

The sociology of news production

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Social scientists who study the news speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand. They speak of 'constructing the news', of 'making news', of the 'social construction of reality'. 'News is what newspapermen make it' (Gieber, 1964: 173). 'News is the result of the methods newswriters employ' (Fishman, 1980: 14). News is 'manufactured by journalists' (Cohen and Young, 1973: 97). Even journalists who are critical of the daily practices of their colleagues and their own organizations find this talk offensive. I have been at several conferences of journalists and social scientists where such language promptly pushed the journalists into a fierce defence of their work, on the familiar ground that they just report the world as they see it, the facts, facts, and nothing but the facts, and yes, there's occasional bias, occasional sensationalism, occasional inaccuracy, but a responsible journalist never, never, never fakes the news.

That's not what we said, the hurt scholars respond. We didn't say journalists *fake* the news, we said journalists *make* the news:

To say that a news report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean the news, not to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity. (Tuchman, 1976: 97)

In the most elementary way, this is obvious. Journalists write the words that turn up in the papers or on the screen as stories. Not government officials, not cultural forces, not 'reality' magically

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