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Notes—Bias and Credibility

* How do you define bias? What does it mean to you?
* Imagine your favorite team just lost their game 5-4. Would you rather describe this as a “loss”, “a close game” or “almost a win”? Why? What does your choice say about your opinion of the game/team?

Bias can be really obvious, and sometimes it can be more subtle. Some words are obviously offensive and put a person or a group into a particular light.

Put each of the following words into a line from “positive” to “negative”

Woman

Chick

Lady

Female

Babe

Slut

Girl

Hag

Cougar

Soccer Mom

Negative

Positive

* Which ones were really obviously negative?
* If you saw these highly positive or negative words in a news article talking about a particular woman, what assumptions would you make about the author of that article?

Some language is much LESS obvious. These words are used to put a particular person, place, thing, or situation into a particular light, and by using one word or another, the author reveals their beliefs or BIASES about that person, place, thing, or situation.

For example: Place the following words on a line from “positive” to “negative.”

Liberator

Freedom fighter

Terrorist

Savior

Extremist

Radical

Rescuer

Negative

Positive

* What kind of actions might a “freedom fighter” take?
* Is it possible that a “terrorist” could take the same actions?
* What is the difference between using these different words? How does it affect the article that you read?

Let’s try one with adjectives

Egotistical

Proud

Confident

Self-assured

Arrogant

Self-centered

Dignified

Negative

Positive

* While all of these words mean about the same thing, using them reveals a BIAS about whoever is being discussed. Which do you think you would most like to be called?
* Which words seem to be the most neutral?
* Why might it be important to pay attention to words like this when reading an article, or watching the news?

**There is also bias when you only hear one side of the story. For example, if you are only presented with facts that support the legalization of marijuana, but don’t hear the arguments for the other side at all, even for a counter argument, then the author is being biased.**

* What are some other situations when you have only heard one side of the story? (especially when you know there is another side to the story).

**But what about statistics? They can’t be biased, right**?

What about this one:

* 48 people died in the battle today.
* Less than 50 people died in the battle today.
* Which one sounds better? Why?
* Why might an author choose to write a story using these varying statistics?