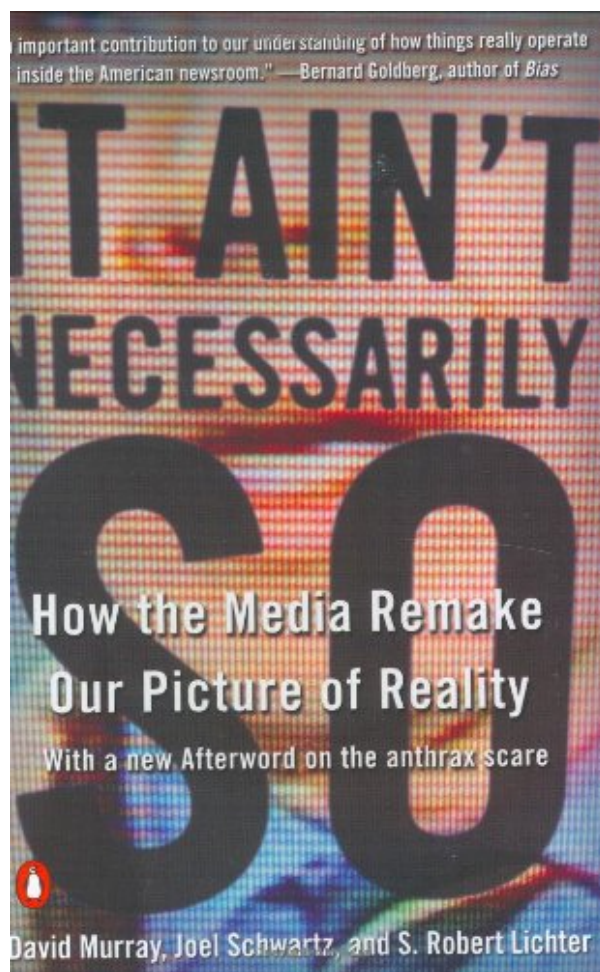


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REALITY BY DAVID MURRAY, JOEL
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From Publishers Weekly

What should readers make of the news report stating that minority mortgage applications are refused twice as often as those of white applicants, when another one claims that their applications are approved 89% as often? How are we to evaluate the various scientific reports we come across every day? Washington, D.C.-based social scientists Murray, Schwartz and Lichter (Lichter is the co-author of *Peepshow* and other books) demonstrate how journalists can put a spin on research results to make them conform to preexisting beliefs, and, alternatively, how complicated findings can be easily and innocently misinterpreted. When politicians get hold of the news reports, the qualifiers found in the original research too often disappear as the pols seize upon a potentially troublesome finding and attempt to "do something about" it. Yet, as the authors fairly point out, the fault doesn't always lie with the messenger. Sometimes researchers use proxies instead of direct measurements, using income as a proxy for poverty, for example. And often, seemingly paradoxical results confuse everyone: a decline in the number of cases of a disease can still result in an increase in the percentage of total illnesses if other ailments have declined even more. The authors do a thorough job of pointing out the fallacies and errors that underlie much reporting on science such as widespread reports that male sperm counts have decreased over the decades (a good look at the evidence, they claim, shows the conclusion was based on insufficient figures). Readers from all walks of life will acquire a more critical eye from this thought-provoking examination of how science gets served up for our early-morning reading and postprandial evening news.

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From Library Journal

The intersection of media culture with scientific research does not often result in a better-informed public, according to Murray and coauthors Joel Schwarz and S. Robert Lichter. In a series of case studies, the three authors affiliated, respectively, with the Statistical Assessment Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Center for Media and Public Affairs illustrate what happens to scientific research as it

becomes news. Scientists publish the results of their work as the first step in a process that includes dialog and further studies. Journalists seek stories that are exciting, controversial, and novel. All too often the resulting news articles are not good science. Sometimes, stories are reported prematurely, such as the 1989 coverage of nuclear cold fusion. Other times, startling statistics are offered without context, such as reporting the number of abductions of children without explaining the various categories of abduction used by the researchers. After reading this suggestive analysis, readers will come away wondering if it is possible to understand the world around us through the news media. Recommended for aspiring journalists and consumers of news. Judy Solberg, George Washington Univ. Lib., Washington, DC
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Review

"Whether it's a scientific study on day care or health care, hunger in America or the environment, once it gets into the hands of journalists—look out! You may think you're getting the straight story—but it ain't necessarily so, as this aptly named book makes clear. But beware: *It Ain't Necessarily So* may confirm your worst fears about the media. Which is precisely why it's such an important contribution to our understanding of how things really operate inside the American newsroom." —Bernard Goldberg, author of *Bias*

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Anthrax scares. Airplane crashes. The AIDS epidemic. Presidential election polls and voting results. Global warming. All these news stories require scientific savvy, first to report, and then—for the average person—to understand. *It Ain't Necessarily So* cuts through the confusion and inaccuracies surrounding media reporting of scientific studies, surveys, and statistics. Whether the problem is bad science, media politics, or a simple lack of information or knowledge, this book gives news consumers the tools to penetrate the hype and dig out the facts.

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"Wonderful reading." —Chicago Tribune

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Exceptionally well researched.

By F. Homan

The media has an awesome power to mold public opinion and shape policy. This book not only sets the record straight on various issues through its examples (worth the reading just for that), but shows how to become better news consumers. The research is impressive, the writing made the reading easy and the perspectives gave me a whole new view of what I am reading, seeing and hearing in the media. This is a real eye opener.

11 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Great book, wish there was more of it!

By G. Gonzalez

The book is very informative, and fairly concise, which is probably my only criticism of it. I would have loved to read more case studies! Actually, something like this should have a newsletter.. hmmm hey authors, how about something via email?

I was already suspicious of much I heard in the media, but this book fully opened my eyes. I will no longer just take for granted the conclusions reached by our esteemed media.

Read it, and pass it around to your friends and family, it can only serve to open their eyes as well, that is, assuming they want to open them..

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For victims of misleading media stories

By Robert Fately

Don't believe what you read in the popular press or hear on the media - that's the lesson affirmed by the authors. They review a gaggle of cases where the reportage of some issue or event was obviously filtered, through intent or incompetence, to fit the story the author wanted to state.

Rabid liberals who don't realize how far left the media has seemed to come will view this book as a subtle right-wing treatise. However, these are people who, like their reactionary counterparts, internally filter out anything that doesn't fit into their own paradigm, and they are better ignored. Nothing will help people who are too tilted in either direction, but this is not a reason to dismiss important work.

In all, this should be required reading for every newspaper and television reporter and editor and journalism student, not to mention every adult who wants to think independantly.

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