





**Effective Communication:  
Critical to Acquire BUT  
Requires WORK**

by Anthony Socci

**AMS Summer Policy  
Colloquium**

June 10, 2008

# Roots of Objectivity

Two ospreys are shown in flight against a blue background that features a faint grid and a globe-like pattern. One osprey is in the upper right, and another is below it, both facing left.

“Without protection against propaganda, without standards of evidence [Lippmann's intended definition of journalistic objectivity], without criteria of emphasis, the living substance of all popular decision is exposed to every prejudice and to infinite exploitation.” — Walter Lippmann, 1920.

# Importance of Objectivity.....



- "...the journalist [not unlike the scientist] is not objective, but his method can be."
- "In this original understanding of objectivity, *neutrality is not a fundamental principle of journalism*. It is merely a voice, or device, to persuade the audience of one's accuracy or fairness."

Source: Kovach & Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, 2007

# Objectivity and the Craft of Journalism

Two birds, possibly ospreys, are shown in flight against a clear blue sky. One bird is in the upper right, and the other is slightly below and to the left of it. The background of the entire slide is a blue grid pattern.

- “..verifying facts resides in the central function of journalism.”

Yet...

- “..the discipline of verification...is also part of one of the great confusions of journalism – the concept of objectivity.”
- “The original meaning of this idea is now thoroughly misunderstood and by and large lost.”

*Source: Kovach & Rosenstiel, The Elements of Journalism, 2007*

# Objectivity in Practice Today



- “The notion of an objective method of reporting exists in pieces...”
  - When a sampling of journalists were asked about where they learned strategies for verifying their reporting, the overwhelming answer was “.. by trial and error, on my own, or from a friend.”


*Source: Kovach & Rosenstiel, The Elements of Journalism, 2007*

# The Science Community



- Science has a process of verification referred to as 'peer-review'.
- Does it serve as a model for 'objectivity' in journalism? If so, what would it look like in journalism?
- What is the role of editors as journalistic standard-bearers?
- Have we done due diligence in the realm of communication?

# Science Meets Media or Media Meets Science

Two birds are flying in a clear blue sky in the upper right corner of the slide. The birds are in flight, with their wings spread, and appear to be moving from the top right towards the center.

- Scientists and journalists: what should we expect from one another and how do we attain it?
- Do our respective institutions help us realize our expectations of one another and live up to our own professional standards?

# A Fly in the Ointment?


Two birds, possibly ospreys, are shown in flight against a blue sky. One is in the upper right, and another is slightly below and to the left of it. The background of the entire slide is a blue grid pattern.

Pre-1920 studies in psychology and persuasion led Lippmann to fear that the problem [*failures of the press being remedied by more responsible reporting; that the average citizen could make intelligent judgments if presented with the facts*] went beyond censorship, ignorance or distortion. It went to the very nature and workings of human perception and the human mind.

We humans do not automatically and objectively see what is before our eyes. We filter the outer world to correspond to our inner world. We interpret the world as we are.

*Source: Adapted from Ronald Steel, from the Forward to Lippmann, Liberty & the News, 1920.*

# Fast-Forward; Enter Framing

Two birds are flying in the sky in the upper right corner of the slide. The background is a blue grid with a globe-like pattern.

Q - Are these communication myths?

"The truth will set us free. If we just tell people the facts, since people are basically rational beings, they'll all reach the right conclusions"

*Source: Lakoff, Don't Think Of An Elephant, 2004*

Q - Don't we all frame things, often unconsciously & isn't it how we organize and comprehend reality?

Q - If so, does this not have profound implications for science and journalism, in particular?

# Facts and Reason

The background of the slide is a blue grid pattern. In the upper right corner, there is a photograph of two birds, possibly ospreys, flying in a clear blue sky. One bird is in the foreground, and another is slightly behind and to the right.

Q - Do facts and reason alone inform?

Q – Do facts and reason matter in shaping behavior or prompting people to act on knowledge or, did we [scientists, media and others] perhaps naively think that reason, logic and facts are sufficient reasons for people to **take note** and secondly, **alter their behavior** accordingly?




Q - Or instead, are we now relegated to communicate via the use of dueling 'frames'? Or, is 'framing' the way people have always incorporated and responded to information and we were largely not aware?

Q – Do 'frames' trump facts? Can we hope for something better from the labors of our collective intelligence? Can frames and framing be tested against reality/real outcomes?

Q - Do we need a 'Rhetoric Beat' in the media to help keep political discourse as clear and intellectually honest as possible? (*Source: The Rhetoric Beat, Brent Cunningham, CJR, Nov./Dec., 2007*)

Ex:

- death tax vs. estate tax
- enhanced interrogation techniques vs torture
- unlawful enemy combatant vs prisoner of war
- 9/11 as an act of war vs an act of mass murder
- global warming vs climate variability

- 
- “Changing your mind isn’t *like* changing your body—it’s the same thing.”
  - “...people [do not] use an objective system of reasoning to decide on their politics [or political choices].”

***Source:*** Editorial review of *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain*, by George Lakoff

# Communication Has Deep Psychological & Linguistic Roots



- Were you aware that:
  - When accusations or assertions are met with silence, they are more likely to feel true?
  - We tend to react to myths, lies and bad information by countering them with accurate information. Paradoxically however, denials and/or clarifications can reinforce myths and contribute to their resiliency.
  - Put another way, once a notion has been implanted in people's minds it can be difficult to dislodge or alter.
  - Hearing something over and over, even from untrustworthy sources, can make it feel true and that it came from multiple independent sources.

Source: Shankar Vedantum, *Wash. Post*, Sept. 4, 2007

# Let's be clear about being clear...

As we know, there are known knowns.  
There are things we know we know.  
We also know there are known unknowns.  
That is to say we know there are some things  
we do not know. But there are also unknown  
unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't  
know.



*Donald Rumsfeld—Feb. 12, 2002, Department of Defense news briefing*