

The Adversary Relationship in Academe: A Test

By David B. Sachsman

► The relationship between the press and government in modern society is one of both cooperation and conflict. James Reston has said, "the people who write the news are not the enemies but the allies of officials," but he readily admits that conflict, too, is inherent in the relationship, quoting George Reedy, former White House press secretary, as follows:

. . . there must be a divergency of viewpoints between the political leader, who assesses public communications in terms of help or hindrance toward a worthy goal; and the newspaperman, who assesses public communications in terms of their consonance with what he regards as reality . . .¹

Thus, government officials and reporters are engaged in an adversary relationship as well as a cooperative relationship. But when do they cooperate, and when do they act as adversaries? In nations where the government controls the press, an adversary relationship is inconceivable. But nations which have developed along libertarian lines contain the basic prerequisite for the adversary relationship, a free press. And libertarian theory does not merely imply a free press; it also implies the right to report fully on government activities and to act as a watchdog and critic of government.²

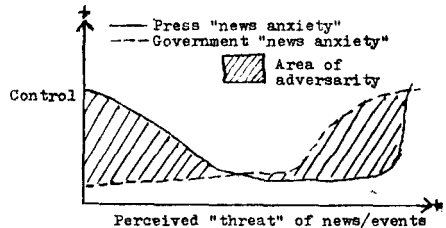
A Model of Adversarity. William B. Blankenburg has taken the first steps toward the construction of a "model" of the adversary relationship in his unpublished paper, "Toward a Theory of Adversarity."³ He assumes that both

government and the press feel anxiety over news and as a result exercise certain controls. He contends that "government is naturally sensitive (anxious) toward news and events that are potentially damaging either to itself or to the community it governs . . ." and, thus, "exerts certain controls in the face of threat." The press, too, exerts controls of news in the face of anxiety by selecting out those news stories too "dull" to print, and like government, it has been known to impose control in the case of a strong threat to the community.⁴

Blankenburg terms the controls applied by the press as "restriction" (censorship, etc.), "initiation" (creating news), and "facilitation" (printing the news it receives), and government controls as "restriction" (censorship, etc.), "regulation" (setting "release dates," requiring accreditation, etc.), and "facilitation" (giving the news to the press).⁵

FIGURE 1

The Adversary Relationship Between Government and Press



Blankenburg uses "perceived threat of news" as the independent variable, and "applied control" as the dependent variable.

This study has been designed to test the applicability of the model to the

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¹ James Reston, *The Artillery of the Press* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. xii.

² William A. Hachten, "The Press as Reporter and Critic of Government," *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY*, 40:12-18 (Winter 1963).

³ Unpublished paper, Stanford University, 1967, pp. 8-12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

TABLE 1

Mean Differences Between University Administrators and Student Editors

<i>News/Events</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Editors</i>	<i>Chi Square</i>
Newspaper should print story about:			
1. President's birthday	6.20	6.21	p > .1
2. Alumni visit	4.57	5.93	p < .005
3. Award to administrator	3.17	4.21	p < .05
4. Sale of jewelry	3.86	4.10	p > .1
5. Football	2.03	2.00	p > .1
6. Student government election	1.00	1.00	p > .1
University should withhold information about:			
7. Basketball	7.00	6.69	p > .1
8. Percentage Negroes employed	6.04	6.89	p < .01
9. Professor fired, selling drugs	5.00	5.79	p < .05
10. Athletes' academic standing	4.63	5.97	p < .05
11. Selection of new president	2.21	4.86	p < .005
12. Purchase of land by university	1.50	4.14	p < .005

relationship between university administrators and student newspaper editors.

Method

A questionnaire was mailed in April, 1968, to 50 presidents of state universities (one in each state), and to the 50 student newspaper editors of those same state universities.

The questionnaire asked administrators and editors their opinions concerning identical issues on identical seven-point scales. The larger the difference between their attitudes, the greater the degree of adversarity between the two institutions concerning those issues.

Results

Thirty university administrators and 29 student editors returned the questionnaire. The mean differences between administrators and editors are shown in Table 1. The issues are arranged along what Blankenburg calls the "threat" dimension in the model of adversarity between administrators and editors shown in Figure 2.

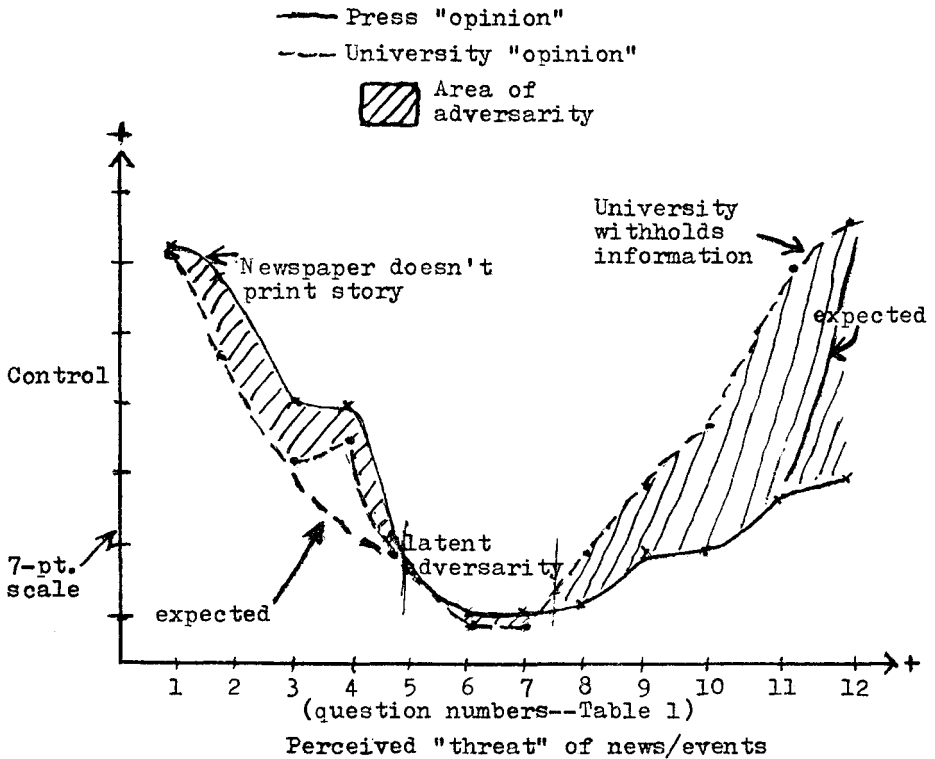
The model of adversarity in a

university generally corresponds to Blankenburg's theoretical conception of the relationship between government and the press. It was found, however, that university administrators agreed with student editors that a story about the university president's birthday should not be printed. Apparently, administrators have a degree of "news sense" and are not out to get every "favorable" story into print. Thus, the far left of the model shows agreement between administrators and editors as to the degree of "control" that should be used by student newspapers.

The editors did not think stories about visiting alumni or about administrators who receive local awards should be printed. The administrators differed significantly in the direction of printing such stories. Here we see the two institutions as adversaries: for example, the administration sends a "press release," and the newspaper decides not to run a story. In the middle of the model, administrators and editors agreed that no controls should be applied concerning such news events as student government elections.

FIGURE 2

The Adversary Relationship Between University Administrators and Student Editors



But as the perceived "threat" of the news events increased on the right side of the model, the university administrators increased their desire to withhold information from the student press. The editors, on the other hand, felt that information concerning the selection of a new university president or the purchase of land by the university should not be withheld. Concerning "threatening" news events, then, the administrators and editors would be engaged in an adversary relationship as

the editors demanded information that the universities refused to supply.

The results show that university administrators and student newspaper editors differ in opinion as to which news stories should appear in print and as to which news stories should be withheld from the press and that this difference increases as the threat value of news events increases. The data support the existence of an adversary relationship closely resembling the Blankenrug model.

Government and Media Mistrust Public

► I think it is a mistake to oversimplify the news control issue and dangerous to underestimate its implications for society as a whole. Even more serious, however, is the tendency of many government and media leaders to mistrust the public and to belittle its intelligence and common sense.—DR. EDWARD M. GLICK, The American Institute for Political Communication.