

CONSTRUCTING SKEPTICISM: FOUR DEVICES USED TO ENGENDER THE AUDIENCE'S SKEPTICISM

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Introduction

The analysis presented in this paper uses as its data Dan Rather's interview of George Bush. While the interview was exceptionally dramatic, my interests in it were not in its exceptional aspects. Instead, I chose to analyze four devices that were used on this occasion and are used on other occasions as well. These devices apparently are used to move an audience to become skeptical of someone's version of events.

This is a study, then, of some aspects of a social process that attempts to engender skepticism. In the context of news reporting, the devices selected were constrained by a sense of what is part of the work of reporting. The devices used involved Rather-as-Narrator (in the CBS Feature that preceded the interview) and Rather-as-Interviewer (in the interview) offering purported "facts" to the audience in an apparent attempt to discredit various public statements of government officials.

Some of the observations and analysis included in this paper were developed in work sessions with Marsha Witten, with Adam Kendon, and with the students in my Fall 1988 seminar on information seeking strategies. In addition, I would like to thank Robert Sanders and Stuart Sigman for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

There are five segments that are reviewed in this paper. The first four are drawn from the CBS Report; the fifth consists of Rather's first interview question. In the first four segments, the feature focused on statements made by Donald Gregg, Bush's National Security Advisor. They apparently were aimed at discrediting the version of events that Gregg maintained: that he did not tell Bush about the United States' involvement in the Iran-Contra arms supply deal. In the fifth segment, Rather-as-interviewer apparently attempted to undermine the version of events that Bush maintained: that he did not know about the Iran-Contra arms supply operation at the time that it was happening.

In this paper, four devices are described that attempt to lead an audience to adopt a critical stance towards Gregg's and Bush's versions of events. In the feature, three of the devices were used, and reused in combination, over the course of the four segments. Each of the subsequent segments apparently was offered to build upon the previous segments, so that the case to doubt Gregg's statement that he did not tell Bush consisted of a cumulative argument. The three devices that were used in the feature were: (a) juxtaposing a statement with "facts" to the contrary, (b) presenting a visual document of a statement as seemingly weak or suspicious, and (c) presenting contradictory statements by the same speaker. In Rather's first question, a fourth device, building upon the argument presented in the feature, is used. That device is: (d) reporting two "facts" that imply different and inconsistent versions of events.

Although I propose that these devices may be used in an attempt to influence an audience's perception of events, this study has not looked at the effectiveness of the devices. A study of influence would involve an examination of audiences' perceptions (Sigman & Fry, 1985).

The remaining paper is organized according to the following sections: "A General Feature of Reporting," "Two Concerns of Professional Journalists," "Analysis of Five Segments," and "Concluding Remarks."

A General Feature of Reporting

A common activity done in conversation is to report or describe purportedly objective matters, e.g., what is, what was, what happened.

When offering a description, a speaker unavoidably takes a stance regarding the report's truthfulness (Pomerantz, 1984).

There are at least three stances a speaker may adopt when offering a report: (1) (s)he may endorse the description as true with an indication of some degree of certainty; (2) (s)he may display skepticism or doubt regarding the report's truthfulness; or (3) (s)he may be a "mere reporter," giving the information only as it is known to the speaker. The first two stances can be seen very clearly in the following excerpt taken from the book, *The Family Crucible* by Napier & Whitaker (1978, p. 101):

My father had a "back injury" or so the story went, and he spent a lot of time reading and doing odd jobs and supposedly looking for work.

In this excerpt, the speaker produced descriptions some of which she endorsed as true. The speaker offered as an accurate picture the descriptions that her father "spent a lot of time reading and doing odd jobs." A technique for endorsing a description as true is to simply assert it—produce an unmodified declarative assertion.

The speaker also produced descriptions with marked skepticism. She indicated skepticism regarding whether her father actually had a back injury and whether he actually went looking for work. She displayed skepticism of the facticity of his back injury with a marking of "back injury" (with quotation marks) and the formulation of it as a "story." She indicated skepticism of the facticity of his job hunting by including the word, "supposedly."

A third stance that a speaker may take is to merely report what is (said to be) known for certain, taking no official position on the report. A usual way of doing this is to report someone else's assertion, that is, cite a source along with an assertion. This reporting practice may be used when a speaker has insufficient knowledge to judge the validity of an assertion, does not want to go on record with his/her position, and/or is being careful to get the facts out just right.¹

To reiterate, a speaker necessarily takes a stance when offering a report. One stance is to offer a report as representative of an actual state of affairs. This often is done with a declarative assertion of an actuality. A second stance is to display skepticism, often done

through emphasis (e.g. "He says..."), and/or with marked formulations ("or so the story went" and "supposedly"). A third stance is to 'merely report' where this often is done by reporting an assertion with its source.

Two Concerns of Professional Journalists

Bennett (1988) reports that journalists are overwhelmingly committed to a professional code of independent, adversarial, objective reporting.² As the sets of behaviors that achieve being "objective" and "adversarial" are central to professional reporting, I briefly discuss the concepts of "objective reporting" and "adversarial reporting."

Objective Reporting

Bennett describes one of the key practices of "objective journalism" as follows:

The truthfulness and factuality of the news is guaranteed by *the use of documentary reporting practices* that permit reporters to transmit to the public only what they can observe or support with physical evidence. (p. 120)

Journalists, as well as others in society, define a reporter's job as one of "merely reporting" the news. Professional reporters should not convey their personal positions, opinions, or judgments concerning the news that they report. The distinction between merely reporting the facts and taking a position is reflected in the respective institutions of "a news report" and "an editorial."

Some evidence that this concept, and the set of practices that actualize it, are central to professional reporting is found in the ways that the Rather-Bush interview was reviewed in the mass media on the days following the interview. One of the questions posed by journalists was whether Rather handled the interview in a professional manner. For those who argued that he "lost it," the example often given was Rather's statement to Bush, "You've made us hypocrites in the face of the world" (transcript, lines 297, 299). That a particular

statement was isolated and offered as evidence of unprofessional behavior suggests that audiences have a strong sense of what journalists should/should not do and how they should/should not talk. In this case, Rather's assertion was seen as a breach of documentary reporting practices—an assertion that could not be empirically verified and hence a violation of good reporting practices.

Adversarial Reporting

In addition to the role of providing information that may not otherwise be available, a reporter may see him/herself as a watchdog for the public good. This may involve confronting and being critical of interviewees on behalf of the public's interests and exposing offenses.

Different journalists hold different views regarding the adversarial role. Clayman (1988) reports that Robert MacNeil holds that the interviewer's primary job is to enable prominent spokespersons to communicate their views while Sam Donaldson and Ted Koppel stress the need for more critical and adversarial forms of interviewing.

During his interview of Bush, Rather took an adversarial stance. As inferred from both the videotaped segment and his conduct during the interview, Rather's interest was to challenge or expose Bush's stated position regarding his lack of knowledge of the Iran-Contra arms supply operation at the time it transpired.

Multiple Concerns

While attempting to expose Bush's version of events, Rather apparently was committed as well to using objective or documentary reporting practices and maintaining due respect for the Vice President. These multiple concerns may pull in different directions. A strong commitment to adversarial reporting practices may be seen as a loss of objectivity and/or a breach of proper respect toward the interviewee. A strong commitment to objectivity and giving a fair hearing to both sides may result in a limiting and/or toning down of critical questions (Orr, 1980). It is plausible that a reporter may fail to convincingly expose an offense if (s)he limits and tones down his/her critical questions.

In a statement made on the CBS Evening News program on the evening following the interview, Rather responded to some of the concerns that callers expressed about the interview. He made three points in his statement: he denied that CBS misled Bush about the subject of the interview, he addressed how he treated Bush during the interview, and he accounted for his abruptly ending the interview. His second point went as follows:

Secondly. I of course respect the office of the Vice Presidency, the institution, and the Vice President. Trying to ask honest questions and trying to be persistent about answers is part of a reporter's job. And however it may seem at any given time, the intention of even persistent questioning in a spirited interview, is to do an honest, honorable job. The fact that more attention is given to the heat than to the light is regrettable but it goes with the territory.

In this part of his statement, Rather suggested that good interviewing involves asking "honest" questions, pursuing answers to one's questions, and showing due respect to the interviewee. In this context, it seemed that for Rather, "honest" questions were those that challenged Bush's version of events.

In conducting this adversarial interview, then, Rather was concerned with challenging Bush's version of events—that he did not know about the Iran-Contra arms supply deal. To challenge it, Rather attempted to portray Bush's version as less plausible than an alternative version—that Bush did know about the arms' supply deal. As a professional reporter, Rather used documentary reporting practices in attempting to move his audience toward skepticism; he offered "reports" of statements and "descriptions" of events, that is, "facts."

Analysis of Five Segments

CBS's videotaped feature used as a theme the juxtaposition of *a reported statement* that *asserted* one state of affairs with *the record* that *documented* a contrary state of affairs. In both the feature and the interview, Rather presented "facts" that apparently were intended to imply that Bush probably did know about the Iran-Contra arms

supply deal at the time it was being transacted. As part of that argument, the feature apparently attempted to have the audience question the truthfulness of Bush's aide's, Gregg's, statement that he had not told Bush about the arms supply deal.

In the last three minutes of the prepared feature, there were four segments that focused on Gregg. The four taken together built an argument about Gregg's credibility, with the last segment being used as a lead-in to Rather's opening question in the interview.

First Segment about Gregg

In the first segment about Gregg, three devices to engender skepticism were used: (a) juxtaposing a statement claiming one state of affairs with a report of events to the contrary, (b) presenting a visual record of what may be an observably suspicious statement, and (c) presenting contradictory statements by the same speaker.

((“R’s Voice” is Rather’s voice as the narrator of the feature))

R’s Voice: Questions center on this man. Donald Gregg. Bush’s National Security Advisor and a veteran CIA agent. When the Sandinistas shot down Eugene Hausenfus, the first U.S. official alerted was Gregg’s assistant. Yet Gregg denied it.

News Clip

Reporter: ..he contacted someone who worked for you=
 =I- [he- he- contact you [indirectly [in some way?
 Gregg: No No No No

R’s Voice: Gregg later admitted that wasn’t true.

One device used to engender skepticism involves reporting a statement claiming one version of events followed by a report of contrary events having taken place (device a). An audience is given a statement on the one hand and an actuality on the other. Normatively in our culture, these two choices are not equivalent—facts (as well as pictures) speak louder than words. The viewer is given weights to put on each pan of the metaphorical scale: the weight of reality and the weight of a public statement.

Rather-as-narrator used this device in an apparent attempt to lead viewers to question Gregg's denial. After introducing Gregg, he reported an event as having occurred by declaring unqualifiedly that it was so: "...the first U.S. official alerted was Gregg's assistant." This was then juxtaposed with a report of Gregg's statement about this, or more specifically, his denial: "Gregg denied it."

The feature used this device in raising the question of whether or not Gregg's assistant was contacted when Hasenfus was shot down. The version that Gregg's assistant was contacted was supported by reporting that that was what happened. The version that Gregg's assistant was not contacted was supported by Gregg's statement to that effect. The viewers thus were given relatively strong evidence for the version that Gregg's assistant had been contacted, that is, that the event happened, and relatively weak evidence for the version that Gregg's assistant had not been contacted, that is, Gregg's denial.

The usual ordering of the components in this device seems to be a report of a statement followed by a report of events to the contrary. The ordering of the two components in this segment was reversed: a report of events was given first and that was followed by a report of a statement to the contrary. The inverted ordering may be accounted for by the fact that this device is not standing alone but used as part of, and in anticipation of, using Gregg's statement in relation to another device (device c), reporting two contradictory statements by the same speaker (see below).

A second device to engender skepticism that was used in this segment is to present a visual display of an observably suspect statement. After Rather-as-narrator *reported* that Gregg denied the fact, the audience also was shown a video news clip of Gregg "denying the fact." The clip showed an exaggerated denial. The way in which Gregg shook his head and repeated the "no"s brought snickers and other skeptical reactions to some people in the audiences I have observed watching it.

A third device used to create skepticism is to present contradictory statements by the same speaker (device c). The viewer already had been told (and shown) that Gregg denied the assertion that his assistant had been contacted when Hasenfus was shot down. That was the first statement reported. In addition to reporting the denial

as fact, the feature offered documentary evidence (a visual display) for the facticity of Gregg's denial having occurred. After the news clip was shown, Rather-as-narrator reported another statement that Gregg made. He reported that Gregg changed his position and "admitted" that his prior statement "wasn't true."

This device to engender skepticism consisted of reporting a statement of denial followed by a statement of a change of position. The truth of Gregg's initial statement is, of course, undermined by the report that he "later admitted" that it was not true. If the viewers believed Gregg's later statement, they would no longer believe that the first statement was true. By the end of this segment, the audience had been given a picture, literally, of Gregg's producing a false denial. This also may have created suspicion about the trustworthiness of Gregg's verbal reports in general.

Second Segment about Gregg

In the second segment about Gregg, two devices to engender skepticism were used: (a) juxtaposing the report of a *statement* claiming one state of affairs with a report of events to the contrary, and (b) presenting a visual record of what may be an observably suspicious statement.

R's Voice: But then just three days ago, Gregg again denied any involvement with the Contras.

News Clip

Reporter: Mr Gregg, do you still insist that you played no role inuh in in aiding the Contras between 1982 and 1987

((Shot of Gregg, Gregg looks away for 2 seconds))

Gregg: Yes I do

R's Voice: But the record shows, Gregg pushed for more secret aid to Contras early in 1982, when he was responsible for covert operations at the NSC...

Rather-as-narrator first reported a statement of Gregg's ("Gregg again denied any involvement") and then reported events that

contradicted that version ("Gregg pushed for more secret aid to Contras early in 1982, when he was responsible for covert operations at the NSC...." (device a). Previously I argued that juxtaposing a "statement" and "facts" was a device to engender skepticism of the statement by presenting the viewer with weak evidence for the statement's validity and strong evidence against its validity. In this segment, this device was used again but this time with an even greater imbalance.

After calling the worth of Gregg's denials into question in the just previous segment, Rather-as-narrator reported, "Gregg again denied any involvement..." With the word "again," the narrator attempted to remind the audience that this denial was subsequent to the previously reported denial, one that was just shown to be untrue. Gregg's statement was cast as "another denial," where the viewer had just been shown Gregg's public statements as inconsistent and his denial as problematic.

In contrast to the "questionable denial" offered on behalf of Gregg's not having been involved, the report offered in support of the version that Gregg was involved was of "events having occurred." In addition to the power of a report of an actuality, the events that were reported to have occurred were introduced with "The record shows" "The record" can be thought of as a "god term." According to Weaver (1985, pp. 211-232), a god term is a term with enhancing power. If a speaker can make a god term stick, it will validate almost anything. In his discussion of current god terms, Weaver argued that terms such as "progress" and "fact" have that status. "Fact" suggests that the truth of the matter is obtained (or obtainable) through empirical verification and that all other knowledge must defer to it. To successfully claim that something is a "fact" is to cloak it as a very sure form of knowledge, as the object of trustworthy perception.

Inasmuch as "The record" is thought of as the "facts" collected and recorded, Weaver's proposal about the power of the term "fact" also applies as well to the term, "the record." "The record"—the body of facts compiled by the Tower Commission—was used to support the version of events that held that Gregg was involved in the Iran-Contra arms supply deal.³

To reiterate, Rather-as-narrator provided the audience with two reports that argued for alternative versions of events. The plausibility

of the version that Gregg was not involved in the Iran-Contra arms supply deal was supported by Gregg's denial and hence depended upon whether Gregg's denial would be seen as believable. Gregg's credibility, of course, had been challenged in the previous segment. The plausibility of the version that Gregg was involved in the Iran-Contra arms supply deal was supported by the reported occurrence of events, as documented in "the record." Reinforced by the visual image of record folders displayed during the feature, the term "the record," conjures up, in our culture, an empirically backed body of facts that have been established as true.

In this segment, the device (b) of showing a visual of an observably weak or suspect statement was used as well. The visual news clip shown contained an interviewer asking Gregg a question followed by a shot of Gregg looking away for two seconds before answering. While sorting out the negation in the question could account for the delayed response, Gregg's long hesitation before answering could have appeared humorous and/or suspect.

In the first two segments about Gregg, the CBS feature provided grounds for the viewer to be suspicious about the truthfulness of Gregg's public statements, particularly his denials of an involvement in the Iran-Contra arms supply deal. In the first segment, the viewer was shown a denial that Gregg later "admitted" wasn't true. In the second segment, the viewer was shown Gregg "again denying" his involvement although "the record" documented that he was involved.

Third Segment about Gregg

In this segment, the device (b) of presenting a visual of an observably weak or suspect statement was used. The viewer was given a two part sequence: a report of Gregg having been asked for a statement followed by a clip of Gregg's giving a statement to a reporter.

R's Voice: We asked Gregg about that last Friday

News Clip

Gregg: ...that I've heard about that memorandum and I have no explanation for it ((news clip was cut off before Gregg had finished his turn))

Recall that in the first segment about Gregg, Gregg reportedly reversed an earlier denial that he had made, and in the second segment, Gregg's denial was juxtaposed with a contrary record of events. In this third segment, only his statement was shown to the viewer. It was shown without a statement or facts to the contrary. Even so, by the time the viewer would have seen the third episode, s/he may have been primed to consider, or to anticipate CBS's argument for, the possibility that Gregg's statement in this segment was untrue.

In his statement, Gregg said that he had no explanation for the memorandum. If viewers perceived that Gregg was telling the truth, the version of events that was supported was that Gregg, indeed, was puzzled by the memorandum and had no explanation for it. If viewers perceived that Gregg was not telling the truth, the version of events inferable was that Gregg could tell about the memorandum and used the answer to avoid giving information.

CBS elected to show a visual record of Gregg's giving that answer. In all likelihood, CBS selected that scene because the portion of Gregg's answer that was shown might be seen as observably lame or weak. Whatever else Gregg went on to say was not included in the news clip. Heard against the backdrop of the prior two segments that challenged Gregg's truthfulness, the viewer may have perceived "I have no explanation" as another in a series of Gregg's problematic statements.

Fourth Segment about Gregg

In this final segment of the feature, the device (a), reported statement versus actuality, again was used. As in the first segment, the order of the components was reversed, again possibly due to its use in conjunction with, and in anticipation of, presenting an apparently incongruous fact (see fifth segment).

R's Voice: By summer relations between North and Rodriguez grew tense. North asked Gregg for help, telling him, "You're the only one who can control Felix." .hh Gregg and Rodriguez met in the Vice President's office that August. Rodriguez told him, "North was supplying the Contras with arms." But Gregg claims he never told Bush because the in-

formation was “not Vice Presidential.” .hh Today, Donald Gregg still works inside the White House as Vice President Bush’s trusted advisor.

Rather-as-narrator reported events that happened and Gregg’s statement to the contrary. The first report detailed a series of events that circumstantially suggested that Gregg probably told Bush of the Iran-Contra arms supply. Juxtaposed with the report of those events was the report of Gregg’s statement: “Gregg claims he never told Bush because the information was ‘not Vice Presidential’.”

Through each of the segments about Gregg, the audience was presented with a choice: to accept Gregg’s statements as true or to be skeptical and see them as problematic, or worse, false. While Gregg received three minutes of the feature’s attention, the feature and interview principally were aimed at addressing Bush’s knowledge of the Iran-Contra arms supply deal, not Gregg’s credibility. The segments on Gregg were used as part of the story: to suggest a lack of truth in the statements made by Gregg, the person who was Bush’s likely source of information on the Iran-Contra arms supply deal and who claimed that he did not tell Bush. In anticipating the live interview with Bush, the focus at the end of the feature was whether or not Gregg told Bush about the Iran-Contra arms supply deal.

Fifth Segment: Rather’s Initial Interview Question

At the conclusion of the feature, the issue addressed was whether Gregg told Bush about the Iran-Contra arms supply deal. On the one hand, the events that were reported implied that Gregg probably told Bush about it; on the other hand, Gregg “claimed” that he did not. As previously argued, Rather-as-narrator apparently attempted to persuade viewers to conclude before the interview began that Gregg probably told Bush about Iran-Contra.

Rather took up that issue in his first interview question. The way he presented it, though, might seem puzzling. Recall that as narrator of the feature, Rather worked to discredit Gregg’s version, i.e. that Gregg did *not* tell Bush. In his question, however, he presented as “factual” the very version that he had attempted to undermine in

the feature. This difference may be seen by comparing the underlined phrases in the feature and in the interview question.

R's Voice: By summer relations between North and Rodriguez grew tense. North asked Gregg for help, telling him, "You're the only one who can control Felix." .hh Gregg and Rodriguez met in the Vice President's office that August. Rodriguez told him, "North was supplying the Contras with arms." But Gregg claims he never told Bush because the information was "not Vice Presidential." .hh Today, Donald Gregg still works inside the White House as Vice President Bush's trusted advisor.

[CBS feature ends; live interview begins]

Rather: Mister Vice President, Thank you for being with us tonight, .hh Donald Gregg still serves as your trusted advisor, =he was deeply involved in running arms to the Contras and he didn't inform you. .hhh Now when President Reagan's (0.2) trusted advisor: Admiral Poindexter: (0.6) failed to inform hi:m, (0.8) the President- (0.2) fired him.hh (0.5) Why is Mister Gregg still: (.) inside the White House an' still a trusted advisor.

Why did Rather offer to Bush as an asserted "fact" (that Gregg "didn't inform" him) a version of events against which he had previously argued? Why was Rather not seen to be endorsing that "fact" anyway, despite his declarative assertion of it as true? The following analysis attempts to answer these questions.

The device that Rather used in his question was to present two apparently inconsistent "facts": (1) Gregg, at the time of the interview, still served as Bush's trusted advisor, and (2) Gregg had not informed Bush of his involvement in supplying arms to the Contras. The "fact" that Gregg still served as Bush's trusted advisor implied that Gregg was considered to be trustworthy. The "fact" that Gregg had not informed Bush of his involvement implied that he was not trustworthy. This latter implication was sharpened by Rather's presenting a report that Reagan fired Poindexter from the same position for the same offense. Rather reported the President's action apparently as a model of right action, with Bush's action (or inaction) contrastive with that "right" course.⁴ Thus, Rather's question posed an

incongruity: (1) Gregg still was Bush's trusted advisor, and (2) Gregg did not tell Bush, and therefore he should be seen as untrustworthy and should not be Bush's trusted advisor.

The incongruous "facts" were simultaneously presented to Bush for a response and to the viewers for their consideration and reconciliation. The two "facts," however, were presented in dramatically different ways. The first "fact" was simply asserted once and in an unadorned way: "...he didn't inform you." The second "fact" (that Bush still trusted Gregg) was emphasized through repetition and reinforced with multiple phrasings.

Rather previously had identified Gregg's position as "Bush's National Security Advisor" (see the first segment about Gregg). While the formulation, "Bush's National Security Advisor" or perhaps "Bush's Advisor," would have adequately referred to Gregg's position, Rather incorporated the modifier, "trusted," to indicate Bush's trusting relationship of Gregg.⁵ That purported trust, as asserted in the phrase, "trusted advisor," was emphasized through repetition. In the last sentence of the feature together with Rather's first question, the phrase, "trusted advisor," was uttered four times: (1) "Today, Donald Gregg still works inside the White House as Vice President Bush's trusted advisor."; (2) "...Donald Gregg still serves as your trusted advisor..."; (3) "Now when President Reagan's trusted advisor Admiral Poindexter..."; and (4) "Why is Mister Gregg still inside the White House and still a trusted advisor."

One way, then, that Rather supported the version of events that held that Bush trusted Gregg was by repeating the phrase, "trusted advisor." Another way was his use of multiple phrases instead of a single sparse one: "Why is Mister Gregg *still inside the White House* and *still a trusted advisor*." Rather thus implied that Gregg was an insider (and hence trusted) coupled with the phrase "trusted advisor." A third way that Rather supported the version that Bush trusted Gregg was by using a possessive pronoun instead of an indefinite one ("Donald Gregg still serves as *your* trusted advisor" (emphasis added)).⁶

To reiterate, Rather presented incongruous "facts" that implied different versions of events. One version (that Gregg did not tell Bush about the Iran-Contra arms supply deal) was supported by a simple

unadorned assertion to that effect. The other version (that Bush still trusted Gregg, with the implication that Bush probably had been informed by Gregg) was supported by repetition and adornment.

Rather's question, then, seemed designed to have viewers conclude that Bush trusted Gregg and therefore Gregg probably had informed him. If viewers judged this to be the more believable version, they would have believed that Gregg probably informed Bush, regardless of any assertions to the contrary.

It seems plausible that viewers used an interpretive frame through which they saw Rather as not authoring or endorsing the assertion that Gregg did not inform Bush of the Iran-Contra arms supply deal. The interpretive frame might have been to see Rather speaking as a reporter who was being strategic in asking a tough, challenging question. A strategy or device for asking a tough question involves an interviewer's confronting an interviewee with incongruous "facts." The interviewer might be seen to be taking the role of making visible or voicing an incongruity rather than of reporting facts.

Concluding Remarks

This paper is comprised of a preliminary study of four devices used by a journalist to engender skepticism. In this section, I comment on the four devices and suggest possible future research directions.

Juxtaposing a report of a statement with a report of a contrary actuality (device a) may be used to engender skepticism of the statement-maker's credibility. That format is used in complaints as well. A generic type of complaint is: [You/(s)he said X but the facts are Not-X]. A mismatch between what someone said and what turned out to be the case may be a complainable matter. An example of such a complaint is given below.

Ann reported the unhappy incident of not getting the food that she ordered from a restaurant and that Don reportedly wanted. Ann reported her disappointment or annoyance with a contrast between a "statement" and an actuality to the contrary.

[CG.CD:42]

Two families are having take-out Chinese food. Ann has just tasted one of the dishes.

Ann: Hey waitaminnit. They told us- (0.6) Don said get something hot'n spicy an this- they said this was and it isn't

In her narrative, Ann described three actions: Don's request for hot and spicy, the restaurant's statement indicating that they met her request, and an actuality to the contrary. Ann implicitly attributes the responsibility of the unhappy incident to the restaurant; after all, they misinformed her.

In both engendering skepticism and complaining, juxtaposing a statement with an actuality to the contrary seems to be used to overtly or covertly blame the party making the incorrect statement. Further research might be done to further explore other interactional features and uses of this device.

In the CBS feature, visual displays of observably weak and/or suspect statements apparently were used to engender and/or reinforce skepticism. The selection of which visual displays to include would make use of how people perceive weak and/or deceptive answers. Members of the culture, as observers, make judgments about whether someone is telling the truth or lying, whether a response seems honest or deceptive. There are methods used for making these judgments, though research suggests that the cues relied on (especially nonverbal cues) as indicators of deception are not well related to actual deception (Stiff & Miller, 1986).

The visual displays that would be selected to engender skepticism would be performances of statements that would be *judged* or *perceived* as suspect, perhaps regardless of the actual veracity of the statements. For engendering skepticism, a producer would want the viewers to observe the performance and conclude that the statement-maker may be exaggerating, covering up something, lying, etc. An area of future research would be to identify the interpretive practices through which viewers see statements as weak, suspicious, or deceptive.

Another device used to engender skepticism is to present contradictory statements by the same speaker (device c). On face value,

this would seem to be a strong device for engendering skepticism as the contradictory statements might cast doubt on at least one of the statements and might injure the statement-maker's credibility. An area of future study would be to investigate the kinds of accounts that are offered and the negotiations that are engaged in that work to preserve the credibility of a person who is confronted with having made contradictory statements.

A fourth device used to engender skepticism of a statement is to report a fact that is incongruous with the version of events asserted in a statement. In stating the incongruous "fact," a journalist might be seen to be strategically asking a tough question. In the service of asking a confrontational question, a journalist may act as if someone's statement is true (produce a declarative assertion), present an incongruous fact, and let the interviewee and audience deal with the incongruity. The viewers might do some sort of weighing procedure and decide which version of events is more believable.

Two directions for future research on skepticism seem exciting. The first is to look at how interactants in interpersonal relationships display, and attempt to engender, skepticism. The following segment is an example of an interactant in an interpersonal relationship displaying skepticism.

- B: Uh I would' rely on anything she found out.
 A: No [heh
 B: [Frankly, I really wouldn't.
 A: .hhhh [Well,
 B: [Her-her-her-her
 A: I don'tuh [I don't like-
 B: [Although she said she wen' into homes, why that
 doesn't mean anything, one home in each country doesn't
 mean a thing,
 A: N(h)o.
 B: And uh, uh:: she prob'ly wrote a (1.0) a paper on it

Interactants in interpersonal relationships would not necessarily feel the same constraint to use documentary reporting practices that professional journalists feel. Preliminary observations suggest that the devices used to engender skepticism in interpersonal relationships

have some similarities with, and some differences from, the devices used by journalists. An empirical study would encaver those similarities and differences.

The second direction for future research would be to examine the work practices of another professional group in which the expression of skepticism is discouraged, inhibited, or restricted. One such profession is psychotherapy. At least some psychotherapists view their judging and commenting on the correspondence between a patient's version of events and reality to be outside of their domain of work.⁷ One direction for a future study would be to examine the devices that psychotherapists use when they may be skeptical, for example, when they hear an obviously far-fetched or exaggerated account of events.

NOTES

- 1 One type of occasion in which I observed this kind of careful talk was when litigants testify. Another type of occasion might be represented in the following datum taken from Frankel (forthcoming). Frankel recorded a mother who called up a poison control center and reported, "she's thrown up on her own and says she has burning in her throat." While the mother probably did not doubt the symptom (burning in the throat), she nevertheless did not report it as, "She's thrown up on her own and has burning in her throat." Instead she reported it as her daughter's report ("and says she has..."). Merely reporting seems to be a practice that is used when individuals feel the need to be precise.
- 2 While Bennett argues that objective reporting practices are not objective but rather lead to bias, and that the adversarial role is in actuality "empty adversarialism," for the purpose of this paper we focus on the professional code itself as it bears on the conduct of journalist-interviewers' strategies.
- 3 The use of "the record" to persuade the audience of the truth of one's assertion is not limited to journalists. The following segment comes from a demonstration tape of divorce mediation.

Joan: I want him to remain with me and to receive the kind of care that a five year old boy needs. Uh, I want...I want to
John: (Interrupting) Again assuming that the father can't provide that kind of care

Joan: (Interrupting) Excuse me. Excuse me. ... I think if you look at the record and you see who's been around, you will see, and you can ask friends, relatives, whoever you like, John's business has always been his first love. (emphasis added)

- 4 In an analysis of reporters' confrontational questions during presidential press conferences, Orr (1980) coded five recurring elements of confrontational questions and looked at the interrelationship of those elements. One pattern that he found was that when reporters imply (rather than state) criticism, they tend to ask restricted-response questions. Orr argued that with implied criticism, some compensatory acts were required to convey the confrontational thrust of the expression.
In his initial question, Rather conveyed criticism implicitly: he presented "facts" from which an accusation may or should be inferred. In line with the pattern Orr proposed, Rather followed the implied criticism with a restrictive-response question: he asked Bush to explain the problematic circumstance that he had described.
- 5 Verbal forms that look like adjectives imply an agent and describe the agent's relationship to the named object. For example, in saying "the loved child," the speaker implies that there is someone (unnamed in the phrase) doing the loving of the child. In the same way, "trusted advisor" implies the agent, Bush, doing the trusting.
- 6 Orr (1980) discusses how the referent of criticism may be described clearly or ambiguously. In this case, Rather permits no ambiguity as to whose advisor Gregg is and who is doing the trusting.
- 7 This view of psychotherapists' work was offered in an informal interview on this topic that I conducted with David Shapiro, a psychotherapist.

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