

Some Reflections on a Modest Intellectual Journey: Mine

By

Hugh M. Culbertson

Professor Emeritus of Journalism

Ohio University

As they approach the end of their careers, some journalism professors surely reflect on what they have done over a period of 30 to 50 years or so. What major questions did they raise and emphasize in their teaching and research? What tentative (an omnipresent qualifier) answers, if any, did they come up with? How did these things relate to their work as journalists as well as their transformative studies in grad school and beyond?

I have decided to write down some thoughts along these lines. I am doing this primarily for my own edification, though it would be great if a few colleagues and students might reach at least this point in the document. In the “old days” – perhaps as recently as 5-10 years ago – I would never have thought of presenting such ideas for public consumption. After all, I am no Steve Chaffee, James Grunig, Maxwell McCombs, Guido Stempel, Paul Deutschman, or other guiding light in the field! However, I presume to write this in light of three basic developments.

First, communication scholars and practitioners often note these days that *it doesn't cost much to create a website*. Space and time constraints which long tended to frustrate and challenge journalists seem to have gone out the window -- though new constraints have replaced these. Thus it makes sense to design messages likely to appeal to only a few people.

Second, a friend and long-time colleague, Professor Emeritus Lylle Barker of Ohio State University, informed me that U.S. Army generals are asked to write books or monographs, upon retiring, that seek to articulate their leadership philosophies, principles and practices. It certainly seems presumptuous for a private first class in the U. S. Marine Corps Reserves to follow in the footsteps of a three-star general such as Lylle!!!

However, while he is not one, surely there are rather “ordinary” retired generals. Maybe, just maybe, if reflections of an ordinary Army person merit recording for posterity, reflections of an ordinary professor might do the same!

Third, journalism professors of my era have been framed by an unusually large variety of factors. Most of us worked in jobs relating to news, public relations or advertising for several years, creating some habits of mind and thought. And, when we took the real academic plunge and went to grad school, we found ourselves trying to cope with a vast array of disciplines that ranged from psychology, sociology and speech communication to linguistics, philosophy and literature. Communication scholars borrowed from all of these but seemed unable to let themselves or their students specialize in any one or a two. As a result, we have tended to swim as best we could in a wide range of academic ponds, not remaining in any one of them long enough to do much more than get our feet wet. I certainly fit this pattern, dabbling in at least a dozen different areas. Now, as a geezer (a term my wife despises!), I feel a need to identify underlying patterns and themes that may help make some sense of it all.

Writing this document is something of an act of rebellion for me. As a journalist, I tended to stray very little from the inverted pyramid or the summary lead while always keeping an eye on the Flesch readability formula. And, as a quantitatively oriented researcher, I wrote mostly in the rather stifling format of introduction-lit review-methodology- results- conclusions- implications. Now, as is already apparent to the reader who goes this far, I even presume to write in the first person. God , please forgive me!!!

Continuing in this personal vein, I grew up on a southern Michigan farm and came to love rural life while recognizing early on that I could never earn a living as a farmer. Later, as an extension editor at Michigan State University, I wrote an article about research in rural sociology that showed young farm people had a tough row to hoe even in the 1950s – well before Willie Nelson began holding concerts to rescue them!! They often had limited education that prepared them for urban or town life. Thus, when forced off the farm by impending financial ruin, they often found themselves quite poor and even living on the dole in town. (This article elicited far more letters of consternation than any other I wrote. Shame on me and the sociologist I quoted, writers said, for challenging the idea that farm setting was ideal for raising kids. After all, it had given us Abraham Lincoln!)

As a high school student, I found that I liked to write. And I became aware of an emerging discipline called agricultural journalism. I decided to major in this field as it combined two loves of mine. I wound up getting two degrees in the field – a B.S. at Michigan State and an M.S. at the University of Wisconsin. And I worked as an extension editor in Michigan for four years before enrolling in the highly theoretical Ph.D. program at MSU.

As an undergrad, I worked part-time in the extension editor's office. There, I was assigned for one summer to collaborate with a dairy-husbandry specialist named George Parsons in developing a campaign to stamp out Brucellosis – a disease that affected dairy cattle and could, unless dealt with quickly, wipe out entire herds. I wrote a series of articles that appeared in Michigan and other Midwestern newspapers.

In the process, I developed a kind of evangelical zeal – I was helping in some small way to save an industry. Also, I learned the importance of “getting it right.” George checked our copy carefully and found instances in which, with my zeal, I had oversimplified research findings and failed to insert needed qualifiers about how, where and whether to apply them. Translating scientific reports into interesting prose understandable to layman – and amenable to coverage in short newspaper or magazine articles -- was a tremendous challenge. To me, it was a real calling almost on a par with that experienced by monks and nuns as they prepare to take vows!

Over the years, my work and thought seems to have fit into two general categories: *media operation, use, and effects* and *role-taking, community and ethics*. My dozen or so areas of study fit within these categories, and these “chapter headings” provide a structure for organizing this essay.

Media Operation, Use and Effects

Graph Comprehension

As a neophyte extension writer and editor, I felt my job was to provide information and scientific findings in a form that lay people might find interesting and useful. This fit well with my master’s thesis work in Madison. There I hitched my wagon to a study on graph comprehension directed by Richard Powers and supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In that study, we presented numerical information about agriculture in the form of line and bar graphs. And we asked farmers, as well as Wisconsin students, to complete a comprehension test. Our basic conclusion: *comprehension is greatest when we make a*

graph as simple as possible, forcing the reader to carry out few operations while interpreting the data provided. For example:

*A bar should portray a certain magnitude through its length. And each bar should originate from a horizontal or vertical axis. Bar segments should not be stacked, one on top of another, so the reader would have to subtract and compare differences to grasp the magnitudes shown.

*Scores went up when we wrote magnitudes (240 for cows, 17 for sheep, etc.) on each bar rather than requiring assessment of a bar's length by reading a number on a horizontal or vertical axis.

*Labels (cows, sheep, etc.) written on bars also aided comprehension. (1)

As I wrote and edited extension materials, I discovered that, in reality, *my sources and I were trying to communicate conclusions and advice, not simply information*. We sought to clarify qualifications and doubts so readers would not accept these conclusions and recommendations uncritically. However, we almost never spelled out basic procedures and data so as to allow readers and listeners to start from scratch and draw their own conclusions. We held back in this way for two basic reasons. First, *space and time limits in the media* prevented giving such detail. And second, *our audience members seldom had the background, motivation, and/or time to plow through and interpret "raw data."*

In spelling out conclusions and giving advice, we were *taking a stand* on what to do or think. We were trying to give a sense of where this advice came from and the bases for it. But we really were asking the reader to accept our conclusions. And, if he were to do that, he had to feel he was dealing with a source who had the credibility needed to

draw such conclusions. This line of thinking led me to focus on a completely different dependent variable, *perceived writer stand*.

Iconicity, Adaptation Level, and Perceived Writer Stand

Like most students, I read the work of thousands – perhaps tens of thousands – of scholars. And, I suppose in a way that must be fairly typical, I found myself being influenced by a dozen or two of these scholars in a rather profound way.

Two such scholars were Carolyn and Muzafer Sherif, a man-and-wife team of social psychologists. They focused on perceived stand of messages relating to somewhat controversial issues. And they zeroed in on reader attitude as their primary independent variable. In a nutshell, they found that a person who was highly ego-involved in taking a stand – say opposing abortion – would see a balanced (pro vs. con) message as favoring abortion and thus opposing their own points of view.

In dealing with receiver attitude, the Sherifs and their colleagues ignored properties of the message itself. They explicitly viewed these properties as factors to be controlled and taken out of play in their research.(2)

Gosh, I thought. I had been a message creator and framer prior to and while I enrolled in the doctoral program at Michigan State University. There, when I encountered the Sherifs, I decided to remove message properties from “under the rug” and see if they might influence perceived writer stand.

My exposure to learning theory – the work of Hull, Skinner, Watson, etc. – suggested we appear to interpret stimuli in at least two basic ways. We view them in light of *what we associate with them through connections in time and space*. This occurs

in classical condition a la Watson and operant conditioning a la Skinner. And we respond to stimulus B much as we might to A if A and B are *similar in their physical attributes*.

Thinking back to my work on graph comprehension, I realized that those bars were similar to their referents. If cows were presented as outnumbering sheep by 2-1, the cow bar was twice as long as the sheep bar. And so on. The relationship between symbol and referent was *iconic*. A word, on the other hand, did not resemble its referent in any discernible way. Thus the connection here was purely learned and was *digital*.

Thus a key variable in my dissertation research was *iconicity*. I hypothesized that the use of graphic symbols within the pro portion of a pro-vs.-con two-sided message would make the overall message appear to be pro. And this might hold, in particular, where the symbol represented its referent in *shape* (with a line drawing of a cow or sheep) and/ *detail* (with a photographic picture of each animal) as well as magnitude. The more iconic the stimulus, according to existing theory at the time, the stronger the response to it.

As is often the case, I got very mixed results. There was an indication that, in the above example, iconic stimuli on the pro side might not affect overall perceived stand. However, it did appear to make readers less certain that the overall message leaned in the anti direction.

Dissertation data were collected from farmers in southern and central Michigan. In follow-up research on students at Ohio University, I found some indication that iconicity did impact message interpretation much as originally hypothesized. Further, it made a message more interesting and convincing. However, where pictures had fairly sensational content, verbal descriptions of that content seemed to have at least as much

perceived impact as did the pictures themselves. This seemed in line with research suggesting pictures can, at times, attract attention away from the basic message that one seeks to convey. (3)

Another author who greatly influenced my thinking as a doctoral student was Harry Helson. He noted that, when we assign meaning to a quantity, we always do so in light of some standard of comparison. This he called an *adaptation level*. (4)

As I began work on my dissertation in the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War was heating up. I read daily news accounts asserting that, say, 17 Vietcong soldiers were killed and seven sampans were sunk in the Mekong Delta region. But I couldn't decide whether seven or 17 was a large number. If I compared them with casualty figures in World War II, they seemed minute. If I used the French and Indian Wars of North America as a standard, they might look larger. But I couldn't easily find data about 200-year-old battles, so I found myself very puzzled. What I needed was a *relevant standard of comparison*.

I began to ponder what might contribute to relevance. I came up with three ideas: *similarity*, *closeness in time and space*, and *consensual definition* based on experience. Thus I did an experiment in which I viewed crime rate in the city of Cleveland as a "core quantity" to be assessed. I hypothesized that a certain frequency of violent crime would seem low if presented alongside a high crime rate in another city but high if compared with a low rate in that city.

This seemed almost too obvious to warrant testing, though Helson seemed to have ignored *contextual relevance*. I manipulated this variable by defining Detroit as a high-relevant city, Denver as low-relevant, when thinking about crime in Cleveland. After all,

Detroit and Cleveland were just a few miles apart, and both were beginning to suffer, even in the late 1960s when we did the study, from afflictions affecting the “rust belt.” Also, by tradition, Detroit and Cleveland had been rivals in sports. The Lions and Browns had played in four NFL championship games within a few years, and the Tigers and Indians had battled ever since the days of Ty Cobb and Tris Speaker. Denver, in contrast, was more than a thousand miles away from Cleveland. It was a center of tourism and service industry, not manufacturing. And there seemed to be little traditional rivalry between the two cities. [Note: When this study, the Cleveland Browns had not yet begun a series of playoff losses to the Denver Broncos that occurred in the next decade or two.] (5)

As predicted, varying the crime rate in Detroit had more impact than did that in Denver when assessing the situation in Cleveland.

To this point, my research had largely been experimental. I came away with a feeling that results would always seem tentative until countless extensions and replications had occurred to insure generalizability. I decided that, as a practically oriented guy, I did not want to wait until, say, 3,000 A.D., before coming up with interesting conclusions. Sure, these would always be tentative. *But research and theory seemed more useful as aids in framing questions than in providing clear answers, anyhow.* Thus I switched to survey research and content analysis for the balance of my career – with only a few ventures back into experimentation.

After taking a deep breath following the dissertation and follow-up experiments, I became engrossed in another realm relating to what might influence people’s assessment of source credibility. A grad-school term paper influenced my thinking about this. In

this paper, I proposed a concept which I called *message stumpability*, which dealt with the reader's ability to make sense of the arguments advanced. Often, I argued, one lacked the time and ability to do so. What could one do but try to decide whether the message, on balance, favored or opposed some conclusion or course of action – and *assess whether the message source(s) were credible?*

Interestingly, my reasoning here anticipated that of two authors, Richard Petty and Joseph Cacciopo, who came along about 15 years later. Their *Elaboration Likelihood Model* postulated two routes to interpreting message. In the *central* route, one analyzed arguments carefully, assessed their strength, and drew a personal interpretation. In the *peripheral* route, one relied on peripheral cues such as the source's nature and credibility. (6)

News Attribution and Unnamed Sources

The Watergate Scandal of the early 1970s, and the fame of that unnamed source named Deep Throat, led me to wonder how people felt about unnamed news sources and what they looked like. Research on various aspects of unnamed attribution kept me busy for much of a decade.

I began my thinking here by noting that the attribution battle that Deep Throat helped popularize was somewhat misplaced. Journalists focused on a source's *name* as the crucial information in assessing him, her or it. However, it seemed to me that a name and generic job title, in and of themselves, tells the typical reader very little. Sure, they indicate that he, she or it has “stood up to be counted” and might thus be accorded some trust as a courageous, if not honest, person or organization. However, this really tells little about the perspective or framework that shapes a source's statements.

One experience on the Ohio University campus during the Vietnam War drove this home. In a debate, a noted historian who had written several books about Vietnam argued that the crucial element in “pacifying” the country was providing a genuine voice in government for all parties. A former worker in the U.S. Agency for International Development said this might hold, but at least as much weight should go to aiding economic development— especially in poverty-stricken rural areas.

Now, if one followed traditional news conventions, the historian had all the better of it. He had the title of distinguished professor. His co-debater was simply an “aid worker” who had spent a few years in southeast Asia.

However, this seemed to ignore the real issue. The two gentlemen came from *different academic and professional traditions*. Historians tend to focus on the political sphere and questions of power. Aid workers, on the other hand, begin from the assumption that starving people with little economic opportunity tend to be unhappy. Nothing in the news accounts of this panel discussion clarified these differences between professional groups. (7)

Our work on unnamed sources fell in three areas – media content, audience reaction, and editor assumptions plus policies.

Attribution Content

In an initial phase of our research during the early 1970s, we studied unnamed-attribution phrases in 12 newspapers – the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, four metropolitan dailies in the Midwest, and six varied Ohio dailies. Issued covered came from April 1 to August 31, 1974 – at the heart of the Watergate scandal that drove President Richard M. Nixon from office.

Unnamed sources were common. At least one such source appeared in 36% of all stories, 54% of those in the *Times* and *Post*. Interestingly, Watergate coverage did not account for a very large percentage of all such attributions. Many other things went on at that time!

Newspapers quite often indicated a source's organizational affiliation (State Department official, etc.). However, they seldom indicated his or her job or role in that organization.

Adjectives and adjective phrases were quite rare. They usually suggest sources were *well-informed* and were *connected*, as spokespersons or aides, with people or organizations of high status. *Not a single attribution of the 5,182 coded seemed to offer a red flag suggesting clearly that a source was biased or questionable.* Perhaps this should not have surprised us. A reporter probably could not get a quote past his or her copydesk if the quote came from a "a Pentagon source who clearly has an axe to grind!"

Few stories relied on a single unnamed source. As was well known, the Washington Post had invoked a rule, not uniformly followed, that any statement from a veiled source should be confirmed by at least two independent individuals.(8)

In further analyses, we studied *Time* and *Newsweek*, the two primary news weeklies of the era. Unnamed sources were common in those publications. And the phrases used to define them seemed to square with elements of newsmagazine style.

The newsmagazines tended to cite persons, not organizations. This seemed to go along with the publication's emphasis on enlivening the news by personalizing it.

Also, phrases emphasized sources' partisan ties – perhaps needed to interpret. After all, magazines sought to interpret, somewhat in contrast with newspapers' supposed emphasis on hard news.

However, like newspapers, the magazines often quoted organizations and gave little information that seemed useful in assessing credibility. In particular, clarifying information was sparse in international stories. Perhaps this reflected heavy reliance on foreign media and on official diplomatic sources.

Time and *Newsweek* often used a technique that might be called “broadening.” They would quote a source and then suggest, in latter attributions, that he or she represented a broader group of people such as Republicans or Liberals. Seldom did it appear that the sources actually quoted were drawn carefully from the larger group so as to insure representativeness. (9)

A related master's study indicated that sources' governmental affiliations had considerable impact. Attribution phrases gave less information about news sources when quoting Soviet citizens than when dealing with Israeli or American sources in the 1980s. This could reflect low access to varied sources within a controlled press. It could also suggest journalists assumed Russian sources would not be very meaningful to American readers. (10)

In a related study, Guido Stempel and I distinguished between two aspects of attribution to broad groups of news sources. These were *prominence* and *dominance*.

Both physicians and “other health-care professionals” tended to be mentioned often in stories about health care as objects of coverage. Thus both groups were *prominent*. However, physicians tended to be quoted more often, suggesting they were

very assertive (i.e., *dominant*) in interpreting to the media health-care developments and issues. (11)

The next phase of our research dealt with audience perceptions of and reactions to unnamed sources.

Audience Reactions

Nancy Somerick and I surveyed residents of three varied Ohio communities about attribution in late 1974 and early 1975 – soon after President Nixon's resignation. Differences among the communities were minimal, suggesting fairly wide generalizability of overall findings.

We first sought to gauge general knowledge of and beliefs about attribution in news. About 80% of respondents reported correctly that a direct quote, with quotations marks, was certified as verbatim. Also, a majority of respondents saw a by-line as indicating the reporter was competent and took responsibility for what he or she had written. Somewhat surprisingly, only low-educated, low-knowledgeable people tended to see a by-line as indicative of story importance. (12)

When it came to unnamed sources, reactions were mixed. About 68% of respondents saw veiled sources as less believable, overall, than named ones. Yet twice as many felt unnamed sources were good than that they were bad. Obviously people believed that, without attribution to unnamed whistle-blowers, important information would not reach the public. Furthermore, there was fairly widespread knowledge that almost no stories relied on a single unnamed source. Thus cross-checking for truthfulness might offset problems with individual spokespersons.

In specific ratings, respondents tended to see veiled sources as *competent and knowledgeable*, but as *having vested interests* based on closeness to officials and government agencies. This seemed in line with attribution phrases as described above.

We conducted a field experiment in which randomly chosen portions of our sample received identical versions of four stories with named sources quoted in some versions while veiled-attribution phrases were substituted for the names in other treatments. Stories with named and unnamed sources received almost identical overall credibility ratings. And, surprisingly, the unnamed versions were regarded as more interesting than the named in three of the four cases. Apparently people saw the veiled persons' "axes to grind" as indicative of intrigue that had some appeal! (13)

Those knowledgeable about public affairs tended to notice veiled sources more than did other readers. This held with education and interest in politics controlled. (14)

Our results squared with those of other researchers in the 1970s. Unfortunately, we did not conduct follow-up studies following the episode involved Janet Cooke in the early 1980s. Ms. Cooke, a *Washington Post* reporter, was disgraced and fired after it was revealed she had made up sources in a story about a young heroine addict. This led to much soul-searching among journalists. There is some evidence that skepticism about investigative-reporting practices such as the use of unnamed sources increased as a result.

Editor Concerns

While readers did not appear to be overly concerned about veiled sources in the 1970s, editors worried that they might reduce media credibility – perhaps even endangering first-amendment rights.

Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors saw a need for unnamed attribution, but also they often saw it as a haven for lazy reporters. We asked journalists to guesstimate what percentage of unnamed sources might go on the record if really pressed. Surprisingly, the mean estimate was 56%. And quite a few felt even their own staff members were failing to authenticate veiled-source comments adequately. Many bemoaned the fact that they had to quote off-the-record because of competitive pressures. Truly they “had a tiger by the tail.” (15)

Nor surprisingly, those on larger papers and those who emphasized investigative or watchdog reporting saw an especially strong need for veiled sources. (16)

As a want-to-be agricultural communicator, I had specialized in various disciplines so I could understand what I was writing about. However, I also became aware that, throughout the twentieth century, most journalists – at least, those who worked for well known institutions – tended to be generalists. This led to criticism that they over-simplified and sensationalized their stories. All of this led me to ponder the next topic as a grad student.

Specialized Journalism -- A Structural View

In reporting on a complex issue or topic, one must strive to achieve three goals:

- a-*Coherence* – clarifying the causes and implications of what’s reported.
- b-*Sensitivity* – conveying a sense of doubt and qualification where needed to avoid exaggeration, sensationalism, and over-simplification.
- c-*Understandability* – so message consumers can and will grasp what is being said.

A varied array of *specialists* often seem needed to achieve coherence and sensitivity. And *generalists* play an important part in striving for understandability as well as in assessing overall implications – the “big picture.”

In analyzing media performance, one must look at *reporters* who gather information and *editors* who choose what goes into a story and package it in final form.

The author, as a young agricultural communicator, had occasion to work with the largest-circulation specialized magazine of its time, *Farm Journal*. There *reporters*, operating out of field offices around the country, tended to be *generalists*. And *editors*, housed largely at the magazine’s headquarters, were varied *specialists* – agronomists, economists, dairy husbandry writers, homemakers, etc. This arrangement seemed to be the opposite of the “traditional newspaper model” where the specialists, to the extent that they existed, tended to be beat reporters.

At *Farm Journal*, the specialists interacted to define important angles that needed emphasis in a story along with questions to be asked in exploring them. Reporters in the field then asked these questions and provided at least tentative answers so as to insure *coherence* and *sensitivity*. And a rather generalized editor often supervised writing of a story – or did the writing him/herself --to insure *understandability*.

Obviously this was time-consuming – perhaps not feasible with less than monthly deadlines. Also, it was a bit cumbersome, creating demands for in-house communication that contemporary information technology might address more effectively than was possible in the 1950s.

Unfortunately, the author never got around to doing formal research on the traditional-newspaper, *Farm Journal*, and other structural models. He did suggest this as an area worthy of attention. (17)

The notion of understandability, in particular, requires careful audience study. This realization led me to my next topic area.

Following or Leading the Audience

As a practitioner and educator, I pondered the news-judgment process a great deal. And light bulbs went on when, early in my professorial career, I encountered the Chaffee-McLeod coorientation model. (18) This formulation called attention to three components of news judgment:

a-The *editor's own* assessment of what was important (EO).

b-The *audience's own* assessment (AO)

c-The *editor's assessment of audience priorities* (EA).

Chaffee and McLeod focused on the three possible bivariate relationships among these concepts:

a-r(eo,ao) – actual level of *agreement* between editor and audience.

b-r(ao,ea) – the *accuracy* with which the editor assesses audience beliefs.

c-r(eo,ea) – the *congruency* or assumption by the editor of how similar to the audience he or she is in viewing news.

Application of this model in real-world journalism raises philosophical and measurement issues beyond our domain here. Estimating the overall priorities of a large and heterogeneous aggregate of people is difficult to do – and to measure. Of course,

technological developments in the past 30 years or so have made it possible to think in terms of smaller and smaller audience segments – even the individual news consumer.

However, the basic model suggests an important axiom. *High congruency yields high accuracy only given high agreement.* Or, in plain English, assuming the audience is like the editor is valid only if, in fact, the audience and editor think alike! In fact, editors no doubt differ, in most cases, from their audiences. And this suggests they must put forth effort to accurately understand their audiences. Audience research and study seem important.

Incorporating actual journalistic decision-making in the model, we come up with NJ, the priorities reflected in news judgment. Given that congruency is not terribly high, this raises an important question that seems at the heart of many modern criticisms of the field. Does and should the journalists follow his or her own inclinations, as reflected by high $r(eo, nj)$ or *autonomy*? Or should the journalist put his own views on the shelf and provide his audience what he believes it wants, yielding high $r(nj, ea)$ or *followership*?

Critics often claim journalists cave into to business-office pressures, pandering to audience interests excessively. As a result, the media lose their soul – their tendency to define issues and events as the audience may need but not actually want. Agenda-setting research suggests the audience looks to the media for clarification of what goes on in the world. And, if followership is high, we have the media looking to the audience for leads on what to emphasize. This amounts to a classic case of a “dog chasing its own tail” – hardly a recipe for socially responsible journalism.

On the other hand, the editor who ignores audience interests and preferences is likely to lose his audience. Obviously the appropriate position generally lies somewhere

between extremely high followership and extremely high autonomy. Just where surely depends on the journalist's role, business model, and audience.

In pondering this issue, the author zeroed in on widely quoted research by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (19) and by Wilhoit and Weaver (20). In national surveys of working journalists, these scholars identified certain beliefs clusters that seemed connected with followership vs. autonomy. However, they did not seem to focus clearly on that connection. I decided to do this in an early 1980s survey of 258 journalists at 17 varied midwestern newspapers. I identified three beliefs clusters which resembled, but weren't identical to, those found in previous research. Few if any individual journalists believed in one cluster while totally rejecting the other two. However, the clusters did come out pretty clearly in multivariate analysis.

Traditionalists tend to believe in news elements such as consequence, timeliness, and human interest. They emphasize formal layout and the inverted pyramid as a model for news writing. Also, they see objectivity as an important norm, believing that the senses provide us with truth about the world around us.

Idealistic interpreters focus on careful research and analysis to clarify the causes and implications of events reported.

Activists advocate careful, fair reporting to promote needed social justice and change.

Each of these clusters tended to entail certain tendencies in self-reported news judgment.

Traditionalists tended to follow their audiences. We had predicted this on the grounds that, as fans of objectivity, they may have trained themselves to set aside their

own beliefs in judging news. Also, they regarded journalism as a business and doubtless felt one must follow his or her audience in order to gain and keep it.

Interpreters and activists, however, tended to follow less and lead a bit more. This seemed logical because they had strong personal frames of reference for judging news. The interpreter drew his or her frame from research, the activist from belief in certain causes.

We noted certain other tendencies that seemed to have escaped other belief-cluster scholars.

First, *traditionalists tended to emphasize local news*, doubtless drawing on the traditional view that the newspaper is a local medium. The other two sets of journalists downgraded local news somewhat, but in different mixes. The *interpreters focused heavily on national news*, no doubt reflecting the fact that investigative-journalism awards and emphases tended to focus, in the 1970s and 1980s, on Washington, D. C. And the *activists wanted to play up international stories*, perhaps seeing cosmic or universal implications as social-justice seekers are prone to do.

Predictably, *traditionalists emphasized timely spot news* more than their brethren. *Interpreters stressed interpretive reporting at the expense of human interest copy.* We had expected this on the theory that, when you interpret, you feel compelled to do so with a factual base established with hard news. In contrast, *activists downgraded spot coverage at the expense of interpretative content, not human interest.* Perhaps these people saw human interest as important in persuasion, an element in striving for change?

A couple other associations emerged from the data.

First, *interpreters tended to see news judgment as requiring high problem recognition* – an understanding that news is complex and fraught with uncertainty. And second, *activists tended to show high concern for constraints* posed by time and space – and by executive pressures – in news assessment. (21)

In addition to surveying working journalists, we studied 272 upper-class and graduate students in four varied schools of journalism. Like their working colleagues, these students said they would follow audiences more often and strongly than they would attempt to lead them. The students placed fairly high emphasis on audience research but tended to view their audiences, somewhat simplistically, *in least-common-denominator terms rather than through a more sophisticated audience-segmented lens*. That lens involved choosing items of intense interest to even a fairly narrow segment of the audience not much interested in other items within an editorial mix.

Also, autonomy correlated positively with emphasis on audience needs, followership with a focus on audience research. This suggests that, in the eyes of students, research might pull the “rope” toward followership in a mental tug of war with autonomy. (22)

Sequence did make a difference. Magazine students tended to follow the audience and emphasize audience research – a focus of many magazine texts. (23) Also, public relations and advertising students emphasized persuasion as a communication goal. The PR people, unlike their advertising mates, joined their media-sequence counterparts in stressing education of the audience as a goal. (24) Of course, it is unclear whether such beliefs might carry over into the workaday world as students enter it.

I also explored trade-press coverage of belief clusters with Lujuan Thompson. We found that the *Columbia Journalism Review*, an external critic of the media, and *The Quill*, an internal critic (organ of the Society of Professional Journalists) both called frequently for greater emphasis on interpretation. *CJR* was more critical of interpretative performance than was *The Quill*. Neither said much about activist crusading for social change. (25)

While I studied attribution and perceived writer stand, teaching forced me to think in new directions, including the next topic.

Linkage Beliefs

As a practically oriented practitioner and educator, I found it important to decide what to talk about in framing messages. News sources definitely were not the whole story!

Given this view, I became interested by the late 1980s in associationist psychology – especially the work of Norman Anderson as well as Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen. (26) These scholars demonstrated that an attitude (for example, assessment of a political candidate) depended in part on how closely people linked that candidate to various objects (peace, prosperity, war, poverty, etc.). In practice this equated to guild (or credit) by association.

Associationists tended to view closeness and valence (positive or negative) of such linkages as *independent variables* with attitude degree and direction, stability, and change resistance as *dependent factors*.

I shifted the focus by asking what might influence beliefs linking an attitude object to something else. I sought clues here in applied studies of a small-city police

department's educational and service activities, college student-organization leaders' thoughts about and plans to join alumni chapters after graduation, a medical clinic, and a school of health care.

The data, along with psychological theory, suggested that a person often links an attitude object quite closely to another object where:

a-He or she has experienced the two together, often, in *time and space*.

b-He or she sees them as *similar*. For example, students emphasizing extra-curricular activities while in college tended to place high priority on joining alumni chapters after graduation. I hypothesized this because alumni chapters share an emphasis on team and social activity with campus groups.(27)

c-He or she sees the linked objects as *part of* the attitude object, or vice versa. For instance, osteopathic physicians (D. O.s) view wellness or preventive medicine, treatment of the whole person rather than specific body parts, and close doctor-patient relations as parts of osteopathic medicine. And closeness of linkage to these concepts predicted osteopathic credibility. (28)

d-He or she sees the linkage as *ego-involving* – as closely tied to one's role in life. In our police study, women placed high priority on police-department educational activities. We had predicted this as women presumably see child-rearing as especially central to their life experiences. (29)

e-He or she sees the linked object as important where *other, more basic, needs have been met*. For example, citizens expected their police departments to do drug education in schools and escort parades through town, but only if they felt cops were doing a good job on their core functions – catching bad guys and bringing them to justice.

(30) Also, health-care consumers saw linkage of D. O.s to wellness and doctor-patient relations as important in evaluating osteopathic credibility, but only if they felt they had good insurance that allowed access to basic diagnoses, treatments and prescriptions. (31)

f-He or she *saw the level of emphasis as appropriate*. In our osteopathic study, Ohioans saw manipulative treatment (applying pressure to bones, joints and muscles) as a plus in judging osteopathy. However, they appeared to recognize that manipulation is appropriate only for a fairly narrow range of ailments. Thus only among those who see manipulation as used by D.O.s with only moderate frequency did closeness of linkage between that procedure and osteopathy predict D. O. credibility. (32)

Linkages seem useful in diagnosing image – an omnipresent concept in modern public relations. Carl J. Denbow and I have proposed a pattern for such interpretation (33)

The next topic grew out of a long-standing concern on my part about media impact. Who reads, sees, or hears what we present? And what difference does it make?

Media Use and Reliance

Guido Stempel, Carl J. Denbow and I explored two issues that came up in media-effects research. These were media malaise and the distinction between media use and reliance.

In our osteopathic-medicine survey of the early 1980s, we observed an interesting phenomenon. Most people were quite happy with their own health care but pessimistic about the nation-wide picture. This held with regard to various issues: doctor's viewing of the "whole person," health-care availability, doctor-patient relations, and overall

health-care merit. In short, contrary to a popular saying, “the grass seemed greener on my side of the street.” (34)

Why?

Obviously one can use personal experience to evaluate his or her own health care. However, in assessing the national picture, most people surely depend substantially on media reports.

This led us to consider Michael Robinson’s “video-malaise” hypothesis. Robinson had theorized that coverage contributed to widespread apathy and cynicism about politics for two basic reasons. First, TV coverage tends to focus on scandal and quarreling among politicians. And second, TV tends to emphasize, in particular, sniping and scolding within the federal government – rather remote from, and probably not responsive to the daily lives of most citizens. (35)

Evidence for the video-malaise hypothesis was mixed at best. However, we found some support for it when applied to coverage by all media of a personalized topic, health care. The more favorable people felt media coverage of *societal* health care was, the more favorably they assessed that care. This did not hold, however, where the dependent variable was assessment of *one’s own* health care. Furthermore, media coverage was seen as fairly negative overall. (36)

In a 1983 survey of two issues on a state ballot in Ohio, Stempel and I noted that use of and reliance on a particular medium – newspapers or television – were separate concepts. Previous research had tended to combine the two. However, when we measured reliance and use separately, they did not correlate, especially where TV use (frequency of news viewing) was the focus. Surely a democratic idealist might find this

alarming! Relying on a medium that one uses infrequently or superficially would seem to be a recipe for ignorance. And this turned out to be the case in our study!

We also found, somewhat to our surprise, that focused attention to news in the medium that respondents claimed not to rely on most predicted knowledge level strongly. The person who attends to more than one medium appears to be an active news consumer.

Some other interesting findings:

a-Those who relied on newspapers tended to use them a great deal. This did not hold with TV-news reliance and use.

b-*Focused TV viewing* (dealing with state and local news) among newspaper-reliant people correlated significantly with knowledge of arguments *opposed* to one's own position on an issue. Surely one able to recall a lot of arguments, especially those opposed to one's own position, seems apt to be particularly thoughtful and open-minded. This amounts to *breadth of perspective* – a concept mentioned quite often elsewhere in this essay.

c-Many people watch TV to relax, viewing whatever happens to be on when they turn on the set or pick up the remote control device. Thus *overall TV viewing predicted knowledge level less strongly than did specific viewing of state and local political news*. Such differences between general and specific news consumption were less marked when newspaper use was analyzed. (37)

Recent research by Stempel and his colleagues has confirmed that active news consumers use multiple media, including the internet. People do not approach news consumption by making either-or choices.

While in grad school, I became very interested in role-taking, the cornerstone of a sociological school of thought called symbolic interactionism. It seemed to me that journalists and public relations people often had to assess or predict the views and behaviors of their audience members, sources, and clients without being able to question or study these people directly. This interest led to a second major focus of my work, encompassing the next four specific topics.

Role, Community and Ethics

Roles and Role-Taking

In a literature review, I tried to lay a foundation for fine-tuned analysis of role-taking processes. Psyching out others – predicting their views and behavior – clearly is an important skill for public relations practitioners who deal with varied publics in a fragmented, interdependent world. Space limitations preclude a full review of 12 role-taking dimensions that I came up with. Among the more important concepts are these:

a-How *loosely or tightly defined* is a role, by consensual definition, in the social system where it exists? As I knew from experience, a recruit in the U.S. Marine Corps operates under tight constraints! In contrast, a professor supposedly has much freedom of thought and action. Freedom can be rewarding, but it often entails much responsibility and effort.

b-To what extent does a role-taker *project* his or her views onto a role-takee, manifesting what Chaffee and McLeod called *high congruency*? (38) Also, does one rely heavily on *careful study* of the role-takee's culture and situation, as well as on *personal interaction* over time with that individual?

c-Given a perceived difference between client and public, does a practitioner *follow* the public? Or *lead* it? In short, is followership or autonomy predominant? Or do both occur to a degree?

d-How *much breadth of perspective* does one show? This concept crops up often in this essay. In grad school, I studied the authoritarian personality (39) along with symbolic interactionism (40). This led me to emphasize the wisdom of learning the “other guy’s point of view – even when it’s strongly opposed to your own.

B.O.P. basically involves taking the role of people unlike the role-taker. Research has suggested that creative scholars and noted leaders don’t engage in narrow, party-line thinking. They have been exposed to – and presumably understand – varied perspectives. (41)

As noted earlier, our study of newspaper journalists and opinions about state issues suggest the thoughtful, well informed person – journalist or news consumer – has high breadth of perspective.

Also, our research on osteopathic medicine indicated PR problems arise when differences are not appreciated. Audience members over-estimated the use of manipulative treatment by D.O.s who did not accurately perceive that erroneous assessment. (42)

The much-heralded two-way symmetric model of public relations emphasizes the importance of taking into account fully the views of people clients are seeking to harmonize with. This clearly involves breadth of perspective.

A prominent line of research headed by Glen Broom and David Dozier asked what roles public relations practitioners played. (43) Basically, these scholars sought to

determine what PR people do – what bundles of behaviors they carry out – in their work. I have criticized this research for an over-emphasis on behavior bundling as opposed to the processes of interaction that create and enact roles. (44) I have worked on two studies which added to the useful literature on these bundles.

In a survey of educators, I confirmed that, as viewed by practitioners themselves, PR people tend to emphasize two roles – *communication technician* (focusing on preparation and dissemination of messages) and *communication manager* (covering various aspects of liaison, planning, and strategizing).

Educators appeared to distinguish between two technician subroles not articulated fully by Broom and Dozier. One was *narrow*, focusing on message design as well as mechanics of production and distribution. The other was quite broad, encompassing writing and planning of overall campaigns and programs. (45)

In a related study, Ni Chen and I collected data from lady practitioners in mainland China. These folks placed heavy emphasis on *guest relations* – escorting, translating for, and building ties with those with whom client organizations deal.

This was expected given the importance in Chinese cultures of establishing trust and friendship. Other Asian studies have yielded somewhat similar results. In addition, our data revealed that, during the 1990s, within that hierarchical society, women were constrained in their work roles. Limiting factors included executive stereotyping of them as “Miss PR,” as narrow specialists in guest relations.

Of course, guest relations requires understanding of your guests – of what they talk about, where they come from, and so on. Lady practitioners often appeared to be very knowledgeable and dedicated to gaining that understanding and resulting empathy.

They often *thought as managers*. But they *behaved as technicians*, spending lots of time guiding tours, arranging lodging and transportation, etc. (46)

In another study relating to roles, I conducted a classroom experiment in which 78 fairly advanced writing and editing students predicted news preferences of individual “target” audience members. These student “editors” predicted more accurately when given the targets’ ratings of a comparable set of recent stories than when given students rankings of 18 terminal-life values or no information at all. The lesson: *data about recent audience preferences can enhance predictions about priorities in today’s news*. Perhaps “test-panel” data need to be recent. But they usually cannot – and probably need not – be instantaneous with actual news-play decision making.(47)

In a study with Byron Scott, we constructed class exercises in which those acting as journalists gave their own (EO) assessments of stories or leads along with their perceptions of audiences (usually fellow students’) assessments (EA) and audiences’ actual assessments (AO). And our student journalists gave news-judgment rankings (NJ).

Using the basic Chaffee-McLeod coorientation model and the Culbertson news-orientation model discussed earlier (48), we found the measures of association [congruency, $r(eo,ea)$; followership; $r(ea,nj)$; autonomy, $r(eo,nj)$; agreement, $r(eo,ao)$; and accuracy, $r(nj,ao)$] generated grist for lively discussion of the news-judgment process]. (49)

Breadth of perspective showed up yet again in our next series of studies.

Agenda Diversity

B.O.P. among news consumers seems likely to be greatest where varied media report on many issues within a general topic area.

I noted in the 1980s that a couple research teams had used the H-statistic as a measure of *agenda richness* – concern for many and varied issues within the audience. (50) However, few if any scholars had used H as a measure of *diversity within media agendas*.

In a pair of content studies, I have demonstrated internal-consistency reliability of this measure as applied to candidate position papers during a presidential campaign (51) and coverage of South Africa by prominent U.S. dailies. (52)

H is greatest where a) *the number of issues or topics is high* and b) *these topics are covered almost equally*, -- with a low standard deviation among the percentages of space devoted to them. H can be viewed as a unidimensional measure of agenda diversity only if, across media or sources, the two components correlate highly and negatively. This held in the aforementioned studies. Interestingly, it did not hold in an analysis of editorials during the Filipino election campaign that led to the “nearly bloodless revolution” which ousted President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. An editorial page offers limited space, I reasoned. Thus focus on many topics presumably imposes a tendency to cover some in cursory fashion if one is to deal fully and convincingly with others. (53)

One study suggested that *agenda diversity* correlates highly across newspaper with ratings of *newspaper quality* and commitment to depth of coverage. Also, *interpretative potential* was indexed by average number of topics covered in a given story. Presumably issues inter-relate, and one cannot report such connections without taking note of them in a story. (54)

Also, agenda diversity appeared to be low among cause-oriented publications that focused, laser-like, on certain goals such as nationalism, poverty reduction, and moral uplifting. (55)

In a related vein, H was used to measure *diversity of sources*. In studies of coverage of rural development in mainland China (56) and of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong by Britain to China (57), the government-owned Chinese press scored high with regard to *issue diversity* but not *source diversity*. *People's Daily*, aimed largely at a domestic audience, and *China Daily*, published largely for foreigners and Chinese expatriates, covered many issues and topics but apparently limited who told the stories. Government sources had high dominance, using a concept advanced earlier in this essay.

Communication based on understanding of nations, clients, and peoples requires understanding of social, political, and economic contexts. This was the focus of my teaching and writing in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Social, Political and Economic Contexts

In order to role-take effectively with various publics and make reasonable assessments of needed and actual linkage beliefs, a practitioner must understand his or her clients' contexts.

Unfortunately, front-end research on these contexts has been lacking. Most applied public-relations studies have sought to evaluate a program after it has ended – or at least, after it began.

In teaching, I assigned students to study social, political and economic contexts of clients through library research, interviewing of clients, and audience studies. My own research in this area, and my students' and colleagues', have focused on the osteopathic

school of medicine, a city government, a small-city police department, a hotel chain, a university's Afro-American Studies Center, a medical clinic, a university's alumni relations office, an organization crusading against inhumane use of child labor in the third world, a livestock trade association, and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In 1993, three former students and I published a book entitled *Social, Political and Economic Contexts in Public Relations: Theory and Cases* .(58) Here we applied 17 theories and concepts from varied behavioral-science disciplines. We came to believe strongly that, as psychologist Kurt Lewin famously asserted many years ago, "nothing is as practical as a good theory."

Five of the theories we used dealt with social processes and interactions. Six each focused on economic concepts and on political processes, broadly defined, that seem needed to "get things done."

Here we offer a few illustrative examples of our research on these contexts.

In days gone by, policemen walked their beats, chatting with citizens in relaxed settings. They often helped elderly folks cross the street and rescued cats from window ledges. Recently, however, many cops have spent much of their time riding in patrol cars for efficiency and safety. There they could respond quickly when their dispatchers reported a problem.

Unfortunately, informal chatting declined. Police-community relations suffered as cops interacted with citizens mostly at crime scenes filled with stress and danger. (59)

In another realm, osteopathic physicians had long defended themselves against allopathic doctors, M.D.s, who had called them quacks. In a survey that Stempel,

Denbow and I conducted, D.O.s wanted to stress *differences* between allopathic and osteopathic medicine rather than the many similarities.

When we surveyed the general public, however, we found that those attaching high credibility to osteopathy tended to see it as *similar* to allopathy. Obviously this difference in viewpoint between doctors and health-care consumers needed to be addressed. (60)

In our child-labor study, it became apparent that many third-world cultures do not stress rights and educational opportunities for poor kids. In part, this reflected economic factors. After all, not too long ago, many Americans had to keep their kids out of school to help till the soil. Thus harsh criticism of child labor in a place like Bangladesh did not set well with the natives there. (61)

In our livestock-magazine study conducted by Dennis Jeffers, people at different economic levels had differing needs. Smaller, less prosperous farmers needed and asked for information about how to run their farms. On the other hand, the larger, more prosperous operators called for primary emphasis on farm-policy issues as they already had plenty of practical, day-to-day advice and information. Unfortunately prosperous farmers tended to set policy in the association even though the “little guys” outnumbered them. This put the magazine editor in a bind. (62)

The political context of a university’s Afro-American Studies Center analyzed by Martin Terrell was problematic for several reasons.

First, the Center was formed in the early 1970s amid high-level calls for more Black power in society. Later, as such calls faded, universities came under pressure to cut funding for these centers in order to meet other needs.

Second, the Center under study found it difficult to *maintain* strong support from its core Black constituents while fulfilling the *task* of integrating with the powerful white student body. Students and courses tended to emphasize Black pride and heritage at the expense of truly promoting inter-racial understanding. (63)

In the third world, governments tend to feel insecure, leading them to ignore calls for minimizing exploitations of child workers. Such calls might stir threatening protests. Also, resentment against colonial influence leads people to resist western crusaders largely because they are western. (64)

In a motel chain, Donna Besser Stone found that many motel managers tend to spend a great deal of time playing a *politician* role, promoting the motel to various potential publics. This sometimes comes at the expense of devoting effort to *technical* areas such as developing and maintaining a nice swimming pool or elevator system. In politics, presidents such as Barack Obama speak eloquently and gain public support. Technocrats such as Henry Kissinger lack these skills and are not likely to succeed in being elected. (65)

These illustrative examples of contextual study give only the flavor of our work. Clearly the SPE context becomes critical as we look at our next area of study – communitarian thought and ethics.

Community and Ethics

For many years, I taught a 2-3 week section on ethics in a graduate seminar on public relations theory and cases as well as in a senior-level offering on public relations principles. I found no text that seemed to fill the bill in either case. So I co-authored, with Ni Chen and Shi Linzhi, former advisees from China, a “teaching monograph” that

presented nine principles which seemed to apply in the United States and China, two very different societies.

We focused largely on the implications of five ideas:

a- One should strive to be truthful, telling the whole truth (*impression accuracy*) as well as nothing but the truth (*fact accuracy*). The literature of the field tends to agree on the importance of fact accuracy. However, many observers contend that impression accuracy is less important – activist groups and the media should provide the “other side of the story.” We disagree with this latter view on practical as well as moral grounds.

b- An ethnical practitioner needs substantial *autonomy*. He or she must often lead as well as follow publics. And it is important to choose clients or bosses carefully and to exercise independent judgment when dealing with them. In achieving this, one needs to be part of the management team.

c- In making decisions, one should take into account the viewpoint and well-being of the “other guys” – those affected by the decisions. This requires *listening* carefully, systematically and respectfully.

d- A practitioner is obliged to consider the well-being of *a society or community as a whole*, not simply of bosses and clients.

e- One must make realistic assessments of consequences, a *utilitarian* view. At the same time, he or she generally should adhere to more-or-less universal rules such as the Ten Commandments, as advocated by *deontologists*. The postmodern world has seen a shift toward utilitarianism, often to clients’ and societies’ detriment. On a scale from 1=extreme utilitarian to 10=extreme deontologists, Chen and I scored at about 8.5. However, when we quizzed our students, they tended to average about 2-3! This

difference posed a dilemma for us as teachers who took seriously the idea that we needed to “meet students where they were, not where we thought they ought to be.” (66)

This concern led us to search for a system of beliefs that we could accept wholeheartedly. We settled on communitarianism, a perspective championed by sociologist Amatai Etzioni. (67)

Chen and I, along with Diana Martinelli, reviewed related literature and came up with another set of nine beliefs that overlapped with our ethics principles. Two additional notions came to the fore here.

a-Breadth of perspective – striving to understand people and ideas very different from one’s own. That notion shows up repeatedly throughout this essay.

b-A sense of empowerment. People work together for the common good, it appears, only if they feel doing so will make a difference. (68)

We continue research on how these beliefs relate to each other. We hope to learn whether, in fact, they serve as a foundation for commitment to the concept of *symmetry* – a widely heralded if somewhat controversial view in contemporary public relations scholarship.

When I mentioned to a colleague a few years ago that I was writing about public relations ethics, he remarked that my paper should be very brief. There aren’t many!! I disagreed. While acknowledging that there are shady PR people, I contended many are acting as effective consciences for their clients and bosses. Further, I suggested all of us can sometimes learn about good by loitering in dens of iniquity.

Now I conclude with some brief comments about teaching and applied research.

Some Concluding Comments

Teaching

During 38 years of teaching, I became disenchanted with the very concept of textbooks. Experience told me that a thoughtful, creative, effective teacher surely would never “teach from a textbook.” I often caved into the system by assigning students to purchase texts. But I usually would assign them to read only a fairly small fraction of these books. At term’s end, they would complain that they had been forced to spend \$60 or so for only \$10-20 worth of content! I decided they had a point and spent a lot of time preparing 20-page summaries of 400-page books to ease the strain.

Early in my career, I co-authored, with Ralph S. Izard and Donald A. Lambert, a news-reporting text called *Fundamentals of News Writing*. (69) The book sold pretty well, and we published six editions. However, few of the co-authors really tested students on the entire book. News-writing is a practical course and is not based primarily on book learning.

Further, as we prepared for a seventh edition, the publisher insisted we produce a companion workbook. We refused, contending that such a workbook would include only or primarily canned exercises not conducive to true learning. *The workbook would be intended primarily for instructors with little or no experience in news reporting.* Facilitating teaching by such instructors would, we felt, contribute to the downfall of civilization. Thus the seventh edition never saw the light of day. We may have been playing Don Quixote here. We came away a little poorer, perhaps, but with a clear conscience.

Chastened by this experience, I became a fan of brief teaching monographs such as those published some years ago by Sage Publishing Co. on such research-methods topics as factor analysis, non-parametric tests, and analysis of covariance.

In this spirit, Ni Chen and I published our monograph on ethics mentioned earlier. Also, we edited a book of readings about public relations as practiced in many countries and regions around the world. (70) This book, entitled *International Public Relations: A Comparative Analysis*, really pioneered in establishing a new sub-discipline, international public relations. In the past 13 years, at least five or six books have followed in our footsteps.

Each book added to and did not replace its predecessors. Now students seeking information about public relations as practiced anywhere from the United States and United Kingdom to Malaysia or Malawi can find concise analyses that stem from a fairly coherent, understandable conceptual framework.

In our book, we rolled out oft-cited theories offered by two scholars. James Van Leuven offered a formulation regarding sequential growth of public relations in so-called developing societies as they develop. (71) And Ali Kanso El Ghorri addressed a basic question. Should a PR practitioner in the globalized world take a single message or appeal designed for world-wide consumption and adapt it in various societies? Or should one start from scratch, developing separate and distinctive appeals within each society? (72)

Another concern has bothered me for years as I taught. I differed greatly from my students in many areas. One such realm, discussed earlier, was the distinction between

utilitarian and deontological thinking (doing things because they worked, or because they were right). Another had to do with basic motivation.

As a young professor in a state university that was more or less forced to accept most any warm body that walked onto the campus as a student, I became discouraged. Administrators emphasized course and teacher evaluation – a good and needed thing, I believed. However, all too often, such evaluations seemed to amount to little more than popularity contests. I and my colleagues felt pressure to do what students wanted – *even when we felt they needed something else*. This amounted to the distinction between autonomy and followership emphasized earlier in this paper.

I had been taught that education was a *privilege* to be earned, not an *entitlement* to be taken for granted. Certainly, as a professor, I felt obliged to make my classes interesting and appealing – and to help students as much as possible. However, they too often seemed to suggest that *I was the one primarily responsible for motivating them*. This seemed to suggest a kind of immaturity that I felt compelled to combat. *One can get ahead only by taking responsibility for his or her own actions*.

Given this difference in viewpoints, I suffered at times from low morale. Fortunately, things improved about 10-12 years into my career. My university began selective admissions, so my classes had fewer students who seemed to be there largely because the classroom was more appealing than, say, the rice paddies of Vietnam! And second, I began teaching primarily seniors and grad students who had to show commitment or they would be elsewhere.

In any case, I became convinced that learning is a two-way street. Both teacher and student learn from each other. And both share basic responsibility for making things

work. Somehow, when President George W. Bush pledged not to leave any child behind, he said little about that sharing.

Applied Research

Research-methods courses and books often focus on theory building, not theory application. The latter seemed to lack appeal as viewed by promotion-and-tenure committees and deans.

As someone committed to application, I found myself torn. I was an experimentalist early in my career and was asked to write a textbook chapter on experimental methods. (73) However, I became tired of the constant feeling that we could not do enough experiments, in varied settings, to produce generalizable findings until, say, about 3,000 A.D. I would not be around that long. And I was not sure experimentalists would reach their goal even by then!

I next focused heavily on a combination of content analysis and survey research, doing one field experiment (74) and seeing a need for more. I also became convinced that qualitative analysis was needed – particularly as a preliminary step in front-end applied studies. Focus groups and in-depth interviews seem helpful in identifying important linkage beliefs, issues and arguments. And, in content studies, I found it necessary to use after-the-fact categories, formed on the basis of painstaking study and not in the spirit of hypothesis testers which had dominated my instruction when I was in grad school. This led me to write two more textbook chapters on combining varied research methods. (75)

I close with a final point. Exploration of meanings and their inter-relationships is very important. And contrary to what some qualitative analysts assert, quantitative data

can shed light on such relationships. For example, insistence on rigor means one thing if attributed to an experimentalist, but something quite different if advanced by a critical-rhetorical scholar.

Too often, I have found, qualitative researchers decry numbers in principle. This recalls an experience on one of the first master's committees on which I served. The study was historical, and the researcher emphasized that southern Ohio had several copperhead (pro-Confederacy) newspapers during the ante-bellum period. I objected to use of word several in every such reference. I argued that it would be more informative to say 78 or 36 rather than several. And I stand by that belief even today.

##

Notes

Items boldfaced below are sources which the author has found to be especially influential in shaping his thinking and research. Other items are publications authored or co-authored by the author.

1. "A Study of Graph Comprehension Difficulties," *Audio-Visual Communication Review*, 7(2):97-110 (Spring 1959) (senior author with Richard D. Powers); "Using Graphs More Effectively for Economic Information," Department of Agricultural Journalism Bulletin 29, University of Wisconsin (December 1959) (senior author with Thomas Flores, Richard Powers and Larry E. Sarbaugh); "Comprehension of Graphs," Department of Agricultural Journalism Bulletin 31, University of Wisconsin (January 1961) (third author with Larry E. Sarbaugh, Richard Powers & Thomas Flores).
2. **Carolyn W. Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, & R. E. Nebergall, *Attitude and Attitude Change: The Social Judgment-Involvement Approach* (Philadelphia: Sanders, 1965).**
3. "The Effect of Art Work on Perceived Writer Stand," *Journalism Quarterly*, 46(2):294-301 (Summer 1969); "Visual Detail, Sensationalism and Perceived Writer Stand," *Journalism Quarterly*, 51(1):79-86 (Spring 1974); "Words vs. Pictures: Perceived Impact and Connotative Meaning," *Journalism Quarterly*, 51(2):226-237 (Summer 1974).
4. **Harry Helson, *Adaptation Level Theory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).**

5. "The Interpretation of a Message in Light of Contextual Magnitude and Relevance," *Journal of Communication*, 20(1):32-50 (March 1970).
6. **R. E. Petty & J. T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986).**
7. "Is Attribution Battle on Right Fronts? Name Not Enough: Perspective Needed," *Grassroots Editor*, 14(2):5-7, 30 (March-April 1973).
8. "Veiled News Sources – Who and What Are they?" *News Research Bulletin #3*, American Newspaper Publishers Association (May 1975).
9. "Veiled Attribution: An Element of Style," *Journalism Quarterly*, 55(3):456-465 (Autumn 1978).
10. "Relations Between Attribution Specificity and Accessibility to News Sources," *Journalism Quarterly*, 64(4):799-804 (Winter 1987) (Junior author with Mbark A. Algraawi).
11. "The Prominence and Dominance of News Sources in Newspaper Medical Coverage," *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(3):671-676 (Autumn 1984) (Junior author with Guido H. Stempel III).
12. "Quotation Marks and Bylines – What Do They Mean to Readers?" *Journalism Quarterly*, 53(3):463-467, 508 (Autumn 1976) (Senior Author with Nancy Somerick).
13. "Cloaked Attribution – What Does It Mean to News Readers?" *News Research Bulletin #1*, American Newspaper Publishers Association, May 1976) (Senior author with Nancy Somerick).

14. "Variables Affect How Persons View Unnamed News Sources," *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(1):58-69 (Spring 1977) (Senior author with Nancy Somerick).
15. "Survey Shows Editors Divided on Handling Unnamed Sources," *Presstime*, 2(8):25-26 (August 1980).
16. "Leaks – A Dilemma for Editors As well as Officials," *Journalism Quarterly*, 57(3):402-408, 535 (Autumn 1980).
17. "Specialized Journalism – A Structural View," *Mass Comm Review*, 5(2):2-6 Spring 1978).
18. **Steven H. Chaffee & Jack M. McLeod, "Sensitization in Panel Design: A Coorientation Experiment," *Journalism Quarterly*, 45(4):661-669 (1968).**
19. **John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, & William W. Bowman, *The News People* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1967).**
20. **David H. Weaver & G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).**
21. "Three Perspectives on American Journalism," *Journalism Monographs*, 83 (June 1983).
22. "Should Journalists Follow or Lead Their Audiences?: A Study of Student Beliefs," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 4(2): 193-213 (1989).
23. "The Neutral and Participant Perspectives – What Do They Mean?" *Newspaper Research Journal*, 1(1):60-72 (November 1979).
24. "Study of Student Beliefs Suggests Sequences Do Make a Difference," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 31(1):24-27 (Spring 2986).

25. "A Comparison of The Quill and Columbia Journalism Review Relative to Three Critical Perspectives," *Mass Comm Review*, 11(1-2):12-21 (Winter-Spring 1984).
26. **Norman H. Anderson, "Cognitive Algebra: Integration Theory Applied to Social Attribution," in Leonard Berkowitz (ed.). *Cognitive Theories in Social Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 1-101; Martin Fishbein & Icek Ajzen, "Acceptance, Yielding and Impact: Cognitive Processes in Persuasion," in Richard E. Petty, Thomas H. Ostrom & Timothy C. Brock (eds.), *Cognitive Responses in Persuasion* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981), pp. 339-359.**
27. "Linkage Beliefs: What Are The Links?" *Public Relations Review*, 18(4):335-347 (1992).
28. "Linkage Beliefs and Public Relations Effects," *Public Relations Research & Education*, 2(1):23-35 (Summer 1985) (Senior author with Guido H. Stempel III); "David and Goliath Coexist: The Story of Osteopathic Public Relations," in Hugh M. Culbertson, Dennis W. Jeffers, Donna Besser Stone & Martin Terrell, *Social Political and Economic Contexts in Public Relations: Theory and Cases* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993), p. 250 (Senior author with Carl J. Denbow and Guido H. Stempel III).
29. "Police in America: A Study of Changing Institutional Roles as Viewed by Constituents," *Public Relations Research Annual*, 1:155-174 (1989) (Senior author with Hochang Shin).

30. "Needs and Beliefs in Construct Accessibility: Keys to New Understanding," *Public Relations Review* 24(2): 125-143 (1998) (Senior author with Carl J. Denbow and Guido H. Stempel III).
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. "Linkage Beliefs and Diagnosing an Image," *Public Relations Review*, 11(1):29-37 (1985) (Junior author with Carl J. Denbow).
34. "Media Malaise: Explaining Personal Optimism and Societal Pessimism About Health Care," *Journal of Communication*, 35(2):180-190 (Spring 1985) (Senior author with Guido H. Stempel III).
35. **Michael J. Robinson, "Television and American Politics: 1956-1976," in Morris Janowitz and Paul Hirsch (eds.), *Reader in Public Opinion and Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1981), pp. 98-116.**
36. Stempel & Culbertson, "Media Malaise: Explaining Personal Optimism....," *op. cit.*
37. "How Media Use and Reliance Affect Knowledge Level," *Communication Research*, 13(4):579-602 (October 1986) Senior author with Guido H. Stempel III).
38. Chaffee & McLeod, "Sensitization in Panel Design:....," *op. cit.*
39. **Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960).**

40. **George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Ralph H. Turner, "Role-Taking, Role Standpoint, and Reference Group Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*, 61:316-328 (1956).**
41. "Breadth of Perspective: An Important Concept for Public Relations," *Public Relations Research Annual*, 1:3-25 (1989).
42. Culbertson, Denbow & Stempel, "David and Goliath Coexist:....," *op. cit.*, p. 252.
43. **Glen M. Broom, "A Comparison of Sex Roles in Public Relations," *Public Relations Review*, 8(1):17-22 (1982).**
44. "Role-Taking and Sensitivity: Keys to Playing and Making Public Relations Roles," *Public Relations Research Annual*, 3:37-65 (1991).
45. "Practitioner Roles: Their Meaning for Educators," *Public Relations Review*, 11(4):5-21(Winter 1985)
46. "Guest Relations: A Demanding but Constrained Role for Lady Public Relations Practitioners in Mainland China," *Public Relations Review*, 22(3):279-296 (Fall 1996) (Junior author with Ni Chen).
47. "Factors Influencing Coorientation Variables in News Judgment," paper presented to Theory and Methodology Division, Association for education in Journalism, Ft. Collins, Colorado, August 1973.
48. Chaffee & McLeod, "Sensitization in Panel Design," *op. cit.*; Culbertson, *Three Perspectives on American Journalism*, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

49. "Some Editorial Games for the Magazine Editing or Writing Class," paper presented to Magazine Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Seattle, Washington, August 1978 (Senior author with Byron Scott).
50. **Richard Allen & Fausto Izcaray, "Nominal Agenda Diversity in a Media-Rich, Less Developed Society," *Communication Research*, 15(1):29-50 (February 1988); Steven H. Chaffee & Donna C. Wilson, "Media Rich, Media Poor: Two Studies of Diversity in Agenda Building," *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(3):466-476 (Autumn 1977).**
51. "Measuring Agenda Diversity in an Elastic Medium: Candidate Position Papers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 69(4):938-946 (Winter 1992).
52. "Agenda Diversity Indicates Newspaper Quality," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 28(1):40-54 (Winter 2007).
53. "American and Filipino Editorials on the 1986 Philippine Election and Revolution," *Philippines Communication Journal*, 1(3):1-14 (June 1987).
54. Culbertson, "Agenda Diversity Indicates Newspaper Quality," *op. cit.*
55. Culbertson, "American and Filipino Editorials ...," *op. cit.*
56. "China Daily Coverage of Rural Development: A Broad Window or a Small Peep-Hole?" *Gazette*, 59(2):105-120 (April 1997).
57. "Nationality 1, Audience 0: A Study of Factors Shaping News About the 1997 Hong Kong Handover," *International Communication Bulletin*, 36(1-2):4-19 (Spring 2001).

58. *Social Political and Economic Contexts in Public Relations: Theory and Cases* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993) (Senior author with Dennis W. Jeffers, Donna Besser Stone, & Martin Terrell).
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 125.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-255.
61. "Giving Two Hundred Million Kids A Childhood," in Judy VanSlyke Turk & Linda H. Scanlan (eds.), *Fifteen Case Studies In International Public Relations: Case Studies from Countries in Transition* (Gainesville, FL: The Institute for Public Relations, 1999), pp. 131-152.
62. Culbertson, et al., *Social and Economic Contexts in Public Relations:....*, " *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-210.
64. Culbertson, "Giving Two Hundred Million Kids A Childhood," *op.cit.*, pp. 132-138.
65. Culbertson, et al., *Social Political and Economic Contexts in Public Relations....*," pp. 186-187.
66. "Public Relations Ethics: Some Foundations," *Ohio Journalism Monograph*, 7, Bush Research Center, E. W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University, January 2003 (senior author with Ni Chen & Linzhi Shi).
67. **Amatai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).**
68. "Communitarianism: A Foundation for Communication Symmetry," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 42(2):36-41 (Summer 1977) (Senior author with Ni

Chen); “Communitarianism: Part of a World View for Symmetry in Communication,” paper presented to International Interdisciplinary Research Conference, Miami, FL (1994) (Senior author with Diana Knott Martinelli).

69. *Fundamentals of News Reporting* (Dubuque, Iowa, Kendall-Hunt, sixth edition published in 1994) (Second author with Ralph S. Izard and Donald A. Lambert).
70. *International Public Relations: A Comparative Analysis* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996) (Senior Editor with Ni Chen).
71. **James K. Van Leuven, “Public Relations in Southeast Asia from Nation-Building to Regional Interdependence,” In Culbertson & Chen, *Ibid.*, pp. 207-222.**
72. **Ali Kanso El Ghori, “Standardization vs. Localization: Public Relations Implications of Advertising Practices in Finland,” in Culbertson & Chen, *Ibid.*, pp. 299-315.**
73. “Statistical Designs for Experimental Research,” in Guido H. Stempel III & Bruce H. Westley (eds.), *Research Methods in Mass Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981 edition, pp. 217-239; 1989 edition, pp. 221-246).
74. Culbertson & Somerick, *op. cit.*, “Veiled Attribution: What Does It Mean to News Readers?”
75. Culbertson, et al., *Social, Political and Economic Contexts in Public Relations:...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-48; “Applied Public Relations Research,” In

Guido H. Stempel III, David H. Weaver & G. Cleveland Wilhoit (eds.),
Mass Communication Research and Theory (Boston: Allyn & Bacon,
2003), pp. 53-75.