ambiguity, to deal only in hard, precise facts. This may explain, at least partly, why journalists are drawn to negative news, which usually contains more precise facts than positive news. Negative news is often event-oriented and can be reported in terms of hard facts about that event. Positive news is often issue- or trend-oriented and is harder to report because of the usual ambiguity surrounding the facts.

Both versions of Story No. 9 discuss a 17.5 percent rate change that will take place immediately. These are facts that journalists can deal with. Story No. 5, however, discusses the decade's financial picture in general terms: the average American will have one-half (or twice) the spending income he had in 1965. This is a different kind of story. The vague effects will happen at a nebulous future time.

The importance ratings reflect this difference and support Galtung and Ruge's hypothesis that journalists shun ambiguity. The two utilities rate change story leads had a mean importance rating of 89.65. The two financial picture for the decade story leads had a mean importance rating of 66.31. Even though a bleak financial picture for an entire decade would seem to be more important news than a rate increase, the journalists preferred the latter. The financial picture story just did not give the journalists anything definite on which to make an importance judgment.

A pilot project for the present study found ambiguity, or the lack of specific facts, to be a powerful predictor of selection. In fact, the difference in the mean importance ratings of ambiguous vs. not-ambiguous stories was greater than the difference between positive and negative stories. Not-ambiguous negative stories received the highest importance ratings, strongly suggesting an interaction between negativism and ambiguity when judging the importance of a news story. These data suggest that any future study of news values and news selection should include consideration of ambiguity.

Forced-Choice Test

The forced-choice results more strongly supported the hypothesis that journalists prefer bad news over good. Four negative versions were selected three-to-one over the positive versions. Three others were preferred about 60 to 40 and just barely missed statistical significance. Two of the significant preferences also were rated significantly higher on the split-sample test and were discussed above. The other two preferred negative versions came on Story No. 1 (drug use among local high school students is up or down) and Story No. 6 (because of crop problems in South America, coffee prices in this country are going up or down).

Interestingly, the positive version of the drug use story was rated as more important on the split-sample test, though the difference was not significant. This may be explained because of another news value: unusualness. Drug use among teenagers has become the norm. The fact that it was found to be decreasing is a deviation from the norm and therefore newsworthy. But when faced with choosing which version--the fact that drug use was up or down--journalists overwhelmingly went with the negative news version.

This situation was mirrored by the coffee price story. In the split-sample test, the positive story also was preferred (50.44 to 49.22), though the difference was again not significant. In the forced-choice situation, however, journalists preferred the negative version three-to-one.

These two examples illustrate what may be the crux of the entire negative news "problem." Studies in psychology have shown that positive information is of limited usefulness in forming first impressions (Briscoe et al., 1967) and that negative information has more influence on opinions than positive information (Richey et al., 1967). In other words negative news probably holds more information of value than positive news.

Sears and Whitney (1973) posit that people are more attentive to negative information because it may be more useful in avoiding negative experiences and unpleasant outcomes. This can be seen in both the drug use and the coffee price story. In the former, knowing that drug use is down is good news, but it has no function, it is not useful information. Knowing that drug use is up, on the other hand, is useful because action can be taken before the situation worsens. Also, if coffee prices are going down, that is good news, but no action needs to be taken. But if journalists report that coffee prices are going up, one can hoard coffee now at lower prices and avoid an unpleasant outcome. In both cases, the negative version holds information of some value whereas the positive version does not. Thus it should come as no surprise that journalists see the negative as more important than the positive.

On all four of the story pairs in which the positive version was seen as slightly more important by the split sample, the forced choice results showed at least a 60-40 preference in the opposite direction, for the negative version.

One could argue that choosing between two nearly identical story leads is highly unrealistic, especially if the central facts in the stories, such as prices are going up or down, are opposed to one another. But, in a sense, choosing between a story about a bus wreck in Ecuador and one about trends in health care is "unrealistic." How can one compare such stories? Journalists face similar decisions many times a day every day. Based on these data, it seems fairly clear that journalists believe that negative news holds more information of value than positive. That fact coupled with the relative ambiguity of positive news drives the journalist toward negative news, perhaps in spite of himself.

One positive version (Story No. 2, SAT scores at a local high school went up or down) was significantly preferred over the negative version. The preference was not nearly as strong as the preference for the four negative versions. In the split-sample test, the negative version was rated more important, but not significantly. As with the slight preference for the positive drug use story, unusualness probably played a part in this selection. The positive version mentioned that the students were "bucking a national trend" in declining SAT scores. The negative version said that the students were following the national trend. The addition of "unusualness" to the positive version was reflected in the news value additivity index scores. This positive version was the only one to receive more points (6 to 5) than the negative version.

News must pass a certain threshold of perception before it can be recognized as such. If an event continues in the news for a long period of time, its threshold is raised and more deviation is necessary for the event to be seen as news (Galtung and Ruge, 1973). Declining SAT scores have been going on for so long that stories about yet another drop are only marginally interesting. A story about a long-running trend being broken, however, is new and thus it is news.

The fact that the addition of another news value--unusualness--to the positive drug use and SAT score story leads affected importance ratings and/or preference underlines the accuracy of the news value additivity index in predicting news selection. The additivity index scores for each story correlated highly (+0.79) with the mean importance ratings. The index scores also were useful in predicting the significant differences in the split-sample and forced-choice tests.

On the split-sample test, all three pairs in which the negative version was rated significantly higher had a difference of at least two points in index scores (Table 9). One other story (No. 3) that did not show a significant difference on the split-sample ratings did show a two-point differential on the additivity index. All other differentials, however, were only one point. Noting those pairs with two-point differentials on the index would have been fairly accurate predictions of differing reactions to the two story lead versions.

TABLE 9

NEWS VALUE ADDITIVITY INDEX DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POSITIVE
AND NEGATIVE VERSIONS WITH FORCED-CHOICE RESULTS

Story Pair No.	Additivity Index			Forced-Choice Test		
	Pos.	Neg.	Diff.	Pos.	Neg.	Z-Score
1	5	6	-1	26%	74%	+3.65 ^a
2	6	5	+1	61%	39%	-1.66 ^a
3	7	9	-2	40%	60%	+1.52
4	3	6	-3 ^b	24%	76%	+3.96 ^a
5	5	6	-1	47%	53%	+0.45
6	4	5	-1	25%	75%	+3.78 ^a
7	7	9	-2 ^b	23%	77%	+4.05 ^a
8	6	7	-1	39%	61%	+1.62
9	8	10	-2 ^b	39%	61%	+1.57
10	6	7	-1	43%	57%	+1.03

^aSignificant at $p < .05$ (± 1.645).

^bNegative version significantly higher on split-sample test.

On the forced-choice test, two of the significantly preferred negative versions had index scores of two or more points higher than the positive version (see Table 9). The significantly preferred positive version was the only positive version to receive a higher index score than its negative opposite. Overall then, the additivity index was highly useful in predicting mean importance scores, positive-negative rating differentials, and forced-choice preference.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Journalists are taught to apply a rather standardized list of "news values" when they approach a news event and try to decide if it is indeed "news." Journalists cannot agree on which news values are most important, and generally speaking, cannot even describe news, though they say they "know it when they see it."

Many on-the-job influences distort the simple news selection process based on news values alone. Among the most important influences, according to the literature, are: (1) personal biases and reality judgments, (2) newsroom policy, (3) the organizational structure of the newsgathering process, (4) the influence of the sources of news, (5) news judgments by other journalists, and (6) the size of the news hole on a given day and other situational variables. These influences act as intervening variables, distorting the theoretically "pure" selection process based on news values.

Negativism in the news, or "information about events, objects or other referents which are themselves generally considered to be unpleasant or harmful" (Haskins, 1981b), seems to have been increasing in recent years. Media critics and members of the general public alike have been complaining about too much "bad news" in the media. Some studies have indeed shown that, if negative news is not on the

increase, there is at least a great deal of it published or broadcast every day. Several previous studies (Miller, 1977; Peterson, 1979, 1981) have shown that the presence of negativism in a story is a significant predictor of selection by journalists.

Galtung and Ruge (1973) pointed out four reasons why negative news seems to turn up in the media more often than positive news: (1) negative news better matches the frequency of the daily media news hunger; (2) negative news is less ambiguous than positive news and is thus more attractive to fact-oriented reporters; (3) negative news is consonant with today's troubled times and it fulfills a latent need for negative information; and (4) negative news is more unexpected than positive news and, therefore, fits another news value: unusualness.

To test whether journalists would tend to select negative news over positive, 10 pairs of story leads were constructed. Each story in the pair was equal in nearly every way possible except that one version was negative and the other positive news. For one measure, the story pairs were split into separate lists of five positive and five negative versions and given to split samples of journalists to rate the importance of each. In a second test, all journalists in the overall sample were presented with both the positive and the negative versions and asked to pick one over the other in terms of importance, or whether they would publish it in the next day's newspaper.

It was hypothesized that journalists would rate the negative stories as more important in the first test, and select the negative

over the positive version in the second. The first, split-sample test only mildly supported the hypothesis. Only three negative versions were rated significantly higher than the positive version. A fourth negative version approached significance. The overall rating of the negative versions was not significantly higher than the positive story ratings. However, no positive story lead received a significantly higher mean importance rating.

The forced-choice test more strongly supported the hypothesis. Nine negative versions were preferred over the positive version, though only four were statistically significant. Three other versions, however, approached statistical significance, and the overall preference for the negative versions was significant at $p < .05$.

A news value additivity index, based on standard news values plus negativism, was calculated for each story. It was hypothesized that there would be a strong positive relationship between the index score and the mean importance rating of each lead version. The correlation coefficient between the two scores was +0.79, indicating a strong linear relationship.

Conclusions

Negativism does seem to play a part in the news selection process, though it may not be as strong nor as direct as hypothesized. Although it is arguable that the selection of negative news over positive takes place because the negative holds more information of value or because it is less ambiguous, that argument may not be of

much concern. Regardless of the reasons why, journalists are sometimes drawn to the negative, even when a positive story of equal news value is available. The converse is never true: a journalist will not select a positive story over a negative, all other values being equal. Thus, negativism does play an important part in news selection, usually as a "direction" of the news value consequence.

The fact that journalists are drawn to stories with precise facts and shun vague or ambiguous stories is worth further study. The present newsgathering process, which emphasizes the beat system and its reliance on easily gathered facts from reliable official sources, may itself be a major factor in negativism's role in the news selection process. Police departments, hospital emergency rooms, and the courts are places where journalists can satisfy their need for quick, precise facts and quotes. The facts and quotes usually centered around "bad news" because these are places where crime, accidents, disasters, and corruption are often the subject of the day. In other words, journalists themselves may not exhibit a strong personal bias toward the negative, but their sampling of news sources probably is biased toward "bad news."

Realizing that positive news is often shunned because of its vagueness may be important. Sources and/or writers of positive news could enhance their chances of news selection if they would write more precisely and gather facts and quotes from acceptable and reliable official sources. Because negative news has been shown to have deleterious effects on community image, it may well be important

to try to increase the amount of positive news in the media by presenting it more to journalists' liking.

A news value additivity index based on the presence and level of intensity of a variety of news values in a story would also be a useful predictor of news selection for news sources. The data in this study clearly showed a strong relationship between the values in a story and its rating of importance and "selectability" by journalists, adding support to Galtung and Ruge's (1973) original hypothesis. Sources could increase their chances of selection not only by reducing ambiguity, but also by injecting as many strong news values as possible into their story.

Galtung and Ruge's complementarity principle--that low presence of one value can be compensated for by high presence of another--was harder to see in action in these data, but it too seems to be workable. Because the stories were so nearly alike, the only value truly different was negativity. In the story pair about Third World child deaths, however, the complementarity principle did seem to work. The positive story had little consequences for the reader, had no proximity or prominence, and the timeliness was vague. The positive version was rated fairly low by the journalists. Adding the high level of negativity associated with an increase in child deaths added enough points to the negative version to make the difference statistically significant. Sources wishing to overcome the absence of negativity in their stories would have to compensate by having very high levels of other values.

Few significant differences in response were found for any of the demographic variables. However, on the two forced-choice stories that showed significant differences by sex (No. 6 and No. 10), females highly preferred the negative, whereas males did so only slightly. Females also rated the negative versions of stories 3 and 5 in the split-sample test, significantly higher than did males. Sex may be a factor in judging newsworthiness and should be studied further.

The moderate but definite attraction of journalists to negative news is important because of the possible deleterious effects on society. The highly controlled stories in this study may not have presented journalists with a realistic situation, though negativism was clearly isolated. To further study the role of negativism in the news selection process, comparisons of on-the-job news story selections and rejections, such as in an in-depth study done by Peterson (1981) need to be carried out. Combined with a study of the role of ambiguity in the news, this more naturalistic method may further delineate the role of negativism in the news selection process.

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Allen, T. H., & Piland, R. N. Bungling assassins rate page one. Journal of Communication, 1976, 26 (4), 98-101.
- Anderson, N. H., & Jacobson, A. Effect of stimulus inconsistency and discounting instructions in personality impression formation. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, 2, 531-539.
- Atwood, L. E. How newsmen and readers preceive each others' story preferences. Journalism Quarterly, 1970, 47, 296-302.
- Atwood, L. E., & Grotta, G. L. Socialization of news values in beginning reporters. Journalism Quarterly, 1973, 50, 759-761.
- Badii, N., & Ward, W. J. The nature of news in four dimensions. Journalism Quarterly, 1980, 57, 243-248.
- Batlin, R. San Francisco newspapers' campaign coverage: 1896, 1952. Journalism Quarterly, 1954, 31, 297-303.
- Becker, J., & Fuchs, D. A. How two major California dailies covered Reagan vs. Brown. Journalism Quarterly, 1967, 44, 645-653.
- Bird, G. L., & Merwin, F. E. The Newspaper and Society. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1942.
- Bohle, B. (Ed.) The Home Book of American Quotations. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1967.
- Boorstin, D. J. The Image. New York: Atheneum Press, 1962.
- Bornholdt, J. N., Jr. Should the student press be more serious? Journalism Quarterly, 1966, 43, 560-562.
- Borstel, G. H. Ownership, competition, and content in 20 small dailies. Journalism Quarterly, 1956, 33, 220-222.
- Bowers, D. R. A report on activity by publishers in directing newsroom decisions. Journalism Quarterly, 1967, 44, 43-52.
- Breed, W. Newspaper "opinion leaders" and the process of standardization. Journalism Quarterly, 1955, 32, 277-284, 328.
- Breed, W. Social control in the newsroom: a functional analysis. Social Forces, 1955, 33, 326-335.

- Breed, W. Analyzing news: some questions for research. Journalism Quarterly, 1956, 33, 467-477.
- Briscoe, M. E., Woodyard, H. D., & Shaw, M. E. Personality impression change as a function of favorableness of first impression. Journal of Personality, 1967, 35, 343-357.
- Brooks, B. S., et al. News Reporting and Writing. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980.
- Broussard, E. J., Blackman, C. R., Blackwell, D. L., Smith, D. W., & Hunt, S. News of aged and aging in 10 metropolitan dailies. Journalism Quarterly, 1980, 57, 324-327.
- Bruning, J. L. & Kintz, B. L. Computational Handbook of Statistics. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1968.
- Buckalew, J. K. A Q-analysis of television news editors' decisions. Journalism Quarterly, 1969, 46, 135-137.
- Buchanan, R. E. News breaks and news repetitions in morning-evening newspaper cities. Journalism Quarterly, 1942, 19, 356-361.
- Burgoon, J. K., Burgoon, M., & Atkin, C. K. What is news? Who decides? And how? A preliminary report by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, May, 1982.
- Bush, C. R. A system of categories for general news content. Journalism Quarterly, 1960, 37, 206-210.
- Carey, J. W. Journalism and criticism: the case of an undeveloped profession, in M. C. Emery & T. C. Smythe (Eds.) Readings in Mass Communications (3rd ed.). Dubuque, Ia.: Wm. C. Brown, 1977.
- Carlson, E. R. Psychological satisfaction and interest in news. Journalism Quarterly, 1960, 37, 547-551.
- Carter, R. E., Jr. Newspaper "gatekeepers" and the sources of news. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1958, 22, 133-144.
- Casey, R., & Copeland, T. Current "news hole" policies of daily newspapers: a survey. Journalism Quarterly, 1957, 34, 175-176.
- Childs, M. W. Column, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Aug. 25, 1964, 1-C.
- Charnley, M. V. Reporting (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, Inc., 1976.

- Church, G. F. The socio-psychological nature of news. Social Forces, 1938-39, 17, 190-195.
- Cirino, R. Bias through selection and omission: automobile safety, smoking. In S. Cohen and J. Young (Eds.), The Manufacture of News. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1973.
- Cirino, R. Power to Persuade. New York: Bantam Books, 1978.
- Clark, C. D. News: a sociological study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1931.
- Clyde, R. W., & Buckalew, J. K. Inter-media standardization: a Q-analysis of news editors. Journalism Quarterly, 1969, 46, 349-351.
- Cohen, B. C. The Press and Foreign Policy. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Cony, E. R. Conflict-cooperation content of five American dailies. Journalism Quarterly, 1953, 30, 15-22.
- Culbertson, H. M. Three perspectives on American journalism. Journalism Monographs, 83, June 1983.
- Davison, W. P. On the effects of communication. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1959, 23, 343-360.
- Delia, J. G., O'Keefe, B. J., & O'Keefe, D. J. The constructivist approach to communication. In F.E.X. Dance (Ed.), Human Communication Theory. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982.
- Doig, I., & Doig, C. News: a consumer's guide. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.
- Dominick, J. R. Crime and law enforcement in the mass media. In C. Winick (Ed.), Deviance and the Mass Media. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1978.
- Donohew, L. Decoder behavior on incongruent political material: a pilot study. Journal of Communication, 1966, 16, 133-142.
- Donohew, L. Newspaper gatekeepers and forces in the news channel. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1967, 31, 61-68.
- Donohew, R. L. Publisher attitude and community conditions as factors in newspaper coverage of a social welfare issue. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1965.

- Dreschel, R., Netteborg, K., & Aborisade, B. Community size and reporting of local courts. Journalism Quarterly, 1980, 57, 71-78.
- Drew, D. G. Notes and decision making of three television beat reporters. Journal of Broadcasting, 1972, 16, 165-173.
- Epstein, E. J. The selection of reality. In Elie Abel (Ed.) What's News. San Francisco: Institute for contemporary Studies, 1981.
- Erbring, L., Goldenberg, E. N., & Miller, A. H. Front-page news and real-world cues: a new look at agenda-setting by the media. American Journal of Political Science, 1980, 24, (1), 16-49.
- Fedler, F., & Jordan, D. How emphasis on people affects coverage of crime. Journalism Quarterly, 1982, 59, 474-478.
- Fishman, M. Manufacturing the News. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.
- Flegel, R. C., & Chaffee, S. H. Influences of editors, readers, and personal opinions on reporters. Journalism Quarterly, 1971, 48, 645-651.
- Frank, J. The Beginnings of the English Newspaper: 1620-1660. Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961.
- Galow, C. A comparison of newspapers' editors and subscribers' news values. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1973.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. Structuring and selecting news. In S. Cohen and J. Young (Eds.), The Manufacture of News. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Gans, H. J. Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.
- Gieber, W. Do newspapers overplay negative news? Journalism Quarterly, 1955, 32, 311-318.
- Gieber, W. Across the desk: a study of 16 telegraph editors. Journalism Quarterly, 1956, 33, 423-432.
- Gieber, W. How the "gatekeepers" view local civil liberties news. Journalism Quarterly, 1960, 37, 199-205.
- Gieber, W. News is what newspapermen make it. In L.A. Dexter & D. W. White (Eds.), People, Society, and Mass Communications. London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, 173-181.

- Gieber, W., & Johnson, W. The city hall "beat": a study of reporter and source roles. Journalism Quarterly, 1961, 38, 289-297.
- Gray, R. G., & Wilhoit, G. C. Portrait of the U. S. Journalist. Editor & Publisher, May 21, 1983, 116 (21), 11.
- Grey, D. L. Decision-making by a reporter under deadline pressure. Journalism Quarterly, 1966, 43, 419-428.
- Hamelink, C. An alternative to news. Journal of Communication, 1976, 26 (4), 120-123.
- Harriss, J., & Leiter, K. The Complete Reporter. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981.
- Hartung, B. W., & Stone, G. Time to stop singing the "bad news" blues. Newspaper Research Journal, 1980, 1 (2), 19-26.
- Haskins, J. B. Pre-testing editorial items and ideas for reader interest. Journalism Quarterly, 1960, 37, 224-234.
- Haskins, J. B. Too much crime and violence in the press? Editor & Publisher, October 19, 1968, 38.
- Haskins, J. B. Stories of violence get high readership. Editor & Publisher, February 8, 1969, 12.
- Haskins, J. B. Knoxville newspaper opinion survey. Proprietary research report, Knoxville, 1978.
- Haskins, J. B. Paradoxes and quirks in human communications behavior and some explanatory theories. In J. McKerns (Ed.), Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Communications Research Symposium. Knoxville: College of Communications, University of Tennessee, 1981.
- Haskins, J. B. The trouble with bad news. Newspaper Research Journal, 1981, 2 (2), 3-16.
- Haskins, J. B. The effects of bad news and good news on newspaper and community images, ANPA News Research Report, December 30, 1983.
- Haskins, J. B. A comparison of bad news on radio and television using the News Morbidity Scale. Knoxville: Communications Research Center, University of Tennessee, April, 1983.
- Haskins, J. B., Miller, M. M., & Quarles, J. Reliability of the news direction scale for analysis of the good-bad news dimension. In press, Journalism Quarterly, Fall, 1984.

- Hays, W. L. Statistics (3rd ed.) New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.
- Hemanus, P. Objectivity in news transmission. Journal of Communication, 1976, 26 (4), 102-107.
- Hughes, H. M. The social interpretation of news. The Annals, January, 1942, 219, 11-17.
- Hulteng, J. L. Testing judgments in news selection. Journalism Quarterly, 1959, 36, 348-350.
- Johnstone, J. W. C., Slawski, E. J., & Bowman, W. W. (Eds.). The News People (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).
- Joliffe, H. R. A semantic slant on "objectivity" vs. "interpretation." Journalism Quarterly, 1956, 33, 189-193.
- Jones, E. E., & Davis, K. E. From acts to dispositions: the attribution process in person perception. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. New York: Academic Press, 1965.
- Jones, R., Troidahl, V. C., & Hvistendahl, J. K. News selection patterns from a state TTS wire. Journalism Quarterly, 1961, 38, 303-312.
- Joseph, T. Reporters' and editors' preferences toward reporter decision making. Journalism Quarterly, 1982, 59, 219-222, 248.
- Kelley, D. Press coverage of two Michigan congressional elections. Journalism Quarterly, 1958, 35, 447-449, 509.
- Kirk, R. E. Experimental Design: Procedures for the Behavioral Sciences. Belmont, Ca.: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1968.
- Klein, M. W., & Maccoby, N. Newspaper objectivity in the 1952 campaign. Journalism Quarterly, 1954, 31, 285-296.
- Lindeborg, R., & Stone, G. News values as reflected in news content found stable from 1950-1970. ANPA News Research Bulletin No. 7, 1974.
- Lowry, D. T. Gresham's law and network TV news selection. Journal of Broadcasting, 1971, 15, 397-408.
- Markham, J. W., & Stempel, H. G., III. Analysis of techniques in measuring press performance. Journalism Quarterly, 1957, 34, 187-190.

- Menninger, K. The world needs an "up" beat. Syndicated article in the Knoxville News-Sentinel, November 25, 1979, F-6.
- Miller, A. H., Goldenberg, E. N., & Erbring, L. Typeset politics: impact of newspapers on public confidence. The American Political Science Review, 1979, 73, 67-84.
- Miller, S. H. News coverage of Congress: the search for the ultimate spokesman. Journalism Quarterly, 1977, 54, 459-465.
- Molotch, H., & Lester, M. News as purposive behavior: on the strategic use of routine events, accidents and scandals. American Sociological Review, 1974, 39, 101, 112.
- New Directions for News, Women's Studies Programmed Policy Center of The George Washington University, September, 1983.
- Nixon, R. B., & Jones, R. L. The content of non-competitive vs. competitive newspapers. Journalism Quarterly, 1956, 33, 299-314.
- O'Brien, D. W. The news as environment. Journalism Monographs, September, 1983, 85.
- Olien, C. N., Donohue, G. A., & Tichenor, P. J. The community editor's power and the reporting of conflict. Journalism Quarterly, 1968, 45, 243-252.
- O'Neill, M. Quoted in Brown, R. U., IPI warned of "right to communicate." Editor & Publisher, May 28, 1983, 116 (22), 7-8.
- Paletz, D. L., Reichert, P., & McIntyre, B. How the media support local governmental authority. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1971, 35, 80-92.
- Pasqua, T. News values: reconsidered through factor analysis and regression analysis. Paper presented to the annual faculty meeting of the Journalism Association of Community Colleges, Morro Bay, Calif., February 14, 1981.
- Peterson, S. Foreign news gatekeepers and the criteria of newsworthiness. Journalism Quarterly, 1979, 56, 116-125.
- Peterson, S. International news selection by the elite press: a case study. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1981, 45, 143-163.
- Phillips, E. B. Novelty without change. Journal of Communication, 1976, 26 (4), 87-92.

- Pool, I. de Sola, & Schulman, I. Newsmen's fantasies, audiences, and newswriting. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1959, 23, 145-158.
- Price, G. A method for analyzing newspaper campaign coverage. Journalism Quarterly, 1954, 31, 447-458.
- Redding, W. C. How to conduct a readership survey. Chicago: Lawrence Ragan Communications, Inc., 1982.
- Richey, M. H., et al. Relative influence of positive and negative information on impression formation and persistence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, 4, 322-327.
- Robinson, M. J. A statesman is a dead politician: candidate images on network news. In Elie Abel (Ed.) What's News. San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1981.
- Rock, P. News as eternal recurrence. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.), The Manufacture of News. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Roshier, B. The selection of crime news by the press. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.), The Manufacture of News. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Ryan, M., & Owen, D. The content analysis of metropolitan newspaper coverage of social issues. Journalism Quarterly, 1976, 53, 634-640.
- Sasser, E. L., & Russell, J. T. The fallacy of news judgment. Journalism Quarterly, 1972, 49, 280-294.
- Schiller, D. Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.
- Schramm, W. The nature of news. Journalism Quarterly, 1949, 26, 259-269.
- Schramm, W. Newspapers of a state as a network. Journalism Quarterly, 1958, 35, 177-182.
- Schramm, W. The nature of communications between humans. In W. Schramm & D. F. Roberts (Eds.), The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971, 3-53.
- Schudson, M. Discovering the News. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978.

- Seals, M. C., & Deppa, J. The impact of computer terminals on copy editors. Unpublished paper, 1983.
- Sears, D. O., & Whitney, R. E. Political persuasion. In I. de Sola Pool & W. Schramm (Eds.), Handbook of Communication. Chicago: Rand-McNally College Publishing Co., 1973, 253-289.
- Sherizen, S. Social creation of crime news: all the news fitted to print. In C. Winick (Ed.), Deviance and the Mass Media. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1978.
- Singletary, M. W. What determines the news? ANPA News Research Report No. 5, 1977, 1-5.
- Singletary, M. W. Newspaper photographs: a content analysis. Journalism Quarterly, 1978, 55, 585-589.
- Singer, B. D. Violence, protest and war in television news: the U. S. and Canada compared. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1970, 34, 611-616.
- Steadman, H. J., & Cocozza, J. J. Selective reporting and the public's misconceptions of the criminally insane. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1977-78, 41, 523-533.
- Stempel, G. H., III. Uniformity of wire content of six Michigan dailies. Journalism Quarterly, 1959, 36, 45-48.
- Stempel, G. H., III. Content patterns of small and metropolitan dailies. Journalism Quarterly, 1962, 39, 88-90.
- Stempel, G. H., III, & Westley, B. H. (Eds.) Research Methods in Mass Communication. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1981.
- Stone, G., & Hartung, B. W. Good news vs. bad: a relative impact investigation. Paper presented at Association for Education in Journalism convention, Houston, August, 1979.
- Swanson, C. E. What they read in 130 daily newspapers. Journalism Quarterly, 1955, 32, 411-421.
- Taylor, W. L. Gauging mental health content of the mass media. Journalism Quarterly, 1957, 34, 191-201.
- Tesser, A., & Rosen, S. The reluctance to transmit bad news. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. Vol. 8. New York: Academic Press, 1975.

- Tuchman, G. News, the newsman's reality. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University, 1969.
- Tuchman, G. Objectivity as strategic ritual: an examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity. American Journal of Sociology, 1972, 77, 660-670.
- Tuchman, G. Making news by doing work: routinizing the unexpected. American Journal of Sociology, 1973, 79, 110-131.
- Tuchman, G. Telling stories. Journal of Communication, 1976, 26, 93-97.
- Tuchman, G. Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality. New York: The Free Press, 1978.
- Wamsley, G. L., & Pride, R. A. Television network news: rethinking the iceberg problem. Western Political Quarterly, 1972, 25, 434-450.
- Wang, G. A newspaper without news. Journalism Quarterly, 1982, 59, 286-289.
- Ward, W. J. News values, news situations, and news selections: an intensive study of 10 city editors. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1967.
- Ways, M. What's wrong with news? It isn't new enough. Fortune, October, 1969, 110-113, 155-156.
- Whitney, D. C., & Becker, L. B. "Keeping the gates" for gatekeepers: the effects of wire news. Journalism Quarterly, 1982, 59, 60-65.
- Wilhoit, G. C., & Sherrill, K. S. Wire service visibility of U. S. senators. Journalism Quarterly, 1968, 45, 45-48.
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. Mass Media Research. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1983.
- Wilkins, L. Information and the definition of deviance. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.) The Manufacture of News. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Windhauser, J. W. Reporting of Ohio municipal elections by the Ohio metropolitan daily press. Journalism Quarterly, 1977, 54, 552-565.
- Yankelovich, Skelly & White, Inc. Tracking the attitudes of the public toward the newspaper business. ANPA News Report No. 19, April 20, 1979.

APPENDIX

The state utilities board today accepted a proposal for a 17.5 percent drop in gas and electricity rates, effective immediately.

← A or B →

The rate decrease, based on lower electricity costs from the state's new power plant that is now in full operation, means that the average homeowner's monthly electricity bill should drop by \$15, according to a utilities board spokesman.

The state utilities board today accepted a proposal for a 17.5 percent rate increase for gas and electricity, effective immediately.

The rate increase, based on increased costs because the state's new power plant is not yet in full operation, means that the average homeowner's monthly electricity bill should go up by \$15, according to a utilities board spokesman.

A safety program intended to cut down on traffic accidents and deaths on Highway 43's infamous "Blood Alley" does not seem to be working, Chesterfield County Sheriff Emmett Lee Wingo said today.

← A or B →

Wingo said that the signs asking motorists to turn on headlights and warning them of the dangerous stretch of highway are not helping the problem. He said injury-causing accidents are actually up 50 percent and fatalities up 28 percent over last year's figures, before the program was begun.

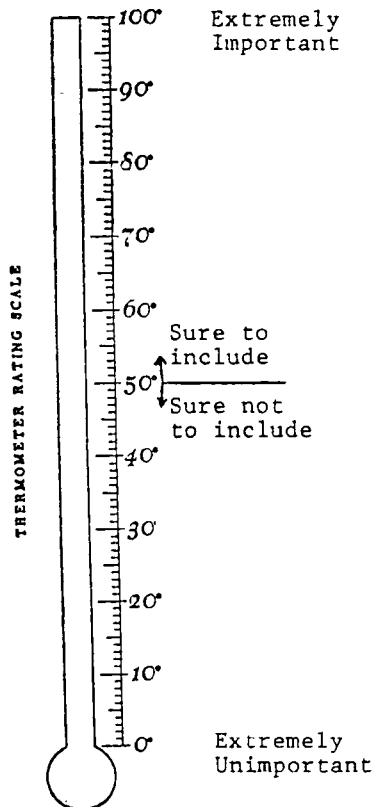
A safety program intended to cut down on traffic accidents and deaths on Highway 43's infamous "Blood Alley" seem to be working, Chesterfield County Sheriff Emmett Lee Wingo said today.

Wingo said that the signs asking motorists to turn on headlights and warning them of the dangerous stretch of highway must be the reason behind the 50 percent decrease in injury-causing accidents and the 28 percent decrease in fatalities so far this year.

Please continue...

NEWS CONTENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read each of the brief story leads. Rate each one on an importance scale, as illustrated by the thermometer below. If you believe a story lead to be extremely important and it must be included in tomorrow's Richmond newspaper, give it a score of 100. If you believe a story lead to be extremely UNimportant, and it should not be included in tomorrow's Richmond newspaper, give it a score of zero. Otherwise, give each story lead a score between zero and 100 that best represents how important it is.



1 After a three-month-long investigation, Richmond police officials have announced that drug usage among Richmond high school students appears to be on the wane. Police Chief Frank S. Duling announced today at a City Hall press conference that his under-cover agents saw fewer marijuana purchases than they did two years ago.

The agents, who were young enough to pass as "transfer" students, also noticed no hard drug sales, as they did in the first investigation.

1. _____

2 Scholastic Aptitude Test scores at John Marshall High School fell again this year, making it the third consecutive year that JMHS juniors have followed the national trend of declining scores in the test.

Joanna Doe, John Marshall principal, said that the lower scores can be attributed to the effects of the defeated bond issue four years ago.

"Without the learning center those extra tax dollars would have bought, the quality of education was bound to decline," she said.

2. _____

3 Millions of elderly citizens no longer face the spectre of poverty as new federal regulations have rescued the Social Security program from insolvency, according to a Human Services Administration spokesman.

John Smith told a Washington Press Conference yesterday that more money was paid into the program last year than was given out in benefits. He said that it was the first time in five years that the program was not "in the red," meaning that it is no longer necessary to talk of discontinuing the program.

3. _____

Please continue...

- 4 A United Nations report shows that death by starvation among children in Third World countries is at an all-time high.

Bihh Harapt, a deputy secretary for food development, attributed the continuing increase in deaths to a cutback in shipments of wheat, rice and dry milk from the United States.

4. —

- 8 The Consumer Price Index made its largest drop in nearly two years last month, signaling good news for the nation's consumers.

The CPI, based on a market basket of consumer goods, fell 3.2 percent last month. It was the third consecutive month that the CPI figure went down.

8. —

- 5 Despite recent increases in the prime lending rate, the financial picture for the average American in the next 10 years is better than ever, a leading economist said today.

Dr. Thomas Carlton, an economics professor at Harvard University, said that interest figures will be dipping back into single digits soon.

"And future income tax changes will mean that the average American will have twice as much unencumbered spending money as he did in 1965, when inflation began eating away at his wallet," Carlton said.

5. —

- 9 The state utilities board today accepted a proposal for a 17.5 percent rate increase for gas and electricity, effective immediately.

The rate increase, based on increased costs because the state's new power plant is not yet in full operation, means that the average homeowner's monthly electricity bill should go up by \$15, according to a utilities board spokesman.

9. —

- 6 This year's South American coffee bean harvest is expected to reach record levels, reducing fears of another dramatic rise in coffee prices to American consumers.

The American Coffee Importers Association estimates that the coffee bean crop will be 35 percent larger than last year's. Because of the additional coffee on the market, prices would definitely drop, according to an ACIA spokesman.

6. —

- 10 A safety program intended to cut down on traffic accidents and deaths on Highway 43's infamous "Blood Alley" does not seem to be working, Chesterfield County Sheriff Emmett Lee Wingo said today.

Wingo said that the signs asking motorists to turn on headlights and warning them of the dangerous stretch of highway are not helping the problem. He said injury-causing accidents are actually up 50 percent and fatalities up 28 percent over last year's figures, before the program was begun.

10. —

- 7 Violent crime in the nation has increased dramatically, according to statistics released today by the FBI.

The largest increases in the number of crimes reported occurred with murder, rape and armed robbery. The murder rate rose 33 percent, rape increased 21 percent and armed robberies rose by 11.5 percent.

7. —

Please continue...

Now, one more quick set of importance ratings. Please look at each story pair. Select one story for publication in tomorrow's Richmond newspaper based on which you believe is more important. Circle the letter of the version you would select for publication.

After a three-month-long investigation, Richmond police officials have announced that drug usage among Richmond high school students appears to be on the wane.

Police Chief Frank S. Duling announced today at a City Hall press conference that his under-cover agents saw fewer marijuana purchases than they did two years ago.

The agents, who were young enough to pass as "transfer" students, also noticed no hard drug sales, as they did in the first investigation.

← A or B →

After a three-month-long investigation, Richmond police officials have announced that drug usage among Richmond high school students appears to be on the rise.

Police Chief Frank S. Duling announced today at a City Hall press conference that his under-cover agents saw more marijuana purchases than they did two years ago.

The agents, who were young enough to pass as "transfer" students, also noticed more hard drug sales than they did in the first investigation.

Scholastic Aptitude Test scores at John Marshall High School fell again this year, making it the third consecutive year that JMHS juniors have followed the national trend of declining scores in the test.

Joanna Doe, John Marshall principal, said that the lower scores can be attributed to the effects of the defeated bond issue four years ago.

"Without the learning center those extra tax dollars would have bought the quality of education was bound to decline," she said.

← A or B →

Scholastic Aptitude Test scores at John Marshall High School rose again this year, making it the third consecutive year that JMHS juniors have bucked the national trend of declining scores in the test.

Joanna Doe, John Marshall principal, said that the higher scores can be attributed to the effects of the new learning center, which was funded by a bond issue four years ago.

"I think we can see the quality that those extra tax dollars have brought to our high school," she said.

Millions of elderly citizens no longer face the spectre of poverty as new federal regulations have rescued the Social Security program from insolvency, according to a Human Services Administration spokesman.

John Smith told a Washington Press Conference yesterday that more money was paid into the program last year than was given out in benefits. He said that it was the first time in five years that the program was not "in the red," meaning that it is no longer necessary to talk of discontinuing the program.

← A or B →

Millions of elderly citizens face the spectre of poverty as new federal regulations have failed to rescue the Social Security program, according to a Human Services Administration spokesman.

John Smith told a Washington press conference yesterday that more money was paid out in benefits last year than was paid into the program. He said that it was the fifth consecutive year that the program was "in the red," meaning that the program may have to be discontinued.

A United Nations report shows that death by starvation among children in Third World countries is at an all-time high.

Bihn Harapt, a deputy secretary for food development, attributed the continuing increase in deaths to a cutback in shipments of wheat, rice and dry milk from the United States.

← A or B →

A United Nations report shows that death by starvation among children in Third World countries is at an all-time low.

Bihn Harapt, a deputy secretary for food development, attributed the continuing decrease in deaths to more and bigger shipments of wheat, rice and dry milk from the United States.

Please continue...

Despite recent increases in the prime lending rate, the financial picture for the average American in the next 10 years is better than ever, a leading economist said today.

Dr. Thomas Carlton, an economics professor at Harvard University, said that interest figures will be dipping back into single digits soon.

"And future income tax changes will mean that the average American will have twice as much unencumbered spending money as he did in 1965, when inflation began eating away at his wallet," Carlton said.

←A or B→

Recent increases in the prime lending rate show that the financial picture for the average American in the next 10 years is worse than ever, a leading economist said today.

Dr. Thomas Carlton, an economics professor at Harvard University, said that interest figures will continue to rise.

"And future income tax changes will mean that the average American will have one half the unencumbered spending money as he did in 1965, when inflation began eating away at his wallet," Carlton said.

This year's South American coffee bean harvest is expected to reach a record low level, bringing fears of another dramatic rise in coffee prices to American consumers.

The American Coffee Importers Association estimates that the coffee bean crop will be 35 percent smaller than last year's. Because there would be less coffee on the market, prices would definitely rise, according to an ACIA spokesman.

←A or B→

This year's South American coffee bean harvest is expected to reach record levels, reducing fears of another dramatic rise in coffee prices to American consumers.

The American Coffee Importers Association estimates that the coffee bean crop will be 35 percent larger than last year's. Because of the additional coffee on the market, prices would definitely drop, according to an ACIA spokesman.

Violent crime in the nation has decreased dramatically, according to statistics released today by the FBI.

The largest drops in the number of crimes reported occurred with murder, rape and armed robbery. The murder rate declined 33 percent, rape decreased 21 percent and armed robberies fell by 11.5 percent.

←A or B→

Violent crime in the nation has increased dramatically, according to statistics released today by the FBI.

The largest increases in the number of crimes reported occurred with murder, rape and armed robbery. The murder rate rose 33 percent, rape increased 21 percent and armed robberies rose by 11.5 percent.

The Consumer Price Index made its largest rise in nearly two years last month, signaling bad news for the nation's consumers.

The CPI, based on a market basket of consumer goods, rose 3.2 percent last month. It was the third consecutive month that the CPI figure went up.

←A or B→

The Consumer Price Index made its largest drop in nearly two years last month, signaling good news for the nation's consumers.

The CPI, based on a market basket of consumer goods, fell 3.2 percent last month. It was the third consecutive month that the CPI figure went down.

Please continue...

No. ____

Please answer the following brief questions about yourself. These questions are just as important as those. Remember that all answers are confidential and will be used only in combination with other respondents to form a composite picture for statistical analysis. Your answers will not identify you as an individual. Please mark your response with an X, or fill in the blank where appropriate.

	DO NOT USE
1. Sex: Female () Male ()	_____
2. Age: _____	_____
3. Education: () High school diploma or less () Some college () College degree () Some post graduate classes () Graduate degree	_____
4. Degree field: () Journalism/Communications () Related communications field (English, speech, etc.) () Related field with minor in journalism () Not applicable () Other field	_____
5. Present position: () Editor () Non-editor	_____
6. Number of years in present position: _____	_____
7. Number of years of full-time experience: _____	_____

You are finished! Thank you very much for your time. The results of this study will be available to you at a later date.

VITA

Robert Henry Bohle was born in Oak Park, Illinois on June 24, 1947. He attended elementary schools in Cincinnati, Ohio and was graduated from Deer Park High School in June 1965. After moving to California in 1967, he entered California State University, Long Beach, and in June 1970 he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. He received a Master of Arts degree in English Literature from the same university in 1972.

In 1972 he began teaching high school English and journalism. In 1974 he began teaching journalism in community colleges, spending 1976-1983 at College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California. Beginning in September 1983 he became an assistant professor of mass communications at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Communications from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in August 1984.

The author is a member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications; Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi; Society of Newspaper Design; Phi Kappa Phi; and Kappa Tau Delta.

He and his wife Sharon, of Long Beach, California, have two children.