Presenting Information to Change Minds by Repetitions of Massaged Depictions

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Presenters of information often massage their data or select examples to create a favorable or unfavorable impression about a particular issue. The media does this regularly by reporting on particular outliers from a population, for dramatic affect. Proponents of a set practice may conversely focus on averages, while ignoring the extremes that may exhibit an adverse effect. In sum, descriptive statistics can present the data in such a way as to leave a desired impression.

Various common and less common examples of presenting information will be considered. Particular attention is paid to how arguments are tabulated and the linguistic use presented in two separate tables. By combining both tables into one, the comparison became more evident than when they were separate. The author's purpose was stated explicitly so this was not a disguised attempt to obfuscate his intent. It does, however, illustrate the value of "looking at" presented information from different angles.

Reporting of Statistical Averages or Outliers

Twenty ordered numbers will be used to contrast their presentation for different purposes: the set x_i = 1,1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 4,4, 5, 5, 12 & 14. While one may be debate the importance of including 12 &14 in the distribution, they are usually included mathematically. So for the above n=20 numbers, the arithmetic mean is 4 (Σx_i / n = 80/20 = 4). Two other averages compensate for the data's skew. The mode, or most frequent number is 3, happening six times. The median or central number is also 3. Internet sources and basic statistics texts elaborate on this.

The point here is to emphasize how the media vs. practitioners treat the extremes in a population. Reporters seek out exceptions (12 & 14) that are "news" items (e.g. man bites dog is news, not dog bites man) *and* supports their political biases. It's bi-partisan, as most political junkies will point to biased reporting from broadcasters slanted toward the party favoring other wing's coverage (either left or right).

Practitioners use averages (4 or 3), not outliers for various reasons. Advocates of methods often sell their protocols as being universally applicable and attribute failures to faulty application.

Large organizations prefer to have interventions that can be applied across-the-board, without the need to manage exceptions. Also, leaders and managers are drawn toward codified "solutions," hence the popularity of fads and fashions. Concerns arise when an approach is oversold and causes harm; violating the guiding edict of *first, do no harm.*

Averages or outliers are overblown to support solutions to problems and social issues. They can be used in ignorance or with intent and it is the duty of the recipient to at least be aware of limitations. If one is a decision maker, it behooves them to make the effort to pursue more information.

Changing Mindsets Takes Time

Mindsets tend to be tenacious and change takes repetitions over time. Worldviews are formed from memories of experiences, largely emotional. As this resistance is psychological, it seems appropriate to include an observation written by Sigmund Freud from *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*:

> Inclined as itself is to all extremes, a group can only be excited by an excessive stimulus. Anyone who wishes to produce an effect upon it needs no logical adjustment in his arguments; he must paint in the most forcible colors, he must exaggerate, and he must **repeat the same thing again and again**.

The last line bears repeating, "repeat the same thing again and again." Although Freud was referring to groups, persons likewise persist in the status quo.

Freud and psychoanalysis also taught us about transference, later cognitive psychologists introduced schema, and the current focus is mentalism. There is a theoretical foundation to each, but for our purpose knowing points of view are tenacious is sufficient. In essence, we carry beliefs and perceptions "ingested" since birth by memories of feelings and experiences. Our past affects how new situations are perceived and how they are incorporated into our worldview.

Another way of saying this is that new experience is interpreted through the filter of what is already known. The newly acquired input has to mesh with existing beliefs. There is a certain inertia and emotional attachment to what is already understood. Much of this was inscribed emotionally. Therefore, those wishing to change minds introduce emotion into their means and methods of changing minds.

Changing Minds Through Literature

Mark Bracher advocates using literature classes as a venue for changing students' minds by multiple repetitions of readings and discussions on social justice. Bracher traces the proposition of the ideology critique approach to resurgent Marxism and second-wave feminism of the 1970s and their desire to "not simply to interpret the world but to change it."

Bracher starts from the belief that *his* views on social justice are sacrosanct and *he* advocates an approach to teaching literature designed to help students view the world as *he* sees it. He has written much on how English professors can and should use literature to change student's beliefs about social justice through selection of readings and repetitive emphasis on reinforcing themes.

Such books as *The Jungle* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provide themes that point out the plights of workers and slaves. The example below is on how a point of view is linguistically emphasized. Bracher provided two tables that encompass many aspects with somewhat subtle emotional underpinnings by the use of language. I think this becomes apparent in the merging of his two tables that I provided below.

Bracher presented the four social problems of: terrorism, crime, poverty, and addiction. After criticizing views that just focused on one variable (the person) of a multivariate (bio-psycho-social) causation, he then goes on to emphasize the single *social* variable. Linguistically, his titles are Presumed vs Root Cause and Consequent vs Resulting Action and under each category the language bias is evident.

Characterlogical Versus Sociological Causation, Resulting Emotions, and Actions Contrasting Two Single Variable Considerations Within a Multivariate Situation			
Problem TERRORISM	***Presumed Cause*** *Evil People (terrorists)* **Root Cause(s)** Identity-damaging social, economic and cultural conditions; personal traumas	***Resulting Emotion*** ***Hatred*** *of terrorists* **Resulting Emotion** **Sympathy** for terrorists' identity-damaging conditions	***Consequent*** *Action* *Wage war on and kill* **Resulting Action** Alter identity damaging conditions; provide identity repair
CRIME	***Presumed Cause*** *Bad People (criminals)* **Root Cause(s)** Personal trauma, lack of opportunity	***Resulting Emotion*** ***Anger*** *at criminals* **Resulting Emotion** **Sympathy** for criminals' traumas and limitations	***Consequent Action*** *Imprison or execute* **Resulting Action** Prevent or heal traumas; provide opportunity
POVERTY	***Presumed Cause*** *Lazy People (the Poor)* **Root Cause(s)** Lack of jobs or resources needed to hold a job	***Resulting Emotion*** ***Resentment*** *of poor* **Resulting Emotion** **Compassion** for poor	***Consequent Action*** *Make suffer or work* **Resulting Action** Provide jobs, skills, economic aid
ADDICTION	***Presumed Cause*** *Self-indulgent (addicts)* **Root Cause(s)** Genetic vulnerability, trauma, and socialization	***Resulting Emotion*** ***Contempt*** *for addicts* **Resulting Emotion** **Compassion** for addicts	***Consequent Action*** *Imprison or let suffer* **Resulting Action** Prevention or rehabilitation

Source: Mark Bracher. *JAC,* Vol. 26, No. 3/4 (2006), pp. 466-512. (Both Tables on p. 484)
"Teaching for Social Justice: Reeducation the Emotions Through Literary Study."