What I Learned about Assessing People
Who Have Been Convicted of Sex Offenses from
the Presidents of the United States of America

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A decade and a half ago I attended a presentation by Joseph LoPiccolo, President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex. He addressed an audience of sex therapists, speaking about people who have been convicted of sex offenses. In the ensuing years I have forgotten much of his message, but I clearly recall a pithy sentence he asked us all to remember whenever our work brought us in contact with people who have been convicted of sex offenses: “They lie.”

My work with people who have been convicted of sex offenses has not dispelled LoPiccolo’s cautionary words, but it has broadened my perspective. A current book by syndicated columnist and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy provides a framework for communicating this perspective. The book is Norman Solomon’s War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death (Solomon, 2005). Herein we consider the words of presidents and pundits, mental-health workers, probation officers, parole boards, and people who have been convicted of sex offenses. An important perspective for assessing people who have been convicted of sex offenses emerges.

Presidents and Pundits

In this section we consider some statements made by presidents of the United States of America and members of their administrations and their military, as conveyed directly and/or reported by American media.

Prologue

Daniel Ellsberg described how he “watched and marveled” when his boss, John T. McNaughton, a key Pentagon official on Vietnam policies, spoke to reporters: “As he got into areas where he had to be especially untruthful or elusive, his Pekin, Illinois, accent got

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broader until he sounded like someone discussing corn at a country fair or standing at the rail of a riverboat. You looked for hayseed in his cuffs. He simply didn’t mind looking and sounding like a hick in the interests of dissimulation. … Reporters would tell me how ‘open’ my boss was, compared with others they ran into, this after I had listened to an hour of whoppers. It became clear to me that journalists had no idea, no clue, even the best of them, just how often and how egregiously they were lied to” (Ellsberg, 2002, p. 41).

The following statement from top aide H. R. Haldeman’ to President Nixon was captured by Oval Office tapes in June 1971 on the day after the New York Times started publishing the Pentagon Papers: “To the ordinary guy, all this is a bunch of gobbledygook. But out of the gobbledygook comes a very clear thing: you can’t trust the government; you can’t believe what they say; and you can’t rely on their judgment. And the implicit infallibility of presidents, which has been an accepted thing in America, is badly hurt by this, because it shows that people do things the president wants to do even though it’s wrong, and the president can be wrong” Ellsberg, 2002, p. 413; Solomon, 2005, p. 38). Haldeman attributed the point to Donald Rumsfeld,9 then a young staffer at the White House.

**Lyndon Johnson**

The Dominican Republic was ruled by a dictator, Rafael Trujillo,10 for three decades until his assassination in 1961. The next year, Juan Bosch11 was elected president in free elections, but seven months later he was deposed by a military coup. A popular uprising appeared to be on the verge of restoring Bosch to power in 1965, until President Johnson sent in the U.S. Marines. Johnson went on television to tell us that military action was necessary to rescue Americans. At the time, there were nearly 2,000 U.S. citizens in the Dominican Republic. But before the Marines arrived, 1,856 of those Americans had already been evacuated. A newspaper columnist, Jan Glidewell,12 who had participated in the invasion as a young Marine, later remarked, “Johnson said we were being sent in to ‘protect American lives.' Nobody I spoke to ever saw an American who wasn’t either wearing a military uniform or a Red Cross armband” (Solomon, 2005, p. 3). Yet President Johnson declared that “99 percent of our reason for going in was to try to provide protection for these American lives and the lives of other nationals”13 (Solomon, pp. 4-5).

On April 30, 1965, Johnson told a television audience about “signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control,” and two days later he told us, again on television, that “what began as a popular democratic revolution, committed to democracy and social justice, very shortly moved and was taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of Communist conspirators” (Solomon, 2005, p. 3). When Johnson’s aides conferred with CIA staff members about those claims, “we were given incredibly flimsy evidence, such as that one Bosch confederate had been seen in an apartment building suspected of housing a Communist cell. It proved nothing” (Solomon, p. 2). Yet

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7 Image is from ap.grolier.com/...article/picturepopup.html
8 Image is from www.catfun.net/blog/archives/2004_12.html
9 Images of the Presidents are from the official White House website http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/index2.html
10 Image is from www.27febrero.com/trujillo.htm
12 Image is from http://www.sptimes.com/columns/
13 Originally quoted by Murrey Marder, Washington Post, October 30, 1983.
20,000 American troops invaded the country. A subsequent, careful review by the New York Times concluded “One point on which there is little controversy among Dominicans … is that the reasons Mr. Johnson gave publicly for intervening seem to have no basis in fact”14 (Solomon, p. 6). Even one of the most prominent Dominican military leaders against the efforts to reinstate Bosch to the presidency said he never believed the claims that American lives were in danger or that the Dominican Republic was at risk of becoming another Cuba.15

Although Latin American diplomats viewed the 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic as "nothing short of a scandal" (Solomon, p. 5), the U.S. Congress and people in the U.S. (according to public opinion polls) supported the war by immense margins (Solomon, p. 6).

Meanwhile, the United States was at war in Vietnam.

In general, the more a president persists with making war, the more he touts his commitment to peace. After the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the Johnson administration – eager to reassure Congress and the public - filled every year with fervent homilies to peace while heightening the carnage in Vietnam. A few examples:

1964 “Our one desire – our one determination – is that the people of Southeast Asia be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way.” – President Johnson

1965 “Our commitment to strengthening the peace has not weakened.” – Vice President Humphrey

1966 “I do not genuinely believe that there’s any single person anywhere in the world that wants peace as much as I want it.” – President Johnson

1967 “There is no quick and easy way to peace – it must and will be built out of the cumulative acts of men and women who dedicate their lives to the service of their fellow men – and therefore to the service of God.” – Vice President Humphrey

1968 “But our goal is peace – and peace at the earliest possible moment. … I wish – with all of my heart – that the expenditures that are necessary to build and to protect our power could all be devoted to the programs of peace. But until world conditions permit, and until peace is assured, America’s might – and America’s bravest sons who wear our Nation’s uniform – must continue to stand guard for all of us – as they gallantly do tonight in Vietnam and other places around the world.” – President Johnson (Solomon, 2005, pp. 36-37)

Although they claimed to desire peace, the Johnson administration escalated the war in Vietnam while manufacturing the need to do so. Via the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Congress gave President Johnson authority “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” And headlines in major American newspapers on August 5, 1964, clearly stated that “armed attacks against the forces of the United States” had been perpetrated: “American Planes Hit North Vietnam After 2d Attack on Our Destroyers; Move Taken to Halt New Aggression”16 and “President Johnson has ordered retaliatory action against gunboats and ‘certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam’ after renewed attacks against American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin”17 (Solomon, 2005, pp. 103-104).

The official story was that North Vietnamese torpedo boats launched an “unprovoked attack” against a U.S. destroyer on “routine patrol” in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2 – and that North

16 Washington Post
17 New York Times
Vietnamese PT boats followed up with a “deliberate attack” on a pair of U.S. ships two days later. But the truth was very different. Rather than being on a routine patrol August 2, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* was actually engaged in aggressive intelligence-gathering maneuvers – to sync with coordinated attacks. “The day before, two attacks on North Vietnam [by U.S. forces] ... had taken place,” wrote scholar Daniel C. Hallin. Those assaults were “part of a campaign of increasing military pressure on the North that the United States had been pursuing since early 1964” (Hallin, 1989, p. 16).

On the night of August 4 [1964], the Pentagon stated that a second attack by North Vietnamese PT boats had occurred earlier that day in the Tonkin Gulf – a report cited by President Johnson as he went on national TV that evening to announce a momentous escalation in the war: air strikes against North Vietnam. But Johnson ordered U.S. bombers to “retaliate” for a North Vietnamese torpedo attack that never happened.

Prior to the U.S. air strikes, top officials in Washington had reason to doubt that any August 4 attack by North Vietnam had occurred. Cables from the U.S. task force commander in the Gulf of Tonkin, Captain John J. Herrick, referred to “freak weather effects,” “almost total darkness,” and an “overeager sonarman” who “was hearing ship’s own propeller beat.” Herrick advised against jumping to conclusions: “Review of action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. ... Suggest complete evaluation before any further action” (Hallin, 1989, p. 17). One of the navy pilots flying overhead that night was squadron commander James Stockdale. “I had the best seat in the house to watch that event,” he recalled many years later, “and our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets – there were no [North Vietnamese] PT boats there. Not a conspiracy, but a hysterical mix-up. I reported that, and Washington received it promptly, but we went to war anyway.”18 (Solomon, 2005, p. 104).

Flimsy evidence reported as firm fact, first by the government and then by unquestioning media, is a theme that recurs with devastating results. This time, in 1964, “By reporting official claims as absolute truths, American journalism opened the floodgates for the Vietnam War” (Solomon, 2005, p. 104).

At the time of his second inauguration in 1973, President Nixon told us, “Because of America’s bold initiatives, 1972 will be long remembered as the year of the greatest progress since the end of World War II toward a lasting peace in the world” (Solomon, 2005, p. 40). But compare those public words of the President with this April 25, 1972, noontime dialogue among Nixon, White House press secretary Ron Ziegler,19 and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger,20 as captured by the White House taping system:

*President:* “How many did we kill in Laos?”

*Ziegler:* “Maybe ten thousand – fifteen?”

*Kissinger:* “In the Laotian thing, we killed about ten, fifteen. ...”

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19 Image is from [http://www.biwa.ne.jp/~presley/celeb/](http://www.biwa.ne.jp/~presley/celeb/)
President: “See, the attack in the North that we have in mind ... power plants, whatever’s left – POL [petroleum], the docks. ... And I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?”

Kissinger: “About two hundred thousand people.”

President: “No, no, no ... I’d rather use the nuclear bomb. Have you got that, Henry?”

Kissinger: “That, I think, would just be too much.”

President: “The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? ... I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christsakes.”

Nine days later, while conferring with Kissinger, NSA Deputy Assistant Al Haig, and Treasury Secretary John Connally, President Nixon said: “I’ll see that the United States does not lose. I’m putting it quite bluntly. I’ll be quite precise. South Vietnam may lose. But the United States cannot lose. Which means, basically, I have made the decision. Whatever happens to South Vietnam, we are going to cream North Vietnam. ... For once, we’ve got to use the maximum power of this country ... against this shit-ass little country: to win the war. We can’t use the word ‘win.’ But others can” (Ellsberg, 2002, pp. 418-419; Solomon, 2005, pp. 39-40).

Gerald Ford

Of course, many U.S. Presidents have told the truth many times. Some of those times occur by default, when the administration cannot figure out how to lie its way out of an embarrassing moment: “Soon after Ford takes office, he sets about wrapping up America’s involvement in Vietnam. During the final hours of the war there is a small crisis: Kissinger’s staff tells the press that all Americans have been evacuated from Vietnam, only to learn hours later that the last Americans have only just left. So they need to sort of tell people, ‘Well, now all Americans are out.’ [But] how do you do that when you just said that four hours ago? And Kissinger’s staff is thinking about, ‘Well, maybe we won’t say this or maybe we’ll fudge it or something.’ And [Donald] Rumsfeld [who] is White House chief of staff, says, ‘There have been so many lies during this war. Let’s finally tell the truth.’ ”

Jimmy Carter

Remember My Lai, where U.S. soldiers massacred about 300 Vietnamese civilians in March 1968? How many U.S. villages or towns underwent similar assaults? How many U.S. civilians were killed in their homes by bullets or bombs? How much of the U.S. landscape was ravaged by war? Nevertheless, on March 24, 1977, then two months into his presidency,

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21 Image is from www.politicallibrary.org/ghi.htm
22 Image is from http://www.answers.com/topic/john-connally
23 Interview with James Mann on June 30, 2004; Frontline: Rumsfeld’s War. Downloaded 10/2/05 from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/pentagon/etc/cronfeld.html
24 Image is from http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerre_du_Vi%C3%A1t_Nam
Jimmy Carter explained why the U.S. government had no responsibility to provide aid to Vietnam: “The destruction was mutual” (Solomon, 2005, p. 205).

**Ronald Reagan**

In October 1983, two days after a truck bomb killed 241 Americans at the U.S. Marine headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon, President Reagan launched an invasion that became a military triumph. Opinion polling showed a net gain in popularity for the President, who told us that the war was to save American lives and to evict the government that Reagan called “a brutal group of leftist thugs” (Solomon, 2005, p. 21). It was not immediately clear whether those justifications for war were genuine or not, because the White House barred reporters from the entire country. The only pictures available had been made by Defense Department photographers with the U.S. invasion force. Nevertheless, it was clear that the U.S. had not retaliated against Lebanon but had attacked Grenada. The secret war, considered “antithetical to an open society” and “absolutely outrageous” obscured our ability to assess the truth of Reagan’s “invasion-day claim that the factor ‘of overriding importance’ was the need to protect ‘innocent lives, including up to a thousand Americans, whose personal safety is, of course, my paramount concern’” (Solomon, 2005, p. 21).

The poster children for that U.S. invasion were medical students who comprised most of the U.S. citizens on the islands. The Reagan administration told us, and the media reported, that the U.S. attack was necessary to rescue those students. But State Department officials sent to Grenada two days before the invasion found no reason to believe that the Grenada government would harm the students: “Only 100 to 150 students wanted to leave, and their fear was prompted by the threat of a U.S. attack.” A telegram from 500 of the students’ parents sent to President Reagan asked Reagan not to invade Grenada because they did not want their children endangered! “The State Department had been purposely avoiding options for a peaceful evacuation. … The medical students, in fact, were part of the administration’s plan for invading Grenada. It needed the appearance of their being in danger as a pretext to remove Grenada’s government. … Reporters understood that the administration had invented facts to justify the Grenada landing. The New York Times [November 6, 1983] wrote that the administration put out ‘deliberate distortions and knowingly false statements of fact.’ Time magazine [November 7, 1983] called the administration ‘disingenuous in its public explanations,’ and said that ‘American aims’ went ‘well beyond those stated.’ Most media coverage, however, accepted the administration statements at face value. The television networks broadcast and rebroadcast scenes of the medical students kissing the ground at U.S. airports after their return flights, giving the impression that our forces had saved them from certain danger” (Quigley, 1992, pp. 204-210; Solomon, 2005, p. 21).

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26 Image is from [http://i-cias.com/e/o/beirut.htm](http://i-cias.com/e/o/beirut.htm)
27 Image is from [www.wind-borne.com/Pictures200207_WindwardIssl.htm](http://www.wind-borne.com/Pictures200207_WindwardIssl.htm)
29 Image is from [www.nostalgiacentral.com/years/1983/grenada.htm](http://www.nostalgiacentral.com/years/1983/grenada.htm)
George H. W. Bush

In August 1988, as sitting Vice President campaigning to become President, George H. W. Bush assured the American people and the world, “I hate war. I love peace. And I am not going to let anyone take it away from us” (Solomon, p. 35). Sixteen months later he ordered the invasion of Panama.

U.S. troops invaded Panama in December 1989. A December 26 New York Times story began, “The United States military headquarters here, which has portrayed General Manuel Antonio Noriega30 as an erratic, cocaine-snorting dictator who prays to voodoo gods, announced today that the deposed leader wore red underwear and availed himself of prostitutes” (Solomon, pp. 9-10). The Pentagon’s news release also included: “The story of this truly evil man continues to unfold with bizarre evidence of his incredible life style” (Solomon, p. 10).

Two days into the invasion the U.S. military announced that Noriega had a big stash of white powder (official military spokespersons described it first as a 50-pound and then a 120-pound supply) and “We’re sure it’s cocaine” (Solomon, p. 20). The Boston Globe reported that U.S. soldiers “found the cocaine, worth over $1 million” (Solomon, p. 20). Thirty-two days later the Pentagon retracted the statement: “It was not cocaine,” but tamales wrapped in banana leaves.

A military spokesperson told us that “General Noriega kept his Brazilian witches here. This was the brewery for the witches, if you will,” which contained “among other things, a vat of blood, animal entrails and other evidence of dabbling in the widespread Caribbean voodoo-like cult of Santeria” (Solomon, p. 17). “The Army apparently just missed capturing four Brazilian witchcraft specialists, said Lieutenant Curtis Vinyard” (Solomon, p. 18).

So, did the U.S. send thousands of troops into Panama, killing mostly civilians in an invasion deployed by the vast majority of the Organization of American States, because Noriega engaged in voodoo-like practices and wore red underwear? The White House provided four reasons why President Bush considered the invasion necessary: “to protect the lives of Americans in Panama, to restore the democratic process there, to preserve the Panama Canal treaties, and to apprehend Noriega”31 (Solomon, p. 15). But none of these reasons holds up to scrutiny. There was no evidence that American lives or the Panama Canal were in danger prior to the invasion.32 The democratic process had been thwarted for years while Noriega had a positive personal relationship with CIA director William Casey,33 and it was known during those years that Noriega was involved in drug trafficking. When Noriega was indicted in Miami in 1988 for drug trafficking, all but one of the charges were related to activities that took place prior to 1984. As long as Noriega served what the U.S. President considered to be U.S. interests, the White House supported Noriega, as it did in summer 1986: “The Reagan administration told Congress Thursday that Panama is providing useful cooperation against drug trafficking and money laundering and sought to dissociate itself from a published report alleging personal involvement by the chief of Panamanian armed forces [Noriega] in such activities”34 (Solomon, p. 11).

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30 Image is from kobra.web-log.nl/
32 There was evidence that some Americans had been harmed by some Panamanians, but they appeared to be spontaneous incidents rather than being preplanned by any Panamanian authorities.
33 Image is from http://www.voltairenet.org/article123666.html
But when Noriega was no longer abetting the U.S.’s illegal support of the Nicaraguan Contras, the U.S. went from supporting Noriega to attacking his country and deposing him. “The U.S. government knew that Noriega was involved in drug trafficking since at least 1972 … but he stayed on the CIA payroll. … He was a gangster and a drug peddler—that was known all along.” But the U.S. did not act to invade Panama and depose Noriega until he was no longer “our boy, helping with the U.S. war against Nicaragua, stealing elections with U.S. approval and generally serving U.S. interests” (Chomsky, 1993, p. 51).

President Bush deliberately misled the American people and the world a) when he said that he invaded Panama to protect American lives, b) when he said, “America does not seek conflict, nor do we seek to chart the destiny of other nations,” and c) when he said, “The mission of our troops is wholly defensive.”35 Prior to the isolated incidents of violence to which he claimed to be reacting, “military officers posing as tourists had spread through Panama to reconnoiter locations they planned to attack. Fred Hoffman,36 a former Pentagon official, referring to classified planning documents for the invasion, said the administration ‘had a plan’ and was ‘just waiting for an excuse to use it’” (Quigley, 1992, pp. 249-250; Solomon, 2005, p. 24).37

William Jefferson Clinton

For several nights in December 1998, the United States and Britain fired hundreds of cruise missiles at Iraq, with the rationale that the regime in Baghdad had not cooperated enough with the U.N. weapons inspectors. Saddam Hussein38 claimed that weapons inspectors were infiltrated with U.S. spies who were gaining intelligence information that could be put to use in a war. Clinton administration officials insisted that no such thing was going on. So, did you believe the President of the United States or a man that the prior U.S. President had called “a little Hitler”?39

“U.S. Spied on Iraq Under U.N. Cover, Officials Now Say. … United States officials said today that American spies had worked undercover on teams of United Nations arms inspectors ferreting out secret Iraqi weapons programs. … By being part of the team, the Americans gained a first-hand knowledge of the investigation and a protected presence inside Baghdad.”40 “Reports that the United States used the United Nations weapons inspectors in Iraq as cover for spying on Saddam Hussein are dimming any chances that the inspection system will survive.”41 “That American spies have operations in Iraq should be no surprise. That the spies are using the United Nations as a cover is deplorable. … Saddam Hussein’s numerous complaints that U.N. inspection teams included American spies were apparently not imaginary. … [U. S. espionage operatives] planted eavesdropping devices in hopes of monitoring forces that guarded Mr. Hussein as well as searching for hidden arms stockpiles”42 (Solomon, 2005, p. 31).

36 Image is from www.wiu.edu/release.sphp?id=854
37 The quote from Fred Hoffman appeared in Newsweek, June 25, 1990.
38 Image is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War
That news was turned on its head four years later in President Bush’s March 17, 2003, speech just before the U.S. invaded Iraq: “Over the years, U.N. weapons inspectors have been threatened by Iraqi officials, electronically bugged and systematically deceived” (Solomon, 2005, p. 32, emphasis added). But Hans Blix, head of the U.N. weapons inspection team, reports that weapons inspections were progressing. On that very day, March 17, 2003, weapons inspectors in Iraq “supervised the destruction of two Al Samoud 2 missiles, bringing the total number destroyed to 72. They conducted a private interview with a biological scientist, bringing the total number of such private interviews to 11” (Blix, 2004, p. 7). U.N. weapons inspectors had to rush out of Iraq to avoid the risk of being bombed by the Americans. All went well, and the inspectors were even able to take their sensitive equipment with them. “The Iraqis had been most helpful throughout the [evacuation] operation” (Blix, 2004, p. 10).

“Had there been any denials of access? Any cat-and-mouse play? No. Had the inspections been going well? Yes. True, they had not resolved any of the open disarmament issues, but in my view they had gone much too well to be abandoned and [to] justify war. While the Iraqis had become frantic, though not very successful, about finding evidence of their own innocence, the U.S. had become frantic – but also not very successful – about finding convincing evidence of Iraqi guilt” (Blix, 2004, p. 11). As he listened to U.S. spokespeople talk about a “moment of truth” arriving, Blix thought it would be more apt to say “The first casualty of war is truth.” “Lying is not a part of diplomacy – at least not of good diplomacy” (Blix, 2004, p. 9).

On March 27, 2003, when President Bush declared to the Iraqis, “The day of your liberation is near,” Baghdadis recalled Major General Sir Stanley Maude’s promise to Baghdad as he led the British invasion in March 1917: “Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy, and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task, I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions in which British troops operate; but our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.” The ensuing British colonial rule lasted 15 years (Shadid, 2005, pp. 17, 388, 409).

At the time of this writing, we do not know how long the U.S. occupation of Iraq will last. We do know that the Pentagon’s claims about “precision bombing” were exaggerated. When Secretary of State Colin Powell was asked about reports that the U.S. military had bombed a hospital maternity ward in Baghdad the night before, he did not deny it. Powell said, “As you look at these scenes on your television sets, I think you will realize that we will be as careful as possible, surgical as possible, as we can be in going after command and control targets that support the military forces of Iraq” (Glantz, 2005, pp. 13-14). The blame for the destruction of the hospital does not fall solely on the U.S.A. “A Syrian fighter had taken up a position on the street and started firing his machine gun at an American tank. The American tank fired back with its cannon, destroying the hospital. This was not simple barbarity on the American side” (Glantz, 2005, p. 17).

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44 Image is from [http://www.answers.com/topic/hans-blix](http://www.answers.com/topic/hans-blix)
45 Image is from [http://www.1914-1918.net/whoswho.htm](http://www.1914-1918.net/whoswho.htm)
46 Image is from [http://www.sptimes.com/2003/02/06/Worldandnation/Powell_s_hard_sell_st.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2003/02/06/Worldandnation/Powell_s_hard_sell_st.shtml)
“Our air forces continue to strike regime command and control and military formations virtually all over the country with precision munitions and precision application of those munitions,” Gen. Tommy Franks, 47 U.S. Central Command chief, said in a briefing at his regional headquarters in Qatar on March 24. 48

Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski 49 (3/21/03) [reported on NBC] that “every weapon is precision guided -- deadly accuracy designed to kill only the targets, not innocent civilians.” On the Today show the next morning (3/22/03), Miklaszewski reiterated his point: “More than a thousand bombs and missiles were dropped on Baghdad, three times the number from the entire Gulf War. And this time, they’re all precision-guided, deadly accurate, designed to kill only the targets, not innocent civilians.” That same day, reporter Chris Jansing 50 sized up “the first daylight pictures of severe damage from yesterday’s massive and incredibly precise air assault on the Iraqi capital.” But on-the-ground reports from the scene of the bombings would be necessary before making any definitive claims about “surgical” strikes. 51

On-the-ground reports showed that the missiles did, indeed, kill civilians. 52 “The major causes of death before the invasion were myocardial infarction, cerebrovascular accidents, and other chronic disorders whereas after the invasion violence was the primary cause of death. Violent deaths were widespread … and were mainly attributed to coalition forces. Most individuals reportedly killed by coalition forces were women and children. The risk of death from violence in the period after the invasion was 58 times higher … than in the period before the war. Interpretation: Making conservative assumptions, we think that about 100,000 excess deaths or more have happened since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. 53 Violence accounted for most of the excess deaths and air strikes from coalition forces accounted for most violent deaths” (Roberts, Lafta, Garfield, Khudhairi, & Burnham, 2004).

We should have known not to trust military claims of “precision bombs” targeting only bad guys and sparing civilians. “In World War I, 15 percent of the fatalities were civilians, with that proportion rising to 65 percent in World War II” (Ehrenreich, 1997, p. 227; quoted in Solomon, 2005, p. 281). “In the wars of the 1990s, civilian deaths constituted between 75 and 90 percent of all war deaths” (Hedges, 2003, p. 7; quoted in Solomon, 2005, p. 193).

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49 Image is from http://www.barberusa.com/politics/miklaszewski_jim.html
50 Image is from: msnbc.msn.com/id/3080424/
51 Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, March 26, 2003. Downloaded 10/4/05 from http://www.fair.org/activism/nbc-bombs.html Glantz (2005) reports that shortly after the fall of Baghdad he was struck by how much of the city was undamaged. He credited the attempt by the U.S. to hit only military targets. He noted, though, that not all missiles were “precise” or “surgically” accurate; some were so far off that they missed the country entirely, one landing in Syria, one in Iran, and three in Turkey. Also, electrical and telephone centers were purposely bombed; thus many Iraqis were without electricity, clean water, telephone service, and gasoline (due to insufficient electricity to refine the abundant oil). The destruction of electrical and telephone centers was true to the letter of the claims of precise targeting, but contrary to the spirit, as it has caused continuing suffering of the Iraqi people. The continuing lack of basic services has been one of the major sources of frustration that has eventually led ordinary Iraqis to sympathize with, and increasingly to join, the insurgency. 52 For detailed on-the-scene accounts, see Glantz (2005) and Shadad (2005). For words and pictures, see Marc Herold’s “When Precision Bombing Isn’t” at http://www.courser.org/stories/mythofprecision.html
53 by October 2004.
At the time of this writing (October 2005), a current ad lists six alleged lies that are attributed to Bush and his administration. They are

1. “We know where the [WMDs] are.” – Donald Rumsfeld
2. “We found the weapons of mass destruction.” – George W. Bush
3. “There’s no question that Saddam Hussein had al-Qaeda ties.” – George W. Bush
4. “We will, in fact, be greeted as liberators. I think it will go relatively quickly, in weeks rather than months.” – Dick Cheney
5. “We believe Saddam has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons.” – Dick Cheney
6. “We do know that [Saddam] is actively pursuing a nuclear option.” – Condoleezza Rice

A self-described neutral organization reviewed those six purported lies and concluded, “Looking back, it is now clear that much of what is quoted in this ad was, even in context, false or misleading. To say Bush and the others ‘lied,’ however, requires evidence that they knew the intelligence they were getting was wrong.”

There is evidence that, like Jake and Elwood (the fictional Blues Brothers), President Bush believed that when he authorized invasions of other countries he was on a mission from God. Nabil Shaath, who became the Palestinian Information Minister, described a meeting in Egypt involving himself, the Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and President Bush. Shaath said that President Bush told them, ‘I’m driven with a mission from God. God would tell me: ‘George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan’. And I did, and then God would tell me: ‘George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq.’ And I did. And now, again, I feel God’s words coming to me, ‘Go get the Palestinians their state and get the Israelis their security, and get peace in the Middle East.’ And by God I’m gonna do it.” Prime Minister Abbas said that President Bush told him, “I have a moral and religious obligation. So I will get you a Palestinian state.” Peter Brierley, whose son died while on duty in Kuwait in March 2003, said, “Maybe [Bush] believes that those are the messages he has been hearing, but to me that just makes you wonder about his sanity. It certainly makes you doubt his credentials.”

At the time of this writing, much is being said and written about contradictions between what the current President and his administration say, and the truth. Some of these apparent contradictions have been unambiguously proven or disproved; others are still in flux. And there is disagreement regarding whether Bush and his administration knew the statements were false when they said them, and whether

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55 Image is from [http://www.blueoregon.com/kari_chisholm/](http://www.blueoregon.com/kari_chisholm/)
57 FactCheck.org announces “We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit ‘consumer advocate’ for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics. See [http://www.factcheck.org/UploadedFiles/factsheet70.html](http://www.factcheck.org/UploadedFiles/factsheet70.html).
58 See [http://www.factcheck.org/article349.html](http://www.factcheck.org/article349.html).
60 Image is from [http://www.abc.net.au/sundayprofile/stories/944683.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/sundayprofile/stories/944683.htm)
62 Image is from [http://www.yorkshiretoday.co.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=55&ArticleID=1032060](http://www.yorkshiretoday.co.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=55&ArticleID=1032060)
63 *Yorkshire Post*, October 7, 2005, reporting about a documentary to be aired in October on BBC2.
they exaggerated or distorted the truth when they knew that any evidence tending to support those statements was “thin.”

In order to allow some time for history to play itself out, the remainder of this section will focus on an interview of President Bush by Tim Russert in the Oval Office on February 7, 2004. The interview gave the President an opportunity to explain apparent distortions or lies made by him and/or others in his administration, the importance of secrecy in an open society, and people’s opinions of the President in reaction to lies, distortions, and secrecy. (Quotes are taken selectively, as they were in previous sections about prior presidents, to point out “facts” that proved untrustworthy. I encourage the reader to read the full transcript to see the President’s words in context.)

Russert: Shouldn’t the American people have the benefit of the [results from the 911] commission before the election?

President Bush: Now, look, we are in a political season. … I’m a war president. I make decisions here in the Oval Office in foreign-policy matters with war on my mind. Again, I wish it wasn’t true, but it is true. And the American people need to know they got a president who sees the world the way it is. … And see, the danger of allowing for information that I get briefed on out in the public arena is that it could mean that the product that I receive or future presidents receive is somewhat guarded for fear of — for fear of it being revealed, and for fear of people saying, “Well, you know, we’re going to second-guess that which you told the President.” … I want the truth to be known. …

Russert: The night you took the country to war, March 17th, you said this: “Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.”

President Bush: Right.

Russert: That apparently is not the case.

President Bush: Correct.

Russert: How do you respond to critics who say that you brought the nation to war under false pretenses?

President Bush: I based my decision on the best intelligence possible. … And I made a decision based upon that intelligence in the context of the war against terror.

64 “Downing Street memo” in The Sunday Times May 1, 2005.
65 Image is from http://www.livingprimetime.com/tr1.htm
66 Transcript of interview of George W. Bush by Tim Russert by NBC’s Meet the Press; interview date February 7, 2004; air date February 8, 2004. Downloaded 10/9/05 from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4179618/
67 But documents appear to show that the Bush administration was not carefully relying on accurate intelligence in order to plot a course. Instead of developing a policy based on careful analysis of “the best intelligence possible,” the Bush administration was bending the “facts” to try to justify actions they wanted to take to achieve pre-conceived goals. See “the secret Downing Street memo”: See the “memo” at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1593607,00.html. For a very best consideration of its significance, see http://democracyforamerica.com/memo_movie.php. For reaction from scores of members of the U.S. Congress, see http://www.tompaine.com/articles/20050509/these_are_the_crimes_that_try_mens_souls.php
68 Note that declaring a “war against terror” is grammatically weird. “Terror” does not attack us, and we cannot attack “terror.” Being attacked by Al Qaeda, then based in Afghanistan, is not a legitimate reason for attacking Iraq or Iran or Saudi Arabia or Mexico or Canada or Florida. Note that in 1987 the “United Nations General Assembly passed a very strong resolution against terrorism, condemning the plague in the strongest terms, calling on every state to fight against it in every possible way. It passed, [nearly] unanimously. One country, Honduras, abstained. Two votes against, the usual two, United States and Israel. Why should the United States and Israel vote against a major resolution condemning terrorism in the strongest terms? … There is one paragraph in that long resolution which says that nothing in this resolution infringes on the rights of people struggling against racist and colonialist regimes or foreign military occupation to continue with their resistance.” Chomsky, N. The New War Against Terror, downloaded 10/2/05 from http://www.zmag.org/GlobalWatch/chomskymitt.htm
Russert: Mr. President, the Director of the CIA said that his briefings had qualifiers and caveats, but when you spoke to the country, you said “there is no doubt.” When Vice President Cheney spoke to the country, he said “there is no doubt.” Secretary Powell, “no doubt.” Secretary Rumsfeld, “no doubt, we know where the weapons are.” You said, quote, “The Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency.” “Saddam Hussein is a threat that we must deal with as quickly as possible.” You gave the clear sense that this was an immediate threat that must be dealt with.

President Bush: I think, if I might remind you, that in my language I called it a grave and gathering threat, but I don’t want to get into word contests. But what I do want to share with you is my sentiment at the time. There was no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein was a danger to America. No doubt.

Russert: In what way?

President Bush: Well, because he had the capacity to have a weapon, make a weapon ... and then let that weapon fall into the hands of a shadowy terrorist network. ... Containment doesn’t work with a man who is a madman.

Russert: But can you launch a pre-emptive war without iron-clad, absolute intelligence that he had weapons of mass destruction?

President Bush did not answer that question yes or no, but said, “The world is a safer and better place as a result of Saddam Hussein not being in power.”

Russert: There’s a sense in the country that the intelligence that was given was ambiguous, and that you took it and molded it and shaped it — your opponents have said “hyped” it — and rushed to war.

President Bush: Yeah. ... You can’t rely upon a madman. And he was a madman. ...

Russert: But there are lots of madmen in the world, Fidel Castro ... 

President Bush: True.

Russert: ... in Iran, in North Korea, in Burma, and yet we don’t go in and take down those governments.

President Bush: Correct. ... The policy of this administration is to be — is to be clear and straightforward and to be realistic about the different threats that we face.

Russert: On Iraq, the vice president said, “We would be greeted as liberators.”

President Bush: Yeah.

Russert: It’s now nearly a year, and we are in a very difficult situation. Did we miscalculate how we would be treated and received in Iraq?

President Bush: Well, I think we are welcomed in Iraq. ...

Russert: Are you surprised by the level and intensity of resistance?

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69 Russert is correct. Bush said, “Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.”


70 For more about the Bush administration’s planning and preparation for war, see Woodward (2004).

71 A clue that there may be a lack of safety in a country is the number of journalists being killed. “For the second consecutive year, Iraq was the most dangerous place in the world to work as a journalist, and the conflict there remained one of the most deadly in recent history for the media. Twenty-three journalists were killed in action in 2004, along with 16 media workers.” See Committee to Protect Journalists, http://www.cpj.org/attacks04/mideast04/iraq.html

72 Image is from http://www.planet-wissen.de/pw/Artikel,,,,,,DBDFF22BA0C4C10E0340003BA5E0905,,,,,,,,,,,,,.html
President Bush: No, I’m not. … There are people who desperately want to stop the advance of freedom and democracy because freedom and democracy will be a powerful long-term deterrent to terrorist activities. See, free societies are societies that don’t develop weapons of mass terror and don’t blackmail the world. …

Russert: If the Iraqis choose, however, an Islamic extremist regime, would you accept that, and would that be better for the United States than Saddam Hussein?

President Bush did not answer that question yes or no.

Russert: You do seem to have changed your mind from the 2000 campaign. In a debate, you said, “I don’t think our troops ought to be used for what’s called ‘nation-building.’”

President Bush: Yeah.

Russert: We clearly are involved in nation-building.

President Bush: Right. … I did say also that our troops must be trained and prepared to fight and win war and, therefore, make peace more possible.

Russert: But this is nation-building.

President Bush: Well, it is. That’s right. …

Russert: Are you now willing to allow the United Nations to play a central role in the reconstruction?

President Bush: In the recon — in spending our money, no. …

Russert: Now that we have determined there are probably not these stockpiles of weapons that we had thought, and the primary rationale for the war had been to disarm Saddam Hussein, Paul Wolfowitz,93 the Deputy Defense Secretary, said that you had settled on weapons of mass destruction as an issue we could agree on, but there were three. “One was the weapons of mass destruction, the second is the support for terrorism, and third is Saddam’s criminal treatment of his Iraqi people.” He said the “third one by itself is a reason to help Iraqis but it’s not a reason to put American kids’ lives at risk, certainly not on the scale we did.”

President Bush: Um-hmm.

Russert: Now looking back, in your mind, is it worth the loss of 530 American lives and 3,000 injuries and woundings24 simply to remove Saddam Hussein, even though there were no weapons of mass destruction?

President Bush did not answer that question yes or no.

Russert: In light of not finding the weapons of mass destruction, do you believe the war in Iraq is a war of choice or a war of necessity? …

President Bush: … It’s a war of necessity. …

Russert: Every president since the Civil War who has gone to war has raised taxes, not cut them.

President Bush: Yeah.

Russert: Raised to pay for it. … How about no more tax cuts until the budget is balanced?

President Bush: That’s a hypothetical question which I can’t answer to you. …

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93 Image is from http://www.dw-world.de/dw/image/detail/1,1599,1506700,1,00.html
94 And counting. Also, 56 journalists have been killed in Iraq as of September 22, 2005, See Committee to Protect Journalists, http://www.cpj.org/news/2005/Iraq22sept05na.html
Russer: Why do people hold you in such low esteem? 75

President Bush: Heck, I don’t know. … When you do hard things, when you ask hard things of people, it can create tensions. … I’ll tell you, though, I’m not going to change, see? … I’ve got a vision for what I want to do for the country. See, I know exactly where I want to lead. I want to lead us — I want to lead this world toward more peace and freedom.

Implication of What Presidents and Pundits Say

In a different context, Lou Reed76 cautions “You can’t always trust your mother.”77 In this context, if you can’t believe the President of the United States, his administration, his military, or a free press,78 who can you believe? For other purposes it would be very important to know when the presidents and their administrations and their military knew they were lying to us, and when the media knew the stories were false and reported them anyway. But for our purposes, the important point is what J. R. Haldeman told President Nixon that people would learn from the Pentagon Papers: “You can’t trust the government; you can’t believe what they say; and you can’t rely on their judgment” (Ellsberg, 2002, p. 413).79 We have been admonished: Trust no one.80

75 Image is from http://www.snopes.com/katrina/photos/disaster.asp
76 Image is from http://www.bobgruen.com/files/loureed.html
77 Lyrics are from http://www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Lou-Reed/Last-Great-American-Whale.html
78 Jon Stewart: What should the media’s role be in covering the war?
Stephen Colbert: Very simply, the media’s role should be the accurate and objective description of the hellacious ass-whomping we’re handing the Iraqis.
Stewart: Hellacious ass-whomping? Now to me, that sounds pretty subjective.
Colbert: Are you saying it’s not an ass-whomping, Jon? I suppose you could call it an ass-kicking or an ass-handing-to. Unless, of course, you love Hitler.
Stewart [stammering]: I don’t love Hitler.
Colbert: Spoken like a true Hitler-lover.
Stewart: Look, even some American generals have said that the Iraqis have put up more resistance than they were expected to.
Colbert: First rule of journalism, Jon, is to know your sources. …
Stewart: I’m perplexed. Is your position that there’s no place for negative words or even thoughts in the media?
Colbert: Not at all, Jon. Doubts can happen to everyone, including me, but as a responsible journalist, I’ve taken my doubts, fears, moral compass, conscience and all-pervading skepticism about the very nature of this war and simply placed them in this empty Altoids box. [Produces box.] That’s where they’ll stay, safe and sound, until Iraq is liberated.
Stewart: Isn’t it the media’s responsibility in wartime …
Colbert: That’s my point, Jon! The media has no responsibility in wartime. The government’s on top of it. The media can sit this one out. …
Stewart: Haven’t there been some rumors that he may not even have some of those weapons?
Colbert: That would be a huge headache for Saddam. In that case, he’d have to build factories to create the weapons, create them, admit to having created them and then destroy them. Again, by Monday. It’s nearly impossible, Jon, unless he possesses weapons of mass destruction, in which case he can use them to destroy his weapons of mass destruction …
Stewart: I’m confused. We think he has weapons, but if he doesn’t …
Colbert: Jon, don’t confuse him actually having them with the threat posed by our thinking he has them. Just imagine what Saddam could do if he did what we’re imagining he’ll do. It’s almost unimaginable.
Stuart: “Unless the U.N. authorizes the use of force against Iraq for disregarding its guidelines, the U.S. will unilaterally attack Iraq, thus disregarding the U.N.’s guidelines.” Downloaded 10/3/05 from http://www.nootrope.net/stewart.html.
79 For more about lying Presidents, see Alterman (2004).
80 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_X-Files
Mental Health Workers, Probation Officers, Parole Boards, and People Who Have Been Convicted of Sex Offenses

As I read the words of presidents and pundits in War Made Easy, I was chilled by the process that gets America gung-ho about sending someone else’s children overseas to kill other people, mostly civilians. And as my mind wandered momentarily to my recent and current cases involving risk assessment of people who have been convicted of sex offenses, I found myself haunted by an eerie similarity between the two influence processes, particularly from the point of view of a consumer of propaganda.

I am now convinced that when our presidents have decided they wanted to go to war, for whatever reason, they did so. Part of the preparation involved the logistics of moving people and equipment close enough to kill enemies. Two other parts of the preparation involved convincing the American people that the particular war was necessary, and attempting to frame the attacks in the most favorable light possible within the community of nations. Because we live in a country with a de jure free press, the government cannot order various media to simply tell the public what the administration wants us to hear. Yet, time and again in the buildup to war and the early phases of a war, most of the media do just that. Eventually, if the war lasts long enough and we aren’t winning, more media begin to ask questions and eventually report truths that are unsettling at best, horrifying at worst. How did we do it again: proudly killing people, mostly civilians, in the name of freedom in a war that, with hindsight, was unnecessary?

So what should the media do? What should consumers do? Check the facts. Unfortunately, it is unrealistically naïve to believe that we can trust our government even – and perhaps especially – about crucial issues such as whether or not to go to war. And I see a parallel with my work as an evaluator doing risk assessments of people who have been convicted of sex offenses. To paraphrase Haldeman’s words to Nixon: When conducting a risk assessment in the context of civil commitment of a person who has been convicted of a sexual offense, you can’t trust treating professionals, secondary documents, or social histories that are based on descriptions provided by the person convicted of a sex offense. You can’t believe what they say and you can’t rely on their judgment.

When interviewed by a mental-health professional, a parole board, a probation officer, or a law enforcement officer, a person who has been convicted of a sex offense may have a reason to lie. In the context of civil commitment of sexually violent predators, the person being evaluated may want to give an account that matches documents he expects the evaluator to have read, with two distinctions. First, the person being evaluated may try to explain away some of the most damning information in the documents. Second, the person being evaluated may try to put the data in a different context by lying about what is not spelled out in the documents.

For example, Mr. A told me, “I never hurt nobody in my life. … I never touched a child in my life. To be thought of as a sexual predator is freaking me out.” The documents immediately available provided nothing to dispute his claims (his victims were adults, and nonsexual violence was not detailed in the documents initially provided to me). But when I requested and obtained more detailed documents concerning Mr. A’s crimes, the documents showed that his ex-wife had reported that he was violent toward her, and she sought and obtained a domestic violence injunction. And the police report regarding one of his sexual offenses included the following: “Mr. A attempted to tie her hands with a rope, but she fought back and he was unable to do so. He attempted to drag her to the second floor. Several times she

81 See the New Hampshire Gazette’s Chickenhawks at http://www.nhgazette.com/cgi-bin/NHGstore.cgi?user_action=list&category=%20NEWS%3B%20Chickenhawks
briefly escaped his clutches, but he kept overpowering her. ... Mr. A jumped on top of her, then tried to pull off her dress. ... Deputies returned to Mr. A’s house, where they found the victim’s shoes, wallet, key chain, and car keys; they also found several lengths of rope, neckties tied to the bed posts, and other items which may be used to tie someone up.”

It is important for evaluators to carefully review official documents, especially sworn testimony. Evaluators must be wary about how we review documents, staying tuned to the possibility that what a professional has reported may simply be a regurgitation of an unreliable statement from the person who has been convicted of a sex offense. And documents can include statements reflecting unsubstantiated clinical opinions, based on unreliable self report. Consider this case example:

Both Dr. G (chief psychologist at the prison where Mr. B was being held; a female) and Ms. Y (prison minister)\(^2\) confidently told me that, although Mr. B has been convicted of raping three women, he did not act violently when he did so. Dr. G said, “He didn't beat up or kill anyone when he was raping them. He never threatened them. There’s something in the police report that he threatened them with a screwdriver, but he swears he never did that. That’s not in his personality.” Ms. Y told me, “He’s been so honest with me! He’s not afraid to tell me certain things. ... I know that he tied up at least one victim. I know it’s a violent act but he wasn’t violent in the way he did it. I know he used a screwdriver to open up a door to get in, and they listed it as a weapon, but he didn’t really use it to threaten them.” Similarly, Mr. B told me:

- I did not use that screwdriver as a weapon.
- The arrest report is gonna say that I stuck the screwdriver to her neck because she supposedly had abrasions to her neck.
- [regarding a different victim] You’re gonna read a report that says I put the screwdriver up to her throat. I didn’t do that. That screwdriver was in my back pocket.
- I told her if she didn’t give me any trouble she wouldn’t get hurt, just to do what I said.
- I had her scoot down on her knees on the bed.
- She asked me a couple times please not hurt her. And I told her I wouldn’t.
- I grabbed my erection and had a hold of the back of her head and I put that towards her mouth and she began to give me oral sex. I didn’t feel like I needed to tell her.
- I got off and I scooted down beside her.
- She responded to what I was doing, the way women respond. I asked her if she came and she said yeah.
- I stopped at her breasts. I played with them. I sucked on them. I kissed her. And I entered her, for I don’t know how long.

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\(^2\) Ms. Y, the prison minister, told me that she has fallen in love with Mr. B and hopes to marry him and have his baby. She expressed some apprehension at giving a birth to a child while she is in her 40s, but said, “I know they can take the HIV virus out of his sperm. ... I have a book, well, it’s an out-of-date book, that says that if you follow the guidelines, people have been known to get rid of their HIV!” She is convinced that he is the best friend she has ever had, and is ecstatic in spite of the facts that she has lost her job and is losing her marriage.
• She sat up and asked me if I came. I asked her why. She said she was just wondering.
• I laid my hand over her body and I kissed her.
• I put my hand between her legs and patted her leg inside her thigh to open her legs up and she opened her legs and I got on top of her and commenced to doing what I previously did. I raped her.
• She asked me would you please go now and I told her yeah.

Thus, although Mr. B has acknowledged to his minister/fiancé, his treatment provider at Dogpile Prison, and to me, that he committed three rapes, he has consistently described his actions in a way that has downplayed the violence and terror of the assaults. He portrayed himself as a gentle rapist, not violent, just looking for love in the wrong places. The arrest reports told a somewhat different story, but they said little about Mr. B’s nonsexual violence. To investigate Mr. B’s claim of being a gentle rapist I requested and obtained the victim/witness statements, supplemental police reports, summaries of the crime-scene evidence, and Mr. B’s own statements to the arresting officers. The results did not match what Mr. B told me about his crimes. The following excerpts are from official records regarding several of Mr. B’s sex crimes:

• Mr. B said, “I went to the um side of the bed, sat down on the edge, covered her mouth with my hand. Uh, I let her know that I had a screwdriver. She felt the tip of it.”
• Agent Q photographed injuries to the victim’s (GG’s) face, neck, and back, all sustained as a result of the crime.
• She was attacked in her driveway and violently resisted her assailant.
• The woman suffered injuries to her face, neck, and back during the altercation.
• GG was overpowered by the man … her hands bound behind her back, and rags pushed into her mouth.
• When she continued her resistance … she was gagged, then threatened with serious physical injury, at which point she felt the man was pressuring a knife into her side.
• At this point the man forced her back into the home where he placed a pillow case over her head and then sexually assaulted her both orally and vaginally, her hands still bound.
• The distraught and confused victim waited nearly an hour after the subject fled, before she left the residence to summon help.
• Mr. B has visible injuries to his face and was complaining of pains in his ribs.
• JM had obvious bruising to her facial area around her mouth, cheeks, and neck, also obvious red scratches were noted around the victim’s wrists and arms.
• JM stated that a physical struggle ensued at which time she was slammed against the bed.
• JM stated that at one point she was able to escape her attacker, but she was pursued and dragged back to the bed.
• Mr. B said [to law enforcement officers], “The one [rape] last night I did try to use it [screwdriver] to quiet her down. There was no intent on using it to inflict harm.”

• “I was walking from my house to my car. I saw someone (shadow) running towards me, and I started screaming. He told me to shut up or he – I kept screaming. That’s when he started hitting me, and me hitting him – I still kept screaming. He got me on the ground and tied my hands behind my back and stuffed my mouth with rags. I spit out the rags and started screaming again. Then he had an object in his hand and said it was a knife and if I didn’t shut up he would hurt me. … Then we went inside the house to the bedroom and he threw me on the bed and put a pillowcase on my head. Then he took off my pants and stockings. Then he put his penis in my mouth for about 20 seconds and he stuck his penis inside of me and pumped on me until he climaxed. Then he got up and told me not to call anyone or leave the house, that he might be waiting for me, that if he heard I reported rape he would kill me.”

• “First I saw somebody running at me and I started running and then … he kept right on and told me to shut up and that’s when he more or less attacked me … he jumped on … you know … pushed me down … that kind of thing. … More screaming and biting and fighting … both of us hitting and fighting … me screaming and then he gagged me and started tying my hands … I was spitting the gag out and started screaming again and then he tightened it [behind her neck]. … He brought the gag and the rope with him. … He threatened me not to tell anybody and all that kind of stuff or he would kill me if he found out about it in the newspaper or anything like that.

• “Trying to get away from him and to being slammed up against the bed and to the point dragged across the bed and choked, and repeatedly to not scream and to not try and escape.”

• “The first part of the activity was physical struggle against this person until it occurred violence and more violence. And I realized that after almost losing consciousness and strangling that he intended to hurt me if I screamed any more than I did. From that point on it was a rape situation. Being dragged across the bed and having my pajamas ripped off me and ah penetrated.”

• He made constant threats “that if I tried to escape or tried to scream that he would hurt me … did in fact tie me up several times. … After the choking when he realized the phone was behind my head and he undid the phone wire from the phone … and used that to bound my hands behind my neck” and around her neck.

• After the victim temporarily escaped from the bedroom, Mr. B “dragged me from behind back into the bedroom, kicking and screaming” followed by “more attacks. And more violence and profanity because I had tried to escape.”

• He was asking JM whether she was sexually satisfied by his sexual assault of her. “I would not respond at all or I would say no and he got very angry with both of those responses.”

• JM has extensive scratches and marks and bruises on her face.

• “I shifted from an escape mode, when I realized that I was going to be brutalized, into trying to rationalize with the man. … I guess he realized what I was trying to do and it made him violent.”

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• “I was woken up with a hand over my mouth and a sharp object against my neck. He said not to scream; he would hurt me.”
• “I promised not to try anything. He said if I did he would break something.”
• “He was going to ejaculate and told me to swallow it or he would hurt me.”
• JT knew he was armed because “I felt the sharp point in my neck.” Injuries include “my lip split, a scratch underneath my eye, and scratches on my neck.”
• Mr. B threatened to hurt victim JT: “He threatened to break something … a finger, leg, a bone of my body.”

Mr. B claimed to have been a gentle, non-violent rapist who never hurt anyone. His spin of the facts was consistent with what was in his prison file, and with people who said they knew him well. But once additional, detailed records were obtained from the arresting agencies, the facts (sworn testimony by law enforcement officers and victims in cases that resulted in convictions) clearly contradicted Mr. B’s description. When he committed sexual assaults, he violently attacked the women and girls. The additional records were not necessary for determining whether or not he was convicted of the crimes, but the records were necessary to understand exactly what he did. Thus the additional records contributed to the risk assessment.

Some mistakes by mental-health personnel or correctional or classification officers involve carelessness, sometimes leading to typographic, grammar, or spelling errors. For example\textsuperscript{83}: “SUBJECT HAS TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING AND WRITING. ... CASE IS NOT ASIGNED TO NOBODY. ... S HAS DIFFICULTY READING AND WRITING THEREFORE HENDING HIS PROGRESS IN TREATMENT.”

Other mistakes may stem from similar sources, but have more profound effects. In a recent case, the person who had been convicted of a sex offense was repeatedly denied parole prior to his release date. One of the reasons for denying parole was that Mr. C had chosen especially vulnerable victims; he had sexually assaulted two 11-year-old children. But careful review of the Information prepared by the State Attorney showed that in both cases, the charges were for “Sexual Battery of a Person over the Age of 11” (emphasis added). Review of the police reports revealed that both of those victims were adults. There was no evidence that Mr. C had ever assaulted a child. Yet throughout the records were statements that Mr. C had sexually attacked 11-year-old children, all stemming from the one mistake by one parole board years before. If I had relied on the content of the Parole Commission’s Orders\textsuperscript{84} and subsequent secondary records, my diagnosis and risk assessment would have been based on official documents showing that he victimized children. If I had not sought and obtained the original documents detailing his crimes, my evaluation would have resulted in garbage (DeClue, 2002, 2005).

\textsuperscript{83} These excerpts are all from one paragraph of one form.

\textsuperscript{84} Mr. C was considered for parole several times prior to his release. Each time, the Parole Commission’s orders detailed why he was not being paroled, and each time the Commission’s reports stated that Mr. C chose vulnerable victims, specifically, two 11-year-olds. My evaluation took place when he was nearing completion of his sentence. (He was never paroled. He served his full sentence, less gain time for good behavior, etc.)
Conclusions

Inaccuracy is a fixed fare of journalism, which in time becomes history (Lorenz, 2003).

So, what have we learned?

1. Presidents

It is clear that some politicians, including presidents, lie some of the time. The truth may be somewhere between “Some politicians lie some of the time” and “Most politicians lie most of the time.” If the President of the United States wants to go to war, then we are going to war. If the true reason for war (stable supply of oil, having countries led by leaders with world views similar to our president’s) is deemed unpopular (or insufficient to justify loss of life, limb, and financial resources), then the president will emphasize a lesser reason for going to war or make up a reason. (Recall the Downing Street Memo: the facts are being fixed around the policy.) The take-home message is what Haldeman told Nixon: “You can’t trust the government; you can’t believe what they say; and you can’t rely on their judgment. And the implicit infallibility of presidents, which has been an accepted thing in America, is badly hurt by this, because it shows that people do things the president wants to do even though it’s wrong, and the president can be wrong.” We need not be cynical, but we had better be skeptical.

I find it disturbing that the leader of a democracy would lie to the people in order to fight a war that might be unpopular if the people knew what the war was really about. For a government of the people, by the people, and for the people to function, the people must be informed. We ordinary citizens have an obligation to educate ourselves about what is going on so that we can vote wisely. But politicians and the military have a strong duty not to lie to the people and not to distort the truth. Certainly there are moments when the government or the military have a need for secrecy, and they should be allowed to say, “Sorry, I cannot answer that. That is classified information.” Of course, they should not abuse that privilege. It is perfectly clear that we the people do not want our leaders to lie to us:

In late February 2002, news broke that the mission of the Pentagon’s oddly named Office of Strategic Influence included trying to deceive the international media. After nearly a week of negative coverage, President Bush proclaimed zero tolerance for lies from U.S. officials. “We’ll tell the American people the truth,” he vowed. The next day, the controversial office became history. … Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld … took the opportunity to offer assurances that the Defense Department would not ever try to deceive journalists: “This is something the Pentagon has not done, is not doing, and would not condone.” … During the year that followed, the Pentagon put out a profuse supply of bogus stories based on “intelligence” – about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and purported links to Al Qaeda – with the goal of promoting an invasion of Iraq. Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski saw the disinformation process unfold, working at the Pentagon’s Near East and South Asia bureau and observing the defense secretary’s beloved Office of Special Plans, which provided talking points to top-level administration officials. “You could find bits and pieces of fact throughout,” she later told documentary filmmakers. “But framed, articulated, crafted to convince someone of what—well, of things that weren’t true.” She looked back ruefully: “I worked in a place where they concentrated on preparing this story line and selling it to everyone that they could possibly sell it

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85 In context it does not appear that Haldeman was bemoaning the fact that the White House was full of people who lied repeatedly, whenever it appeared to suit their interests. Rather, it appears that he was bemoaning the fact that their lies were discovered and made public.
86 For a sad story about a military cover-up, Google “Pat Tillman” and follow the leads.
89 Image is from http://www.freedomsummit.com/speakers2005az.shtml
Anyone would be ill advised to assume truthfulness of Pentagon pronouncements (Solomon, pp. 55-57).

Recall that Ekman’s studies (e.g., Ekman, O’Sullivan, and Frank, 1999) have shown that most people are not very good at recognizing whether someone is lying or telling the truth. Therefore, until we have done some fact checking, including consideration of some alternative media sources, we would be ill advised to believe what the president or other politicians or military officers say, even – and perhaps especially – when the topic is as serious as the need to initiate a war.

I was angry to see that our current president manipulated information and misinformed the public to facilitate an unnecessary pre-emptive war. Now I am saddened to see that president after president has been doing that same thing. I miss my anger.

I think it should be illegal for a government official to lie to the people, even when he or she is not under oath. And I think there should be serious consequences for government officials to unwittingly pass along false information when they should have checked the facts and should have known the truth. A democracy cannot function properly if the government routinely withholds or distorts information as they communicate with the people.

2. Pundits

I still do not understand why a free press plays up whatever government officials say and plays down hints, and eventually proof, that things are not really as the government says. But here it is: we cannot trust the free press to check facts and to question authority. Somehow the media companies with the most equipment, airtime, and readership are run by people who would rather tell us whatever the government wants us to hear than to ferret out the truth. How did we get here?

“Despite polling showing that the majority of world public opinion is opposed to the U.S. war with Iraq, only 41 percent [of Americans] were aware that this is the case [in 2004]. Among those who knew that world public opinion opposed the U.S. going to war with Iraq, only 25 percent thought that going to war was the right decision.”91 … A follow-up study found that most Americans who got their news from commercial TV harbored at least one of three “misperceptions” about the Iraq war – that weapons of mass destruction had been discovered in Iraq, that evidence linking Iraq to Al Qaeda had been found, or that world public opinion approved of the U.S. invasion. Fox News viewers were the most confused about the key facts, with 80 percent embracing at least one of those misperceptions. The study found a relationship between being misinformed and being supportive of the war92 (Solomon, 2005, p. 154).

I find it necessary to explore various news sources, including fringe news accounts, and I try to sift through the pap and muck to understand what is really going on. Although I do not understand how we got to the point where much of the media simply parrot politicians, Amy and David Goodman93 provide an idea about how things could change for the better:

Social change does not spring forth from the minds of generals or presidents – in fact, change is often blocked by the powerful. Change starts with ordinary people working in their communities. And that’s where media should start as well. The role of the media isn’t to agree with any person or group – or with the government or the powerful. But the media do have a responsibility to include all voices in the discourse. Then let the people decide. This is a new kind

93 Images are from http://book.democracynow.org/authors.php
of power politics. Instead of backroom deals, it’s open-air rallies, public, transparent, and full of lively debate. That is what democracy looks like (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 311).

3. People who have been Convicted of Sex Offenses

Remember LoPiccolo’s admonition about people who have been convicted of sex offenses: “They lie.” To paraphrase Nicholas Groth’s words at another workshop a decade and a half ago, of course they lie. If you are driving on the interstate and you get pulled over by a law enforcement officer, and he or she asks you how fast you were going, do you say, “Well, I was only going 80 when I saw your squad car. Usually I drive faster, but I kind of got hung up behind a truck and I had not had a chance to get back up to full speed when I saw your car.” Many – perhaps most – people who speed regularly would lie to get out of a traffic ticket if they thought they could get away with it. So it is not surprising that a person being questioned about committing a sex offense might be tempted to lie.

We recognize that the person who is being evaluated has an agenda such as not going to jail or not getting confined via civil commitment, so evaluators approach that part of the assessment with some skepticism. Still, I have seen reports in which the evaluator was swayed by the offender’s statements, sometimes subtly, by, for example, accepting an offender’s version of a crime when detailed official records are not immediately available. Also, sometimes an offender’s disinformation can lead an unawary evaluator to consider the details of a crime to be ambiguous when careful and comprehensive analysis would have shown that the offender’s claim was an outlier in an otherwise consistent set of descriptions of events.

It would be wrong to think that an offender lies every time he opens his mouth. But it would also be wrong – bordering on delusional if one reads the literature and still believes it – to believe that we can tell when a person is lying and when he or she is not (e.g., Ekman, O’Sullivan, and Frank, 1999). The demand characteristics of an evaluation relevant to civil commitment are so powerful that one must treat with skepticism any self-serving statement made by the person being evaluated. Without independent confirmation, such claims should be given no credence. But without contradictory evidence, one cannot assume the claims to be false, either. We must do what investigative journalists do: check the facts.

4. Mental-Health Workers, Probation Officers, and Parole Boards

Vicariously journeying through the years with presidents and pundits had little effect on how much weight I put on an offender’s self-serving statements in an evaluation relevant to civil commitment: very little weight. But watching the media dance right along with the presidents, other politicians, and the military gave me pause. Offenders can be charismatic, like the one in the example above who got a prison minister to fall in love with him and to plan to have babies with him, even though he is incarcerated and has AIDS and she has lost her job and is losing her marriage. Yet she is ecstatic about it all! Politicians, too, can be charismatic, of course, but I do not yet understand why journalists report government claims as if they were revealed truths. They are just government claims, and I appreciate those journalists who do check the “facts.”

It does give me pause when I read about uncritical journalists and I think of the records I have encountered. When I conduct a comprehensive assessment relative to risk for sexual re-offense, some of the files I review are quite useful but many are, to state it as positively as possible, good enough for government work. Oh, for a Fair Witness! (a fictional character in Robert Heinlein’s works who is “rigorously trained to observe, remember, and report without prejudice, distortion, lapses in memory, or
personal involvement.”94 Unfortunately, being a Fair Witness is not a job requirement for someone who prepares documents that will eventually be pondered over in a civil-commitment evaluation.

One of the first rules in journalism is to KNOW before you SPEAK and WRITE. (Anonymous)

Similarly, forensic evaluators must consider the facts carefully before rendering an opinion. We should rely on primary documents (such as the arrest reports, witness statements, sworn statements at trial or deposition, and official court records such as judgments and sentences). When primary documents are not available, we should request them. On those occasions when the primary documents are ultimately unavailable, we should a) clearly present the limitations of the data if we express an opinion, and b) refrain from expressing an opinion when there is insufficient reliable data to support one. Meanwhile, we must recognize that other professionals may have inadvertently presented a non-fact as a fact, whether by reporting unchecked statements by the offender or via simple mistakes or carelessness.

The take-home message is that when reviewing records as part of an evaluation for civil commitment, we must treat secondary sources not as facts but as leads to be confirmed or disconfirmed by checking with the primary documents. And any document that was created from the offender’s self report should be treated with the same degree of skepticism that one would apply to the offender’s direct report to the evaluator.

In order to do good forensic psychology casework in the context of civil commitment of a person who has previously been convicted of sexual offenses, the practitioner must do good investigative journalism. Part of a forensic psychologist’s job is to gather and analyze data. The psychologist must consider the reliability of the information, and must be vigilant to avoid propagating myths deliberately planted or sown inadvertently. Whenever possible, primary documents should be obtained. When it is impossible to obtain primary documents, the evaluator should note that, and the evaluator should identify the lack of primary documents as a potential source of error in the report and/or testimony.

Solomon (2005) blames bad journalism for “opening the floodgates of the Vietnam War” by reporting what U.S. government officials claimed, without checking the facts. Forensic psychologists must do our share to enhance judicial decision making by carefully checking the facts and properly attributing facts to their sources.

Evaluators should cite our sources as we present the factual bases for our opinions. Examples:

• According to the Information for case number 634-5789 …

• The 3/11/03 Intake Summary at Dogpile Prison quotes Mr. X as saying …

• The disciplinary report for throwing mustard on 4/11/03 shows that Mr. X pled not guilty and was found guilty …

Forensic evaluators must engage in at least one task of investigative journalists: check the facts. Doing our jobs well will probably not prevent an unnecessary war, but it will contribute to preventing future sexual assaults and unnecessary detentions.

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References


