

marshal Helmuth von Moltke (1848–1916) was the actual originator, though, like Durocher, von Moltke didn't put the thought in very pithy form.

President John F. Kennedy was a serial misquoter. "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing," he ringingly declared, (mis)citing Edmund Burke. It certainly *sounds* like something Burke might have said, and Kennedy's imprimatur has kept that fiction alive. (The true provenance of the quote is unknown.) Keyes says many misquotes follow patterns. If it's something saintly, then Gandhi said it (or Mother Teresa).

"If it's about honesty, Lincoln most likely said it (or Washington), about fame, Andy Warhol (or Daniel Boorstin), about courage, John Kennedy (or Ernest Hemingway)." Parochialism also plays a role. "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing," said football coach Vince Lombardi (if you're American) or soccer coach Bill Shankly (if you're British). "Golf is a good walk spoiled" is "given to Mark Twain in the United States," says Keyes, and to "author Kurt Tucholsky in Germany."

Newspaper reporters routinely improve the grammar, diction, and, yes, the thoughts of those

they quote: Vice President Jack Garner compared his office to "a pitcher of warm piss," but in the newspapers it was sanitized to "a pitcher of warm spit." And while such misquotes might have had limited reach in former times, today the Internet does more to abet misquotation than contain it, spreading each error like a "verbal virus."

But there's nothing new about misquotation. The New York wit Dorothy Parker was so often credited for things she didn't actually say that the playwright George S. Kaufman once lamented, "Everything I've ever said will be attributed to Dorothy Parker."

PRESS & MEDIA

Coverage That Kills

THE SOURCE: "Are News Reports of Suicide Contagious? A Stringent Test in Six U.S. Cities" by Daniel Romer, Patrick E. Jamieson, and Kathleen H. Jamieson, in *Journal of Communication*, June 2006.

IT'S OFTEN HARD TO SAY HOW strongly the news media affect the behavior of individuals, but in one instance the influence is surprisingly clear: Media coverage of suicides encourages more people to take their own lives.

A dozen studies point clearly in this direction, showing that front-page stories and those involving celebrities are most likely to motivate others to take their own lives. Yet each of these earlier studies had limitations, note Daniel

Romer, Patrick E. Jamieson, and Kathleen H. Jamieson, all researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center. They took a close statistical look at the experience in six cities over a four-month period, aiming to sort out the influence of everything from local news broadcasts to soap operas and movies.

They found that media attention to suicides led to 21 additional deaths, or 2.5 percent of all such deaths in the six cities. The suicides occurred among the youngest and oldest age groups. People in the 25-to-44 age group were *less* likely to commit suicide

in the days after one was reported.

Not guilty of influencing suicides, say the authors, were national television news, movies, and soap operas. Coverage in local newspapers and news shows accounted for virtually all of the increase.

Social scientists who have studied the phenomenon aren't sure how to explain this "contagion effect." Some troubled people may identify with celebrities or others who kill themselves; some may feel less inhibited when public attention is focused on what is normally a socially proscribed act. The authors don't suggest that the news media stop reporting suicides, but journalists could "reduce the potential for suicidal imitation by downplaying the romantic or sensational aspect of suicide deaths as well as the implication that suicide resolves problems for the victim."