



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## **Bias, Misinformation and the Paradox of Neutrality.**

Bednar, Peter; Welch, Christine

*Published in:*  
[Host publication title missing]

2008

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Bednar, P., & Welch, C. (2008). Bias, Misinformation and the Paradox of Neutrality. In E. Cohen, & B. Boyd (Eds.), [Host publication title missing] (pp. a1-a18). Informing Science Press.

*Total number of authors:*  
2

### **General rights**

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:  
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

# Bias, Misinformation, and the Paradox of Neutrality

**Peter M. Bednar and Christine Welch**  
**Lund University, Sweden; University of Portsmouth, UK**

[peter.bednar@ics.lu.se](mailto:peter.bednar@ics.lu.se) [christine.welch@port.ac.uk](mailto:christine.welch@port.ac.uk)

## Abstract

What is normally described as bias? A possible definition comprises attempts to distort or mislead to achieve a certain perspective, i.e. subjective descriptions intended to mislead. If designers were able to exclude bias from informing systems, then this would maximize their effectiveness. This implicit conjecture appears to underpin much of the research in our field. However, in our efforts to support the evolution and design of informing systems, the way we think, communicate and conceptualize our efforts clearly influences our comprehension and consequently our agenda for design. Objectivity (an attempt to be neutral or transparent) is usually regarded as non-biased. However, claims for objectivity do not, by definition, include efforts to inquire into and reflect over subjective values. Attempts to externalize the mindset of the subject do not arise as part of the description. When claims to objectivity are made, this rarely includes any effort to make subjective bias transparent. Instead, objectivity claims may be regarded as a denial of bias. We suggest that bias can be introduced into overt attempts to admit subjectivity. For example, where people are asked to give subjective opinion according to an artificially enforced scale of truth-falsity (bi-valued logic), they may find themselves coerced into statements of opinion which do not truly reflect the views they might have wished to express. People do not naturally respond to their environment with opinions limited to restricted scales; rather, they tend to use multivalued logic. This paper examines the impact of bias within attempts to establish communicative practice in human activity systems (informing systems).

**Keywords:** bias, misinformation, phenomenology, multivalued logic, informing systems, analysis.