

Becky Clay
Professor Jim Watkins
Philosophy 110
5-19-2010

Gulf of Mexico Oil Leak: OC Register vs. LA Times

While many Americans assume that the major media sources are presenting unbiased, impartial facts on current events, it is quite often the case that such reporting is influenced by the personal perceptions of the news reporters and journalists themselves. The recent oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico is a prime example of this occurrence. While the explosion that caused the leak occurred nearly three weeks ago on April 20, a recent attempt over the weekend to contain the leak is the event that is breaking new headlines. Both the LA Times and the OC Register reported on the event, and both media sources delivered biased material to their readers. From their article title and throughout the report, both reputable media sources used selective wording and phrases to present, leading their readers likely to swing more one way than another.

In the LA Times, the article begins with the title, "Oil containment dome runs into problems" and then is quickly followed by an opening paragraph stating that, "the idea was fraught with unknowns and potential problems." Within the first few sentences, the reader is led to believe that the attempted oil containment was a failure before efforts even began, and possibly even that there some so-called "experts" in charge that are making poor decisions on the matter. A bit further into the article, the LA Times reporter states that, "six of the 126 people on board" were BP employees and that while "all six escaped without serious injuries," there are "eleven rig workers presumed dead." At first glance, this reporting seems clearly factual, however deeper inspection reveals a possible hidden motive. The subtle mention of the 126 workers on board immediately followed by the statement that eleven workers are "presumed dead" eludes to the fact that only a small amount of people were killed in this catastrophe. Additionally, the words "presumed dead" leads the reader open to believe that these eleven people are possibly still alive.

In the OC Register, the article on the same oil spill leads with the title, "Spill workers consider options," and then immediately refers to the containment effort as a "novel but risky attempt." When contrasted with the title of the LA Times, the title of the OC Register carries a much softer tone and a far less negative connotation. The OC Register title suggests that while the containment effort did not work as planned, the experts involved are actively working on an alternative solution. The opening sentence of the OC Register has a much more optimistic feel to it as well. Stating that the containment effort was "novel but risky" admits that the experts knew the uncertainty involved in deploying such a plan, but simultaneously gives them credit for devising such a new and innovative solution. Lastly, the OC Register reports that the rig explosion "killed eleven workers," a much more blunt phrase than used by the LA Times.

In summary, while it is important for reporters to remain as impartial and unbiased as possible when delivering news to the public, it is also vital that Americans are aware of these possible biases in the media so that they can develop accurate perceptions of current events. After comparing just two of the leading media sources and finding them both riddled with countless statements of partiality, this fact only proves truer. While it is likely that reporters do their best to remain unbiased, it is equally likely that these biases are purposely pushed through to print with the intention of swaying the public one way or another.