

COVERAGE OF BILL CLINTON AND NEWT  
GINGRICH IN TIME, NEWSWEEK, AND U. S. NEWS  
& WORLD REPORT DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS  
OF THE 104TH CONGRESS: A BIAS STUDY

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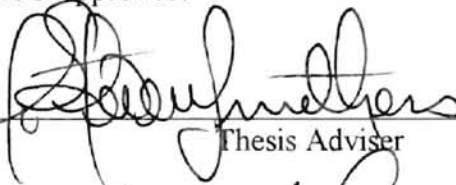
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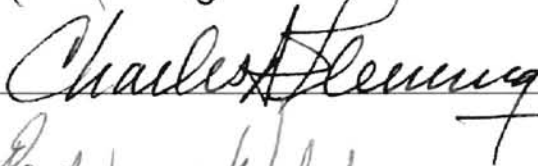
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## PREFACE

This thesis uses content analysis to examine the possible bias in coverage of President Bill Clinton and House Speaker Newt Gingrich in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World report*, from January 1, 1995, to April 14, 1995. The study uses John C. Merrill's method: bias were divided into six types--adjective bias, adverbial bias, attribution bias, outright opinion, contextual bias, and photographic bias. The bias were also decided as positive and negative. The result shows that the three magazines' coverage of the two politicians was not totally balanced: *Newsweek* showed more negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich, while *Time* and *U. S. News & World Report* showed more negative bias toward President Clinton in their coverage during the period.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

General

Objectivity should be one of the most important goals of the news media. The highest quality of journalism has traditionally been considered to be impartial news coverage, but true objectivity has been proven to be hard to obtain.

One of the concerns of media researchers about objectivity in journalism reporting is how the three newsweeklies, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*, cover politicians. Many studies have been conducted in the past decades to examine the news stories about politicians in these influential newsmagazines. Most studies have revealed that the magazines were not necessarily neutral in their political coverage. The images of the politicians in the news stories were sometimes excessively positive or negative, depending on the magazines' political preferences.

In 1994, American voters elected a Republican majority in the U. S. House and Senate, the first time in forty years that the G.O.P. controlled congress. The political mood at this time suggested that voters were disappointed about their economic situations and the perceived moral decay in this country. The new Republican House Speaker, Newt Gingrich, was advocating a political revolution in the United States, which he called "The Contract with America." This program outlined the Republican vision for reforming government and curing social problems. Gingrich's plan received extensive media attention, and Gingrich quickly became a household word in American politics. In fact, the

new House Speaker had such an impact on the American political agenda that he was chosen as “Man of the Year” in 1995 by *Time* magazine.<sup>1</sup>

Gingrich’s ideals generally conflicted with those of Democratic President Bill Clinton. Each leader’s political “agenda” differed on such issues as a balanced budget, welfare policy, and the crime bill. The ideological struggle over the federal budget caused a government shutdown at the end of 1995.

This study will examine issues of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* published during the first 100 days of the 104th Congressional term in an attempt to determine if the magazines were impartial when they covered Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton. This is an opportunity to examine the level of objectivity of the three magazines. By comparing the magazines’ news stories about the two controversial politicians, the study will reveal if the magazines have made any progress in guarding against patterns of bias when covering politicians since the first study of this kind conducted in 1965.

## Background

### General

Today, people in the United States rely on information provided by the news media to understand the world. According to the book Four Theories of the Press:

(People) cannot experience much of the world at first-hand, and in an urbanized society he lacks much of the face-to-face discussion which characterized earlier societies. The Kansas farmer who would understand a strike in Detroit, the Detroit automobile worker who would understand the policy of the government regarding atomic energy, the government worker in Washington who would understand the implications of a drought in Kansas--they all must depend upon the mass media. And in ideas as well as in news, Americans must conduct much of their discussion in the press instead of in small face-to-face groups.<sup>2</sup>

Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach conclude in the Theories of Mass Communication that “the media system’s power lies in its control over scarce information resources that individuals, groups, organizations, social systems, and societies depend upon to attain their goals.” They also point out that “individuals, like social systems, develop dependency relationships with the media, because individuals are goal directed and some of their goals require access resources controlled by the mass media.”<sup>3</sup>

One specific area where people depend on media is covering politics and government. Since people cannot go to Washington, D.C., to meet with politicians, they become acquainted with politicians and their ideas through the media. Denis McQuail wrote in The Influence and Effects of Mass Media that political coverage is an area where the mass media have not only affected people’s political opinions, but also the way politics is conducted. He points out that the mass media may have changed political roles, people’s expectations of politicians, the relationships of followers to leaders, and even some of the values of political life.<sup>4</sup>

As people are dependent on media to get political information, the media should provide accurate coverage of political issues. Any sign of bias in news reporting potentially affects the reader’s understanding of current political situations. More specifically, the readers of the three newsmagazines are looking more for the “why” and “how,” while the magazines are responsible for presenting objective descriptions and correct analyses of political events. Tainted descriptions and biased analyses of political issues could potentially mislead the nation.

The social responsibility theory of the press stipulates that, “Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society.” Under the social responsibility framework, the press should service “the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs” while “enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government.” The press is not only required to be accurate and to distinguish opinion from fact, but to “report *the truth about the fact*,” and to seek “the whole truth,” and to represent all important viewpoints, not only those of the publishers.<sup>5</sup>

According to Anita Silvers, journalistic obligations, such as objectivity, do not arise from a purely moral source. The obligations are produced by the special institutional status which people give to the profession. According to the U. S. Constitution, the basic free press principle is included in the First Amendment. It is widely accepted, however, that this legal guarantee relies on an even more fundamental relationship. She points out that “journalism justifies itself and its special institutional status by reference to its social value, and the ethical principles characteristic of the profession are prescriptions which are supposed to make practices within the profession productive of the relevant social value.”<sup>6</sup>

The authors of Four Theories of the Press specify that people in the United States depend on the media to get information about their world: people “cannot experience much of the world first-hand, and in an urbanized society (they) lack much of the face-to-face discussion which characterized earlier societies.”<sup>7</sup>

Other authors have also discussed the heavy reliance that people place on the press for information. S. J. Ball-Rokeach and M. L. DeFleur state the dependency in this way:

Dependency is defined as a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party. So defined, dependency on media information resources is an ubiquitous condition in modern society. One finds this condition in many settings, ranging from the need to find the best buys at the supermarket to more general or pervasive needs such as obtaining the kinds of information that will help to maintain a sense of connectedness and familiarity with the social world outside one's neighborhood. There are numerous ways in which people are dependent on media to satisfy information needs.<sup>8</sup>

More specifically, it has been proven that people depend on media for political information. In the book American Politics and Journalists, Charles Press and Kenneth VerBurg conclude that "it is clear that many politicians are convinced that newspapers, radio, and especially television, can and do create climates of political opinion about important and unimportant issues." They also cite the observation of political scientist Bernard Cohen: "The media may not be very successful in telling us what to think. But, they are often 'stunningly successful' in telling us what to think about-- screening events for us, not changing our attitudes." The media are influential, Cohen suggests, because they tell the rest of us what the important issues are.<sup>9</sup>

According to Denis McQuail, the mass media have such social powers:

First, the media can attract and direct attention to problems, solutions or people in ways which can favor those with power and correlatively divert attention from rival individuals or groups. Second, the mass media can confer status and confirm legitimacy. Third, in some circumstances, the media can be a channel for persuasion and mobilization. Fourth, the mass media can help to bring certain kinds of publics into being and maintain them. Fifth, the media are a vehicle for offering psychic rewards and gratifications. They can divert and amuse and they can flatter.<sup>10</sup>

The news media can influence people's perceptions of politicians and, thus, influence politics in this country. Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar point out that the news organizations influence people's assessment of the President both in the Washington community and among important constituencies throughout the nation. And the public bases its judgment on the President and their decisions on media coverage. The book states that "what the media present to their audience has important consequences for the public as well as for the President, and for political institutions as well as for the individuals and groups who are actors on the national stage..."<sup>11</sup>

The above citations suggest to some degree that media can influence people's political perceptions and reactions. According to Carol H. Weiss, leaders in America (industrial corporations, non-industrial corporations, labor unions, the Congress, federal departments and independent agencies, political parties, voluntary associations, and the mass media) and the very wealthy read newsmagazines. According to the study, the three newsweeklies are read by at least two-thirds of these people. There is only one exception--*U.S. News & World Report* is read by just over one half of the media professionals. The research also found that the media are the most frequently mentioned source of information for 45 percent of the leaders investigated. The research also shows that when these elites are reading newsmagazines, they read to obtain news rather than opinion. These media are widely read and highly regarded by America's leaders. "Major newspapers, newsmagazines, other general and specialized periodicals, and a few television newsmen provide inputs for top-level debate and negotiation that America's leaders view as important in the resolution of national policy issues."<sup>12</sup>



The news media bear some responsibilities in our society. According to the social responsibility theory, the press, which enjoys a privileged freedom in America, is required to provide the public an accurate account of the world and to seek the whole truth. To do so, the press have to distinguish fact from opinion, identify sources of news, and present various viewpoints.<sup>13</sup> The press has a natural connection with politics in society, and it is the press' responsibility to offer the public objective information on public affairs.

### Responsibility of the Press

The code of ethics of the American Society of Newspaper Editors encourages its members to work responsibly and impartially: "The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time." It also requires that "every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate, free from bias and in context, and that all sides are presented fairly. Editorials, analytical articles and commentary should be held to the same standards of accuracy with respect to facts as news reports." There should be a clear distinction between news reports and opinion.<sup>14</sup>

The Code of Ethics of Society of Professional Journalists specifies that:

Objectivity in reporting the news is another goal that serves as the mark of an experienced professional. It is a standard of performance toward which we strive. We honor those who achieve it.

Journalists recognize their responsibility for offering informed analysis, comment, and editorial opinion on public events and issues. They accept the obligation to present such material by individuals whose competence, experience and judgment qualify them for it.<sup>15</sup>

The social responsibility of the press is detailed by other authors. In the book, Groping for Ethics in Journalism, Gene Goodwin and Ron F. Smith have built a system of ethics for the journalists:

1. Journalism should provide valid information, information that is truthful and untainted by vested and special interests. Journalists have to be independent searchers for truth.
2. As they gather and report the news, journalists must be fair and compassionate in their treatment of people and events.
3. Journalists are not exempt from the ethical principle that means are as important as ends, and both means and ends must be truthful and honorable.
4. Journalists have to be honest to themselves, their news sources and associates and, above all, the public. And a little humility wouldn't hurt. Arrogance has no place in a profession so dependent on the public when they shed light on the less obvious profession so dependent on credibility.
5. Journalists make a vital contribution to our democracy when they monitor the activities of politicians and provide citizens with information they need to know. Likewise, activities of business and other areas of the private sector in which the public has a legitimate interest...<sup>16</sup>

According to William L. Rivers, Wilbur Schramm, and Clifford G. Christians, "the development of a quality called objectivity was one of the meaningful accomplishments of American (and a few other) journalists." A century ago, the news and the newspapers were usually biased. The growth of wire services and the growing dissatisfaction with "slanted news" caused news to separate opinion. This resulted in the birth of the standard news story, or "straight news" story, which required "the chronicling of sheer fact: objective, factual reporting, dispassionately setting forth a series or group of facts with all authorities and sources noted."<sup>17</sup>

However, Everette E. Dennis, criticized the standard form for being "too simplistic and assumes that complex situations can always be reduced to a balanced presentation

with two alternative views...Such an approach leaves little room for ambiguity.” So the standard form cannot achieve objectivity.<sup>18</sup>

According to the book Responsibility in Mass Communication, the standard form cannot help readers understand the cause and background of complex events. For example, this reporting method was found ineffective in explaining the complexity of World War I because it could not offer any background information based on politics and trends, but just factual reporting of the obvious. From this time, the techniques of interpretative reporting began to develop. The gathering complexity during the New Deal days, during World War II, and especially during the cold war made the method of reporting the straight news story sometimes useless, since “reporting what a government official said, or what Congress did, was often misleading; the facts didn’t quite speak for themselves.” Interpretative reporting became more and more popular in news writing.<sup>19</sup>

Lester Markel specified the distinction between interpretation and opinion: “interpretation is an *objective* appraisal, based on background, knowledge of a situation, and analysis of primary and related facts. Editorial opinion, on the other hand, is a subjective judgment; it is a definite taking of sides; it is likely to be exhortation.” Markel also wrote that if the audience “cannot discern from the report where the journalist stands with respect to the issue or personality he is presenting, the interpretation is objective.”<sup>20</sup>

In interpretative reporting, analysis is a must. But the substance should be verifiable fact--not opinion--while analyzing in reporting. Because of the complexities of some issues, only presenting facts is not enough, since facts cannot speak for themselves. In these cases, analysis and explanation are needed. Clarification, explanation, and analysis

means that facts have to be weighed and filtered. But that does not mean that interpretive reporting should be abandoned. It merely shows that interpretation should also work within tight restrictions: “the journalist is still a reporter, still detached in a basic way, with all that that means for maintaining a healthy distance between reporters and the events they describe.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Everette E. Dennis, the “5Ws and H” style of objectivity has been criticized as cold and lifeless, and can obscure the truth. During the 1960s and 1970s, some new journalistic styles and standards emerged. Some of the new developments were: the “new journalism,” “advocacy journalism,” “investigative reporting,” “service journalism” (or the marketing approach to news), and “precision journalism.” All of these new styles are said to be more objective than traditional objectivity. Based on these new developments, Everette E. Dennis found the way to objectivity: “first, through strategic planning in the reporting process; second, through the use of systematic tools to analyze communities and gather information; and third, through the clear delineation of the presentation form used.”<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars doubt the possibility of objectivity in news reporting. John C. Merrill points out that all of the products of the news media are subjective. “Even the so-called straight news reporter is subjective and his story is always judgmental, value-loaded, incomplete, and distorted as to reality. That is the nature of journalism. In fact, that is the nature of any kind of communication.”<sup>23</sup>

John C. Merrill also cited other researchers’ opinions in the book Basic Issues in Mass Communication: A Debate: “not only is this belief in objectivity contrary to linguistic

philosophy (and they could have said also to the principles of general semantics) but that it demeans and devalues the individual person and the whole concept of intersubjectivity.”<sup>24</sup>

W. Lance Bennett wrote in the book News: The Politics of Illusion that it is possible that most “truths” in the news contain subtle political messages that appeal to subconscious beliefs and prejudices. He points out:

In the absence of a grasp of news theory or political history, the only other obvious source of independent news judgment is political ideology. Ideologies are formal systems of belief about the nature, origins, virtues, and means of promoting values that people regard as important. Not only do ideologies provide people with a clear sense of life’s purpose, but they provide a logic for interpreting the world. Since ideologies refer to values that exist or should exist in the real world, they contain rules for translating real-world events into illustrations of how those values are promoted or damaged. Thus, people who view the news through the lens of an ideology are likely to spot hidden political messages and translate them into independent political statements.<sup>25</sup>

#### Politics: 1994-1995

In 1994, the Republicans dominated the November 8 midterm congressional elections and became the majority in the House and the Senate after nearly 40 years of serving as the minority party in Congress. In this battle, “not a single Republican incumbent lost. The G.O.P. won not only the Senate and House but made huge gains in state houses and legislatures as well. It was the biggest GOP sweep since 1946.”<sup>26</sup> Surveys conducted after the election showed that “voters punished Democrats for Clinton’s failure to deliver on his promise of ‘fundamental change’ in Washington, and for his inability to make people feel more secure about their jobs.”<sup>27</sup>

While the Democrats were talking about the optimistic economic statistics indicating a growing economy, rising employment, low inflation, and a shrinking deficit, average Americans became more economically anxious, since they still felt that the

recession was unbroken in their area, despite the overall brighter economy. In a Time/CNN poll in 1994, fifty-eight of the interviewees said they “did not feel better off as a result of the brighter economic picture.” According to *Time* magazine, “America may be No.1 again in productivity, but the middle-class workers who made it so have seen many of their colleagues laid off, have been forced in some cases to settle for temporary jobs and in disposable income.”<sup>28</sup>

In a 1994 *U.S. News* poll, only 36 percent of respondents agreed that the economy was recovering, while 57 percent said it was stagnating or declining. A 1994 report from the Census Bureau showed that the actual income of an average family declined in 1993 by about \$300.<sup>29</sup> *Time* magazine reported on November 13, 1995, that although the economy and the corporate profits were growing, American workers’ incomes rose only 2.8 percent and benefits rose a meager 2.2 percent in the past 12 months. According to the magazine, this is “the smallest increase since the Labor Department first started keeping track in 1981, and barely enough to keep pace with inflation.”<sup>30</sup>

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, sluggish incomes, global competition, corporate downswing and defense cutbacks, which made Clinton win in 1992, undermined the Clinton administration in 1994.<sup>31</sup> Beside economic anxiety, Americans were also concerned about a perceived increase in crime and moral decay, and that Washington leaders did not pay attention to their concerns. In the *U.S. News* poll conducted in 1994, seventy percent of the respondents disapproved of the way Congress was doing its job, and four out of five voters said that the government benefited the special interests, not the public.<sup>32</sup>

While Democrats were big losers in the congressional elections, the new House Speaker, Newt Gingrich, was a big winner. After the G.O.P. took control of the House, the Republican Speaker planned to turn planks of his “Contract with America” into law. Specifically, the “Contract” specified:

1. *The Deficit*: A constitutional amendment would require the federal budget to be balanced, and legislation would give the President a line-item veto on big spending bills.
2. *Violent Crime*: A package would include limits on death-penalty appeals and more money for prisons and law enforcement.
3. *Welfare Reform*: The Republicans will seek to cut costs and deter births out of wedlock by stopping benefits for recipients after two years, enforcing enrollment in work programs and capping total spending.
4. *Family values*: The House plan would provide a \$5,000 tax credit for child adoption and a \$500 credit for home care of the elderly, among other provisions.
5. *Middle-Class Tax Cut*: The House GOP would give a \$500-per-child tax credit for families earning up to \$200,000, new individual retirement accounts with tax-free interest, and a 50% cut in the capital-gains rate.
6. *National Defense*: The plan would bring a “restoration” of national security to slow current spending cuts and to resurrect the controversial Star Wars system.
7. *Senior Citizens*: The contract would repeal the 1993 tax increase on upper-income retirees’ Social Security benefits and would boost the limit on outside earnings to \$30,000 with no loss of benefits.
8. *Deregulation*: The plan requires federal agencies to assess the risk and cost of all regulations they issue and severely limit the government’s ability to impose burdens on private-property owners.
9. *Legal Reform*: The contract would penalize certain frivolous lawsuits by making the loser pick up the winner’s legal fees and curbing punitive damages in product-liability cases.
10. *Congressional Term limits*: A proposal would grant House members the choice of limiting the terms of Representative to six or twelve years and senate to twelves.<sup>33</sup>

The “Contract” generally conflicted with Clinton’s political agenda. For example, Gingrich promised a constitutional amendment to ensure a balanced federal budget. But Clinton said lawmakers still had not made the hard choices needed to really balance the budget. On the \$500-per-child tax credit, the House Democrats planned to stop “at those



families making \$75,000 a year, while the Republican plan would apply to everyone up to \$200,000.” The G.O.P. also disagreed with Clinton’s big crime bill and his crime-prevention programs.<sup>34</sup> The struggle on the government budget caused the government shutdown at the end of 1995.

According to *Time* magazine, “Americans in 1995 kept a wary, ambivalent eye on both Clinton and Gingrich, the famous fraternal twins of American power, yin and yang of the Baby Boom, polar extremes of Pennsylvania Avenue.”<sup>35</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

This study will examine the level of objectivity of the three magazines. The study is concerned about whether the magazines are politically bias free when they are transmitting political information to the public. This research will answer the questions: Did the three weekly newsmagazines, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, act objectively when covering President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich during the first 100 days of the 104th Congress? The reason this period was chosen is because that the G. O. P. took control of Congress in January 1995 and vowed to make the “Contract with America” into law in the first 100 days of their administration. Thus, the conflict between the President and the Speaker attracted heavier media coverage during this time. This study was conducted to examine whether the three major newsmagazines fulfilled their responsibilities as defined by media codes and the theory of social responsibility.

### Methodology

#### General



The methodology used in this study is content analysis. The researcher analyzed all the issues of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* published between January 1, 1995, and April 14, 1995. All news stories and photographs and illustrations within the articles about Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich were studied, however, “letters to the editor,” editorials, columnists’ opinions, commentaries and cartoons were excluded.

The Republicans took over Congress in January 1995, and from this time, Newt Gingrich became the Speaker of the House and tried to turn specific items of his “Contract with America” agenda into law. The study will examine possible differences in coverage of the legislative programs of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich in the three newsweeklies in 1995. This study employs the six categories of bias as identified in Merrill’s research in 1965: 1) attribution bias, 2) adjective bias, 3) adverbial bias, 4) contextual bias, 5) outright opinion, 6) photographic bias.<sup>36</sup> Simple and complex chi-square analyses are used to analyze the results.

### Research Questions

This study was intended to answer these questions:

1. Which leader--Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton --received more favorable bias among the three magazines?
2. Which leader--Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton--received more negative bias among the three publications?
3. Were there any differences in the attitudes toward President Clinton or Speaker Gingrich among the three magazines?

The following null hypotheses were developed to guide the study;

1. There is no difference in the amount of favorable bias for Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton in the three newsmagazines.
2. There is no difference in the amount of negative bias for Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton in the three newsmagazines.
3. There are no differences in the attitudes toward President Clinton or Speaker Gingrich among the three magazines.

### Significance of the Study

Readers of the three magazines would benefit from the study by knowing the degree of objectivity in the magazines before they would make any decision or judgment based on the information provided by the publications. The result of the study would show them the quality of the products they are consuming and tell them to what extent they can trust the newsmagazines' political coverage. This study would also enable the readers to perceive the degree of usage of bias techniques in the news stories in the well-known newsmagazines.

This study would also be useful to journalism professionals as an exemplar for guarding bias in their work. The results of the study might help them know where the problems are and make the correction work possible. Moreover, the objectivity of these influential magazines' political news coverage is important to American society. To point out deficiencies in these publications would surely help people realize that media coverage is not always free of bias, and that effective decision-making means relying on a variety of information sources.

### Scope and Limitations

The results of this study cannot be applied to other forms of media, as those forms of communication have their own specific characteristics. Since the study followed the method of previous studies, the limitations of the previous ones can influence the results here. For example, Merrill's study neglected to consider the fact that the six categories of bias are not the same: the influence of a contextual bias contained in whole paragraphs or even in an entire story is different from that of an adverbial bias contained in one word. But, in fact, Merrill considered them the same in his study. It is obvious that the newsmagazines studied here are just a fraction of the available news media. Other means of communication, such as television, radio, and newspapers, are also offering political news coverage that can influence the public. In fact, the public is influenced by a combination of different types of media. So it is hard to conclude that one particular news medium has influenced the public on a specific issue.

#### Organization of the Study

Chapter II reviews relevant literature containing background information of the study.

Chapter III explains methodology used in the study.

Chapter IV analyzes and discusses the findings.

Chapter V summarizes the study, and provides recommendations for the future studies.

## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Mass media are influential in the United States. One area the media influence in the society is politics. According to Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach:

As is evidenced by the decline in candidate 'whistle stops' or 'coffee klatches,' and dramatic increases in the proportion of campaign budgets devoted to media advertising, it is virtually impossible to hold an election today without the mass media. The political system has become, at least in this way, more depend on the resources of the media system than it was when political parties were powerful and mass communication was only incidental. No matter how angry that state of affairs may make candidates or how frustrated it may make citizens, they cannot do too much to alter it. It is a structural fact that shapes the election process.<sup>1</sup>

As they absorb other kinds of information from the mass media, people get lots of political messages from media news coverage, too. Thus these political reporting should be accurate and objective, since any distortion would mislead the voters in this country.

As a part of the mass media in the United States, the three newsweeklies, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* are considered important information sources, especially among the leaders of business and political institutions and news professionals. The magazines offer more in-depth news reporting than newspapers, radio, or television.

Since they are well known and influential, the contents of the three magazines have been examined by researchers in the past decades. Some of studies are concerned about the coverage of politicians, which have shown that the three magazines were somewhat biased in their coverage of politicians in the past.

This research will continue the previous studies in the past decades, and examine the coverage of two politicians in this country, Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton in the three magazines in 1995. It will study the images of the two politicians presented by the magazines to their audience.

### Media and Political Coverage

In the past, news coverage of political issues was analyzed in various studies. Researchers tried to determine the degree of objectivity of political news coverage. The political coverage researched includes politicians, elections, nuclear powers, industrial relations, abortions, crime and punishment, international conflicts, armaments and defense.<sup>2</sup>

Denis McQuail summaries the history of research of media election coverage. McQuail cites studies by Lazarsfeld et al., who studied newspaper and radio coverage of candidates Roosevelt and Wilkie in the 1940 presidential campaign and found that Roosevelt got more media coverage by a margin of three-to-two (in quantitative terms), but the news reporting favored Wilkie by a margin of two-to-one. This shows “the independence of measures of degree and of direction of attention.”<sup>3</sup>

Several studies followed. One which is regarded as important among them, is Klein and Maccoby’s study of newspaper coverage of the 1952 U. S. election. The authors specifically studied the relationship between the newspapers’ political views and their news stories. This study defined bias as the “existence of a *differential*, larger than could be expected by chance alone, between the front page coverage allotted the two candidates by the two sets of papers (supporting Eisenhower or Stevenson). Here ‘differential’ was



measured by 18 variables, including aspects of prominence, language, quotes, photos and biased remarks.”<sup>4</sup>

Denis McQuail pointed out that the heated political arguments in the United States in the 1960s and the added duties of the supposedly objective network TV news caused some renewed researches. Among them, Hofstetter’s carefully analyzed network news coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign to find possible bias in attention given to candidates McGovern and Nixon. Balance was judged in terms of the amount and kind of attention, choice of topics, coverage of policies, linkages of candidates to other groups and interests and any possible evaluative associations. The results of the study indicate that the network news coverage did not favor either of the candidates, and there were no differences in political bias among the three networks.<sup>5</sup>

However, another study of network news in the same election conducted by Patterson and McClure reached a different conclusion. The study shows that network news did not favor McGovern and failed to report his policy positions and positive leadership personality traits. While the two candidates received almost the same attention in these respects, the coverage was relatively unfair to McGovern. But Comstock thinks that the “bias” was the results of the campaign strategies used by the candidates. Clancy and Robinson analyzed the balance of attention to Reagan and Mondale in the 1984 presidential campaign, computing the precise number of seconds on several dimensions of coverage, according to whether the candidates received a ‘bad’ or a ‘good’ press. “On matters of candidate quality, Reagan received 7,230 seconds of ‘bad press’ and Mondale only 1,050, while on ‘horse-race’ stories, the balance was reversed at 1,200 : 5,880.”<sup>6</sup>

### Coverage of Political Issues In Television and Newspapers

Coverage of the issue abortion is a major political controversy examined by Kathryn Irene Pyle who examined seven newspapers' coverage of activities of a pro-life group, "Operation Rescue," when the group protested at several abortion clinics in Atlanta, and police used rough holds to arrest the activists which attracted national media attention. Pyle analyzed each story on Operation Rescue by seven standards: inclusion, placement, length, language, photographs, headlines, and sources. The study found that there was possible bias against the pro-life movement, and several newspapers showed some bias for it.<sup>7</sup>

News coverage of conflicts in other countries has also been a concern for by researchers in the last decade. For example, Roberta Karen Andersen studied American media coverage of the conflict in El Salvador by examining television news and news photographs of the national news magazines. The study compared television network news stories of some selected events in the country with historical documentation of those same events and found that news stories were often dramatized only to focus on violence and disruption, and failed to present social context, political motivations, and historical background of the events. Picture selection, captions, and layout, also served to express the editorial view. The research concluded that ideology was the cause of bias and distortion.<sup>8</sup>

Media coverage of political organizations is one of the topics studied by researchers. One example is the *New York Times*' coverage of the United Nations, examined by Douglas A. Brice. The newspaper claims to be "fair and objective." But the

study revealed that the *Times*' coverage of the United Nations is not objective. By analyzing the *Times*' coverage of the United Nations in 1945 when UN was founded, and in 1985 when the organization was forty years old, Brice concludes that the newspaper only reports the optimistic side of UN actions.<sup>9</sup>

The relation between military press policy and news reporting is one of the concerns in political coverage. Amy Lorin Wright Connelly examined the relationship between the Department of Defense's "maximum disclosure, minimum delay" press policy and press objectivity in the reporting of wartime issues. Connelly studied two newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. Coders of the study classified sentences selected from front page news stories. The results of the study show that there is no difference between the the pre- and post policy event in wartime coverage. The study also found a common frequency distribution in instrument coding, which shows coders share the same perception of media bias.<sup>10</sup>

Chris Anne Raymond compared occupational health coverage in the mainstream and advocacy press from 1970-1982. The study shows that mainstream press presents government as an independent source of power, describes occupational health problems as separate incidents, seldom reports working class issues or the views of workers, and concentrates on technical disputes as the critical dimension of risk. On the other hand, the advocacy press portrays government power as resting on corporate ties, claims occupational hazards as social problems, covers workers and working class issues, and focuses on labor as the central issue. The researcher concluded that journalism should go beyond advocacy and objectivity and journalists should be collators, theoreticians and

informed analyzers of increasingly complex technical issues, so that the public can depend on the press to understand and react on important social issues.<sup>11</sup>

Jongsoo Lee analyzed CBS news documentaries about the Vietnam War, aired as part of “CBS Reports” from 1964 to 1984, and found that the ideological “limits” influenced the Vietnam War news stories in American commercial network television. Most documentaries tended to show loyalty to the American political system or the modernization view on Third World countries. The news documentaries rarely touched on moralistic consideration of the war. The ideological limits are “the economic constraints of commercial networks, the professional norms and conventions based on ‘objectivity,’ and the cultural conception of Third world countries.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Previous Studies of the Newsmagazines

In 1965, John C. Merrill investigated the contents of news stories about three American Presidents (Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy) in *Time* magazine. Merrill used ten consecutive issues of *Time* from each of the three Presidential administrations in his study. He concentrated on the the language the magazine used to describe the Presidents, and paid special attention to the presence or absence of “loaded” words and expressions and general contextual impressions presented. Merrill had set up six bias categories in his study: 1) attribution bias, 2) adjective bias, 3) adverbial bias, 4) contextual bias, 5) outright opinion, and 6) photographic bias. These biases were identified either as positive or negative. By using these techniques, Merrill found that *Time* stereotyped the President in office and editorialized and subjectivized its news stories to a great extent, which biased the stories. The magazine mixed the facts with a semi-fictionalized language pattern. The

news stories in the magazine were in fact “highly loaded essays of a subjective type” which influenced the reader’s thinking. The study indicated that the magazine 1) was anti-Truman, 2) was pro-Eisenhower, and 3) was neutral or moderate toward Kennedy.<sup>13</sup>

In 1979, Fred Fedler, Mike Meeske and Joe Hall replicated Merrill’s study to analyze the political coverage in *Time* magazine. The study examined *Time*’s coverage of four presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, and Jimmy Carter. The result of the study showed that *Time* still used most of the bias techniques identified in Merrill’s research, though there were some changes in the manner. The magazine continued using semi-fictionalized language patterns and editorializing the news stories which intended to influence the readers’ thinking. The opinions of the magazine were still found in its news columns. The research showed that stereotyping politicians was still one of the magazine’s routine duties and the magazine “was ambivalent toward Johnson, strongly favored Nixon before Watergate, reluctantly opposed him after Watergate, moderately favored Ford and was critical of Carter.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1983, Fred Fedler, Ron Smith and Mike Meeske analyzed stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* about the presidential campaigns of John, Robert and Edward Kennedy and found that the two magazines favored John, criticized Robert and Edward. The content analysis of news coverage showed that “identified rather than anonymous sources were more likely to agree the magazines’ editorial viewpoint.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1989, Yang-hou Yu and Daniel Riffe proved the hypothesis in their study Chiang and Mao in U.S. News Magazines that “press coverage parallels policy.” The result of their study was “the news magazines collectively portrayed the two Chinese

leaders from a viewpoint consistent with U.S. policy toward the People's Republic of China and, perhaps, with improved access to that nation."<sup>16</sup>

In 1990, Keqin Jiang examined the news coverage of the former President of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* in January 1990, during and immediately after the Romanian revolution which ended both Ceausescu's ruling and his life. The result of the study found that the news stories in the three newsweeklies suggested clear negative bias toward Ceausescu. Most of the bias techniques found in Merrill's research still existed in the news stories about Ceausescu and the Romanian Revolution in the three magazines published in January 1990. In such news coverage, facts were not purely pictures of reality--they were mixed with the magazines' opinions.<sup>17</sup>

In 1991, Heidi Rae Mclean analyzed the coverage of the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War by the three newsweeklies using techniques of general semantics. Mclean found that the coverage of the war by the magazines revealed that the magazines did not fulfill their their responsibilities defined by the theories of the press and the professional codes.<sup>18</sup>

In 1994, Tian-Ming Sun compared the news coverage of China in 1985 and 1993, four years before and after the 1989 Tiananmen Square event in China in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. The study found that the image of China changed in the three magazines between 1985 and 1993, according to the U.S. policy towards China, though "*U.S. news & World Report* maintained certain objectivity compared with *Newsweek* and *Time*."<sup>19</sup>

Chiung-Chang Wang compared the reporting of gays in the military, from 1993-1995, and coverage of women in combat, between 1991-1995 in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. The study revealed that though both positive and negative biases exist in the three magazines, most of the biases were positive toward the issues of women in combat and gays in the military.<sup>20</sup>

### Summary

The twentieth century has witnessed a giant growth of the news media. Today, people are becoming more and more dependent on media, and objectivity of the news is always a concern for researchers. Journalism professionals are always challenged by the objectivity norm. They strive to achieve such goals by inventing new reporting styles and standards which claim to be more objective than the older ones.

Previous research cited in this study shows that objective coverage of politics is problematic. The coverage of leading politicians by *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* has been researched by various studies, but few have been done on the magazines' news coverage of the newest generation of politicians in this country, Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton. This study examines the images of these two influential politicians presented by the three newsmagazines.

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## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### General

This study uses content analysis to examine possible differences in coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich from January 1, 1995, to April 14, 1995, in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*. During the year, Democratic President Clinton and Republican Speaker Gingrich were the two most controversial politicians in this country because of philosophical differences over legislative reforms. This study sought to determine whether the three magazines were objective when covering these two politicians. This is a chance to see if the three magazines act responsibly as defined by social responsibility theory and media codes, and to what extent readers can trust news coverage of these influential publications.

#### Research Approach

Content analysis is used in this study. The research technique is defined by George V. Zito as:

a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communications by *systematic*, *objective*, and *quantitative* analysis...Since any written communication (and this includes novels, plays, and television scripts as well as personal letters, suicide notes, magazines, and newspaper accounts) is produced by a communicator, the *intention of the communicator* may be the object of our research. Or we may be interested in the audience, or *receiver* of the communication, and may attempt to determine something about it.<sup>1</sup>

B. R. Berelson's definition of content analysis is, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages."<sup>2</sup>

Content analysis is a scientific way to observe media content. Guido H. Stempel III points out that there is a need for formal content analysis since some issues are too important to be determined by people's impressions, and he thinks that content cannot be ignored in many situations in mass communication. He writes that people "need a better way than merely recording the impressions of all those who have impressions about a given kind of content."<sup>3</sup>

According to Heidi Rae Mclean, using content analysis to study media content can be effective:

Once the contents are analyzed, those persons involved in producing the content can gain further insight into what makes them either "biased" or "objective," and, ultimately, what things must be done to insure that they fulfill their responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

Content analysis is the method well suited to study media content, since it can "infer underlying intent, motivation, orientation, and effect, either implicit or manifest."<sup>5</sup> Content analysis is "a research technique for making replaceable and valid inferences from data to their context."<sup>6</sup> It is often used to check the media coverage of various social groups and issues. Content analysis can determine the degree of objectivity of media content, and call media professionals' attention to potential deficiencies.

### Magazine Profiles

#### *Time*:

*Time* is the largest among the three newsmagazines with a circulation of 4,335,092 in 1995.<sup>7</sup> It is also the oldest of the three magazines (founded in 1923). The magazine's routine columns are Critic's Voices, World, Nation, Milestones, Science, Religion, Cinema, Books, Meicine, Theater, Music, Sports, People and Essay. *Time* claims to

“better serve the needs of busy, curious, intelligent readers.”<sup>8</sup> Its task is “1) to sift through the weekly mass of information and bring order a sense of priorities to the news; 2) to package that news in a manner that is compelling and accessible; 3) to analyze the issues.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Newsweek*

*Newsweek* is the second largest newsmagazine with a circulation of 3,100,000 in 1995.<sup>10</sup> The magazine was founded in 1933. Its regular columns are National Affairs, International, Business, Society, The Arts, Lifestyle and separate sections like Periscope, Letters, Perspectives, and Newsmakers. The magazine carries articles on current issues and aims for “a hard-edged, newsy look.”<sup>11</sup>

#### *U. S. News & World Report*

In 1995, *U. S. News & World Report*'s circulation was 2,351,313.<sup>12</sup> The magazine was founded in 1933. It has such basic sections as Currents, U. S. News, World Report, Business, Horizons, News You Can Use and Editorial. The magazine has “an ordered, conservative look,” and highlights News You Can Use--personal service features.<sup>13</sup>

#### Research Questions & Null Hypotheses

In order to decide the degree of objectivity of the political news coverage in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*, this study analyzed the news reporting about Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton from January 1, 1995, to December 31, 1995, in the three magazines, and intended to answer the following questions:

1. Which leader--Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton--received more favorable bias among the three magazines?

2. Which leader--Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton--received more negative bias among the three publications?

3. Were there any differences in the attitudes toward President Clinton or Speaker among the three magazines?

Three specific null hypotheses were developed:

1. There is no difference in the amount of favorable bias for Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton in the three newsmagazines.

2. There is no difference in the amount of negative bias for Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton in the three newsmagazines.

3. There are no differences in the attitudes toward President Clinton or Speaker Gingrich among the three magazines.

#### Definition of Terms

1. "Extent of News Coverage" was defined as any information about Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton appearing in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*, either in stand-alone articles or summaries and photographs.

2. "Bias" was defined as "descriptive expressions which may stimulate or affect people's perceptions away from neutrality or create favorable or unfavorable attitudes. Bias includes positive (favorable meaning) and the negative (unfavorable meaning)."<sup>14</sup>

In this study, bias was examined with respect to Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton, not to other persons or events or issues.

3. “Categories of Bias” are the six categories of bias set up in Merrill’s research: attribution bias, adjective bias, adverbial bias, contextual bias, outright opinion, and photographic bias.<sup>15</sup>

### Categories of Analysis

#### *Adverbial Bias:*

Adverbial bias uses qualifiers or magnifiers--adverbs--to produce a favorable or unfavorable impression in the reader’s mind by generally telling how or why a person said or did something. This type of bias often reinforces another bias expression already present (e.g., an adverb reinforce an attribution bias: “He barked *sarcastically*.”)<sup>16</sup>

#### *Contextual Bias:*

Contextual bias may include whole sentences or paragraphs or in other (and larger) units of meaning, an entire story. The aim is to present the person reported on in a favorable or an unfavorable light by the overall meaning or innuendo of the report, not by specific words and phrases alone. The whole context must be considered.<sup>17</sup> Contextual bias must be decided on the basis of agreement of the coders.

#### *Outright Opinion:*

Outright opinion is the most blatant and obvious type of bias or subjectivity in news reporting. The expression of the writer’s opinion is equal to presenting a judgment. S. I. Hayakawa defines “judgment” as “all expressions of the writer’s approval or disapproval of the occurrences, persons, or objects he is describing.” For example: “His (Eisenhower’s) powers of personal persuasion are strong” and “He has an aversion to stirring up unnecessary national crises.” Sometimes, outright opinion is expressed in a

disguised and indirect way, through semantic tricks the magazines permit someone else to say or believe something about the people described. Example: "Few at home in the U. S. seemed to begrudge the President his trip, however inauspicious the timing." Plus, the magazines project their opinion by explaining why people in the news do as they do.<sup>18</sup>

*Photographic Bias:*

Photographic bias can be determined by an overall impression created by the way people were presented in a picture--dignified, undignified; angry, happy; calm, nervous, etc..<sup>19</sup>

*Attribution Bias:*

Attribution bias arises from the magazine's means of attributing information to a source. The bias is contained in the verb. For example, an attribution verb such as "said" is neutral because it is not opinionated and evokes no emotional response. An attribution verb such as "snapped" carries negative influence on people, so it is regarded as unfavorable. On the other hand, "smile" is categorized as a favorable term, since it is positively affective.<sup>20</sup>

*Adjective Bias:*

Adjective bias is a kind of bias which may build up an impression of the person described. This is accomplished by using adjectives, favorable or unfavorable to describe the person. Adjectives should be used with extreme care or subjectivity will appear. Even the mere use of adjectives will cause a favorable or unfavorable impression. For example, "serene state of mind" is a favorable bias in adjective use, while "flat, monotonous voice" is an unfavorable example. These uses of adjectives could prejudice the reader for or

against the person described, and they are subjective in nature. They are opinions of the writers and could be called “judgmental” adjectives. “The *blue* sky” is an example of neutral or objective description.<sup>21</sup>

### The Quantification System

Items of bias were listed under the six categories of bias, and they were identified as favorable and unfavorable with respect to Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton. The data collection was nominal (or frequency count).

### Coding

There were three independent coders in this study. Each person read every article on Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*, recorded instances of bias according to the six categories of bias, distinguished the positive from the negative, and later compared the findings. If no agreement could be reached on some ambiguous statements, these ambiguous statements were discarded. A pretest was conducted to examine the procedures and estimate intercoder reliability.

Distinguishing among the categories was made easier by using the model advanced by Fred Fedler:

Isolated words and phrases classified as examples of adverbial, adjectival or attribution bias. Entire sentences which were deemed biased were classified as ‘outright opinion’ of the author, and whole paragraphs that contained positive or negative impression were classified as ‘contextual bias.’<sup>22</sup>

Photographs were judged as positive or negative, regardless of the content of the caption. The photograph was determined as positive, even if the matching caption was negative. And the caption was classified as negative in the category of outright opinion



bias. This is because a photograph usually gives people the more immediate positive or negative impression of the image portrayed.

#### Sampling

All issues of the three magazines published between January 1, 1995, and April 14, 1995, were included in the study. A total of 58 articles and 75 photographs was examined. They included news stories and photographs and illustrations within the stories on Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton. Letters to the editors, signed columns, commentaries, interviews, editorials and cartoons were excluded.

#### Units of Analysis

The basic units of analysis were the text of each individual story and photograph.

#### Statistical Analysis

Since the data were measured at the nominal level, chi-square analysis was used to decide relationships and differences in news reporting in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*. The 99 percent level of confidence was used to determine if the differences found in the study were statistically significant.

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## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### General

This chapter offers statistical analysis of bias found in the three magazines' news coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich. Six categories of bias are identified in the study. Examples of the six types of bias are provided in the chapter.

#### Intercoder Reliability

In order to examine coders' reliability in identifying bias, the three coders--one American and two Chinese students--have an intercoder reliability test. The test uses the formula  $R = 2M / (N1 + N2)$ , where M is the number of mutually agreeable decisions, and N1 and N2 are the total decisions made by coder one and coder two respectively, coder one and coder three respectively and coder two and coder three respectively. On a scale of 0 to 1.0, where 1.0 is the highest score. The intercoder reliability between coder one and coder two was 0.96. The intercoder reliability between coder one and coder three was 0.95. The intercoder reliability between coder two and coder three was 0.95. The correlations ranging from 0.95 to 0.96 were high enough to guarantee dependable results.

#### Findings

##### Extent of Coverage

The extent of coverage is the number of articles and photographs concerning President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich from January 1, 1995 to April 14, 1995. Overall, concerning President Clinton, *Time* published nine articles including nine photographs.

*Newsweek* published eight articles including eight photographs. *U. S. News & World*

*Report* published ten articles including eight photographs. See Table I.

TABLE I

EXTENT OF COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT CLINTON IN TIME, NEWSWEEK, AND U. S. NEWS, FROM JANUARY 1, 1995 TO APRIL 14, 1995

MAGAZINE				
ITEMS	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
No. of Articles	9	8	10	27
No. of Photos	9	8	8	25
Total	18	16	18	52

On Speaker Gingrich, *Time* published eleven articles including twenty-four photographs. *Newsweek* published fourteen articles including twenty photographs. *U. S. News & World Report* published six articles including six photographs.

TABLE II

EXTENT OF COVERAGE OF SPEAKER GINGRICH IN TIME, NEWSWEEK, AND U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, FROM JANUARY 1, 1995 TO APRIL 14, 1995

MAGAZINE				
ITEM	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
No. of Articles	11	14	6	31
No. of Photos	24	20	6	50
Total	35	34	12	81

TABLE III

TOTAL OCCURRENCES OF BIAS TOWARD PRESIDENT CLINTON BY  
MAGAZINE

MAGAZINES				
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF BIAS	88	54	80	222

Simple Chi Square Statistic = 8.55  
Table Chi Square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )

Final value for the simple chi square test shows that the difference of the total occurrences of bias in reporting on President Clinton is significant at the .05 percent level of confidence. This means that there is a difference among total instances of bias concerning President Clinton. *Time* had the greatest number of instances of bias while *Newsweek* had the fewest.

TABLE IV  
TOTAL OCCURRENCES OF BIAS TOWARD SPEAKER GINGRICH BY  
MAGAZINE

MAGAZINES				
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF BIAS	104	174	23	301

Simple chi square statistic = 113.82  
Table chi square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )

The simple chi square value indicates that there is a significant difference among the occurrence of bias in reporting on Speaker Gingrich by the three magazines at the .05

percent level of confidence. *Newsweek* had the greatest number of instances of bias while *U. S. News & World Report* had the fewest.

TABLE V  
OCCURRENCES OF POSITIVE BIAS TOWARD PRESIDENT CLINTON  
BY MAGAZINE

	MAGAZINES			
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF POSITIVE BIAS	17	16	19	52

Simple chi square statistic = 0.27  
Table chi square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )

The simple chi square analysis of instances of positive bias occurred in coverage of President Clinton in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report* shows that there is no significant difference at the .05 percent level of confidence among the three magazines. There is no difference in the number of occurrences of positive bias toward President Clinton among the three news magazines.

TABLE VI  
OCCURRENCES OF NEGATIVE BIAS TOWARD PRESIDENT CLINTON  
BY MAGAZINE

	MAGAZINES			
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. MEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF NEGATIVE BIAS	71	38	61	170

Simple chi square statistic = 10.1  
Table chi square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )

Simple chi square test value indicates that there is a significant difference at the .05 percent level of confidence in the number of occurrences of negative bias concerning President Clinton among the three magazines. *Time* had the greatest number of instances of negative bias toward President Clinton while *Newsweek* had the fewest.

TABLE VII

OCCURRENCES OF POSITIVE BIAS TOWARD SPEAKER GINGRICH  
BY MAGAZINE

	MAGAZINES			
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF POSITIVE BIAS	42	49	9	100

Simple chi square statistic = 27.39  
Table chi square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )

The simple chi square analysis of the amount of positive bias in reporting Speaker Gingrich among the three magazine finds there is a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence. It reveals that *Newsweek* had the greatest number of instances of bias, and *U. S. News & World Report* had the least.

TABLE VIII

OCCURRENCES OF NEGATIVE BIAS TOWARD SPEAKER GINGRICH  
BY MAGAZINE

	MAGAZINES			
	TIME	NEWSWEEK	U. S. NEWS	TOTAL
OCCURRENCES OF NEGATIVE BIAS	62	125	14	201

Simple chi square statistic = 92.51  
Table chi square = 5.991 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 2$  )



The calculated simple chi square value shows that there is a significant difference in amount of instances of negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich among the three news magazines. *Newsweek* had more instances of negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich than *Time* or *U. S. News & World Report*. *U. S. News & World Report* had the fewest.

TABLE IX  
OVERALL OCCURRENCES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BIAS TOWARD  
PRESIDENT CLINTON AND SPEAKER GINGRICH BY MAGAZINE

	CLINTON		GINGRICH	
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
TIME	17	71	42	62
NEWSWEEK	16	38	49	125
U. S. NEWS	19	61	9	14

A simple chi square analysis indicates that there is a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence in the amount of positive bias between coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *Time*. The results show that *Time* had more instances of positive bias when covering Speaker Gingrich than President Clinton. The simple chi square test also shows that there is no significant difference at the .05 level of confidence in the amount of negative bias between the coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *Time*.

A simple chi square test shows that there is a significant difference at the .05 confidence level in the amount of positive bias between coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *Newsweek*. The results indicate that *Newsweek* had more positive bias

when covering Speaker Gingrich than President Clinton. However, the result of the simple chi square test also shows that there is a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence in the amount of negative bias between coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *Newsweek*. *Newsweek* had more instances of negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich than President Clinton in the news stories. A simple chi square test found that there is a significant difference at the .05 confidence level between the numbers of positive bias and negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich in *Newsweek*. The genuine difference indicates that there are more occurrences of negative bias than positive bias toward Speaker Gingrich in *Newsweek*.

A simple chi square analysis indicates no significant difference at the .05 confidence level in the amount of positive bias between coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *U. S. News & World Report*. But Simple chi square analysis of instances of negative bias shows a significant difference at the .05 confidence level between coverage of President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich by *U. S. News & World Report*. *U. S. News & World Report* had more negative bias when reporting President Clinton than Speaker Gingrich.

TABLE X  
OCCURRENCES OF SIX CATEGORIES OF BIAS TOWARD PRESIDENT  
CLINTON AND SPEAKER GINGRICH BY MAGAZINE

	ATT	ADJ	ADV	OPI	CON	PHO	TOTAL
TIME	40	56	5	56	0	22	179
NEWSWEEK	74	56	14	55	4	21	224
U. S. NEWS	35	16	6	32	2	10	101
TOTAL	149	128	25	143	6	53	504

Complex chi square statistic = 19.92

Table chi square = 18.307 (  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 10$  )

Att = Attribution bias Adj = Adjective bias Adv = Adverbial bias Opi = Outright opinion bias  
Con = Contextual bias Pho = Photographic bias

The value of complex chi square test shows that there is a significant relationship between type of bias and magazine at the .05 confidence level. However, a calculated "C" value of 0.2, on a scale of 0 - 1.0 where 1.0 is the strongest, indicated that the strength of the relationship was almost negligible.

### Examples of Bias

#### Attribution Bias

Examples of attribution bias used by *Time* to describe President Clinton are:

Positive -- President Clinton "*urged* his aides to stop clapping."

Negative -- "Clinton *bristled*." "In the dreary days after the disastrous midterm election, one topic made the often volcanic President Clinton *erupt* more than any other: his political consultants." "How could we have paid them so much and done so poorly?" he once *shouted* in the Oval Office."

Examples of attribution bias used by *Time* to describe Speaker Gingrich:

Negative -- Speaker Gingrich "*barks* at his scheduler."

*Newsweek*'s uses of attribution bias on President Clinton:

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Positive -- "He *won* them in 1992 by establishing himself as the preeminent advocate for middle-class concerns."

Negative -- "Clinton and his top aides *struggle* over how to confront the GOP challenge." "Finally, Clinton *snapped*. 'I don't like being judged by your political correctness,' he *shouted*."

*Newsweek's* instances of attribution bias in reporting about Speaker Gingrich are:

Positive -- "Gingrich had *promised* to keep all social issues out of the 100 days set aside to vote on the contract."

Negative -- "Newt *lashes out* at his political enemies as the controversy escalates over his book deal."

Examples of attribution bias used by *U. S. News & World Report* to describe President Clinton are:

Positive -- "Clinton *won* big, establishing his reputation as the Comeback Kid."

Negative -- "Clinton tried to persuade Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia and other wavering Democrats to oppose the measure. He *failed*."

Examples of attribution verbs used by *U. S. News & World Report* to describe Speaker Gingrich:

Negative -- "'Twenty-four hours after we had a good meeting, when we were told we are going to cooperate,' Gingrich complained."

### Adjective Bias

*Time:*

Positive -- President Clinton was "positioning himself as perhaps the most *moderate* candidate in 1996." He "has always been *persuasive* in person." "Still, he was *winsome*." He was "*enthusiastic* about his home state."

Negative -- President Clinton was "*irritated*" this time.

Positive -- Speaker Gingrich, as *Time* says, is "especially *adamant* about getting his troops singing the same rhetorical song." Now there is a "*brave* Newt world."

Negative -- Speaker Gingrich "can be *meanspirited* and just plain *goofy*."

*Newsweek*:

Positive -- The magazine described that the President established himself as "the *preeminent* advocate for middle-class concerns." He is "*knowledgeable*" on trade and currency issues.

Negative -- The President "is *angry* at his polltaker." "He has seemed *lost* and *pathetic* since the election."

Positive -- According to the magazine, the Speaker "has a *fresh* vision." He is "*famous*," and "*outspoken*."

Negative -- The Speaker is "an *odd* conservative." He is also "*extreme*." He is claimed to be "too *arrogant*" and "too *greedy*." He is "*shrewd*." He was considered in the past "to be a *noisy*, slightly *buffoonish* backbencher." He is a "*paper* soldier." "Then he turned *nasty* himself."

*U. S. News & World Report*:

Positive -- President Clinton was "*buoyant*" after the address. He is "especially *proud*" of his appointments. He is a "*good old boy* from Hot Springs." He was "*determined*" to win back the office.

Positive -- "Gingrich remains *confident* that his revolution is still on track."

### Adverbial Bias

Few instances of adverbial bias concerning President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich were found in the three magazines.

#### *Time:*

Positive -- President Clinton "tries *gamely*." He "talks *amiably*."

Positive -- Speaker Gingrich "has *defly* exploited the roiling discontent."

Negative -- Speaker Gingrich acted "*aggressively*."

#### *Newsweek:*

Positive -- Speaker Gingrich "says *proudly*." He worked "*effectively*."

Negative -- Speaker Gingrich's eyes "were narrow *in hate*." "Gingrich is *shrewdly* arguing for a more systematic reliance on charity than the episodic good works of George Bush's 'thousand points of light.'"

#### *U. S. News & World Report:*

Negative -- President Clinton's 1990 campaign might "*improperly* wooed black votes."

Negative -- Speaker Gingrich "*abruptly* changed course and said he would take only a \$1 advance and sales royalties."

### Outright Opinion

The following are the opinions and judgments presented by the three magazines.

*Time:*

Bill Clinton was the only one who had to do a backflip while eating his words. -- negative.

Clinton's tax cuts resemble the dealer incentives that Detroit once offered to win back buyers who had switched to Japanese cars. -- negative.

Clinton would try to explain what he stands for to voters who can't recall -- and increasingly don't care. -- negative

President Clinton is "very decisive in giving away our money." -- negative.

The same questions linger now as they did for Jimmy Carter in 1980 and George Bush in 1992: What is the rationale for a second term? After his party's drubbing in last November's midterms, what can Clinton offer that that will convince voters he should be President for six more years instead of two. -- negative.

Some are saying that he (Gingrich) could e the strongest speakership since the legendary Republican Speakers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. -- positive.

In fact, any examination of Gingrich's setback - studded career shows that he has risen to where he is through stamina, a willingness to take outrageous risks and - most important - a ruthless and slavish devotion to his vision. "There is a certain brilliance factor, an ability to make your own luck," says a veteran Democratic House aide with grudging admiration. "Newt has it. None of our guys do." -- positive.

*Newsweek:*

His (Clinton's) penchant for indecision , and the hybrid nature of his politics, makes the task more difficult. -- negative.

Clinton's State of the Union could be a blueprint for the next big theme of politics -- reinventing citizenship -- if he can follow it. -- positive.

His sad "Middle Class Bill of Rights" speech -- good plan (as tax cuts go), stale rhetoric -- proves that he has not yet figured out how to communicate with the American public in the new era. It may well be that his (Clinton) presidency is beyond the point of no return, that a collective decision has been made: this guy can't be trusted. Washington already seems to have written him off. -- negative.

CLINTON, BUSH, GINGRICH: A STATE OF AFFAIRS

Newt's opportunism, often a virtue in politics, can be devastating in private life. Gingrich has a deep feel for human history, but not always for human beings. -- negative.

The speaker's role may be too divisive -- and his own nature too combative -- for him to speak credibly about "civil society." -- negative.

Gingrich did not hesitate to share power with business lobbyists. -- negative.

Gingrich had risen to speak in favor of a constitutional amendment imposing term limits on congressmen. The amendment was sure to fail, and most Republicans suspected that Gingrich, in his ninth term, was not deeply disappointed. -- negative.

At times last week, Gingrich did seem more like an old-fashioned pal than a New Age reformer. -- negative.

Gingrich sometimes has a problem with self-control. -- negative.

Gingrich has proven himself the most effective lawmaker since LBJ. -- positive.

*U. S. News & World Report:*

"Clinton still tries to do too much himself." -- negative.

Clinton and his advisers still disagree with many of Reagan's policies. But they are grudgingly learning to respect the leadership, political strategy and management style of the Great Communicator. -- negative.

Then it was on to some mean, tough, hard Newtonian attacks. -- negative.

### Contextual Bias

*Time:*

Gingrich is providing the energy, imagination and confidence that, at least at this pregnant moment, seem lacking among other leaders of both parties. The new Speaker will gavel the House down to real work three weeks earlier than usual. He will move immediately to slash congressional staff and change the way it operates. He will seek speedy passage of a balanced - budget amendment, tax breaks, spending cuts and other measures the Republicans promised in their "Contract with America." -- positive.

Bill Clinton's presidency has been an exercise in crisis. His legislative victories have often come only after bloody , near - death struggles, and his numerous political setbacks are nightmarish and ongoing. He has - experienced - and

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somehow survived - more make - or - break moments in two years than most Presidents do in four. The repudiation in the polls last November was as thorough as any President has ever suffered at mid-term, leading to mordant jokes around Washington that Clinton has become the country's first half-term President. Though the White House released a 16 - page list of accomplishments last week, the public gives him little or no credit for any of it. -- negative.

*Newsweek:*

The much - publicized first 14 - hour - long session of the 104th Congress "was a remarkably controlled event," Gingrich boasted to *Newsweek*. "It worked. It worked amazingly." The central question for the next 100 days -- and possibly years to come -- was whether Gingrich can keep control. His first week offered clues as to why the new speaker is at once the Republicans' great hope and perhaps a liability as well. -- negative.

*U. S. News & World Report:*

The dearth of different voices, say critics of the administration's affirmative action policies, is the point. Simply hiring African - Americans, Hispanics, women, gays and disabled people does not guarantee that a broad range of political opinions will be represented. Indeed, one insider thinks loyalty to the president and connections to the Clintons from elite venues like the first couple's alma maters of Yale and Wellesley impress the president and Mrs. Clinton more than race or ethnicity. "[Justice Department nominee] Lani Guinier wasn't picked because she was black," says the aide. "She knew them from Yale, from Martha's Vineyard." -- negative.

Showing compassion, however, is not Bill Clinton's problem. "People already know he understands their troubles and is on their side," says a Clinton adviser. "But they think he's incompetent or that he can't be trusted." A big reason is that the president is a man of so many faces -- a deficit hawk one day, a tax cutter the next; a supporter of gays in the military, but also as advocate of traditional family values; an unwavering advocate of free trade but a will - o' - the - wisp on school prayer, personnel appointments, the Whitewater affair and a variety of other character questions. -- negative.

### Photographic Bias

Examples of positive photographic bias show President Clinton smiling, cheering, or having a firm expression; Speaker Gingrich is smiling or thinking. Negative examples:

Speaker Gingrich looking worried in one photo; in another photo, he is angrily holding a one dollar bill to defend his book deal with the publishing company, HarperCollins.

Illustrations of both President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich tend to exaggerate facial features and add a humorous look to each man. These are considered as examples of negative bias.

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## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

This study examined possible bias in the coverage of President Bill Clinton and Speaker Newt Gingrich from January 1, 1995, to April 14, 1995, in three national news magazines: *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*. It was generally hypothesized that the three news magazines' coverage of President Clinton, a Democratic, and Speaker Gingrich, a Republican, might be different because of the magazines' different political ideologies. Overall, fifty-eight articles and seventy-five photographs concerning President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich in the three news magazines were analyzed. Bias was classified by Merrill's six categories: attribution bias, adjective bias, adverbial bias, outright opinion, contextual bias, and photographic bias, which biases were divided into positive and negative categories. Three coders worked in this study.

#### Research Questions and Findings:

1. Which leader -- Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton -- received more favorable bias among the three magazines?

The study shows that there is a difference in the attitudes toward Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton among the three magazines. There is a difference in the total amount of occurrences of bias toward President Clinton among the three magazines. To be more

specific, *Time* had the greatest number of instances of bias toward President Clinton among the three magazines.

The three magazines' attitudes toward Speaker Gingrich are different too. The study shows that overall, *Newsweek* had the largest number of instances of bias toward Speaker Gingrich, while *U. S. News & World Report* had the least. Among the three magazines, *Newsweek* had more positive and negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich than the other two magazines.

In *Time*, Speaker Gingrich received more favorable bias than President Clinton did. In *Newsweek*, Speaker Gingrich received more favorable bias than did President Clinton. In *U. S. News & World Report*, there is no difference between the amount of favorable bias received by Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton. Overall, Speaker Gingrich received more favorable bias among the three magazines. The null hypothesis is not supported.

2. Which leader -- Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton -- received more negative bias among the three publications?

In *Time*, there is no difference in the amount of negative bias the two leaders received. In *Newsweek*, Speaker Gingrich received more negative bias than President Clinton did. In *U. S. News & World Report*, President Clinton received more negative bias than did Speaker Gingrich. The null hypothesis is not supported.

3. Were there any differences in the attitudes toward President Clinton or Speaker Gingrich among the three magazines?

The study shows that the magazines' attitudes toward President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich were different. *Time* had the greatest number of instances of negative bias toward President Clinton while *Newsweek* had the fewest. This indicates that *Time* was more unfavorable toward President Clinton. On the other hand, *Newsweek* had more instances of negative bias toward Speaker Gingrich than *Time* or *U. S. News & World Report*. This means that *Newsweek* was more negative toward Speaker Gingrich than the other two magazines. The null hypothesis is not supported.

### Conclusion

According to the social responsibility theory of the press, the media have an obligation to service the political system by providing consumers with information on public affairs. The press should provide the whole truth on political issues.<sup>1</sup> However, this study shows that the three privileged magazines failed to achieve this goal. The unbalanced bias distribution in the three magazines shows that they have strong political viewpoints on the two politicians and they are not hesitant to share them with readers. This has proven W. Lance Bennett's conclusion that it is possible that most "truths" which appear in the news are probably produced by subtle political messages that are attracting to subconscious beliefs and prejudices.<sup>2</sup> It also has confirmed George Gerbner's finding that "the basic editorial function is not performed through 'editorials' but through the selection and treatment of all that is published."<sup>3</sup> The magazines' political beliefs and prejudices caused the different attitudes toward President Clinton, a Democrat, and Speaker Gingrich, a Republican. The results of one study in 1974 showed that "*Newsweek* favored the Democrats, *U. S. News & World Report* favored the Republicans and *Time* was

in between, leaning slightly to the Republican side.”<sup>4</sup> This may explain the findings of this study: *Newsweek* is very negative toward Speaker Gingrich, and more balanced in displaying positive and negative biases in coverage of the President. *Time* and *U. S. News & World Report* are more negative toward the President, and their positive and negative biases related to the Speaker are more balanced. The three magazines not only use colorful words to make their news coverage more biased, but also present their opinions and judgments on the two politicians in the news stories. Some of the judgments are supported by results of polls or identified sources. It is found that unidentified sources are greatly reduced in the three magazines. Though sometimes the uses of biased description made the article more interesting to read, readers may be misled on some very important political issues, since the controversies over such issues as medicare, a balanced budget, and social security between President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich are important to this nation and its people. When the magazines display bias over controversial politicians’ stands and policies on the controversial issues, the public can be misled.

This study adopted the method developed by John C. Merrill. There are some deficiencies in Merrill’s system. The method categorizes bias into six types: attribution bias, adjective bias, adverbial bias, outright opinion, contextual bias, and photographic bias. However, this method does not include all ways in which bias occurs in news stories. For example, Merrill’s study did not consider nouns as a source of bias. But sometimes, the magazines used biased nouns to name the politicians. *Newsweek* offered Newt Gingrich such titles: “an army *brat*,” “*bomb-thrower*,” “*Stage manager Gingrich*,” “*C-Span polemicist*,” “*backbencher*,” “*cyberpunk*,” and “*user*.” It is also realized that the

effects of the six categories of bias might not be the same. An outright opinion consisting of several sentences may be more influential than a single biased adjective. For example, the following is an outright opinion found in *Time*:

In fact, any examination of Gingrich's setback - studded career shows that he has risen to where he is through stamina, a willingness to take outrageous risks and - most important - a ruthless and slavish devotion to his vision. "There is a certain brilliance factor, an ability to make your own luck," says a veteran Democratic House aide with grudging admiration. "Newt has it. None of our guys do."

The effect of this paragraph in demonstrating the positive side of Speaker Gingrich is much stronger than a single word to describe Gingrich, "brave." The paragraph offers more detailed reasons and background to convince the readers that Speaker Gingrich is respectable. But Merrill's method identifies both types of bias as having the same amount of influence, which renders the result of the analysis slightly inaccurate.

When they are presenting an opinion or judgment of their own, the magazines often support their opinions with poll results. Most of the time, such polls are conducted by the magazine or with another news organization. The size and representation of the sample populations are unknown. So the objectivity of the poll is doubtful. In these cases, whether the judgment based on the poll results is an objective news analysis or a biased opinion is problematic.

There is another factor that might influence the results of this research. The study chose the first 100 days of the G. O. P. controlled the Congress as the period of analysis. Because the Republican leadership brought a new conservative agenda, the "Contract with America," to Washington and promised considerable reforms, there could have possibly been a "honeymoon" period between the newcomers on Capitol Hill and the press since

the latter might have been inclined to be more charitable to the Republicans (as media tend to treat new Presidents early in their administrations). Such treatment could give the illusion of a positive slant toward Speaker Gingrich by the three magazines.

This study has excluded editorials, commentaries, signed columns, and interviews according to Merrill's research. But, in fact, such articles in a magazine could still influence readers' understanding of current political situations to some extent. How to deal with these magazine features remains a new research question.

Finally, the author realizes that simply counting instances of bias in a magazine is not the same as the degree of bias of the magazine. This might influence the results of the study.

#### Recommendations

This study only covered a short period from January 1, 1995, to April 14, 1995. Since the political debates between President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich still attracted media attention in the rest of the year ( Speaker Gingrich was elected as the "Man of the Year" by *Time* in 1995 ), a longer period of news coverage could be included in future studies.

It is clear that television and newspapers are also influential carriers of messages during political campaigns. Nancy B. Lowden, Peter A. Andersen, David M. Dozier, and Martha M. Lauzen conducted a research about media use in 1992 presidential primary election in California. The results of the study shows that voters who are issue-oriented depend on newspapers for information about candidates' stands on issues. They also watch television to meet their information needs on the personal, image qualities of



candidates. On the contrary, image-oriented voters only use television to get all political information, both issues and image. Even issue-oriented voters tend to use both television and newspapers to get issue information. This study supports Rosenberg and Elliot's argument that voters depend on more than one source of mass media to evaluate a candidate. Furthermore, this study supports Bogart's findings that television has become a leading source of information for both issue- and image-oriented voters.<sup>5</sup> Future studies should include these two important information sources for the public. Cross-media analysis should be conducted to compare the balance of the news coverage among them.

News media have the obligation to objectively present objective news to the public. Though this has been proven to be a difficult task due to different reasons, it still should be the goal of the news professionals. Progress in journalistic objectivity made in the past could convince people that it is not unrealistic. Problems identified in various research are obstacles to objective news coverage. But identifying problems in news coverage also helps solve the problem, since news professionals and audiences of the news media could know and be alert to such problems, which means more progress in journalistic objectivity in the future.

## ENDNOTES

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3. George Gerbner, "Ideological Perspectives and Political Tendencies in News Reporting," *Journalism Quarterly*, (Summer, 1964), 495-516.
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