

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
DESCRIPTIVE ACCURACY AND  
JOURNALISM TRAINING

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## PREFACE

This study is concerned with the abilities of journalism students to accurately report events and occurrences. It is concerned primarily with the influence a reporter's attitudes, biases and prejudices may have on his observing-reporting performance. The study is exploratory in nature, attempting to determine the efficiency of coursework in journalism at Oklahoma State in teaching accuracy in reporting.

I wish to express heartfelt recognition to my wife, Sue, whose understanding and encouragement provided constant motivation without which this study would not have been completed. This work is dedicated to her.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Purpose . . . . .	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . .	5
Introduction . . . . .	5
Stereotyping . . . . .	6
Abstracting . . . . .	9
Internal Noise--A Theoretical Model . . . . .	10
Allport and Postman . . . . .	16
III. METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, ANALYSIS . . . . .	21
The Test Instrument . . . . .	22
Variables . . . . .	24
The Sample . . . . .	26
Analysis . . . . .	26
IV. FINDINGS . . . . .	28
Reporting Accuracy by Class Standing and College Major . . . . .	28
Reporting Accuracy by College Major and Newswriting Background . . . . .	30
Reporting Accuracy by Class and Newswriting Background . . . . .	31
Summary . . . . .	32
Response Analysis . . . . .	33
V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	42
Hypothesis-Related Findings . . . . .	43
Recommendations . . . . .	46
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	48
APPENDIX A - WILLIAM V. HANEY'S UNCRITICAL INFERENCE TEST . . . . .	50
APPENDIX B - THE TEST SLIDES AND JUDGES' OBSERVATIONS . . . . .	55
APPENDIX C - THE BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE . . . . .	60
APPENDIX D - RUMOR CLINIC . . . . .	62

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Mean Net Reporting Accuracy of JB and Non-JB Majors by Class Standing . . . . .	29
II. Mean Reporting Accuracy of JB and Non-JB Majors By College Major and Writing Background . . . . .	31
III. Mean Reporting Accuracy by Class Standing and Newswriting Background . . . . .	32

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Johnson's Ladder of Abstraction . . . . .	10
2. Westley and MacLean Communication Model . . . . .	11
3. Development of Reporting Bias . . . . .	12
4. Factorial Analysis Paradigm Showing Juxtaposition of Attitude Variable Levels . . . . .	25



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose

There has been a lot of banter between the working journalist and the academic journalist as to the significance of journalism education. Some professionals seem to feel experience provides better training while some academicians apparently believe training in journalistic competence may be obtained, or at least augmented, through a study of the reporting-writing arts, coupled with a well-rounded liberal arts education.

Few studies have provided a significant amount of information to determine whether journalistic oriented curricula can provide the training needed to produce competent newsmen.

What education is needed and what parameters arise to determine the measure of a journalist--quick thinking, an ability to rapidly analyze situations, wide knowledge of a variety of subjects, curiosity and an ability to observe reliably--are cited in textbooks.

It appears textbook writers are more concerned with "personality traits" than with education. Curtis MacDougall lists a lengthy paragraph of preferred traits (MacDougall, 1968, p. 10):

Most of the personality traits usually listed as valuable for a journalist are ones which would be equally essential for success in other professional fields: intelligence, friendliness, reliability, imagination, ingenuity, nerve, speed, accuracy, courage, endurance, perseverance, mental alertness, honesty, punctuality, cheerfulness, the power of observation, shrewdness, enterprise, optimism, honor,

adaptability, intuitiveness, and the like.

All the above are "preferred" to be a good reporter. Where does education fit in? Again, MacDougall (1968, pp. 22-23) indicates an answer to this question:

From two-thirds to four-fifths of a student's class work is taken in the liberal arts or other divisions . . . the student should expect to be taught how to use the background and theoretical knowledge acquired over the rest of the campus in reporting and interpreting the contemporary scene.

A strict journalism instructor . . . can teach sound methods of research. The journalist's fact finder does not begin with an hypothesis for which he seeks factual proof. Rather, he is an open-minded seeker after truth who explores every possible avenue of investigation and only after he exhausts every chance to obtain additional information, does he attempt to draw conclusions regarding accumulated data.

MacDougall seems to contradict himself. He encourages teaching of "sound methods of research," then immediately disregards one of the primary steps in research methodology--that of formulating an hypothesis upon which to test acquired "observation-information."

By objective observation is meant the ability to perceive an event and report its make-up as accurately as possible without influence of internal or external noise, i.e. personal bias or prejudice and group pressure, etc.

The reporter first must observe, then analyze the information gathered from the event. It follows, then, that accuracy of reporting is a function of accurate observation.

The Oklahoma State School of Journalism and Broadcasting seems to have a good reputation for turning out journalists through a four-year program which includes two required courses in reporting-writing. It is in these courses that accuracy in observation should be stressed, yet primarily has to do with reporting a series of events from a workbook.

In the course numbered JB 2113, students spend a goodly part of the semester writing stories from information provided by Covering Yourtown workbook (Mason, 1974) or information given by the instructor.

Where in the coursework is the future newsman taught to observe events so as to accurately report them and to do so as much as possible without influence of individual attitudes (bias, conditioning, prejudice--his "internal noise")?

In courses outside the journalism major's field of concentration, the only courses that might help the student understand his individual behavior are offered by the psychology department. No psychology course is required by the journalism school, although Psychology 1113, Introduction to Psychology (OSU Catalog, p. 177A) is offered as an option, according to the journalism department's curriculum guide.

Even so, if the student is to adapt what he has learned about individual behavior to his major field, he must do it on his own.

This study will attempt to determine whether students having attended classes in journalism training are more accurate observers and reporters of given stimuli than their contemporaries in other fields.

The instrument used for this study is based upon the Uncritical Inference Test by William V. Haney (See Appendix A). The instrument hopefully will show any "true" differences that exist between (1) students exposed to four years of journalism training at OSU, (2) students in the lower and upper divisions of their education and (3) students majoring in coursework other than journalism.

The results and conclusion were based upon students responses to a set of four slides depicting situations that could lead to potentially biased observations and reporting.

The students viewed each slide for ten seconds and were asked to describe what they saw illustrated in the slide. The slides are presented in Appendix B.

Slide A shows a group of soldiers or partisans in battle poses. Slide B depicts a construction scene with passers-by and workers. Slide C illustrates a street scene between a fruit vender and two boys, and slide D shows action between two men on a public conveyence.

By reporting anything other than what the cartoon slide shows, the student shows his ability to make ready inferences or jump to conclusions about the event. Any conclusions or inferences made by the students were scored as incorrect observations while simple descriptions of the slide were scored favorably.

It might be thought lower classmen majoring in journalism, who have not been exposed to training, as well as non-journalism students might perform equally on the test--indicating no significant differences between accuracy of observation. However, by the very nature of choosing journalism as a field of study, the "untrained" journalists may be self-selected and thus more likely to observe details in events than will the students outside the field of journalism.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!  
I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune.  
(Shakespeare)

Lines from Shakespeare's Hamlet (Black, 1937, p. 1127) telling of the young prince finding Polonius behind a curtain and mistaking him for the king and killing him, shows an example of what may happen when an action is based upon an assumption and not upon accurate observation and data.

Like Prince Hamlet, the printed word can result in damage as totally as a dagger if ill-used. If a newsman-observer does not report accurately an event, a life may be ruined, possibly through a libelous inaccurate account of the event, where misinformation is disseminated. Walter Lippman addressed himself to problems of communication (Schramm, 1971, p. 275):

The analyst of public opinion must begin, then by recognizing the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture working itself out upon the scene of action.

It is here the crux of this study rests. What do individuals see when exposed to a scene of action?

It seems that witnesses of a scene often see only what is "convenient" for them to see at the time, in accordance with their own

predispositions, attitudes, or thoughts at the time of the event.

Time and time again, beginning reporting textbooks emphasize the reporter must be aware of his own prejudices and biases to separate facts to be reported in a news story, from his own "colored" viewpoint (many texts neglect to say, however, how this is to be done or to provide possible methods to minimize distorted reporting).

The question, then, can be posed: "Can people of different backgrounds report events in various situations without coloring their report with internal bias?"

### Stereotyping

Prejudice and bias, which hopefully are minimized through journalism education (i.e. training the future journalist to become aware of his own biases, attitudes and prejudices that can distort and interfere with his work) manifest themselves in everyday conversation.

For instance, if we say, "you cannot trust the local businessmen," we are categorizing all the local business people as unworthy of trust. Surely not all business people in a given population cannot be trusted. This is a form of stereotyping and is one of the most common forms of internal bias.

Kenneth S. Keyes, Jr., in How to Develop Your Thinking Ability (Keyes, 1950, p. 41) ties stereotyping into a form of allness--"a comforting feeling of confidence that we know all there is to know about everything." Such a statement as "you cannot trust the local businessmen" is such an allness statement. We infer everyone (you) cannot trust all local businessmen, while at the same time the statement stereotypes all local businessmen as being untrustworthy.

To support such a statement we would have to know that all business people in a given area are untrustworthy. Then we ask, "untrustworthy of what?" To make statements as the above with credibility we would have to have all the facts about local business practices, which is impossible. As Keyes states, no person knows all about anything (Keyes, p. 41):

'But,' you may be saying to yourself, 'ever since I got out of grammar school I've known that no one knew all about everything.' The trouble is we know that, but frequently do not act as though we knew it. As the old saying goes, 'every one knows it, but the idea has not occurred to everybody.'

The journalist, then, must keep an open mind about his subjects. It would be dangerous for him to adopt a "know-it-all attitude." Such an attitude lends itself to assumptions and stereotyping.

Stereotyping has become a common disease symptomatic of evasion techniques as discussed by Cooper and Jahoda (Schramm, 1971). Stereotyping occurs when people or objects are locked into categories such as: lazy, slow Negroes; money-hungry Jews; dirty, free-loving hippies, and short-haired rednecks.

Wendell Johnson and Dorothy Moeller demonstrate the lunacy (and rigidity) of stereotyping and classifying in their book Living with Change: the Semantics of Coping (Johnson, 1972, p. 69) where they write:

Suppose I put you in a category or you put me in a category. Suppose you say I am a Swede. As the world seems to be now, after you had decided to categorize me that way you probably would not keep me out of hotels and restaurants. But you could put me in another kind of category and you would keep me out. And this is the kind of insanity that is socially accepted.

How does a person enter a category? How does he leave it? When he is in a category, at what moments does he do whatever people do in order to enter the category in the first place? What moments does he not do this? And when he is not doing it, has he left the category? Is he in the category or not? I used to be what people call a severe stutterer. I now speak with relative ease and fluency. But people still say to me 'You didn't stutter

very much tonight.' How do you leave the category? Our language does our thinking for us.

The reporter must be careful to be curious of his language. His natural habits of categorization and stereotyping, if carried into his writing, can only promulgate the pigeon-holing of people, places and things.

According to Haney (1960, p. 103), stereotyping saves time by setting up "neat, well-ordered and oversimplified categories into which we slip our evaluations of people, situations and happenings." This discrimination or categorization is handy for storage of information and is useful as long as the person is aware of the stereotyping and allows for differences that make a difference in people, places and objects.

Johnson (1972, p. 92) addresses the problem of classifying and categorization with more caution:

In classifying . . . we are concerned with resemblances, not differences. To classify we use a language for talking about how things seem alike or resemble each other . . . this is the language that we tend to speak most of the time. It's a lumpy language. It's easy to talk this way and so comfortable.

Lacking words and time, and perhaps motivation and information . . . We generalize grandly. We classify. We categorize . . . It takes so long to talk about all the ways in which the experience, the observation, could be different and so we just don't, but turn instead to those categorical nouns that cover whole blocks.

It is this "lumpy," "easy" language that brings problems to reporting events. The reporter must be aware of his tendencies to do this. As Haney puts it (1960, p. 108), "the problem . . . arises when a person is unaware of or unwilling to recognize his stereotypes as such or when . . . his categories become hardened." Irving J. Lee said it another way (Haney, 1960, p. 108): "the more we discriminate among, the



less we discriminate against."

We know that our upbringing and social conditioning have provided us with pre-constructed categories in which we may stereotype people or events. It is through the use of stereotyping that we can make further reportorial errors. Inferential statements, based on stereotyping and not on information, contributes to our reporting dilemma.

Even if we are aware of our own attitudes and their possible effects on us, it is difficult in everyday life to be constantly on guard. But the effort must be made, as Haney wrote (1960, pp. 17-18):

In other words, there is nothing in the structure of our language that makes it inescapable that we discriminate between inferential and observational statements. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that our failure to distinguish on these verbal levels may contribute . . . to the difficulty we have on preverbal levels, namely our propensity to confuse inferences and observation . . . we find it . . . easy to make statements with the false assurance that we are dealing with facts--and the consequences . . . are often less than pleasant.

#### Abstracting

Wendell Johnson, in People in Quandaries (1946) utilizes inferential statements as the structure of his "ladder of abstraction."

Starting with reality, we label what we see--a descriptive abstraction of the first order. The more we categorize, the more we leave out information in continuing the process, climbing Johnson's "ladder of abstraction." The following diagram is based upon Johnson's "ladder" (Johnson, 1946, p. 135).

This diagram depicts an example of abstracting. As we leave the reality of the baseball and start our abstracting process we leave out more and more details, until we have not a "baseball" but merely a "spherical object."

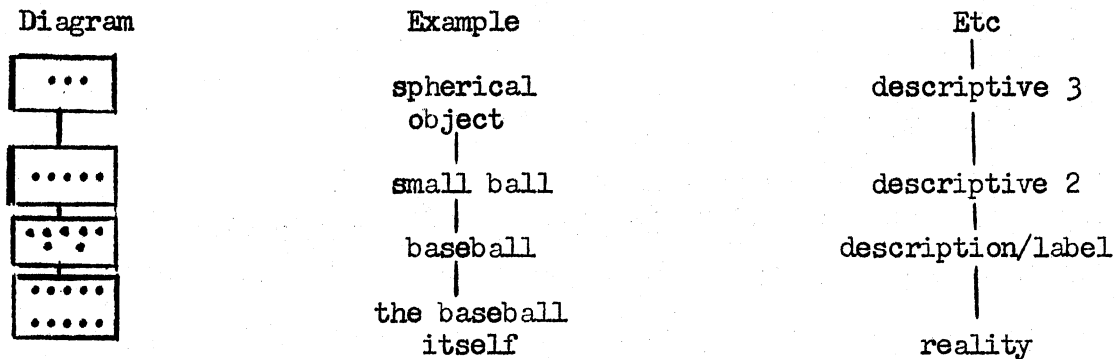


Figure 1. Johnson's Ladder of Abstraction

As Haney warned against the hazards of stereotyping and categorization, Johnson (1946, p. 133) warns us to be conscious of the abstracting process:

What is important at all times is a consciousness of abstracting, an awareness and understanding of the fact that a symbol is not the same as what it symbolizes, that the verbal and non-verbal levels are to be kept distinct and coordinated.

The statement by Johnson brings us back to the problem at hand. Discrimination by an observer between what he sees and what he thinks he sees is the subject of this study.

#### Internal Noise--A Theoretical Model

To understand how prejudice can affect one's perception of an event we look at a basic model of communication (Westley and MacLean, 1957, p. 32).

Person A picks up sensory messages from Stimuli  $X_1 \dots X_n$ , selects those that effect him most (according to his pre-disposition) and relays a message based upon these stimuli to Person B, who may or may not respond

to Person A's message.

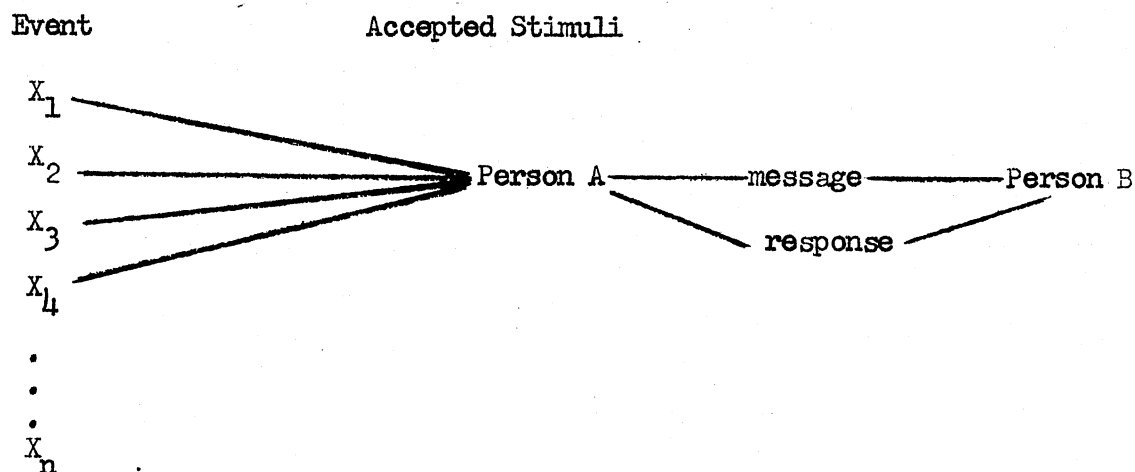


Figure 2. Westley and MacLean Communication Model

Note Person A selects certain points of stimuli to respond to. Obviously an individual is incapable of responding to all stimuli encountered in his environment. Instead, he selects certain ones which have significance to him or are perceived as wanted by his significant others. With this selective perception, the message Person A sends to Person B may not be a representative picture of reality but a distortion. The accuracy (fidelity) of the communication depends upon the source's and receiver's abilities to prevent their internal feelings from distorting the perception.

If Person B chooses to respond to Person A, his response will be based upon his selectivity of stimuli from those presented by Person A. This selection, as with Person A, is based upon stimuli most interesting

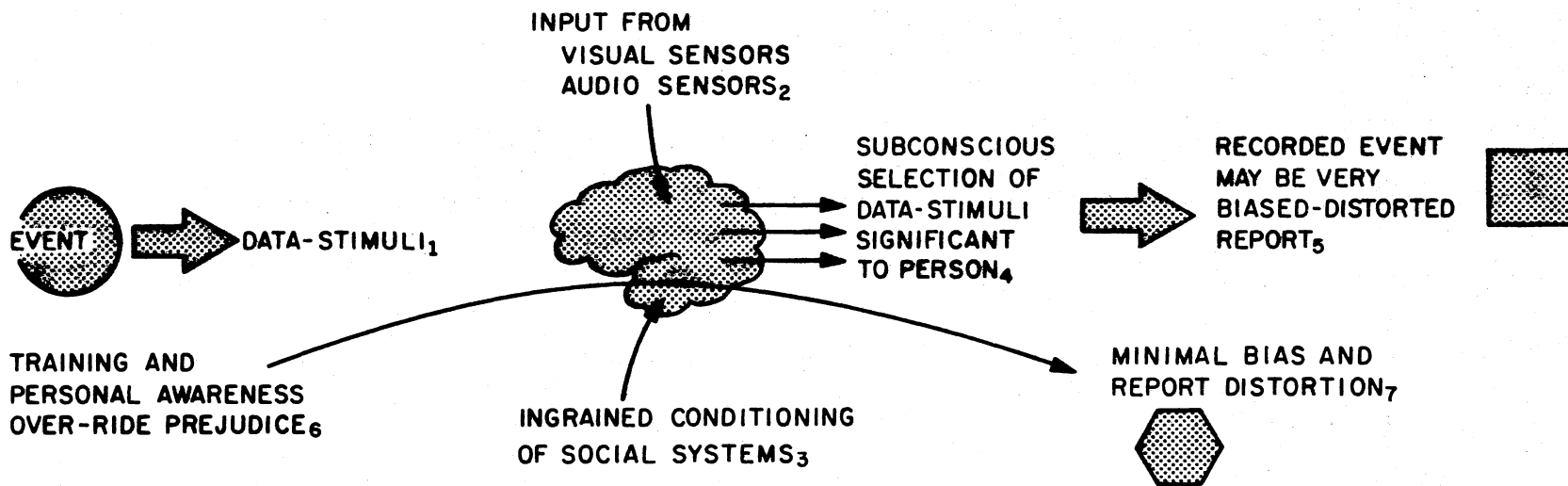


Figure 3. Development of Reporting Bias.

to the individual. Therefore, the "picture" Person B gets from Person A is even more distorted. Hopefully, through communication with one another, Persons A and B can arrive at a similar understanding of the presented stimuli.

The Communication Model of Figure 2 illustrates the process by which a person perceives a set of stimuli and communicates them to another person. Figure 3 shows a simplified diagram of the process received data may be subjected to by Person A before it is communicated to Person B.

Let's say a news reporter receives Data-Stimuli (1) produced by an event through audio and visual sensors (2). His previous experiences, social conditioning and education (3), cause him to subconsciously select those stimuli significant to him (4). His report, therefore, because of the missing data will not be as close to resembling reality as it should be resulting in a distorted or biased report of the event (5).

Hopefully, however, journalism training with emphasis on consciousness awareness (6) ~~over-rides~~ to some extent subconscious selectivity which results in a more complete report with a closer resemblance to the event (7).

With training, Person A should be able to report more accurately his observations to Person B, including more of the data-stimuli  $X_1 \dots X_n$  (see Figure 2) in his message. If Person B also is aware of his "internal noise", the report he receives from Person A will be more accurate. Person B's response or feedback will be more "true-to-life."

It should be emphasized here that while the person-reporter who has had consciousness awareness training will not be able to report all of  $X_1 \dots X_n$ , he should be able to report more of the stimuli than one who is not trained and allows "internal noise" to color his descriptions.

Noise is referred to in these communication models as outside stimuli which tend to interfere with reception of a message, such as the physical phenomena of noise (that of a jackhammer--classified as channel noise) or something subtle such as the placement of a news story beneath a gory picture on a newspaper page (other examples are lies and rumors, and inaccurate and distorted information--classified as semantic or internal noise).

Internal noise may also include attitudes, everyday pressures and stress which affect the reception and interpretation of a message. Prejudice is one such type of noise.

The way a newspaper handles prejudice-noise makes a difference in its reporting. If a reporter knows his attitudes and can deal with them, he may be able to record an observed event more accurately (as illustrated in Figure 3). The way a reporter or any other person handles his biases and prejudices is the subject of a study by Cooper and Jahoda: The Evasion of Propaganda: How Prejudiced People Respond to Anti-Prejudice Propaganda (Schramm, 1971).

Theoretically, Cooper and Jahoda said, prejudiced people react to anti-prejudice propaganda in two ways: (1) they may fight it, or (2) they may give in to it. They found, however, (Schramm, 1971, p. 288):

They (prejudiced people) prefer not to face the implications of ideas opposed to their own so that they do not have to be forced to either defend themselves or to admit error. What they do is to evade the issue psychologically by simply not understanding the message.

Cooper and Jahoda (Schramm, p. 289-294) indicate evasion occurs sometime between the presentation of a propaganda item and the respondent's response to the situation. Through derailment, misunderstanding the message, invalidation, degrading the message to fiction, and increasing

the message complexity (thus making it "too difficult" to understand) Cooper and Jahoda's respondents evaded anti-prejudice propaganda messages.

All their respondents evaded the "real meaning" of the anti-prejudice message without conscious realization of their evasion mechanism. To explain the phenomenon, Cooper and Jahoda postulate that facing everyday contradictions to a person's life-long conditioned beliefs head-on would undoubtedly set up disturbing tensions which would in turn involve serious difficulties for most people (1971, p. 299):

Evasion appears to be a well-practiced form of behavior which receives encouragement from the social structure in which we live. In connection with response to anti-prejudice propaganda, it serves as a defense against group attack.

In the past, stereotyping and abstracting have contributed to incomplete, inaccurate and slanted reporting of events. The mechanisms Cooper and Jahoda highlight are present to some extent in all of us. An example of how bias colors reporting is found in the following study.

In an article "They Saw A Game: A Case Study", that appeared in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology (1954), Albert H. Hastorf and Hadley Cantril studied conflicting perceptions of a football game between Dartmouth and Princeton. The game between these two rivals was an important one, as is described in the study's preface (Schramm, 1971, p. 300):

It was an important game. Feelings were high. A considerable amount of rough play took place in the field. Some star players were injured. Discussion and argument went on long after the Saturday when the game was played.

After their study, Hastorf and Cantril remarked (Schramm, 1971, p. 300), "It seems clear, there is no such thing as a 'game' existing out there in its own right which people observe. The game exists for a person and is experienced by him only insofar as certain happenings have significance in terms of his purpose."

Hastorf and Cantril's observations of the 1951 football game point to the distortion incurred when attitudes and prejudices interferred with description of a game. The article raises a question as to whether the scene would acquire significance if a person's attitudes did not play a part (1971, pp. 308-309):

Of crucial importance is the fact that an 'occurrence' on the football field or in any other social situation does not become an experimental event unless and until some significance is given to it; an 'occurrence' becomes an event only when the happening has significance. And a happening generally has significance only if it reactivates learned significances already registered in what we have called a person's assumptive form world.

The significance assumed by different happenings for different people depend in large part in the purpose people bring to the occasion and the assumption they have of the purposes and probable behavior of the people involved.

The event, then, is there to be observed and recorded. The event, no matter how minor or innocuous, may be said to be significant to a reporter because he (1) has been sent to the scene and therefore "must" do his job or (2) the event is spontaneous and its occurrence caught the reporter's interest.

How the reporter happened upon the event is not as important here as what the person sees fit to record and not to record. It is here the person's prejudices and biases influence reporting.

Allport and Postman

Before continuing with examples of faulty reporting, a brief word about the results of distorted information should be mentioned. As noted earlier, distorted reporting can lead to undesirable reactions from people. Rumors, falsifications and lies can be created and encouraged through dissemination of a distorted report on the part of a newspaperman.



With Figure 3, we illustrated how an event can become distorted on its way to becoming a record of the happening. The person's (Person A in the figure, for example) perception of the happening can become distorted because his "internal noise" can "block" out differences that make a difference. His transfer of information, therefore, (keep in mind the communicated message of Person A to Person B and B's response in Figure 2), is not "true to reality." With Person B receiving a distorted report from "A" and adding his own biases and passing it on to Person C, we have the beginnings of a good rumor.

Allport and Postman trace the development of rumor in their article "The Basic Psychology of Rumor" (Katz, 1954, p. 394). As a result of their studies, the researchers define two conditions for rumor formation. First, importance of the subject matter to the receiving population, and second, the lack of hard information about the subject material or its ambiguity. Allport and Postman state (Katz, 1954, p. 394):

. . . rumors concerning a given subject matter will circulate within a group in proportion to the importance and the ambiguity of this subject matter in the lives of individual members of the group.

Using the same slides in their rumor formation experiments as those in this study, they noted mechanisms that contribute to the distortion of information.

The experimenters projected a test cartoon slide to a group of subjects, then asked a member of that group to describe the slide to another subject standing with his back to the screen so he could not see the slide. After having heard the description, the second subject would then be asked to repeat the description to another subject, etc. In the course of the repeated description, the experimenters noted how the description would differ from the reality of the slide.

Allport and Postman found that not only did the repetitions become distorted with each telling, but the repetitions disintegrated even more with the passage of time. (Katz, 1954, p. 394).

In their analysis of the process, they found three mechanisms at work: leveling, sharpening, and assimilation. These inter-related functions are defined and studied more closely in relation to this study in Chapter IV. In summary, Allport and Postman concluded

Whenever a stimulus field is of potential importance to an individual, but at the same time unclear, or susceptible of divergent interpretations, a subjective structuring process is started. Although the process is complex (involving as it does leveling, sharpening, and assimilation), its essential nature can be characterized as an effort to reduce the stimulus to a simple and meaningful structure that has adaptive significance for the individual in terms of his own interests and experience. The process begins at the moment the ambiguous situation is perceived, but the effects are greatest if memory intervenes. The longer the time that elapses after the stimulus is perceived, the greater the threefold change is likely to be. Also, the more people involved in a serial report, the greater the change is likely to be, until the rumor has reached an aphoristic brevity, and is repeated by rote. (Katz, 1954, p. 403).

Rumor formation, as previously stated, can be a direct result of erroneous information if the circumstances of importance and ambiguity are present. As the previous study shows, even a supposedly accurate description of an event can be distorted upon repetition. It is even more important, therefore, that those entrusted with news dissemination be extremely careful in their observations and reporting so as to minimize the possibilities of widespread misinformation and rumor.

Although a newsman can do nothing to minimize the importance of a news item (indeed, importance of the item is a criterion for presentation), he can do everything in his power to minimize its ambiguity and increase his accuracy. The following case study is an example of observation and reporting that contributed to dissemination of ambiguous and potentially

hazardous information.

The Kerner Commission, ordered by President Lyndon Baines Johnson to investigate reasons for civil disorders prevalent in the mid-1960's, found media coverage "failed to report adequately on the causes and consequences of civil disorders and the underlying problems of race relations (Kerner Commission, 1968, p. 363).

Could the inaccurate and incomplete reporting occurring during this time period be caused by a lack of "consciousness awareness" on the part of reporters on the scene? Could training of journalists to recognize the existence of internal values that might affect their reporting possibly have alleviated some of the misinformation disseminated about disorders?

Investigating the accuracy of newspaper coverage through interviewing techniques, the Commission found that "almost everyone had his own version of the truth," and further that even some reporters and editors questioned their own accuracy in reporting (1968, p. 366):

. . . many of the inaccuracies of fact, tone and mood were due to the failure of reporters and editors to ask tough enough questions about official reports, and to apply the most rigorous standards possible on evaluating and presenting the news.

More specifically, the Commission found events reported were often exaggerated in both mood and event. In analyzing media coverage, the Kerner Commission said (1968, pp. 364-365):

. . . of the 955 television sequences of riot and racial news examined, 837 could be classified for predominant atmosphere as either 'emotional', 'calm', or 'normal.' . . . only a small portion of scenes analyzed showed actual mob action, people looting, snipers setting fires or being injured or killed. Moderate Negro leaders were shown more frequently than militant leaders on television news broadcasts. . . almost all of the deaths, injuries, and property damage occurred in all-Negro neighborhoods, and thus the disorders were not 'race-riots' as the term is generally understood.

The Commission goes on to say:

The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world. The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negroes burning sense of grievances, are seldom conveyed. Slightings and indignities are a part of the Negroes daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls 'the white press'--a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifferences of white America. This may be understandable but not excuseable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society.

The Commission's report is good reason in itself to require reporters to be trained and educated to realize their own values and attitudes and the possible influences they may have on reporting the day's events.

The reporter-observer, then, must be able to over-ride his personal desires, feelings and attitudes to be able to relay to his readers an accurate as possible account of an occurrence. Through training (see Figure 3) he should be conscious of his "natural" tendency to stereotype people, places and objects and thus leave him open to assumptions and inferences. He must keep an open mind, not allowing himself to slip into comfortable "feelings" of "knowing-it-all."

The observer-reporter should remember he is the "eyes" and "ears" of his reader-viewers when he is at the scene of an event and as such must communicate all he can to the best of his ability. He is Person A communicating to our Person B in Figure 2, and we, as his audience, want to know as much about Stimuli  $X_1 \dots X_n$  as possible without interference from the reporter's (person A) internal noise.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY, DESIGN, ANALYSIS

A testing procedure to measure degrees of descriptive accuracy between groups of journalism and non-journalism majors, and between groups of journalism majors who had completed a course in newswriting and those who had not, had to be designed.

The instrument was based upon the William V. Haney Uncritical Inference Test, which he used to determine one's propensity to confuse inference with observation. (See Appendix A)

The Uncritical Inference Test involves the reading of a brief story, after which the respondent is asked to answer several true or false questions.

In his instructions, Haney emphasizes: "Answer ONLY on the basis of the information presented in the story. Refrain from answering as you might THINK it happened."

This same emphasis is critical to this study, since the respondents are to observe and describe what they SEE and not what they THINK they see.

By comparing net means of the results of two or more respondents against each other, we are able to determine which group has the higher mean of descriptive accuracy. Or, put another way, which group tended more to confuse inference with observation.

### The Test Instrument

The four slides used are reproductions of a cartoon strip concerning Rumor Control published by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (See Appendices B and C). The ADL's Rumor Clinic is apparently adapted from the Allport and Postman study discussed in Chapter II.

The slides depict scenes which could be mis-interpreted. For example, in one scene, a white boy appears to be taking a fruit while a black boy looks on, not taking part. A prejudiced observer might "see" the black boy as the thief or "assume" he encouraged the white boy to steal. Such assumptions would be, of course, erroneous. A correct answer would be simply to state that a cartoon figure of a white boy appears to be lifting what looks to be a piece of fruit from a vendor while a black boy looks in his direction (See Appendix B for slides and correct observations).

The four slides are verbally described as follows:

Slide A: A country scene with soldiers or partisans in combat pose. A "black" soldier is standing against a wall with a hand grenade and looking toward the viewer. Near his feet are two soldiers, one with binoculars, the other with a rifle. In the background is a building which appears to be partially destroyed, and two other prone figures with what appears to be a weapon aimed toward the figures in the foreground. At the bottom of the slide cartoon, a man is in prone position, either resting or wounded or ill. To his right can be seen a truck and a man running in the direction of the above person. To the slide's left is a sign showing the word "Paris, 18 K."

Slide B: A construction scene in what appears to be a commercial area. A man in working clothes standing next to the building under construction is holding a rope which is connected to a platform for raising

and lowering equipment, in this case, bricks; one of the bricks is falling from the platform. To the top of the slide can be seen the feet of another workman. To the left of the slide is a man in a suit walking away from the construction scene. To the right of the slide are two pairs of people. The pair closest to the right edge are dressed in suits and one carries a briefcase, the pair closer to the middle of the slide appear to be dressed more casually. In the immediate foreground, a person with a hat and cuffed working gloves is pointing in a direction toward the construction work.

Slide C. The slide shows what appears to be a fruit vending cart on a street corner. In the background are clothing shops and what appears to be a theater. Also, in the background is a policeman appearing to be running toward action in the foreground. In the foreground a white boy dressed in striped shirt and shorts appears to be lifting a piece of fruit from the cart. The man behind the cart seems to be reaching toward the boy. To the white boy's right is another boy, black, with a sling shot hanging from his pocket. To the black's right is a garbage can over-filled with trash.

Slide D. The scene appears to take place on some type of public conveyance, perhaps a trolley car, bus or subway. There are two central figures. One white man dressed in overalls, hat and holding a straight razor in the left hand is facing and pointing toward a taller black man dressed in a business suit and hat. The black is gesturing toward the white. In the background can be seen several people sitting along a bench, some looking toward the two men and some not. The people have different characteristics; for instance, one is a woman with an infant, another appears oriental, and another appears to be dressed as a clergy-

man. Over the heads of people are several advertisements and through the windows of the conveyance can be seen a lamp-post, clock and buildings.

The test subjects, after viewing each slide for ten seconds, wrote what they saw in the slide. They were allowed five minutes to write after viewing each slide. The instructions given before each test were as follows:

We are conducting, as a part of our program in media research, a preliminary study to determine how well people observe. During the next few minutes you will be shown four slides and asked to respond to each of them. Each slide will be shown for ten seconds, after which you will write a description of what you saw in the slide. You will have five minutes to write the description before the next slide is shown. Remember to report what you observe and not what you think you observe. Are there any questions?

After the responses to the slides were gathered, the subjects were asked to fill out a fifteen-item questionnaire concerning background information such as race, religion, social class, etc. The subjects were also asked if they had completed a course in basic news-writing (Introduction to Newsroom Practice, JB 2113). This was used to classify the subjects into "writing" and "non-writing" groups for analysis.

Of the fifteen demographic questions, the only ones used for quantitative analysis were the subject's major (journalism-broadcasting or non-journalism-broadcasting), college class (Upper or Lower Division), and news-writing background (whether the respondent had completed the JB 2113 course in basic newswriting.)

#### Variables

Three independent attribute variables, then, were gleaned from questionnaire data. They were:



## I. College Class

1-a. Upper Division

2-b. Lower Division

## II. College Major

2-a. JB Major

2-b. Non-JB Major

## III. Newswriting Background

3-a. JB 2113 Completed

3-b. JB 2113 Not Completed

Juxtaposition of the three variables by their levels comprises a 2x2x2 factorial analysis paradigm shown in Figure 4.

		College Class			
		Upper Division		Lower Division	
		College Major			
		JB	Non-JB	JB	Non-JB
Newswriting Background	JB Completed				
	Non-JB Completed				

Figure 4. Factorial Analysis Paradigm Showing Juxtaposition of Attitude Variable Levels

However, due to some small and highly unequal numbers of respondents in some of the cells of Figure 4, multivariate analysis was limited and had to give way to simple analysis of differences between some groups, as explained in the next chapter.

Due to limitations cited above, only the following hypothesis were tested:

1. JB majors will tend to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoons than will non-journalism majors.
2. Upper division JB majors will tend to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoon slides than will lower division JB majors.
3. JB majors who have completed the basic newswriting course, JB 2113, will tend to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoons slides than will JB majors who have not completed JB 2113.
4. JB majors who have not completed the basic newswriting course JB 2113, will tend to report more accurately events portrayed in the cartoon slides than will non-JB majors who have not completed the course.
5. Upper division students will tend to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoon slides than upper division students who have not completed the course.

Actually, hypothesis 1 and 2 comprise an interaction hypotheses, since College class and College major were analyzed simultaneously in a 2 x 2 factorial paradigm, shown in Figure 4.

#### The Sample

The non-randomized sample comprised 300 students at Oklahoma State University. A little more than 50 percent (174) were journalism and/or broadcasting majors, taken from JB 2113, Introduction to Newsroom Practice; JB 3331 Publications Editing; and JB 1013, Introduction to Mass Communications.

The 126 non-journalism subjects were drawn from Sociology 1113, Introduction to Sociology, and Political Science 4053, World Politics.

#### Analysis

So far as possible, accuracy scores were subjected to factorial analysis to test the effects and interaction of assigned variables such

as Class standing and major field of study.

Analysis of scores from Figure 3 would determine any differences between the mean reportorial accuracy of (1) Upper and Lower Classmen subjects, and (2) journalism and non-journalism majors, and those who had, or had not, completed JB 2113. Equally important, the analysis would reveal how reportorial accuracy of journalism majors varied depending upon class standing, and/or writing experience. But, as mentioned earlier some of these differences and interaction could not be determined. Only the relationships stated in the hypotheses could be tested.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Only two of the three independent variables could be compared at one time in data analysis, due to an insufficient number of respondents in some categories.

College major (JB-non-JB) was juxtaposed with Class (upper-lower divisions). However, respondents who had completed the basic newswriting course, JB 2113, as well as those who had not, were not sufficiently evenly distributed among all Class and Newswriting levels, as pointed out later.

The reader is reminded that all mean accuracy scores reported hereinafter are net accuracy scores. That is, the number of incorrect statements of "fact" about cartoon events were subtracted from the number of correct statements for each respondent. For example, if a person reported 10 correct "facts" and 13 incorrect, his net accuracy score was minus three.

#### Reporting Accuracy by Class Standing

#### And College Major

Of the 300 respondents, 174 were JB majors and 126, non-JB majors. Of those 300, 198 were of Lower division standing and 102 Upper division.

The research question behind hypothesis number one involved the relationship between College major and Class standing. Both Upper and

Lower division JB majors were expected to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoons than were non-JB majors. The hypothesis was supported, as indicated in Table 1.

TABLE I  
MEAN NET REPORTING ACCURACY OF JB AND  
NON-JB MAJORS BY CLASS STANDING

Class Standing	College Major		Total Mean Accuracy
	JB Majors	Non-JB Majors	
Upper Division	-3.47	-5.50	-4.48
Lower Division	-3.85	-6.88	-5.36
Total Mean Accuracy	-3.66	-6.19	

JB majors netted a minus 3.66 in mean reporting accuracy, compared with minus 6.19 by non-JB majors. This means that both groups reported more incorrect facts than correct, on the average, but non-JB majors much more so ( $F=13.75$ ,  $p < .61$ ,  $df=1/298$ ). Examples of incorrect facts due to leveling, sharpening and assimilation of information will be discussed later in this chapter.

Hypothesis number 2 stated that Upper division JB majors would report more accurately than those in Lower division. Table I shows no more than a chance difference of .40. Upper division JB majors reported with a

mean accuracy of minus 3.47, compared with Lower division's minus 3.85.

Though the difference between Upper and Lower division respondents' reporting accuracy did not exceed chance (-4.48 v. 5.36,  $F = .61$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $df = 1/298$ ), interaction between College major and Class was significant ( $F = 13.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 1/298$ ). Interactive effect mostly was due to the higher number of reporting inaccuracies by Lower division non-JB majors (minus 6.88), compared with Lower division JB majors (minus 3.85).

#### Reporting Accuracy by College Major And Newswriting Background

Only 66 of the 300 respondents had undergone the basic newswriting course, JB 2113. All were JB majors. Of those 66, nine were Lower division and 57 Upper. Due to wide disparity in numbers of respondents between Upper and Lower divisions who had completed JB 2113, multiple or interaction hypotheses were untestable. Simple variance analyses were conducted.

From hypothesis number three, the author expected JB majors with the JB 2113 background to report cartoon events more accurately than JB majors not having completed the course. The latter, in turn, would report more accurately than non-JB majors who had not completed JB 2113. This was hypothesis number four.

The mean reporting accuracy of minus 5.73 for JB majors without the basic newswriting course differs significantly from that of JB majors who had completed the course ( $F = 31.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 1/172$ ). Even JB majors who had not completed JB 2113 recorded a significantly lesser number of incorrect cartoon "facts" than non-majors (-5.73 v -6.72,  $F = 5.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 1/232$ ).

TABLE II  
 MEAN REPORTING ACCURACY OF JB AND NON-JB MAJORS  
 BY COLLEGE MAJOR AND WRITING BACKGROUND

Writing Background	College Major	
	JB Major	Non-JB Major
JB 2113 Completed	-4.32	None
JB 2113 Not Completed	-5.73	-6.72

Again, we see JB majors holding the edge on reporting accuracy over non-majors, with the greater accuracy being evident among JB majors who had some newswriting background.

#### Reporting Accuracy by Class and Newswriting Background

Because of disparate distribution of subjects by Class and Writing Background, hypothesis number five simply stated that Upper division respondents having had JB 2113 would report more accurately than Upper division students with no newswriting background. Mean accuracy scores are shown in Table 3. As it turned out, all the Upper division respondents with newswriting experience were JB majors. Those with no experience were non-JB majors. In essence, then, the author was comparing Upper division JB and non-JB majors.

The mean reporting accuracy of minus 6.64 by Upper division students with no newswriting background was significantly less than the minus 4.07 accuracy count by Upper division writing students ( $F = 5.23, p < .05$ ,

df=1/100). This is the same as saying Upper division JB majors with writing background reported more accurately than Upper division non-JB majors.

Lower division writing and non-writing students could not be compared, due to highly unequal distribution of cases.

TABLE III  
MEAN REPORTING ACCURACY BY CLASS STANDING  
AND NEWSWRITING BACKGROUND

Newsriting Background	Lower Division	Upper Division
JB 2113 Completed	-6.33	-4.07
JB 2113 Not Completed	-4.44	-6.64

#### Summary

Of the five testable hypotheses in this study, four were supported.

To sum up, JB majors tended to report more accurately the events portrayed in the cartoons. Furthermore, JB majors who had completed the basic newswriting course reported with higher fidelity than JB majors who had not completed JB 2113. However, JB majors with no newswriting experience were more accurate observers than non-majors. Finally, Upper division JB majors with writing experience tended to stick more with the



facts than Upper division non-majors, none of whom had done any news-writing.

Contrary to hypothesis number two, Upper division JB majors with writing experience did not report more accurately than Lower Division JB majors--only nine of whom had had any newswriting experience. The author turns now to analysis of the reporting inaccuracies that lie beyond the quantitative presented thus far.

### Response Analysis

It should be recalled that, for this investigation, subjects were asked to respond in essay form to events portrayed in four slides which they viewed for ten seconds each. They were asked only to describe what they saw in each slide. However, the answers obtained were not only descriptions but in almost every instance, more assumptions and inference-based interpretations were included, as shown by the minus accuracy scores.

In other words, instead of an accurate detailed description, the respondents revealed what the slide represented to them; and in doing so distorted "facts" presented in the slide, or added some.

In Chapter II, a study in the psychology of rumor by Allport and Postman was summarized. In their findings, they classified the causes of rumor distortion into three integrated areas. In examining the subject's responses, we can find examples of leveling, sharpening and assimilation.

#### Leveling and Sharpening

Allport and Postman define leveling in the following manner (Katz 1954, p. 398):

As rumor travels, it tends to grow shorter, more concise, more easily grasped and told. In successive versions, fewer words are used and fewer details are mentioned.

In our investigation, repetition of the information was not required. So leveling as defined above could not occur, but we can see its beginnings in sharpening (Katz, 1954, p. 399):

We may define sharpening as the selective perception, retention and reporting of a limited number of details from a larger context. Sharpening is inevitably the reciprocal of leveling. The one cannot exist without the other, for what little remains after leveling has taken place is by contrast unavoidably featured.

By reporting the events in a story form, the subjects readily give evidence of sharpening. The inclusion of details in their interpretations of what happened, the deletion of details that they could not orient to their understanding and the inclusion of details that were assumed to be present, helped put reported observations in a meaningful light to the subject. But at the same time description moves further away from events portrayed.

For example, in one slide, a combat situation was depicted (See App. B, Slide A). Instead of a description of the scene, relaying facts of observation, a 19-year-old Engineering sophomore responded as follows:

There are four boys playing army. Two were in front of a broken down brick wall shooting guns. They were white. One black was sitting on a partial wall getting ready to throw a hand grenade. The fourth boy was white and was lying down in back of the two boys who were shooting. He looks as if he was ill or was playing like he was wounded.

Although the respondent did get the over-all position of the characters correctly, he left out background details such as a building, two other "soldiers" shooting back, a supply truck and an air explosion (which may be interpreted as the sun).

He has made several assumptions, leaving out details and only picking

up those which he can relate to his own orientation. Why was the story interpreted to be boys "playing army" instead of a real-live depiction of men in combat. Details which would separate the real life depiction from the play acting were left out. Other subjects also interpreted the slide as other than an actual combat scene, saying it was an army "exercise" or from a television program.

Another example of extreme sharpening may be seen in a response to slide D (See App. B). An 18-year-old male accounting sophomore gave the following report:

I see a group of people doing their everyday thing after work. The two men standing are discussing a controversial subject like football. The interaction between the people is close to zero. I guess they are just scared to talk to each other.

Contrast the above with this response by a 19-year-old female business sophomore (See App. B, Slide D):

This is a train that has just picked up two people. There seems to be a problem though. There is only one vacant seat left. It happens that the two people that just got on, one is white and one is colored. Most of the people are anxiously awaiting to see who will get to sit in the seat. Some other passengers are minding their own business. Some are reading a newspaper. The colored man is in suit clothes while the white man is in work clothes.

Quite a difference in reporting the same scene, from passivity to potential conflict. Both leave out details and add others to improve their comprehension of the scene. In the second description, the respondent added a vacant seat, made an assumption the public conveyance is a train, and has attributed anxiety to most of the people who await an outcome of the assumed conflict between the "colored" and the white.

Allport and Postman indicate that "although sharpening occurs in every protocol, the same items are not always emphasized" (Katz, 1954, p. 399).

In the above description, the two men seem to be the center of controversy, but in the following description by an 18-year-old female Radio-Television-Film freshman, the surrounding people take up most of her attention (See App. B, Slide D):

Two men arguing with spectators. On one side a blonde lady and a blonde man with a black man. On the other side a black haired apathetic fat man, a bearded man, a young blonde lady, and an older lady.

While in most of the responses the subjects indicated the two men arguing it is unusual that this subject would have them arguing with the spectators.

Other examples give detailed information as to what street the transport vehicle is passing, the advertising on the walls and what time is illustrated on the clock in the background. Other subjects detail clothes the subjects were wearing.

For instance, the smaller man carrying the straight razor (See App. B, Slide D) is described by one subject as "a white man, obviously a laborer clad in overalls and other pieces of clothing."

Another subject reports, "the man with the barbering razor is wearing the clothes of a plumber or a carpenter." No clothing detail is reported by any of the tested subjects in describing the spectators in Slide D. Although Allport and Postman indicated the same items are not always described, all our subjects concentrated on the two men's dress in Slide D. In the other three slides, wearing apparel was not as important, and the subjects varied in their degree of description of clothing. (See App. B).

The same subject which described the clothing of the "plumber" above, did not go into such detail in other slides. In Slide C, which depicts actions of two small boys, the subject describes them only as "two small

kids, black and white."

### Assimilation

This phenomenon deals more readily with internal values and attitudes of the observer/reporter and is linked closely with leveling and sharpening. Allport and Postman state (Katz, 1954, p. 401):

It is apparent that both leveling and sharpening are selective processes. But what is it that leads to the obliteration of some details and pointing up of others; and what accounts for all transpositions, importations, and other falsifications that mark the course of rumor. The answer is to be found in the process of assimilation, which has to do with the powerful attractive forces exerted upon rumor by habits, interests, and sentiments existing in the listener's mind.

Herein lies the foundation of this investigation; that internal attitudes, interests and prejudices affect the observer/reporter's ability to record adequately an event without producing distortion. It is through these processes of leveling, sharpening and assimilation that reports are distorted, thus, compounding the problem of reporting events accurately.

Assimilation occurs under various tenses. Items may become leveled or sharpened to fit the general theme of a story, to make it consistent and more plausible. Falsifications may occur to fill in a gap which exists in the scene. Items may be distorted through condensation. That is, instead of remembering two or more items, the subject may group them into one. For example, on a subway, advertising cards along the top may be labeled as a billboard. They have been condensed, losing their individual identities as advertisements.

Assimilation by expectation occurs when the subject imports facts or changes some to match his own "expectations." Allport and Postman use an example concerning the supply truck in the combat cartoon (See App.

B, Slide A). They found the supply truck that supposedly carried ammunition was changed to an ambulance or Red Cross truck by their subjects, "because it was expected." (Katz, 1954, p. 401)

Subjects in this study usually failed to mention it. Those who did, classified it as a "troop carrier," or simply said it was "a truck."

Linguistic habits and prejudice link to become major contributors to distortion, which usually seems to manifest itself in stereotyping. In one previously quoted example (description of spectators in Slide D, App. B), a cartoon character has become "an apathetic fat man."

Linguistic forms and stereotyping seem to occur in almost every response studied. However, when these forms are compared with Allport and Postman's results (Katz, 1954), a shift in stereotyping or character representation is found. Perhaps because of today's emphasis on civil liberties, exposure of students to minority problems, or any number of explanations, the emphasis portraying the black man as a villain has lessened.

To illustrate, Slide D (See App. B); which depicts a white and black man in a public conveyance, Allport and Postman indicate (Katz, 1954, p. 402):

The most spectacular of all our assimilative distortions is the finding that, in more than half of our experiments, a razor moves from a white man's hand to a Negro hand. This results in a clear instance of stereotyped expectancy. Black men are 'supposed to carry razors,' white men are not.

In this study, the subjects "kept" the razor in the hands of the white man, but another perspective was evident--the white man became the aggressor.

An 18-year-old, Radio-TV-Film freshman reports (See App. B, Slide D):

A white man with a razor is accosting a black man. The little man with the razor is wearing the clothes of a plumber or carpenter while the black man is wearing a business suit and appears appalled by the little man's outburst.

A 22-year-old Political Science senior wrote (See App. B, Slide D):

. . . a Negro and a white guy about to get into a fight. The Negro is trying to reason like always, and the white guy is starting it, just like always.

Another example by a 20-year-old Journalism sophomore (See App. B, Slide D):

An aggressive white trying to badger a calm black. The white, in cap and overalls, is holding a club in his right hand while pointing a finger at the neatly dressed . . . black.

Although the razor changed to the club in the above example, the white man remains the aggressor. Another example includes not only aggression but rationale for it, thus filling in gaps in the stimulus (See App. D, Slide D):

In a streetcar, there is an argument taking place between a white laborer and a black business man. For some reason, the argument might be about the laborers jealousy of the success of the black businessmen.

That stereotyping of characters has shifted in recent years may be concluded by these examples. They are not peculiarities found in a few responses but are found throughout the 300-subject sample, without regard to the subjects' college classification, major or training in basic reporting. Although few of the respondents were Negro or of any other race than Caucasian, distortions similar to the above appeared in their responses also.

A few subjects seemed to leave the events as depicted on the slide and ventured into philosophy, reporting the characters in symbolic language.

A 20-year-old female Wildlife Communications major described the combat scene (See App. B, Slide A) as "a black soldier leading a war

on an old, established church. (underlining is the subject's)

An 18-year-old male Radio-TV-Film freshman reported the same scene in the following manner (See App. B, Slide A):

The forces of evil (war) combating against the elements of good (the church). Picture showed evil forces taking command, as the church was in poor condition . . . gutted.

It should be noted that only slides A and D (the combat slide and the two men on the public conveyance, See App. B) seemed to elicit responses where imagination seemed to override descriptive portrayal. Although mistakes in observation and reporting were made in Slides B and C, the two slides apparently were not as susceptible to such innovative descriptions.

There were instances of extremely detailed reporting, added details not apparent in the slide. In describing Slide A, an 18-year-old male freshman History major wrote (See App. B, Slide B):

Attack on a stone building. Three American soldiers in their position behind a destroyed house wall, 12' x 9'. The wall has a shell or bomb hole about 6' x 6'; in the center. Two soldiers are laying down a covering fire or are firing at distinct targets. The third, possibly black, is about to commit suicide by standing up in the hole exposing not only his body but his head above the top of the wall, a position that few survive. The two soldiers lying prone have helmets, the third doesn't.

The respondent could not have known the nationality of the soldiers depicted in the slide, nor could he have known the dimensions of the house or wall.

Background information reported on the questionnaire by the subjects is not sufficient to analyze motivating forces behind the subject's responses. However, judging by these responses, it seems some type of rigorous conscious awareness program is needed to increase accuracy in reporting an event. Journalism students should be trained to observe and



report without allowing distortion to occur to the degree represented in stated examples. Although perfection in accurate reporting is an unobtainable goal, student reporters should at least be made aware of the mechanisms contributing to biased and prejudiced reports. Perhaps in this way we can minimize inaccurate observations and reporting.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to determine if a difference existed in degree of descriptive or reporting accuracy between groups of journalism and non-journalism majors, between journalism majors classified as Upper or Lower classmen, and between groups who had completed a course in journalism writing and those who had not.

A non-randomized sample of 300 students was selected and administered an instrument designed to test the influence of the following variables upon their accuracy in reporting.

- I. College Classification: Upper division and Lower division
- II. College Major: Journalism or non-Journalism
- III. Newswriting Background: JB 2113 completed or JB 2113 not completed

Of the 300 respondents, 174 were JB majors and 126 were non-JB majors. Of the 300, 198 were lower division standing and 102 upper division standing.

All subjects were subjected to a series of four slides (See App. B) and asked to describe what they saw illustrated. The slides were designed to elicit any biased or prejudiced response from the viewer. It was expected that journalism majors would report only description of the slides and not include their inferences or interpretations of the slides.

Responses were tabulated as net scores, i.e., incorrect observations were subtracted from correct observations. Factorial and simple analysis

of variance were used to determine if significant differences existed between the group's net reporting accuracies.

Only 10 percent, or 30 of the 300 respondents, received positive net scores. All others received negative net scores, indicating substantial inability among the subjects to differentiate between observation and inference in their reporting. Even allowing for error in design and testing, such a high percentage of negative net scores tends to indicate that most people untrained in techniques of observation have a tendency to confuse observations with inference.

#### Hypothesis-Related Findings

Five testable hypotheses were presented and four of them were supported by data analysis. Keeping the above listed variables in mind, it was found that Upper and Lower divisions journalism majors reported the cartoons more accurately than did non-JB majors, supporting hypothesis number one. JB majors were expected to observe and report events more accurately than non-JB majors possibly because of their interest in the field (self-selection) and training.

It would follow then, that Upper division JB majors would probably report more accurately than Lower division JB majors due to their advanced training. However, the difference in net reporting accuracy was no more than could be expected by chance, indicating no significant difference between the reporting accuracy of Upper and Lower division JB majors, contrary to hypothesis two.

Analysis did indicate interaction between class standing and college major. The higher number of inaccuracies among lower division responses was due to non-JB majors. There was no significant difference between

the reporting accuracy of Upper and Lower division JB majors, despite the fact that only nine of the Lower division students had completed basic newswriting. All Upper division JB majors had completed JB 2113.

It was hypothesized that JB majors who had completed basic newswriting JB 2113, would be better reporters than JB majors who had not completed the course. Scores supported the hypothesis.

Self-selection may have had an influence upon hypothesis number four in which the author felt JB majors not having completed JB 2113 would still be better reporters than non-JB majors. Simple analysis of variance tended to support this assumption.

Hypothesis number five compared Upper division students who completed the JB 2113 with Upper division students who had not completed the course in another attempt to determine the value of JB 2113 in the JB curriculum. It was found the Upper division students who completed JB 2113 reported more accurately.

Although JB majors tended to report more accurately, they still had an exceedingly high number of reporting errors. It is doubtful in this data if JB 2113 can give a strong accounting for any relatively higher reporting accuracy. If journalism majors do tend to report more accurately than majors in other fields, the author suggests that self-selection factors may be involved, wherein some persons with characteristics and/or background who related more accurate observation may have selected journalism as their field of study.

In analyzing individual responses to the slides, the author found evidence of leveling, sharpening and assimilation as described by Allport and Postman in their study of "The Basic Psychology of Rumor", mentioned in Chapters II and IV (Katz, 1954).

It was found in almost every instance of reporting respondents included assumptions and inferences about activities depicted in the cartoon slides (See App. B).

The respondents, then, revealed what the slides represented to them and added or deleted details, presumably to fit their frames-of-reference.

In Chapter II some of the problems behind objective reporting were discussed. Cases were presented to show the influence a persons feelings can have on his perception and reporting of an event. In reviewing selected respondents' answers the author revealed "internal noise" at work; the student would fill in "gaps" in the cartoons to make them be more meaningful to him. He would delete, overlook, or add facts to meet his "stereotypes", his "expectations", and his own "feelings" about the cartoons as he "perceived" them to be. The reader should realize that reasons for inaccuracies are inferred from the Allport and Postman studies (Katz, 1954). The author did not gather such information from the respondents.

It may be concluded, then, according to findings in this study, that (1) overall, the respondents did less than adequate jobs of separating "facts" from their own "inferences", and delivered more interpretation than description of the cartoons; (2) that JB majors, possibly because of self-selection and training, can report facts more accurately than their non-journalism oriented contemporaries; but that (3) while JB 2113 probably contributed to the success of some JB majors in reporting, it is still not sufficient in minimizing reporting inaccuracies. The author points out, however, that JB training composes sources other than JB 2113.

## Recommendations

Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

(1) That an examination of JB 2113, Introduction to Newsroom Practice be conducted as to course content to determine what is being done to train JB majors to take into account their tendencies to make inferences and interpret facts according to their own values.

(2) Following the examination above, an integration into the coursework of a "consciousness of awareness" program to increase future reporters understanding of the influence his "internal noise" or values may have on his reporting accuracy. Journalism students should be trained to observe and report without allowing distortion to occur to the degree represented in the examples stated in this investigation (Chapter IV, Response Analysis, page 33.) Although perfect accuracy in reporting is an unobtainable goal, student reporters should at least be made aware of the mechanism contributing to biased and prejudiced reporting, perhaps in this way reporting of inaccuracies and distortions can at least be minimized.

The "consciousness of awareness" program should be based primarily on the differences in the structure of language and reality and sound research methodology, including familiarization of the student with theories of the psychology of rumor (as proposed by Allport and Postman, Katz, 1954) and the effects "biased" reporting can have on the society at large (Kerner Commission, 1968).

(3) Since the author feels JB 2113 to be a critical course in the JB majors program, and since it has been found JB majors do not usually enroll in JB 2113 until their junior year (according to the completed questionnaires), the course can also be used to synthesize knowledge

they have gained not only in the JB curriculum but in other areas of their university education. Mass communications law, principles of mass communications theory, and the application of such courses as psychology, sociology, economics, and political science to the field of journalism would be desirable.

This would, of course, require instructors to teach a well-rounded synthesis of what it is to be charged with the responsibility of reporting the day's events accurately.

It is hoped this investigation's findings will stress to those in decision-making roles the need for a different and higher quality in the OSU-JB and, no doubt, many other schools of journalism throughout the country.

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APPENDIX A

WILLIAM V. HANEY'S UNCRITICAL INFERENCE TEST

# THE UNCRITICAL INFERENCE TEST

**SAMPLE**

by  
**William V. Haney, Ph.D.**  
Northwestern University  
Evanston, Illinois

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## INSTRUCTIONS

This test is designed to determine your ability to think *accurately* and *carefully*. Since it is very probable that you have never taken *this type* of test before, failure to read the instructions **EXTREMELY CAREFULLY** may lower your score.

1. You will read a brief story. Assume that all of the information presented in the story is definitely *accurate* and *true*. Read the story carefully. You may refer back to the story whenever you wish.
2. You will then read statements about the story. Answer them in numerical order. **DO NOT GO BACK** to fill in answers or to change answers. This will only distort your test score.
3. After you read carefully each statement, determine whether the statement is:
  - a. "T" — meaning: On the basis of the *information presented in the story* the statement is **DEFINITELY TRUE**.
  - b. "F" — meaning: On the basis of the *information presented in the story* the statement is **DEFINITELY FALSE**.
  - c. "?" — meaning: The statement *MAY* be true (or false) but on the basis of the *information presented in the story* you cannot be *definitely certain*. (If any part of the statement is doubtful, mark the statement "?".)
4. Indicate your answer by circling either "T" or "F" or "?" opposite the statement.

## SAMPLE TEST

### THE STORY

The only car parked in front of 619 Oak Street is a black one. The words, "James M. Curley, M.D.," are spelled in small gold letters across the left front door of that car.

### Statements About the Story

- |   |                         |                                    |                                    |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. The color of the car in front of 619 Oak Street is black.                                  | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 2. There is no lettering on the left front door of the car parked in front of 619 Oak Street. | <input type="radio"/> T | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 3. Someone is ill at 619 Oak Street.  | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> ? |
| 4. The black car parked in front of 619 Oak Street belongs to James M. Curley.                | <input type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> ? |
5. REMEMBER: Answer *ONLY* on the basis of the information presented in the story. Refrain from answering as you think it *MIGHT* have happened. Answer each statement in numerical order. Do not go back to fill in or to change answers.

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OUR PUBLICATIONS CATALOGUE ON SEMANTICS AND IMPROVING COMMUNICATION.

### STORY (A)

A certain west coast university scientist chartered a ship for exploration purposes. When a large white bird was sighted the scientist asked permission to kill it. He stated that white albatrosses are usually found only off the coast of Australia. He wanted the bird as a specimen for the university museum.

The crew protested against the killing of the bird, calling the scientist's attention to the old sea superstition that bad luck followed the killing of a white albatross.

Nevertheless the captain granted permission to kill the bird and the bird was killed. These mishaps happened after the bird was killed:

The net cables fouled up three times.

The net caught on the bottom and was ripped to shreds.

The shaft on the main winch snapped and it took the crew members five hours to reel in by hand 1,700 feet of cable.

A rib was broken when Jackie Larson, a scientific aide, fell down a hatch ladder.

The scientist became seasick for the first time in his life.

Lost gear forced the ship to head for land.

The cook left his job.

### Statements About Story A

- |  |                                    |                                    |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. The scientist had never been seasick before.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 2. The purpose of the voyage was primarily pleasure and sight-seeing.                              | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 3. The story lists various incidents which follow the killing of a bird.                           | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 4. After the scientist shot the albatross the troubles happened.                                   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 5. No scientist's name was mentioned in the story.   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 6. The scientist was surprised to see a white albatross in the vicinity.                           | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 7. The scientist was not from a university or college.   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 8. The scientist asked the captain for permission to kill the bird.                                | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 9. It took the crew members less than five minutes to reel in the seventeen hundred feet of cable. | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 10. A lost gear made it necessary for the ship to return to the west coast.                        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 11. Fortunately, the net cables never fouled up.   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 12. A ship was chartered by a scientist.   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 13. The net was ripped on the bottom of the sea.   | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 14. The cook was fired because of his objection to the killing of the bird.                        | <input checked="" type="radio"/> T | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 15. Larson broke a leg.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input type="radio"/> ?            |
| 16. After the bird was killed the mishaps occurred.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input type="radio"/> F            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> ? |
| 17. The white albatross was sighted near Australia.  | <input type="radio"/> T            | <input checked="" type="radio"/> F | <input type="radio"/> ?            |

### STORY (B)

Babe Smith has been killed. Police have rounded up six suspects, all of whom are known gangsters. All of them are known to have been near the scene of the killing at the approximate time that it occurred. All had substantial motives for wanting Smith killed. However, one of these suspected gangsters, Slinky Sam, has positively been cleared of guilt.

#### Statements About Story B

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Slinky Sam is known to have been near the scene of the killing of Babe Smith.   | T | F | ? |
| 2. All six of the rounded-up gangsters were known to have been near the scene of the murder.                             | T | F | ? |
| 3. Only Slinky Sam has been cleared of guilt.  | T | F | ? |
| 4. All six of the rounded-up suspects were near the scene of Smith's killing at the approximate time that it took place. | T | F | ? |
| 5. The police do not know who killed Smith.  | T | F | ? |
| 6. All six suspects are known to have been near the scene of foul deed.  | T | F | ? |
| 7. Smith's murderer did not confess of his own free will.  | T | F | ? |
| 8. Slinky Sam was not cleared of guilt.  | T | F | ? |
| 9. It is known that the six suspects were in the vicinity of the cold-blooded assassination.                             | T | F | ? |

### STORY (C)

A business man had just turned off the lights in the store when a man appeared and demanded money. The owner opened a cash register. The contents of the cash register were scooped up and the man sped away. A member of the police force was notified promptly.

#### Statements About Story C

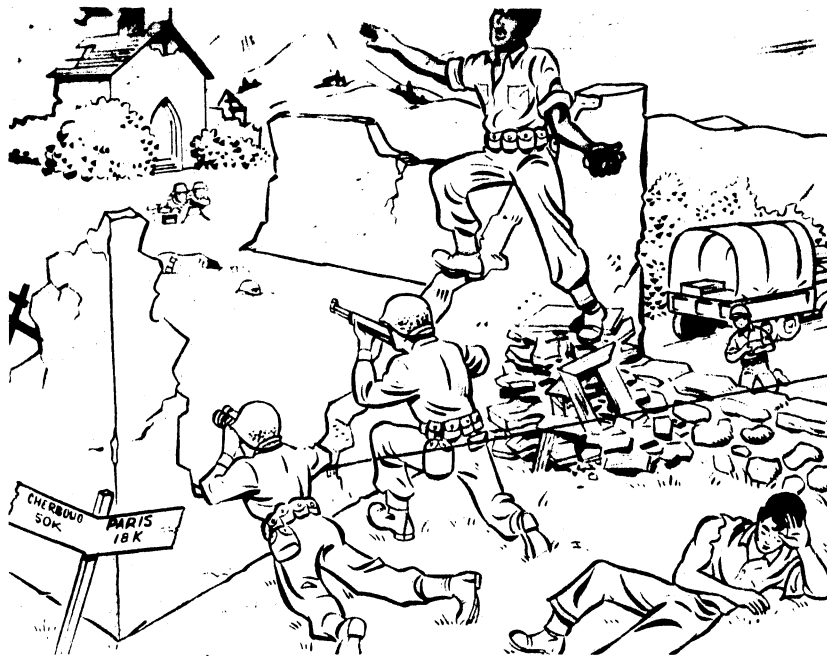
- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. A man appeared after the owner had turned off his store lights.   | T | F | ? |
| 2. The robber was a <i>man</i> .   | T | F | ? |
| 3. The man who appeared did not demand money.  | T | F | ? |
| 4. The man who opened the cash register was the owner.   | T | F | ? |
| 5. The store-owner scooped up the contents of the cash register and ran away.  | T | F | ? |
| 6. Someone opened a cash register.   | T | F | ? |
| 7. After the man, who demanded the money, scooped up the contents of the cash register, he ran away.   | T | F | ? |
| 8. While the cash register contained money, the story does <i>not</i> state <i>how much</i> .  | T | F | ? |
| 9. The robber demanded money of the owner.   | T | F | ? |
| 10. The robber opened the cash register.   | T | F | ? |
| 11. After the store lights were turned off a man appeared.   | T | F | ? |
| 12. The robber did not take the money with him.  | T | F | ? |
| 13. The robber did not demand money of the owner.  | T | F | ? |
| 14. The owner opened a cash register.  | T | F | ? |
| 15. The age of the store-owner was not revealed in the story.  | T | F | ? |
| 16. Taking the contents of the cash register with him, the man ran out of the store.   | T | F | ? |
| 17. The story concerns a series of events in which only three persons are referred to: the owner of the store, a man who demanded money, and a member of the police force. | T | F | ? |
| 18. The following events were included in the story: someone demanded money, a cash register was opened, its contents were scooped up, and a man dashed out of the store.  | T | F | ? |

- 18. When an albatross was sighted flying near the ship the scientist asked permission to kill it. T F ?
- 19. The net was not damaged. T F ?
- 20. The troubles happened after the albatross was killed. T F ?
- 21. The scientist was less influenced by the old sea superstition than were the members of the crew. T F ?
- 22. The ship, propelled by a motor, was in difficulty after the gear broke. T F ?
- 23. Permission to kill the bird was given by the captain. T F ?
- 24. Seventeen hundred feet of cable were reeled in by hand. T F ?
- 25. The bird that was killed was an albatross. T F ?
- 26. The sailors were not disturbed when the scientist violated the old sea superstition. T F ?
- 27. The person who fell down a hatch ladder was a man named Larson. T F ?
- 28. Larson broke one of the ribs of the ship. T F ?
- 29. The scientist did not want the bird as a specimen for the university museum. T F ?
- 30. The naturalist did not charter the ship. T F ?
- 31. The scientist did not ask the crew for permission to kill the albatross. T F ?
- 32. The scientist's attention was called to the old sea superstition that bad luck follows the killing of a white albatross. T F ?
- 33. The naturalist did not ask permission to kill the bird in order to secure it as a museum specimen. T F ?
- 34. The scientist expected to see a white albatross in that vicinity. T F ?
- 35. The scientist was influenced by the warnings of the crew. T F ?
- 36. The cook did not leave his job. T F ?
- 37. The captain broke one of his ribs. T F ?
- 38. The bird was killed against the captain's orders. T F ?
- 39. The crew members were only trying to frighten the scientist by protesting against the killing of the bird. T F ?
- 40. A lost gear was not the reason the ship landed. T F ?
- 41. The crew protested against the killing of the bird. T F ?
- 42. Jackie Larson became seasick before the albatross was killed. T F ?
- 43. The scientist's aide was Jackie Larson. T F ?
- 44. The bird was not killed. T F ?
- 45. The bird was killed by the scientist. T F ?
- 46. The cook helped reel in the seventeen hundred feet of cable. T F ?
- 47. While the crew men were undoubtedly upset by the scientist's action the cook was the only man to actually leave his job. T F ?
- 48. A scientist fell down a hatch ladder. T F ?

APPENDIX B

THE TEST SLIDES AND JUDGES' OBSERVATIONS

## SLIDE A

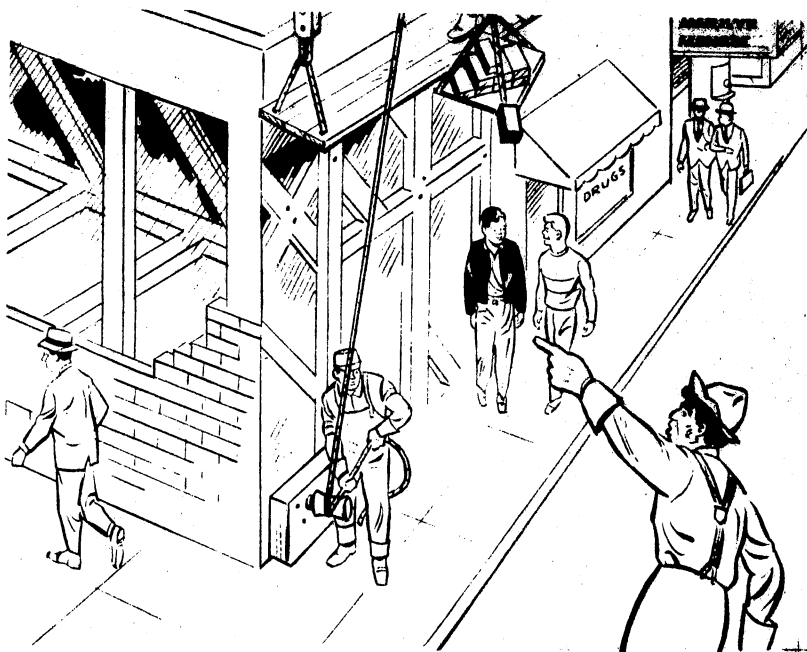


## Responses by Judges For Data Analysis

1. Four cartoon characters in combat clothing
2. An army truck
3. Ruins of building in background
4. Wounded or ill soldier in foreground
5. One man observing through binoculars
6. One man pointing rifle
7. One man preparing to throw grenade
8. Man near truck running toward action scene
9. Two men with machine gun in background
10. Sign showing "Paris 18 K" in left foreground



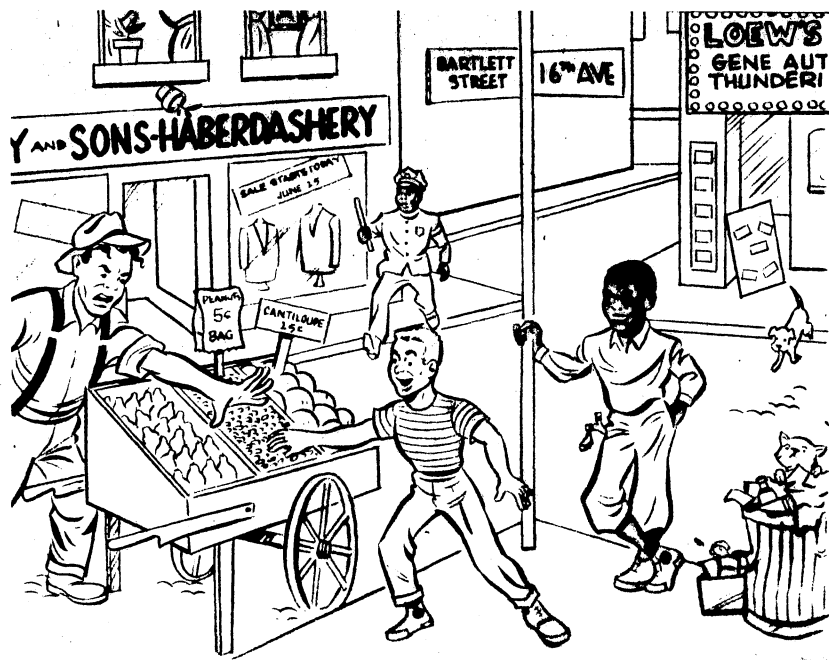
## SLIDE B



## Responses by Judges For Data Analysis

1. Cartoon depicting construction work
2. Man raising bricks by pulley
3. Brick falling from board
4. Man in hat pointing in direction of falling brick
5. Man walking toward left border of cartoon
6. Two boys walking toward area of falling brick
7. Two men, one with briefcase, walking down sidewalk
8. Marilyn Monroe sign in upper right corner
9. Drug store between boys and men walking
10. Feet of worker on scaffold

## SLIDE C



## Responses by Judges For Data Analysis

1. Four cartoon characters in street scene
2. One white boy in striped shirt reaching for peanuts
3. One black boy leaning against lamp-post
4. Man in back of wheeled cart reaching toward white boy
5. Flower pot falling from window in background
6. Sign showing Bartlett Street and 16th Avenue
7. Policeman coming toward wheeled cart with club in hand
8. Dog in right of cartoon starting to cross street
9. Trash barrel and cat's head in lower right of cartoon
10. Sons-Haberdashery on sign in background

## SLIDE D



1. Cartoon showing several people on public conveyance
2. Sign in background showing Dykeman Street
3. Signs above heads of people showing advertising
4. Two men standing in center of picture
5. One black man dressed in business suit
6. One white man dressed as worker holding straight razor
7. Man in background with newspaper
8. Woman next to above with flower in hat
9. Woman in background with infant
10. Clock in background

**APPENDIX C**

**THE BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE**

## BACKGROUND DATA

1. Age
2. Religious preference
3. Parental religious preference
4. Parental income: below \$6,000, \$6-9,000, \$9-12,000, \$12,000-15,000, \$15-20,000, over \$20,000
5. Race: Caucasian, Negro, Indian, Oriental, other
6. Did you attend a public school, private or religious (if parochial, what denomination) during elementary school, high school, college (circle if applicable).
7. Father's profession
8. Mother's profession
9. Would you say your parents raised you with (circle one), no discipline, average discipline, mildly disciplined, more disciplined than most, less than most, strict discipline.
10. Parents level of education:  
    father: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral  
    mother: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, Bachelors, Masters, or Doctoral
11. Political affiliation: Republic, Democratic, Other
12. Political affiliation of parents: Republican, Democratic, Other
13. Would you classify yourself as conservative or liberal, on the following scale:  
    conservative, mildly conservative, middle of the road, mildly liberal, liberal.
14. College classification and major field of study.
15. Have you completed the course JB 2113, Introduction to Newsroom Practice?

APPENDIX D

RUMOR CLINIC

## HOW TO PUT ON A RUMOR CLINIC

1. get volunteers & send out
2. tell about rumors

### I. GETTING SET UP

#### *The Equipment You Need:*

1. A film strip projector.
2. The film strip of the "Rumor Clinic" pictures.
3. A projection screen (a light wall will do in a pinch).
4. A blackboard will be handy in the discussion that follows the demonstration, but it is not necessary.
5. Pencil and paper for the discussion leader to take notes on the changes that take place in the reports.

#### *People To Take Part:*

1. Six people to be "Reporters."
2. Somebody to be doorkeeper.

Select the "Rumor Clinic" picture you feel will be most suitable for your group. Get your projector set up, choose the people to help, and send the "reporters" out of the room. You are now ready to start putting on the Clinic.

### II. INTRODUCING THE RUMOR CLINIC

When all the reporters are out of the room, explain that the group will now have a chance to see what happens to stories and rumors when they are told and retold. Don't go into detail. An air of mystery will make the demonstration more interesting and the results will be clearer if neither the reporters nor the rest of the group have been "alerted" to what is going to happen.

When introducing the Clinic to your audience, you might say something like this:

*"This is a demonstration to show you how a rumor grows as it travels. Six volunteers have been picked to act as reporters. A picture will be shown on the screen for you to study. We will call in the first reporter, who will be the only one to see the picture with you. He will study it, and then tell the next reporter as much as he can remember from this picture. Then reporter number 2 will repeat the story to reporter number 3, and so on, until each reporter has had a chance to tell the story. As the report is passed on from person to person, we will watch to see what changes take place in a story as it is passed along. After the reporters have finished, we will try to get a good discussion going on these changes and the reasons for them."*

### III. PUTTING ON THE RUMOR CLINIC

Show the "Rumor Clinic" pictures you have selected for a minute or two.

Before calling in the first reporter, tell your group that the reports made in the Rumor Clinic will probably be much less distorted than those we get in real-life "rumor spreading." Explain that there will be fewer changes for the following reasons:

1. Having an audience makes the reporters more careful about detail when telling the story; however, it also makes them shorten their story.
2. Each reporter tells his story right after he hears it; there is almost no time for the details to get fuzzy in his mind.
3. The picture is quite simple compared with most of the situations reported in shop or neighborhood gossip.

*Note:* Caution the group not to laugh, comment or "coach" the reporters in any way during the demonstration. Also, be sure that the reporters talk loud enough for the entire group to hear.

1. Ask the doorkeeper to bring in Reporter #1. Let him look at the picture for about two minutes. Then ask him to turn his back on the screen.
2. Call in Reporter #2, but don't let him see the screen. Ask Reporter #1 to describe the scene in the picture. (Try to keep the picture on the screen while the reporters are telling the story to the audience if it is possible to do this without the reporters seeing it too. If it means that the reporter will see the screen as he walks into the room, you might turn the projector off until he has taken his place.)
3. Bring in Reporter #3. Ask Reporter #2 to repeat the story he has just heard from Reporter #1.
4. Continue until each reporter has heard and retold the story. Let Reporter #6 tell the whole group his version of the story told him by Reporter #5.

*Over*

#### IV. DISCUSSING THE RUMOR CLINIC

The Rumor Clinic demonstration, by itself, usually makes a strong impression on the group. But the effect can be even greater if a good discussion follows the demonstration. The discussion can help the members of the group realize:

- a. how great the changes and distortions in a report can become as the story is passed along from person to person;
- b. how the changes take place, even when there is no desire on the part of the people involved to distort what they heard or saw;
- c. *why rumors can never be accepted as fact until they are checked, and why they must be checked so carefully before they are made the basis for any action.*

Begin the discussion by asking the group what changes they noticed in the story as each reporter passed it along. (The notes that you have taken will help you remind the group what changes were made.) Ask the group why people make changes in stories as they retell them.

*Note:* It's a good idea to list the reasons on the blackboard, and discuss them as they are given. Let people illustrate the reasons using their own experiences in the shop and where they live.

Here is a list of some of the more important reasons to help you guide the discussion.

- a. *Usually people remember sharp details and forget those that were not so vivid.* For example, the razor in the picture showing the subway scene is so vivid, that once it is noticed by the first reporter it is almost never left out by the others.
- b. *What people notice and remember depends on their own interests and experiences.* For example, in one slide there is a Red Cross truck carrying ammunition instead of medical supplies. Men will be more apt to notice this, while women will be more aware of clothing, etc.
- c. *People see what they expect to see, whether it was really there to be seen or not.* Thus, people who expect Negroes to get into fights will "see" a razor in a Negro's hand even though it was really in somebody else's hand.
- d. *People fill in gaps to make a story more believable.* They make the story what it "ought" to be, or what

it "usually" is. For example, in one picture there is a drug store in the middle of the block. This drug store is often placed on the corner when the story is retold.

- e. *People build up a story in retelling it.* They make it more exciting and important than it may have been in order to make it worth retelling. The new, dramatic details exaggerate the story, and often distort it seriously. For example, a small argument may build up into a "riot" when the story is retold.
- f. *People often shorten a story in retelling it.* Leaving out these details makes the story easier to remember but often changes the effect the story has on the listener.

#### V. SUMMARY

*Point out that each of us approaches a situation with his own interests, his own experiences, and his own expectations of how people should — or do — behave.* In talking about what we saw, or what we were told, this background of our own creeps into the story. The person retelling it becomes part-author of a new version of the story rather than just a "reporter" who passes along exactly what happened.

*It is these changes in the story, arising out of the attitudes and prejudices of the person who tells or retells it, for which we must always be on the lookout in stories, reports, and rumors.*

What tests can we make of the rumors we hear to help keep ourselves straight, and to straighten out the person who is spreading a rumor? The list of tests should include questions like these:

- a. How much of this story do you know to be true, and how much are you taking on somebody else's say-so?
- b. Who told you this story? How reliable is he in this case, and where did he get it in the first place?
- c. How far from the original source has this tale come?
- d. How much harm and injustice may we be doing if we believe this story, and if we help to pass it around?
- e. If the story seems to require some action, how can we check it for facts, and sort out the truth from the changes and distortions that have crept in, before we act on it?



VITA

Lawrence M. Maloney

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

**Thesis:** A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESCRIPTIVE ACCURACY AND JOURNALISM TRAINING

**Major Field:** Mass Communication

**Biographical:**

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