

Media manipulation at record burning criticized

Editor's note: All newspapers say they are committed to informing their readers. But sometimes it becomes necessary to inform readers on how and why decisions are made the way they are. Throughout the semester, News Editor Steve Miller will be addressing these issues as they occur.

Some events are especially attractive to the news desk. The record-burning ceremony Tuesday in Grand Island was such an event.

Nebraskan, the press did some manipulating of its own.

The news desk had to decide whether to run the story because a group of people were doing something newsworthy or to rebel against the manipulation involved and ignore the story.

Everybody does it

Nothing good can be said about manipulation of the media but the fact remains that it is always with us. Politicians manipulate the press, religious leaders do it, people make livings by manipulating the news for other people and companies have been built around the idea.

Often, when we allow ourselves to be manipulated, we do the public a disservice. We jeopardize the independence needed to do our job. Stories manipulated into print often are one-sided, weighted heavily by philosophy and serve no purpose but to get a name into print.

The media have many reasons to avoid manipulation. But avoidance can go too far. The dangerous part of dealing with manipulation is deciding whether the story or event is merely advertising or whether it really is news.

Some papers come just short of banning stories concerning the Moral Majority. It's a touchy situation. Does continuous coverage gain or hurt news credibility?

The Moral Majority is only one example. I believe tactics used by the Rev. Jerry Falwell were especially effective. For a time he was covered in the news every day. There must have been an excruciating moment for many editors when they realized how far they had been sucked up by the maneuvers of Falwell and his public relations people.

But legitimate news about the Moral Majority may now be left out. Again, that is a disservice.

There was some manipulation by the church group, but that does not diminish the fact that the people involved were burning album covers and breaking albums with a hammer because they believe they cannot be both Christians and rock 'n' roll lovers.

I think that is newsworthy.

But I regret the media manipulating the event. The media never should be allowed to interfere with the natural course of such events.

It is hard for people to act naturally and intelligently when television crews with cameras and lights and photographers and reporters with notepads swarm around them. It is difficult for me to believe that members of the media asked members of the church group to start earlier — so daylight would light the scene for the cameras — and asked them to repeat actions for the cameras — action is better for pictures.

I do not like manipulation but I do not regret covering the record burning. I do regret performances by members of the media.

steve miller commentary

It was a chance to get some good photographs, an interesting story and a little color in the news section of the *Daily Nebraskan*.

Not all stories have that much to offer. Many of them simply have to be done.

The problem with the record burning story was that it had the smell of a media event — an event staged only for publicity. Media events often are the closest thing to fiction the news desk of any paper will run. They are, to some degree, fabricated.

I have no doubt the people involved were sincere. I'm sure they were. But they were manipulating the media to some degree. Worse yet, as reported in Wednesday's *Daily*

Foreign teaching...

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Meanwhile, students of foreign teaching assistants should make an effort to meet the teacher on a personal level, Sharifi said.

"Students should always try to talk to their teachers anyway," he said. "If they can go in and just talk to him or her for an hour or so, they will become accustomed to the person's dialect, and in the process get to know the person," Sharifi said.

Most department chairmen will hire the student that has the "greater mind," he said. The chairman will hire one who will contribute the most to the university, he said.

"Because of that, most of the foreign students, both graduate and undergraduate, are bright compared to the average American student," Sharifi said. "They are both usually the cream of the crop."

Burning and breaking newsworthy

In the case of the record-burning event, I considered what I thought to be the sincerity of the people involved.

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