

SECOND

EDITION

# MEDIATING THE MESSAGE

Theories of Influences  
on Mass Media Content

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Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content, Second Edition

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Longman, 10 Bank Street, White Plains, N.Y. 10606

Associated companies:

Longman Group Ltd., London Longman Cheshire Pty., Melbourne

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Production editor: Linda Moser/Alice Vigliani Cover design: Joseph dePinho,

dePinho Designs Production supervisor: Richard Bretan

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Shoemaker, Pamela J.

Mediating the message: theories of influences on mass media content / Pamela J. Shoemaker, Stephen D. Reese.-2nd ed. p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8013-1251-5

1. Mass media. 2. Content analysis (Communication) I. Reese,

Stephen D. II. Title. P91.S46 1996

95-3796 CIP

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10-MA-98979695

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# Preface to the Second Edition

The mass media do not simply mirror the world around them. If you were an eyewitness to an event and you then read or viewed a story about it in the news media, any similarity between what you saw and what the news media reported would hardly be the result of a simple process. Mass media content—both news and entertainment—is shaped, pounded, constrained, encouraged by a multitude of forces. Sometimes the reality presented by the media matches the world as you know it, and sometimes it is very different. Sometimes two media present similar versions of the same event, and sometimes the result is very different. Consider the following examples.

Eyewitnesses reported that on January 25, 1993, 12-year-old Chelsea Clinton, daughter of U.S. President and Mrs. Clinton, complained to her school nurse that she had a headache. Because her parents hadn't filled out the standard permission forms, the school nurse was unable to give Chelsea any medication until one of her parents had been contacted. According to two student eyewitnesses, Chelsea said, "My mom's away—you'd better call my dad" (Rowe, 1993). Not only was this story presented differently by different media, but the "facts" evolved over time.

On February 11, the San Francisco Chronicle wrote about the event as if it had happened "last Friday," changed Chelsea's headache to a rash on her arm, and quoted her as saying "Gee, my mother's been pretty busy the last few days—better call my dad."

Also on February 11, the Daily Telegraph in London turned the headache into the need for an injection. In response to the nurse's request for written authorization, Chelsea is reported to have said, "Sure, but you'd better try my dad. Mom's rather busy these days."

## X PREFACE

The rash and headache versions of the story were reported by many media in February, and in later months the media referred more vaguely to Chelsea just feeling sick. According to Chip Rowe's analysis (1993), virtually every medium attributed the need to call President Clinton to Mrs. Clinton being too busy to help Chelsea, rather than to her being out of town. Why?

The conflicting reports about this event tell us something about how media content is produced. They hint at the forces that tug, pull, squeeze, and ultimately form mass media content. These are the issues in which we *are* interested, and this second edition of our book follows the first in its emphasis on questions about why mass media content is the way it is. Differences between the first and second editions are primarily due to (1) the addition of many "real-life" media examples of the theoretical concepts we present, and (2) the addition of many new scholarly studies in this area of research.

The book is still aimed at upper-division undergraduate and beginning graduate students, although parts of it—particularly the last two chapters—are admittedly aimed more at our research colleagues than at students. We hope that our colleagues will do us the honor of testing some of the hypotheses we present in Chapter 11. We are gratified to see that some of this is being done already, and we are pleased to learn that our conclusions are generally supported. We welcome comments and suggestions for improvement in the hope that a third edition will be forthcoming. If you've tested one of our hypotheses, please send one of us a copy of the study.

Many people have helped us in preparing this *revised* edition and deserve our thanks. At the Ohio State University School of Journalism, graduate students Kim Sankey and Amy DeLaHunt assisted with locating and organizing the new information. At Syracuse University, doctoral student Michael Breen assisted with final manuscript details. Our editor, Kathleen Schurawich, provided inspiration and an occasional nudge. Finally, we thank our families for tolerating the piles and boxes of research materials that seemed to always grow larger and for understanding our occasional grumpiness when the revision went more slowly than expected.

Pamela J. Shoemaker  
Stephen D. Reese

# Preface to the First Edition

On the morning of April 13, 1990, the president of the University of Texas at Austin scheduled a press conference outside the administration building to deliver an address to the news media—the topic was racism on campus. Like many campuses around the country, Texas has experienced an upsurge in activism among minority students who have been advocating a more multicultural curriculum and the hiring of more minority faculty. In the weeks before the speech, two racial incidents at campus fraternities had been widely publicized. Stepping to the lectern, the president began to read a lengthy prepared text about his administration's steps to address minority issues. The large crowd of students that had gathered began to periodically heckle the president, causing him to stop momentarily each time, then resume his reading. Finally, toward the end of his address, the crowd became more vocal, leading the president to abruptly end his speech and return to his office.

An analysis of subsequent news media—particularly television—coverage of the event, full-length raw videotape footage, and interviews with some of the black students present (who also happened to be enrolled in the authors' classes) revealed some important features of the media portrayals. The crowd members (of which many were Anglo) had apparently hoped to hear the president address them "from the heart," denouncing in more forceful terms the earlier racial incidents. The contrast between the emotionally charged setting and the president's formally recited speech directed to the press appeared to contribute to the crowd's frustration.

The footage that made the local television news focused on the final part of the speech when the crowd became its most vocal. Reporters trailed the president back to his office and, through their questions, allowed him to frame the event as a free speech issue: The students had unduly prevented him from speaking. Reacting to subsequent media coverage, black students felt that the television reports in particular had not given sufficient attention to their specific proposals for change. The televised version of the event suggested to viewers that the president had been disrupted from the start and throughout his speech, that the heckling was an unruly and irrational outburst—an unfortunate response to a legitimate university official's exercise of free speech. Had those viewers been present at the speech, they might have drawn a different conclusion—that the president was given ample opportunity to speak and could have finished had he wished. They might have felt, as did the black students, that his speech was not appropriate to the setting. Those same viewers might have seen the disruption of the speech as the culmination of the students' frustration that had built not only throughout the speech but also over the previous months and years.

The gap between firsthand experience and the mediated version becomes particularly clear for events like this—when people are present at an event and compare their experience with media coverage, and when the issues involved are controversial—meaning that the stakes are high as to how the event is to be framed. Going back a quarter of a century, similar events gave rise to increasing scholarly attention to how the media frame reality. During the mid-to late 1960s, large crowds regularly took to the streets to protest for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. The inadequacy of the media in reflecting these social tensions became more apparent than ever before, particularly to the participants. The "credibility gap" became a problem for the news media as well as for the president.

Today, these questions relating to the media and social change are more important than ever, but we hope that our understanding of the media has improved. When students experience an event like the one on our campus, they question the role of the media, they want to discuss it in class and talk about it afterwards. We hope that this book will provide a framework within which issues like this can be understood, both for students and for researchers hoping to extend that understanding. We have tried to synthesize the growing body of research addressing these issues and propose how future research can be structured. As such, we hope faculty researchers and



other media scholars—in addition to students—will find this book useful.

Although we cover a wide breadth of material, some choices had to be made. One of the issues we struggled with was how to treat news and entertainment content. By background we are primarily oriented toward news, although we wanted to produce a book that would address media content in general. As we found, much more research has been directed toward the production of news than entertainment (although many content analyses have examined the latter). More scholars, however, are beginning to explore this area of content and the influences behind the scenes, but a better treatment of this research will have to wait for another volume. Where possible, we do speak of media workers or media content, noting the commonalities across news and entertainment, and we include examples other than news as well.

We have directed this book to upper-level undergraduates and graduate students. Because of the diverse number of courses taught in university departments, it is hard to identify one specific class for which this book is best suited. Our emphasis on the news media makes this book most at home in a journalism and mass communication course—it could serve as the primary text for a media sociology course or seminar. But it could also serve as a framework text to be complemented by other sources for more general media courses. Within departments of journalism, radio-television-film, telecommunications, mass communication, or communication, many have a course about how media content gets made, often under a "mass media and society" title. For introductory communication courses, the book could be paired with one of the many "introduction to mass communication" texts to give a greater conceptual thrust. It could also be used in a mass communication theory course to add "influences on media" theories to those about "media influences." This would, in effect, cover the complete range of mass communication theory from production to reception of media messages. Other courses about the mass media that might usefully include this book can also be found in departments of political science and sociology.

We have found textbook writing a challenge and a different task altogether from writing about our research projects for conference papers and journals. We have tried to write in a readable manner and to find organizing schemes and examples that convey our points as clearly as possible. Of course, we haven't successfully communicated until others read and understand those points. We hope that readers will come up with their own examples and alternative ways to organize this research. And, we would appreciate hearing from those who have suggestions for improvement.

Every book has a history. To understand why this book takes the form it does, it may be helpful to recount how we came to write it. Both of us were trained in the media effects tradition at the University of Wisconsin, one of the major centers for research of that type, receiving our Ph.D.s in mass communication in 1982. While there and since then both of us have conducted many audience-centered studies of mass communication. Thus, when we critique the preoccupation of research with audiences and effects (as in Chapter 2), it is from firsthand experience. As it happened, however, our graduate school years represented a transition period in communication research. Critical scholars began asking serious questions about the prevailing research paradigm, its assumptions, methodologies, and theories. A growing number of scholars became interested in what "sets the media's agenda?" As a result, our approaches to research have evolved considerably just within the past decade.

Since coming to the University of Texas we have taken different routes, yet we have arrived at quite similar intellectual interests. In the case of Shoemaker, an interest in political communication led her to study media coverage of deviant political groups. Her finding that these groups are covered less legitimately than centrist groups led naturally to general questions of how such media content was formed and to several studies showing that the more deviant an event is, the more prominently it is covered by the media. Reese has had a long interest in the exercise of political power, and he came to view the power-oriented study of news production as a way to combine those interests with media studies. His studies of audience use of news media, particularly broadcast, had been based on the assumption that news is a good thing for society and that people should read and watch as much of it as possible. Closer study of news content, however, shows its limitations, leading us both to question what factors prevent it from doing a better job. This book allowed us both to explore these interests more completely.

We consider ourselves true coauthors, sharing equally in the conceptualization and writing of the present volume. Based on our respective interests, Shoemaker took primary responsibility for Chapters 1, 5, 8, 10, and 11, and Reese did so for Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, and 9; Chapter 4 was a joint *effort*. Beyond the simple division of labor, this book is a synergistic result of a close friendship that began in graduate school. Our academic training is similar enough to give us a common ground, but our approaches are different, such that we do not simply echo each other's ideas.

Intellectual work is more enjoyable when it can be shared, particularly with a supportive friend. A work's quality is improved by continual discussion, which leads to checking, clarification, and revision. In addition, wheedling and cajoling each other helped keep us not too far behind schedule.

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We are fortunate to be members of an active community of scholars at the University of Texas. Of our many colleagues here, specific discussions have included AI Anderson, Barbara Brown, Wayne Danielson, Dominic Lasorsa, Max McCombs, Joan Schleuder, Griff Singer, Jim Tankard, and Gale Wiley. We especially thank Wayne Danielson, who, when we were stumped for a good title, provided one. The Department of Journalism at the University of Texas has provided a comfortable and friendly academic home, ever since former chairman Dwight Teeter brought us here together eight years ago. Here we have had the opportunity to both study and teach the theories we examine in this book. Our present chairman, colleague, and friend, Maxwell McCombs, has helped provide a supportive intellectual atmosphere where both are possible.

In some way or another we owe a debt to all of the instructors we have had and the academic friends and colleagues with whom we have worked over the years. Although the list would be too voluminous to include here, we particularly recognize our teachers from the University of Wisconsin: Steve Chaffee, Dan Drew, Robert Hawkins, Jim Hoyt, Jack McLeod, Mark Miller, and Byron Reeves.

Finally, but most important, we gratefully acknowledge the love, patience, and support of our spouses, Carol Reese and John Parrish, and our children, Jack Parrish, Aaron Reese, and (most recently) Daniel Reese. They have tolerated our sometimes excessive and often ill-timed work schedules. To them we dedicate this book.

Stephen D. Reese

Pamela J. Shoemaker

## chapter 1

# Studying Influences on Media Content

**T**his is a book about media content and the influences that shape it. Our perspective is different from that commonly taken in books about mass communication research, which tend to use media content as a starting point. Such studies typically ask: By what *process* is the message received and understood by the audience? What *effects* do the media have on the audience? Instead of taking media content as a given, we ask: *What factors inside and outside media organizations affect media content?*

The fact that we ask this question reveals that we do not assume that mass media content reflects an objective reality. It does not mirror the world around us. Rather, media content is shaped by a variety of factors that result in different versions of reality. Consider the following eight examples:

1. In 1993 when a woman cut off her husband's penis after being raped by him, headlines varied dramatically ("The 'Offending Organ,'" 1993):
  - Washington Post* "Va. Woman Tells Police She Mutilated Husband after He Raped Her?"
  - Washington Times*: "Woman Cuts Off Husband's Penis."
  - Free Lance Star*, Fredericksburg, Va.: "Claiming Husband Raped Her, Woman Severs Offending Organ?"
  - The Guardian*, London: "Errant Organ Refixed after 'Raped' Wife's DIY [Do It Yourself] Snip."

Why were some media afraid to use the word *penis* early in the coverage of the story? And why did the media regularly use the word *penis* after the case went to trial? There were only about 20 articles using *penis* in the first half of 1993, but more than 1,000 later in the year (Sachs, 1994).

In the same story, even so-called "fact" varied between media: The television news show "20/20" referred merely to "the knife," whereas *Vanity Fair* called it "an 8-inch-long, red-handled carving knife." The *Washington Post* referred to "a 12-inch fillet knife," and the *Wall Street Journal*, "a 12-inch kitchen knife" ("The Cut Heard Round the World," 1993). Why did the descriptions of the knife differ?

2. In March 1993, reporter Carol Huang of the *Morning Times* in Laredo, Texas, wrote a story that was published in her newspaper about a dead, 79-foot, 300-pound earthworm blocking Interstate 35. The trail of mucus it left behind indicated that it may have come from the Rio Grande River, speculated the authorities (Martinez, 1993). The story was false. Why did the reporter write it? Why did the paper print it?

3. During the week of December 28, 1992, and January 3, 1993, three made-for-TV movies aired about high school student Amy Fisher, who had shot and killed the wife of her lover and pimp, Joey Buttafuoco (Rapping, 1993). Why did three networks run movies about the same event at roughly the same time? How did the movies differ, and why?

4. In November 1993, a woman sportswriter was shoved during a locker room interview with a Tampa Bay football player, "You don't belong here!" he shouted (Giobbe, 1993). How did this affect the interview the sportswriter was conducting and her subsequent story?

5. In 1993, the *Los Angeles Times* revised its "style book," substituting *pro-abortion* for *pro-choice* and *abortion foe* for *pro-life*. It also banned the word *Anglo* except for people of English descent; *co-ed* as a noun; and *elderly* for describing the age of a person. Other banned terms included *hillbilly*, *mailman*, *WASP*, and *welsh* (as on a bet) (Stein, 1993). Why? On what basis did the newspaper decide to make these changes?

6. A New Jersey tabloid newspaper has begun to publish photographs of scantily dressed models on its front page. Although this is common in Great Britain, it is unusual in an American publication (Case, 1993). Why show nearly nude women on the front page?

7. "Good evening. I'm Connie Chung. In today's news ... Murphy Brown gave birth to a baby boy." Chung is a real journalist, but Brown plays a journalist on a TV show (Morrison, 1992). Why are real and fictional characters showing up together?

8. Television played a big role in the 1993 David Koresh tragedy in Waco, Texas—too big a role, according to some terrorism and hostage experts. Robert Kupperman, a terrorism expert, compared television's part in the burning of the Davidian compound to inciting a riot. The television journalists "were communicating with one man, amplifying his effects and

promoting an incendiary, situation which eventually led to the burning down of the compound. [It] was like yelling 'Fire!' in a crowded theater; but all this was occurring in slow motion until the conflagration." Gary Weaver, an expert in hostage negotiations, compared television coverage of the situation in Waco to a mob on the sidewalk chanting, "Jump! Jump!" to someone threatening to commit suicide by jumping from a tall building. "You [television broadcasters] can say you didn't push [Koresh] and that's true," Weaver says. "But on the other hand, you contributed?" Moreover, television news gave David Koresh a global audience that he could otherwise not have had (Kamen, 1993). Why was TV news so involved in the Koresh story? Why did it spend more than 50 days with cameras pointed at the compound?

The answers to these questions tell us something about how media content is produced and shaped. These anecdotes represent observations that mass media users make daily. But they are not discrete and unrelated events. Instead, these events are related and can be compared in a variety of ways. This book will explore those relationships.

Figure 1.1 suggests how this book's theme fits in with the more traditional "process and effects" books. The studies we discuss here address questions about the nature of media content, the ways in which such content is manufactured (how it is itself a result or an effect), and what interests it serves.

The impact of both the entertainment and the news and information aspects of media content has been widely studied. For example, research has looked at whether televised portrayals of violence make children more aggressive, and at

**FIGURE 1.1** Most books on mass media research mainly cover studies dealing with the process through which the audience receives mass media content or with the affects of content on people and society. We believe that it is equally important to understand the influences that shape content.

CONTENT INFLUENCE STUDIES

PROCESS AND EFFECTS STUDIES

Influences on  
mass media  
content

Mass media  
content as  
transmitted  
audience

Effects of mass  
media on people  
and society to the

Whether the projection of presidential election results by television network news shows makes West Coast citizens less likely to vote. These are interesting areas for study, but we suggest that more important questions exist: *Why* do television networks produce shows that may make children more aggressive? *Why* do network news shows risk lowering voter turnout in California? The answers, we believe, lie in such factors as the personal attitudes and orientations of media workers; professionalism; corporate policies; corporate ownership patterns; the economic environment; advertisers; and ideological influences.

### SOME DEFINITIONS

Let's begin by defining what we mean by media content. By *content*, we mean the complete quantitative and qualitative range of verbal and visual information distributed by the mass media—in other words, just about anything that appears there. The *quantitative* range of information includes those attributes of media content that can be measured or counted—the number of seconds a television news story lasts, for example, or the number of column inches a newspaper story uses. We can also count such things as the number of newspaper stories about a particular country that appear within a given time period, the number of women who appear in automobile advertisements, the number of situation comedies broadcast in the last ten years, the number of magazine photographs that show U.S. senators, or the number of times a particular sportscaster refers to black football players.

Such measures can provide important information about *amounts* of coverage and some insight into priorities, but *they* cannot tell us what the coverage was like—the *qualitative* attributes of the content. Two newspapers may run precisely the same number of inches of news about Israel but still provide very different views of what is happening in that country. Knowing how many times a sportscaster refers to black athletes doesn't tell us whether the coverage reflects fairness or prejudice. Measuring the qualitative attributes of media content is difficult, but it is often far more revealing than looking at quantitative data alone.

Many social scientists who study the media are concerned with the elusive concept of *objectivity*. How close do the media come to representing an objective reality? The problem, of course, is that there is no such thing as an objective observer, of reality; all of us use our experiences, personalities, and knowledge to interpret what we see. The best we can do, then, is to compare *media reality* with *social reality*—a view of the world that is *socially derived*; that is, what society knows about itself (Fishman, 1980).

Society offers many sources of information about itself, from personnel files, office memos, and business inventories to book reviews, opinion polls, and media reports. Our assessment of social reality—that is, our best guess about what is actually going on in the world—uses all of the data at our disposal.

Generally we find that reality is much too complex to be described objectively by any one source. (For more on the social derivation of reality, see Ichheiser, 1970.)

## **A RICH HISTORY OF RESEARCH MEDIA**

### **Media Sociology**

The term *media sociology* is sometimes applied to studies that look at influences on media content, but these are not always in fact sociological. For example, studies that look at the socialization of journalists as professionals and at their personal attitudes fall more within the realm of psychology than of sociology. Whether we call these Studies media sociology or social psychology, However, they reflect an increasingly popular area of research. A number of researchers who previously studied media effects—including ourselves—now find themselves asking why such effect-producing content exists to begin with.

Although research describing media content has been available since the early part of this century, scientific investigation into the influences on content wasn't extensive until after World War II. Modern studies began with David Manning White's (1950) suggestion that journalists act as *gatekeepers* of media messages—that they select from among the day's events those that will become "news"—and with Warren Breed's (1955) description of how journalists become socialized to their jobs. Since then, an increasing number of studies have focused on the ways in which media workers and their employers, as well as organizational structures and society itself, affect media content. Yet although the number of such studies has increased, there has been little attention paid to the theoretical links between them.

### **The Hypothesis Approach**

The content studies, generated in the last 40 years have provided substantially more data than theory, especially as compared with the studies conducted on the "effects" side shown in Figure 1.1. Few content studies actually define and test a specific theory; rather, the researchers typically present a brief description of what they expect to find and then test one or more *hypotheses*, or relationships between two or more variables that characterize some phenomenon.

An example of a hypothesis is this: The more newsworthy an event is judged to be, the more prominently it will be covered by the mass media. The two major variables in this example are *event newsworthiness* and *coverage prominence*. Both are to some extent quantifiable (a national presidential election is objectively more newsworthy than an election for city commissioner, and the placement and amount of coverage devoted to both can be measured). The hypothesis predicts that events of extremely high intrinsic newsworthiness will receive prominent coverage, perhaps on a newspaper's front page or at the beginning of a television newscast; events of only moderate



newsworthiness will still be covered, but only on the inside pages of the newspaper or in the middle of the newscast; and events that are low in newsworthiness may not be covered by the mass media at all.

Testing several related hypotheses can lead to breakthroughs of theory that help us make better predictions about media content. As these theories grow, they typically also include assumptions that researchers make about their topic, definitions of key concepts, and suggestions for measuring them. In their concentration on data, however; most media content studies lack these kinds of theoretical connections. As a result, the common threads among them have largely been ignored, and the growth of theory inhibited,

A theory may be limited to one hypothesis (such as the one in our example above) or to several that deal with the same overall idea but address separate aspects of it. The theory of news content developed by one of the authors of this book, for example, offers eight assumptions and forty-eight hypotheses about how mass media content is shaped (Shoemaker, 1987).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Other scholars have organized content research around a variety of theoretical perspectives. Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980) group these approaches into a handful of categories:

- *Content reflects social reality with little or no distortion.* The *mirror* approach to content research assumes that what the mass media distribute conveys an accurate reflection of social reality to the audience—like a television camera turned on the world. The *null effects* approach similarly suggests that media content reflects reality, but it sees this reality as the result of compromises between those who sell information to the media and those who buy it; these forces counteract one another and produce an objective portrayal of events.
- *Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes.* This *communicator-centered* approach suggests that psychological factors intrinsic to communications personnel—their professional, personal, and political attitudes, and the professional training communicators receive—lead them to produce a social reality in which agreement among social groups is the norm, and in which new ideas or behaviors are treated as undesirable oddities. This approach predicts that communicators will portray deviant people or groups as eccentricities that reasonable people will not take seriously.
- *Content is influenced by media routines.* The *organizational routines* approach argues that media content is influenced by the ways in which communications workers and their companies organize work. News reporters are taught to write stories in the *inverted pyramid*, for example, putting what they consider the most important information first and organizing the rest in descending order of importance; the journalist's assessment therefore determines the content of the story.

- Content is influenced by other social institutions and forces. This approach suggests that factors external to the communicator and the organization—economic and cultural forces, and audience—determine content. The market approach, for example, locates influence in the communicators' desire to give audiences what they want in order to ensure large audiences for sponsors' products; the social responsibility approach locates influence in the communicators' desire to give audiences what they need rather than what they want.
- Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo. Hegemony is a broad theoretical approach suggesting that media content is influenced by the ideology of those in power in society. Being key parts of the economic system that are controlled by those with economic power, mass media carry an ideology consistent with those interests, which helps ensure that society will continue in its present form.

## BUILDING A THEORY OF MEDIA CONTENT

In this book we compare and contrast the existing research in media content, point out similarities among these various theoretical approaches, and thus take the first step in building theory. We begin our look at the factors that shape mass media by (1) comparing our approach with that of the traditional process and effects texts, and (2) demonstrating why the important area of media content has been more or less ignored by researchers in mass communication, and why research has been primarily limited to microlevel or individual analysis. We identify several reasons for this, including the history of the field, the cultural preference in American society for the individual over the social focus, and the tendency of scholars to adopt an industry perspective. These arguments compose Chapter 2 in this book.

In Chapter 3, we discuss how media content has been conceptualized and studied over the years, and we question the extent to which media have been thought to reflect reality. We propose an *active* media role in constructing a reality that may be compared with other sources of social reality.

In Chapter 4 we establish the nature of media content, looking at the people, places, and events that make up the media "world" We isolate patterns of media coverage that appear in a variety of studies. (Several studies have shown that news conveys information about the powerful, for example.) We examine) the extent to which media content reflects social reality by exploring studies that compare, media content with other measures of social reality, and we, establish that media do *not* always mirror reality. We describe the systematic ways in which the "media world" differs from the "real world."

Chapters 5 through 9 examine the various factors that affect media content as suggested by the Gans and Gitlin categories identified above. In Chapter 5, we look at media professionals in terms of both their personal attitudes and those that result from their professional roles. We investigate claims that communicators' liberal political attitudes affect their work, the difference between "neutral" and "participant" journalists (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972), and how journalists' conceptions of what is news affect their choices about what kind of events they cover.

In Chapter 6, we look at how content is influenced by media routines that result from constraints on both newsgathering and transmission. We discuss how media routines such as gatekeeping, the beat system, pack journalism, and reliance on official sources have developed in response to organizational needs to produce a product acceptable to consumers in the most efficient manner.

In Chapter 7, we investigate the influence of media organizations on content, including such areas as political endorsements, editorial positions, and corporate policies. We consider organizational roles, structures, and policies, as well as patterns of ownership and how the economic goals of the organization as a whole affect news content.

Chapter 8 looks at extramedia factors such as the economic environment in which the media operate (both macro and micro—circulation, market size, profitability, competition with other media, and the extent to which various media corporations are interlocked through their boards of directors), advertisers and other revenue sources, and cultural and national variables.

In Chapter 9, we review influences on content from the societal-level ideological perspective. We discuss the role of the media in establishing social boundaries between the "normal" and the "deviant," and the links between media content's ideological character and the power centers of society proposed by Marxist scholars. In addition, we describe the relationship between lower-level influences (routines, journalists' values) and their larger ideological functions.

In Chapter 10, we suggest ways in which our content-oriented approach to the study of media can be linked to more traditional process and effects studies. *Effects* studies specify the types of content that produce a particular outcome; our perspective helps predict what arrangement of factors is most likely to produce that type of content—and thus helps to determine the extent of the effect. For example, the hypothesis that "the more people read news-papers, the more likely they are going to vote" needs to be qualified by the *kind* of political content offered by the newspaper they read, which is in turn affected by a variety of intra- and extramedia influences. We dispute the usual underlying assumption that mass media content is a channel through which reality passes to audience members, and we suggest that much of the media effects literature is in need of reinterpretation.

Chapter 11 synthesizes what we know about influences on media content into a series of assumptions, propositions, and hypotheses. Through such an inductive process we can begin to develop a comprehensive theory of media content.

**NOTE**

1. For examples of early studies, see Taeuber (1932), Fisk (1933), and Ridings (1934).

## Chapter 2

# Beyond Processes and Effects

**M**ost mass communication theory books concentrate on the process through which messages are received and understood by the audience, and on the effects that those messages may produce. In both cases, the message itself is, in social science terms, the *independent variable*, or cause. The effects of the message are then considered to be *dependent variables*—dependent, that is, on exposure to content. In this book, we define the message itself as a *dependent variable*. We argue that the message, or media content, is influenced by a wide variety of factors both inside and outside media organizations. Before we look at these factors individually, however, we need to understand why they have not been explored in the past as thoroughly as questions of audience, process, and effect. In this chapter, we will lay out a framework to help us understand where communications scholars have concentrated their attention—and why.

### **THE TRADITIONAL FOCUS OF COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH**

To establish the first part of our framework we find it useful to categorize research according to two dimensions: level of analysis, and that which is being studied.

#### **Level of Analysis**

The levels of analysis in communications research can be thought of as forming a continuum ranging from micro to macro—from the smallest units of a system to the largest. A microlevel study examines communication as an activity engaged in and affecting individual people; a macrolevel study examines social structures beyond the control of any one individual—social networks, organizations, and cultures. These levels function hierarchically: What happens at the lower levels is affected by, even to a large extent determined by, what happens at higher levels.

### What Is Studied?

One of the earliest and most often quoted ways of describing the communication process was suggested by Harold Lasswell (1948), who proposed this framework:

Who  
Says What  
Through Which Channel  
To Whom  
With What Effect

Mass communication studies have examined all these elements—the communicator (who); media content (says what); the medium (through which channel); the audience (to whom); and the effects (with what effect)—but most studies have concentrated on the final two elements, audience and effects.

Many studies focus on more than one component, but even those that examine several tend to concentrate on one more than the others. To understand how this works, let's look at a classic voting study conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in Erie County, Ohio, in 1940 (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Three thousand residents were interviewed about their voting intentions, personal characteristics, and the attention they paid to newspaper and radio messages about a particular political campaign. The researchers concluded that media messages *reinforced* (but did not determine) people's political predispositions. Personal characteristics of the audience members were found to determine campaign interest, and audience members were found to have used media selectively to filter out political messages contrary to their preexisting political stances. In this study, as in many others, a number of components were involved ("says what"—campaign messages; "through which channel"—radio and newspapers; "to whom"—voters; "with what effect"—reinforcement); however, the primary focus was on the audience.

If we use Lasswell's framework and factor into it our level-of-analysis dimension, we can construct a matrix within which to locate the landmark communications studies of past years. (See Figure 2.1.) Clearly, the largest number of studies (and arguably the most influential) fall into the upper right quadrant of the matrix—under the "To Whom" and "With What Effect" columns, and on the micro or individual row.

The studies we use in Figure 2.1 are those identified by Shearon Lowery and Melvin DeFleur in their book, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research* (1983, 1988, 1995). Note that although many of these studies have macrosocietal theoretical implications or deal with society wide

Who (communicator)	Says what through which channel (media content)	To whom (audience)	With what effect (effects)
Micro/Individual	Seduction of the Innocent, 1954  Violence and the Media, content analysis, 1969  Television and Social Behavior; Media Content and Control, 1971  Television and Behavior, 1982	• <i>The Payne Fund Studies: Motion Pictures</i>  Then Invasion from Behavior, 1940  <i>Radio Research</i> 1942-1943  <i>The Diffusion of Hybrid Seed Corn</i> , 1943  The People's Choice, 1948  Personal Influence 1955  Television in the Lives Of our Children, 1961 Violence and the Media, audience Survey, 1969  Television and Social Behavior, 1971 - TV in Day-to-Day Life	Hovland's Experiments in Mass Communication, 1949  Communication and Persuasion, 1953  <i>Television and Social Behavior</i> , 1971 - Television and Social Learning -Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness  Television and Behavior, 1982
Macro/Social system		<i>The Flow of Information</i> , 1948	<i>The Agenda-setting Function of the mass Media</i> , 1972

**FIGURE 2.1** A matrix approach to describing "milestones in mass communication research."

problems, they are conducted at the individual level of analysis; we use the measurement variables actually employed in the studies, not their level of theorizing, to locate them on our matrix. Only three of these studies examined media content in any way, and none was devoted solely to communicators. Let's look briefly at each of these "milestone" studies.

### Communications Studies

*On Media Content.* Lowery and DeFleur identify only three landmark studies of media content in their 1995 edition. A third content study was included in the 1983 and 1988 editions but was removed in 1995. It is Frederic Wertham's *The Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), which caused considerable public commotion by linking an analysis of sexual and violent content in comic books with an assumption that such content would negatively affect readers, even to the extent of causing an increase in juvenile delinquency. A more recent and scientific study of content is George Gerbner's analysis of violence in the report of the Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, *Violence and the Media* (Baker & Ball, 1969). (This study also includes research on media professionals—the "who"—but this comprises only two of eleven reports in the volume.) Another content analysis by Gerbner was included in the later surgeon general's report, *Television and Social Behavior* (Gerbner, 1971). The 1982 follow up to the 1971 studies on television reviewed literature published since the previous report, including studies defining the concept *violence* and determining how much violence is present in television programming. The report also discussed the proportion of women and minorities in television shows as compared to the real world.

*On Audience.* Most of the "milestone" studies fall into the "to whom" category. The first of these, the Payne Fund Studies of 1933, comprise 12 separate volumes and are not easily pigeonholed in our matrix (for an overview of these studies, see Charters, 1933). The goals of these studies included measuring film content and audience composition, with the primary object of determining how movies influence children; the resulting research bridges- the "audience" and "effects" categories, and the authors conclude that a host of individual and situational factors mediate the effects of film.

*The Invasion from Mars* (Cantril, 1940) is easier to locate squarely in the "audience" category of our matrix. Cantril explores audience factors associated with panic behaviors through personal interviews with audience members for Orson Welles's famous radio broadcast.<sup>1</sup>

*The People's Choice*, the Erie County voter study referred to earlier (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948), examines the formation of voting decisions over time, with a primary focus on audience social categories and predispositions. The researchers began with the assumption that voters who changed their voting intentions between May and November did so because of campaign communication, but the study did not bear this out. *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) was equally influential in its focus; the researchers surveyed women to determine on whom they relied for various kinds of information. This study hints at a macrolevel analysis by exploring networks of relationships, but measurements are confined to isolated individual respondents.

Using some data from the *Personal Influence* study and other data collected by the Office of Radio Research at Columbia University in the 1940s, Herta Herzog examined the *ways* in which the

audience used the mass media. These studies are the precursor to the uses and gratifications approach, a highly popular body of research even today.

In 1943 another prolific area of research got its start—the diffusion of innovations and of information. Bryce Ryan and Neal Gross published a study on “The Diffusion of Hybrid Seed Corn in Two Iowa Communities” in the journal *Rural Sociology*.

Schramm, Lyle, and Parker’s study of the child audience, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (1961), was the first large-scale investigation of children and television. It was based on comparisons between individual children. The authors focused on children as an active audience, on the uses children make of television, and on the functions television serves for children. The *Violence and the Media* report (1969) mentioned above contains a more general study of the audience for media violence. The Media Task Force survey concentrates on audience norms about violence and media habits; media effects are inferred. *TV in Day-to-Day Life: Patterns of Use* (Comstock & Rubinstein, 1971), the fourth in a four-volume series on television and behavior issued by the United States Surgeon General’s office, sheds more light on audience uses of television. Only the last study in this “to whom” category approaches the macrolevel of analysis. *The Flow of Information* (DeFleur & Larsen, 1948) examines how information flows through a social system. The authors studied how slogans included in leaflets dropped in a community were retained and distorted by the audience.

**On Effects.** Justly famous effects studies include those conducted with American soldiers by psychologist Carl Hovland during World War II (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949), which systematically varied content to determine the most persuasive message. Although other components in Lasswell’s description of the communication process are included in this study (such as the credibility of the communicator and the structure of the arguments in the messages), these are of interest only in terms of the effects they produce. Later studies by Hovland solidified the central role of persuasion effects in communications research (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

Two other effects milestones were part of the surgeon general’s multivolume report mentioned above (Comstock & Rubinstein, 1971). Volumes 2 (*Television and Social Learning*) and 3 (*Television and Adolescent Aggressiveness*) summarize research and make the strongest case up to that time linking television viewing and aggression. The 1982 *Television and Behavior* report showed 10 years of additional evidence to support this relationship. However, it also showed how television could have prosocial effects on the audience.

The final study in our matrix (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) examines media agenda setting. The researchers found that residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, perceived issues to be important to the extent that the media emphasized those issues; in other words, the media were found to have a potentially persuasive cognitive impact by emphasizing an agenda of issues that tells people not what to think, but what to think *about*. Although specific individuals were interviewed for this study, their responses were combined; the issues ranked important by the Chapel Hill



*community* corresponded to those emphasized by the media available to them. Because of this, we place this study toward the macro side of our matrix.

By mapping these studies, identified by communications scholars as land-marks, we can see clearly that the thrust of communications research has been toward the individual, or micro, level and toward a focus on audience and the effects on that audience. When content has been studied, the purpose has been to make inferences about its potential effects rather than about the people, organizations, and society that produce it.

### **Textbooks**

Before discussing the reasons for this imbalance, we use two final examples to make our point in another way. Most college students have had ample experience in learning from textbooks that convey the common wisdom of a field by summarizing a myriad of studies. Such textbooks must conform to what professors who teach in the field consider the norm—the dominant approach or paradigm. We can, therefore, get a quick reading on how a field has developed by consulting popular textbooks; three in communications theory that may be considered typical are *Mass Communication Theories and Research* (Tan, 1985), *Mass Media Processes and Effects* (Jeffres, 1986), and *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media* (Severin & Tankard, 1992).

All three texts begin with chapters on the nature of theory and research generally and then devote the majority of their remaining space to audience and effects research. Tan devotes sections to communication and persuasion effects, the audience and its needs, socialization, and media and social change (this last approaching the level of macroanalysis). Only 6 percent of the book covers communicators and their environment. Jeffres, as the name of his book suggests, devotes the lion's share of space to effects research—a chapter each on social, political, economic, and cultural effects. A single chapter covers audience, and another content, but much of the latter is devoted to audience perceptions of media content. About 15 percent of the book constitutes information about media industries, people, and organizations. Severin and Tankard devote large sections in their text to the scientific method and models, perception and language issues, the social-psychological approach, and media effects and uses. Only one major section, the final one, deals with the media as institutions; included are chapters on media ownership and the media in modern society. In this latter chapter, however, the discussion of roles and functions of the media still deals with media effects, but on a broader societal scale.

### **WHY THE TRADITIONAL FOCUS?**

Having established that the prevailing focus of communications theory has traditionally been on "to whom" and "with what effect," and that the prevailing level of analysis has been individual or micro, we need to look at the second part of our original question: *Why* has that been the case?

### **The Social Science Context**

Journalism and social science are both systems of information-gathering, and the two have a lot in common. Both are activities that try to represent the world as truthfully as possible; both make claims of objectivity; and yet both by their nature present a restricted view of reality.<sup>2</sup> Neither can be understood apart from the culture that produces and supports it.

Both social science and journalism have routines—those habitual, ongoing, patterned procedures that are accepted as appropriate professional practice. For journalists, these include such things as gatekeeping, the beat system, balancing sides in issue stories, and reliance on authoritative sources. For social scientists, they include making systematic observations, formulating hypotheses, and testing these against data. The routines of both social science and journalism were developed to help their practitioners make sense of the world and interpret ambiguous situations (Tuchman, 1977; Tuchman, 1979; Kidder & Judd, 1986).

Routines like these help the journalist claim accuracy and objectivity and the researcher claim scientific reliability and validity. The journalist interviews credible sources, attributes their remarks, and avoids expressing overt opinions. The social scientist uses methods that invite duplication. In each case, the resulting work can be defended because professional procedures have been followed.

Because they are invoked to defend work, however, does not mean that these routines are perfect. As systems of information-gathering, both journalism and social science have their biases. In fact, no system of information-gathering is ever completely adequate. Instead, we rely on what Kuhn (1962) called paradigms—ways of representing reality based on widely shared assumptions about how to gather and interpret information. These paradigms do not provide truth; they simply give us information that we find useful in ways that we find acceptable.

Paradigms are based on currently shared beliefs and expectations, and as a result, we tend to take them for granted. We lose sight of the fact that beliefs and expectations—and therefore paradigms—change not only over time but from one cultural environment to another. As news consumers, for example, we get used to the routines of the journalistic paradigm. We forget that the information we see and hear has been carefully filtered at several levels.

Scientific knowledge, particularly in the social sciences, is also filtered. It focuses on those questions considered important within the given paradigm. In fact, since the 1960s the paradigms for both journalism and social science have undergone serious challenges both from without and from within. The ability of news to convey "truth" has become increasingly questioned by a wary public, media "watchdog" monitors, and journalists themselves, who have become more active and cynical following Vietnam and Watergate. Postmodern currents in the social sciences have led to "critical" studies that question core philosophical assumptions about the study of human phenomena. Thus, there is increasing awareness that in the social sciences, just as in journalism, the answers we find depend on the questions we ask.

What causes some questions to be asked more frequently than others? We need to look more closely at the society in which the questions are being asked.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss how social factors like cultural norms have affected what social scientists study and how they study it, and we will identify several influences in mass communications research that have resulted in the individual, audience, and effects emphases in our matrix.

### **The Focus on the Individual**

Three American cultural biases feed into the microlevel orientation of mass communication research: cultural, methodological, and theoretical.

***Individualism as a Cultural Bias.*** The social sciences in America share this country's larger cultural priorities, one of which is to prize the individual over the collective. Our cultural ideal emphasizes self-contained individualism, and we tend to look unfavorably on those who rely too heavily on others (e.g., people on welfare) and on the collective society. Conformity has negative overtones in this context of individualism, although conformity may help society work more smoothly. The ideal individual is self-sufficient, self-actualized, and autonomous; the dependent person is considered weak and psychologically underdeveloped. In theory, if not in practice, we value the independent thinker over the organization person.

Individualism is also the religious and social norm in the United States. The dominant Protestant denominations emphasize a personal relationship with God and individual salvation, and the average American prefers a single-family house with a yard and, preferably, a fence around it. Alternative living arrangements that involve interdependency—collectives, communes, and the like—arouse skepticism and suspicion.

Politically, of course, communism is considered patently un-American, and even mild forms of socialism such as government-sponsored medical care are highly suspect. Similarly, our economic system revolves around individual consumption and profit. Naturally, advertisers encourage such consumption—often at the expense of other more collectively beneficial expenditures. Sharing does not create optimum demand and is therefore discouraged. Automobile makers, for example, reap higher profits when each of us owns a car (or two) than when we use mass transit. Consequently, companies like General Motors and Ford have lobbied for Americans' "freedom of transportation" by pushing for more roads, which in turn encourage more cars. No such powerful lobby exists for mass transportation. Thus, urban interstate highways are now clogged with commuters, most of them driving alone.

***Individualism as a Methodological Bias.*** The methods we have developed to study behavior also strengthen this individual bias and work against the study of larger social structures. The statistical techniques we use to analyze data are often based on surveys of individual respondents, so that each person becomes a case; the individual is the unit of analysis.

The same sampling techniques developed for use in manufacturing have been applied to people. The beer bottler discovered early in this century that randomly checking a small number of bottles

for quality would give reasonable assurance that the entire batch was good, within certain bounds of probability (see Tankard's description [1984] of W. S. Gosset's work for Guinness Brewery). Before long, someone discovered that this same procedure could accurately measure the behavior of people, and so effective are these techniques that they now form the basis for a huge polling industry.

The beer bottler, however, has no interest in the relationship between and among the bottles; each one is a discrete unit unto itself. The student of human behavior, on the other hand, does need to examine relationships among people in addition to their individual characteristics. Such relationships—sometimes called *social structures*—are less easily studied by performing statistical tests on data collected from individuals. C. Wright Mills (1959) was among the critics of such research, deriding it as "the statistical ritual." Mills argued that we cannot understand larger social structures simply by adding up data about individuals.

The rise of statistical methods came with the increasing professionalization of the social sciences after World War II, leading to the desire to codify research procedures to make them more standardized and "scientific." Sociology, often called the "tool maker" for the social sciences, was especially concerned with refining the measurement of individual response through large-scale surveys and the analysis of variables. Although this approach does give greater precision in measuring some human behavior, it has greater difficulty in capturing other group and community qualities. Blumler, for example, argued that the crucial limit to the successful application of variables analysis to human group life is set by the process of interpretation or definition that goes on in human groups. This process, which I believe to be the core of human action, gives a character to human group life that seems to be at variance with the logical premises of variable analysis. (Quoted in Hammersley, 1989, p. 116)

***Individualism as a Theoretical Bias.*** We theorize more easily about those things we can measure. Consequently, our methodological biases may also have encouraged the development of theories at the micro level. Such development of theory is complicated, however, by the fact that any given individual's behavior generally has many causes. We *may say*, for example, that a juvenile delinquent breaks the law because of a psychological tendency toward crime—an individual explanation for behavior—or because of influence from the gang to which the child belongs—a group-centered explanation. American theorists have preferred the individual explanation, a tendency some have criticized as restrictive. Examples of this abound.

After World War II, communication research incorporated many important areas from its allied field of social psychology—including group dynamics, norms, interpersonal relations, and attitudes—and used them to explain how mass communications were mediated by the audience (Delia, 1987). In spite of this apparent group orientation, however, social psychology has tended to explain the social with reference to the psychological rather than the other way around.

Three prominent areas of social psychology research—*androgyny*, cognitive consistency, and aggression—demonstrate this clearly.

The commonly accepted concept of *androgyny*, for example, is the presence of both male and female traits in an individual personality and is assumed to define a "standard of psychological health" (Bern, 1974, p. 162). Critics such as Edward Sampson (1977, p. 772) suggest, however, that a more cooperative, interdependent cultural ideal would not be as likely to favor the self-contained androgynous personality but would regard it as excessively isolated from others. This alternative to our cultural ideal would place greater value on a person who "recognizes his or her interdependency on others in order to achieve satisfaction and completion as a human being." The healthy personality would then be found within a grouping of two or more individuals with complementary traits in a mutually interdependent relationship. Traits like *androgyny* are not intrinsically healthy, as Sampson points out, but are simply better suited to individual-centered cultures like our own.

In another prominent area of study, cognitive consistency, individuals are said to strive to keep their thoughts and behaviors consistent; and the inability to do this results in an uncomfortable tension, or dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Studies have shown that persons made to suffer in order to reach a goal perceive that goal as more attractive than those who were not made to suffer. Presumably, suffering for an undesirable goal produces dissonance, which can be reduced by changing one's perception of the goal (Aronson & Mills, 1959).

Social psychologists have also looked within the individual for causes of aggression. In one prominent line of research, for example, people were found to respond more aggressively if they were frustrated, particularly if the frustration was seen as "arbitrary" (Pastore, 1952; Berkowitz, 1962).

Some scholars warn, however, that we should not view all behavior as internally motivated. Albert Pepitone (1976) criticizes dissonance and aggression theories for ignoring cultural explanations for behavior. Pepitone suggests, for example, that "dissonant" goal seekers may simply be expressing a shared cultural norm (the Protestant ethic, that goals worth seeking require hard work and sacrifice) or that aggressive individuals may be responding to a breach of contract, an ethical violation of a cultural norm.

These may seem to be minor semantic differences in how behavior is interpreted, but such minor differences can make a major difference in how we see and interpret the social world. An individual-centered culture colors the way research is conducted within that culture, and we need to be aware of that coloration in order to avoid a common fallacy; that is, we need to understand that *because we can and do measure the behavior of individuals, we must not conclude that individual-level factors are the sole causes of behavior.*

### **The Focus on Audience and Effects**

Having identified some general reasons for the concentration of research in our matrix (Figure 2.1) at the micro or individual level, we next identify some factors that have tended to limit the topics of study in communications theory research.

As we have seen, the dominant focus has traditionally been on the process and effects of communication content as used by the audience, rather than on the organizational, institutional, and cultural roots of that content.

**Uncritical Social Science.** Mass communication research shares with other social science research the extent to which it has failed to critically examine the systems around which it developed. The weaknesses in the social sciences observed by Robert Lynd (1939) continue to be a problem today. Economists spend most of their time measuring the operations of the current economic system and evaluating ways to fine-tune it, rather than investigating alternative systems. As Lynd points out, political science tends to be preoccupied with minor adjustments to the political system, rather than with the larger impact of the system or, again, possible alternatives. Lynd was particularly critical of large-scale data-gathering bureaucracies, such as the former National Bureau of Economic Research, that purport to be objective analyzers of data. Such research "asks no questions that fundamentally call into question or go substantially beyond the core of the folkways" (Lynd, 1939, p. 144).

Lynd's criticisms of economics and political science might also be made of mass communication research, which has concentrated on the day-to-day operation of the mass media and rarely questioned mass media institutions themselves. Of course, social scientists of all disciplines do perform a valuable function by helping us understand the processes that take place within the existing social framework. But to the extent that we take political, economic, and media structures for granted, the structures themselves fail to come under scrutiny. Like the Washington-based journalists who adopt the values of the political system they cover, scholars are similarly susceptible to the values and priorities of the institutions they study.

This uncritical acceptance of the status quo has become more pronounced in recent years with the increasing importance of policy-oriented research institutes, of "think tanks," which hire and promote the work of their own social science analysts. These individuals in turn usually have their own political bias and are closely tied to the American establishment elite. The public sees these experts on television representing think tanks such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which receives major funding from conservative foundations and defense contractors. In his analysis of the rise of such "experts," James Smith says they "must speak to power in a political and bureaucratic context; and they must speak a useful truth. Their claims to speak the truth must always be viewed in light of their relationship with power" (Smith, 1991, p. xiii). Thus, the expertise of these analysts depends not on their intellectual accomplishments but on their status as government insiders and their familiarity with the "players" (see also Soley, 1992).

**Early Institutional Patronage.** Even more than in other social sciences, mass communications scholars and the institutions they study are tightly inter-connected. Academic concerns have often been those of the large media institutions, and the early history of communications research is inseparable from the history of the mass media. One key early figure in mass communication

research, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, spearheaded the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, and the word *applied* was not chosen lightly. The bureau actively sought corporate funding for early studies of consumer and voter uses of the media; in return, those studies provided practical "applied" knowledge to their sponsors (Delia, 1987).

Robert Lynd and C. Wright Mills were also on the sociology faculty at Columbia. First Lynd and later Mills attacked the new model of research that they saw emerging from this academic-corporate alliance. Both felt that large-scale data-gathering projects made academic researchers too dependent on large-scale funding. This dependence on money from outside the university, Lynd argued, lured researchers into provisional acceptance of "the system's" definition of problems. The institutional patronage exerted a profound influence on communication by promoting a style of research that has been termed *administrative*. This new academic model of scholarship, exemplified by Paul Lazarsfeld, was characterized by data-gathering bureaucracies, funding from business-oriented foundations, and projects of relevance to corporate interests. The new model is important because, as Gitlin (1978) argues:

The dominant paradigm in the field since World War II has been, clearly, the cluster of ideas, methods, and findings associated with Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his school: the search for specific, measurable, short-term, individual, attitudinal and behavioral "effects" of media content, and the conclusion that media are not very important in the formation of public opinion. (p. 75)

The problems addressed by administrative research—in other words, the main concerns of the big media organizations—focused on what the audience was doing with media products. Radio in particular had no way of estimating audience size without survey research; television would later share that concern. In the mid-1930s Lazarsfeld worked closely on radio research with Frank Stanton, then research director at CBS. *Life* magazine helped fund the Erie County voting study, which intrigued McFadden Publications (*True Story, True Confessions*) founder Bernarr McFadden, who funded Lazarsfeld's follow-up study, *Personal Influence*, on opinion leading in fashion, buying, movies, and politics (Gitlin, 1978).

Government also wanted information about media effects. Carl Hovland's earliest experimental tests of persuasion via a mass medium (Hovland et al., 1949) were funded by a U.S. government that needed to convince soldiers of the value of fighting Germans and Japanese during World War II. DeFleur and Larsen's *Flow of Information* was also government funded (by the U.S. Air Force), since dropping leaflets was a common "propaganda" technique and the military was vitally interested in measuring the method's effectiveness.

This cooperation among government, business, and scholars came at a time of shared national purpose. During World War II, defeating the Axis powers clearly required a concerted effort. Later, widespread prosperity during the Eisenhower years encouraged a general acceptance of the political,

economic, and media systems; taking these systems for granted led logically to a research focus on their effects rather than on the systems themselves.

***The Relationship Today.*** Media organizations continue to provide grants for scholars to conduct research, and media professionals continue to serve on boards of colleges and universities. Many professors in departments of communication studies (variously called journalism, mass communication, telecommunication, radio-TV-film, and so on) have themselves worked in the media and often bring values of their former organizations to their teaching and research. Even so, academic researchers often find themselves under attack from professionals in media organizations for not doing more useful studies of practical problems. Other social science academic departments—sociology or psychology, for example—also rely on external grants for research funding, but they have neither the professional link that communications scholars often have nor the concentrated grant-giving constituency.

Such ties between communication research and the communications industry do not prevent critical questions from being asked. What has concerned critics like Mills and Lynd, however, is the potential development of a systematic tendency for researchers to ask some questions more than others and to ask them from an industry perspective. Studies that clearly will not appeal to grant givers may not even be proposed, let alone funded.

Many scholars find nothing wrong with this arrangement. They point out that working on applied problems can produce interesting results of general theoretical value. This attitude rests partly in the positivist view held by many behavioral scientists, who assume the possibility of eventually gaining a complete understanding of the social world. In Jerald Hage's (1972) view, theories approximate knowledge, a limit toward which they get closer and closer:

As the process of theory construction continues, we move closer to our limit of perfect knowledge, which is truth, or at least an accurate picture of the sociological component of social reality. (p. 187)

With enough time, some social researchers argue, a theory of behavior may be developed that is similar in power to those in physical science. To take a simple example, a physics professor who rolls a ball down an inclined plane, and who knows the size and weight of the ball and the angle of incline of the plane, can predict how that ball will behave every time.<sup>3</sup> Some social scientists suggest that with enough time, human behavior can be equally predictable. As Hage argues,

The awarding of a Nobel Prize in economics is indicative of how far that discipline has developed. Physics and chemistry have better approximations to their limits than do psychology and economics. Each discipline is at a different stage of development. (p. 186)



The continuing search for predictive theories in both the social and the physical sciences assumes that given enough observations, the many discrete research results may ultimately be ordered up into a complete understanding of physical and social life. The development of new knowledge therefore becomes self-justifying; the hope is that in the long run it will all make sense.

Mills and Lynd attacked this notion. They saw it as a justification for not addressing the larger questions of power, values, and social structures. It is, however, a notion that is fully compatible with American free-market, laissez-faire capitalism: If all knowledge is good, and if it eventually must be known, then why should the scientist not begin with those questions that also interest big—and wealthy—institutions outside academia, questions that primarily concern media impact on audience buying, voting, and viewing?

### SUMMARY

As we can see, a variety of factors have combined to skew communication research in our matrix toward an individual or microlevel approach, and toward questions of media audiences and effects. In this chapter, we have attempted to give you a framework for understanding this state of affairs and to provide you with a little more context than books like this typically offer. Theories and research, after all, do not exist in a vacuum; they are human activities, shaped by the same cultural forces that affect other human activities.

In the remaining chapters, we will turn to the questions that interest us—and that have traditionally been less often asked. Interest in these kinds of questions has been growing in recent decades. Media sociologist Herbert Gans (1983) notes a "veritable flood" of studies on the news media since 1970, following a "relative famine" of such research, and he suggests that the rise of television news was partially responsible. In addition, Gans argues that social scientists and journalists began to disagree in their worldviews following the social upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s, a period marked by civil rights and antiwar protest, racial strife, and the scandal of Watergate. The systems of information-gathering and the communications paradigms developed during previous decades were no longer so widely and unquestioningly accepted.

The increasingly substantial body of research on the organizational, social, economic, and cultural roots of media content (the lower left quadrant of our matrix in Figure 2.1) has rarely been presented with an organized theoretical framework. Yet these influences determine, after all, the available information from which audiences must choose, and they are thereby indirectly responsible for the entire range of effects that have traditionally fascinated communications researchers.

### NOTES

1. The 1938 radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds* was a Halloween spoof by the Mercury Theater that depicted a Martian invasion of Earth. Written as a series of newsbreaks into a musical show,

the broadcast seemed realistic and frightened many listeners, especially those who tuned in too late to hear the regular Mercury Theater introduction.

2. In fact, some journalism educators have advocated applying social science's more systematic techniques (such as survey research) to the practice of journalism (e.g., Tankard, 1976, and Meyer, 1979).
3. Even in physics, however, what is "law" one day can be questioned the next by theoretical physicists. If the physics professor tries to predict which direction a subatomic particle will move after being measured, the task will be very difficult; current theories of quantum physics show that the behavior of the particle is far less predictable than that of the much larger ball.

## Chapter 3

# Analyzing Media Content

**W**hy are we interested in content? What part has content played in communication theory, and how has it been studied? In this chapter, we examine these questions and present a framework for thinking about media content in relation to other sources of social reality.

### **WHY IS CONTENT IMPORTANT?**

Media content is the basis of media impact: It is, for the most part, open and accessible for study—the most obvious part of the mass communication process—unlike the behind-the-scenes decisions made by producers, writers, and editors and the behaviors of media consumers.

Communications content is of interest not only in its own right, but also as an indicator of many other underlying forces. Studying content helps us infer things about phenomena that are less open and visible: the people and organizations that produce the content. We can make inferences, for example, about the consumer demands that give rise to certain content, as well as about the organizational and cultural settings that contribute to its production. A quick glance at stories in the *National Enquirer* shows that they are designed to appeal to a different kind of audience than those in the *New York Times*. Comparing editorials in the *Wall Street Journal* with those in the *Washington Post* demonstrates a very different political orientation.

A study of media content also helps us predict its impact on its audience. Media effects researchers have typically, as a first step, determined what messages are available to an audience and, therefore, what messages are available to have an effect on that audience. Bradley Greenberg's *Life on Television* (1980), for example focuses solely on the content of entertainment television, but

he justifies his large-scale research in this area with a social learning perspective; that is, he argues that it is important first to determine what messages are available for viewers to use in learning about their world.

If we assume that the media provide most of the reality" that people know outside their own personal experience, then studying media content surely helps us assess what reality it is that they consume. Simply establishing that messages are available, however, does not by any means ensure that those messages have an effect. Social reformers and special interest group members often assume that media content equals direct effect, and media "monitors" (e.g., the Parent-Teachers Association on children's television) use content research to support their push for more or less content of specific kinds.

A study of media content alone is not sufficient, however, to understand either the forces that produce that content or the nature or extent of its effects—but content research is a start. Systematic, patterned regularities in content result from stable, underlying structural factors.

## **CONTENT AND COMMUNICATION THEORY RESEARCH**

### **Categorizing Content**

What do communication researchers mean when they talk about *media content*? Are they talking about television or print, news or entertainment? Do these kinds of distinctions matter to our theories of mass media? When we talk about media effects, to what kind of content are we referring? Often the answer is not clear. Different kinds of content have different effects and result from different audience needs and organizational pressures. Yet most studies do not explicitly examine content; rather, *they* look at the time spent with television as opposed to other activities, the number of newspapers read, and so on. To find useful answers to our questions about content, we need first to suggest a useful framework for discussing it.

There are countless ways in which we could attempt to categorize media content. We might label it based on audience appeal (highbrow/lowbrow), particular effects (prosocial/antisocial), the medium used (television, radio, print), sexual content (pornographic/nonpornographic), or any of a dozen other ways. One common approach is based on the use, or function, that content is designed to serve. Harold Lasswell (1948), in the same essay in which he proposes his components of communication model, identifies three important functions that communication serves in our society: (1) the *surveillance* of the environment; (2) the *correlation* of parts of society in responding to the environment; and (3) the *transmission* of social heritage from one generation to another. To these, Wright (1986) adds *entertainment*. Communication researchers have tended to organize their studies around these functional categories. Let's look more closely at the kinds of content that fit into them.

**Surveillance.** News content most closely fits the surveillance function. Wright (1986) suggests that news provides "warnings about imminent threats and dangers in the world" and is useful to such everyday activities of the society as the stock market, navigation, and air traffic. News is usually based on some underlying event, and traditionally there is a clear separation between the subjects of the news and its producers; the producers of news, unlike the producers of entertainment, do not have complete control over the events on which their product is based. Also unlike entertainment, news often provides delayed gratification for the consumer, who may have no immediate use for the content presented but may find it helpful eventually in determining political, economic, or other kinds of actions. The milestone studies in political communication listed on our matrix (Figure 2.1) are most concerned with surveillance content: agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and voter behavior (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948).

**Correlation.** Lasswell's correlation function is less explicit, but Wright (1986) associates it with editorial and propaganda activity—that is, with the production of appropriate responses to problems identified through surveillance content. In one of Lasswell's many analogies, a flock of sheep benefits from having some members act as sentries to warn the rest when necessary; other examples also describe specialized "leaders" who stimulate "followers" to "adapt in an orderly manner to circumstances heralded by the sentinels" (1948, p. 86). Consider that Lasswell published his essay shortly after the end of World War II; in the spirit of the times, the media were perceived as functional instruments that leaders could use to mobilize society toward largely agreed-upon goals.

Correlative content might actually include any content that interprets the news, although it is most often considered to comprise purposive communication that attempts to persuade.<sup>1</sup> Related studies include Hovland's persuasion experiments, as well as propaganda analysis. Lasswell does not mention advertising, but we might also consider this correlative content, since it allows consumers to correlate responses to needs.

**Transmission.** Virtually all forms of content transmit the perceived norms of society in some way. Although Lasswell considered educators to be society's "socializers" (1948, p. 87), virtually all mass media perform this function at some time in some way (and media researchers have examined that phenomenon). Surveillance, correlative, and entertainment content all help transmit lessons to new members of society.

**Entertainment.** We normally think of entertainment content as that which provides immediate gratification, relaxation, and respite for the consumer, and that which is under the complete control of its producer. Entertainment content, may, shed light on reality, represent the human experience, and have its origins in real life, but entertainment is usually not designed to convey actual events. Most television content falls into this functional category, and studies of it would include those on television violence conducted by George Gerbner (1971),

Wertham's comic book studies (1954), and the research on children and television by Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961).

Obviously, the functional categories outlined by Lasswell and Wright are not mutually exclusive and often blur, but it is basically the first and the last—news (or surveillance) and entertainment—that concern us here.

### **Our Focus on News and Entertainment**

Most early communication research (e.g., propaganda analysis) was concerned with correlative content—the overt, persuasive appeal. Certainly, with the rise of mass marketing, especially after World War II, this kind of content has grown to constitute a vast array of messages. But correlative content forms only a part of what the media produce. Entertainment content is not generally designed specifically to persuade (although it *may* in fact accomplish that purpose), and only a small percentage of the available space in daily newspapers or the available time on network or local news broadcasts contains overt editorial viewpoints. Thus, the early persuasion-oriented research did not properly reflect the media's informational role and its effects on learning in addition to attitudes (Becker, McCombs, & McLeod, 1975). Advertising, news, and entertainment form a mutually reinforcing array of content. In our society they are mostly products of commercially organized media, which manifest aspects of the culture. A few scholars have focused on the themes in advertising (e.g., Ewen, 1976, 1988), but most studies have dealt with news and entertainment content, which is widely available to audiences and which forms a far-reaching symbolic pseudo-environment of social reality. That is what we concentrate on here.

**Content Similarities.** Although news and entertainment differ in very important ways, they are also similar in ways that become apparent when we begin trying to categorize content. The often arbitrary distinctions do not hold. For example, most of us would probably agree that the evening network news broadcasts are "news" and the prime-time shows that follow are "entertainment" But where do we classify "reality-based" talk shows such as "Donahue" and "The Oprah Winfrey Show," or television's police show "Cops"? What about recent "infotainments" such as "Inside Edition," "A Current Affair," "Hard Copy," and "America's Most Wanted"? How do we classify *People* magazine or the *National Enquirer*? Television news has often been accused of injecting entertainment values into hard news stories; several networks have been chastised recently for staging reenactments of news events. Even organizational boundaries blur; ABC's morning news show, "Good Morning America," is produced by ABC's entertainment division.

The audience does not always draw the same distinctions that the researcher does. Viewers are entertained by a television news story about a killer whale giving birth, and they learn important information about AIDS from a made-for-TV movie. Adolescents often look to fictitious characters as role models and learn from them.

**The Media's Symbolic Environment** News and entertainment both tell us something about the world, and together they make up a significant symbolic environment. The fact that some content is officially labeled "entertainment" does not make it *any* less potent as a cultural force. Both news and entertainment tell us who is important, how to behave, and what the new trends are in speech, manners, and dress. Both take us to places we've never been before. Many of us have never seen the inside of a hospital operating room, for example, but almost all of us know what one looks like. We've seen it on television—and it makes little practical difference to us whether it was on a news show or a hospital drama.

With both news and entertainment, the frequency of messages, the production techniques, and the target audiences can be systematically examined. Both types of content may be explained as resulting from an organizational, cultural, and economic base, as well as from the value systems of the messages' producers. As we'll see below, the same techniques can be used to measure, quantify, and describe both types of content.

### **MEASURING CONTENT: HOW WE STUDY IT**

If as we have agreed we consider *content* everything that appears in the mass media, then our definition takes in an extremely wide range of phenomena—a range almost as all-encompassing as reality itself. Our task, then, is to impose some sort of order on these phenomena in order to grasp their meaning. Part of this ordering process consists of singling out the key features that we think are important and to which we want to pay attention. Researchers approach content in different *ways*, using different conceptual and methodological tools. We take what is basically a social science approach to content research, but others have taken a more humanistic perspective.

### **Humanistic v. Behaviorist Traditions**

Humanists are less likely than social scientists to ask: Do the media reflect reality? They see media content as an *integral part* of a real culture, not as something divorced from that culture. Culture is manifested in many ways, of which media content is one. A humanist examines content for aesthetic meanings. In postwar film analysis, for example, humanist scholars drew from psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology to analyze how film revealed truths about a society or historical culture (Czitrom, 1982), and more recent scholars such as Horace Newcomb (1982) have studied television's prime-time and daytime serials to find insights into drama, ritual, and mythology. Newcomb argues that television acts as a cultural forum.

Rhetorical analysis, a prominent branch of the humanistic tradition, examines the internal logic of content: What are the rules, forms, thematic unities, ways of for example, examine how

representation the sanctioning agent principal source that justifies the events, actions, and conclusion of the drama). Robert Smith (1979) studied a number of television newscasts to determine whether they contained a limited number of consistent and predictable narratives; he found that 83 percent could be classified in three categories: "man decides," "suffering," and "villain caught." Smith also found that males and the government were more often shown acting rather than acted upon; the reverse was true for voluntary associations.

This emphasis on the inherent cultural meanings in content differs from that of the social scientist, who has typically been concerned with content to the extent that it produces effects. Humanistic analysis tends to take content as a starting point and work backward, to understand the culture producing it; behaviorists *have* traditionally taken content as a starting point and worked forward, to examine the effects external to and created by the message. For the former, content is artistry, a "text" worthy of study in its own right. For the latter, it is part of a chain of cause and effect. Both traditions have made valuable contributions to the study of media content.

**Quantitative v. Qualitative.** Behavioral content analysis is not always or necessarily conducted using quantitative, or numerical, techniques, but the two tend to go together. Similarly, humanistic content study naturally gravitates toward qualitative analysis. Because of their interest in effects, social scientists have sought to quantify content in keeping with behavioral stimulus-response psychology; that is, the more frequently a given stimulus is found, the more potent is its presumed effect. Reducing large amounts of text to quantitative data, however, does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition (Gitlin, 1980).

Quantification nevertheless has great value in summarizing what is to be found in media content, and one of the most popular social science approaches to media research, content analysis, is the "objective, systematic, quantitative and manifest analysis of content" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). In fact, analyzing how frequently things, people, and places appear in media content has the advantage of letting us compare media content to some reality benchmark (e.g., the percentage of Latinos shown on prime-time television versus the percentage of Latinos in the total U.S. population). If we know content patterns, we can try to understand them by looking at the organizations and people behind them.

We are drawn as researchers to those repetitive patterns of widely attended-to mediated messages that have social significance and were produced by media organizations in a routine and standardized way. These systematic repetitive patterns of content make it more likely that content represents some underlying cultural pattern or organizational logic.



## DO MEDIA REFLECT EVENTS?

### Passive v. Active Conceptualizations

In his book *Public Opinion* (1922), Walter Lippmann describes an island where a handful of French, English, and Germans lived peaceably just before World War I. A British mail steamer provided their only link with the outside world. One day in mid-September, the ship brought news that the English and French had been fighting the Germans for over six weeks. For those six weeks the islanders, technically enemies, had acted as friends, trusting "the pictures in their heads" (p. 3). Lippmann's compelling allegory has intrigued communication scholars ever since. His simple but important point is that we must distinguish between "reality" and "social reality"—that is, as Lippmann termed it, "the world outside" of actual events and our mediated knowledge of those events—because we think and behave based not on what truly is but on what we perceive to be.

In ancient times, most of the world that people needed to know about was close at hand. They rarely ventured far from their own communities. They lived and died close to where they were born. The complexity and interdependency of modern society, however, mean that people are affected by economic and political forces far beyond their own communities. In fact, we could argue that most of the world that matters to us is beyond our direct grasp and must necessarily be mediated, thus becoming, as Lippmann called it, a "pseudo-environment" The importance of the mass media as sources for these pictures in our heads leads us logically to question how closely the media world actually resembles the world outside.

The extent to which we see the mass media as distorting the world outside depends on how we envision the media acting. Some conceptions treat the media as passive transmitters of events; others view the media as taking a far more active role in manipulating or "constructing" reality.

### A Passive Role for the Media: Media as Channels

Early models of the communication process implied a passive role *for* the media in shaping events. Lasswell's model, for example, asks "who/says what/through which *channel*?" The channel idea suggests that the media are nothing more than pipes or conduits through which bits of information flow—neutral transmitters of messages, linking senders to receivers. This approach is perhaps best illustrated in Westley and MacLean's 1957 model of the mass communication process (Figure 3.1), specifically designed with the newsgathering process in mind. They designated channels (the media) as serving "as the agents" of audience members in selecting and transmitting nonpurposively the information they require, especially when the information is beyond their immediate reach. *Nonpurposive* messages are those transmitted without any intent by the communicator to influence the audience. Such a model assumes that nothing important happens to the message while

**FIGURE 3.1** Westley and MacLean's (1957) model of the mass communication process. "A" represents the communicator, "C" the channel (the mass media), "B" the public, and the "Xi" the universe of possible messages.

it is in the channel. Any effects on the audience that result from using the mass media must then be due to source or audience characteristics and not to anything that happened to the information while it was in the channel.

**Early Studies of Media Effects.** Early communication research reflected this view of the media as channels. It was not that these channels were viewed as weak; on the contrary, the ability to communicate to a mass audience was regarded as a powerful instrument that could be used for evil or for constructive social purposes. These early studies of content effects had more to do with human communication theory (how audiences respond to specific messages) than they did with *mass* communication theory (what about the media causes the content to be the way it is). They focused on identifying messages that produced effects, or on audience characteristics that mediated those effects. (Which was more persuasive—a one- or two-sided argument? Who was most likely to panic during the "War of the Worlds" broadcast?) The media were seen as instruments for conveying those messages.

Harold Lasswell pioneered the study of propaganda in 1927 with his book *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. The warring nations had used modern communication as an integral part of military strategy, and Lasswell sought to list and categorize these techniques. Propaganda continued as a serious concern

until the outbreak of World War II. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis was established in 1937 in response to the apparent success of propaganda in Nazi Germany and helped to publish antipropaganda teaching materials for American schools. These materials told children of the common propaganda techniques such as "name calling," "glittering generalities," "plain-folks," and "card-stacking," in the hope of thereby "immunizing" them against their sinister use.

But the U.S. government coveted these same instruments of persuasion to facilitate its war effort. The Army assigned noted director Frank Capra to produce a series of films, called *Why We Fight*. With titles like *Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike*, *Divide and Conquer*, and *The Battle of Britain*, the films were designed to educate recruits about events leading up to the war. Carl Hovland and his colleagues at Yale (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949) conducted experiments to evaluate the effectiveness of the films. They found the films did convey facts but were ineffective in improving attitudes toward U.S. allies and motivation to fight the enemy. In later research, Hovland looked at other message attributes that might affect their persuasive power, such as one- versus two-sided arguments, source credibility, and fear appeals (Hovland et al., 1949, 1953). These studies assumed that if the right message could be devised, spreading it through mass communication channels would vastly increase its power.

On a larger scale, the studies of Paul Lazarsfeld and others at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research during the 1940s and 1950s also promoted this "media as channels" concept. Their primary purpose was to find how and why people decided to vote, including the role of political propaganda. Finding that the heaviest media consumers were also first to make up their minds, they concluded that the primary effect of the mass media in political campaigns was to reinforce preexisting political attitudes.

In *The Effects of Mass Communication* (1960), Joseph Klapper enshrined this notion in a widely accepted generalization: "Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences" (p. 8). In a sense, audience members, like source/persuaders, also were seen as using mass media content as an instrument, to reinforce and justify their own predispositions. An analysis of media content was not considered important, since audience members were assumed to pick and choose the commentators, articles, and other facts that supported their own views. So, in any case, media were viewed as channels, through which purposive messages flowed from persuaders, and from which audience members could select those messages most consistent with and supportive of their views. The media's role in shaping the symbolic environment in which all these decisions were made was largely ignored.

**The Neutral Journalist Theory.** Another source of the media-as-channel philosophy comes from the journalistic profession. "We don't make the news; we report it," said Richard Salant of CBS News. "Our reporters do not cover stories from their point of view. They are presenting them from nobody's point of view" (Altheide, 1976, p. 17). Former television newscaster Walter Cronkite's

traditional ending for his news program, "and that's the way it is," also exemplifies this perspective. Journalists often defend themselves by pointing out that their role is neutral, to gather and transmit information. The ultimate journalist, then, would be a disinterested, totally independent, all-seeing, and ever-present observer and recorder who never makes a mistake. Media content is assumed to provide an accurate and representative portrait of the world.

**The Null Effects Model.** A more formal academic model by Young (1981) also predicts that media content is free of distortion. The *null effects model* holds that mass media provide a fair representation of reality with little or no distortion. The reason for the distortion-free content, however, differs greatly from the traditional "journalist as neutral transmitter" approach described above. Young believes that representative content results not because journalists are neutral and noble observers and recorders of reality, but rather because they are pushed and shoved by counterbalancing forces (e.g., liberals versus conservatives, gun control advocates versus the National Rifle Association) into providing a fairly accurate view of the world. The mass media, says Young, simultaneously "buy" the views of those who have power (news) and "sell" those views to the working class. The result of this market system—the buying and selling of news—lessens distortion in media content, because distorted content would have a smaller potential audience and would be less lucrative to media owners.

In both the null effects model and the limited effects model, the mass media are viewed as having little or no effect on social change. Control lies within the audience members—both the controlling and working classes—who are active processors of information.

**A New Approach.** The problem with both these approaches is that they have failed to explain how two or more media channels can be so different in covering the same world. People can easily observe these discrepancies. For example, two newspapers in the same town *may* provide radically different views of the day's events. People who attend a political rally have a much different idea of what happened from that of those who watched it on television. If the media are mere channels for transmitting reality, then all media should provide the same basic view of an event. If counterbalancing forces from news buyers and sellers result in content that accurately represents the world, then the media version of social reality (such as of the amount of crime in society) ought to conform to that offered by other sources of information (such as police reports). Communication researchers have begun to address these problems by reconsidering the "channel" conceptualization and examining the extent to which the mass media impose their own structure and logic on events in creating a media world.

#### **An Active Role for the Media: Media as Participants**

**Media v. Real World: The MacArthur Day Parade.** How does a media portrayal of an event differ from the real thing? Walter Lippmann (1922) warned us that people act based on the "pictures" in their heads, but it was three decades before someone took a close empirical look at how the

"pictures" we get from the media differ from the world outside. In a now classic study, compelling in its simplicity, Kurt and Gladys Lang (1971) analyzed the 1951 MacArthur Day parade in Chicago. The Langs stationed observers along the parade route and in front of television sets and compared the reactions of those who experienced the parade live with those who saw it on television. People who saw the parade on television thought it was a far more exciting event than did those who saw it in person. The camera followed the action, giving the viewer an uninterrupted picture of excitement; the television viewer went with MacArthur all along the way, whereas the observers stationed along the route got only a brief glimpse of him as he passed by. Unlike viewers, the eyewitnesses saw thinning crowds, making MacArthur's reception appear less glamorous than it appeared on television. People standing along the parade route may also have observed that individuals cheered because they were about to be on television for the first time in their lives, not because they were seeing MacArthur. The Langs concluded that the representation of the world provided by television differed in important ways from personal experience.

**Manipulating Reality.** If content does not perfectly describe reality, then what does it describe? Media content may be based on what happens in the physical world, but it singles out and highlights certain elements over others; and the media's own structural logic is imposed on those elements. Reality is necessarily manipulated when events and people are relocated into news or prime-time stories. The media can impose their own logic on assembled materials in a number of ways, including emphasizing certain behaviors and people and stereotyping. Television can distort people visually through camera perspective and other techniques. Rhetorically, people can be portrayed with different labels (e.g., freedom fighter or terrorist). One of the most obvious ways in which media content structures a symbolic environment is simply by giving greater attention (in the form of more time, greater prominence, and so on) to certain events, people, groups, and places than others. Most content analysis focuses on these features.

**Visual v. Verbal Manipulation.** Over the years, the primary research emphasis has been on verbal content, on text instead of on pictures. Perhaps we've assumed that verbal content is most open to manipulation, whereas pictures are direct shots of reality. Films and television shows are more ephemeral, harder to study, and have often been deemed less serious-minded than the written word. (Perhaps this is because mass communication researchers often have print media backgrounds.) However, pictures can also be distorted, by cropping, angles, and shot selection. In his study of media treatment of student radicals in the 1960s, Todd Gitlin (1980, pp. 50-51) included two pictures of an antiwar protest. One picture was made available by UPI but was not used by the *New York Times*. It showed protest marchers holding placards close up in the foreground, relatively more prominent than a group of counterprotesters in the background across the street. Instead the *Times* used another photo, a long shot of both groups, but

taken from the side of the street where the counterprotesters marched, thus minimizing the other protesters, both in size and perspective.

Camera perspectives can also manipulate perception. Hans Kepplinger (1982) notes that film can manipulate time and space through, for example, slow motion and extreme camera angles. Newsfilm, he says, claims objectivity and thus hews more closely to reality. Nevertheless, news cameramen he interviewed said it was possible to depict a subject favorably or unfavorably by choosing different camera perspectives.

In analyzing Newsfilm from a then West German election campaign, Kepplinger found differences in the two candidates' visual images. Helmut Kohl received fewer eye-level shots than Helmut Schmidt (a perspective considered more favorable by the cameramen), and shots of audiences booing, heckling, and holding signs critical of the candidate were seen more often in coverage of Kohl than of Schmidt. Thus, Kepplinger notes, Kohl was portrayed as the candidate most often meeting with voter disapproval.

In some countries, where the major media lack a tradition of objectivity, taking stronger political sides is more overt. For example, the privately owned Mexican television news organization, Televisa, was accused of unfairly depicting the opposition candidate in the 1988 summer presidential elections. The news showed him with only a few people around him, implying that few supported him, whereas the government candidate was always shown with large throngs. (They didn't mention that PRI, the government ruling *party*, paid people to attend). In another case, Televisa superimposed a picture of Mussolini next to the opposition candidate delivering a speech (Rohter, 1988).

Television news has several other potential visual tricks up its sleeve. During a 1980 presidential campaign story about policies on which Reagan had reversed himself, CBS News put a white "x" on his face every time the reporter said that he had changed his position. CBS apologized the next day, calling it a very bad idea for a graphic (Rohinson, 1981, p. 174). In the famous "See It Now" broadcasts of 1954, Edward R. Murrow made famous a more common and powerful visual device. He juxtaposed footage of statements Senator Joseph McCarthy had made at different times and places. Taken as a whole, they proved damaging to McCarthy, because viewers were better able to see the true nature of McCarthy's demagoguery.

## **SUMMARY**

In the next chapter, we will review several studies of media content. Many of them compare the media world with the so-called real world. Before we go any further, however, it's important to understand key terms. Philosophers argue about whether there is an objective reality independent of individuals' perceptions. Does a falling tree make a sound if no one is there to hear it? (No, if by *sound* we mean airwaves detected by the ear.) Because we can know the physical world only through our human senses, the limits and nature of our senses limit and shape our knowledge

of that world. Practically speaking, then, there is no world apart from our ability to perceive it with our senses. Therefore, questions about the existence of an objective reality apart from our ability to perceive it are moot. What is more, as we discussed earlier, we depend on secondhand sources for our knowledge about that part of the world beyond our immediate perceptual grasp—which is most of it. Abstract cultural concepts such as "Republican," "Democrat," "democracy," and "civic rights" are socially constructed; to understand these, we must rely on sources outside of ourselves. Our perceptions of an object or event are at the mercy of the accuracy and completeness of those sources.

Fishman (1980) avoids the assumption of an objective external reality by defining social reality as that which a society knows about itself. There are many sources of information about society and/or a specific event. Some are obvious. If you want to know what goes on at the city council meetings in your town, you could get information from the mayor or from another city official, from a citizen who attends the meetings, from the newspaper, from radio or television coverage, from legal notices, from a friend who has information from one of these sources; or you could attend a meeting yourself. Many information sources are not as obvious. Your local telephone directory probably includes some information about city council members—their names, addresses, and telephone numbers, for example. From their names you could infer the number of people on the council and its ethnic or gender makeup. If you could get access to memoranda or other correspondence with the city council members, you could learn still more. What would you learn if you could see the food and drink orders that the city council cafeteria places, personnel files for the city clerks, office-supply inventories, or the council members' trash?

Of the potentially vast number of information sources, each provides its own piece of social reality. Because there are so many, it is impossible for any one source to convey the entire picture. Indeed, the complexity of social reality effectively prevents an objective assessment by any one source (Ichheiser, 1970). To the extent that an individual has access to some of these sources and not to others, his or her social reality (the individual's knowledge of what the world is like) may differ from that of others in the society. All these assessments of reality are social constructions, and, therefore, each is subjective in its own way. If, as Fishman says, social reality is the fund of what society knows about itself, then distortion arises from a conflict between sources of information about some feature of society. When the proverbial blind men tried to identify an elephant, one felt its tail and declared it was a rope, another felt a leg and concluded it was a stump, and so on. Like society, the elephant was too large for them to take it all in at once. Like social analysts, they had to rely on their limited senses in examining one portion of the object at a time. Perhaps enough blind men could have pooled what they felt and arrived at a more accurate conclusion.

In the next chapter, we will discuss what kinds of things we may "feel" about social reality from media content. What kind of pictures of the world do media present, and how do they compare with other indicators of reality?

1. Wright (1986) sees a journalistic role in correlation, defining it as "selection, evaluation and interpretation of events." It "signifies the relative importance of what is reported ... through the conventions of headlines, ... and other devices" (p. 19). These categories are clearly not mutually exclusive.



## Chapter 4.

# Patterns of Media Content

In this chapter, we focus on the following questions:

- What ideas, people, activities, and views are presented most frequently in the media, and in what fashion?
- In what ways does media content deviate systematically from other sources of social reality?

By reviewing studies in these areas, we see how content as a whole represents a form of cultural mapping, and we discuss these patterns as they relate to social reality and social change.

### **NARROWING THE FOCUS**

Obviously we cannot look at every message distributed on every medium in our attempt to find content patterns. In what content are we most interested? Mass communication studies have traditionally dealt with that mediated content which is widely shared by a large audience. Researchers have paid little attention to small-scale media such as memos, cassette recordings, photocopies of speeches, and computer electronic bulletin boards; and we further exclude from our study media such as books, billboards, and records that may be important but are less central to our daily lives than other forms of media.

We focus instead on messages in the mass media, and particularly in the major mass media: television, newspapers, and magazines. Although many other media channels exist—and these grow more numerous with new technologies—we choose to focus on those channels that have received the

most research attention, as well as the most audience attention. In later chapters, we will narrow our focus even more, paying particular attention to the major news channels.

Even if we confine ourselves to news and entertainment and to major media, we *are* still left with a wide range of research to review. We have therefore selected studies that we see as representative of content research. These studies describe *patterns* of media content rather than coverage of a single story or issue. We choose the systematic over the idiosyncratic, and where possible, we include studies that compare content to other social reality benchmarks. We don't divide the studies by medium (television, newspapers, magazines) or by content type; rather, we choose to discuss the commonalities of content and save media comparisons for a later chapter.'

## **PATTERNS OF CONTENT**

Whom do we see in the media? What are their personal characteristics? Where do they come from in the social system? What behaviors do they exhibit? How are they presented in relation to others in society? When we examine a series of representative studies of media content, we begin to see patterns emerging. The following areas have been among the most widely examined.

### **Political Bias**

Most analyses of political content in media have questioned the extent of political bias that exists—that is, specifically partisan, ideological bias. Denis McQuail (1992, p. 191) defines bias as "a consistent tendency to depart from the straight path of objective truth by deviating either to left or right (the word derives from the game of bowls, in which a ball can have an inbuilt tendency to deviate or be made to deviate by a player). In news and information it refers to a systematic tendency to favour (in outcome) one side or position over another." Because of the importance of the news media as partisan forums, many studies have been undertaken for adversarial rather than scientific reasons. The conservative movement has been especially active in monitoring content, through groups like Accuracy in Media, to determine if the media are treating some views, parties, and candidates (mainly their own) less fairly than others. For example, in 1987 the Media Research Center (MRC) was established "to document liberal media bias and distribute this research to the public" (Bozell & Baker, 1990, p. vii). MRC tapes television news and public affairs programs and analyzes news content in a variety of ways. By coding content as favorable, unfavorable, neutral, or ambiguous, the MRC has concluded that "in most cases the ratio of positive-to-negative stories, comments, and total words favors the Left beyond reasonable doubt" (pp. 7-8). Most attention has centered around campaigns, because they inherently lend themselves to this partisan analysis.

McQuail (1992, pp. 193-194) has proposed a "typology of news bias" using two concepts relating to objectivity—whether the bias is open or hidden, and whether it is intended or unintended. Four types of news bias result.

*Partisanship* includes content such as editorial endorsements of a political candidate, opinion columns, access slots in television or radio, and advertisements. In all such cases, the content is openly and intentionally partisan. *Propaganda* on the other hand, is also intentionally partisan; but its purpose is to remain hidden, and therefore it is not always as easy to identify once it gets into the news. Using McQuail's typology, examples of propaganda may include the results of public relations efforts or "disinformation" floated by a government official. *Unwitting bias* is open and unintended, such as the deliberate selection of topics (or parts of the country) that are considered newsworthy. *Ideology* includes unintended yet hidden bias that is "embedded in texts" (p. 194). It is difficult to demonstrate with content analysis techniques, because the enumeration of items selected in particular categories does not necessarily reveal the underlying ideology.

Academic researchers have looked closely at bias and *have* generally given the news media good marks for fairness, and objectivity. Robinson and Sheehan's (1983) analysis of CBS and UPI 1980 campaign coverage concluded that reporters behaved objectively, rarely making value statements about issues or direct assertions about candidate leadership qualities and policies, sometimes making inferences, but mostly about the campaign's chances or game plan.

Television has received the most criticism (and research attention) for alleged bias, perhaps because Spiro Agnew singled out the networks for his attack on media liberalism in 1969. Agnew called journalists a band of "effete eastern snobs," which Altschull (1990, p. 330) says isn't far off the mark. The key news media do form "a closely knit media power structure" in which minority groups and concerns are not well represented.

In general, empirical evidence shows that most news content is neutral, with little evidence of overt partisan bias in favor of one candidate or another. Hofstetter (1978), for example, supports this view, finding no significant partisan bias in the 1972 presidential campaign. In a later study, Michael Robinson (1981) suggested that television campaign coverage is not necessarily biased toward one party or another, but rather is negative toward front-runners and incumbents. In this study, coverage became more favorable when candidates dropped out of the race (as former senator Howard Baker did in 1980). Robinson speculated that the media felt they had an obligation to fully critique any likely winners but could be magnanimous to those who had dropped out of the race.

Challengers, almost by definition, have less authority than incumbents and are therefore less likely to be considered newsworthy (Cook, 1989, p. 108). Following the "horse race" of U.S. presidential politics is certainly the pre-dominant form of coverage, with the *New York Times* and *USA Today* both carrying far more stories in 1988 about who was ahead in the race than about the campaign issues (King, 1990; see also Major, 1992).

Conveying who is ahead in a race is often done by covering events with more symbolic value than issue orientation. For example, in 1988 George Bush's visit to a manufacturer of U.S. flags and his call for a mandatory pledge of allegiance got much more attention than his stand on the environment (Kaniss, 1991, p. 47). Bush did not find it as easy to capture the symbolic race in the 1992 election: In this race, a compelling symbol, according to Columbia University

professor Henry Graff, was "the picture of Clinton wearing shades and playing the saxophone on the 'Arsenio Hall' show. Instead of looking like politicians, Clinton and Gore look like co-captains of the local high school team. They have become folk heroes, not merely politicians" (FitzSimon, 1992b, p. 45).

By the time of the 1992 presidential race, when Bush was the Republican incumbent, media gatekeepers had to decide how much coverage to give Bush and how much to give the challengers, an especially difficult problem early in the campaign when the field of challengers had not been significantly narrowed. Hal Bruno, political director for ABC News during this period, says that ABC decided to "mainly concentrate on the Democrats and that whatever happened on the Republican side would not command as much attention" (FitzSimon, 1992a, p. 24). At the end of the overall election campaign, a study by the Freedom Forum Media Studies Group of 21 media outlets showed that the Democrats got 55 percent of the media's "attention," compared to the Republican's 45 percent (FitzSimon, 1992b, pp. 34-35).

The problem with measuring bias is that there are no suitable references with which we can compare media content. A convincing case of bias requires an acceptable standard of fairness, but these are not easy to come by. Journalists are as aware as the media watchdogs of the most simplistic quantitative measures of bias. With ruler and stopwatch they strive to cover candidates evenly in column inches and seconds of airtime, finding, for example, that the U.S. Senate gets more news coverage than does the House of Representatives (Cook, 1989, p. 106). But if we assume that events drive news, then quantitative balance is not a good standard, for events don't always occur in balanced amounts.

As Cook (1989) points out in his study of how the media cover the U.S. House of Representatives, very few of the events and activities are actually covered, and those covered get further winnowed down. "The sample is by no means representative, any more than the goals and fistfights that sports coverage extracts from sixty minutes of hockey. Reporters may assert that they have brought the most important information to public attention, but selection can bestow importance at least as much as reflect it" (p. 57).

Nevertheless, some kinds of balance can be observed: A study of the 1984 presidential election showed balanced coverage of the Republicans and Democrats by ABC, CBS, and NBC in terms of "number of stories, average length of stories, initiation of subjects of stories by both candidates, proportion of soundbites used, percent of reinforcing remarks by reporters, and objects of visuals" (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991, p. 78). Needless to say, bias has been and will remain a hotly contested research issue, examined in a politically charged atmosphere.

### **Behaviors**

Of all the behaviors depicted by the media, aggression must surely be the most widely studied. Because Americans, particularly children, spend so much time with the medium, television has

been the predominant focus of content studies of violence. In an extensive program of research, George Gerbner and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School of Communication have analyzed the violent content of television for more than 20 years. They find the incidence of *violence*, defined as "open expression of physical force" (p. 11), high and fairly constant from year to year: 70 percent of prime-time shows contained violence, at a rate of 5.7 violent acts per hour, while 54 percent of lead characters were involved in violence. And this high rate of violence is not confined to adult programming: 92 percent of weekend daytime children's shows feature violence (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). How does this compare with real life? One is vastly more likely to encounter violence in the television world than in real life—.32 violent crimes per 100 persons, according to the 1970 census, versus 64 percent of television characters encountering some violence, either committing or receiving (Gerbner, Gross, Eeley, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977). From 1967 to 1985, 55 percent of television characters were involved in or encountered violence; 11.5 percent were involved in killing (Signorielli, 1990, p. 93). Note that comparing violent crimes with violence on television (as broadly defined by Gerbner) is not the best comparison. But even if we take his figure of 10 percent of leading characters involved some way in killing (Gerbner et al., 1977, p. 23), it's a wide discrepancy between television and real life.

That violence on television exists is hardly debatable. However, network officials such as Jack Valenti, 1993 president of the Motion Picture Association of America, say that more concern should be given to the issue of responsibility for children seeing televised violence. A *New York Times* article about an August 1993 conference, sponsored by the National Council for Families and Television, quotes Valenti as saying, "What is needed is parental responsibility more than anything" (Kolbert, 1993, p. B1). This removes responsibility for running violent content from the television networks, an approach that George Gerbner (at the same conference) did not find acceptable: "The notion of parental control is an upper-middle-class conceit. . . . Passing the buck to parents is the greatest cop-out of this industry" (p. B1).

A comprehensive analysis commissioned by *TV Guide* of the amount of violence on Thursday, April 2, 1992, from 6 A.M. to midnight eastern time, 10 television channels showed that there were 1,846 individual acts of violence in 180 hours of programming. This included 175 fatalities; 389 serious assaults; 362 scenes involving gunplay; 673 depictions of punching, pushing, slapping, dragging, and other physically hostile acts; and 226 scenes of menacing threats with a weapon (Hickey, 1992, p. 2).

Newer program forms, such as music videos and reality shows ... are significantly increasing the amount of violence on our screens. And commercials for violent theatrical movies and TV series have become a major source of televised violence. News broadcasts, in their heightened competitive fervor, are peddling strong doses of murder, muggings, and mayhem as ratings-getters. In fictional programming alone—which

accounted for 95 percent of the total—we found an average of 185 scenes of violence per channel. That works out to more than 100 per hour across the 10 channels we monitored (p. 2).

Public concern over televised violence and its apparent effects on children caused the U.S. Senate's Commerce Committee to hold hearings on the topic in 1993, with Attorney General Janet Reno warning the television networks that if they did not themselves reduce the amount of violence children are exposed to, the Clinton administration would join Congress in seeking legislation that would curb the amount of televised violence. The hearings were prompted by several highly publicized incidents in which children apparently imitated what they saw on television, with dire consequences. A 2-year-old Ohio girl died after her 5-year-old brother used matches to set their house on fire, in imitation of what he had seen on the MTV show "Beavis and Butt-head." In New Jersey, two boys were killed by cars when they laid down in the middle of a highway, in imitation of a character in a movie called *The Program*. In reaction, MTV moved "Beavis and Butt-head" to a late-evening time slot so that fewer young children would see it. Walt Disney's Touchstone Pictures, the distributor of *The Program*, called back 1,222 copies of the film and eliminated the highway scene from the movie (Morganthau, 1993).

Violence is common in the news as well, mostly in coverage of criminal acts. Indeed, news shows a preference for violent crime over other types. Crimes against people (e.g., see Ammons, Dimmick, & Pilotta, 1982; Fedler & Jordan, 1982) and violent crimes (see Windhauser, Setter, & Winfree, 1990; Antunes & Hurley, 1977) are more likely to get media coverage than crimes against property or nonviolent crimes. Deaths due to violence are more likely to be reported than deaths due to disease (Combs & Slovic, 1979).

This is not confined to the United States. A study of English newspapers by Bob Roshier (1981) showed that reporting of various crimes bore no relationship to their relative frequency in the communities. Overreported crimes were the same across newspapers and over time—serious offenses (crimes against persons, fraud, blackmail, and drug offenses). Murder, including manslaughter, was markedly overreported. The papers focused on solved crimes and serious punishments, giving an inflated view of the possibility of getting caught and seriously punished.

Although critics often mention "sex and violence" in the same breath, far fewer studies have examined the sexual content of the mass media; of these, most are about television. For example, one study found that sexual acts occurred once or more per hour of prime time, with intercourse primarily occurring between unmarried people (surely against the actual occurrence in real life) (Greenberg, Graef, Fernandez-Collado, Korzenny, & Atkin, 1980).<sup>2</sup>

### **Deviance**

One way the media tell us what is normal is by showing us what is deviant. The media give importance to some people and groups by portraying them frequently and in powerful positions, and

marginalize others by ignoring them or presenting them less advantageously and outside the mainstream. The treatment of deviance is therefore an important feature of media content. For example, Stanley Cohen (1981) notes that in dealing with deviant groups, British news media often "overreport" by exaggerating the seriousness of events, the violence that occurred, and the damage caused. On the other hand, the U.S. conservative Media Research Center accused the media of "sanitizing" the April 1993 gay rights march on Washington, D.C., by ignoring behaviors such as gay men with nipple rings and bare-breasted lesbians kissing. The result was to make the gay movement seem more mainstream than it really is, claims the center. Television reporters who covered the event, however, say that these types of behaviors were exceptions and that the vast majority of participants were "dressed conventionally and were mild-mannered." Clearly the challenge for television is to cover a political event without mimicking tabloid journalism (Shepard, 1993).

The psychologically deviant, the mentally ill, are frequently stereotyped by the media as dangerous and as outside the mainstream. An extensive content analysis by Jum Nunnaly (1981) concluded that although they do not portray them often, "the media of mass communication generally present a distorted picture of mental health problems." He observed that the media deviated from expert opinion (or even public beliefs) on the subject of mental illness, emphasizing bizarre symptoms to make the subject more exciting and appealing to the audience (p. 195). On television, more attention has been given to mental illness on daytime serials than on prime time. Women are three times as likely as men to be portrayed as mentally ill on soaps, but men are shown as more dangerous. Depictions reinforce the image of the mentally ill as evil by associating them with criminal behavior (Fruth & Padderred, 1985).

The treatment of political deviance is central to ideological analyses of the press. James Hertog and Douglas McLeod (1988) examined several features of local media coverage of a march on downtown Minneapolis by members of the anarchist movement. In articles about the march, the tone was condescending, emphasizing the marchers' appearance over their message. Anarchist actions, such as burning dollar bills in front of a bank, were examined on the basis of criminality rather than their symbolic criticism. More attention was paid to bystanders than to the anarchists, and much attention was given to official points of view (police, city attorney, etc.). Visually, the television cameras captured the march from behind police lines, giving viewers the police officers' visual perspective. By treating nonmainstream points of view as unduly deviant, Hertog and McLeod argue, the media restrict the diversity of political discourse.

Other types of deviance can also be investigated. (For a fuller description of deviance and newsworthiness, see Shoemaker, 1987; Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991.) Statistical deviance, for example, causes things that are unusual (either good or bad) to be considered more newsworthy than common-place events. The statistically deviant event is more likely to be covered, but our assessment of whether something is statistically deviant may change. For example, at one time open-heart surgery was practically unheard of, and news organizations considered these

unusual operations extremely newsworthy. Today, on the other hand, heart operations—even heart transplants—are common enough to be downgraded significantly as news. Headlines such as "Boy sees dad die at mom's grave" and "Finger is found in food" epitomize the type of surprising and unusual stories that the news media seem to delight in ("Boy sees dad die at mom's grave;" 1993; "Finger is found in food;" 1993).

Another type of deviance is normative deviance—ideas or events that break norms or laws. Forty years ago, rape was rarely mentioned in newspapers because rape was considered so normatively deviant as to be outside the sphere of matters to be publicly discussed. Today, on the other hand, rape stories are more common—and ironically, as they become more common, they also become less newsworthy. As Gordon (1992, p. 131) points out, "typical rapes—conceived as a stranger attacking a lone woman in a dark, deserted place—are no longer news" in many cases. For rape to become deviant enough to be considered news, the rape itself must be unusual. It must include salacious details or involve prominent people. The same emphasis on conflict holds for news coverage of politics. Ken Auletta, journalist and author, says of the 1992 Democratic and Republican conventions: "Because there were not the conflicts, which is how we in the press have come to define something as newsworthy, we judged that the [Democratic] convention was not news" (FitzSimon, 1992b, p. 42).

Deviance was surely the impetus for much coverage of the Branch Davidian religious group near Waco, Texas, in February 1993. The siege and ultimate destruction of the group's compound outside Waco became a media spectacle of major proportions. Many reports about the events emphasized the deviance of the group, referring to it as a "secretive religious cult?" The impetus for local authorities going to the Branch Davidian compound was information suggesting a massive weapon buildup, along with reports of child abuse and other bizarre tales. At its height, hundreds of Journalists were in Waco covering the story (Holley, 1993).

Norm-breaking stories can also include those that are far less serious. When Great Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana officially announced a marital separation, the story made headlines all over the United States. Even the stately *New York Times* ran the story in the top left of page 1: "Buckingham Palace wrote the unhappy ending today to a storybook marriage gone badly wrong," began the *Times* story, which was accompanied by separate photos of Charles and Diana (Schmidt, 1992). The story is accorded so much prominence not because it is of social significance but because it is deviant.

### **News Sources and Topics**

Before television, most content analyses addressed the print news media. In more recent years, several good media sociology studies have given us a general picture of the common names and activities in the news, with particular interest in the diversity of views expressed. Herbert Gans (1979), in his analysis of CBS, NBC, Newsweek, and Time, found that news is dominated by the "known," people already prominent (71 percent of television stories, 76 percent of magazine



columns in 1967). These knowns consist of incumbent presidents, presidential candidates, leading federal officials, state and local officials, and alleged and actual violators of the laws and mores ("well-known people who get in trouble with the law or become enmeshed in political scandal"). The unknowns (representing about a fifth of coverage) consist of five types: (1) protesters, rioters, strikers; (2) victims; (3) alleged and actual violators of the laws and mores; (4) voters, survey respondents, and other aggregates; and (5) participants in unusual activities.

Leon Sigal (1973), in another frequently cited study, confirmed the prominence of "official" news sources. Sigal examined the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. American and foreign government officials accounted for three-fourths of all news sources. Furthermore, he identified almost 60 percent of news stories originating through routine, source-controlled channels: official proceedings, press conferences, and press releases. The same patterns held true for these papers in 1979 and 1980 (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1986).<sup>3</sup>

The major activities in the news followed a similar pattern, according to Gans (1979): a focus on the official, or, if not official, the deviant. The major nonwar domestic activities were government conflicts and disagreements; government decisions, proposals, and ceremonies; protests violent and nonviolent; crimes, scandals, and investigations; and disasters actual and averted.

This was supported by Sandra Dickson's (1992) study of how the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* covered the U.S.-Nicaraguan conflict between 1983 and 1987. Government officials were used as sources about half of the time, but "contra" officials (from the Nicaraguan anti-government, U.S.-supported forces) were not cited frequently. Her conclusion was that these newspapers did legitimate the U.S. position in the conflict by failing to show diverging view-points and by failing to question the wisdom of U.S. policies (p. 571). Even when the U.S. media are critical of a subject, as has been the case with South Africa's system of apartheid, white government sources are given more "weight" (Fair & Astroff, 1991, p. 72) than the black sources who were working for social change.

Daley and O'Neill (1991) found that newspaper coverage of the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaskan waters included a preponderance of official sources, both from government and the oil industry. The result was a media narrative about the environmental disaster that emphasized the message of "Big Oil" (p. 53) to the detriment of other points of view. The tendency of the media to frame the event as an accident also gave it the cachet of deviance—this was a very unusual event. The authors point out that this drew media attention (and hence the public's attention) away from the issue of whether systematic problems exist in the oil industry and toward the abnormality of the specific event.

### **Geographic Patterns**

**Domestic.** The geographic patterns of news coverage present an appealing opportunity to test the correspondence of that coverage to real-world distributions. Dominick (1977) shows an uneven

distribution of network news coverage across the United States, with a predominant focus on the two coasts (as do Whitney, Fritzler, Jones, Mazzarella, & Rakow, 1985). In an update of Dominick, Graber (1988) confirms that the Pacific Coast and Northeast are overcovered, whereas the Midwest is the most undercovered in proportion to population. In her census of 1985-1987 newscasts containing information about individual states, Graber found coverage of the 50 states "quite sparse and extremely uneven?" (State news was defined as stories presenting some information about an individual state, excluding stories about, for example, a sports team that just happened to be located in a state.) Although they are among the most populous states, California and New York received proportionately more stories than their population would predict—24 percent of the state stories from mid-1985 to mid-1987. Graber notes that they received nearly as much coverage as the 30 least-covered states. California, New York, Florida, and Texas combined received 39 percent of state news coverage, while constituting only 25 percent of electoral college votes. In addition, a study of National Public Radio's (NPR) shows *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition* accuses NPR of "beltway bias"—the tendency for news to be dominated by events and officials in Washington, D.C. In late 1991, Washington-based stories accounted for 28 percent of all domestic stories, and 61 percent of political stories originated in Washington (Ryan, 1993).

A similarly disproportionate distribution of entertainment "hometowns" exists, with 44 percent of 1993 television characters living in big cities, compared with 16 percent of the U.S. population. Television families are particularly likely to live in New York and California, but 27 states have no television hometowns at all even though these states represent one-third of the U.S. population (Cerio & Hollis, 1993).

*International* A large number of studies have examined international news coverage, too many to discuss here. Like candidates and corporations, countries are concerned with how they are covered and, as a result, perceived by others in the world community. This is particularly true for underdeveloped countries. Without large media systems of their own, they often hear about themselves through the media of other nations, particularly the United States. They easily notice disparities between the coverage and reality. Larson (1983) conducted an extensive analysis of network news coverage from 1972 to 1981. Seven of seventeen stories on average *were* international stories (mentioning some foreign country). He found that the television networks covered the Third World less than industrialized countries. What coverage there was tended to be crisis oriented (27 percent), defined as unrest/dissent; war, terrorism, crime, coups, and assassinations; and disasters. Specifically, minimal attention, except for crises, was paid to Latin America, South Asia, Eastern Europe (excluding the Soviet Union), and Africa, which received the greatest proportion of crisis coverage. Developed countries received disproportionately high coverage relative to their population. Sixteen developed countries—14 percent of the world's population—accounted for 35 percent of references, and socialist and developing countries were correspondingly underreported.

Contrary to Larson, Wilhoit and Weaver (1983) found that the number of wire stories on less developed countries exceeded the number on the developed countries. However, compared with coverage of developed countries, a greater proportion of the developing nation coverage concerned conflicts and crises. Similar results were found in a study of photographs in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* during 1986 (Langton, 1991). More than a third of all photos in the study contained Third World subjects, compared to about half for Western countries, which the researcher concluded was a significant amount of Third World photographic coverage. Asian countries were underrepresented. The study did confirm earlier findings, in that most of the Third World photographs were oriented around crises and conflicts.

According to Herbert Gans (1979), foreign news covers stories relevant to Americans and American interests, with themes and topics similar to domestic coverage. (Larson's network news data support this—the United States is referred to in 60 percent of international stories.) Gans found that the countries most prominent in foreign news are U.S. allies and communist countries and allies. International news concentrates on American activities in a foreign country, foreign activities affecting Americans and American policy, communist-bloc country activities, changes in foreign government personnel, and political conflict and protest. Gans notes that U.S. coverage of foreign countries contains more value judgments than would be justifiable in domestic coverage. These values are revealed in the frequent focus on the excesses of dictatorship (the left-wing coups d'etat and revolutions are given greater play than their right-wing equivalents). Perry's (1981) study of *Time* and *Newsweek* coverage of international industrial disputes suggests that international coverage responds to the same standards of newsworthiness embedded in domestic coverage. Coverage of strikes and lockouts corresponded to the magnitude of the problem (measured by lost work days) up to a point. However, strike coverage was relatively less for those countries, such as Italy, where labor problems were frequent. Common events (dog bites man) are less newsworthy than rare ones (man bites dog). Whether a story is covered often depends on whether it has "sizzle"—disasters and other events that "stir the emotions" (FitzSimon, 1993, p. 25). For example, the media are more likely to cover the more emotional issues of global warming and water pollution than garbage and sludge stories (Gersh, August 1992). This idea is supported by Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger (1991), who show that world events that are somehow "deviant" are more likely to be covered by the U.S. media and are more likely to get prominent coverage than nondeviant events, even if the nondeviant event has high social significance.

The rise of Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN) has dramatically changed international news flow. Although CNN's market share is generally small, it skyrockets during international crises (FitzSimon, 1993, pp. 17-18). The simultaneous transmission of news from many countries has often made CNN the quickest way to get information about what's happening around the world. During the Persian Gulf War, government officials from all countries relied on

CNN for the most up-to-date information. As Jamieson and Campbell (1992, p. 15) put it:

Because CNN broadcasts around the globe, it has become a vehicle for airing the competing claims of various nations and their leaders. Voices previously unlikely to be heard by U.S. audiences have received air play. In September 1991, for example, CNN carried a speech by Jordan's King Hussein appealing for moderation by all sides in the Kuwait-Iraq crisis. King Hussein warned that the world was slipping into war in the Middle East just as it had slipped into World War I. Within days, the Saudi ambassador to the United States was on CNN delivering a rebuttal to Hussein's speech. The appropriate analogy, argued the ambassador, was the role Hitler's aggression played in starting World War II. One index of power is the ability to have one's message heard; by that measure, CNN has empowered countries and leaders that otherwise would play a smaller role on the international stage. In short, CNN has accelerated the emergence of a multipolar world.

In contrast, the traditional U.S. television giants—ABC, CBS, and NBC—have dramatically reduced their number of foreign correspondents, causing Brookings Institution analyst Stephen Hess to say that "The networks are now basically out of the foreign news business" (FitzSimon, 1993, p. 17). Television correspondents find themselves practicing "parachute journalism"—flying to wherever the news is and putting a story together quickly (p. 18).

U.S. newspapers vary widely in their reporting on world events, with the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* having the most foreign correspondents and providing the most international news. A smaller number of correspondents is fielded by the *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Baltimore Sun* and the major newsmagazines. The result is that the world is seen "through a pretty narrow needle" (FitzSimon, 1993, p. 17).

### **Demographic Patterns**

Like geographic patterns, demographic statistics give us an unambiguous standard by which to assess coverage. Does it over- or underrepresent people and their roles relative to real-world distributions? Because of its power role in shaping the symbolic environment, many studies have looked closely at television. For example, in occupational patterns, Greenberg (1980) found that professionals are overrepresented on television (over twice the percentage) relative to their prevalence in the population (according to the 1970 census). Clerical and service workers were underrepresented by at least half of their real-world percentage (p. 39). The patterns of occupations seen on television have been stable. A 1964 study by DeFleur shows that upper-middle-class occupations were overrepresented, whereas middle- and lower-class ones were underrepresented.

Dominick

(1979) found support for this pattern in a later study. Television overrepresents persons in managerial/professional occupations and underrepresents others. Of the professionals, Signorielli (1985, p. xvii) notes that doctors, among the most frequently portrayed professionals, are treated as "demigods," whereas nurses are seen as subservient to doctors and sometimes as sex objects.

Media portrayals of ethnic groups have been the focus of many research studies. Greenberg (1980) notes that the model prime-time television character is a white male in his late forties to early fifties (p. 186). Minorities are under-represented across the world of prime time (Signorielli, 1983), particularly so in daytime serials (Greenberg & Heeter, 1983). In fact, Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) find pervasive stereotypical treatment of nonwhite groups in all American entertainment forms. They note that a stereotype is an oversimplified picture that, when combined with prejudiced views toward ethnic groups, treats whites as the desirable reference point. These ethnic stereotypes have given rise to many inaccurate and disparaging media portrayals of American Indians (primitive and savage), Asians (Fu Manchu: corrupt and violent), Latinos (hot-tempered and lazy), and African Americans (shiftless and easily frightened). In the case of early movies, these portrayals were designed to appeal to the mostly white movie audience. More recently, the 50th anniversary of the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese gave the U.S. media an opportunity to portray the Japanese people in stereotypic ways. The war's anniversary, coupled with Japan's strong economic position relative to the United States, resulted in a large amount of media coverage during 1991, much of which had racist overtones, for example, an editorial cartoon showing a Japanese man as wearing thick glasses and as having buck teeth (Quigley, 1992, p. 7). A year-long study of U.S. media by the Asian American Journalists Association suggests that news stories about Asians "perpetuate stereotypes, reflect cultural bias, inflame racial hostilities, or use ethnic slurs" (Fan, 1993, p. 16).

Most analyses of ethnic content have focused on television, and of these, most have examined African Americans. From virtual invisibility until the mid-1960s, blacks in more recent years have grown to represent 6 to 9 percent of all television characters (approaching the national percentage of African Americans in the population, 12 percent in 1990, according to the Bureau of the Census). Compared with whites, however, they tend to play more minor roles in less prestigious occupations, be more often victimized by crime, and be more involved in crime and killing. (It is true that in real life blacks are more likely to be crime victims than whites.) Half of these African-American characters are concentrated in a few comedy series, where they are more likely to be stereotyped and of a lower socioeconomic status than in integrated casts (the *Cosby* show was one exception) (cited in Atkin, Greenberg, & McDermott, 1983). A study of minority-centered television programming since the 1950s shows that the number of these shows increased dramatically between the 1960s and 1970s, possibly reflecting advertiser interest in a growing African-American middle class (Atkin, 1992). Whereas ABC, NBC, and CBS collectively aired 11 minority-centered shows in the 1950s and in the

1960s, there were 52 such shows in the 1970s and 59 in the 1980s. For the 1990-1991 season alone, there were 9 shows with minorities as the central characters (p. 344).

Although fewer blacks than whites actually hold higher-level occupations in real life, blacks are still underrepresented in those positions in prime time relative to their real-world numbers (Greenberg, 1980). Greenberg also found that whereas a majority of black characters were under age 20, most white characters were older. He suggests that producers have felt that blacks would be more palatable to a white audience as young and funny (Greenberg, 1980, p. 21). As for blacks' relations with whites, Signorielli (1985) notes that television studies by Gerbner and his colleagues show white men as most authoritative and least likely to be victimized. African-American men were shown as less powerful and more likely to be victims than victimizers.

In news content, Gans (1979, p. 23) found that the national news featured middle- and upper-middle class African Americans who had surmounted obstacles to enter the white society. Less affluent blacks become newsworthy as "protesters, criminals, and victims." National news tends to ignore blacks who are already a part of national institutions or who are making no attempt to enter them. Even newspaper comics underrepresent African Americans. The vast majority of comic strip characters and their creators are white (America, 1992).

The next most examined ethnic group has been Hispanics. Although television shows about African Americans have become more frequent, Hispanics, Asians, and women are still underrepresented (Atkin, 1992). For example, Greenberg's (1980, p. 6) content analysis of television prime-time series, 1975-1978, showed a pattern of underrepresenting Hispanics. That group comprised only 1.5 percent of speaking characters (versus an estimated 9 percent of the population at that time). Moreover, in news, police brutality is generally presented as a "black-white" problem, ignoring "the many Latino uprisings related to police abuses, from Perth Amboy, N.J., to Washington, D.C., to Miami" (Jordan, 1992). Few Latinos are covered at all, and they "become victims of negative stereotypes" (p. 23).

Although women are the numerical majority, their media treatment has much more in common with minority groups. For example, if the subject of a news story is a white male, there is rarely any reference to his gender or race, but "black leader" and "female candidate" are all too typical of references to minorities and women in the news (Gersh, October 1992). "Despite the hype about 1992 being the 'Year of the Woman,' for the fifth year in a row women were found to be significantly underrepresented in American newspapers and on network news programs" (Gersh, 1993, p. 20). Gaye Richman (1981) finds that since the early days of television, women have been underrepresented in television portrayals (two men for every woman). The proportion has remained relatively constant, notes Tuchman: Males were 60 percent of prime-time characters in 1952, 74 percent in 1973. Among those depicted as employed, an even higher 80 percent were male. Women, like blacks, were concentrated in comedies. When depicted with men, women are most often shown in an inferior capacity (e.g., a male doctor with a female nurse, or a male lawyer with a female secretary). Similarly, Tuchman says that commercials neglect or *stereotype* women

in domestic roles. Greenberg (1980, pp. 44-45) confirms this finding: Women are outnumbered three to one, they are young, and overrepresented in lower level jobs, situation comedies, and family dramas, although he sees a trend toward greater diversity. Older men are more apt to be seen on television than older women, directly contrary to the ratio in real life (Greenberg, 1980, p. 45). Nancy Signorielli (1985) notes that the numerous television studies consistently show that women are vastly outnumbered by men, are younger than men, and are featured in traditional, stereotyped roles. This is even more the case on children's programming. Women in daytime serials are more often treated as equals, but women in traditional roles are seen as having an easier time of it (Signorielli, 1985). Women are even stereotyped on television commercials. Men are seen as more authoritative and provide most voice-overs, even for women's products (Signorielli, 1985).

Female television characters are often depicted in dependent or weak positions. For example, two of three women were portrayed as married, compared with one of three men, and women were disproportionately seen as very young or old (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Signorielli, 1990). Greenberg (1980) found that males in television series commit antisocial acts more often than females. Males are involved in physically aggressive acts on television more than twice as often as females (p. 120). Gerbner and his colleagues (1980) confirm this imbalance: Two-thirds of males and one-half of prime-time females were involved in violence. Females were more likely than males to be depicted as victims (Signorielli, 1985). Women in minority roles (i.e., old, young, nonwhite, and lower-class) were more likely to suffer violence than to inflict it. Gerbner interprets these findings from a power perspective, equating symbolic violence with power—that is, who is able to get away with doing something to others? White males are the most likely victimizers, whereas old, young, and minority women are the most likely victims (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982). The picture is more complicated, however, when gender and social class are simultaneously considered. A review of television situation comedies from 1946 to 1990 showed an inverted relationship between social class and gender: For television working-class families, the father was shown as weak and the mother as competent. For middle-class television families, on the other hand, fathers easily meet a standard of competency. The working-class male is "demasculinized" and his "gender status is inverted" (Butsch, 1992, p. 397).

Even in magazines designed for women, stereotypes are well defined. In a sample of women's magazines, such as *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*, Helen Franzwa (1974) found that all the women in fiction stories were defined by the absence or presence of men in their lives, furthering a dependent and passive stereotype. As a corollary, work for women was treated as secondary to their home life and even undesirable. Susannah Wilson (1981) analyzed two general interest Canadian magazines, finding that fewer fictional heroines in these publications were employed, compared with the percentage in the population. Few working married women and even fewer working mothers were portrayed (although these roles have become common for women).

Few heroines were of low socioeconomic status, held low-status jobs, or belonged to "nondominant" ethnic groups; heroines tended to be young and attractive. Helen Butcher et al. (sic) (1981) noted a consistent image of women across several media outlets, all depicting women as oriented toward being mothers, wives, housewives, and sex objects: from a pretty stewardess saying "Fly me" in a television advertisement for an airline, to the Miss World contest on prime time, to popular British press cartoons showing women as illogical, frivolous, and emotional.

When it comes to gender treatment in news, most of the people shown are men. Gans (1979) found that most coverage of women in the 1970s dealt with their entry into the professions and politics (making them, in a sense, newsworthy because of their minority characteristic). Coverage of women politicians, however, has not been without its own biases. A study of U.S. Senate candidates in the elections of 1982-1986 showed that not only did female candidates get less coverage than their male counterparts, but the women's coverage was more about their viability as candidates (shown as low) and less about their stands on issues (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991, p. 180). Ironically, even when women are the center of a newsworthy story, they are still often under-covered. For example, although women are 10 times as likely as men to contract the HIV virus through heterosexual sex, there is little media coverage of this. Most coverage of women and AIDS centers on female prostitutes and the chance that they may spread the disease; there is little coverage on how prostitutes become HIV infected (Devitt, 1993).

News media coverage of women is remarkably similar to that on television and in women's magazines. Kay Mills says that the small number of women in newsrooms in the 1960s left the news media unprepared to cover the women's movement; "the news media giggled like awkward adolescents or were grossly hostile (1993, p. 23). Caryl Rivers suggests that today's most prominent news coverage about women "always seems to validate women's frailties" (1993, p. 3). There are certain "bandwagon concepts," Rivers asserts, that the media all too eagerly embrace. Examples include stories about premenstrual syndrome (PMS) (women as suffering from "raging hormones"), "math genes" (women as lacking the genetic makeup to be skilled at math), and "the study 'confirming' that after a certain age, women have as much chance of getting married as of being killed by a terrorist" (p. 3)—all stories with little or no scientific support of a causal relationship that captured the imagination of the media and were given broad play. We are unlikely to see significant change until women become more dominant in the newsroom, particularly in management positions. Some progress is being made along these lines, with the television network CNN being the first to use many women and minorities in anchoring and reporting positions (Jamieson & Campbell, 1992, p. 14).

The elderly may also be considered a minority group. Gans (1979) concludes that national news generally doesn't notice age divisions very much, preferring to cluster age groupings into generations. Nevertheless, daily metro news coverage of aging and the elderly was found to be



disproportionately low, compared with the number of elderly in the population. The papers did not appear to negatively stereotype old people, however (Broussard, Blackmon, Blackwell, Smith, & Hunt, 1980). Greenberg (1980) found a similar imbalance in the television world: People 20 to 49 years of age represented two-thirds of television characters, but only one-third of the census population at the time. People between 50 and 64 years of age were represented proportionally to their numbers (p. 27). Signorielli (1985) notes that both very young and very old are underrepresented and negatively stereotyped on television. Even here, though, gender differences remain: Older men are treated more favorably than older women.

Gay men and lesbians constitute another "minority" group. A growing number of newspapers are now accepting personal classified ads from dating services for homosexuals. The *Buffalo News* (N.Y.) runs a column called "The Meeting Place," which includes sections for women seeking women, women seeking men, men seeking men, and men seeking women. The newspaper's policy is to inspect the ad wording so that the ad does not seem to find only a "sexual liaison" (Kerwin, 1993, p. 22).<sup>4</sup>

#### **UNITY OF CONTENT: POWER/CULTURE MAP?**

Of these content studies we've reviewed, some have explicitly compared media patterns with demographic, geographic, and other external benchmarks. Other studies compare changes in media coverage of an issue over time. For example, a study by the media watchdog group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) found that the amount of environmental coverage in newspapers and TV networks declined after reaching its zenith around Earth Day 1990 (Spencer, 1992). A different study found that crime news increased from 1980 to 1985 in 24 Louisiana newspapers (Windhauser, Seiter, & Winfree, 1990, p. 72). For much content, though, there can be no easy way to calibrate it in relation to other standards. What is the standard by which we may judge, for example, news source selection, political bias, or the news agenda? It's easier to compare the media world with the geographic and demographic world. Doing so lets us see whether these worlds differ in predictable, systematic ways. Implicit in such studies, however, is that news and entertainment programming *should* represent the world in amounts proportionate to population, land mass, ethnic distribution, or some other criterion. This would be missing the point, however. A "slice of life" from most of our lives would not attract a large prime-time audience, nor would setting up a camera on a downtown street corner and calling it a news show (although perhaps the C-SPAN channel on cable television comes closest to this news *vérité* style). We depend on news to alert us to things that aren't going well. Hearing nothing, we assume they are. It's more efficient for news to alert us to things that have an impact on our lives than those that don't. Similarly, both dramatic forms (the most common entertainment vehicle) and news single out some features of the environment and emphasize them over others. Both drama and news are different from and larger than life, so that they

may better tell us about life. In fact, for immigrants to the United States, media portrayals of the United States are often very important in making the decision to come to the United States. In their study of Korean Americans, Messaris and Woo (1991) found that for some of those studied, the mass media were the only source of information about the United States prior to immigration. Mediated images commonly included a picture of the United States as luxurious, a dreamland with fancy restaurants and affordable automobiles (p. 77).

If some features are to be selected over others, how are these selections to be made? Both news and entertainment forms are cultural manifestations and, therefore, represent a reality that is culturally constructed, with people portrayed as they exist in that cultural system. One useful way of thinking about this culture and the patterns we've observed is in terms of power relations. If each person were equally powerful, then we might expect that media attention would be spread according to population and other demographic breakdowns. But each person is not equally powerful, and this gives rise to many of the imbalances we've noted. In any analysis of social relations, power may be considered the most fundamental element, whether it is openly acknowledged or not. Power is an abstract concept, but we can observe its manifestations. Power, to use Michael Parenti's definition, is "the ability to get what one wants" (Parenti, 1978, p. 4). A has power over B to the extent that A can get what A wants from B, in spite of B's efforts to resist. We can see the manifestations of this power in the wealth that people are able to accumulate, their ability to benefit from the political and economic system, and other associated indicators.

If we take the power relations embedded in our culture as the reality in question, then news and entertainment media content comes closer to reflecting it. How are power relations expressed in media content? In television entertainment content, Gerbner has viewed violence as a shorthand way of expressing power: Who has the power to victimize, who is powerless to avoid being victimized? We can look for less overt, physical expressions of power as well. Simply portraying one kind of person more often than another sends a message that the *person* seen most frequently matters the most: men more than women, Anglos more than ethnics, the younger over the elderly, and so on. In Gaye Tuchman's terms, the media have the ability to express lack of power by minimizing people through "symbolic annihilation," by under- or misrepresenting them (Tuchman, 1981).

Which occupations are seen most often? Those associated with the powerful—professional and managerial. The inferior power position of women is shown in stereotypical media portrayals as being dependent on men, as more often married than men, and as having lower-prestige occupations. In the television world, Greenberg (1980, p. 36) concludes that the important people in television are male, white, unmarried, upper-middle-class, and between 20 and 40 years old.

We can also see the geography of power in media. Which states are mentioned most often? Those on the East and West Coasts. New York is the seat of financial power; Washington, D.C., the

center of political power; and Los Angeles, the power center of cultural promotion. Internationally, which are the most powerful countries? The Western world and its adversaries, the former communist-bloc countries. The Third World is less powerful, matters less to the First World, and is heard from only when a great calamity breaks through the news threshold. News is about the powerful; therefore, news organizations station their bureaus and reporters to be near the powerful. News media reflect these power relations in the selection of sources, by relying on officials and other wealthy, corporate, and bureaucratic elites. These people are covered routinely. Less powerful people, groups, and causes gain news attention when they become extremists, but then they are taken seriously only as a threat to the status quo and are often evaluated through establishment sources. When the powerful become deviant by committing so-called white-collar crimes, those violations receive less attention than crimes by the powerless. This balance between the routine and the deviant captures the power relations in society—the powerful are presented routinely as representing the normal state of affairs, whereas the less powerful, when they do intrude into the symbolic environment, do so as deviants or as stereotyped inferiors.

Such patterns become all the more important when we realize that there is a great deal of commonality among content presented by the various media, what has been called "media consonance" (Reese, 1991, p. 313). When the media "converge" around a few key sources and certain issues, the result is that the media have more power to influence the audience—there are fewer "voices" and hence less diversity in media content (p. 316). The most powerful media help to "set the agenda" and to define reality for the less powerful media (p. 324). If the audience relies primarily on the mass media for information, and the media converge around a closely defined interpretation of the world, then the audience can be said to be powerfully influenced by the mass media.

#### **SUMMARY: MOLDING SOCIAL REALITY**

**The importance of differences between media content and other sources of information about the world lies in the fact that our views of the world, and resulting actions, will be molded by our predominant source of information: the mass media. If you have never traveled to Russia or talked at length with someone who has, most of what you know about that country—your "social" reality of that country—comes from the mass media in your country. But the media transmit more than just information. Heavy consumers of television entertainment content (e.g., evening soap operas that were popular on American television in the early 1980s, such as "Dallas" or "Dynasty") receive a substantial number of "lessons" about how to make money and get power, how to be an effective political actor, and how to get what they want.**

**This is not a book about the effects of content, but we are assuming that content has important implications for social change. We'll discuss these in greater depth at the end of this**

book. **For now, though, let us just say that we don't regard content as only a manifestation of culture. Rather, we assume that media content is both that and a source of culture. That is, media content takes elements of culture, magnifies them, frames them, and feeds them back to an audience. Media impose their own logic in creating a symbolic environment.** If we assume that culture must change, adapt, and improve, then media content may serve as either a catalyst for or a brake on this change. By portraying women as homemakers, content may be magnifying a kernel of truth (women used to be found primarily in those roles), but the strength and pervasiveness of those symbols may make it more difficult for women to be accepted in nonstereotypical roles. Media content may take the worst features of a society and blow them up so large that they are reinforced and made difficult to change. Although media portrayals may reflect power relations as they exist, they also may ensure that no other types of relations are conceivable.

The rest of the book examines from several perspectives explanations for the systematic content patterns we have discussed above. These explanations can be found in Journalistic routines, journalists' socialization, and media practices; media owners' and employees' attitudes and role conceptions; organizational constraints; extramedia factors such as the economic environment, revenue sources, advertisers, and culture; and ideological forces from the powerful or, more specifically, media financiers. Some of these forces working to influence media content have more serious ramifications for social change than others (Shoemaker, 1987). We certainly should not equate a typographic mistake caused by a newspaper reporter with influences on content from government regulations,

In general, influences resulting from media practices (e.g., use of press releases, availability of technology, choice of wire service stories, story type, and editing) may have relatively minor effects on the overall society, since they probably are not factors that would systematically emphasize or exclude certain content to serve institutional imperatives. Influences resulting from individual media professionals may be somewhat broader, but the potential effects of journalists' actions are limited because they are value judgments by individuals rather than institutions at large. When media content is influenced by factors at a higher level of analysis, that is, outside of the media organization, then the opportunity is great for manipulation of media content by extramedia forces seeking to *serve* their own *purposes*. Substantial influences on media content from the Ideology of the powerful (often referred to as *hegemony*) would indicate broad and pervasive effects on society. We turn next to analyze these influences.

## NOTES

1. Of the mass media, some scholars have considered television the most central, and it has certainly received its share of the research. Nancy Signorielli (1985) has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of television studies, whose index gives a rough idea of the topics attracting the most research attention. The heading of "blacks"

contained the most listings (111), followed by "family" (52), "occupations" (51), "employment" (39), "violence" (39), "marital status" (38), "social class" (36), "victimization" (30), "aggression" (26), "professionals" (22), "housewives" (20), "Hispanics" (20).

2. Even television portrayals of such routine daily activities as driving a car have been examined. Greenberg and Atkin (1983) concluded that a large number of irregular driving behaviors could be observed in prime time, but few deaths and few instances of legal fines and seat belt use.
3. When the media break away from the official routine to cover crises, do they portray them accurately? Scanlon, Liuiko, and Morton (1978) conclude that the general impression the media gave about crisis events was accurate, but that there were errors in reporting factual details, such as names, ages, and statistics. Borman (1978) found that few of the facts published about science topics were actually inaccurate, but that there were many omissions of relevant information.
4. Even treatment of insects has not escaped the content analyst. Although 99.9 percent of insect species are not harmful or beneficial, most magazine articles sampled in one study stressed the negative aspects of insects (the same magazines that carry insecticide ads) (Moore, Bowers, & Granovsky, 1982).

## Chapter 5.

# Influences on Content from Individual Media Workers

**A** lot of people are unhappy with the mass media: Conservatives accuse the media of concentrating on negative news and expressing a liberal bias. Liberals accuse the media of kowtowing to conservative presidents. Films and television shows are accused of including too much sex or violence or not enough socially significant storylines. And a lot of people put the blame for media content squarely in the hands of communication workers such as journalists, filmmakers, photographers, and advertising and public relations practitioners. Characteristics of these *individual* communicators are the subject of this chapter. As Figure 5.1 shows, the individual level of analysis is the first we will discuss.

The number of journalism jobs increased by more than 60 percent between 1971 and 1982, when the total news work force in daily and weekly newspapers, newsmagazines, television, radio, and news services was calculated to be 112,072 by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986a, p. 13). A substantial slow-down in the growth of journalism jobs occurred in the 1980s, with the growth rate between 1982 and 1992 being only 9 percent (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 1). A nationwide *survey* of journalism schools and graduates by Lee Becker and Gerald Kosicki (1993) shows that the unemployment rate for new graduates of journalism and mass communication schools was 16 percent in 1992, about twice that of the 1988 rate. News-editorial students were more likely to get jobs at newspapers than were other majors (e.g., public relations, advertising) to get jobs in their chosen careers. Graduates who had majored in broadcasting had the highest rate of unemployment (Stein, 1993, p. 14).

Using somewhat different categories than Weaver and Wilhoit,' the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1992-1993 estimated the number of people engaged in communication jobs, whether full-time, part-time, or on a freelance basis:

ideological level  
extramedia level  
organization level  
media routines level  
Individual level

**FIGURE 5.1** Individual influences on media content in the hierarchical model.

- 67,000 reporters and correspondents.
- 232,000 writers and editors.
- 67,000 radio and television announcers and newscasters.
- 109,000 public relations specialists.
- 427,000 marketing, advertising, and public relations managers.
- 120,000 photographers and camera operators, about half of whom are self-employed.
- 95,000 actors, directors, and producers.

In this chapter, we discuss potential influences on mass media content from factors that are intrinsic to the communication worker. First, we look at the characteristics of communicators and at their personal and professional backgrounds-to see how, for example, the journalists education ma influence their stone Second, we consider influence from communicators and beliefs-those attitudes that individual communicators hold as a result of-their backgrounds or personal experiences, for example, political attitudes or religious beliefs. Third, we investigate the professional orientations and role conceptions that communicators hold at least partly as a



function of being socialized to their jobs, for example, whether journalists perceive themselves to be neutral transmitters of events or active participants in developing the story.

Figure 5.2 shows the relationships among these factors. The communicators' characteristics (such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) and their personal backgrounds and experiences such as religious upbringing and their parents' socioeconomic status) not only shape the communicators' personal attitudes, values, and beliefs, but also direct the communicators' professional backgrounds and experiences (such as whether the communicator goes to journalism or film school). These professional experiences (including those from communication jobs) then shape the communicators' professional roles and ethics. These professional roles and ethics have a direct effect on mass media content, whereas the effect of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs on mass media content is indirect, operating only to the extent that the individuals hold power within their media organizations sufficient to override professional values and/or organizational routines (such as we discuss in Chapters 6 and 7).

**FIGURE 5.2** How factors intrinsic to the communicator may influence media content.

Communicators' professional backgrounds and experiences.

Communicators' professional roles and ethics.

Communicators' personal attitudes, values, and beliefs

Communicators' power within the organization

Effects of communicators' characteristics, backgrounds, experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs, roles, ethics, and power on mass media content.

## BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS

What kind of person goes into mass communication? Weaver and Wilhoit's 1992 survey of U.S. journalists discovered that although there is substantial variability, "the 'typical' U.S. journalist is a white Protestant male who has a bachelor's degree from a public college, is married, is 36 years old, earns about \$31,000 a year, has worked in journalism for 12 years, does not belong to a journalism association, and works for a medium-sized (42 journalists) group-owned daily newspaper" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 3).

### Gender

Although the proportion of women in journalism jobs increased from about 20 percent to about 34 percent from 1971 to 1982-1983, there were still only 34 percent women journalists in 1992. Women make up more of the new hires, however, with nearly 45 percent of journalists having *fewer* than five years of experience being women. The proportion of women journalists declines as the number of years of journalistic experience increases, with only 20 percent of journalists with 20 or more years of experience being women (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, pp. 4-5).

Women are more highly represented in news magazines (46 percent) and weekly newspapers (44 percent) than they are in daily newspapers (34 percent). The lowest representation of women in news jobs is in television news, which has only 25 percent female journalists (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1993, p. 5).

With today's journalism school populations being primarily women—a figure that has held steady at about 62 or 63 percent since 1988 (Becker & Kosicki, 1993, p. 18)—one might expect that more news jobs will be held by women as the years go on; however, many female students are training for careers in public relations and advertising, mass communication jobs that are not included in Weaver and Wilhoit's statistics. In fact, Becker, Fruit, and Caudill's (1987, p. 56) study of journalism education shows that female students "are less likely to pick news editorial study and more likely to pick public relations than [are] male students."

Women apparently are being promoted more often, with 42 percent of women journalists in the 1992 study saying that they have news-editorial supervisory responsibility (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, pp. 4-5). The percentage of women who were supervising editors (such as desk editors in newspapers or news producers in television and radio) increased from 12 percent in 1971 to 28 percent in 1982. In 1982, 20 percent of newspaper managing editors, 8 percent of television news directors, and 18 percent of radio news directors were women (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986a, pp. 70-71). Stone's 1986 survey of television and radio news directors showed that the trend continued through the early 1980s (1987, p. 749), but a 1992 follow-up study showed that the percentage of women who are television news directors has fallen to 16 percent (Prato, 1992, January/February, p. 24). In contrast,

the percentage of women editorial writers at newspapers has more than doubled in the past decade, from 7 to 16 percent (Wilhoit & Drew, 1991, p. 5).

Indeed, the "boys on the bus" are increasingly women (Mills, 1993, p. 25), as was shown when women such as Cokie Roberts, Susan Spencer, Helen Thomas, Andrea Mitchell, Elizabeth Arnold, and Ann Compton covered the 1992 presidential campaign. In today's news media, women are found covering the Persian Gulf War and the war in Somalia. "And yet," Kay Mills wrote in 1993, "the nation's four most prestigious papers—the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*—have named only men as news editors in the last five years; no woman has ever headed a network news division. In 1994 the second woman ever—Des Moines *Register* editor Geneva Overholser—will serve as president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors; the first was Katherine Fanning, then of the *Christian Science Monitor*, in 1987. Only two women head major Washington news bureaus" (p. 25).

As more women work in journalism, the large salary discrepancies observed in 1970 by Johnstone (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, pp. 84-85) have narrowed substantially. The median income for female journalists in 1970 was 64 percent that of male journalists. In 1981 this had increased to 71 percent, and by 1991 female journalists' salaries were 81 percent that of males (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 9). When Weaver and Wilhoit looked at salaries at different levels of journalistic experience in 1991, the salary discrepancy was found to have decreased, although male journalists still had higher salaries than women at the lower levels of experience. Women who have 15 or more years of journalism experience make about the same salary as their male counterparts (p. 9).

### **Ethnicity**

Unfortunately, the successes of women in journalism have not been accompanied by similar successes of minorities. A 1993 survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) showed that 10 percent of newsroom employees are minorities (Foote, 1993). Many of these minorities were hired between 1982 and 1992, when the percentage of minority journalists increased from 4 percent to 8 percent (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 1). African-American journalists make up nearly half of these (3.7 percent) minority journalists, with Hispanic Americans at 2.2 percent, Asian Americans at 1 percent, and Native Americans at .6 percent (p. 6). Less than 3 percent of newspaper editorial writers are minorities (Wilhoit & Drew, 1991, p. 5). Because U.S. journalism schools have shown slight increases in their minority student populations since 1988 (Becker & Kosicki, 1993, p. 19)<sup>2</sup> and minorities make up 12 percent of new hires (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 5), it seems that retention is as much of a problem as recruitment.

Indeed, some minority journalists give news work a try and then leave for other careers. This was the case with Jill Nelson, who joined the *Washington Post's* Sunday magazine in 1986 and left in 1990 after experiencing what she called a "weird, journalistic purgatory, a seemingly endless proving ground on which, just when you think you've won the game, the rules are changed" (Cose,

1993). One manager at the *Post* "observed that blacks generally were not seen as complete journalists, but as African Americans valued for offering a `black point of view- (p. 54).

Some newspapers have been aggressive in trying to increase the numbers of minorities in their newsrooms. In 1986 the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Minorities Committee released a report that calculated the "Year 2000" goal for daily newspapers in the United States (Haws, 1991, p. 765). The goal is for each newspaper to have at least the proportion of minority journalists in its newsroom as in its community. For example, a 1990 survey showed that the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* had 12 percent minorities in the newsroom but 25 percent minorities in the community (p. 766). The ASNE goal is for newspapers that are behind in their community-based goals to increase the percentage of minorities in their employ by 2000. At the present time, the newspapers most likely to have reached their year 2000 goals are those in communities with smaller minority populations. In fact, since 1978 the "nation's minority population has grown at a faster rate than has minority employment in the newspaper newsroom, which means, assuming the trend continues, that by the year 2000, newspapers will be farther from—not closer to—meeting their individual goals" (p. 771).

Yet change is possible. In 1991 there was only one minority journalist at the *Merced Sun-Star* in California, which has a community comprised of 48 per-cent minorities. Two years later, after a vigorous recruiting campaign Managing Editor Randolph D. Brandt, the newspaper had 20 percent minorities. Brandt says, that newspapers that don't have a significant minority population in their newsroom "don't want to do it, don't consider it a daily priority" (Roefs, 1993, p. 22). Another success story is the *Seattle Times*, whose minorities in the news-room rose from 4 percent to 21.1 percent over seven years—and the community has a 15 percent minority population (p. 23). Managing Editor Alex MacLeod attributes their success to a range of recruiting tools, but especially their willingness to recruit nationally by being active in the National Association for Black Journalists as well as similar associations for Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans (p. 23). In addition, an annual survey of top newspapers by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) showed for the first time in 1992 that each of the newspapers had hired at least one Hispanic journalist in the newsroom (Gersh, 1993), although the slight increase shown between 1991 and 1992 was called "insignificant" by Don Flores, then president of the NAHJ (Stein, May 1992). Other newspapers with high proportions of minorities in the newsroom include the *Miami Herald* (34.7 percent), *Detroit Free Press* (21.0 percent), and *USA Today* (20.8 percent) (Minorities make news-room gains, 1993). Unfortunately, for every success there are many newspapers that have failed to come close to their Year 2000 goals.

Some minority journalists have moved up into management positions, but this creates a new set of expectations for both minority employees and minority managers. Thomas H. Greer, vice president and senior editor of the *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, is an example of an African-American

journalist who has made the move into management. Greer said at a 1993 National Association of Black Journalists convention in Houston, "Sometimes black staffers do not show their black bosses the same kind of respect they show their white bosses." He added:

I think I am not exaggerating when I say (the black manager/black journalist issues) are truly special problems—wholly different from the truly mountainous problems of black managers supervising white journalists. . . . Managers either expect black staffers to work harder than any other staffer or at the opposite pole they will lower their expectations—almost assuming because they are black, they are not capable of the same level of achievement as other staffers. (Fitzgerald, August 1993, p. 28)

### **Sexual Orientation**

The first job fair for gay and lesbian journalists was held in September 1993 at the two-year-old National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) in New York (Case, September 1993). Attendees could interview with some of the largest U.S. communications companies. Organizations such as Time Warner, Dow Jones & Co., Knight-Ridder, Inc., and Reuters have included sexual orientation within their anti-bias agreements with employees, with sexual orientation being one more variable on which employers can diversify their staffs (p. 10); however, most newspapers do not include sexual orientation in their antidiscrimination policies (Rosenkrantz, 1992). In creating the NLGJA, gay and lesbian journalists are following in the footsteps of their Hispanic-American, African-American, Native-American, and Asian-American colleagues in forming an association that will help address their issues (p. 31). The organization has 600 members and 8 chapters (Iwata, 1992). Estimates are that 10 percent of the U.S. population is lesbian or gay (p. 33).

This is in strong contrast to the environment faced by gay and lesbian reporters in the not-so-recent past. Although Merle Miller is thought to be the first gay journalist to reveal his homosexuality in print (in a 1971 *New York Times Magazine* article), most gays and lesbians are afraid to reveal their sexual orientation to their employers for fear of reprisal. Even in the early 1990s, "coming out of the closet" was a calculated risk. For example, Juan Palomo of the *Houston Post* wrote a column about a homophobic murder, and at the end he revealed for the first time in print that he is gay. His editors disapproved, however, and ordered him to remove the personal reference from the column. When the story later came out in an alternative newspaper, Palomo was fired, then rehired a week later and given a post on the editorial board. His column still ran, but on the op-ed page—and less frequently (Rosenkrantz, 1992). Yet during the same period, Deb Price, the Washington news editor for the *Detroit News*, became the author of the first syndicated newspaper column that deals exclusively with gay and lesbian issues (Case, July 1992).

### **Average or Elite?**

One of journalism's myths is the conception of the early newspaper editor as a courageous, rough-and-tumble character who braved the frontier, learned his profession at the knee of the local printer, and dared to speak out in defense of people just like himself—working people, immigrants, or the needy. Not everyone idealized journalists, however. Sociologist Max Weber said journalists were members of a "pariah caste" (Hess 1981), and in the late 1800s, Harvard University president Charles William Eliot described reporters as being "drunkards, deadbeats, and bummers" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986a, p. 6). Journalism certainly was not a very lucrative profession: As late as the mid-1800s, many journalists were paid only \$12 to \$20 a month, with fringe benefits that included board and washing (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986a, p. 5). A review of movies about journalists from the 1930s onward by Debra Gersh reveals that they are still portrayed in a similar stereotypical manner—"rude, *many* times divorced, hard-drinking, cigarette-smoking, social misfits who will do anything for a front-page byline" (1991, p. 18).

By the late nineteenth century, American journalists had more in common with the corporate elite than with the working class. When Hart (1976) studied the backgrounds of 137 newspaper editors between 1875 and 1900, he found that they did not have much in common with poor immigrants or even with the average American, although older editors did tend to have humbler origins than the younger ones. Older editors began as printers' apprentices and worked their way up to be newspaper owners. Younger nineteenth-century editors were more likely to come from elite families in which the father was successful in business. The younger editors generally started their journalism careers as reporters and were less likely than their predecessors to buy a controlling interest in the newspaper for which they worked.

This pattern of recruitment and education remains the norm in today's newspapers, even though one occasionally still reads that as recently as 20 to 30 years ago journalists' origins were closer to the working class. Studies of Washington, D.C., journalists by Rosten in 1936, Rivers in 1951 (both cited in Hess, 1981), and Hess in 1981 all show that journalism has become, in the words of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "if not an elite profession, a profession attracted to elites" (Hess, 1981, p. 116). In the 1930s, 80 percent of journalists had at least some college education. About a third of Washington reporters since the 1970s have been graduates of highly selective universities (Hess, 1981). Among college students majoring in journalism, students from families in which their fathers held managerial positions were more likely to pick news editorial study as their emphasis than were students from lower occupational backgrounds (Becker, Fruit, & Caudill, 1987, p. 56).

Researchers' conclusions about whether journalists represent the "average American" or the "elite" depend on which journalists are studied. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986a) conclude from their study of journalists from a representative sample of U.S. news media (daily and weekly newspapers,

newsmagazines, news services, radio, and television stations) that U.S. journalists come primarily from "the established and dominant cultural groups in the society" (p. 22). Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter (1986) studied only journalists at what they call the "elite" media—the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and CBS, NBC, ABC, and PBS (p. 20)—and conclude that "the typical leading journalist is the very model of the modern eastern urbanite" (p. 294).

### **The Evolution of Communication Careers**

Journalism has always been a relatively easy career to get into—no license or test is necessary; you don't even need a college degree in journalism. Because most people think that they can write (whether they can or not), they often think that they would make good journalists. The result is that a lot of people try journalism as a first career and then move on to something else. Low salary and benefits are the most-cited reasons for leaving journalism (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, pp. 38-39).

This turnover makes journalism primarily a young person's career: The median age of journalists is slightly lower than the median age of all U.S. civilian workers (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 20). More than half of U.S. journalists are under 35 years old, and only about 10 percent are 55 or older (p. 19). Hess (1981) reports that 38 percent of journalists working in Washington, D.C., are in their thirties, 25 percent in their forties, and only 16 percent are over age 50. A study of police reporters and law enforcement officials found that journalists are much younger, have less work experience, and have lived for a shorter time in the community than their sources (Grusin, 1990). Television may rely on even younger people. Jeff Zucker, for example, was named executive producer of NBC's "Today" show in 1992 and executive producer of the "NBC Nightly News" show in 1993, the youngest person ever to run a network's evening news broadcast ("NBC names producer, 27, to news job," 1993).

Youthfulness is associated with excitement, and a sense of excitement and discovery makes a good journalist. Washington-based columnist Stanley Karnow says that "journalism is the only profession in which you can stay an adolescent all your life" (Hess, 1981, p. 128). Most television reporters seem especially young and attractive, whether because of youthful excitement or prejudicial hiring on the part of management. Although the prevailing wisdom remains that men age more gracefully than women, you don't see an abundance of older men on television, and there are virtually no unattractive reporters of any age or gender. There are notable exceptions, of course. Charles Kuralt, who for years traveled America doing stories "on the road" for CBS, says that being "fat and bald" helps him put people at ease: "People look at me and they say, 'if that guy can look like that and talk like that, then I can just be myself'" (Kuralt, 1986, p. 5).

Journalists who lose their youthful sense of excitement or who want higher salaries generally get out of journalism. Those most likely to leave tend to have the most education and experience; they tend to be between 30 and 45 years old (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 103). Specialty reporters sometimes leave work in their area of expertise; we know of an award-winning environmental reporter who went to work for an environmental group, apparently frustrated about being on the sidelines of environmental battles. Some reporters who cover politics become advocates for candidates or causes and leave their media jobs to become political actors instead of watchers.

Sometimes journalists just get bored or burned out by the repetitious nature of the job (not another election story about the candidate's supportive spouse!) or by the cynicism that often accompanies the journalist's role as a passive observer of events: David Wise, a former Washington bureau chief for the *New York Herald Tribune*, says that reporters spend "an awful lot of time sitting around marble corridors waiting for the grown-ups inside to tell them what's happening" (Hess, 1981, p. 123). In addition, as journalists age, they can become dismayed by the fact that they know more about the secretary of transportation's job than does the newly appointed (and probably younger) cabinet member. Likewise, newspaper copy editors are more likely to be emotionally exhausted and to feel more "depersonalized" than reporters (Stein, August 1992a).

Job-related knowledge is essential for reporters covering technical beats. The typical newspaper science writer is older and better educated than the average general assignment reporter (Storad, 1984). Science writers need quite a bit of scientific training if they are to translate technical reports into language that the layperson can understand. An apocryphal story about a newspaper photographer assigned to cover an anniversary of the first sustained nuclear reaction at the University of Chicago illustrates the dangers of limited knowledge: "Arriving on campus, the photographer addressed himself to the assembled scientists, including Yannevar Bush, Enrico Fermi, Arthur H. Compton, and Harold C. Urey. 'Now, fellows,' he said, 'I got three pictures in mind. First you guys putting the atom in the machine. Then splitting the atom. And finally all of you grouped around looking at the pieces- (Braden, 1981, p. 248).

There is a fair amount of movement between journalism and other mass communication jobs. Some journalists leave their newsgathering jobs to work as television writers and producers. For example, Kurt Luedtke, the former *Detroit Free Press* executive editor, won an Oscar for his screenplay of *Out of Africa*. Former magazine writer Joe Eszterhas earned \$3 million for his screenplay of *Basic Instinct*. Joe Pichirallo left the *Washington Post* to take a position as a development executive for HBO Pictures (Pagano, 1992). In her study of Hollywood television producers, Cantor (1988) identifies three types of producers, two of which are occasionally associated with journalism backgrounds. The *filmmaker* producers are the youngest, generally having a college education in mass communication. Although most of the filmmakers started in the bottom ranks of a major Southern California studio, some had also worked as journalists or radio disc jockeys. The *writer-producers* tend to be middle-aged but have backgrounds similar to the filmmakers. Their university degrees generally involve writing—mostly journalism or English, but



sometimes theater. As writers, they had generally held mass media jobs before becoming television producers, such as radio writers, news editors, or movie script writers. In contrast, the *old-line producers* are less likely to have university degrees and are often the oldest and most successful producers in television.

Job satisfaction has dropped substantially since 1971, with 49 percent of journalists in 1971 saying they were very satisfied, compared to 40 percent in 1982-1983 and 27.3 percent in 1992. African-American and Asian-American journalists are least likely to say that they are very satisfied with their jobs. The year 1992 was also a three-decade low in the percentage of journalists who say that their organization is doing an outstanding job of informing the public: 14.9 percent in 1971, 17.9 percent in 1982-1983, and 12.5 percent in 1992 (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 10).

Another reason for movement away from journalism and mass communication jobs may be the relatively low pay: Becker and Kosicki's annual surveys show that for those who graduated in 1992 with a bachelor's degree, the median full-time weekly salary was \$350 (essentially the same as in 1989). For those who had a master's degree, the median full-time weekly salary was \$476 (compared with \$423 in 1991 and \$481 in 1990) (Stein, August 1993).

Disaffection with news jobs can be high for some women and men who find it difficult to balance the demands of a news organization with those of a family. In an article aptly titled "Get a Life!" reporter Rebecca Theim (1993) describes the problems of news work: "grueling workdays, unpredictable schedules, difficult politicians, unreasonable editors." How does this mesh with the equally difficult and important demands of a family? Theim provides the example of Rosemary Harty, who was a city hall and education reporter at the *Dayton Daily News* until the conflicts between family and the 12-hour-a-day job became insolvable. For example, at one point she was confronted with the choice of attending a preplanned "mother's luncheon" at her youngest stepson's kindergarten class or covering a breaking crime story. She chose her stepson over the job, but the decision wasn't easy. Soon afterward she left her newspaper and became media relations director for the University of Dayton. "I just didn't want to have to make those kinds of choices for the rest of my life."

When newspaper journalists were asked whether they would like their sons or daughters to become journalists, only about half said yes. The problems? "Low pay, long hours, poor prospects and 'inhuman' management. And—say a sobering number—newspapers are dinosaurs that probably won't survive" (Pease, 1992, p. 34).

### **The Education of Communicators**

Another aspect of communicators' backgrounds is the amount and type of education they have. Although college-level journalism education was begun in the United States, it now appears in nearly every developed country in some form (Lowenstein & Merrill, 1990, p. 109). Communication departments have flourished in universities under a number of different names—

journalism, mass communication, radio-television-film, speech communication, advertising, communication arts, and communication sciences. The formal origins of journalism education were in 1869 at a short-lived journalism program at what is today Washington and Lee University; and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several land grant colleges established journalism programs (Dennis, 1988, pp. 10-11). In 1908 the University of Missouri created the first academically separate journalism school, soon followed by programs at universities in Illinois and Pennsylvania (Gaunt, 1992, p. 29). The first two journalism courses at the Ohio State University were taught in 1893, and journalism became a separate academic unit in 1914. At first, journalism training was limited to the basic skills required to work in a newspaper. As the media developed, more conceptually based curricula on ethics and law, media and society, and media management were introduced (Gaunt, 1992, p. 27). Today more than 304 universities grant bachelor's degrees in journalism and mass communication (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 44), and these programs continue to grow. In 1985, more than 20,000 bachelor's degrees were awarded in journalism and mass communication—more than six times the number awarded just twenty years earlier (McCombs, 1988, p. 101). In addition, some institutions such as Columbia offer only a master's degree in journalism. These programs typically can be completed within one year and focus almost entirely on skills-oriented classes (Lewis, 1993; Gutmann, 1993).

A 1987 survey of full-time mass communication faculty from four-year and graduate programs revealed that 98 percent have professional media experience; the average is nine years. Although faculty members holding Ph.D. degrees have less professional experience than other faculty (who average twelve years of experience), the media experience of Ph.D.s still averages more than six years (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986b, p. 16). Nearly three-quarters of male educators hold the Ph.D. or an equivalent degree, compared to 62 percent of female educators (Viswanath, Kosicki, & Creedon, 1993, p. 242).

It should not be surprising, then, that mass communication faculty are similar to working journalists in many ways, including geographic distribution, ethnic and religious origins, undergraduate college major, and use of the mass media (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986b, p. 38).

### **How They Got Started**

Tom Burke, news director for WCMH-TV in Columbus, Ohio, began his career as a radio sports commentator at two Massachusetts radio stations. He received a BA from Boston College in 1978.

James Dowling, chairman of Burson-Marsteller, is a journalism graduate who worked for *Newsweek*, United Press, and Associated Press after college. A brief stint in public relations for Mobil Oil convinced him to pursue a PR agency job. He joined Burson-Marsteller when it was still small and quickly rose through the management ranks.

Leonard Downie, Jr., executive editor, *Washington Post*, got his BAJ (Bachelor of Arts in Journalism) and MA from Ohio State University in 1964 and 1965. He joined the *Washington Post* as a summer intern in 1964, becoming managing editor in 1984 and executive editor in 1991.

David Hawpe, editor, the *Courier-Journal*, Louisville, Kentucky, started as a reporter for the Associated Press in Lexington and later in Louisville. He then worked for several years on the St. Petersburg (Florida) *Times* before returning to the *Courier-Journal*.

Barbara A. Reynolds, columnist and inquiry page editor for *USA Today*, got her bachelor's degree from Ohio State University. Her first newspaper job was with her hometown newspaper, serving the African-American community, the *Call & Post*. She worked for the *Cleveland Press*, *Ebony* magazine, and the *Chicago Tribune* before beginning at *USA Today*.

Carol Rueppel, news director at WDIV-TV in Detroit, was an English major in college. After a one-year stint in advertising at a high school newspaper, she got a job as a television reporter and news producer. She worked at several stations around the country before becoming news director at WDIV.

Bernard Shaw, Washington anchor for Cable News Network, started in journalism as a reporter for WYNR (Chicago). He decided to become a journalist at age thirteen, having been impressed by Edward R. Murrow. After four years in the Marine Corps, he majored in history at college.

Compiled from the following sources: (1) Great Careers, Modest Beginnings (1988), (2) Fink (1990); (3) Albers (1993); (4) Hawpe (1993); and (5) information from the journalists themselves.

Today the vast majority of media professionals have communication degrees, , whereas earlier they came primarily, from English, creative writing, political science, American studies, or other discipline (Gaunt, 1992, p. 33; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 54). Not all media people value a journalism education, however; CBS writer/editor Charles Kuralt says that he would rather hire an American Studies graduate than someone from journalism school: "Journalism is not so complicated that you can't learn it on the job, but America is complicated, and deserving of much contemplation" (Kuralt, 1986, p. 6). Those who disdain journalism education often do not themselves have journalism degrees and may know little about modern journalism and mass communication education (Lowenstein & Merrill, 1990, p. 110). Nonetheless, the vast majority of new hires at newspapers are journalism graduates (McCombs, 1988, p. 101). A movement of communication graduates into management over the past couple of decades could account for the increase in communication graduate hires.

Journalism and mass communication schools have not lacked for students and may have become victims of their own success (Gaunt, 1993, p. 33). The dramatic increase in the number of journalism students in the 1980s is now leveling off, but the widespread budget cuts of public universities (where most journalism schools are located) in the late 1980s and early 1990s has

combined with high student demand to cause some journalism schools to be seriously understaffed and have outdated equipment. Schools that have been able to restrict enrollment and take only the best applicants for the journalism major have been the most successful in matching the demands of enrollment with available resources. Many prospective journalism majors think they can write well but in fact cannot; as a result, many journalism schools have to teach at a more basic level than they prefer, including teaching basic grammar (Stein, 1992b).

The best approach to mass communication education is a subject of some debate. Many journalists are critical of their journalism education (Burgoon, Burgoon, & Atkin, 1982). Although some professionals like Kuralt want liberal arts educations with a strong orientation in research, theory, and critical thinking, others want highly technical, skills-oriented programs. This disagreement shows up in mass communication textbooks and in the types of materials that journalism faculty read. After reviewing 31 textbooks, Shoemaker (1987) concluded that mass communication texts are designed either to socialize students to being mass communication "insiders" or to teach them to look critically at all social Institutions, including the mass media (the "outsiders"). The insiders would learn how to be successful media professionals, but they would not be encouraged to contemplate the role of the mass media in society. Insiders are trained to be critical of every social institution *except* the mass media.

Through their choice of textbooks, faculty have ample opportunity to introduce their students to either the insider or outsider point of view. The decision probably reflects the faculty members' own orientation toward mass communication. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986b, pp. 33-34) found that although 40 percent of mass communication faculty keep up with both academic and media industry knowledge, about 30 percent read only industry publications and about 20 percent read only scholarly journals. About 10 percent of faculty don't seem to keep up with either.

In his assessment of "exemplary journalism schools," Footlick (1988, p. 69) writes that good journalists must "know more than a little about a lot of things, from mathematics to foreign policy, from courthouse politics to art history. They must care about a lot of things. They must be able to learn quickly. They must write well, and cherish that ability. To most professionals, the exemplary journalism schools are the ones that give students the best opportunity to begin mastering these fundamental qualities."

Most mass communication departments are organized along media lines, in news-editorial, magazine, broadcast, photojournalism, public relations, or advertising "sequences." Students take very few courses in common, concentrating on the acquisition of specialized knowledge from their sequence. Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, has tried to counter criticism of professional journalism education by abandoning its traditional sequence organization for a more general curriculum that includes four areas: media study and theory, media management and research, media writing, and media production (Christ & Blanchard, 1988). In schools that retain the traditional sequence organization, advertising and public relations sequences are growing the

fastest. Students are increasingly rejecting the news-editorial sequences because of "negative perceptions of what newspaper professions have to offer;" including low salaries and lack of creativity (Mann, 1988, p. 60).

Another debate has centered on how much liberal arts education journalism students should have. The traditional guidelines by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication has been about 25 percent courses inside the journalism or mass communication department and 75 percent in liberal arts and science courses. Some educators want their students to take more courses within the major in order to meet the demands of their increasingly complex profession. In fact, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, withdrew from the national journalism accrediting system at least partially because it wanted to require more credit hours in the school than was then permitted by the accreditors.

The tie between liberal arts and communication disciplines will undoubtedly remain close. After all, most communication students would probably be liberal arts majors (especially in English) if they weren't in communication. Even with journalism school graduates taking over more and more journalism jobs, there still remains a significant core of liberal arts graduates in the profession. Thomas Winship (1988, p. 24) says that "most gifted journalists I know stumbled into the business because they were liberal arts deadbeats."

Journalism and mass communication schools are feeling more and more pressure from the industry to graduate people who are ready to be productive workers the first day they work, contrary to a more traditional system wherein the media (particularly newspapers) expected to put a certain amount of time and effort into training the new employee—a sort of apprenticeship. One notable exception to this is the Tampa *Tribune*, which hires the ten best journalism graduates it can find each year and then trains them in law, writing, editing, and reporting (Crothers, 1990, p. 64). Newspapers like the *Tribune* and other communication organizations are also emphasizing continuing education classes on topics of special interest, such as science, in order to prepare their staff journalists to cover an increasingly more complex world. A 1990 survey of journalists showed that they were most interested in continuing education classes in ethics, science, economics, law, and international affairs (Ramsey, 1990, p. 75).

Some journalism schools are considering or have already encouraged or required students to take double majors—for example, in business and journalism—in order to acquire the depth in a topic area that today's news employers often require. Although a broad liberal arts education is still thought to be important, depth in an area gives new graduates an advantage in job hunting. An understanding of the history and background of an area such as national security can set one journalist apart from another. Far too few journalists of any experience level have enough knowledge of national security to write knowledgeably about it (Burt, 1991, p. 140). Richard R. Burt, a U.S. ambassador to the nuclear and space negotiations in Geneva and a former assistant secretary of state, has said:

The effort to achieve greater expertise must contend with a countervailing tendency in journalism—the declining, but still entrenched view that the best reporters are "jacks of all trades." There is still a strong belief on the part of editors that the "tradescraft" skills of reporting take precedence over subject-specific expertise or, as one editor told me years ago, "If you know how to cover a major fire, you can cover anything." In fact, there is a tendency for editors as well as fellow journalists to be skeptical of a colleague with special expertise on the grounds that he or she has somehow been co-opted by the people or institutions they are assigned to cover. Thus, sheer ignorance often masquerades as "professional distance." (pp. 141-142)

### **Effects of Media Professionals' Backgrounds on Media Content**

"In terms of demographics, if there is an average Washington reporter and an average American, they do not look much like each other. . . . Does this make a difference in how the news is reported? In some instances the answer is yes" (Hess, 1981, p. 117). Yet to say that there is an influence on content is not to conclude that the influence is negative. Journalists are better educated than the average American. They are better writers than the average American. Are these differences negative? Would the world be a better place if journalists were less literate or less educated?

Still, there is a tendency for our backgrounds to affect how we see the world. Our families, our schools, and all of our life experiences shape our priorities, expectations, and dreams. This is no different a process for communication professionals than it is for construction workers, physicians, or social workers.

But how strong are such influences? Weaver and Wilhoit say that the effect of journalists' demographics on news values and content is probably minor, given the importance of organizational routines and constraints (1991, p. 25). Therefore, it is possible that increasing numbers of women and minorities within the mass media will not result in any significant changes in media content; education, socialization, and organizational constraints may negate most individual differences between communicators. This is an empirical question, however, and it can be addressed by research. For example, Farley (1978) found that female magazine publishers gave more favorable coverage to the Equal Rights Amendment than did their male counterparts. Moreover, in her 1991 study, Evelyn Trapp Goodrick found that although what used to be called "women's issues" are the subject of more editorials now than in 1980, "women editorialists do not respond in lockstep to women's issues. They evaluate each issue on an individual basis; some female respondents did not consider the designated issues important" (Goodrick, 1991, p. 29).

This is a time of change in communication workplaces, with some being more open to women than others. For example, women interviewed in a 1993

study Marion Tuttle Marzolf say that the increase in women newspaper editors has changed the nature of some interpersonal interactions in the newsroom: "Cheesecake has virtually disappeared. Sexist, off-color jokes are out—totally." "News meetings are a bit less confrontational. The newsroom is more collaborative in style, more like the real world, more team-oriented" (Stein, August 1993). Yet panelists at a 1993 meeting of the Asian American Journalists Association indicated that "gender politics of the unwelcome kind still pervades the news-room" (Stein, September 1993, p. 13). An African-American woman reported that her white editor "said he liked his coffee 'as black as Sharon's tits?'" The result was a lawsuit, an out-of-court settlement, and an agreement that included giving the woman better assignments and pledging to hire more minority editorial staff members (p. 13).

The increase of women, minorities, and homosexuals in the newsroom has caused new questions to be asked about potential influences. Should women be allowed to cover abortion? some editors have asked. The implication of the question is that women might not be as objective as men on such a story yet does anyone ask whether men should be allowed to cover sports or war (Mills, 1993, p. 19)? Does anyone ask if heterosexuals can cover heterosexual issues objectively? Does anyone ask if white reporters can cover stories about whites objectively?

Minority journalists are in a double-bind, with some of their bosses assigning them to cover minority stories only and others fearing that minority journalists would not be objective on such stories. When the African-American filmmaker Spike Lee requested that the media send African-American journalists to interview him about his 1992 movie *Malcolm X*, the *Los Angeles Times* refused, saying that interviewees are not permitted to select the person who interviews them. Lee reportedly asked for African-American reporters in order to give them "more of a chance," but he also indicated that he thinks "that because *Malcolm X* is such a part of the African-American psyche and experience, that African-American journalists will be that much more sensitive to the subject matter" (Stein, November 1992, p. 9).

The 1992 Los Angeles riots following the acquittal of policemen accused of beating Rodney King presented many opportunities for African-American reporters "not normally afforded junior reporters. Nevertheless, many felt those stories were then undervalued," said Dorothy Butler-Gilliam, *Washington Post* columnist and National Association of Black Journalists vice-president/print (Fitzgerald, September 1992, p. 20). The minority reporters felt that they were assigned to the story because of their ethnicity, but then were not permitted to write lead stories or direct coverage. Sidmel Estes-Sumpter, producer of the evening news for WAGA-TV in Atlanta, said that "we were asked to live in two worlds: We were asked to report objectively on the rage that was in the street, but at the same time we as African Americans felt that rage at the unjust [Rodney King beating trial] verdict and the frustration of years past" (p. 20).

Gay and lesbian reporters are also asked if their sexual orientation influences the stories they write. Assistant National Editor Jeffrey Schmalz of the *New York Times* says that many *gay* stories are left out of newspapers "unless a *gay* reporter

says that there's a story there.' For example, Schmalz says that doing a story for the *New York Times Magazine* on gays' political power would never have occurred to a heterosexual reporter (Rosenkrantz, 1992, p. 33). Another gay editor says that gay journalists are able to "flag words, phrases or images that mislead or reinforce stereotypes" (p. 34). Randy Shilts, author of the bestseller *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, says that "the lack of [openly] gay reporters ... had a disastrous effect on the AIDS crisis. Straight reporters with their Olympian objectivity ignored the story because of their prejudice against homosexuals" (p. 33). A study of senior editors and their gay and lesbian reporters found that although the editors were interested in covering the homosexual community, they were ignorant about issues of concern to lesbians and gays. Editors sometimes equated coverage of AIDS with coverage of the gay/lesbian community (Brent & Greenwald, 1992/1993, p. 107).

How loyal should women, minorities, and homosexuals be to their groups? To what extent should they be advocates for their gender, ethnic group, or sexual orientation? At a 1992 meeting of the Asian American Journalists Association, Lincoln Millstein, assistant managing editor for features at the *Boston Globe*, said that he was "'mildly troubled' by the feeling of 'ethnic loyalty versus the pursuit of truth' at the gathering. We, as a group, need to be careful and not go over the edge as an advocacy group, and not become too emotional about what's going on" (Case, September 1992, p. 14). In a 1993 column in the *Columbus Dispatch* (Ohio), Lovell Beaulieu wrote about reactions to his column criticizing the superintendent of schools. Beaulieu, the superintendent, and Beaulieu's critics are African American:

I sensed that my critic was concerned because he felt a racial bond with the superintendent. The facts of the case no longer were seen as colorless. And when that happens, it's hard for one black person to report another's deficiencies without feeling the wrath of still other blacks. (Beaulieu, 1993, p. 11A)

Beaulieu was trying hard to hold to the traditional journalistic canon of objectivity. "I have sometimes thought that I would like to become a judge. I think I have the right temperament," he said. Others critique the traditional concept of objectivity, saying that everyone has a point of view and that it is best if the writer's point of view is stated openly.

One of gay journalists' biggest critics, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas, says that *gay* journalists are primarily lobbying for gays' political agenda. Yet the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association argues that openly gay and lesbian reporters will force their heterosexual colleagues to confront their own biases, resulting in better coverage of issues relevant to the homosexual community (Robles, 1993, p. 19).

The influence of backgrounds may be most obvious when demography is related to expertise, as in the changing nature of foreign correspondents. Scott Shuster (1988), a former freelance



foreign correspondent, says that budget trimming among U.S. media is making it more practical to hire foreign journalists as "foreign" correspondents than to send American journalists abroad. "There is *an army* of foreign journalists out there, ready to put an end to the ancient and ridiculous practice of sending speak-only-English American reporters halfway around the world to pretend to be experts on places they have never seen before" (p. 43). And, fiscal responsibility aside, these foreign journalists can probably do a better job: Because they know more about the local environment, they "should be able to depict foreign reality more accurately than a 'parachuting' foreign correspondent" (p. 43). David Lawrence, Jr., now publisher of the *Miami Herald*, advocates hiring U.S. Hispanics as journalists, saying that the fact that most Hispanics are bilingual and bicultural will help them "communicate with and understand the perspectives of 400 million people south of the border" (1988, p. 1).

Similar arguments have been made by Hispanic leaders who criticize local newspapers that hire Anglos to cover the Hispanic community, according to a study by Greenberg, Burgoon, Burgoon, and Korzenny (1983). Even when Hispanic personnel were recruited, they "tended to be hired from places other than the local community and consequently failed to identify and focus on those issues perceived by the Hispanic constituency as important" (p. 64). As a result, "employment patterns and traditional stereotypes were said to cause an over-emphasis on negative news" (pp. 64-65).

For those journalists who leave communication work to enter another occupation, such as politics, coming back is problematic.

"Once you do it, you can then be perceived as 'soiled goods,'" explains Ray Jenkins, who left as executive editor of *The Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser* in 1979 to serve as deputy press secretary to President Jimmy Carter.... "I did not give any consideration to what (taking the job) might do to my career in journalism," recalls Jenkins, who went on to become the editorial page editor of *The Evening Sun* in Baltimore.... "I was a plain egotist and flattered to be asked to serve the president. I would have done it even if I had known it would ruin my career. It didn't, but it could have" (Rykken, 1992, p. 4.)

In this example, experience in the political arena was seen as potentially negative. Other editors, however, view government experience as positive in terms of knowing how to cover that beat.

As in all careers, the population of communication professionals is self-selected—you "volunteer" to be a journalist; you aren't drafted—and people who choose the same career tend to have characteristics in common. Hess (1981, p. 124) says that there is a "personality type" in journalism and that the study of journalists' personalities "may be the most promising field of study for explaining why news is as it is." He says that journalists like excitement and dislike abstractions. Their love for excitement leads them to prefer covering the Senate rather than the House of Representatives and politics rather than management.

## **PERSONAL ATTITUDES, VALUES, AND BELIEFS**

Charges that mass communicators are politically liberal, against religion, and unlike "most Americans" have been common in recent years. Concern with mass communicators' attitudes and values are based on the assumptions that a journalist's attitudes influence his or her stories.

### **Personal Values and Beliefs**

U.S. journalists (and many other Americans) generally hold what are called the "motherhood" values—they favor family, love, friendship, and economic prosperity; they oppose hate, prejudice, and war (Gans, 1979, p. 42). In addition to these basic values dealing with human kindness (or the lack of such), journalists hold values more typical of the American Progressive movement of the early twentieth century (Gans, 1979). Paletz and Entman (1981) *say* that these include individualism, free enterprise, competitiveness, and materialism. Gans (1979) identifies these as ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership.

*Ethnocentrism* refers to journalists' tendency to value U.S. practices above all others—other countries are judged against an American standard.

*Altruistic democracy* is the label Gans uses to indicate most journalists' belief that the news should "follow a course based on public interest and public service" (1979, p. 43). This value underlies stories about corrupt politicians and others who deviate from some unstated democratic ideal, government waste, and the failure of citizens to fully participate in their democratic society.

*Responsible capitalism* is what most journalists expect business people to practice—fair competition without unreasonably high profits or the exploitation of workers, and respect for small and family-owned businesses. In fact, Peterson, Albaum, Kozmetsky, and Cunningham (1984) found that newspaper business editors are more favorably disposed toward capitalism than is the general public.

*Small-town pastoralism* is a journalistic ideal representing rural areas and small towns as centers of virtue, craftsmanship, and cohesive social relationships. Stories about urban areas emphasize crime, the hectic pace, racial unrest, economic problems, and threats to the environment.

*Individualism* is prized by journalists, who fill feature stories with "rugged individualists"—people who work for the good of society, but in their own *way*. The individual is the hero who wins despite overpowering odds. This value also applies to stories about technology and large organizations that rob people of their individualism.

*Moderatism* acts as a check on excessive individualism—the hero must not break the law or existing norms. Fanaticism of any sort is treated as suspect, as is conspicuous consumption and fervent political ideology.

*Social order* is valued highly by journalists, leading them to include many stories on unrest and threats to the establishment. By pointing out instances in which people disrupt the social order or act contrary to established social values, journalists help define what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

*Leadership* is also prized by journalists, because leadership is required to deal with social order. This leads to stories about politicians who are lacking in honesty or morality and explains why journalists are suspicious of powerful people who may influence elected officials. Ettema (1988, p. 3) illustrates how investigative reporting can be a conduit for the journalist to express "righteous indignation not merely at the individual tragedy [being investigated] but also at the moral disorder and social breakdown which the tragedy represents." The journalist's outrage is often aimed at the "incompetence, indifference, or illegal behavior of public officials and agencies" and frequently results in demands for social reform.

As Gans (1979) points out, some of these values reflect an underlying conservative ideology and others reflect liberalism. Journalists' defense of "responsible capitalism" could be described as "right-leaning liberalism," whereas journalists' respect for tradition, nostalgia for pastoralism and rugged individualism, defense of the social order, and faith in leadership are conservative (p. 68). Although individual journalists may agree more or less with each of these, Gans argues that these values—typical of the reformist Progressive movement—come through clearly in the news. Perhaps people who wish to improve society gravitate to journalism as a career because of the opportunities that journalism gives them to expose social evils.

### **Personal Political Attitudes**

Popular wisdom during the early 1980s held that journalists were predominantly liberal, thanks to a study of journalists from major Northeast U.S. media organizations (Lichter, Rothman, & Lichter, 1986, p. 294), quickly picked up and spread by conservative organizations such as Accuracy in Media:

Today's leading journalists are politically liberal and alienated from traditional norms and institutions. Most place themselves to the left of center and regularly vote the Democratic ticket. Yet theirs is not the New Deal liberalism of the underprivileged, but the contemporary social liberalism of the urban sophisticate. They favor a strong welfare state within a capitalist framework. They differ most from the general public, however, on the divisive social issues that have emerged since the 1960s—abortion, gay rights, affirmative action, et cetera. Many are alienated from the "system" and quite critical of America's world role. They would like to strip traditional powerbrokers of their influence and empower black leaders, consumer groups, intellectuals, and . . . the media. [ellipsis in original]

Their data have been used by many conservatives to justify criticism of the media: Herbert Schmertz, *former vice-president* of public affairs for Mobil Oil, *says* that journalists' views "are in direct opposition to prevailing American values" and that "if [journalists] use the press to 'crusade' on behalf of these beliefs . . . they do the public a great disservice" (Gans, 1985, pp. 29-30).

So just how liberal are journalists? What is behind their political orientations? We have already discussed the fact that journalists tend to be better educated than the average American—a difference that has been tied to charges that journalists are more politically liberal than most Americans (Gans, 1985). A college education is not necessarily tied to liberalism, however. Whereas college students of the 1960s and early 1970s tended to be more liberal than their parents, college students in the 1980s showed a tendency to be more conservative.

Since 1971, there has been an increase in the percentage of journalists who describe themselves as Democrats: 35.5 percent in 1971, 38.5 percent in 1982-1983, and 44.1 percent in 1992. The percentage of Republicans has declined: 25.7 percent in 1971, 18.8 percent in 1982-1983, and 16.3 percent in 1992. Those identifying themselves as Independents shifted from 32.5 percent in 1971 to 39.1 percent in 1982-1983 and to 34.4 percent in 1992 (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1992, p. 7). "When compared to the overall U.S. population, journalists are 5 to 10 percentage points more likely to say they are Democrats, and 10 to 15 points less likely to say they are Republicans, depending on which poll you use as a measure of the overall U.S. adult population's party preference. The percentage of journalists claiming to be Independents is very close to the overall population percentage" (pp. 6-7). Part of the increase in Democrats may be tied to the increase in minority and women journalists, who are more likely to identify themselves as Democrats (p. 7).

The arguments about liberalism have not centered around the average journalist, however, but rather around what Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter (1986) described as media "elites"—those journalists who work for the most prestigious and influential U.S. media. Between 1979 and 1980, they found that 54 percent of elite journalists were politically liberal and 17 percent were conservative. Of those elite journalists who voted in presidential elections between 1964 and 1976, more than 80 percent voted for the Democratic candidate in each year (1986, p. 30). This compares with Weaver and Wilhoit's data gathered from a probability sample of U.S. journalists (not just from elites) that show that in 1982-1983, 45 percent of journalists were Democrats, 25 percent were Republicans, and 30 percent were Independents (1991, p. 29).

Whether true or not, many individuals persist in their perception of journalists as politically more liberal than the general population, and journalists are not immune to this: In his study of

the "elite" Washington press corps, Hess (1981) found that although Washington journalists also perceive the news corps to have a liberal bias, they rate themselves as being more conservative than this image (p. 115). Hess concluded that elite Washington journalists are more apolitical than press critics imply.

A study of media coverage of Democratic and Republican candidates in the 1984 U.S. elections (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991, p. 73) showed that the television networks varied in whether they included "deflating" or "reinforcing" remarks about the candidates:

ABC carried a higher percentage of both reinforcing and deflating remarks about Democrats than about Republicans, NBC carried almost equal proportions of reinforcing remarks about both parties but more deflating remarks about Republicans (51%) than about Democrats (42%), and CBS carried substantially more deflating remarks about Democrats (42%) than about Republicans (23%) and fewer reinforcing remarks about Democrats (14%) than about Republicans (26%). Thus, ABC reporters were more opinionated about Democrats than Republicans (both positively and negatively), NBC reporters were opinionated but the most even-handed, and CBS reporters were most critical of the Democrats in their remarks.

Given that the three networks were covering the same candidates in the same year, they obviously cannot all be "mirroring" the reality of the elections. Whether personal values at the television networks are responsible for these differences is an empirical question. Much more research needs to be done to isolate variables such as personal values in the context of a very complex media environment.

Another important consideration is the extent to which journalists' personal political activities will be and should be tolerated by their media organizations. When Sandy Nelson, the education reporter at the Tacoma, Washington, *Morning News Tribune*, became active in organizing a referendum to ban discrimination in housing based on sexual orientation, she was removed from the education beat and made a copy editor. Nelson saw no conflict because she was covering education, not housing. After the election, "she was told she could return to her reporting job if she foreswore all political activity, save the display of a bumper sticker. She refused—"I think the Bill of Rights is a higher ethic than any code any management could put together ("Outside Activities," 1991, p. 12). "Journalists are like serfs," she says. "We have become the company's property 24 hours a day" (Kantrowitz, 1993, p. 59). Nelson has sued her employer, and the newspaper is fighting back: "This case is not about lifestyles, freedom of speech or an individual," says managing editor Jan Brandt. "It's about protecting a news-paper's credibility. When a journalist takes a highly visible political role, it undermines the credibility of the paper" (p. 59).

Many newspapers have specific policies about potential conflicts of interest. *The Washington Post* says, "We avoid active involvement in any partisan causes—politics, community affairs, social

action, demonstrations—that could compromise or seem to compromise our ability to report and edit fairly. Relatives cannot fairly be made subject to *Post* rules, but it should be recognized that their employment or their involvement in causes can at least appear to compromise our integrity. The business and professional ties of traditional family members or other members of your household must be disclosed to department heads" (Mills, July/ August 1993, p. 24).

### **Personal Religious Orientations**

Closely tied to arguments about journalists' political orientations is the extent to which journalists are for or against Christianity, Judaism, or other religions. Olasky (1988) says that although journalism was Christian up until the mid-1800s, modern journalists have been "influenced by anti-Christian humanism and pantheism [and have] abandoned their Christian heritage" (p. xi).

Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter (1986) studied journalism at ten "elite" national media organizations (all headquartered in the northeastern United States), finding that 20 percent are Protestant, about 13 percent are Catholic, and 14 percent are Jewish. About half the elite journalists studied said that they had no religious affiliation, and 86 percent of elite journalists reported that they "seldom or never attend religious services" (p. 22).

These elite journalists turn out to be considerably more secular than journalists as a whole. Weaver and Wilhoit's (1991) survey of a random sample of 1,001 journalists from all over the United States in 1982 and 1983 shows a substantially different picture than the one presented by Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter. In 1983, Weaver and Wilhoit showed that U.S. journalists as a whole "almost perfectly match the overall society in general religious background," with about 60 percent of journalists saying they are Protestant, 27 percent Catholic, and 6 percent Jewish. Only 7 percent of journalists reported either another or no religious affiliation (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 24). A 1992 replication of the Weaver and Wilhoit study showed that U.S. journalists' religious affiliations are still similar to those of Americans in general. There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of Protestants (for a total of 54.4%) and a slight increase in the percentage of Catholics (to about 29.9%). The percentage of Jewish journalists remained about the same (5.4%), and the percentage of journalists who say they have no religious affiliation has increased slightly (to 5.5%) (Wilhoit & Weaver, 1992, p. 6).

How might journalists' religious values affect the news? The news media do not give as much emphasis to covering religion as they do to other powerful social institutions. Although scandals involving prominent television religious figures (such as Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Bakker) brought religion to the forefront of U.S. news in 1990, it since "has become a Rodney Dangerfield of beats, drastically losing ground on newspapers that used to devote space and personnel to the subject. Editors are sending out signals that the religion beat is peripheral to decent coverage" (Duin, 1992, p. 52). Indeed, there are fewer than 50 full-time religion editors among the nearly 1,600 U.S. news-papers (Mattingly, 1993, p. 13). What the news media have

termed as a monolithic "religious right" is actually diverse; and although these diverse constituencies often make big news, there are few religion beats (Barrett, 1993, p. 33).

One result has been uneven and sometimes uncritical coverage of religious news. An analysis of 40 stories published between March 1990 and March 1993 about mysterious religious events finds that only half the stories presented information from sources presenting "the other side" of the story—those skeptics who did not accept the reported miracles (such as seeing the image of Christ in a spaghetti ad or the appearance of the Virgin Mary) at face value (Triplett, 1993, p. 33). As Art Nauman, ombudsman for the *Sacramento Bee*, said in a 1989 column, "When it comes to covering the serious world of government, law, war, peace, poverty and such, journalists generally can be trusted to raise questions and demand verification in their quests for the truth in the news. But when it comes to another universe of human interest—stories of the paranormal, of the other-worldly, of things that go bump in the night—they often seem to suspend critical judgment" (Triplett, 1993, p. 33). And when journalists do talk to sources who investigate claims about paranormal events, they are rarely quoted or even misquoted. James Randi, who investigates such events, says that "What happens is they call me for a negative point of view, and I say that I have no evidence that [the phenomenon] is real. What ends up in the paper? `James Randi, the arch skeptic, has *no explanation* for this phenomenon- (Triplett, 1993, p. 35).

Reporters may be laughing behind their straight faces and straight stories, but the fact remains that religion is not well covered by the U.S. media. David Broder, syndicated columnist, says that "religion has been the biggest blind spot in newsrooms that I'm familiar with" (Triplett, 1993, p. 36). "Religious figures fear being misunderstood and misrepresented. Journalists fear making mistakes and incurring religious wrath," say *Los Angeles Times* religion writer John Dart and Jimmy R. Allen, founder of the American Christian Television System and former president of the 17 million-member Southern Baptist Convention (Fitzgerald, 1993).

### **Influences of Personal Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs on Content**

One of the most controversial questions facing those who study mass media content is the extent to which communicators' attitudes, values, and beliefs affect content. The existence of an attitude does not necessarily translate directly into behavior: "Bias that counts must be in the copy, not just in the minds of those who write it" (Robinson, 1983, p. 56).

Some critics suggest that journalists consciously bias their news reports in line with their personal attitudes. Although conservative critics charged that journalists treated Ronald Reagan unfairly during his presidency, NBC news commentator John Chancellor has said that the press fell under the spell of "the Reagan enchantment" ("A TV Newsmen's View of Reagan," 1988, p. 69): "The media started out by routinely pointing out inaccurate statements Reagan made in press conferences. But after about 25 such sessions, the President's goofs

became routine even for the press.... And in the kind of mindless way that journalism has, it wasn't news *any* more." Bruce Buchanan suggests that journalists were easier on Republicans than Democrats *because of* charges that the media were liberally biased. "I observed in the Reagan administration what I thought was an effort by the media to restrain itself [sic] in direct response to allegations of liberal bias," Buchanan says. "There are observers who believe that this self-restraint continue [d] in the treatment of George Bush during the 1988 campaign" (Tindol, 1988, p. 2). Robinson's 1983 study of how journalists in the eastern United States reported on the 1980 elections supports Buchanan's contention. He found that the supposedly liberal journalists treated Democrats worse than Republicans.

Other scholars believe that the influence of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs is even less direct. These critics suggest that journalists' "worldviews"—their perceptions of social reality—may influence their work. In response to criticism from Herbert Gans about the Lichter-Rothman-Lichter study, Robert Lichter wrote, "We are certainly not saying that attitudes are everything, nor that journalists are ideologues. We're simply saying that news judgment is subjective and decisions about sources, news pegs, and . . . language will partly reflect the way a journalist perceives and understands the social world" ("Face-off," 1987, p. 31).

Gans may have changed his mind about the extent of such influence. In his 1979 book *Deciding What's News*, Gans wrote that "journalists try hard to be objective, but neither they nor anyone else can in the end proceed without values. Furthermore, reality judgments are never altogether divorced from values. ... The values in the news are rarely explicit and must be found between the lines—in what actors and activities are reported or ignored, and in how they are described" (1979, pp. 39-40). By 1987, however, Gans wrote that organizational constraints and professional norms effectively remove the effects of most journalists' attitudes and values:

Of course, there are some individuals whose attitudes do matter. Henry Luce had some influence on what *Time* said while he was the editor-in-chief and the owner. William Buckley, another fairly highly opinionated editor, has a great deal of influence, I'm sure, on what the *National Review* puts out. But for rank-and-file journalists, whether they are reporters or writers or even news executives, personal attitudes do not affect their work except in unusual circumstances. Moreover, they try to be objective and leave their values at home. ("Face-off," 1987, p. 31)

Some have explained the connection between personal values and the news by using the 1990s fad phrase "political correctness"—a measure of whether a member of a "group"<sup>3</sup> is insulted by another's words or deeds. The need to be politically correct has been used as an explanation for changes in content or in the communication organization environment that would otherwise be insulting to, for example, women or minorities (North, 1992; Fitzgerald, 1991). For



example, when Mike Royko wrote a derogatory column about African Americans soon after the 1991 Rodney King beating, the column was initially killed in-house by *Chicago Tribune* editors as being racist. When Royko charged that they were buckling under to notions of political correctness, the decision was reversed and the column ran (Fitzgerald, 1991).

Explaining a journalist's behavior by his or her need to be politically correct tends to turn attention *away* from a basic link between the person's values and actions and toward avoiding what many journalists would define as censorship. In either case, the issue of the link between values and content is obscured by the highly inflammable terms *censorship* and *political correctness*. The issue becomes not the personal values of the journalist but rather the attempt by someone else to stop the expression of those values, whether interpersonally in the newsroom or in mass media content.

This also includes religious values. A February 1, 1993, story in the *Washington Post* reported on an attempt by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson to prevent gays and lesbians from serving in the military. The page-one news story described the Falwell and Robertson supporters as "largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command" (Barrett, 1993, p. 34). The assertion was criticized as an obsolete stereotype, since many Falwell and Robertson supporters are professionals and business people who help finance the campaign. The *Post* ran a correction, and later the paper's ombudsman further criticized "blindspots in writing and editing that result from either distance or stereotypical thinking." Would such a stereo-type be casually approved by several editors, as was this *Post* story, if it had involved women, ethnic minorities, or gays and lesbians (p. 34)?

Another issue involves observed conflicts between the personal attitudes and values held by elite journalists and those held by journalists at large: Do elite journalists have a substantial impact on media content that is different from the impact of most journalists? Weaver and Wilhoit say that "it is questionable how much influence [the elite journalists] exert over the hundreds of smaller news organizations throughout the country. Certainly with regard to local and regional news, the influence of these media 'elites' is likely to be minimal or nonexistent" (1991, p. 25). But, as Reese and Danielian (1989) have shown, there may be substantial media "convergence" on issues of national concern. In their study of how five newspapers, three television networks, and two newsmagazines covered cocaine during 1985 and 1986, Reese and Danielian show that when one elite medium picks up a particular story, other media are quick to follow. In the case of cocaine during the mid-1980s, the *New York Times* set the news agenda for the television networks. Thus, elite journalists' opinions may in fact have a wider influence than Weaver and Wilhoit assume.

When it comes to filmmakers, however, the expression of values within movies may be more important due to differences in the distribution of movies and television shows as compared with news. Actor/director/producer Alan Aida says that some filmmakers try to produce shows that reflect "a responsible set of values" (Newcomb & Alley, 1983, p. 17). Some producers are more aware than others of how their values influence their work. In the early years of his

career, producer Norman Lear denied that he was "trying to say" anything with his programs:

But gradually I began to realize that I was not being honest with myself. ... Then I began to realize that I was 50 years old, a grown man, with responsibilities and attitudes, and why wouldn't I have *thoughts* and why wouldn't my work express them? And of course it did? Then it became a question of openly saying, "yes, as a full-grown human being with children and concerns and attitudes, who reads a couple of newspapers a day and pays a lot of attention to what is happening to the younger generations, there is much to talk about, much that interests me." (Newcomb & Alley, 1983, p. 177)

In her analysis of "making local news," Phyllis Kaniss (1991) points out that in news coverage of civic development, journalists' personal values can

contribute to their willingness to believe the promises made by officials and to ignore questions of the relocation of existing residents and businesses or considerations of alternative uses of public funds for other neighborhoods outside of downtown or in the suburbs. As middle-class professionals who often live as well as work in the heart of city downtowns, reporters are often eager to see the city made more glamorous and cosmopolitan. Their own personal sense of pride in working for a newspaper in a particular city leads them to pick up on city officials' claims that one or another economic development project will help their city compete with others and gain recognition as a world-class center.... Therefore, the personal and professional bias in favor of downtown development projects, when combined with the newspaper's need for effective regional symbols, leads to a tendency for initial coverage of new downtown projects to be positive. (p. 80)

Summa and Greanville (1993) say that the same sort of support for free trade was evident in U.S. media *coverage of the North American Free Trade Agreement*.

Empirical tests of the extent to which communicators' personal attitudes, values, and beliefs influence their work provide conflicting results:

- Shoemaker (1984) showed that general attitudes about special interest and other political groups can affect how a group is covered by the news media. She correlated data from a content analysis of how legitimately the *New York Times* covered eleven political groups' with a survey of U.S. journalists' attitudes toward the groups. The more deviant journalists thought the groups were, the less legitimately the *Times* portrayed the groups.
- Rainville and McCormick (1977) showed that racial prejudice can influence communication. They compared the descriptions of black

and white football players by sports announcers. White players got more praise and were more likely to be described as the executors of aggression—a desirable trait in football. Blacks were more likely to be referred to negatively and to be unfairly compared with other players.

- Pasadeos and Renfro (1988) showed that owners can influence newspaper content. They compared the content of the *New York Post* before and after its purchase by media baron Rupert Murdoch, finding that the amount of space devoted to visuals increased substantially and that the *Post* tended to cover stories more sensationally.
- Flegel and Chaffee (1971) found that reporters' stories were influenced more by their personal opinions than by their editors and readers. Even more interesting, this influence was apparently conscious.
- Drew's (1975) study found that students' attitudes toward a source were not related to how favorably their stories treated the source. Peterson, Albaum, Kozmetsky, and Cunningham (1984) studied newspaper editors' attitudes toward capitalism as *a way* of explaining the alleged ant business sentiment of the press. They found that newspaper business editors were more favorably disposed toward capitalism than were the general public.

Because of these mixed research findings, we are unable to make any sweeping statements about the influence of communicators' personal attitudes, values, and beliefs on media content. It seems clear that some communicators' attitudes, values, and beliefs affect some content at least some of the time, but such a weak assertion is practically worthless. It is possible that when communicators have more power over their messages and work under fewer constraints, their personal attitudes, values, and beliefs have more opportunity to influence content (see Figure 5.1). As Gans (1985) points out, the routines and constraints imposed by the media organization *may* negate the influence of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs. But we must also realize that the power of organizational routines and constraints varies from organization to organization, probably inversely with the effects of the individual communicator's attitudes, values, and beliefs. Organizational influences are discussed later in Chapters 6 and 7.

## **PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND ETHICS**

Finally, we consider how mass media content may be affected by communicators' professional roles and ethical frameworks. We treat these job-related orientations separately from communicators' personal attitudes, values, and beliefs, which are primarily shaped by forces outside of mass communication, such as their personal characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences. By contrast, communicators' professional and ethical orientations are primarily shaped on the job (or

in professional education), through a process that Breed (1960) describes as socialization: The new journalist "discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values" (Breed, 1960, p. 182).

In his study of the socialization of newspaper journalists, Breed (1960) describes how journalists learn what their organizations want by observation and experience. As young journalists read the newspapers they work for or watch their television stations' newscasts, they learn a lot about the norms of the community and how reporters cover controversy. Are Democratic and Republican candidates treated in the same way? What about Libertarian or Socialist Party candidates? They also learn from the editing process, which gives new journalists direct feedback about what is acceptable in stories. If your editor consistently deletes references to a politician's personal life, then you quickly learn that "policy" discourages it. Sometimes policy is conveyed through gossip, as journalists get together after work and discuss their superiors' actions. New journalists quickly learn what the boss likes from more experienced staffers.

Breed adds that direct communication of policy from the editor or publisher/manager is rare. New employees learn "by osmosis" (p. 182), such as by listening to their superiors discuss the pros and cons of various news stories. Policy information is carried not only by what executives say but also by what they don't say.

The rewards for quickly learning and following policy are from co-workers and employers within the media organization—not from the audience. Socialization to your medium's policies gives you what Sigal (1973, p. 3) calls "a context of shared values" with those around you. These values shape the context in which events are viewed and the selection of the aspects of each event that will become the news.

### **Professional Roles**

Is journalism a profession? The answer depends on which set of criteria you use. One defines a profession as having the following characteristics (Lambeth, 1986, p. 82):

1. *It is a full-time occupation.* This is certainly true of a large proportion of journalists.
2. *Its practitioners are deeply committed to the goals of the profession. Journalists are probably not as committed to journalism as physicians are to medicine. Although an early commitment to social reforms may lead people to journalism as a career in early adulthood, many people leave journalism for other fields.*
3. *Entrance to and continuance in the profession are governed by a formal organization that has established professional standards.*

There is no licensing authority for journalists, and, although codes of ethics and professional standards are recommended by many journalism organizations, one need not adopt any of these to be a journalist. To be a journalist requires only that someone hire you.

4. *Its practitioners are admitted to the profession following prescribed formal schooling and the acquisition of a specialized body of knowledge.* Although most journalists today have college training in journalism, no journalism degree (or any other degree, for that matter) is required. Not only do journalism school curricula differ dramatically, but it can also be said that no specific body of *knowledge* exists to be mastered by potential journalists. Aside from mastering writing and production skills, journalists are educated as generalists; they are expected to know a little about a lot of areas. Although most journalism schools require courses in communication law, ethics, theory, and history, these are often barely tolerated by journalism students, who see them as peripheral to learning skills.
5. *It must serve society.* Although critics suggest that the business aspects of the mass media eclipse their service role, more journalists would agree that the mass media (at least the news media) service society through transmitting information, providing a context for events, socializing new members of society, and entertaining.
6. *Its members must have a high degree of autonomy.* Although some journalists have more autonomy than others, journalists as a group are subject to a wide range of organizational constraints that dictate what they do and when they do it.

Journalism doesn't fit these professionalism criteria very well. Although most journalists work full-time, are (at least for a while) committed to their jobs, and perform services that aid society, there is no mechanism for enforcing professional standards or for prescribing formal schooling and the acquisition of a body of knowledge; and journalists' autonomy is limited by organizational constraints.

Whether journalism meets such criteria is for all practical purposes irrelevant—many journalists think of themselves as professionals, and they share conceptions of what a professional journalist is supposed to be like.' But do journalists' feelings about their professionalism affect the stories they write and edit? Weaver and Wilhoit conclude that media organizations exert many bureaucratic controls over the production of media content, and these controls limit the influence of individual journalists' professional orientations. Thus, journalists are "*of a profession but not in one*" (1991, p. 145). They may not be able to attain professionalism in the same way that physicians do.

Attempts at devising an index to measure journalists' professionalism have had mixed results. Indices developed by McLeod and Hawley (1964), Wright (1976), Weinthal and O'Keefe (1974), and Idsvoog and Hoyt (1977) do not appear to be measuring the same things, leading to different conclusions about professional journalists' demographic characteristics and attitudes (Henningham, 1984). The importance of professionalism, however, is not diminished by our

inability to measure it well. Wearing the cloak of professionalism gives journalists more legitimacy with their sources and the audience (Servaes, 1991, p. 159).

Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1972) found that some journalists consider themselves "neutrals," seeing their jobs are mere channels of transmission, and that others see themselves as "participants," believing that journalists need to sift through information in order to find and develop the story. Neutral journalists see their jobs as getting information to the public quickly, avoiding stories with unverified content, concentrating on the widest audience, and entertaining the audience. Participants see their jobs as investigating government claims, providing analysis of complex problems, discussing national policy, and developing intellectual/cultural interests. In the Johnstone study, participant journalists tended to be younger than neutrals, they had more education, and they worked for larger media organizations.

In their 1982-1983 extension and replication of the Johnstone study, Weaver and Wilhoit added two items to the media role index—serving as adversary of government and business—wondering if the participant role would extend to this adversary relationship. Weaver and Wilhoit there by identified three journalistic role conceptions (1991, pp. 120-122):

- The *interpretive* function—investigating official claims, analyzing complex problems, and discussing national policy—is the dominant professional role of modern U.S. journalists. More than 60 percent of surveyed journalists scored *very high* on the interpretive scale. Print journalists tended to see it as somewhat more important than did broadcast journalists.
- The *dissemination* function—getting information to the public quickly and concentrating on the widest audience—is also very important, with more than half of U.S. journalists scoring very high on this scale. About a third of journalists scored high on both the investigation and dissemination functions. Although print and broadcast journalists agreed about the need to get news out quickly, radio journalists tended to value wide audiences the most, and newsmagazine journalists the least.
- The *adversary* function—serving as an adversary of officials or of business—is a relatively minor role. Only 17 percent of U.S. journalists scored very high on the adversary scale, and there was little overlap between the adversary function and the other two. Print journalists were the most likely to value the adversary role, with radio journalists valuing it least.

Because of the substantial overlap among the roles—only 2 percent of journalists in 1983 fell into one category exclusively, compared with 18 percent in the 1971 Johnston study—Weaver and Wilhoit conclude that "a large majority see their professional role as highly pluralistic.... The modern journalist attempts to blend the classical critical role of the journalist—as interpreter or

contemporary historian—with the technical requirements of disseminating great volumes of descriptive information" (1991, p. 144).

### **Ethical Roles**

Ethics is "the study of the formation of moral values and of principles of right and wrong" (Altschull, 1990, p. 357). An early conception of journalistic ethics was to serve humanity rather than to seek the journalist's own ends (p. 359). Journalists' beliefs about what is ethical can exert an overt influence on media content. Although journalism as a whole lacks an enforceable code of ethics, this is not for lack of possibilities. In 1992, more than 42 percent of newspapers and 31 percent of television news operations had published standards governing how their staffs should operate (Black, 1992, p. 32). For example, the *Milwaukee Journal* published its "Rules and Guidelines" in 1978 to explain that its news-editorial employees are to avoid participating in community activities that could create a conflict of interest "or give the impression of one" ("Rules and Guidelines," 1978, p. 3). Employees also are forbidden to work in public relations and/or for a political candidate.

### **Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics**

SOCIETY of Professional Journalists, believes the duty of journalists is to serve the truth.

We BELIEVE the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.

We BELIEVE in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our Constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.

We BELIEVE those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy, and fairness.

To these ends, we declare acceptance of the standards of practice here set forth:

#### *I. Responsibility:*

The public's right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media. The purpose of distributing news and enlightened opinion is to serve the general welfare. Journalists who use their professional status as representatives of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives violate a high trust.

**Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics**

**(continued)** *II Freedom of the Press:*

Freedom of the press is to be guarded as an inalienable right of people in a free society. It carries with it the freedom and the responsibility to discuss, question, and challenge actions and utterances of our government and of our public and private institutions. Journalists uphold the right to speak unpopular opinions and the privilege to agree with the majority.

*III. Ethics:*

Journalists must be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know the truth.

1. Gifts, favors, free travel, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity of journalists and their employers. Nothing of value should be accepted.
2. Secondary employment, political involvement, holding public office, and service in community organizations should be avoided if it compromises the integrity of journalists and their employers. Journalists and their employers should conduct their personal lives in a manner that protects them from conflict of interest, real or apparent. Their responsibilities to the public are paramount. That is the nature of their profession.
3. So-called news communications from private sources should not be published or broadcast without substantiation of their claims to news values.
4. Journalists will seek news that serves the public interest, despite the obstacles. They will make constant efforts to assure that the public's business is conducted in public and that public records are open to public inspection.
5. Journalists acknowledge the newsman's ethic of protecting confidential sources of information.
6. Plagiarism is dishonest and unacceptable.

*IV. Accuracy and Objectivity:*

Good faith with the public is the foundation of all worthy journalism.

1. Truth is our ultimate goal.
2. Objectivity in reporting the news is another goal that serves as the mark of an experienced professional. It is a standard of performance toward which we strive. We honor those who achieve it.
3. There is no excuse for inaccuracies or lack of thoroughness.
4. Newspaper headlines should be fully warranted by the contents of the articles they accompany. Photographs and telecasts should give an accurate picture of an event and not highlight an incident out of context.



**Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics (continued)**

5. Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free of opinion or bias and represent all sides of an issue.
6. Partisanship in editorial comment that knowingly departs from the truth violates the spirit of American journalism.
7. Journalists recognize their responsibility for offering informed analysis, comment, and editorial opinion on public events and issues. They accept the obligation to present such material by individuals whose competence, experience, and judgment qualify them for it.
8. Special articles or presentations devoted to advocacy or the writer's own conclusions and interpretations should be labeled as such.

*V. Fair Play:*

Journalists at all times will show respect for the dignity, privacy, rights, and well-being of people encountered in the course of gathering and presenting the news.

1. The news media should not communicate unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the accused a chance to reply.
2. The news media must guard against invading a person's right to privacy.
3. The media should not pander to morbid curiosity about details of vice and crime.
4. It is the duty of news media to make prompt and complete correction of their errors.
5. Journalists should be accountable to the public for their reports and the public should be encouraged to voice its grievances against the media. Open dialogue with our readers, viewers, and listeners should be fostered.

*VI. Mutual Trust:*

Adherence to this code is intended to preserve and strengthen the bond of mutual trust and respect between American journalists and the American people.

The Society shall—by programs of educational and other means—encourage individual journalists to adhere to these tenets, and shall encourage journalistic publications and broadcasters to recognize their responsibility to frame codes of ethics in concert with their employees to serve as guidelines in furthering these goals.

CODE OF ETHICS (Adopted 1926, revised 1973, 1984, 1987)

The *Minneapolis Star* "Code of Conduct" (cited in Dennis, 1981) warns staff members against holding stock in local companies. Although it is sometimes considered ethical to receive tickets and meals from sources, other gifts and free trips generally are not acceptable (*Los Angeles Times*' Code of Ethics, cited in Itule, 1987; *Washington Post* Standards and Ethics, cited in Fedler, 1984). The preceding code of ethics adopted by the Society of Professional Journalists and its members addresses journalists' responsibilities to the public, freedom of the press, ethics, accuracy and objectivity, and fair play.

Sometimes it isn't easy to avoid ethical problems. Conflicts of interest can arise from the very nature of the journalists' assignments. For example, crime reporters must gain enough trust from their police sources to elicit cooperation, but such a cooperative relationship could create a conflict of interest in stories about wrongdoing in the police department. Chibnall (1981) says that crime reporters "are obliged to defend and promote the interests of police unless they can be clearly shown to be in conflict with the interests of the public. . . . Such beliefs reinforce already existent predispositions to construct public accounts which are generally favorable to agencies of social control" (p. 93).

Some journalists take a simpler view toward ethics, equating it with objectivity (Merrill, 1985). Still others may equate ethical behavior with truth telling, but which truth? Definitions of truth shift over time and between sources (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 1987). Some journalists take refuge in what Tuchman (1972) calls "objectivity as strategic ritual;" devising a set of rules that, once followed, allow the journalist to protect himself/herself against criticism. Ettema and Whitney (1987, p. 772) say that the journalism ethic combines the ideas of truth and objectivity, and that "constraints on the search for truth are *imposed on* journalistic practice either by the power of other institutions (particularly government) or by the human limitations of individual journalists." Institutionalized ethical strategies such as directly quoting what others say (whether true or not) and presenting "both sides" of an argument will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Some journalists oppose the publication of written standards because such standards may make journalists "more vulnerable to liability in libel cases." Even if a mass medium has not published its own standards, however, "codes of professional groups or testimony by expert witnesses may be introduced into a case in an attempt to prove malice or negligence by a newspaper" ("Two Recent Studies," 1988, p. 5).

In the final analysis, however, no code of conduct can prescribe behavior in every possible situation; interpretation of ethical standards and specific decisions must be made by individual journalists. Editors were presented with such a decision when Pennsylvania treasurer R. Budd Dwyer committed suicide during a news conference in 1987. Both still photos and video of Dwyer putting the gun in his mouth and pulling the trigger were available. Although some local television stations broadcast the actual suicide, none of the national networks did. Although neither ABC nor CBS used video of the press conference, NBC and CNN showed footage of Dwyer reading his statement and waving his gun—

they cut away the actual shooting. In explaining the decision, CNN spokeswoman Judi Borza said, "We didn't feel it was necessary to actually show the man putting the gun in his mouth and shooting himself?" NBC spokesman Andrew Freedman said, "We feel it is too unsettling for our viewers" ("Graphic Suicide," 1987).

Such decisions are often made after consideration of whether the publication of sensational photographs will cause additional suffering to victims or to their families. The media's traditional justification of "the public's right to know" has increasingly been questioned as public complaints increase and lawsuits charging invasion of privacy are filed (Clark, 1988).

Many ethical decisions involve one of three general areas: misrepresentation of an event, questionable relationships with sources, and favors given to reporters (Hausman, 1990, p. 96).

Misrepresentation centers on the issue of whether the story could have been obtained in another way. An ethical storm has risen over the use of "video news releases," videotapes ready to insert into a newscast that have been produced not by the news organization but by a public relations firm on behalf of a client mentioned in the release. *For example*, when Ross Perot ran for U.S. president in 1992, his organization produced news stories about his petition drives, and these were run by many local television stations (Drummond, 1993, p. 35). The use of video news releases—or VNRs, as they are commonly called—began in the 1980s, with about 500 produced per year. In 1992 more than 4,000 VNRs were made, and their production is a multi-million dollar business. Proponents argue that VNRs are nothing more than a video version of the traditional press release, which have been used by newspapers in whole or in part for decades (p. 37). Critics say that for a television news operation to use a VNR in its entirety and without attribution is an abdication of the station's ethical responsibilities (p. 38). The viewer thinks that the news organization has prepared the story and ascribes to it all the credibility and legitimacy of that organization. The true producer of the message is hidden.

A major ethical misrepresentation during early 1993 cost Michael Gartner his job as president of NBC News. The controversy was over a "Dateline NBC" story about how GM truck designs made fires likely during crashes. In preparing the story, producers rigged a GM truck with an incendiary device to ensure that it would explode during an impact. Although Gartner and anchors Jane Pauley and Stone Phillips apparently didn't know about the rigged test ahead of time, Gartner did hold a subsequent press conference at which he denied any wrongdoing. *Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter says that "the problem is that Gartner often neglected to set a tone that would have made such conduct unthinkable in the first place. Ultimately, he looked down his nose a bit at what he did for a living—and it showed. That both loosened his own standards and left him without allies below him" (Alter, 1993, p. 49). Before joining NBC, Gartner had been editor of the *Des Moines Register* and a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*. He is a third-generation newspaper journalist.

New kinds of misrepresentation are now made possible by new technologies. Computers make it possible to get far more information about a person today than ever before, perhaps changing the nature of our definition of invasion of privacy (Cooper, 1992, p. 4). The digitalization of photographs by news organizations makes the content of those photos subject to manipulation by many people. Whereas previously it was possible to tell when a photographic print was "doctored," today's prints from digital sources can be changed in an infinite number of ways without detection. A 1990 study of photo editors found the majority of them to object to photo manipulation beyond the traditional dodging and burning practices of photo printing (Reaves, 1992/1993, pp. 149-150).

Ethical problems with sources arise from a variety of venues. For example, with the recent trend of gay and lesbian journalists to reveal their sexual orientation publicly, some journalists have felt more free to "out" gay and lesbian sources, especially when they are in public positions such as government. "Outing" is revealing in print that a person is homosexual. Although many journalists object to outing as a violation of privacy, others point out that the media rarely hesitate to investigate the private sexual activities of heterosexual public figures, for example, the revelation of an alleged extra-marital affair by U.S. President Bill Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign (Iwata, 1992, p. 11).

"Junket journalism" presents an ethical problem to journalists in the form of free trips and amenities. For example, the twentieth anniversary of Disney World in 1991 was celebrated in part by the Disney company offering "all expense-paid trips to thousands of news organizations" (Garneau, 1991, p. 14). Reactions from the media were not uniform. Whereas some media organizations spurned the free trips from the beginning, NBC initially accepted free airfare and hotel rooms for 30 employees who broadcast the "Today" show live from Disney World. When criticized, NBC backed down and reimbursed the Disney company and Delta Airlines and explained that its acceptance of free services had been appropriate under the guidelines of its entertainment division. In 1993, Leonard Brown quit his job as editor of the *Bucks County Courier Times* in Pennsylvania because he disagreed with the newspaper's policy of allowing reporters to write about trips financed by the industry they cover (Case, March 1993, p. 9).

As the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) worked to develop its *Ethics Handbook*, the group's National Ethics Committee surveyed members to find out what ethical dilemmas were of most concern to members in 1992. Among those mentioned were: naming rape victims, balance, credible sources, confidentiality/attribution, electronic imaging, staging of news, freebies/junkets, professionalism/use of suspects' or accused persons' names, naming of juveniles in crime stories (Black, 1992, p. 31).

The *Ethics Handbook* recommends basic guiding principles and questions to ask about a situation (Gersh, 1992a, p. 14). The guiding principles include: "Seek truth and report it as fully as possible; act independently; and minimize harm." Journalists should also ask ten sets of questions when assessing whether a situation may be unethical: (1) What do I know? What do I need to know? (2) What is my journalistic purpose? (3) What are my ethical concerns? (4) What

organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider? (5) How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process? (6) Who are the stakeholders—those affected by *my* decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate? (7) What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel *if I were* in the shoes of one of the stakeholders? (8) What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short-term? Long-term? (9) What *are* my alternatives to maximize my truth-telling responsibility and minimize harm? (10) Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

Some differences between newspaper editors' and television news directors' ethical attitudes *were* discovered in the SPJ survey (Gersh, 1992b, p. 15). Television news producers were less likely to believe that: (1) It is ethical to change quotes; (2) Having an effective code of ethics will enhance a news operation's credibility; (3) It is acceptable to report the names and addresses of crime victims; (4) It is acceptable to report about a criminal who had threatened to commit suicide if the story ran. On the other hand, television news producers were more likely to: (1) approve source confidentiality; (2) allow staffers to accept leadership positions in civic groups; (3) judge stories as newsworthy because of graphics and packaging; (4) cooperate with an *FBI* request to embargo news about a kidnapping; (5) include the name of press agents when their releases appear almost verbatim; (6) substantiate press releases before airing them.

Weaver and Wilhoit (1991, pp. 128-132) addressed such ethical decisions in their national survey of journalists. Only 5 percent of journalists could see any justification for divulging a confidential source, whereas 20 percent approved of claiming to be someone else in order *to get a story*. Just over one-fourth of journalists approved of paying people for confidential information or using personal documents such as letters without permission. More than half of journalists thought that badgering unwilling informants or using confidential business or government documents without authorization are justified. About two-thirds of journalists accepted going undercover as an employee of a company in order to gain inside information about it. Older journalists were less likely to approve such practices; journalists working for large organizations were more likely to approve them.

In the same study, about three-fourths of journalists credited newsroom socialization or their family upbringings with influencing their ethical standards. Half or more said that fellow journalists or college professors had influenced them (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 135).

### **Effects of Professional Roles and Ethics on Content**

It seems clear that the way in which journalists define their jobs will affect the content they produce. Journalists who see themselves as disseminators/neutrals should write very different accounts of an event than those who see themselves as interpreters/participants. Some evidence for this was provided by Starck and Soloski's (1977) study of student reporters: Journalism

students who saw themselves as neutrals wrote the least fair and comprehensive stories. The most objective and accurate stories were written by students who saw themselves as midway between the extreme neutral and the extreme participant role.

The role of ethical judgments is easier to assess. Whether a decision to publish a certain photograph is based on published codes of conduct or on an individual's personal decision, the decision has a concrete effect on media content. More interesting, however, are situations in which ethical standards may clash with one another or with values. Breed pointed out in 1964 that ethical standards can clash with other values such as public decency, respect for convention, and orderliness. "Accurate reporting is sometimes sacrificed to these other virtues of respect, decency, and order, that is, the mass media have often placed more emphasis on some value other than truth" (p. 183).

### **SUMMARY**

We have investigated how communication workers' characteristics, personal and professional backgrounds, personal attitudes, and professional roles can influence media content. Although it is easy to show that the "average" journalist and the "average" adult American don't look entirely alike, it is difficult to determine what influence journalists' characteristics have on their work. For example, although women and minorities are gaining ground in communication careers, many people believe that the media's practices and routines effectively suppress effects on content due to gender or ethnicity.

Certainly, the fact that journalists are well educated affects media content, but in at least one favorable way—the public would be little served by illiterate journalists. Still, journalists' education (as well as their other background experiences and characteristics) may influence the way in which they see the world, a potentially far-reaching effect on what is selected to report and on how it is reported.

Figure 5.2 on page 61 shows how factors intrinsic to the communicator may interact to influence media content. We believe that there is no direct influence of communicators' characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences on media content, but that content may be affected to the extent that such factors influence both personal and professional attitudes and roles. Of these two sets of attitudinal variables, we believe that communicators' professional roles and ethics have more of an influence on content than do their personal attitudes, values, and beliefs. Not only is the suppression of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs part of the professional communicator's role; the exertion of personal will within a mass media organization takes more power than most communicators can wield. Even the power of publishers and television station owners can be limited by boards of directors, audiences, and advertisers. However, even communicators who are not in ownership or managerial positions can sometimes influence the direction of content. For example, a reporter for a West Coast newspaper who is based in Washington, D.C., has substantially more control over the selection

and direction of stories than the reporter working out of the newspaper's main offices under the direct supervision of management.

Professional roles, on the other hand, determine what the communicator thinks is worth transmitting to his *or her* audience and how the story should be developed. As we will see in the next two chapters, such organizationally defined factors have direct impact on mass media content.

## NOTES

1. Weaver and Wilhoit's figures are based on people who work in news-related jobs at daily and weekly newspapers, newsmagazines, news services, and radio and television stations. They do not include workers in public relations, advertising, or entertainment jobs.
2. In the fall of 1992, 17.3 percent of students working on newspapers at accredited *universities were* minorities (Hipsman, Wearden, & Greenman, no date, p. 1). Minority students are somewhat more likely to pick broadcasting than majority students (Becker, Fruit, & Caudill, 1987, p. 56).
3. We use the term *group* here to include ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians, the elderly, the handicapped, and so on.
4. The groups included (from least to most deviant) were League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, Common Cause, NAACP, NOW, NRA, Moral Majority, Jewish Defense League, Communists, KKK, Nazis.
5. Professional roles can also be learned in journalism school, according to Becker, Fruit, and Caudill (1987), but early job *experiences* tend to alter the professional roles learned in school.
6. This *sense* of professionalism is more prevalent among U.S. journalists than those in Great Britain, apparently because U.S. journalists generally have university degrees and "have been imbued with a sense of professionalism that requires them to *be* more than *mere* stenographers or recorders of what others are saying and doing" (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991, p. 174).

## Chapter 6

# Influence of Media Routines

**I**n order to better understand mass media workers, we must examine the routines that go with their jobs. Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, wrote that "strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that the individual participates in thinking further what others have thought before" (Mannheim, 1936/1964, p. 29). In other words, people are social creatures and they participate in patterns of action that they themselves did not create. They speak the language of their group, think as their group thinks. As individuals in groups, they have developed styles of thought from an endless pattern of response to common situations.

We refer to something similar with the term *routines*, those patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs. From Mannheim's perspective we can view these routines as a set of constraints on the individual media worker (see Figure 6.1). Routines form the immediate context, both within and through which these individuals do their jobs.

To illustrate, consider the *gatekeeper* label commonly applied to mass media decision makers. This term bridges the inner core and the outer ring of our model in Figure 6.1 and helps remind us that the individual is filling a role and serving a function within a larger system of gates. Whether in news or entertainment industries, the media gatekeeper must winnow down a larger number of potential messages to a few. The book publisher chooses from many possible titles; the network programmer selects from among several ideas for sitcoms, serials, and dramas to compose a prime-time schedule; and the newspaper editor must decide on a handful of stories to run on the front page. These decisions directly affect the media content that reaches the audience. But are those decisions made at the whim of the individual?



**FIGURE 6.1** Influences of media routines on media content in the hierarchical model.

ideological level, extramedia level, organization level, media routines level, individual level

Perhaps. The popular notion is that they are. The public knows the personal side of gatekeepers best. Journalists are often romanticized as crusading editors or as fearless investigative reporters like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose work helped bring down a president and was popularized in the movie *All the President's Men*. Library shelves are packed with journalists' memoirs, telling of their hobnobbing with the great and near-great.

These gatekeepers, however, represent their respective professions and organizations. As such, the occupational setting limits their decisions. To understand these limits we have to consider the media system within which people work, including the routines and craft norms that are so much a part of systematic information-gathering. The standardized, recurring patterns of news and entertainment content result in large part from these routine practices. These routines ensure that the media system will respond in predictable ways and cannot be easily violated. They form a cohesive set of rules and become integral parts of what it means to be a media professional. Tuchman (1977a), for example, notes that reporters who have mastered routine modes of processing news are valued for their professionalism (what questions to ask, how to handle hard and soft stories, what techniques are appropriate to each). Routines may be considered means to an end; but often these means, having become institutionalized, take on a life of their own.

Daniel Hallin (1992) argues that over time, journalists have accepted the bureaucratic structure of the newsroom and the corresponding professional routines. Finding that journalists complain less often now than before about editorial interference with their stories, some have contended that journalists now have much more autonomy—an individual-level interpretation. According to Hallin, however,

Contemporary journalists have internalized the constraints of professionalism far more than the 1930s writers had done, and are also far less politicized than their predecessors. They are committed more strongly to the norms of the profession than to political ideas. (p. 15)

The study of media routines is linked to an organizational perspective on the mass media. In recommending that approach, Paul Hirsch (1977) says that the mass media may serve different functions, but they share many organizational similarities that outweigh many of the differences. For example, Hirsch notes:

This perspective finds clear analytical similarities among the constraints on and organizational context in which reporters, writers, artists, actors, directors, editors, producers, publishers, executive vice-presidents, and others learn and carry out activities characteristic of the respective roles, crafts and occupations. (p. 15)

Thus, whether news or entertainment, print or broadcast, from the *New York Times* to the *National Enquirer*, we can ask: What are the stable, patterned sets of expectations and constraints that are common to most media organizations? All these messages are symbolic content, produced according to practical considerations. Routines develop in response to these considerations and help the organization cope with the tasks at hand. Although entertainment and news organizations may be thought of in much the same way, in the remainder of this chapter we focus primarily on journalists. Much more research has been directed at this group than at their entertainment counterparts.

In analyzing this impact, most attention has been directed at the day-to-day activities of lower-level media workers: reporters, editors, writers. The routines of media practice constitute the immediate environment of these media workers. Although publishers and news vice-presidents are also bound by routines, higher-level media workers like these are perhaps given greater range of movement (we address their influence later). (Note that media routines correspond to what Hirsch [1977] calls the occupational level, within which attention is directed to the socialization of media workers and their interactions with the larger organization.) In addition to the gatekeeper, another familiar metaphor helps illustrate how different organizational needs dictate different routines and the tensions that often exist between the media worker and the needs of the larger organization. Although we don't normally think of newswork as a blue-collar occupation, the production of

television news is, in many respects, organized like a factory. All organizations desire routinization to improve efficiency, but some require it more than others. In observing a local television news station, Charles Bantz and his colleagues found that several factors produced routinization in television news. Television news people change jobs more often than print journalists; this creates a continual turnover in personnel, which makes easily learned routines essential for smooth organizational continuity. Television news requires careful coordination of complex technologies (e.g., videotape editing, microwave and satellite transmissions) requiring specialized roles, scheduling, and other routinized procedures to bring it off smoothly. In addition, competition has led stations to rely on news consultants who prescribe formulaic guidelines for the number of stories and their length. These factors, according to Bantz and colleagues, emphasize "technically uniform, visually sophisticated, easy to understand, fast-paced, people-oriented stories that are produced in a minimum amount of time" (Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1981, p. 371).

Bantz argues that a television newsroom resembles a "news factory" that divides tasks into chunks at different stages along the "assembly line": from generating story ideas to presenting the newscast. This highly routinized structure often lacks flexibility. A microwave van operator, for example, when told to help with a live remote report on an unexpected snowstorm, angrily complained: "It wasn't planned." For the newswriters, the highly specialized factory structure means they lack personal investment in and control over the final news product. Furthermore, the factory environment does not encourage such professional values espoused by newswriters, who are evaluated on their productivity—doing the assignment on time rather than well, as epitomized by the "quick and dirty" story. Thus, the routines of the news organization don't always mesh with the individual professional goals of its members.

Ultimately, routines are important because they affect the social reality portrayed by the media. As Altheide (1976, p. 24) says, "the organizational, practical, and other mundane features of news work promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them." Indeed, sociologists such as Tuchman (1977a) even suggest that routines make news by allowing everyday occurrences to be recognized and reconstituted. Similarly, sociologists such as Molotch and Lester (1974) argue that there are no free-standing newsworthy events "out there," but rather occurrences, promoted to the status of "events" by either sources or the media. To understand what becomes news we must understand the routines that go into its construction.

#### **SOURCES OF ROUTINES: PROCESSOR/CONSUMER/SUPPLIER**

As we have already suggested, media routines don't develop randomly. Given finite organizational resources and an infinite supply of potential raw material, routines are practical responses to the needs of media organizations and workers. The job of these media organizations is to deliver,

within time and space limitations, the most acceptable product to the consumer in the most efficient manner. Since most media are profit-making enterprises, they strive to make a product that can be sold for more than the costs of production. A media organization can be described much like any other business that strives to find a market for its product. Media must obtain and process "raw product" (news, comedy), usually obtained from "suppliers" (officials, playwrights) outside the organization, then deliver it to "consumers" (readers, viewers, and listeners). At each stage, the organization must adapt to constraints—limitations on what it can do.

With this in mind, we can think of media routines as stemming from constraints related to these three stages. These routines help the media organization address the following questions: (1) What is acceptable to the consumer (audience)? (2) What is the organization (media) capable of processing? (3) What raw product is available from suppliers (sources)? In a newsroom, for example, an editor must consider all three questions in deciding which stories to publish: What stories are available, which ones would appeal to an audience, and which satisfy the needs of the organization (space requirements, etc.)? These three stages are represented in Figure 6.2. Each media routine can be visualized as fitting somewhere in the triangle formed by these three stages. Depending on the needs that they serve, routines may be closer to one than the others. Of course, these often overlap. A routine may serve both audience and organization requirements. Newspaper stories, for example, are often written in an *Inverted pyramid* style, with facts listed in order of decreasing importance. Readers can stop after a few paragraphs, knowing that they've read the most important information; an editor can trim such stories from the bottom up to fit available space without having to rewrite the entire story.

**FIGURE 6.2** Media routines as related to three sources of constraints.  
**Process of Production of Symbolic Content**

*Media Organization* Producer

Routines

Sources  
Suppliers

*Audience*  
Consumers

In the early days, it was said that telegraph operators strove to get the most important facts over the wire first, in the event that the transmission was lost before they finished tapping the whole story (Schudson, 1978). Thus, the inverted pyramid routine relates to needs of both the organization and the audience. It has relatively little to do with sources/suppliers. Conceptually, a routine located in the exact middle of the triangle would serve all three needs equally. Each routine may be said to strike some balance between all three constraints—none of which can be ignored completely.

### **AUDIENCE ORIENTATION: CONSUMER**

The mass media spend a lot of money finding out about their audiences. Newspapers keep a close watch on their circulation figures. Broadcasters rely on companies such as Nielsen and Arbitron to tell them the ratings and audience shares of their programs. The media are keenly interested in the size and demographic characteristics of their audiences (as we'll discuss in Chapter 8). Most of this information, though, is gathered so advertisers will know where to place their messages so as to reach their target audiences. Audience data help gauge public acceptance after the fact but are not of direct help in guiding the countless choices that go into producing media messages.

Given the nature of the product, "what's news?" is inherently a more difficult question than "what sells?" Perhaps that is why we puzzle more over defining news than entertainment. Entertainment producers have a more direct link to the audience than do their news counterparts. By watching the best-seller lists, the top grossing movies, and the highest-rated television programs, they know "what sells." Unlike news producers, movie studios can even try out different endings with preview audiences. An editor, for example, can't consult audience members before making selections. Audience research may give media workers ideas about general interests of viewers, listeners, and readers, but it doesn't *come* often enough to help much in the many other daily choices. And other forms of audience feedback are minimal.

### **News Values**

Lacking this feedback, audience needs have long ago been incorporated into stable, enduring craft norms. As Schlesinger (1978) says,

Production routines embody assumptions about audiences ... "the audience" is part of a routinized way of life.... When it comes to thinking about the kind of news most relevant to "the audience," newsmen exercise their news judgment rather than going out and seeking specific information about the composition, wants or tastes of those who are being addressed. (pp. 115-116)

This news judgment is the ability to evaluate stories based on agreed-on news values, which provide yardsticks of newsworthiness and constitute an audience-oriented routine. That is, they predict what an audience will find appealing and important; and, in practice, they direct gatekeepers to make consistent story selections.

Over the years, these news values have become fairly predictable. In fact, they are included with little variation at the beginning of most journalism textbooks. In one way or another, the following news values distill what people find interesting and important to know about. They include importance, interest, controversy, the unusual, timeliness, and proximity (from Stephens, 1980; but also see Baskette, Sissors, & Brooks, 1982; Dennis & Ismach, 1981).

1. *Prominence/importance.* The importance of a story is measured in its impact: how many lives it affects. Fatalities are more important than property damage. Actions of the powerful are newsworthy, because what the powerful do affects the general public.
2. *Human interest.* In addition, though, people are interested in lots of things that don't have any direct effect on their lives: celebrities, political gossip, and human dramas. Stories with a human element elicit this kind of interest. That's why television news, in particular, illustrates issues through the people affected.
3. *Conflict/controversy.* Why are we so interested in controversy? It signals conflict and alerts us to important issues. Conflict is inherently more interesting than harmony. Maybe we assume that most of the time things are harmonious, but when they aren't we want to know about it.
4. *The unusual.* The unusual also interests us. We assume that the events of one day will be pretty much like the next, and the unusual is the exception to that rule.
5. *Timeliness.* News is timely. We have limited attention and want to know what's happening now. Timely events are also more likely to require action.
6. *Proximity.* Events that happen near are considered more newsworthy. Local events usually have more effect than distant ones. Local media seek local angles in national stories so as to better interest the audience.

We can see that these news values stem largely from the limited attention and interest of the audience. Even if the media could tell everything that went on in a day, it would not be very useful. If a friend returned from a week's vacation and asked you what happened during that time, you would probably start with the most important things first and work your way down. If you had time, you might throw in something unusual or funny. You would assume that your friend knows the sun normally rises and sets, so you would not include that in your narrative. The

most important news would be that which deviated from the norm, or that would directly affect your friend (tornado sightings, tuition going up).

**The media are often accused of carrying too much "bad" news. But bad news often means a problem that needs action.** We can easily see that this is more efficient than if the media dwelled only on what was going right. In the past, especially in totalitarian regimes, newspapers were published that reported only good news. In the former Soviet Union, for example, the media was used to spread positive messages: a farm collective exceeding its harvest projections, or the opening of a new tractor plant. Such announcements were designed to suit the state, not the audience. Glasnost brought openness and a removal of constraint on the media. The gradual loosening of controls began to bring changes to the face of journalism across Eastern Europe. With the fall of the Soviet Union, many formerly frustrated writers and editors scrambled to launch new publications, mostly weekly newspapers and magazines. By the time Gorbachev lost power in 1991, the formerly "Marxist" press was publishing daring articles assailing the Soviet brand of communism.

Problems still remain, however, both in terms of government control and the lack of journalistic objectivity. The slant taken in stories is regularly for sale. "What do you do" asked one Russian journalist, "when a candidate offers you money to write favorably about his campaign?" This was not an academic question. It described journalistic life in a new market state where journalists are being paid \$40 to \$45 a month (Altschull, 1995).

### **Defensive Routines**

If news values help gatekeepers select content for its appeal, other routines help prevent offending the audience. The routine of objectivity is a prime example, and it can be viewed as serving a defensive function. Objectivity, although a cornerstone of journalistic ideology, is rooted in practical organizational requirements. In this sense, objectivity is less a core belief of journalists than a set of procedures to which journalists willingly conform in order to protect themselves from attack. Their editors and publishers are equally concerned with jeopardizing their own positions.

Michael Schudson (1978) notes that at the turn of the century, newspapers, in competing for circulation, tried to conform to the public's standards of truth, decency, and good taste. Reporters believed they had to be lively and entertaining while factual at the same time. Indeed, editors and reporters were preoccupied with facts to avoid public criticism and embarrassment for the newspaper. Gans (1979) suggests that objective style, by keeping personal values out, allows reporters autonomy in choosing the news. Otherwise every story would be subject to attack. Similarly, Hallin (1989, p. 67) argues that objectivity helps legitimate the media. Because they are large, privately owned, and heavily concentrated, with a great deal of power, the media ensure public support through objectivity by claiming that their power has been put in a "blind trust." The Associated Press is also credited with a strong role at the turn of the century

in strengthening the objectivity norm. A uniform style helped it sell its product to a diverse set of client papers, which in turn needed to reach a mass and diverse audience for their mass advertising. Thus, the objectivity routine helps organizations in a number of ways to maximize their audience appeal.

From the organization's point of view, Tuchman (1977b) argues that objectivity is a ritual that serves primarily to defend the organizational product from critics. Because newswriters have little time to reflect on whether they have gotten at the "truth" in their stories, they need a set of procedures, or strategies, that if followed will protect them from occupational hazards such as libel suits and reprimands from superiors. These procedures include relying on verifiable facts, setting statements off in quotation marks, including many names in a story to keep the reporter's views out, and presenting supplementary evidence for a "fact." Often, verifiable facts are not available, leading reporters to report the truth-claims of sources. Because they often lack time to verify such statements, reporters cannot claim they are factual. They can, however, report conflicting statements, which allows them to say both sides of the story have been told. Both statements may be false, getting the reporter no closer to the truth, yet the procedure helps fend off criticism.

Attributing statements to sources is a key element of the objective ritual. It protects against accusations that they have been manipulated. When Mark Hertsgaard asked CBS News White House reporter Bill Plante to defend himself against the charge that the press was a passive conduit for Ronald Reagan's version of reality in the 1984 campaign, Plante argued that the president's views all had been carefully attributed:

Do you convey Reagan's version of reality, or do you convey what Reagan says is reality? We certainly conveyed what he said was reality. ... [Shifting the blame back to the audience, he continued] ... Now it may be true that most people don't make that distinction. They should. We ought to start off in grammar school, or junior high, with a course on reading the newspaper and watching television: how to understand attribution. (Hertsgaard, 1988, p. 73)

The objectivity routine also leads to omitting seemingly harmless information. Lemert, Mitzman, Cook, and Hackett (1977) found that news stories were less likely to contain *mobilizing* information (instructions on what to do, where to go for a cholesterol screening, what time the political rally will be held) if they were negative, controversial, or nonlocal, or in a main news section or on the editorial page. They speculated that mobilizing information is routinely kept out to avoid accusations of partisanship.

The objectivity routine has led to abuses over the years. One of the most famous was the ability of Senator Joe McCarty to make wild accusations during the anticommunist witch-hunts of the 1950s. They were dutifully carried in the press, properly attributed, but contained falsehoods few of the reporters believed. Although these reporters were angry at being obliged to report



McCarthy's untruths, they did not abandon the resilient objective routine, and reporting patterns remained intact.

### **Audience Appeal and Story Structure**

Not only do gatekeepers select information for its newsworthiness or audience appeal, but they present it in ways designed to meet audience needs. In a newspaper the stories must be readable, the photos arranged properly on the pages, the headlines composed to direct reader attention. Television messages must be visually appealing and hold audience attention. These presentation techniques and formats become important routines of media work.

One of the most enduring routines is the story structure. To appeal to an audience, media content often takes this form. The story must have an inherent appeal, considering the prominence in culture of myths, parables, legends, and oral histories. Perhaps because it is closer to the oral tradition, television news has embraced the story form most easily. Television news producers regularly exhort reporters to "tell stories," not reports. Reuven Frank summed it up in a memo to his staff at NBC:

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probability or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end. These are not only the essentials of drama; they are the essentials of narrative. (Epstein, 1974, pp. 4-5)

Thus, the story represents a routine way of processing "what happened" and guides the reporter in deciding which facts to include in transforming events into a news commodity.

Some stories are made part of a larger continuing drama. Nimmo and Combs (1983) observe that the Iranian hostage crisis story, which began in November 1979 when U.S. citizens were captured at the American embassy in Teheran and held hostage for 444 days, was treated like a melodrama by the networks. The hostages were heroes, the hostages' families were victims, and the Iranian militants were clearly villains. Melodramatic language had the hostages riding an "emotional roller-coaster" and facing trial before a "hanging judge." Visual symbols featuring a logo of a blindfolded hostage heightened the melodrama. Nimmo and Combs suggest that this emphasis on dramatic principles kept reporters from giving a more comprehensive picture of conflicting Islamic and Iranian factions and the history of U.S.-Iranian involvement. The dramatic thrust of the story theme necessitated an anti-Iranian, anti-Islamic, and pro-U.S. government orientation (Nimmo & Combs, 1983).

Of course, reality cannot always be neatly packaged with a beginning, middle, and end. Following this routine carries its own form of distortion. The story format constrains the reporter to organize facts to fit the plot line. One of the most famous examples is the CBS documentary "The Uncounted Enemy:

A Vietnam Deception," broadcast in January 1982. CBS had promoted the show with an ad in the *New York Times* that referred to "a deliberate plot" ("Uncounted Enemy," 1982). At the beginning of the program, correspondent Mike Wallace said evidence would be presented to show "indeed a conspiracy at the highest levels of American military intelligence—to suppress and alter critical intelligence on the enemy in the year leading to the Tet offensive" ("Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," 1982).

In the CBS documentary, General William C. Westmoreland was charged with trying to mislead political officials and the public by suppressing enemy troop counts. The distortion in the program, brought out in the general's subsequent libel suit, can be traced in large part to the producer's need to construct a show compelling enough to compete with prime-time programming. That required finding a clear villain and painting an exaggerated picture of a conspiracy to mislead. As CBS's own internal investigation concluded, the producer violated several CBS News guidelines, including failing to pursue information contrary to the program's thesis. In effect, organizational norms were violated to produce a clear plot line.

### **Audience Routines v. Other Routines**

The audience is included in Figure 6.2 as the ultimate consumer of the media product. Many would argue, however, that the audience figures least prominently in the many routines of the media, particularly in news. Before proceeding further, we consider two reasons why we should pay close attention to other routines, beyond those associated with the audience. It would be a mistake to conclude that news has evolved into its present form because it most perfectly suits the audience—that the public gets what it wants. How could we explain the fact that per capita newspaper subscription is declining, and that only a small percentage of the public keeps up with the news in any serious way? A closer examination of our list of news values also undermines the notion of audience appeal. Because these values have been derived from analyzing actual news content, they represent a post hoc explanation. They rationalize those selections already made. One way to test the influence of news values as a routine is to question whether other stories satisfied these criteria yet did not receive coverage.

Each year a group of media experts from academia and the press do just that. They compile a list of stories for Project Censored, which includes the most important news stories underreported or overlooked by the American media ("Top 10," 1989). The following stories were among those selected:

- *Nuclear accidents.* The Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster in the former Soviet Union became a big story in April 1986. But many other accidents have gone unreported: In 1986 there were 3,000 documented incidents, up 24 percent from 1984. Not reporting them, the project charges, strengthened the industry's undeserved reputation for safety.

- *Biological warfare.* The Reagan administration dramatically raised funding for biological warfare research during its term, up to \$42 million by 1986. There was little reporting on this surge, nor on the risks associated with the research, including safety and security of labs at major universities where it was carried out.
- *Space shuttle carries plutonium.* The National Aeronautics and Space Association (NASA) made plans to launch the Project Galileo shuttle space probe with highly radioactive plutonium. One pound is said to be capable of giving everyone on the planet a fatal case of lung cancer if evenly distributed. The shuttle was to carry 49.25 pounds. NASA minimized the chances of an accident on launch or reentry. But then NASA estimated the chance of a shuttle accident before the disastrous *Challenger* explosion as 1 in 100,000. Later estimates put it at 1 in 25.

The top "censored" stories from the lists of more recent years include the following ("Top Censored," 1994) :

- *1988: George Bush's secrets.* During the presidential campaign the mainstream press failed to cover Bush's role in the Watergate cover-up and his ties with Panama's Manuel Noriega, among other involvements.
- *1989: Radioactive waste.* Little coverage was devoted to attempts by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to weaken restrictions on nuclear waste disposal.
- *1990: S&L solution.* U.S. taxpayers were stuck with a \$500 billion bill to bail out the savings and loan industry, but little comprehensive media coverage of the crisis could be found.
- *1991: Threats to the Freedom of Information Act.* The major media gave little attention to the Reagan and Bush administrations' efforts to weaken public access to government records.
- *1992: Bush's role in arming Saddam Hussein.* Only long after the fact was any coverage devoted to President Bush's role in supporting Hussein before the Gulf War (now called "Iraggate").

These stories were important and timely, yet they did not receive the attention that their importance might have predicted. Thus, it is more accurate to say that to be included in the news, stories must have news value; but that is not sufficient in itself. If these "censored" stories had news value and yet were not reported, why were they excluded? We must go beyond audience appeal routines to fully understand these decisions.

Another piece of evidence leading us toward the other two stages of our media production model comes from the observational study of newswork. In practice, media workers spend less time than one might think considering the audience. Studies of newsroom activity show that occupational and organizational considerations far outweigh any constraints imposed by audience

needs and interests. The low importance of audience-oriented routines in newswork can also be seen in the attitudes of newswriters toward their audience. In his study of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Philip Schlesinger found that these communicators labeled those who tried to contact them as "cranks," in keeping with the conviction that the "bulk of the audience reaction is from cranks, the unstable, the hysterical, and sick" (Schlesinger, 1978, pp. 107-108). Journalists write primarily for themselves, for their editors, and for other journalists.

Indeed, journalists studied by Gans (1979) were highly suspicious of audience research, being reluctant to accept any encroachment on their professional autonomy and news judgment: "When a network audience-research unit presented findings on how a sample of viewers evaluated a set of television news films, the journalists were appalled because the sample liked the films which the journalists deemed to be of low quality and disliked the 'good stories' (p. 232).

### **MEDIA ORGANIZATION: PROCESSOR**

Turning to the second stage of our model in Figure 6.2, we ask: What are the routines that are most related to helping the organization itself in processing information? Like people, organizations develop patterns, habits, and ways of doing things. The media organization must find *ways* of effectively gathering and evaluating its raw material. Most of these routines have become part of the news business, giving workers clearly defined and specialized roles and expectations. As with the audience-oriented routines, we assume these routines have developed to meet the needs of the system and that they have become standardized, institutionalized, and understood by those who use them.

#### **Understanding Mr. Gates**

To understand how media routines work, researchers have spent a lot of time directly observing how people in these organizations do their job. One of the earliest and most frequently cited efforts is the "gatekeeper" study by David Manning White (1950). It focused, however, on individual rather than routinized judgment, and started a long tradition of examining the criteria media decision makers use to select information. White kept track of the stories selected by the last in a chain of gatekeepers, a newspaper wire editor he called "Mr. Gates," and later questioned him about his decisions. White obviously felt that much could be learned by knowing the subjective, idiosyncratic reasons why the editor chose one story over another: "not interesting," "B.S.," "don't care for suicide stories" (p. 386).

However, we can find many indications of routine constraints on Mr. Gates. For example, he said he preferred stories slanted to conform to his paper's editorial policy (p. 390), and White questioned whether Mr. Gates could refuse to play up stories if his competition was doing likewise. Thus, although he took

an individual approach, White did recognize the importance of constraining routines, noting that "the community shall hear as fact only those events which the newsman, as the *representative of his culture*, believes to be true" (p. 390) [our emphasis]. In fact, in a later study of several such editors at 16 Wisconsin daily newspapers in 1956, Walter Gieber (1960) found little difference among the papers in story selection and display, only in their explanations of their decisions. He concluded that the "task-oriented" telegraph editors had the pressures of the newsroom bureaucratic routine in common.

In recent years, scholars have emphasized the concentric rings of constraints around Mr. Gates. This perspective is encouraged by the strong similarities in the news agendas across media, despite the fact that *each* organization is staffed with its own "subjective" gatekeepers. In a re-analysis of White's data, Hirsch (1977) shows that Mr. Gates selected stories in roughly the same proportions as they were provided by the wire service. That is, the menu of crime, disaster, political, and other stories was duplicated on a smaller scale in the editor's selections (see also McCombs & Shaw, 1977). Thus, Mr. Gates exercised personal choice but only within the format imposed on him by the wire service routine. Did Mr. Gates and the wire service simply hold the same individual values as to the relative importance of the various categories, or was the wire menu dictating his "agenda"?

To find out, Whitney and Becker (1982) experimentally presented one group of editors with a set of stories distributed unevenly across seven categories (labor, national, international news, etc.). Another group received the same number of stories in each of these categories. The editors closely followed the proportions contained in their source copy where the proportions varied. They used more subjective judgments when given equal numbers of stories in the categories. When story proportions varied, the wire routine had an impact by cluing the editors in when making their selections.

### **Routines and the Organization**

The wire service menu may limit the choices made by an editor, but that structuring is precisely what a media organization finds desirable. By subscribing to the Associated Press or other news services, a paper can ensure a steady, predictable stream of a quality product and reduce the amount of news for which it is responsible. This routine is but one of many that help media organizations operate smoothly. For example, the more constraints a reporter operates under, such as deadlines and geographic location, the narrower is the range of sources relied on for stories (Fico, 1984). Even though constraints affect content, routines help explain how that content is shaped in response to those limits.

As rational, complex organizations with regular deadlines, the news media cannot cope with the unpredictable and infinite number of occurrences in the everyday world without a system. These occurrences must be recognized as newsworthy events, sorted, categorized, and classified (e.g., hard versus soft news). Organizations must routinize work in order to control it. This is

particularly important for news organizations, which must, in the seemingly contradictory phrase used by Tuchman (1973, p. 111), report "unexpected events on a routine basis." These routines impose their own twist on the social reality they help produce.

Many routines are designed to help the organization cope with physical constraints. The very term *gatekeeper* suggests the idea of adapting to physical limits. That is, given the number of stories and the limited space, decisions must be made to funnel many news events down to a few. From the start, only a small part of the world can be dealt with. Although media space is limited, it is usually fixed from day to day. Regardless of how much is going on, a network newscast has a half-hour format to fill every night. A newspaper is more flexible in the number of pages it prints, but the news hole stays relatively stable from one edition to the next. The gatekeeper must choose some minimal number from among many messages. Because of this steady appetite for information, bureaucratic routines help ensure a steady supply. For example, lacking the ability to be everywhere at once, news organizations establish bureaus at those locations likely to generate news events. Beats for reporters are established, for the same reason, at institutions where reliable news can be gathered (police, fire, courts, etc.).

Time may also be considered a physical constraint, represented by the news organization's deadline schedule. Deadlines force journalists to stop seeking information and file a story, and reporters must adjust their schedule accordingly. Tuchman (1977a) notes that this causes temporal gaps in the news net (in addition to geographic and institutional gaps): Occurrences falling outside normal business hours, for example, have less chance of being covered. As Michael Schudson (1986) observes, the news organization

lives by the clock. Events, if they are to be reported, must mesh with its temporal spokes and cogs. Journalists do not seek only timely news if, by "timely," one means "immediate" or as close to the present as possible. Journalists also seek coincident and convenient news, as close to the deadline as possible. News must happen at specified times in the journalists' "newsday." (p. 2)

Politicians are particularly mindful of this and schedule press "events" early enough in the day to get on the evening newscasts, or on late Friday if they want to minimize coverage. This focus on timely stories often doesn't allow for adequate treatment of slowly developing stories. It also makes media unsuitable for advocacy journalism: Reporters can address a problem but cannot dwell on it. They must move on to more timely issues.

### **Requirements of the News Perspective**

As we've suggested, media routines, although helping fit the flow of information into manageable physical limits, impose their own special logic on the product that results. News organizations are not just passive recipients of a continuous stream of events lapping at the gates. News routines

provide a perspective that often explains what gets defined as news in the first place. Before it even gets to the first gate, news workers "see" some things as news and not others. Through their routines, they actively construct reality.

In this view news is what an organization's routines lead it to define as news. Tuchman (1973), for example, finds that newswriters "typify" unexpected events based on how the organization must deal with them. Thus, the hard news/ soft news distinction is less a function of the nature of the content than how the event is scheduled. Hard news is most often based on "prescheduled" events (trials, meetings, etc.) or "unscheduled" events (fires, earthquakes). In either case, the news of the event must be gotten out quickly. Soft news, also called feature stories, is "nonscheduled." That is, the news organization can determine when to carry it, such as in the thicker Sunday editions. Nonscheduled stories can help fill in those holes where prescheduled stories are slack.

Tuchman uses the term *news net* to refer to a system of reporters deployed to institutions and locations expected to generate news events. Once deployed, this net tends to, at the expense of other events, reinforce and certify the newsworthiness of those happenings that fall within it. Reporters covering these beats promote their daily stories to their organization, which uses them if for no other reason than that it has an economic investment in them—the reporter's salary has already been paid. In his observations of a local newspaper beat system, Fishman (1980) found that even when a reporter and editor agreed that nothing was happening on a beat, the reporter was still obliged to write something.

By directing newswriters to take facts and events out of one context and reconstitute them into the appropriate formats, routines yield acceptable news stories. But in doing so, this process inevitably distorts the original event. A predefined story "angle," for example, provides reporters a theme around which to build a story. Reporters work most efficiently when they know what their interview sources will say. This sounds counterintuitive, but it helps explain why reporters rely on familiar sources—they can predict in advance who will give them the information needed to flesh out their angle.

David Altheide (1976), in his study of a local news channel in Arizona, observed that reporters usually approached stories with predefined options that fit their view of what was significant in an event. Such expectations led them to seek out supportive sources and details. Thus, Altheide concluded that the short time reporters often had to work on stories could not be blamed for distorted coverage; more time would have produced a more detailed but not necessarily more complete story. He observed one Phoenix television reporter who set out to do a story on solutions to traffic jams. The reporter had apparently already decided that more freeways were the best solution before interviewing the following source, an economics professor and transportation specialist:

REPORTER: How many miles of freeway do you think we need in Phoenix?

PROFESSOR: Well, I don't know that. Because, you see, this is the purview of the engineer. So I don't really know how many miles we need. . . . I am an economist and we don't get into the actual matter of how many people use a given mile, etc.... So I can't answer that one.

REPORTER: In general, would you say we could use *more* freeways?

PROFESSOR: Yes, well certainly. I think there is a place that the through, freeway-type of highway has got to play . . . and it probably is one in which we can move people more efficiently on an intermediate basis than if we talk about fixed rail.

REPORTER: But you're still going to need more freeways anyway, aren't you? (pp. 103-104)

Even when covering less ambiguous actual events, reporters often have an anticipated "script" as to how the story will unfold. The power of this script can be seen in an incident one evening in 1983 when a television news camera crew was called to a deserted Alabama town square. An unemployed drifter had called the station to announce that he was going to set himself on fire as an act of protest. The television crew anticipated a routine story of police work: they would arrive at the square in time to film the police subduing the drifter and carting him off to jail. When police were delayed, so strong was the anticipated script that the camera crew commenced filming anyway. By doing so, the crew was criticized for inciting the man to set himself on fire and then filming him running off in a ball of flame. Critics argued that as human beings the crew, in the absence of authorities, should have tried to prevent the man from hurting himself; but the powerful routine script overrode individual judgment (Bennett, Gressett, & Haltom, 1985).

News is commonly thought to revolve around events. An "event" routine is helpful for the organization because, compared to more abstract processes, it is more easily and less ambiguously defined as news. Events are more defensible as news. According to Molotch and Lester, public life consists of an infinite number of "occurrences," some of which are promoted into full-blown news "events" by sources or the media themselves. News organizations find these happenings useful as points of reference in the temporal world, to "break up, demarcate, and fashion lifetime, history, and a future" (1974, pp. 101-102). Television in particular needs events to give the camera something to record. The visual nature of the medium demands that something happen. Even more general issue stories are often centered around a concrete news event "peg." Events are useful to news media in providing both a focus for their attention and a schedule of meetings, elections, and other events around which to plan and allocate resources. The organization can schedule coverage, because it usually knows when and where they will take place. (The Radio/Television News Directors Association, for example, plans its annual meetings to fall in December every even-numbered year to avoid conflicting with election coverage.) Events are so seductive that the press will often cover them, even if news value would predict otherwise: train crashes in France, gas leaks in Canada, apartment fires in distant cities. These stories may not be proximate or important, but they appeal to news producers by fitting an unambiguous news event model.

When events are combined with a dramatic story, so much the better. When 18-month-old Jessica McClure fell down a well in Midland, Texas, in October 1987, the national media



converged on the town. During the 58-hour rescue drama, the "baby in the well" story rivaled many big national issues in coverage. The *story* was ideal for the media: It had a clearly defined location and victim; it contained dramatic elements of suffering, heroism, and suspense; and the event had an unambiguous life span—one way or the other it would come to an end. Of course, many children are victims of longer-term life-threatening conditions, but their stories cannot be depicted in this compact event structure—unless, that is, they require transplants or other dramatic operations that provide an event focus for media and public attention.

The media the world over loved the dramatic controversy surrounding figure skaters Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan leading up to the 1994 Winter Olympics. Harding was implicated in an attack on Kerrigan prior to the games, creating an ongoing soap opera featuring the tough, blonde, pool-playing, cigarette-smoking Harding contrasted with the more elegant, wholesome Kerrigan. The steady stream of investigations, indictments, and hearings before the actual competition in Norway made ideal pegs on which to hang the story, lending the tabloid-style subject a more legitimate basis. Furthermore, the drama had another valuable feature for the media. Because the story pitted two Anglo women against each other, journalists could play it up without being accused of sexism or racism.

Of course, trying to fit news stories into familiar forms may blind reporters to other features of the story. Issues don't always lend themselves to the event model. A president's visit to a national park, for example, may obscure the fact that no substantial action has been taken to protect the environment.

### **Routine Reliance on Other Media**

Journalists rely heavily on each other for ideas, and this reliance constitutes an important organizational routine. Indeed, many blame this groupthink, or "pack mentality," for making the news so similar across media. Leon Sigal (1973) says that in covering an ambiguous social world, newswriters seek certainty in consensus:

So long as newsmen follow the same routines, espousing the same professional values and using each other as their standards of comparison, newsmaking will tend to be insular and self-reinforcing. But that insularity is precisely what newsmen need. It provides them with a modicum of certitude that enables them to act in an otherwise uncertain environment. (pp. 180-181)

Mark Hertsgaard (1988) observed how carefully the three networks monitor each other's coverage: When U.S. jets intercepted the alleged hijackers of an Italian cruise ship, *Achille Lauro*, President Reagan announced that he was sending a message to terrorists everywhere: "You can run but you can't hide." After some argument, one network decided to lead with video of that statement.

As it happened, the other two networks also opened *their* broadcasts with the identical *piece* of Reagan's video. In the postmortem meeting after the broadcast, the producer's colleagues pointed to their competitors' leads as evidence that their initial news judgment had indeed been correct. (p. 79)

Thus, lacking any firm external benchmarks against which to measure the product, journalists take consistency as their guide: consistency with other news organizations, and even with themselves. Electronic news retrieval systems, such as Nexis, now make it much easier for reporters to rely on their own past work for guidance. Big city daily newspapers, for example, rely heavily on material previously published in their own newspaper (Hansen, Ward, & McLeod, 1987). This inbred reliance contributes to the closed-system nature of much reporting, yet it also provides an essential function. It reduces the risk for the organization by ensuring that its product is the correct product.

One much-studied and highly visible version of this routine is the tendency of reporters to cover news in packs. Television and print reporters are often seen crowding around newsmakers with outstretched microphones and miniature cassette recorders. Not only do reporters tend to cover the same people and stories, but they rely on each other for ideas and confirmation of their respective news judgments. In his often-cited study, Timothy Crouse (1972) observed the way reporters covering the 1972 presidential campaign relied heavily on each other, particularly on the AP reporter, for help with how to construct story leads. The "boys on the bus" (as Crouse called his book) knew that their editors would question their stories if they deviated too far from the wire service version of an event. Following a primary debate between Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern, pressroom reporters immediately checked with AP reporter Walter Mears. He said he was leading with the candidates' statement that neither would accept George Wallace as a running mate, and most of the reporters followed his example:

They wanted to avoid "call-backs"—phone calls from their editors asking them why they had deviated from the AP or UPI. If the editors were going to run a story different from the story in the nation's 1,700 other newspapers, they wanted a good reason for it. Most reporters dreaded call-backs. Thus, the pack followed the wire-service men whenever possible. Nobody made a secret of running with the wires; it was an accepted practice. (p. 22)

A more recent study (Martindale, 1984) compared newspaper reports of campaign events but found that they were not as similar as Crouse's observations might have suggested. Perhaps media organizations now strive to provide a service more complementary to the wires. At any rate, the tendency of reporters to follow each other, although strong, is most likely when the stories are based on regular beats and highly predictable events or during crisis coverage when reliable information is scarce (Nimmo & Combs, 1983). Media analyst David Shaw reports that the tendency of the pack to follow the common wisdom has gotten even stronger since the publication of Crouse's book, due in

part to technology that provides instant access to other reporters' work (CNN, computer data services, etc.) (Shaw, 1989).

The importance of "intermedia" influence as a routine is demonstrated in its importance in so many different settings. In their observation of Wisconsin statehouse reporters, Shields and Dunwoody (1986) found that although media organizations urge their reporters to regard each other as competitors, in practice *they* "routinely" share information among themselves, particularly those reporters who had spent many years at the capitol (star reporters and the inner club). All reporters were expected to answer questions about the accuracy of information. A study of Michigan statehouse reporters found that "broadcast and newspaper reporters were more similar in their information gathering and source citation priorities than different." Atwater and Fico (1986) postulate that this pattern of similarities suggests a common value system across organizations—a system reinforced by close proximity, sharing information, and observing the work of other reporters.

Reliance on other media is no less important when journalists aren't in direct contact. They still rely on each other's reporting, as an institutionalized practice, for story ideas and to help confirm their own judgments. Warren Breed (1980), in his classic study of the newsroom, observed that newspapermen (they were mostly men in those days) avidly read other newspapers. For beat reporters, these papers provide a valuable resource. David Grey (1966, p. 422) observed a court reporter for the now defunct *Washington Evening Star*. After entering his basement office in the court building and calling his paper to check in:

- 9:45—Takes off suit coat and sits back in swivel chair. Starts reading the morning *Washington Post*. Flips and scans pages.
- 9:47—Sees article on (then) Justice Goldberg speaking at a Unitarian church. Tears article from paper.
- 9:50—Throws *Post* into nearby wastebasket and starts skimming the *New York Times*.
- 9:54—Throws *Times* into wastebasket.
- 9:56—Leaves office with pencils for sharpening and "to see if I can find out any clues."

Editors are avid readers too. Breed (1980) found that editors of small papers in particular used larger city papers to guide them, "as if the editor of the small paper is employing, in absentia, the editors of the larger paper to 'make up' his page for him" (p. 195). Herbert Gans (1979, p. 91) noted that editors read the *Times* and *Post* before entertaining story ideas. If these respected judges of news value have carried a story, it has been judged satisfactory, "eliminating the need for an independent decision by the editor" (p. 126). For "trend" stories in particular, Gans found that a reporter stood a better chance of selling it to an editor if it had already been reported elsewhere (p. 170). In 1986, for example, the *New York Times* helped certify the "cocaine issue" by

giving it prominent coverage early in the year. Other media followed in a "feeding frenzy" as the networks and newspapers converged on the story throughout the summer and early fall (Reese & Danielian, 1989).

Certain media have special influence. The *New York Times* has strong influence for international stories, the *Washington Post* for national domestic issues. Even smaller publications can sometimes exert influence on others. *Rolling Stone*, for example, regarded as a leader for counterculture anti-establishment stories, triggered national media attention when it ran a story on Americans kept in Mexican prisons on drug charges (Miller, 1978). In general, though, the *New York Times* is considered the final arbiter of quality and professionalism across all the news media. Indeed, in the ambiguous world of journalism, "if the *Times* did not exist, it would probably have to be invented" (Gans, 1979, p. 181).

### **The Pack v. the Exclusive**

The organization must balance the benefits derived from pack routine with the benefits of the "exclusive." To understand why a news organization would usually rather run with the pack than scoop the competition, we have to understand the different yet related functions these routines serve. Exclusives do little to enhance the audience appeal of an organization. Most people read only one paper or see one newscast. Yet newspapers will, for competitive reasons, develop exclusive stories such as the *Miami Herald's* expose of presidential candidate Gary Hart's affair with Donna Rice in 1988, or other high-profile multipart series designed to attract the attention of Pulitzer Prize judges. The very fact that these are exceptional and noteworthy, however, shows them to be the exception to the more common pack coverage.

If the mainstream media all go after the same stories, how is one organization permitted to lay claim to special excellence? Through the scoop. Getting first what everyone else will want is the standard in the highly ambiguous process of deciding what news is. Network journalists covering political conventions pride themselves on getting information even a few seconds before the competition. Exclusives also provide a standard of performance by which organizations can evaluate their employees. Schudson notes that "the race for news—a race whose winner can easily be determined by a clock—affords a cheap, convenient, democratic measure of journalistic 'quality'" (1986, p. 3). Yet the reporter does not want to get too far in front of the pack. In coverage of presidential campaigns, for example, national attention is directed at the same candidates and events, and as a result reporters are perhaps in greatest synchronization. The desire to be unique is far outweighed by the risk of being different and, perhaps, wrong in full view of the nation. (Of course, producers of entertainment content are prone to the same pack mentality. Just look at the similarities in television prime-time programming, and made-for-television movie themes, radio formats, and tabloid television.)

### **Television v. Newspapers: How Do They Differ?**

Clearly, different media must create different structures to carry out their functions. The print and broadcast media, for example, differ in the technology they use to gather and transmit messages, their economic support, how frequently they publish or air their product, and their political relationship (with the Federal Communications Commission, etc.). One way to identify organizational differences that make a difference is to observe how workers differ in their behavior and attitudes. Many of these differences can be traced to the nature of the organization they work for. (Different routines are mentioned here to the extent that they can be traced to organizational differences.)

Although they have a common profession, reporters differ in the ways they deal with their sources. Because television news stations typically have smaller staffs than newspapers in comparable communities, reporters are subject to constant demand for daily stories. This plus the other technological baggage of television news reporters often make them subservient to their sources (Drew, 1972) and dependent on public relations control efforts (Dunwoody, 1978).

Other effects on content are more subtle. For example, television news stories have traditionally relied on reporter "standups," the on-camera appearance of the journalist to guide the viewer in understanding the news. In providing this comment, reporters look for snappy language and often fail to provide the usual attribution for their assertions. Because these standups must often be recorded long before the final story is compiled, last-minute changes in reports can leave the reporter's claims with inadequate support (Taylor, 1993).

In comparing source reliance of Michigan statehouse journalists, Atwater and Pico (1986) found that broadcast reporters relied more on routine activities, such as news conferences, which produced the more visually dramatic stories; whereas print reporters relied most on personal sources (experts, legislative leaders, etc.), which produced good background information. Shields and Dunwoody (1986) found that in the Wisconsin statehouse pressroom, the broadcast reporters occupied the lowest level in the journalists' own hierarchy. The lack of their organization's commitment to a steady statehouse presence, not the fact they were broadcasters, prevented these reporters from "paying their dues" and reaching the "inner club."

Broadcast reporters are less likely to say they have regular beats and to say they have freedom to select the stories *they* work on. They are less likely than print reporters to say they have their work edited (Becker, 1982). Broadcast reporters report having more editorial decision-making power than their print counterparts (Ismach & Dennis, 1978). Television news reporters have fewer layers of editorial oversight. Practically speaking, it is much harder to change a reporter's video package than to edit newspaper copy. Once the reporter has filed a story, however, he or she must relinquish control to others. Because of the presentation aspects of television news, considerable effort goes into getting the show out, and the reporter's work becomes one element within the larger production.

The routines discussed here serve the convenience and needs of media organizations as they produce their product. Of course, the media do not exert complete control over the raw material that goes into that product. To complete the picture of routines, we consider next those that are a function of the suppliers, or sources.

### **EXTERNAL SOURCES: SUPPLIERS**

In manufacturing symbolic content, the media rely on external suppliers of raw material, whether speeches, interviews, corporate reports, or government hearings. These suppliers, or *sources* as we'll call them, have a major influence on media content (as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8). Here, in this final section, we consider how these sources dictate routines for media organizations. In other words, these routines can be viewed as an adaptation by media to the constraints imposed by their sources. In some cases, media and sources have adapted to each other's requirements, making it hard to determine which came first.

In some cases, source-oriented routines are hardly visible. For example, even highly enterprising investigative reports, like those on "60 Minutes," often rely on lawsuits in progress for stories. Notice the number of potential sources in such stories that can't (or won't) comment due to impending litigation. Lawsuit-based issues are convenient for journalists to cover. The legal system has essentially laid the groundwork for the reporter and set the routine. Willing sources (usually on the plaintiff side) are available and committed to a clear point of view. Articulate lawyers are more than willing to advance their client's case. The adversarial format fits the news model, although it may give a distorted view of the case. Other source-based routines are more obvious. Photo opportunities and press conferences show more clearly the routines employed by sources to get into the news. In recent years the public has become wise to many of these strategies, as indicated by the entry of terms such as *media event*, *sound bite*, and *spin doctor* into popular jargon.

The rise of public relations played a major role in routinizing and making more systematic the link between the press and other institutions. During the early twentieth century, Michael Schudson (1978) notes, newspapers encouraged public relations efforts by using the handouts and copies of speeches supplied by press agents, even though scorning those who provided them. Overall, Martin and Singletary (1981) found that nearly 20 percent of press releases were used verbatim (more by the relatively resource-poor nondailies than dailies). The rise of the press release and press conference reduced the ability of reporters to get scoops and inside stories. At the same time, it made journalists more easily manipulable due to their dependence on the news flow of public relations-generated information.

### **Routine Channels**

Theoretically, the news media have countless resources available to them as a raw product, including firsthand observation, libraries, and polling. Practically, though, they depend heavily on interviews with individuals for their information. Stephen Hess (1981), for example, found that the Washington press corps made very little use of documents in doing their research, preferring to rely on sources and each other. Reliance on sources reduces the need for expensive specialists and extensive research. Sigal (1973) found a clear tendency for *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reporters, members of organizations that could presumably afford to gather news through whichever channels they chose, to rely on routine channels of information. He defined *routine channels* as (1) official proceedings (trials, legislative hearings, etc.), (2) press releases, (3) press conferences, and (4) nonspontaneous events (speeches, ceremonies, etc.). Informal channels were (1) background briefings, (2) leaks, (3) nongovernmental proceedings, such as professional association meetings, and (4) reports from other news organizations, interviews with other reporters, and editorials. Enterprise channels included (1) interviews conducted at reporters' initiative, (2) spontaneous events witnessed firsthand (fires, etc.), (3) independent research, and (4) reporters' own conclusions and analysis (p. 20).

Of the page one stories in the *New York Times* and *Post*, of all channels included in these stories, informal channels accounted for 15.7 percent, enterprise 25.8 percent, and routine channels more than double that at 58.2 percent. Of the enterprise channels, interviews with individual sources accounted for 23.7 percent of the 25.8 percent figure. This ratio became even more skewed when Sigal examined stories with Washington datelines and tabulated only those "primary channels" constituting the lead or the major part of a story. Of the channels used, 72 percent were routine, 20 percent informal, and 8 percent enterprise. Sigal concluded that "the predominant use of routine channels in Washington newsgathering seems to reflect efforts of official news sources everywhere to confine the dissemination of news to routine channels, as well as reporters' reliance on them" (p. 123). This same pattern of reliance on routine channels has been found in more recent research (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1987), confirming the importance of this practice. Of course, Washington is not the only place where news is gathered routinely. Moreover, Sachsman (1976) found that reporters and editors relied heavily on press releases for information about the environment, because they provided a convenient source of information.

### **Official Sources**

The centralization of governmental power following World War II enhanced its ability to control information. With that increased ability came routines for institutionalizing the control. The routines imposed by official sources, especially those in Washington, have drawn the most

scholarly attention. Certainly, though, newsmakers in business and the professions also attempt to routinize their relations with the press: Corporation executives hold press conferences to announce a new product, movie actors release press kits through their publicists. The newsmaking activity of government has nevertheless been of greatest interest. After all, official behavior is more open to view and study. Corporate directors don't write as many memoirs as do former politicians. The attempts of business to manipulate information, being more diffuse and secretive, provoke less attention than the more easily located government agencies, with their greater tradition of openness and public accountability. Although all sources are becoming more sophisticated in their media relations, official relations have achieved a formalized and institutionalized state.

In Chapter 4 we observed how, in particular, news content consists largely of statements from official sources. By relying on these official sources, reporters receive most of their information through routine channels. Clearly, official sources prefer to release information through these channels. Doing so allows them to set the rules and exert greater control over the information. The press release and press conference allow them to regulate the release of information and to do so more efficiently than by speaking to everyone in turn. Although press conferences give the appearance of exposing officials to adversarial exchanges, in practice these "events" are often well choreographed by the sponsoring official. Questions can be planted, hostile reporters ignored, friendly ones recognized, difficult questions ignored, or evasive responses given.

Informal background briefings may not be a routine channel, as Sigal defines it, but they are regular channels through which officials transmit information. In that sense, they constitute a source-dictated routine. These briefings are common in Washington and are governed by generally accepted conventions. Briefings can be "off the record," on "deep background," or "background?" Off-the-record information cannot be used in any form; deep background material can be used but not quoted or attributed in any way to the source. "For back-ground only" information may be attributed by using a variety of references other than by name (senior White House officials, Pentagon spokespersons, etc.). The objectivity routine normally dictates that reporters name their sources whenever possible, but they accept these ground rules when their alternative is not to get the information at all. Sources find many advantages to giving out not-for-attribution information, foremost among them the ability to avoid accountability for their statements.

Some officials may go beyond these briefings and pass information to reporters anonymously, in what are often called *leaks*. Presidents complain regularly about leaks in their administration. As the flip side of the carefully coordinated "line of the day," leaks threaten unified control of information. Although they are less common than other channels, leaks are more routine than exceptional and serve many valuable functions for government officials. Hedrick Smith (1988) suggests that because background briefings are so common, they sanction officials to go on background with leaks. Whereas briefings are done on purpose as a part of overall official strategy, often at the request of reporters,



leaks are generally initiated by officials acting on their own as a tactic in intraorganizational infighting; and they are directed at a single reporter at a time, often on an exclusive basis. Hess (1984, pp. 77-78) lists several potential functions of leaks: to float a trial balloon, to blow the whistle on waste or dishonesty, to promote or sabotage policy, to curry favor with reporters, to carry out a grudge against bureaucratic rivals, and to enhance the leaker's ego by promoting an "insider" image.

Reporters rely on official sources *for many* reasons. The government provides a convenient and regular flow of authoritative information, which reporters find efficient compared with more labor-intensive research. Reliance on sources reduces the need for expensive specialists and extensive research. Furthermore, Daniel Hallin (1989) argues that professionalization has strengthened the connection between press and state. Given an objective and disinterested stance on the part of the journalist, government officials provide authoritative validation of the news product.

Paradoxically, Sigal (1973) observes that the competitive requirements of journalism often make them reliant on official sources. Reporters can obtain exclusives the hard way through their own legwork and research, or the easy way through inside tips, interviews, and leaks handed to them by officials. Finding the latter far more efficient, they are forced into a bargain that, in exchange for the occasional competitive bone, requires them to accept the far more common news delivered through routine channels (p. 53). Other professional "perks" perpetuate this dependence. Political candidates, for example, use the journalistic reward system as leverage to get what they want in the press. In the 1988 presidential campaign, Joan Didion (1988, p. 21) observed how political journalists reported clearly "set up" campaign events as though they were not. Because reporters like covering campaigns—it leads to prestige and advancement, gets them out on the road—they "are willing, in exchange for access; to transmit the images their sources wish transmitted. They are willing, in exchange for certain colorful details around which a 'reconstruction' can be built, . . . to present these images not as a story the campaign wants told but as fact."

### **The Experts**

An increasingly important component of the source routine is the expert, the person relied on by journalists to put events into context and explain the meaning of news. Because the objectivity routine prevents reporters from overtly expressing their point of view, they must find experts to provide understandable analysis of the meaning of news events. The choice of experts has an important influence on how that meaning is shaped.

Soley (1992) has analyzed the experts featured on network newscasts and concluded that they constitute a narrow, homogenous, and elite group. Although they are often presented as

objective and nonpartisan, these "news shapers" are largely conservative, associated with Washington-based think tanks (e.g., the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the American Enterprise Institute), former Republican administrations, and prestigious East Coast universities.

Approximately 90 individuals dominate political discourse about national and international events. The analyses of these 90 individuals constantly appear on the network evening newscasts, the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour," NPR's "Morning Edition," and Sunday morning new programs and in metropolitan daily newspapers. It is impossible to avoid hearing or reading their comments that shape the news. (p. 6)

Coverage of the Persian Gulf War showed a similar reliance on a narrow range of "experts" to help explain the conflict. These experts came primarily from New York and Washington, especially from think tanks and from a group of retired military officials, many of them with political biases (Steele, 1992).

The routines perspective predicts that journalists find it easier and more predictable to consult a narrow range of experts than to call on new ones each time.

Albert R. Hunt, Washington bureau chief for the *Wall Street Journal*, says he grew so annoyed at seeing the same experts quoted in his paper all the time that he banned the use of several of them for a couple of months last year. "The ban ended when I did a column and had to quote a couple of them," he says, sheepishly. (Shaw, 1989, p. 3)

Cooper and Soley (1990) found that among the top ten most quoted experts or analysts in 1987 and 1988 on ABC, CBS, and NBC were William Schneider and Norman Ornstein (both of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, or AEI), and Stephen Hess (of the centrist Brookings Institution). Ornstein says the view he gives is "center-center" (p. 23), thus, from a producer's perspective, alleviating the need to balance him with someone else. These experts are valued for their succinct and predictable responses, which further reinforce the conventional wisdom.

University experts, argues Steele (1990), are particularly attractive to television news producers, who usually have already decided what they want said before calling these sources to "reinforce their own understanding of a story" and to create "the illusion of objective reporting" (p. 28). Although few of these academics provoke or challenge, hearing them gives the impression that an important analysis has been given. Their comments are presumed to lack bias and to be impartial, which helps producers and reporters round out stories. Political scientist Ornstein, typical of many experts, promotes himself into the news, hawking his largely descriptive commentary to the mass press in publications such as *TV Guide* (Cooper & Soley, 1990). His centrist viewpoint both ensures his audience appeal and certifies his suitability.

### **Manipulation of Routines**

In recent years, sources have become more sophisticated in dealing with the press and in making routines work in their favor. Many of these routines have become particularly visible at the presidential level through the rise of the Reagan-era public relations model of information management, although many other sources in government and elsewhere have adopted similar strategies. These routines involve controlling information for government agencies by regulating and shaping the flow of information. Although they may have originated in earlier administrations, they became fully developed under Reagan. He continued Nixon's practice of hiring public relations experts and using the techniques of mass marketing as part of overall political strategy.

Simple distancing of the press constituted an important new routine technique. This included providing visual opportunities of Reagan leaving for Camp David but using the waiting helicopter to drown out reporters' questions; restricting questions during White House photo opportunities; and drastically reducing the number of press conferences and other unscripted encounters. One of the most radical restrictions in press access came during the 1983 invasion of Grenada. The administration, breaking a long tradition of military-press cooperation, barred all reporters during the early days of the operation.

When American newsmen tried to get to Grenada on commercial boats, American military planes threatened to fire on them. Four American reporters were held on a Navy ship for several days, forbidden to transmit stories, while the Pentagon set up its own news service, distributing reports with serious omissions and inaccuracies. The administration seemed to want a news monopoly until it could shape public attitudes. (Smith, 1988, p. 435)

Restricted access increased the media's appetite for those messages that did flow from the White House, which then had to be carefully coordinated. Behind the daily activities of the president, for example, lies extensive planning. Hedrick Smith notes that the notion of "scripted spontaneity" originated with Nixon, as explained by David Gergen, who later became Reagan's White House communication director:

We had a rule in the Nixon operation, that before any public event was put on his schedule, you had to know what the headline out of that event was going to be, what the picture was going to be, and what the lead paragraph would be.... One of Nixon's rules about television was that it was very important that the White House determine what the line coming out from the president was and not let the networks determine that, not let New York edit you. You had to learn how to do the editing yourself. (Smith, 1988, pp. 405-406)

In one effort to minimize press editing, the Reagan administration in 1983 began letting news organizations tap into a White House computer for electronic press releases compiled by the communication office. A similar strategy involved beaming unedited presidential appearances to local television stations via satellite, thus bypassing the network filter.

If they are unable to dictate the news itself, administration sources try to put the most favorable light on events through follow-up contacts with reporters. It has become customary, for example, for party spokespersons (administration officials, senators, etc.) to make themselves available to reporters during party conventions and after presidential debates and other campaign events. By presenting a coordinated response, they aim to frame the event in the most desirable manner. Elsewhere, officials may engage in damage control by calling reporters shortly before deadline. David Gergen made a practice of calling network correspondents at the last minute with the White House view, knowing they would be obliged to at least acknowledge it in their closing "stand ups." The reporters respond to that; Gergen said in defense of the practice. "They like it. They need it. And you could get them to change their feed" (Smith, 1988, p. 410).

One of the most skillful crafters of Reagan's media image was Michael Deaver, who developed what he called a "visual press release," an event crafted to make a visual message: Reagan visiting a job training center during the 1982-1983 recession; Reagan visiting a Fort Worth housing construction site to announce a rise in housing starts. According to Hedrick Smith, "Deep down, Deaver's goal was to become the de facto executive producer of the television network news shows by crafting the administration's story for the networks" (p. 416). He strove to reach this goal by providing the network with irresistible events and, in the process, developed a new set of "symbolic routines."

### **Adapting to Source Bureaucracy**

These routines are the more visible ways in which sources influence the news product. A more far-reaching impact results from the adaptation by news organizations to the entire bureaucratic structure of source institutions. Indeed, news can be considered a product of one bureaucracy gathered from other bureaucracies. In the case of government, Sigal calls it the "coupling of two information processing machines" (1973, p. 4).

Thus, in addition to having their news regulated by sources, journalists have information structured for them by other bureaucracies. Out of direct audience and often newsroom contact, journalists adopt through these routines the perspectives of the bureaucracies they cover. This highlights some occurrences while rendering others invisible. In his study of local newsgathering, Mark Fishman (1980) found that the newspaper he studied even depended on the Forestry Service for nature news: "When it turned out that even rocks, trees and squirrels are made available to the newspaper through official agencies, then it is no exaggeration to say that *the world is bureaucratically organized for journalists*" (p. 51) [emphasis ours].

Fishman concentrated on this bureaucratic organization of newswork, observing, among other routines, how reporters made their "rounds." By systematically organizing their stops during the day (courts, sheriff, police), reporters avoided wasting time. Fishman's reporters, for example, made most efficient use of their time by checking with the courts after checking with the sheriff and police. The court office would not know in advance when cases would be coming up, but police and sheriff offices could be monitored at any time for recent developments. Indeed, reporters who failed to follow this routine were likely to get in trouble with their superiors. As Fishman observes, "The round has a day-in day-out repetitive character, a stability over time. It consists of a series of locations that the reporter moves through in an orderly, scheduled sequence" (1980, p. 43).

Fishman argues that the beat routine is constructed around the structure of bureaucracies and directs reporters to certain features of institutions, those points in the system that yield the most efficient concentrations of information. Fishman identifies two kinds of institutional centers in particular that journalists depend on: the "media contact," or press representative; and the "meeting." Reporters value meetings for concentrating lots of information into a short period of time.

The bureaucratic routine renders some occurrences nonevents. Fishman (1980, pp. 78-80) observed a meeting of the county board of supervisors about the following year's sheriff's department budget, during which a woman stepped up to the public podium. Rather than speak for or against a proposal to add new deputy sheriff positions, she related a story about how two deputies had stopped her on the street as she sold wares from a pushcart. The deputies, she said, handcuffed her, pulled her into their car, verbally abused her, and left her at the sheriff's station for several hours bound hand and foot, before eventually releasing her with no explanation. During this time the chairman tried to dismiss the woman, ultimately threatening to have her removed. All the while, reporters in the room stopped taking notes, doodled, talked among themselves, and generally acted put out with the interruption of the normal bureaucratic flow. Needless to say, the "nonevent" went unreported in the newspaper. Although it was a potentially newsworthy story about deputies unjustly arresting a citizen, it did not fit the officials' and reporters' bureaucratic perspective on the purpose at hand. As far as the reporters were concerned, the woman was wasting their time.

### **Routines in the Persian Gulf**

The Persian Gulf War provides a striking case study of how news routines help structure reporting on international conflict. On the most direct level, the U.S. government imposed severe restrictions on journalists, limiting where they could go and what they could write. These tight controls on *modern* war reporting can be traced to the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada, which excluded reporters from the action. Bitter complaints from news organizations led to an agreement whereby reporters would be allowed to accompany future military actions in order to give firsthand reports.

A pool system was established in 1984 that called for representatives from the major news organizations—electronic and print media—to be selected. This group would be allowed to accompany the military and share stories with others not in the pool, but it was obliged to maintain secrecy until an operation was under way. The pool was mobilized several times; for example, reporters were taken aboard the flotilla protecting Kuwaiti tankers in 1988. However, when the United States invaded Panama in 1989, the pool was not allowed access until most of the action was over (e.g., see Arant & Warden, 1994). The system essentially excluded reporters from watching the "game" but gave them "locker room" interviews afterwards, causing the press to eagerly lap up stories about, for example, Gen. Manuel Noriega's alleged pornography and voodoo collection.

Thus, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, journalists were conditioned to expect, and largely accept, the most restrictive wartime press control of modern times. Reporters were denied access to anything not available through routine briefings and press pools, which were accompanied at all times by military handlers. All stories were reviewed by military public information specialists. Critics charged that these routines were imposed not solely for reasons of national security but to present the military and the policy it was following in the best possible light (e.g., see Kellner, 1992). These military-imposed restrictions constituted a powerful kind of source-oriented routine, and journalists were obliged to adapt themselves accordingly. Press officers warned reporters who asked hard questions that they were seen as "anti-military" and that requests for interviews with senior commanders and visits to the field would be in jeopardy (LeMoynes, 1991).

Such restrictive routines have emerged largely due to the prevailing suspicious and antagonistic views within the military toward the media, widely blamed by military leaders for losing the war in Vietnam. When Vietnam-era officers went on to become senior-level leaders, they brought their views about the media with them. But the press has its perspective, too. The routines approach predicts that the media enter into arrangements that provide the most acceptable content, even if it means conforming to heavy-handed military information control.

Indeed, some (mostly alternative) news organizations tried to contest the Pentagon's restrictions in the Persian Gulf. They included the *Nation*, *In These Times*, *Mother Jones*, *L.A. Weekly*, the *Progressive*, *Texas Observer*, the *Guardian*, the *Village Voice*, and *Harper's*. None of the major news organizations, however, joined the lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights on behalf of these publications. In explaining their inaction, Sydney Schanberg argues that the media have adapted to government control out of self-defense.

It's my belief that the press is still living with its own scars from Vietnam. And Watergate. We were accused, mostly by ideologues, of being less than patriotic, of bringing down a presidency, of therefore not being on the American team. And as a professional community we grew timid, worried about offending the political

establishment. And that establishment, sensing we had gone under the blankets, moved in to tame us in a big and permanent way. These new press controls are, for me, a reflection of that move. (1992, pp. 373-374)

Thus, far from provoking journalists into greater adversarial spirit, press restrictions have made them more compliant. The routines perspective provides another explanation for this reaction:

Once journalists had been granted access to the pool, their attitude toward news gathering became highly competitive. Many were more concerned with protecting their exclusive right to news from the front than with giving other journalists reasonable access to information. (Ottosen, 1993, p. 140)

As noted earlier in this chapter, competitive pressures have the paradoxical effect of making most journalists more compliant and dependent on sources, not more independent.

The routines involved in the media-military relationship have their own logic that shapes news content beyond the simple suppression or censorship of news. They impose an interpretive framework that works against alternative perspectives. As with other media-source relationships, the strong dependence of journalists on the military for information can produce co-optation, leading to uncritical acceptance of military frames of reference. This is often signified in news discourse by the use of *we* and similar terms that identify reporters with governmental and military interests: "*We* invaded," "our troops," "our country" (e.g., see Lee & Solomon, 1991).

Former military leaders and "experts," hired by the television networks to provide context for the Gulf conflict, regularly identified themselves with the Gulf policy; but so did journalists such as Barbara Walters, Tom Brokaw, and Dan Rather. As Kellner argues, using *we* and *our* rhetorically binds the anchors to the military and nation, as it binds the audience to the troops in a sense of shared national purpose (Kellner, 1992). As Ottosen (1993) found, this co-optation can be seen in the military commanders' treatment of pool journalists as "their" journalists, "an integrated part of their own forces" (p. 140).

This became clear when the head of an air base at the front provided pool journalists attached to the base with small U.S. flags that had been kept in the cockpit of the first plane bombing Baghdad. When he gave them the flags, he said, "You are warriors too." (p. 140)

Media dependence also means that the military's definition of success is absorbed uncritically by journalists. Thus, the military is allowed to claim achievements using terms of its own making, crowding out other potential criteria for evaluating the government's policy in diplomatic, economic, environmental, moral, and other areas.

By examining the Persian Gulf War we can see how routines developed that served mutual interests, creating a symbiotic relationship between media and military. These interlocking routines help explain the popularity of the high-tech pictures we saw on television, made from the "smart bombs" themselves, as they destroyed Iraqi military targets. The military benefited from showing how successfully their weapons had performed. The media, especially television, benefited by easily (and with little cost) obtaining dramatic footage to grab audience attention. And, of course, the defense manufacturers benefited enormously by reaping priceless advertising for their products. The routines perspective draws our attention to how such structured arrangements of information supplying and gathering are highly practical for military and press interests and for their mutual benefit. Identifying these routines gives a clearer picture of the structure underlying news of modern warfare.

### **SUMMARY**

Routines have an important impact on the production of symbolic content. They form the immediate environment within which individual media workers carry out their jobs. If these highly interconnected routines constrain the individual, they are themselves functions of constraints. The audience has limited time and attention, the media organization has limited resources, and sources limit and structure the material they provide. Yet those routines cannot be completely separated. The event focus of news, for example, is helpful to the organization in scheduling news but also helps the audience in providing a concrete focus for the message. Many of the same bureaucratic routines that are functional for the media organization are also used by external sources for their own advantage. Routines of newswork provide levers that power centers on the outside can grasp to influence content. Some metaphors, in fact, describe the press as straitjacketed or handcuffed by its own routines. The more powerful sources can lead members of the press to adapt to their own bureaucratic structure and rhythms. Less advantaged sources must conform to the media routines if they are to have a chance of getting into the news.



## Chapter 7

# Organizational Influences on Content

**I**n the last chapter we considered how media routines constrain individual media workers, represented by a ring encompassing the individual. Although they are carried out in different organizations, these routines and their constraints are shared by many different media, giving media workers much in common with others in their profession. These common routines allow, for example, a reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* to work for the *Washington Post* with little retraining, just as broadcast anchors and reporters jump from one network to another. Ultimately, however, routines are carried out within the boundaries of specific organizations, which hire, fire, and promote workers and pay their salaries. In this chapter we add another ring to our "doughnut," another set of constraints as we move up a level to look more closely at the organizational setting.

### ORGANIZATION-LEVEL QUESTIONS

Organizations differ in how they solve the problems of production. Here we ask: How are organizations structured, how do they differ, how is authority exercised within them, and what difference does it make to media content? In Hirsch's (1977) terms, this perspective emphasizes differences in organizational roles, internal structure, goals, technology, and markets. It emphasizes the difference made by ownership, goals, and policy. Organizational analysis seeks to explain variations in content that cannot be attributed to differences in routines and individuals. In the last chapter, we reasoned that if two newswriters behave in the same way in spite of individual differences, they are responding to similar work routines. Likewise, if we find that newspaper workers behave in the same way as broadcasters, in spite of different routines, then we will in turn

suspect that organizational similarities make it so. Perhaps both are owned by the same company with the same news policy, overriding the influence of different routines.

Considering an entire organization reveals how role perspectives change depending on an individual's position in the hierarchy. At times the different routines and requirements of media workers, though they may work in the same organization, bring them into conflict. An editor, for example, may need more news bureaus to adequately cover a community, but the publisher may not be able to justify the added expense. Similarly, the routines of editors and reporters, who often have different agendas, must be reconciled. As Gans (1979) suggests, editors are more audience-related whereas reporters are more source-related. The editor is not tied to a beat and thus can help reporters avoid being co-opted by their sources. Editors can request that reporters not conform to routine ground rules promoted by sources, or even rotate them to another beat. Ways must be found to mediate such conflicts. When push comes to shove, individual workers and their routines must be subordinated to the larger organization and its goals.

This approach has much in common with the routines perspective introduced in the last chapter. Both stress that media content is produced in an organizational and bureaucratic setting. Both are what Hirsch (1977) calls an "organization" perspective, but the more macro focus shows the points at which routines run counter to organizational logic, and it reveals internal tensions not indicated by an emphasis solely on routines or individuals.

### **Macro Nature of Organizational Level**

Figure 7.1 visually assigns organizational influence to a more macro level than routines and individual influence levels. Why is this? Here we are dealing with larger, more complicated, more macro structures. The routines of media work form the immediate context for the individual worker, whereas the organization consists of many specialized parts, each having its own routines. Any one person cannot have direct contact with them all. Also, specific policies issued from the top of the organization can overrule lower-level routines. (Although they themselves are individuals and subject to their own routines, organizational leaders make and enforce policy on behalf of the organization in the service of organization-level goals.) We question how these internal components fit together to create an organization and allow it to function.

### **The Organization as Conceptual Model**

It may be helpful at this point to return to our familiar news gatekeeper, but to consider it in relation to the organization, a system whose components must work together. The traditional gatekeeping process viewed news selection as a linear process, rather than as a complex series of interrelated decisions made at many levels. Rather than treat news as a product of specific, single gate-keepers, bounded though they may be by their routines, let us consider the

ideological level  
extramedia level  
organization level  
media routines level  
individual level

**FIGURE 7.1** Organizational influences on media content in the hierarchical model.

organization as a whole as the actual gatekeeper. An example may help to illustrate this. George Bailey and Larry Lichty (1972) examined how NBC News decided to air a dramatic film story during the Vietnam War. The researchers' "cybernetic" approach to gatekeeping likened the news organization to a central nervous control system with many interdependent parts.

During the 1968 Vietnam Tet offensive, an NBC camera crew was covering the skirmishes around Saigon. On Thursday, February 2, correspondent Howard Tuckner and his Vietnamese crew were filming when a group of South Vietnamese marines presented a prisoner to Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams was also there and won a Pulitzer Prize for his famous shot of what happened next, as General Loan calmly pulled out his gun and blew the prisoner's brains out.

That afternoon the NBC crew met with the Saigon bureau chief and discussed the best way to package the execution and other events of the day. A telex was sent to New York giving information about the available stories. When the executive producer of the "Huntley-Brinkley Report," Robert Northshield, arrived for work the next day, the message from Saigon was waiting, notifying him that film of the now widely publicized execution was available. He called the Tokyo bureau, where the film had been sent for satellite transmission, and expressed reservations about whether the film would be in "bad taste," but he was assured by the Tokyo producer that the film

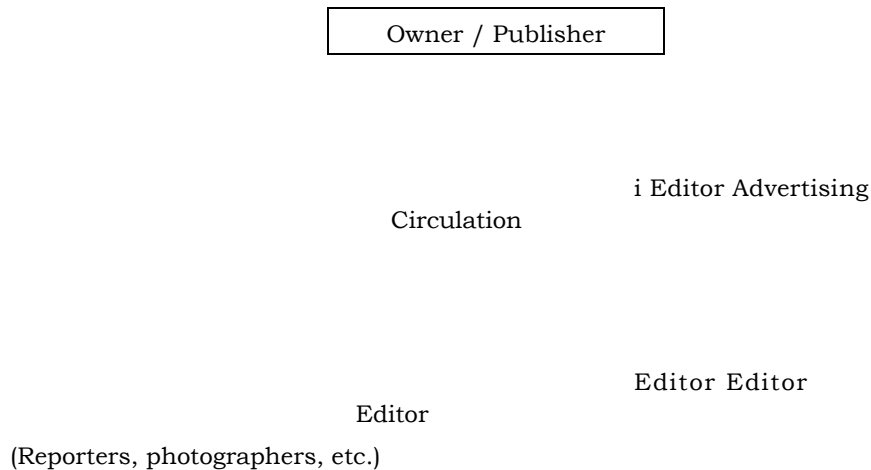
was "quite remarkable." Only after authorizing the satellite transmission was Northshield able to view the film in New York. He chose to cut the film at the point where the prisoner fell to the ground, rather than show the corpse with blood spurting out of its head, a scene he thought was "awful rough."

When the story made it to New York, the time remaining before air was short, requiring a go or no-go decision. However, the authors did not consider this a simple "gate," since New York had been involved in the decision-making process all along: "Reporters, editors, producers, others know which stories are most likely to be broadcast. Each 'gatekeeper' has to estimate how the program's executive producer and even his superiors—will receive the story" (Bailey & Lichty, 1972, p. 229). In this case the executive producer intervened more than usual because the film was stretching the boundaries of perceived audience taste; yet the story had strong news value, having already been certified by the print media in the form of Adams's still photo, and NBC's was the only network crew that had film of it. Such an exceptional case shows how the decision process engaged the organization at its many levels. The very fact that the story was not routine made the network's control more visible. As Bailey and Lichty observed, "The Loan film story was edited by a group. The organization was the gatekeeper" (p. 229).

### **Organizational Questions: The Organization Chart**

Perhaps the most basic and familiar model to help structure our questions at this level is the organization chart. These charts typically show how a company is set up, with boxes and lines to designate roles and lines of authority. Like any good model, the organization chart singles out objects and relationships of interest. Although it is visually simple, the condensed organization chart for a newspaper shown in Figure 7.2 contains a lot of information. The owner/ publisher occupies the top box. The news department is one of the three major departments within the organization, headed by an executive editor. The editor oversees other editors, who in turn supervise several reporters. This chart helps visualize four important questions.

1. *What are the organizational roles?* The boxes in the chart show who does what. As individuals are hired or promoted into these roles, they take on the duties and authorities associated with them. The number and type of roles represented show how specialized or differentiated are the jobs that constitute the media organization.
2. *How is the organization structured?* The arrangement of these boxes, indicated by the connecting arrows, shows the complexity of the organizational structure. What are the lines of authority between the departments? Is power centralized with strong vertical connections or spread among several departments? How are the different departments combined? Traditionally, for example, news departments are kept deliberately distinct



**FIGURE 7.2** Newspaper organization chart.

from other parts of the enterprise to preserve journalistic autonomy. In some organizations the owner/publisher may have a direct hand in day-to-day news decisions, whereas others have several intermediaries built into the structure. Of course, some lines of authority may be more tenuous than others, formal but irrelevant. A star columnist at a major paper, for example, may be below an editor in the organization chart, but for all practical purposes is given little oversight.

3. *What is the policy and how is it implemented?* The arrows in the chart indicate who answers to whom, but they don't say what policies are transmitted. Understanding an organization requires that we know something of the content of those arrows. What priorities are set? What goals are established? (Normally we assume that policy comes from the top, although at times lower-level employees exert pressure upward through employee stock ownership or union activity.)
4. *How are these policies enforced?* Finally, the chart suggests another important question. How are the lines of authority enforced? What control do executives have over workers to ensure that policies are carried out?

Implicit in each of these questions is how organizational factors affect media content. We review several research studies to address these points. Some use the organization as a model, to help conceptualize the production of content. Others have compared actual content differences between media, such as

between family- and group-owned newspapers. These studies may not explicitly say so, but they locate the cause of content variation in the differences between media organizations. Many nonacademic writers have contributed important insights as well, by describing the internal workings of major media companies. A host of books has been written about CBS alone, from which we will draw examples (e.g., Boyer, 1988; Friendly, 1967). When former high-ranking employees of media organizations recount their experiences, they speak from an important organization-level vantage point (e.g., Joyce, 1988). We use all these sources to gain an understanding of organization influences.

### **ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR GOALS**

An *organization* can be defined as the social, formal, usually economic entity that employs the media worker in order to produce media content. It has definite boundaries, such that we can tell who is and who isn't a member. It is goal directed, composed of interdependent parts, and bureaucratically structured—members perform specialized functions, in standardized roles. Organizations compete with other organizations for resources (e.g., Turow, 1984).

Many studies have focused specifically on news operations. Although they are part of a larger firm, news professionals often regard the business side for all practical purposes as outside their organization. Within the newsrooms proper, organizational analysis reminds us that they have the same bureaucratic characteristics as other organizations. Responsibility is divided, authority is structured, seniority is rewarded. There are factions, power struggles, and overly ambitious climbers.

To understand fully the organizational nature of media, however, we must consider the entire structure, within newsrooms and beyond. Ultimately, all members of an organization must answer to the owners and top management, who must coordinate the entire enterprise. The increasing complexity of the corporate ownership structure makes this coordination process more complex and raises important questions. Media organizations often find themselves controlled by nonmedia owners. Loews Corporation, a multifaceted company, includes insurance, tobacco, and hotels, for example, and owns CBS; and General Electric owns NBC. Thus, the lines of authority at NBC News extend from the lowest-level news employee to the chairman of the board of General Electric. We'll examine the implications of this in greater detail below.

Even if a media firm is not actually owned by another company, it can form important interlocks with it, both through stock ownership and in sharing members on their boards of directors (see Chapter 8). Capital Cities/ABC controls ESPN, but RJR Nabisco, a large media advertiser, is a major shareholder in ESPN too. GE owns NBC and is also a major defense contractor and nuclear power company. France's Matra Hachette Company is heavily involved in the publishing and defense industries (Bagdikian, 1992). Deciding where organizational boundaries stop in this complex network of interlocking interests can be very hard indeed.

Yet these broad connections have an important impact on content and must be considered.

### **The Primacy of Economic Goals**

For most organizations the primary goal is economic, to make a profit. Other goals are built into this overarching objective, such as to produce a quality product, serve the public, and achieve professional recognition. In unusual cases, the owner of an organization may choose to make the economic goal secondary. For example, the *Washington Times* is owned by News World Publications, an arm of the controversial Korean figure Rev. Sun Myung Moon; although the paper has suffered heavy financial losses, it continues to gain influence Inside the Beltway (Sperry, 1995). If professional objectives are to be met, the organization obviously cannot afford to ignore the economic goal indefinitely.

When a company is privately owned, the owners can operate the business as they see fit. But most large media firms are owned by stockholders. This form of ownership intensifies the purely economic objectives of the company. Managers of publicly traded companies can be replaced if they fail in their responsibility to the stockholders to maximize profit. The stock market cares little for public service if it means sacrificing profitability.

Other trends have also contributed to enhancing the economic objective. For one, media corporations have gotten larger. These larger firms take fewer risks than smaller ones, which includes exerting their power where possible to obtain economic and political advantage. These corporate goals can permeate the entire firm, as illustrated by a case related by Bagdikian (1992). An editor at Simon & Schuster, a division of Gulf + Western, proposed publication of a book in 1979 that was critical of large corporations. Even though the book did not mention Gulf + Western by name, the president of Simon & Schuster rejected the proposed book because it made all corporations look bad. Indeed, as media firms become more diversified and complex, the economic goal is the one thing the many parts of the corporation have in common. Press scholars have been particularly interested in how these economic goals affect the journalistic product.

### **Economics as Constraints**

Media sociologists, such as Herbert Gans and Leon Sigal, typically view economic considerations as constraints on newswork and, thus, as indirect influences on editorial decisions. Newsworkers find it hard to relate audience demand and advertising revenue to the nature and quality of news coverage (Sigal, 1973). Would one story, for example, raise newspaper circulation or television ratings more than another? And if so, by how much? Most media organizations want to make money, but the organizational structure itself acts as a barrier or filter between the larger organization's economic requirements and the routines of newswork. The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* decentralize their budgets,

giving each news desk control over its share of resources within which news decisions are made, with relatively little concern over cost-effectiveness. Thus, Sigal (1973) concludes that "profit maximization provides no guideposts, only constraints," arguing that these economic constraints establish the parameters within which gatekeepers must contend for scarce resources, an interaction that is bureaucratically structured.

In more profitable times, the network news departments often found themselves going over budget to cover unexpected wars, hostage crises, space shots, and other breaking news events. The professional instincts of news managers, rather than any hope of direct commercial payoff, required them to cover important stories. Former CBS news executive Gordon Manning once told his staff, "don't ever let me catch you missing a story because you wanted to save money" (Boyer, 1988, p. 89).

Indeed, Sigal suggests that news organizations are unlike others in their responsiveness to the profit motive:

So long as revenues are sufficient to ensure organizational survival, professional and social objectives take precedence over profits, particularly for the management of firms like the [Washington] *Post* and [New York] *Times*, where a single family maintains financial control. (1973, p. 8)

### **Economics as Dictates**

In recent years, this view appears less accurate. The national newspapers, newsmagazines, and networks studied by Sigal and Gans were relatively flush with money in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From all accounts the profit motive has become more important since these studies, rendering economic constraints into dictates and weakening the insulation of the news department from the larger firm. We should ask to what extent these economic "constraints," as they become more severe, affect content. Organizations can do two things in response: sell more of their profit to the right people, and/or reduce the cost of production.

In the rush of daily journalism, most stories cannot be weighed on the basis of their economic payoff. Many are clearly evaluated for their audience appeal, which translates into higher circulation and ratings, producing greater advertising revenue. As competition for audience attention grows, newspapers are doing more research to discover readers' wants and needs. Most papers of at least 100,000 circulation have in-house research capability (Veronis, 1989). At profit-hungry local television news stations around the country, a look at coverage during ratings sweeps periods shows that producers are well aware of the economic payoff of sex and violence, which grab attention in news just as they do in prime-time entertainment shows. Prime-time documentaries are now dealing less often with serious issues and more with celebrity interviews. In fact, it would seem that



television, given its weaker and briefer tradition of public and community service, is more prone to economic influences than news-papers. The examples below show how economics has affected the television news product.

Television networks and local stations have provided a particularly high-profile example of trimming production costs. In recent years, ABC, CBS, and NBC have all had to slash budgets, close bureaus, lay off correspondents, and miss stories they would have covered in the past. The skyrocketing salaries paid to star anchors and correspondents (designed to increase product appeal) have cut the resources available for newsgathering. News directors argue, of course, that these cuts do not affect news judgment, but clearly economic considerations have reduced the traditional core of local community reporting (Standish, 1989).

Before bringing its cost-cutting skills to its merger with ABC, Capital Cities, Inc., was known as one of the leanest local news operations in the country. It cut the news budget of KGO-TV in San Francisco by 20 percent, after which an assignment editor there concluded:

I have to laugh when I hear executives say the cutbacks haven't affected quality. A producer doesn't have the time he did in the past to carefully consider a story. There's not sufficient planning—not sufficient time to do stories. Too often people aren't getting that time when they say "Hey, I have a great story. I need two days to report it and two days to shoot it." (Robins, 1989, p. 46)

Another KGO staffer added, "We could do more documentaries if we added more reporters and producers. We could do more follow-up stories—we could be better at going back to pick up where we left off." (p. 56).

KTVY-TV, in Oklahoma City, had its normal staff and budget reduced after it was sold. To adjust, the station made several changes: (1) began planning: coverage farther in advance—a step that favors the prepackaged and promoted. "pseudo-event," (2) began using more picture stories that didn't require reporters, (3) purchased a "supplemental program service"—canned packaged stories, cheaper than adding more reporters, (4) began rerunning consumer pieces dressed up as the "Best of (5) introduced a feature in lieu of a reporter package, in which the meteorologist explained weather. The station news director said that even when profits improve, the "efficiencies" will probably remain (Standish, 1989, p. 23). Few local stations are willing to spend more money on news, even if revenues improve, once they find they can get a show on the air with the new cost-saving measures.

***Economic Dictates and Content: The Tobacco Issue.*** Media organizations can be compared on the basis of how they respond to these economic dictates, which may manifest themselves in less direct ways than in simple cost-benefit analysis for specific stories. Newspapers, for example, are inextricably linked to their local economies and for that reason, as Molotch (1976) argues, must promote growth. This economic influence exerts itself in a number of ways, as

we can illustrate in one particular case. Swisher and Reese (1992) compared newspapers in both tobacco- and non-tobacco-growing regions, reasoning that news threatening the tobacco industry should be fertile grounds for examining this Influence on content.

In 1990 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded that second-hand exposure to cigarette smoke causes 3,800 lung cancer deaths each year. The EPA began selecting researchers for a 16-member panel to review a draft report. As the leading expert on the dangers of passive smoking, Dr. David Burns was enlisted from the beginning. The Tobacco Institute, the industry's lobbying arm, protested Burns's involvement in a letter to the EPA, arguing that he was biased and would be unable to conduct a reasonable, impartial review of the report. After a Virginia congressman protested the appointment, the EPA removed Burns from the panel. An analysis of headlines written by different newspapers for the same Associated Press story of the incident shows how they differed by region in the *way* they characterized the event through their headline framing (see Table 7.1). Only two of five tobacco region headlines directly attributed the removal to industry efforts. By comparison, six of eight headlines in the nontobacco region directly attributed the dismissal to industry efforts; moreover, the language used in the nontobacco region headlines was less favorable toward the industry than was the language in the other newspapers.

**TABLE 7.1** Headlines for the Associated Press story on David Burns showing regional differences.

**Newspapers Inside Tobacco Region:**

Removal from EPA Cigarette Panel Linked to Tobacco Lobby Scientist  
Opposed by Bliley Is Taken Off Smoking Panel  
Tobacco Lobbyists, Lawmaker Get Scientist Off EPA Panel  
Tobacco Backers Get Scientist Taken Off Panel on Second-Hand Smoke  
Tobacco Lobbyists Triumph: "Anti-Smoking" Expert Removed from Panel

**Newspapers Outside Tobacco Region:**

Passive Smoking Expert Forced Out Tobacco  
Industry Changes EPA Panel  
Tobacco Industry Lights a Fire under Scientist, EPA Dumps Analyst from Panel Studying  
Passive Smoking  
Tobacco Industry's Lobbying Gets Scientist Removed from EPA Panel  
Lobbying Removes Scientist from Smoking Panel  
Panelist Removed after Lobbying by Tobacco Industry  
EPA Drops Smoking Expert  
Tobacco Lobby Ousts Scientist

SOURCE: K. Swisher and S. Reese, "The Smoking and Health Issue in Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 69 (1992), 995.

In addition, a quantitative analysis showed comparatively less tobacco region coverage of the "Great American Smokeout"—sponsored by the American Cancer Association—and slightly more coverage of the "Great American Welcome"—a counter-event sponsored by the Tobacco Institute. Newspapers in the tobacco region had comparatively more coverage using the Tobacco Institute as a source and much less coverage featuring the American Cancer Society. Although the routines of newswork prevent radical biasing effects, this study shows a definite shading of content attributable to the regional economic base of news organizations.

### **Economic Logic of the Media**

For the most part, the commercial mass media make their money by delivering audiences to advertisers. To the extent that they are consumed by desirable target audiences, print and broadcast media are attractive to advertisers. They must also provide messages compatible with the ads. *Ms. magazine*, for example, achieved a wide circulation, but its aggressive social issues content was not attractive to advertisers who preferred the *softer* content of the more traditional women's magazines ("Stakes Sold," 1989). Print media pages are a function of the amount of advertisements attracted. When ad lineage is down, a newspaper's news hole is reduced accordingly. Economics exerts an equally powerful though different effect on broadcast media. Whereas a newspaper or magazine can print additional pages for additional news, television and radio are restricted to no more than 24 hours in a day. Additional time for television news, *for example*, means less time for higher-rated entertainment programming. Breaking into regularly scheduled programs means lost advertising time and lost revenue.

The economic logic of television news can also be seen in the fate of other discretionary news programming: the network documentaries. Their small audiences make them unprofitable in a period when no network can afford to write off a block of time. Regular prime-time news "magazine" shows ("20/20," "Primetime Live") incorporate the same entertainment elements as other prime-time fare: celebrity interviews, sex and crime stories. They have evolved to meet the economic goals of the network organization.

For several reasons, television displays the influence of economic objectives on content most clearly. Most broadcast organizations make all their revenue from advertising. Unlike most daily newspapers, television stations compete head to head with comparable organizations offering a very similar product. The inflexible time within which to program commercials translates every programming decision into an economic trade-off. One famous dispute at CBS illustrates how strongly economic logic can influence media decisions. When Senator J. William Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee was holding hearings on the Vietnam War in early 1966, Fred Friendly was the head of CBS News. CBS's morning shows drew the majority of viewers, and preempting those shows to cover the hearings live was economically unfavorable. Nevertheless, Friendly had been given permission to do so for two full days of testimony, although not without resistance from his superiors. When Friendly asked for three additional days of

preemption to stay with the hearings, the request was rejected. Friendly replied: I find this situation untenable. You are making a news judgment but basing it on business criteria, and I can't do this job under these circumstances" (Friendly, 1967, p. 233).

Friendly acknowledged that the decision not to continue televising the hearings was one dictated by "the system" (p. 243). Regardless of the executive in charge, the organization required a decision consistent with its economic logic. In his classic study of network news, Edward Epstein concluded from this incident that Friendly showed that "even the president of a network news division cannot consistently buck the economic logic under which the network operates and survive" (Epstein, 1974, p. 123). The secondary goals of divisions within a media organization must ultimately be compatible with, if not further, the goals of the larger organization.

That television news was ever viewed as anything other than a business seems quaint by today's standards. When ABC broke the million dollar news salary barrier with Barbara Walters in the 1970s it raised hackles by seeming excessive and somehow antijournalistic. Now, not even an eyebrow is raised when ABC News anchor Diane Sawyer is offered \$4 million by the same network to renew her contract. She earns her salary by being presumably responsible for attracting the required audience, continuing the trend of paying top marquee news talent top salaries while paying everyone else less. Media critic Ken Auletta observes:

This is already the pattern in book publishing and records and movies: in those fields, everyone pursues big names because it is now presumed that hits will carry the rest of the business. These businesses have in common a yearning for brand names. With more channels and movies and games and home-shopping and sports and computer bulletin boards to choose from, brand names like Sawyer . . . stand out. (Auletta, 1994, p. 63)

General Electric's acquisition of NBC in 1986 also shows clearly the modern media's economic calculus. After the takeover, GE chairman Jack Welsh asked the news department for a cost-benefit analysis of the news product:

How much does it cost NBC News *per* story covered? How many stories that are covered actually get on the air? How often is each correspondent on? Why can't we save money by allowing some of the two hundred or so NBC affiliated stations to cover stories? (Auletta, 1991, p. 38)

A decline in NBC revenues from \$600 to \$200 million over two years is sufficient to cause speculation by financial analysts about an impending sale and a decline in professional morale within the news division (Carter, 1993). Few would doubt GE's choice to keep or sell NBC and its news operation would be anything but a hard-headed economic decision.

## **THE ORGANIZATION: ROLES AND STRUCTURE**

To carry out its goals, an organization must assign roles and develop a structure through which its members can work together in optimum fashion.

### **Media Organization Roles**

Within most media organizations there are three general levels. The front-line employees, such as writers, reporters, and creative staff, gather and package the raw material. The middle level consists of managers, editors, producers, and others who coordinate the process and mediate communication between the bottom and the top of the organization. Top-level corporate and news executives make organization policy, set budgets, make important personnel decisions, protect commercial and political interests of the firm, and when necessary defend the organization's employees from outside pressures (a frequent requirement in the case of news organizations).

The roles that people fill in organizations largely determine their views. Roles shape their orientation toward organizational issues by providing a distinct vantage point on and stake in decisions. Recruitment patterns help maintain the views associated with these roles. In television, for example, the path to station management traditionally has been through the sales positions, rather than through the news departments. This career path ensures that television managers think more like businesspersons and less like journalists.

Institutional position greatly determines the power vested in a role, although this power does not stem entirely from one's position in the organization chart. Lower-ranking employees may have special expertise or other means to thwart directives from the top, often making negotiation and compromise necessary.

### **Media Organization Structure**

Given this basic outline, there are any number of variations in the ways these roles can be combined and structured with organizations. The *power* associated with organization roles and the relationships between them vary both across and within media. Organization structure has a pervasive, if not readily identifiable, effect on media content.

In a typical newspaper organization a publisher runs the entire organization, which comprises the news, editorial, advertising, circulation, and production departments. A glance at the masthead of most papers reveals their top management. At the *New York Times*, for example, Publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger oversees the executive editor of the *paper* and the president, who in turn oversees the vice-presidents in charge of operations, production, advertising, finance/human resources, systems, and circulation.

The organization chart of the *Wall Street Journal* is shown in Figure 7.3. The managing editor oversees a number of other editors who are responsible

for specific sections of the paper. The level two editors, *who* oversee specialized reporting staffs, are shown below these first-level editors. The arrangement shown was implemented to streamline the placement of news and features, which all go through the news desk staffed by the three senior editors (Tannenbaum, 1989). The foreign editor, for example, would edit stories originating from the various overseas bureaus before sending them to the news desk. The managing editor reports to the publisher and president (who is also chief operating officer of the parent company, Dow Jones & Company, Inc.). The editor and vice-president of the *Journal* is the editorial director and also reports to the publisher, as do the vice presidents in charge of marketing, circulation, production, and technology. Thus, the editorial page is kept separate from the rest of the *paper* by having its editor report directly to the publisher.

The major television networks are also complex organizations, with the news divisions kept structurally distinct from the larger enterprise. At ABC, for example, reporters, writers, producers, and camera operators report to the executive producer, who reports to the president of the ABC News division. (See Figure 7.4) The news head is one of five presidents who report to the president of the Television Network Group. He and the heads of the Broadcast and Publishing Group also hold titles with the larger Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., parent company, which has its own corporate management team headed by the chair of the board and chief executive officer. ABC manages other news operations at its owned and operated stations. Each of these stations has a general manager *who* performs the same functions as a newspaper publisher, overseeing both the editorial and business sides. The news directors at these stations act like the newspaper editor, linking the news division and the rest of the organization, and supervising the producers, who have direct responsibility for specific programs.

Regardless of the medium, the ultimate power lies in ownership. In most companies, stock ownership entitles one to vote for directors on the board that runs the company. Top management is either part of the board or accountable to it. That stock may be broadly owned or controlled by one family or a few large investors. The *New York Times* is a good example of how ownership can be structured to ensure the autonomy and control of a media organization. The *Times* is part of the New York Times Company, a \$1.7 billion enterprise, which also owns other newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting companies. The paper has remained in the hands of descendants of Adolph S. Ochs, who purchased the paper in 1891, earning for itself a strong reputation as an independent and leading voice among the news media. Recognizing the importance of ownership, Ochs distributed company stock such that voting rights and control remain within the family (the Sulzbergers), and thus management is not subject to pressures from outside stockholders and threats of corporate takeovers. Further-more, a stockholders' *agreement* among the trustees prevents them from selling, merging, or giving up the control of the company. Such a move could be taken only if they unanimously agree that it would best serve the primary objective of the trust: "to maintain the editorial independence and integrity of the *New York Times* and to continue it as an independent newspaper, entirely fearless,

free of ulterior influence and unselfishly devoted to the public welfare" ("Notice of 1989 Annual Meeting and Proxy Statement," 1989, p. 3).

### **Newsmaking as an Organizational Process**

Having established the key components of organizational structure, we ask: How does this structure affect media content? How is the product mediated by the organization? In one sense, the structure simply reflects where an organization chooses to allocate its resources and how it adapts to its environment. A decision to maintain a news bureau in Washington, D.C., ensures that news from the capital has organization value, and clearly affects content. In addition, though, we may ask a more subtle question. What is the effect of the fact that media content is produced in an organizational setting?

In one sense, the organization formalizes conflict, an inevitable part of large, complex media operations, and the structure of these organizations represents the playing field upon which employees contend for scarce resources. For news media, Sigal says the division of labor "forms the lines of cleavage along which organization conflict crystallizes" (Sigal, 1973, p. 21). He argues that the uncertainty of news leaves considerable room for the influence of organizational politics.

Conflicts are built into the system, both vertically and horizontally. Reporters are typically oriented toward their sources, with whom they are in most frequent contact. This brings them into frequent conflict with editors, who are attuned more strongly to audience interest and organization goals (Tunstall, 1971; also Gans, 1979).

Lateral turf conflicts also occur between departments. Within a newspaper, for example, contending departments are represented by editors. They serve as mediators who must balance two constituencies—their reporting staffs and the larger organization. That is, they bargain but ultimately must reach an accommodation with other editors over resources, especially space in the publication. Conflict is seen particularly in turf struggles over stories, particularly those with overlapping jurisdictions (Sigal, 1973, p. 21). When the Watergate story broke, for example, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein were assigned the story by the metro desk. Later, of course, it became a major national story, coveted by the more elite national reporting staff (Halberstam, 1979). Similarly, if a Japanese firm buys a U.S. movie company, the business, entertainment, and foreign editors at a paper could conceivably all lay claim to the story.

The newspaper page one makeup process illustrates how organizational politics can affect news content. Editors hold conferences to determine what stories from the various desks (e.g., national, foreign, metropolitan) will make it onto the front page. Each editor advocates the stories being developed by his or her own staff. In his analysis of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* front-page stories, Sigal discovered that out of this bureaucratic conflict emerged a pattern of front-page stories that, over time, balanced the number of stories emanating from the three principal desks. Given that we would not expect actual

events to display such a neat balance, it can best be attributed to an organizational structure that requires the three desks to accommodate each other.

Each organizational structure gives rise to distinct occupational cultures. Because of the extra layer of bureaucracy between the *New York Times's* Washington bureau and its home office, the capital press corps considered it more an editor's paper as compared with the *Post*, which they viewed as a reporter's paper (Sigal, 1973).

At many newspapers, the traditional organizational structure has failed to adequately address journalistic needs. For example, at the South Carolina newspaper, the *State*, the traditional Metro, State, and Features staffs have been replaced by an organizational structure built around beats such as "quality life/ crime," "passages/learning," "community roots," and "government and city life"—"Too many good stories were falling through the cracks of a beat structure that looked better on paper than it worked in reality" (Johnson, 1993, p. 28). The *Orange County Register* has tried a similar shake-up in its traditional ways of allocating space and resources. Reporters are not assigned to sections, such as business or metro, but are grouped by "topics," including "Environment" or "Health"—"a physical and hierarchical cluster of reporters responsible for all aspects of health coverage—from research, to health delivery, to business" (p. 21).

### **How the Larger Organization Affects Content**

From the organizational perspective, we may ask how the producers of content are affected by other parts of a media organization. How does the business department of a newspaper, for example, affect the editorial side? How do other subsidiaries of a conglomerate affect that firm's media organizations? The wave of media mergers, takeovers, and shakeups in the 1980s focused attention on the impact of organizational structure on the media product. Particularly in news, the tradition is such that media scholars have been concerned with organizational influences on journalists that may distort their ability to objectively describe the world. An expose on the dangers of smoking, for example, may endanger a magazine's lucrative advertising, as *Mother Jones* found out in 1980 when tobacco companies pulled their ads following a critical article (Bagdikian, 1987). We can well ask what aspects of organizational structure contribute to or reduce this autonomy, and thus susceptibility to economic pressures.

Traditional studies of newswork paint a picture of a fiercely independent journalistic culture that keeps news departments largely autonomous within the larger organization. Indeed, news organizations are usually structured to ensure journalistic autonomy. However, no law dictates this division; in fact, the wall between the editorial and business sides of media organizations has been steadily eroding. Critics have charged the news media with sacrificing journalistic autonomy for greed and arrogance. From an organizational standpoint, it may be a very natural outgrowth of the fact that newspapers and television networks have both been facing declining revenues.



With increasing pressure for corporate profit in the newspaper industry, the wall between the business and editorial side has all but disappeared in the last 20 years, according to former *Chicago Tribune* editor and executive vice-president James Squires:

Today, with few exceptions, the final responsibility for newspaper content rests with the business executive in charge of the company, not the editor. Editors such as myself who are willing to bridge the gap between editorial and business are now the standard in the nation's newsrooms, Those reluctant to do so don't last long. (Squires, 1993, p. 20)

Today, media departments are urged to work closely in a so-called "wall-less" newspaper, where the marketing and editorial departments are more integrated. Newspapers such as the *Sacramento Bee* have made it routine to include marketing and promotion managers in newsroom meetings (Kerwin, 1993).

A new breed of budget-cutting market-oriented managers has been installed to oversee many newsrooms. For example, it was no accident that, facing declining profits in the early 1980s, CBS (the traditional leader in broadcast journalism since the days of Edward R. Murrow) turned to Edward *Joyce* to head the news division. Joyce had been a local television news director, known more for running profitable operations than *for* his journalistic credentials. Not a part of the strong CBS News journalistic tradition, Joyce was the perfect man to carry out the severe budget cuts mandated by the corporation (e.g., Boyer, 1988). Many at CBS News saw Joyce as less an advocate for the division and more a hatchet man for the larger corporation. Critics have charged that the decline in traditional news standards can be traced to the closer relationship between CBS News leaders and the higher leaders in the company, weakening the "wall" of independence that had always separated news from entertainment, ratings, networking, and profit (Stone, 1989).

The autonomy of the journalistic product is particularly vulnerable when advertising support is scarce. In a growing trend, some magazines have actively sought editorial tie-ins with advertisers. The magazine *Healthline*, for example, proposed to Weight Watchers that it run articles favorably featuring Weight Watchers, in exchange for a \$25,000 "sponsorship fee." Weight Watchers did not pay, but rival Nutri/System, Inc., did. Perhaps, not surprisingly, a subsequent article on a diet-ranking survey rated Nutri/System as the top diet program (Lipman, 1991). Moreover, the science and technology magazine *Omni* went so far as to feature a major advertiser's product on the cover. Motorola's new cellular phone was displayed in hologram form on the second page, visible through a cutout on the cover. The editor resigned in protest over the blatant surrender of editorial values to commercial considerations (Darts, 1991). The breach in editorial autonomy is not confined to small special interest magazines but extends to publications such as

*Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *Esquire*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, all charged with not properly identifying advertising sections made to resemble news content (Lipman, 1991).

Newspaper content is just as affected by influence from major advertisers. The real estate industry, for example, represents a major portion of newspaper advertising revenue in most communities. Consequently, some papers have simply given the real estate section over to the advertising department, resulting in a section of "advertorials." One Florida real estate editor claims, "I see the newspaper as an agent of prosperity ... there is a much closer interaction between ads and news than (there) used to be" (Lesly, 1991, p. 22).

As the corporate organization structure of the media has become more complex, concerns over journalistic autonomy have become greater. In the old days, the primary organizational threat to journalistic objectivity may have been an overeager publisher, anxious to influence news slant. Today, the threat is more abstract. Growing organizational complexity has inserted more hierarchical levels of bureaucracy between front-line media workers and top management. It stands to reason that the more distant these levels become, the less sensitive top management will be to the professional concerns of the workers at the bottom.

Furthermore, greater complexity brings greater interconnections between the top levels and institutions outside the organization. Reporters, for example, are advised not to be politically active for fear it will impede their objectivity. No such restrictions are placed on upper reaches of media management. While he was publisher of the *Austin American-Statesman*, for example, Roger Kintzel was also chair of the local Chamber of Commerce. The directors of many media firms also sit on the boards of other institutions, including banks, universities, and large corporations that rely heavily on media advertising. Thus, the larger and more complex the firm, the more likely that larger organizational factors will prevail over individual and routine influences.

#### **Network Autonomy: De Facto or De Jure?**

At the three major networks, it is understood that the autonomy of the news divisions safeguards their objectivity, and the larger corporation is not to tamper with their news judgment. This formal, de jure structure conceals other, de facto interference.

News departments may be organizationally buffered, but pressures can still be brought to bear. These influences are often subtle and unspoken, yet help enforce corporate policy. In 1984, an ABC News investigative team had conducted research into scandalous conditions at nursing homes owned by Charles Wick, a close friend of President Reagan and head of the U.S. Information Agency. ABC News brass balked at the proposed script and killed the story. Although theoretically the president of news (Ronne Arledge) made the final decisions on news, Wick's lawyer dealt directly with the higher corporate level. He wrote a complaint to the executive vice-president of ABC Inc. (before the Capital Cities buyout), saying the story "would hardly appear to be newsworthy." A copy of the letter was routed to the vice-president of ABC News two days

before the meeting at which the producers were told the story was not newsworthy and would not air (Dowie, 1985). The connection between these events, although circumstantial, suggests that organizations and their personnel are not immune from pressure.

Three examples follow, all dealing with CBS. As the traditional leader in broadcast journalism, CBS has attracted more than its share of analysis of its internal workings, from both scholars and former employees. Network news is a high-profile news medium of wide interest to the public, and the problems at CBS are similar in nature to organizational issues in other media. Furthermore, as a news operation that prides itself on professionalism and independence, CBS represents a conservative test of the likelihood of management interference in news judgment.

Top leaders in media organizations don't often try to influence specific stories, but they may do so under pressure from leaders of other powerful institutions. The published presidential files of former president Richard Nixon show that he was obsessed with how the news media treated him, and he pressured them accordingly. When his chief media monitor, White House counsel Charles Colson, met with CBS president Frank Stanton on July 15, 1971, Colson goaded Stanton by saying Nixon knew Stanton couldn't get involved with the judgment of the news department. Rising to the bait, Stanton said, "You're damn right I can do something about them and will!" adding that he "would certainly call the President of CBS News and raise hell" (Oudes, 1989, p. 296).

A more specific intervention by top CBS management came the next *year*. A major and unusually long (14-minute) story on the growing Watergate scandal aired on October 27, 1972, and predictably displeased the Nixon White House, which immediately contacted CBS chairman William Paley. David Halberstam notes that much corporate planning had gone into "setting the limits while at the same time keeping it from looking as if there were any" (Halberstam, 1979, p. 657). This allowed Paley to keep the news division reasonably contained while preserving the cover story of complete news independence. Paley summoned CBS president Frank Stanton and news division head Richard Salant to criticize the Watergate story and strongly advise against a planned Part II. After much subsequent discussion within the news division, the second piece did air, but with its length much reduced, from 14 minutes to 8 (Halberstam, 1979).

In his analysis of how CBS treated student dissent during the 1960s, Todd Gitlin examined the case of a 1965 CBS documentary, "The Berkeley Rebels." Three weeks before it was to air, CBS chairman Paley and president Stanton intervened to call for substantial modifications, including the addition of comments from the University of California president Clark Kerr, and a deprecating introduction and conclusion to be read by correspondent *Harry* Reasoner. The documentary's creator said he was told that Kerr had complained forcefully about the upcoming broadcast to Stanton, who in turn ordered the changes. Gitlin argues that the media elite enforce their standards, "even—if necessary—against the normal workings of journalistic routines" (Gitlin, 1980, pp. 63-65).

### **The Case of Time Inc.**

In the print media, the merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications Inc, in 1989 provides a good example of how the changing structure of media companies affects media content. Time Inc. (publisher of *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *People*) merged with Warner to become the largest U.S. entertainment/communication company. Indeed, one of the primary issues raised by the merger was the impact on "journalistic integrity and editorial independence," that is, the organizational autonomy of Time Inc. magazines. In rejecting Paramount's hostile takeover bid for *Time*, a Delaware Judge noted that *Time's* most important goal was to "maintain an adequate Time Inc." and preserve the "*Time* culture ... a managerial philosophy and distinctive structure that is intended to protect journalistic integrity from pressures from the business side of the enterprise" (Ciabattari, 1989a, p. 27) [our emphasis].

*Time's* original editor-in-chief was the strong-willed founder Henry Luce, whose will stipulated the company be "principally a journalistic enterprise . . . operated in the public interest as well as the interest of the stockholders" (Ciabattari, 1989a, p. 28). Luce made decisions on the basis of his own ideology and personal commitment to anticommunism, procapitalism, and "The American Century," not on business criteria. In fact, he looked down on his business department and often failed to attend business meetings, preferring to spend his time on his duties as "editor" (Halberstam, 1979). After Luce, this power was formalized by making the editor-in-chief a member of the Time Inc. board of directors, editorially equal to the chief executive officer. But the merger with Warner weakened this role by reducing the earnings contributed by Time publications to the conglomerate.

A more immediate concern of the journalistic community was how *Time* would cover its own story. How impartial would it be? Earlier Jason McManus, editor-in-chief, had decided not to cover the March 4, Time Warner merger announcement, a story big enough for both the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*. McManus later said he didn't want it to appear to be part of a big "public relations rollout" (Ciabattari, 1989b, p. 34). Thus, reporting on the larger enterprise is a no-win situation. When Paramount tried to disrupt the merger with a hostile takeover, rival *Newsweek* made it a cover story (June 26). *Time* journalists worried that they were getting scooped on their own story (Ciabattari, 1989b).

### **Newspapers: The Editor as Manager or Journalist**

The same concerns about autonomy are being raised at newspapers as well. Of particular interest are the changing roles of editors, along with their place in the organizational structure. These changes have important implications for content. Newspapers, like television, have faced declining audiences and increasing competition. This has ushered in a greater marketing orientation among media managers to try to maximize productivity, a phenomenon noted above.

One indication of the erosion in journalistic autonomy is the way in which editors relate to the organization. Do they feel allegiance to the news or business side of the enterprise? In an analysis of news management trends in daily newspapers, Underwood (1988) maintains that "as corporations have extended their hold on U.S. newspapers, the editors of these newspapers have begun to behave more and more like the managers of any other corporate entity" (p. 23). For example, upon becoming executive editor at the Gannett-owned *Seattle Times*, Michael R. Fancher outlined his goals in 1986 to his publisher, saying that 40 percent of his time would be devoted to monitoring newsroom budgets and coordinating its marketing role (he failed to mention anything about news per se). He would oversee a newsroom management reorganization and be liaison with the circulation department (Underwood, 1988).

Underwood concludes that profit pressures and the corporate MBA mentality are transforming the newspaper business, a traditional haven for the "independent, irreverent, and creative spirits" (p. 24). Here we see the clash between individual and organizational values. Whereas the organization values short stories to increase audience appeal and revenue, writers obviously like longer pieces that leave more room for creativity. A former *Detroit News* executive editor says modern management techniques (p. 24) are sapping the vitality of creative editors and reporters: "At a managed newspaper it beats you down" (p. 25). These trends lead us to question whether a top-down organization management structure can be carried to such an extreme that the lower-level workers no longer have the freedom traditionally associated with journalists. Clearly, the media workers' opinions of the new management *vary* depending on their position within the organization.

German sociologist Max Weber wrote of the drive in Western culture toward "rationality," ever-increasing control, predictability, and stability in human relations and organizations (King, 1987, p. 125). This top-down organization structure, which dictates decisions derived from audience marketing, exemplifies the rationalization of the news organization. Bureaucratic structures ensure conformity. Reporters work from lists of stories approved by editors.

*USA Today* is the modern prototype of the editor- and market-driven paper. Its organization structure can be contrasted with that of the *San Francisco Examiner*, the managing editor of which is described as identifying with reporters and having little patience with administrative bureaucratic burdens: The paper's executive editor advocates getting good people and giving them a lot of rope (Underwood, 1988, p. 26). The *Examiner's* structure has the effect of giving relatively more power to the individual at the expense of the organization. Fancher offers an opposing view, arguing:

Editors must understand dollars and cents today better than ever before. Keeping newsroom operating expenses within budget isn't enough. Editors must understand where their budgets fit with the larger financial picture of their company, and where news priorities fit in the overall strategic plan. (1987, p. 79)

He argues that the editor of a newspaper is responsible for keeping the organism as a whole functioning by coordinating both journalistic and marketing efforts: "Today the editor's job is more a function of 'management' than of editing—managing people, managing systems, and managing resources" (p. 73).

Analyzing these changing roles helps us *evaluate* the autonomy and relative power of the editorial side of a paper. If the editor controls both the editorial and business sides of the paper, the relative power of the journalistic division is less. The person making decisions primarily on journalistic grounds occupies a place *somewhere* below the editor in this case. For example, the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was also placed in charge of circulation and promotion, and made president of Philadelphia Newspapers Inc., an unusual move that broke through the traditional wall between the editorial and business sides of the organization. It was made, according to the publisher, to better coordinate *resources* (Puncher, 1987). By doing so, the editor is necessarily drawn into a *greater* marketing posture, responding to audience interests rather than to any autonomous standards internal to the journalistic profession. Ironically, economic pressures have forced news organizations to revise their structure to favor audience-based routines.

As nonjournalistic routines reach further down into the newsroom, the craft values of journalism often collide with "MBA" values. Installing managers in positions formerly filled by newspeople makes a strong impact on content. It changes the entire organizational culture and the extent to which one set of values holds sway over others.

### **Influence of Corporate Synergy**

We have been talking mostly about journalism, but many of the same concerns can be expressed for other media, *even* those producing entertainment fare. Of special interest in recent years is the "synergy" sought by media organizations, the ability for their products to complement and *reinforce* one another. Ben Bagdikian offers one model scenario to media synergy:

Giant Corporation Inc. owns subsidiaries in every medium. One of its magazines buys (or commissions) an article that can be expanded into a book, whose author is widely interviewed in the company magazines and on its broadcast stations. The book is turned into a screenplay for the company movie studios, and the film is automatically booked into the company's chain of theaters. The movie has a sound track that is released on the company record label. The vocalist is turned into an instant celebrity by cover features in the company magazines and *interviews* on its television stations. The recording is played on the company's chain of Top 40 radio stations. The movie is eventually issued by the firm's videocassette division and shown on company television stations. After that, rerun rights are sold to other television stations around the world. (Bagdikian, 1989, p. 812)

In the case of the Time Warner transaction, for example, critics had speculated that the new synergistic firm would benefit from entertainment shows promoted in the magazines. The same questions have been raised in the case of films produced by large conglomerates. Now it is not uncommon for company products to be featured in company films. When Coca-Cola controlled Columbia Pictures, for example, only its beverages could be featured.

Why should we be concerned with this process? Critics like Mark Crispin Miller have questioned the implications for cinematic narrative, particularly when the needs of CEOs and advertisers predominate over needs (and routines) of filmmakers. We would expect the story to be affirmative and upbeat, avoiding anything that would reflect negatively on the company's products. There is cause for concern when messages are selected not necessarily for their importance to an audience, their newsworthiness, or their artistic significance, but for how they fit into a larger organizational marketing scheme.

### **Ownership and Policy**

At the top command posts of media organizations sit the owners. Their influence has attracted substantial scholarly interest. Ultimately media owners or their appointed top executives have the final say in what the organization does. If the employees don't like it, they can quit. Others will be found to take their place, and routines can always be changed. Conservative action groups led by Jesse Helms appreciated the influence of ownership in 1985, when *they* urged their supporters to buy stock in CBS and "become Dan Rather's boss," ("Conservatives," 1985).

In the newspaper industry, countervailing influences on this power, such as unions, have weakened, due in part to the trend toward greater automation. This has given owner-publishers even greater control. When real estate developer and owner of *US News & World Report* Mortimer Zuckerman took over as head of the *New York Daily News*, for example, he cut by a third the number of unionized news and business employees (Glaberson, 1993). In rare instances, however, employees have rebelled against owner control. When New York real estate millionaire Abe Hirschfeld tried to take over the *New York Post* in 1993, the employees took action, fighting economic forces seemingly beyond their control. They devoted most of one issue to criticizing the proposed new owner, arguing that he would not be good for the paper. Ultimately, Rupert Murdoch was given control of the paper by the bankruptcy court judge (Consoli, 1993). One of the reporters commented:

In this era of declining circulation and ad revenue, newspapers are supposed to die neat and orderly deaths—to be shut down by the chains that own them in a mannered, dignified fashion. Screw that. We're not owned by some stinking chain and we're probably not dignified or mannered. (Hoffmann, 1993, p. 28)

The owner's influence can be for good or ill. The most prolonged debate over ownership has been in the newspaper industry, where, early on, Nixon and Jones (1956) concluded that differences in quality appear to hinge on the social responsibility and competence of the owners and operators of a newspaper. The concerns of media scholars have changed with the nature of media ownership, but they continue to question how today's owners have lived up to this responsibility. This responsibility has become greatly diffused, however. Fewer independent owners run their own media organizations, which have become but part of the larger corporate fabric.

We are now less concerned with overt propaganda-style *messages*, promoted by ideological publishers such as Robert McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune*, known for his ultraconservative editorial policy until his death in 1955. The "Colonel's" opposition to change often ran counter to both public opinion and even his own copy editors (Windhauser, Norton, & Rhodes, 1983). Media researchers have in recent years explored questions of news quality, quantity, and emphasis on the local community. If otherwise similar media with different owners vary in their content, we presume an organizational influence that supersedes whatever routines may be held in common.

### **Changes in Corporate Ownership**

Changes in ownership show their influence most clearly. This may come in the form of a corporate takeover, which often brings different values, objectives, culture, and, ultimately, content. Indeed, in recent years the buying and selling of large newspaper and broadcasting companies has become a big story in its own right.

Ownership changes at the big three television networks in the 1980s were widely covered and served as prominent examples of this phenomenon. In the mid-1980s, declining advertising revenues and rising costs put the networks in a crunch. Media critic Jeff Greenfield observed:

What all three networks now had in common was a greatly increased debt-to-equity ratio, and new owners with no link to the old tradition that tended to shield network news from the accountants and cost managers. These owners began asking questions about a division that cost more money than it generated, and that was, moreover, under the direct control of the network. (Greenfield, 1987, p. 29)

The new network owners—Tisch/Loews, Capital Cities, and General Electric—clearly imposed a news policy with far-reaching effects. News was to be treated like their other businesses, expected to support itself—a departure from the traditional view that network news is a loss-leader public service supported by the entertainment side of the enterprise.

These changes have direct implications for content. Media critic Peter Boyer, for example, in decrying the trend toward more sensational, lurid, docudrama-style news, found the root cause in



the organization—namely, the "cataclysmic economic change that has jolted the networks in the last five years bringing new managements and with them new philosophies about the missions of the news divisions" (Boyer, 1989, p. 23).

The newspaper industry has had its share of high-profile ownership changes as well. Australian press magnate Rupert Murdoch, perhaps today's most notorious publisher, bought the *Chicago Sun-Times* in 1984 and made it more sensationalistic, like his *New York Post* and *Boston Herald*. A large number of *Sun-Times* staffers quit, including the top management, and liberal columnists Ellen Goodman and Garry Wills were dropped ("Roger Simon," 1984). Murdoch used his British papers, the *Sun* and the *Times* of London, to help Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Before selling the *New York Post* in 1988, Murdoch had used that paper to render similar support to Ronald Reagan (Bagdikian, 1989, p. 806). When Murdoch bought back the *New York Post* in 1993, he was said to desire a continuing editorial voice, especially in conservative politics (e.g., Glaberson, 1993).

The influence of a flamboyant owner like Murdoch can be easily identified and evaluated, but few media buyers today maintain as high a profile as Murdoch. They are not crusaders, *preferring* to acquire or sell their holdings using economic criteria. Today, there are fewer of the overtly partisan owner/publishers in the mold of *Los Angeles Times* publisher Norman Chandler, who—like most newspaper publishers—was a strong Republican and helped Richard Nixon throughout his career; William Randolph Hearst (who put his *New York Journal-American* to work on behalf of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his communist witch-hunt); and *Time* publisher Henry Luce, who also promoted Nixon, a politician eminently compatible with Luce's staunch anticommunism (Halberstam, 1979). Even in the case of Murdoch, his sensationalism is formulaic and calculated to boost circulation, his partisanship designed to curry political advantage for his enterprises.

The "bias" of news and media content in favor of large-scale corporate interests is largely invisible to the audience. Only when owners express strongly held political views does the issue of potential bias emerge. For example, the journalistic community viewed with suspicion the bid by television evangelist Pat Robertson to buy UPI in 1992. Also of concern was a competitive bid from a consortium headed by Leon Charney, who was said to have close ties with Israel (Gersh, 1992). When taking over the *New York Daily News*, Mort Zuckerman was widely criticized for his potential editorial power. Contrary to most journalistic commentary, for example, Zuckerman praised the restrictions placed on the press during the Gulf War (Husseini & Naureckas, 1993): "As an owner he has a history of imposing his views on news content, sometimes in defiance of journalistic standards or in pursuit of personal interests" (p. 18). Thus, prospective religious, political, and other idiosyncratic personal bias raises greater alarm about owner influence than the much more fundamental corporate economic bias. Regardless of motive, by establishing policy for the entire organization, media owners have an unmistakable impact on media content.

Another important feature of ownership patterns today is the sheer size of media conglomerates. The number of publications on the newsstand and radio and television stations, as

well as new communication channels, make it appear that ownership is widely distributed. In truth, though, most media are owned by a handful of corporate media giants.

Tracing the organizational connections among media reveals greater reasons for concern over the homogenization of content and ownership as an organizational influence. In the fourth edition of his book, *The Media Monopoly* (1992), Ben Bagdikian reports that 20 corporations control most of the media business in the United States; this is down from 50 corporations when the book was first published in 1982. Five mammoth firms that Bagdikian claims now dominate the world's mass media are Time Warner Inc.; Bertelsmann AG (Germany); News Corporation Ltd. (Murdoch's Australia-based firm); Hachette SA (France); Capital Cities/ABC Inc.

### **Ownership and Internal Slant: Newspapers**

We notice the effects of ownership most when owners try to impose their views on media content. This is of particular concern in the news media, with its tradition of objective news reporting. Unlike broadcasting, newspapers traditionally endorse political candidates. Thus, one may assume that these endorsements provide a direct measure of the owner's or publisher's political attitude or that of the editorial board. To what extent do these attitudes find their way into the more "objective" news pages? Traditionally, newspapers have divided their editorial voice from more objective news reporting, usually placing these opinions on a separate page or pages. Several studies have examined the extent to which a paper slants its news reporting to conform to its editorial voice. Doing so would indicate that decisions at the top levels of the organization had superseded the content dictated by the routines of objective newsgathering. (This distinction between the "objective" news pages and the "subjective" editorial pages seems quaint to Europeans. In London, for example, there are several papers that each occupy a different position in the political spectrum and present their content—front page or editorial page—in accordance with those views.)

Since 1940, newspapers have shown an overwhelming tendency to endorse Republican candidates. Only in two presidential elections since then have Democrats received more support: in the 1964 race between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater, and in the 1992 campaign between Bill Clinton and George Bush. Many papers now, however, are declining to endorse a candidate at all, rising from 13.4 percent uncommitted in 1940 to 62.8 percent in 1992 ("Clinton's the choice," 1992). This depoliticization of newspaper endorsements matches the corporate trend away from overt partisan or personal bias. In general, newspapers have rarely been blatant about systematically favoring in news articles the candidates endorsed in their editorials. There is evidence that newspapers bias their reporting of public opinion campaign polls. Poll coverage favors those candidates that newspapers endorse, unless a near competitor has endorsed someone else, in which case coverage is more evenhanded. Interestingly, even

papers not making endorsements still show significant bias in the way they report these polls, indicating that not taking an editorial stand does not mean a paper is free of bias (Wilhoit & Auh, 1974).

Of course, at most papers, letting editorial slant influence the news would make the newspaper an easy target for criticism. When one gets away from the traditional election-style endorsements and coverage, there is greater potential for slanting. Donohew (1967) found a direct, positive relationship between a publisher's attitude toward an issue and that publisher's paper's treatment of the issue. More specifically, Mann (1974) found that in reporting anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in the mid-1960s, pro-war papers gave smaller crowd estimates than did antiwar papers. News coverage of the same rally differed dramatically between the *Charlotte Observer*, which called demonstrators "honorable Americans," and the *Atlanta Constitution*, which disparaged marchers as "vile-mouthed anti-American extremists" with the "official blessings of the North Vietnam government" (p. 282). Perhaps because it is more difficult to gauge, this form of slant has been less frequently examined.

### **Multiple Media Ownership**

Media scholars have paid particularly close attention to those companies owning more than one media organization. Absentee owners may be less inclined to adopt a vigorous editorial policy and aggressive news coverage. The greater the physical distance of the owners from the community being served, the more community interests may take a backseat to corporate and economic factors.

### **Chain v. Independent Ownership**

The debate over newspaper chain ownership has increased as the number of independently owned papers has continued to decline. (After World War II, 80 percent of U.S. dailies were independently owned compared with 28 percent by 1986.) Fewer concerns have been raised over broadcast ownership, given the restrictions on the number of stations that can be owned by one company and the weaker public service tradition of local broadcasting. (One study found that group-owned stations broadcast more news than those that are not group-owned [Wirth & Wollert, 1976].) Chain ownership usually means absentee ownership, and that raises the question of whether larger organization imperatives may outweigh local community concerns when it comes to news coverage. A group of scholars on press concentration has concluded that "groups [or chains] do not necessarily mean a problem for local autonomy, but the potential exists in many chain ownership situations" (Picard, Winter, McCombs, & Lacy, 1988, p. 204).

Is there a meaningful organizational difference between chain and independent papers? One indication examined by Parsons, Finnegan, and Benham (1988) involves the roles in which employees perceive themselves. Whereas the employee of the independent paper is socialized to the single local organization, the chain-paper employee is socialized additionally to the larger chain that transcends the local community. Thus, the organizational role may take precedence

over the chain employee's role as a member of the community. These workers form weaker community attachments due to the job mobility necessary to rise within the larger firm. A survey of managing editors shows that the prominence of community role expectations is reduced in chain papers, and is conflict resolved in favor of the organization (Parsons et al., 1988).

Bagdikian contends that when chains take over a paper, they typically increase ad and subscription rates, reduce serious news—which is more expensive to gather—and hire less qualified journalists (Bagdikian, 1987). However, research has found both positive and negative effects of chain ownership (Hale, 1988). Chains do not necessarily diminish a paper's performance. Indeed, chains can bring acquisitions more in line with industry standards for the proportion of space devoted to news, editorial, and feature selection, and they can infuse new capital and vigor.

Although broad outlines of the product—such as size of news hole, number of columns, editorials, and so on—do not vary consistently with ownership, other more subtle differences in tone and slant do emerge. Clearly, newspapers vary in slant with the ownership. A study of news coverage before and after a takeover of a local paper by Gannett, the country's largest chain, found that the *Knoxville Journal* became more favorable toward the local World's Fair project after the sale (Browning, Grierson, & Howard, 1984). The professional concerns of their news employees limit publishers in the heavy-handed promotion of their views. A closer, more qualitative look at actual content does reveal important differences.

In an analysis of 21 Minnesota dailies, Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor (1985) found that locally owned or in-state owned papers devoted three times the space to reporting local community conflict than chain-owned papers with head-quarters out of state. Furthermore, during a 14-year period from 1965 to 1979, papers remaining under in-state ownership increased coverage of local government conflict by almost a third, whereas those under out-of-state ownership in 1979 had decreased such reporting by nearly half (p 498).

Ownership also affects a paper's editorials. Thrift (1977), for example, found that chain newspapers published fewer argumentative editorials, fewer editorials on local matters, and fewer editorials on controversial topics than independent papers.

At least one study has shown substantial partisan differences by ownership. A survey of editorial editors at papers with circulation of 50,000 or greater found that 55 percent of editors at independently owned papers said they had a Republican publisher versus 93 percent of editors at chain-owned papers. And, in fact, 65 percent of chain papers endorsed Reagan in 1984 versus 44 percent of independents; 25 percent of the chain papers endorsed Mondale versus 44 percent of the independents (St. Dizier, 1986).

In general, chain newspapers are more likely to endorse presidential candidates and to endorse the favored candidate of the press overall. Chains are overwhelmingly homogeneous in these endorsements, with virtually all members of respective chains endorsing the same candidate (Wackman, Gillmor, Gaziano, & Dennis, 1975). There does not, however, appear to be overt collusion by

editorialists within the chain to stress any particular issue or promote any particular political party (Wagenberg & Soderlund, 1975). Chains may not dictate editorial policy overtly, but there is de facto convergence toward similar views.

### **Cross-Ownership**

Other patterns of ownership that have concerned scholars involve companies that own both newspapers and broadcast organizations, so-called cross-ownership. Of particular interest is how the merging of the two media, with different organizational requirements and structure, affects the news product in both. Cross-ownership has been criticized on grounds of media diversity, because it means one company may own both the television and newspaper outlets in a community.

Cross-owned television stations and newspapers transmit just as much if not more news and public affairs information than media that are not cross-owned (Wirth & Wollert, 1976; Wollert, 1978). Indeed, Wollert argues that a company's newspaper, with its primary orientation toward news, may benefit its television counterpart by infusing its news values into the more entertainment-oriented broadcast organization.

However, as to individual communities, media news is less comprehensive in towns where all the media are owned by one company compared with those towns with multiple media owners (Stempel, 1973).

### **CONTROL: HOW IS POWER EXERCISED?**

How does an organization see to it that its members conform to its policies? How does the organization exert control over its members in the production of content? Editors must control reporters, publishers must control editors, and the owner(s) must control the publishers. Control is essential, given the inherent conflict within an organization. Indeed, Paul Hirsch notes that "organizational analysis reminds us that the issue here is not whether social control exists (for it is a constant), but rather who exercises power and for what reasons" (1977, p. 26). The organization must socialize individual workers to their routines and enforce them, while handling situations not covered by the routines. Most control is straightforward and accomplished through a reward system. Promotions and salary raises go to the workers who perform their jobs well; those who don't are demoted or fired. Other control is equally powerful because it is subtle and unquestioned.

### **Control in the News Business**

The question of control becomes particularly problematic in the news business, where journalists often assert their own autonomy against what they consider management interference in their professional turf. Nevertheless, as we have seen, organization leaders can dictate content directly with explicit policy

guidelines. As a recent example, one paper felt compelled to express an overt policy in response to its coverage of a rally for homosexual rights. A memo urged news staffers to "never forget that we are putting out family newspapers in conservative communities. We must never forget that this should be a prime consideration in story and photo selection, in editing, and in cutline and headline writing" ("Document," 1989). However, this kind of influence is less common than other forms of control, which are less direct but just as powerful.

Studies of newsrooms show that overt conflicts over stories don't come up very often. Beyond the newsroom, both Gans and Sigal agree that publishers do not often exert direct power on a day-to-day basis. Obviously, the multitude of daily news decisions would make closer supervision impossible. Instead, the organization sets the boundaries and guidelines to direct these decisions. Tunstall (1971), for example, argues that most organizational policy is traditional and relatively fixed. Journalists learn these often unwritten policies through experience and by observing what kinds of stories are used by the organization. As demonstrated by the cases of intervention in news decisions by ABC and CBS, top management gets involved when the stakes are high. This intervention itself has the effect of letting newsmen know that the boundaries have been reached.

The absence of visible attempts at control does not mean that none are being made. Whenever media workers deduce what their supervisors want and give it to them, de facto control has been exercised. The predictable routines of newsgathering prevent many policy conflicts; but these routines are part of and meet larger organizational requirements, which establish the boundaries of acceptability. The relations between reporters and editors cannot be too heavy-handed. Reporters can counterbalance the power of the editor to the extent they have the support of their peers and greater firsthand knowledge of the subject matter than the editor. Each must rely on the other if they are to fulfill the inexorable demands of daily newsgathering.

Gans (1979) notes that the power of top editors and superiors is maintained by organizationwide pressures for conformity. Enhancing this power are the remoteness of these executives, the layers of bureaucracy between them and lower levels, and the fact that they don't have to justify or explain their decisions, "forcing underlings to guess what will please or displease them" (p. 97). Interestingly, reporters often object to an editor changing their stories but consider it appropriate for editors to kill stories altogether. Writing is considered the reporter's job, and editors properly decide what makes it into a publication. By killing one story, an editor can cause a reporter to self-censor subsequent ones. Because they strive to be taken seriously, reporters are vulnerable to pressure to conform. If they start saying things that diverge from the common wisdom, they are noticed. Editors may doubt their credibility and wonder if they can be trusted—it's safer to hew to the common wisdom. These pressures to conform may be subtle, as indicated by Boston Globe editorial writer Randolph Ryan, who reports that he is known in the newsroom as "Sandino" because he has written critically about Reagan's policy toward Nicaragua (Personal communication,

1989, October 23). (And the editorial page of the *Globe* is considered to be among the most liberal in the country!)

### **Breed's Social Control in the Newsroom**

In one of the early classic studies in media sociology, Warren Breed asked how news organizations enforce "*policy*." *By policy* he meant not a firm's printed rules but the covert and "consistent orientation" of a paper's news and editorials toward issues and events, revolving primarily around partisan, class, and racial divisions (Breed, 1955, p. 327).

Breed asked: "How is policy maintained, despite the fact that it often contravenes journalistic norms, that staffers often personally disagree with it, and that executives cannot legitimately command that it be followed?" (p. 330). Breed notes that if the job of the organization were to report the news as objectively as possible, "control" would not be as important; but this is not the organization's only goal. Breed concludes that the primary news organization objective "to get the news" can *override* individual disagreements over, for example, professional concerns with objectivity. As Breed put it: "News comes first, and there is always news to get" (p. 342).

Other means of control include editorial blue-penciling, striking out parts of a story. Reporters soon learn what objectionable phrases or facts to leave out. In addition, executives give rare reprimands or make explicit policy decisions (as in the case of the homosexual rally mentioned above), thus further enforcing the boundaries. Internal house organ papers also help tell reporters what is acceptable. Breed says that "in the infrequent case that an anti-policy story reaches the city desk, the story is changed; extraneous reasons, such as the pressure of time and space, are given *for the change*. ...Thus the policy remains not only covert but undiscussed and therefore unchanged" (p. 339).

As the organizations that employ journalists have grown larger and more bureaucratic, they have also exerted more pressure to conform to organizational interests. Eric Elbot (1992) confirms Breed's idea of social control in a more modern context, arguing that reporters feel the "invisible hand" if they threaten institutional interests—which include promoting organizational growth. Self-regulation and self-censorship, however, mean that this hand is rarely needed.

Hence, the reporter who best reflects the interests of the institutions on his or her beat is rewarded with scoops, special interviews, "inside" information, air-time, Bylines—and recognitions (or reputation) for being authoritative on these topics.... Those reporters who most threaten institutional interests are the ones we used to read about. The independent, curious, unafraid investigators who are constantly looking for stories behind the story which may identify the real institutional interests and their activities. (p. 6)

In an application of Breed's concepts, Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) focused on minorities in the newsroom. Black, Hispanic, and other ethnic media workers

have many reasons for not conforming to organization policy. They often feel isolated and dissatisfied with media coverage of minority issues and portrayal of minorities in general. Like Breed, Wilson and Gutierrez note that such unwritten policies are stronger than formal ones, which usually come with procedures for changing them. They note that minority reporters may be told their stories lack newsworthiness or were dropped due to space or time limitations. Given the reporters' primary task to get work in the paper or on the air, failing to do so reflects on professional competence.

The individual level of analysis suggests that a more diverse workforce will improve the media's ability to better reflect a multicultural society. Even when minority journalists have reached the top of their profession and, thus, presumably achieved their greatest influence, their experience must be evaluated in view of their adaptation to organizational culture. In *Volunteer Slavery*, former *Washington Post* reporter Jill Nelson (1993) provides valuable insight into her experience as an African-American journalist.

For many of the black folks there, the *Washington Post* is neither heaven nor hell, but some weird, journalistic purgatory, a seemingly endless proving ground on which, just when you think you've won the game, the rules are changed. This is nothing new for African-Americans, corporate or otherwise, but it does tend to make some of us *crazy*. Whatever field we're in, we have to justify ourselves daily to people who'd rather we weren't around. For black journalists, the situation is particularly tricky, since we're in a profession that professes to tell "the truth" and holds the chimera of objectivity as its central tenet. (p. 85)

Nelson observes that the more successful minority journalists refashion them-selves in the image of white men, becoming as nonthreatening as possible to the dominant Anglo, male culture. A familiar technique, she argues, is for an African-American reporter to write a front-page story exposing in vivid detail some aspect of pathology in the black community. Thus, in view of organizational policy, even minority employees may not be able to change the way media portray minority issues. Policy perpetuates the majority culture viewpoint, as institutionalized in the views of the organization. Clearly, at the organizational level we must question the extent to which organizational values predominate in the face of individual values, and how individuals adapt to the controls imposed on them by others.

## **SUMMARY**

Although they are less frequently studied than the influence of routines, organization-level factors have a critical impact on media content. When we look at a media organization, we question the roles performed, the way they are structured, the policies flowing through that structure, and the



methods used to enforce those policies. The primary goal sought by most media organizations is economic profit. News organizations, in particular, have faced growing economic pressures that now play a greater role in dictating journalistic decisions. The way organizations are structured influences content by affecting occupational culture and by determining the degree of independence media organizations have from the larger corporate enterprises, of which so many are now a part. The growing complexity of media conglomerates means that the organizations composing them must now be more mindful of their effect on each other, and news organizations encounter many more potential conflicts of interest.

Of course, the ultimate organization-level power lies with owners, who set policy and enforce it. The influence of ownership on content has been an important concern in the news media. Although news departments may be organizationally buffered from the larger firm, content is still controlled indirectly through hiring and promotion practices and through self-censorship.

This organizational perspective reveals the context within which the routines of media work are carried out. Of course, these organizations themselves are subject to their own limits imposed by their environment. It is to these extra-media influences that we turn next.

## Chapter 8.

# Influences on Content from Outside of Media Organizations

**A**re media workers and organizations all-powerful in determining the nature of media content? In the box entitled "A Profession of Perceptions," newspaper columnist Mike Kelley (1988) illustrates how journalists, who often enter their profession with optimism and idealism, are eventually accused of being pawns for just about everyone. As the messengers who deliver—and shape—the news journalists have a job that is understood by few and criticized by many. As Fred; Barnes has put it, "The New Right and the New Left, the pro-nukes and the anti-nukes, the National Conservative Political Action Committee and the National Abortion Rights Action League have found a common enemy. It is us—the press" (1983, p. 48). And the critics, many of whom have institutionalized methods of communicating their displeasure to the media, are vociferous in their criticism of and advice about media content. Audience members write letters, advertisers withhold economic support, interest groups organize boycotts, and news sources release information so as to reward or punish journalists based on their past, cooperation with the sources.

But just how important is all of this? In the last three chapters, we've shown how media content is affected by both media workers' and the media organizations' characteristics. In this chapter, we shift our attention to factors extrinsic to (outside; of) the media organizations. They include the *sources of the Information* that becomes media content, such as special interest groups, public relations campaigns, and even the news organizations themselves; *revenue sources*, such as advertisers and audiences; *other social institutions*, such as business and government; the *economic environment*; and *technology* (see Figure 8.1).

ideological level  
extramedia level  
organization level  
media routines level  
individual level

**FIGURE 8.1** Extramedia influences on media content in the hierarchical model.

### **A Profession of Perceptions**

*From time to time people ask, "What is it all about, this newspaper business?" I set down the answer to that, as best I knew how, a few years ago and offer it again now.*

The young man was thinking of taking up journalism. "I should like to journal," he said. "Offhand," I said, "I would advise against it. But what sort of journaling do you have in mind?"

"Well," he said, "I would like to make my contribution to our republican democracy by delving into the thoughts and actions of our elected leaders, by divining their sentiments on a variety of the great issues and reporting those concerns so as to inform the very whiz-bang out of the electorate?"

"In other words, you are already throwing in with the political elite," I said. "You intend to be a craven conduit for the political power structure?"

"Pity no," he said. "I would encourage the dissemination of divergent points of view, no matter how scorned might be their purveyors?"

"So you are willing to give a forum to any radical, lunatic fringe group that comes along;

you are prepared to betray your great trust and allow yourself to be a virtual publicity factory for any loon who would publicly laminate a gopher to get attention."

You don't understand at all. I want to tell the world the plight of the powerless. I want to be the voice for those who are not heard."

"Pandering to the minorities and homeless, then, is it? A constant whining and carping about people who could improve themselves if only they would get an honest job and pull themselves up, as countless millions before them have done. You want the hard-working, taxpaying citizens to bankrupt themselves to support a bunch of deadbeats. Just another bleeding-heart liberal."

"Well, of course not," he said with some exasperation. "I have the greatest admiration and respect for people who have succeeded financially. I would lend an eager ear to their opinions, for they have demonstrated their soundness, industry and prudence."

"A shameless hack mouthpiece for the business establishment. A puppet for the three-piece-suited money barons who bend the necks of the working man to their lucre-stained yoke."

"I'm no one's pawn," he protested. "I'm a thinking, perceptive, analytical fellow who simply wishes to employ those attributes to educate my fellow citizens as to the meaning of events?"

"A petty propagandist and nothing more. Cringing behind your veil of purported objectivity, you yearn to impose your own warped prejudices on a defenseless readership. Slant the news to line up with your squalid bias, you pitiable tract writer?"

"Fairness and objectivity are my very hallmarks," he sputtered. "I swear that my reports would be rigorous in exactitude and literal in every way."

"Then you aspire to be nothing more than a loudspeaker;" I said, "repeating precisely the platitudes and self-serving pronouncements of whomsoever might dally with you to indulge his whims. A spineless, mindless siphon sucking up every passing word and spewing it out with no form, no context, no meaning:"

"I want only to be a humble messenger," he said.

"A messenger: A messenger of wars and rumors of wars, a messenger of daily tidings so sordid and base, so disheartening and dispiriting, so threatening, tumultuous and unsettling that your fellows will come to doubt there is any hope at all left for themselves or for the world."

"Enough!" he cried. "You have won. I shall never come within a continent's breadth of the wretched practice. But tell me this: How can you ply so sorry a trade?"

"Why," I explained, "it is the only endeavor I know in which you may enjoy such a rich variety of perceptions while remaining droningly consistent:

*Mike Kelley, columnist, Austin (Texas) American-Statesman, September 30, 1988.*

## SOURCES

Journalists almost never witness airplane crashes. They learn about crashes from other journalists (via news services or media), from people who were on the scene, from government officials and the police, from airline or airport representatives, and from consumer safety advocates; and each individual has a unique point of view about what happened. Each source provides journalists with different information. It is the journalists' job to sift through all the information they are given—which is often conflicting—and to come up with news reports that are accurate and complete. Gans (1979, p. 80) defines *sources* as "the actors whom journalists observe or interview, including interviewees who appear on the air or who are quoted in ... articles, and those who only supply background information or story suggestions?"

### The Journalist-Source Relationship

Because journalist can't include in their news reports what they don't know, the most obvious influence occurs when sources withhold information or lie; but they may also influence the news in more subtle ways, by providing the context within which all other information is evaluated, by providing usable information that is easier and cheaper to use than that from other sources (what Gandy [1982] calls "information subsidies"), and by monopolizing the journalists' time so that they don't have an opportunity to seek out sources with alternative views.

Lying to journalists is probably more common than we know, since few liars admit their falsehoods. An exception is the lawyer for Amy Fisher, whose trial in 1993 for shooting her lover's wife created a media firestorm. Attorney Eric Naiburg says that he has no problem with misleading reporters if he thinks it will help his client. "If I give you deliberate misinformation on behalf of a client and you print it, that's your problem" (Stein, 1993, August 28, p. 9). Naiburg said. that getting media coverage for "a nothing" was *easy* because members of the media were hungry for information.

As Sanford Sherizen (1978) points out in his study of crime news, the police—who are by far the most often used source of information about crimes— "supply reporters with a constant stream of usable crime, and this information, fitting into the work requirements of the reporters, becomes the raw material from which crime news is written" (p. 222). "The police have a vested interest in crime news appearing in newspapers and other media.... The more crimes which become known, the more aid the police may be able to gain in seeking increases in departmental budgets. Further crime news results in a strengthening of the police view of the causes and solutions of the crime problem" (p. 212). But the power imbalance between writers and sources may not always be in the sources' favor. In her highly critical 1989 *New Yorker* series about author Joe McGinniss's relationship with the subject of his nonfiction best-seller *Fatal Vision*, Janet Malcolm denounces journalism as inherently "morally indefensible."

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The journalist, she says, is "a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse" (Malcolm, 1989). In the following months, *Columbia Journalism Review* asked several writers to comment on Malcolm's charges. Here are a few excerpts (Gottlieb, 1989):

- Ken Auletta, columnist for the *New York Daily News*: "It is natural for a source or subject to feel betrayed when the story comes out and the subject doesn't like everything in it. But that doesn't mean the accusation of betrayal is justified. In journalism your loyalty is to the truth as you perceive it, not necessarily to your subject" (p. 22).
- Nora Ephron, screenwriter and novelist: "The world is full of people who honestly don't know that journalists are not their friends. They honestly have no idea how awful it is to be misquoted or to be quoted out of context or to have what they said quoted but used to make a point they never intended—all of which, I'm sorry to say, is standard operating procedure among the majority of journalists" (p. 22).
- J. Anthony Lukas, author and winner of two Pulitzer Prizes: "I am certainly not denying that reporters do their share of manipulation. Of course they do. But the relationship is mutually manipulative. And that's because human relationships are *mutually* manipulative" (p. 23).
- Joseph Wambaugh, novelist: "If anything, I think many of the people I *have* interviewed as a policeman and as a journalist *were* trying to con me all the time. I never felt that I *was* conning anybody" (p. 24).
- Barry Michael Cooper, staff writer for the *Village Voice*: "There is a bit of the con man in the journalist. You have to console, you have to empathize, you have to plead, to get to the truth. And if you don't, if you are just blunt, you can say something that totally turns your subject off and he won't talk to you again. It's happened to me. But I don't consider that malicious lying. I'd call it slanted empathy—empathy with a purpose. And that purpose is that you are trying to get to a larger truth" (p. 30).
- A. M. Rosenthal, columnist for the *New York Times*: "Malcolm is absolutely right when she says that the relationship between subject and reporter can very easily lead to shading the truth, even to falsehood, in order to draw people out. But when she says that this is *inevitable*, I just dismiss that. I don't think it is true" (p. 32).

### The Selection of Sources

There are a lot of possible sources of information about an issue or event, because journalists not only talk with those who are directly involved (such as airline officials who announce a plane crash), but they may also get information from sources only indirectly associated with the event (such as consumer safety advocates) or reactions and opinions from "people on the street."

But not all sources are equally likely to be with contacted by journalists — those with economic or political power are more likely to influence news reports those who lack power (Gans, 1979). Big businesses don't hesitate to use that power to get their side of the story out. Returning to our airline crash example, the airlines (and all big businesses) hire people specifically to gather information and make it available to the mass media—if the media don't come to them, they go to the media. They understand the rhythms of media coverage and can time the release of information just before a media deadline, in order to facilitate that coverage. Airline personnel also have easily reachable offices, with secretaries who can refer journalists' calls to the proper person.

Contrast this with the poorly funded and politically inexperienced citizens group that lobbies for better air safety standards. The citizens group may operate out of somebody's home, with a telephone answering machine taking journalists' calls instead of a full-time staff member, and the group probably can't afford to hire anyone to do press relations. Many journalists may not know that the group exists, and those who do know of the group probably have trouble reaching a representative. The result is that the journalists end up writing stories dominated by information provided by the airline.

These same access problems may make it easier for journalists to use information from organizational sources (such as the airline) than from individuals (such as a passenger or mechanic). Organizations' regular office hours and full-time staff members make it easy for journalists to access information. Private individuals, on the other hand, may be reachable for only a short time each day—whatever time is left over from work, sleep, and other obligations.

We might conclude from this that journalists favor organizational sources over individual ones—that is, presented with information from both types of sources, journalists would be more likely to use the organization's information. But that doesn't seem to be the case. In her study of sources used by journalists at a medium-sized daily newspaper, Seo (1988) traced all sources that journalists had contact with during one week and noted which ones were used in subsequent news reports. She found that although three-fourths of the sources actually covered in the newspaper were from organizations and only one-fourth were individuals, this did not necessarily represent a bias toward organizational sources. Of all sources the journalists had contact with, 96 percent of individual sources were covered, compared with only 71 percent of organizational sources. Seo concluded that journalists will cover individual sources when they are available. The problem is, of course, that organizations often go out of their way to be available, whereas individuals rarely have sufficient time or resources to compete effectively for the journalists' attention.

The nature of the news event may also affect whether individual or organizational sources are used. Atwater and Green (1988) found that individual sources were most likely to be used in the ABC, CBS, and NBC coverage of a June 1985 TWA hijacking—more than half the sound bites used by the three networks included interviews with either the hostages or their friends and relatives. Stories about the plight of people—such as a kidnapping—have strong human

interest and therefore individual sources may seem more appropriate to the journalist. Because such events often are played out over several days, journalists also have more time than usual to locate and interview individuals.

Official sources, such as government officials or police, are often preferred by journalists, not only because they are more easily available for an interview but also because journalists and their editors believe that official sources have important things to say (Paletz & Entman, 1981) and tend to accept the things official sources say as being factual (Gandy, 1982). Therefore, interviewing an official source makes the journalists' job efficient by concentrating on individuals with important things to say and by eliminating the need to double- and triple-check "facts" (Hackett, 1985).

In their study of how newspapers cover environmental disasters, Hornig, Walters, and Templin (1991, p. 43) found that reporters were more likely to rely on government sources than on technical experts who could provide scientific background information or information that would help readers minimize further harm (as in an earthquake story). A study of the 1987 stock market crash revealed that print media sources (*Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*) relied more on Wall Street sources, whereas CBS News relied more on government officials (Lasorsa & Reese, 1990, p. 60).

Frederick Fico (1984a) has shown that reporters covering the part-time Indiana legislature rely on only a few official sources for their stories. Wire service reporters, under the most stringent time constraints, are most likely to rely on official activities and on the governor. Reliance on a narrow range of sources may be at least partially a function of the fact that the Indiana legislature works part-time. When Fico (1984b) studied the full-time Michigan legislature, he found that reporters used more sources and dealt with more topics.

The location of the media organization may also be a factor. Martin (1988) shows that news organizations farthest from the city in which an event occurs will rely primarily on official sources. We also suspect that there is an interaction between the type of event being covered and whether official or nonofficial sources are used. In stories about issues (as is often the case in covering legislation), official sources may be most common because of their vested interest in the debate's outcome. For example, when Congress debates the merits of the proposed budget, you can be sure that officials will be poised to praise the expansion or decry the slashing of their own departmental funds. When the story is about an event, however, especially one involving human interest, we may find that unofficial sources get more play. For example, officials accounted for only 30 percent of the sources in network sound bites about the 1985 TWA hijacking (Atwater & Green, 1988).

Some official sources provide information to journalists but do not want to be personally identified ("a high government source"). The individual may want to let the public know something, provide the journalist with background information (Gassaway, 1988, p. 72), or just test the viability of an idea with a "trial balloon." Many confidential sources provide information because they derive "some satisfaction or benefit from giving information to reporters" (p. 76).



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U.S. presidents are notoriously good at influencing what the news media cover, as Bernard Cohen points out in his discussion of how U.S. presidents can control the mass media:

The president has a natural advantage over the media giving him a commanding lead in setting the terms of public-political discourse. The president is invariably news and especially so when he's new... . The White House can therefore create the news necessary to give the president's agenda wide publicity and even dominance in the political marketplace.... All administrations can, to one degree or another, work the system, and the media system is particularly subject to being worked because it is so open and so predictable. (Gannett Center for Media Studies, 1989, pp. 2-3)

But few recent U.S. presidents have worked the media as effectively as Ronald Reagan. In evaluating the Reagan presidency, former president Jimmy Carter says:

President Reagan has handled the press—and I use the word "handled" advisedly—superbly. Based on his analysis and his advisers' analysis of what is popular and unpopular, President Reagan has been effective in emphasizing those popular items in dealing with the press.... [He] has dealt with the press through very carefully orchestrated encounters and through the passing from the White House to the helicopter, back and forth, and responding to whichever questions he wanted.... His ability to emphasize or to orchestrate the daily news item has been remarkably successful. (Gannett Center for Media Studies, 1989, p. 7)

What else affects which sources are selected? Streitmatter (1985) suggests that the source's personality may affect coverage. In his study, extroverted U.S. presidents got two to three times the front-page coverage of their introverted peers. Stempel and Culbertson (1984) suggest that a source's assertiveness, credibility (as determined by the journalist), accessibility, and quotability can affect both a source's *prominence* (frequency of mention) and *dominance* (tendency to be quoted rather than reported about) in news coverage. However, Weaver and Wilhoit's (1980) study of how U.S. senators are covered showed no relationship between visibility of senators and their seniority, committee assignments, state population, conservatism, or success in their last election.

**Presidents and the Press**

U.S. presidents and the mass media have always enjoyed a love-hate relationship. The presidents try to control the media, and the media try to find out more from the president than he wants to tell.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (in office 1933-1945) began the now institutionalized custom of presidential press conferences. Although he met with journalists very frequently—nearly seven times a month—he usually didn't permit photographs to be taken.

John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) was the first U.S. president to have his press conferences televised live, and he used the medium superbly, holding 19 press conferences in 1961 alone. Kennedy preferred the term *news conference* because it emphasized his conception of the event—news passing from him to the media. During Kennedy's first year in office, the number of reporters covering the White House increased from a few dozen to hundreds. Kennedy reportedly read the *New York Times* every morning, because he could get information about world events more quickly from the *Times* than from the State Department.

Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969) held informal meetings with journalists in addition to about two formal press conferences per month. Johnson ultimately felt that the media undermined his administration.

Richard M. Nixon (1969-1974) had the worst relationship with the media of any modern president, holding press conferences on the average of only every other month. Constant media attention to the Watergate scandal ultimately led to Nixon's resignation.

Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) was the first to hire a media consultant, whose job was to ensure that Carter's image in the media would be favorable. He often held press conferences in small towns so as to enjoy the attention of local media and audiences.

Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), the "great communicator," was a master at managing the media, even though he held a news conference on average only once every two months. His Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts were targeted at setting the agenda for Sunday newspapers.

George Bush (1989-1993) held 28 news conferences in his first 11 months in office. The tone of the conferences was usually informal and personal. Bush was covered less in the news during his first year in office than either Reagan or Carter.

Bill Clinton (1993- ) hired Ronald Reagan's director of communication, David Gergen, to handle the press for him (Gergen was later fired). Clinton's wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, is the first presidential wife to play an important part in the administration and to also be a key media personality. During the Clinton-Bush election campaign, candidates (including third-party candidate Ross Perot) used direct-access media to an unprecedented degree, appearing on television or radio talk shows as a way to get their message to the public unfiltered by media gatekeepers.

Compiled from the following sources. (1) "News? Confrontation? Entertainment? Accountability? Take your pick at the presidential press conference." (1989) In *The press, the presidency and the first hundred days*, pp 29-31. New York: Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University. (2) Doris A. Graben (1984). *Mass media and American politics*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, pp. 221-237. (3) Richard Reeves. (1993)- *President Kennedy' Profile of Power*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 278. (4) Christopher Hanson. (1993, July/August). How to satisfy a spinster every time *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 17. (5) Tony Case. (1992, October 10) Television and presidential politics. *Editor & Publisher*, pp. 32-33, 49 (6) Thomas B. Rosensteel. (1989, December 9). The media. Bush plays it cozy. *Los Angeles Times*, p. A1.

### Interest Groups

An *interest group* is composed of individuals who want to communicate their stance on one or more issues to the public. Interest groups often try to influence legislation, as well as public opinion and behaviors. For example, the National Rifle Association lobbies the U.S. Congress against gun control, and the National Organization for Women advocates an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers works to elevate Americans' consciousness about the dangers of driving while intoxicated, and the American Dental Association tries to persuade everyone to have regular dental checkups. In 1993, the National Coalition on Television Violence was among the groups that lobbied Congress to get some form of control over the amount of violence in television content. The networks have agreed to a form of self-regulation, beginning in the fall of 1993, to include parental warning statements before shows that contain excessive violence (Waters, 1993, p. 64).

Some interest groups seek to influence media content by providing "guide-lines" for covering topics of interest to the group. For example, in 1968 the American Bar Association (ABA) adopted its "fair trial-free press" guidelines; by 1976 as many as 23 states had adopted voluntary press-bar guidelines that specified how the media should cover crime and trials. In their study of compliance with the ABA guidelines, Tankard, Middleton, and Rimmer (1979) found that newspapers operating under a voluntary press-bar agreement were no more likely to follow the ABA guidelines than were those that had no such agreement.

Sometimes one interest group will lobby another, to persuade the mass media on the first group's behalf. For example, in August 1989 a representative of the Austin Society to Oppose Pseudoscience (unsuccessfully) asked members of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for the organization to pass a resolution urging newspapers and magazines to stop publishing horoscopes and other astrological features.

Interest groups may also criticize the media and/or individual journalists. In some instances, changing media content is the interest group's goal, and criticism *of* the media *through* the media exerts a double influence on content. Not only do the criticisms get on the news agenda (thereby replacing something else that would otherwise have been publicized), but they may cause revisions of media practices or policies.

One organization highly critical of the media is the American Family Association (AFA), which describes itself as "a Christian organization promoting the Biblical ethic of decency in American society with primary emphasis on TV and other media" (American Family Association, 1989, March, p. 2). AFA's executive director, Donald Wildmon, sends frequent form letters to AFA *members* to request support in the form of boycotting the advertisers of offending television programs and sending money to AFA. Two such letters sent in early 1989 illustrate the AFA's goals and tactics. The first letter included a transcript of a musical skit aired December 31, 1988, on the NBC television program "Saturday Night Live" (Wildmon, letter to supporters of the American Family Association, no date [estimated as January or February 1989]), in which four men talked and sang about their penises.

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Wildmon's accompanying four-page letter detailed the interest group's objections to specific network television programs, outlined their plan for boycotting those programs' sponsors, and asked readers to take immediate action. Wildmon stated in his letter that he had included the "Saturday Night Live" script only to awaken his supporters' anger and goad them into action. He urged them to:

- Mail signed postcards of protest to the chairman of General Electric, owner of NBC.
- Mail signed postcards of protest to the chairman of Ralston-Purina and Nissan USA, sponsors of "Saturday Night Live."
- Sign up to form the foundation upon which a boycott of "anti-Christian and anti-family" TV shows would be built.

In addition to providing the "Saturday Night Live" script as evidence for a change in television content, Wildmon said that in the previous year CBS had shown three cartoon episodes in which Mighty Mouse sniffed cocaine; that three prime-time series have gay characters; and that "on the 12/01/88 episode of 'L.A. Law'—for the first time on a non-news or non-documentary prime-time TV show—a character said G \_\_\_\_\_ d \_\_\_\_\_ on the air" (Wildmon, letter to supporters of the American Family Association, early 1989).

A month or so later, Wildmon sent another letter to AFA supporters (Wildmon, letter to supporters of the American Family Association, no date [estimated as March 1989]). In a postscript on the last page, Wildmon wrote:

I can give you *a* recent example of the success we can have. General Mills was a sponsor of "Saturday Night Live" On December 31, 1988 "SNL" aired a skit that was truly vulgar and obscene. I contacted General Mills and asked them why they sponsored this show. After receiving my letter, General Mills canceled close to a million dollars of advertising they had planned to spend sponsoring "SNL." That's what our boycott can achieve.

How much influence do organizations such as the AFA actually have on television content? In his book *Inside Prime Time*, Todd Gitlin (1985) points out several ways in which interest groups have influenced television content. Hollywood writer Larry Gelbart told Gitlin that "the far righteous" have proven to be very successful at getting the media's attention, both as the subject of news and feature reports and as a force that can affect program choice by applying pressure to program advertisers (p. 250). NBC's research vice-president, Gerald M. Jaffe, points out that television has two markets to satisfy—the people at home and the advertisers—whereas movies have to satisfy only the theater audience (pp. 252-253). Although most network programming executives told Gitlin that they are not influenced by advertisers' attitudes—because there are more potential advertisers than there are advertising slots on television—CBS's

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Herman Keld replied differently: "I would say they are always taken into account. Always taken into account" (p. 254).

There are many other media watch groups, each with its own mission. Here are some examples:

- *Accuracy in Media*: fights liberal bias in the national news media.
- *Between the Lines*: targets left-wing television news reporting and anti-American movies.
- *Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment (C\*CAVE)*: raises public awareness about the amount of violence in media.
- *Center for Media and Values*: teaches media literacy, an understanding of media messages and their effects on people.
- *Environmental Media Association*: encourages writers, producers, and directors to use environmental themes in television, film, and music.
- *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)*: works for more pluralism and diversity in the news.
- *Focus on the Family*: targets pornography, offensive music lyrics, and other issues of interest to conservative families.
- *National Coalition Against Pornography*: fights against obscenity and child pornography.
- *National Coalition on Television Violence*: monitors video games, war toys, and television for incidence of glamorized violence.
- *National Council for Families and Television*: promotes the well-being of children and families in media content.
- *Parents Music Resource Center*: founded by Tipper Gore to warn against sexually explicit lyrics in music albums and music videos.

### **Public Relations Campaigns**

Interest groups also conduct public relations campaigns that use the media to focus public attention. To the extent that these campaigns are successful, media content is affected directly (through the publication of press releases) and indirectly (by calling the media's attention to the problem). Sometimes journalists themselves are the target of the public relations campaign. For example, Eastman Kodak Company took out a full-page advertisement in *Columbia Journalism Review* to persuade journalists that manufacturing is still an important component of the U.S. economy and to call for a "national debate on the direction of economic policy and how it affects manufacturing" ("America won't work without manufacturing," 1989, p. 13).

Not every organization can afford to buy advertising, however; but getting coverage in the mass media can be an especially cost-effective method of reaching the public for resource-poor interest groups. Such was the case in 1980, when the Citizen's Party candidate Barry Commoner

spent \$3,000 to buy radio time for a commercial that began with the word *Bullshit!* The purpose of the ad went beyond reaching the audience for the radio spot—the purpose was to get audience and media attention for his cause by doing something that would be considered deviant and therefore newsworthy. Commoner did not have the money to buy commercials supporting his candidacy on network television, but he did get free air time from ABC (on October 15, 1980) to discuss why he used the word *bullshit* in his radio commercial (Jamieson, 1992, pp. 123-124).

Jamieson says that advertising is increasingly used to "contextualize" the news, by setting a framework in which news is discussed. This often includes running all or part of an ad on the news, there by giving it free air time. By 1991, ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC all ran stories about an ad run by the Conservative Victory Committee supporting the confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and attacking his opponents (Jamieson, 1992, p. 124). In particularly newsworthy issues and events, outrageous advertising is used to get the attention of newspeople. The ads help set the agenda of the news program by suggesting important aspects of the issue that should be covered. In some sense, the ads become as newsworthy as anything the candidate or nominee does or says on a given day. The ads become news themselves.

One way interest groups get their message across is by designing and holding events that the news media will cover, such as demonstrations and protests (Wolfsfeld, 1984). Boorstin calls such an occasion a *pseudoevent*:

1. It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it... .
2. It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media... .
3. Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in which might have been the motives... .
4. Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel's thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one. (1971, p. 120)

The pseudoevent fulfills the interest group's need to get media coverage in order to reach the public, but it also fulfills the media's need for news. In the print media, the amount of editorial content (i.e., news, columns, and features) is determined largely by the amount of advertising content—the more ads a newspaper sells, the more editorial content it needs to put around the ads. In the electronic media, the amount of editorial content is fixed by the amount of time available (minus the time devoted to advertising); but, because the audience tends to expect

"new" news at each broadcast, the demand for more and more news continues throughout each day. Interest groups play to the media's need for new content by providing interest group-created events for the media to cover, which are more likely to *be covered* than real events.

The term *public relations* encompasses an enormous range of activities, from "the simple mailing of press releases plugging orchestras and activist groups to giant campaigns that generate ink and air time for celebrities, products, and political positions" (Bleifuss, 1994, p. 72). How influential are public relations (PR) campaigns in affecting media coverage? The evidence is mixed. In her study of government public information officers (PIOs) in Louisiana, Turk (1986) found that not only was half the PIO-provided information used by daily newspapers, but the newspapers also gave issues the same emphasis that the PIOs did. On the other hand, she also found that of all stories about the state agencies being studied, fewer than half included PIO-provided information. Whereas Albritton and Manheim (1983) found that a public relations campaign improved Rhodesia's image in the U.S. press, Stocking (1985) says that public relations activities may have no effect on media content beyond the news value of the organizations being promoted.

Interestingly enough, the news judgments of journalists and public relations practitioners are remarkably similar (Kopenhaver, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984). Journalists incorrectly perceive a large gap between their own news values and those of PR practitioners, who don't perceive the same gap, possibly because some were once journalists. There is a tendency for those outside the public relations industry to conceptualize public relations efforts as very powerful. For example, Turow (1989) suggests that "public relations is a driving force behind what gets on television and into print." He cites evidence that many news stories begin from press releases, thereby showing the "overwhelming importance of PR materials for the contemporary press" (p. 206). Turow also implies that public relations activities *have* inherently antisocial motivations: Public relations practitioners "insinuate their ideas into hard news stories with the aim of attracting lawmakers' attention" (p. 208) and try to disguise their own political agenda from both media and public.

A large proportion of negative attitudes toward public relations is based on the assumption that all public relations efforts involve solely persuasive communication, failing to acknowledge that public relations messages may also have cognitive goals (Shoemaker, 1989). For example, a government agency might create a public relations message intended to warn the public about an environmental hazard, or it might plan a public information program designed both to teach people about the health risks of cocaine use and to ultimately reduce cocaine's consumption (a combination of cognitive and behavioral goals).

We can identify three new trends in public relations. (1) There is increasing consolidation of ownership among the largest firms, resulting in public relations conglomerates such as the WPP Group and Omnicom. (2) The largest PR firms are increasingly international, doing business around the globe. (3) Market research is an increasingly important decision-making tool for these

companies, sometimes overshadowing the traditional tools of personal contact and communication (Dilenschneider, 1990, p. 35).

### **Other Media Organizations**

To a certain extent, each news organization acts as a source for the, others. journalists read, watch and listen to-news, from their own and from competing organizations; and when a story breaks first in one medium, it may quickly be picked up by other media. Newspaper executives are the most devoted readers of newspapers, although a *Presstime* poll showed that 96 percent of all news-paper staffers surveyed (including executives) had read a newspaper the previous day (Epping, 1991, p. 9). The *New York Post* is so interested in its competitor, the *New York Times*, that it has run a regular column called "Timeswatch" *Times* spokesperson Nancy Nielson says, "to my knowledge, it's the first time a newspaper has written a weekly column about another newspaper" (Garneau, October 2, 1993, p. 9).

Some media seem particularly good at setting the agenda for other media. For example, the weekly *New England Journal of Medicine* is an often-quoted source of medical news (Caudill & Ashdown, 1989). Although the *Journal* does not send out press releases about its contents prior to its Thursday publication date, it does provide advance copies of the publication to the news media on Monday. North Americans can generally learn about the *Journal's* latest research in their Thursday newspapers or from Wednesday evening television and radio broadcasts. "From an editor's point of view, the *Journal* may be an ideal source of medical news because the publication often reflects the conflict and controversy within the medical profession" (Caudill & Ashdown, 1989, p. 458).

For general news, however, the final arbiter of quality and professionalism is the *New York Times*. "If the *Times* did not exist, it would probably have to be invented" (Gans, 1979, p. 181). In their study of the enormous amount of media coverage devoted to cocaine in 1986, Reese and Danielian (1989, p. 40) say that the *New York Times* "took the lead in covering the cocaine issue" in early 1986, with the other newspapers following soon thereafter. The television networks picked up the story somewhat later (see also Danielian & Reese, 1989).

Another influential media source are the news programs aired by National Public Radio (NPR). A 1989 survey showed that 88 percent of journalists surveyed said that NPR was a "positive influence" on journalism. (In comparison, only 60 percent said the same of Dan Rather, the CBS anchor.) A 1991 "Best in the Business" poll by *Washington Journalism Review* readers gave Charles Osgood of CBS the top radio reporter score, but NPR swept the second, third, and fourth places with Cokie Roberts, Nina Totenberg, and Linda Wertheimer (Fox, 1992, p. 32).

The wire services are also influential in passing stories from medium to medium, as a story is transmitted by a wire service and picked up from town to town. Some people have suggested that



the wire services act as a powerful "agenda setter" for daily newspapers. Although Whitney and Becker (1982) show that newspaper editors publish the same kind of content in the same proportions that the wire services transmit, this may not be a causal connection. That is, there may be another explanation for the similarities in content, such as similar ideas about what is newsworthy. There is support for this idea in a study by Todd (1983), who found that nonsubscribing newspapers *give* stories the same play as do wire service subscribers.

### **ADVERTISERS AND AUDIENCES**

"One of the most profitable commodities in the modern world is human attention. Whoever can harvest it in wholesale quantities can make money in kind.... One percentage point for a network in prime-time audience share represents more than \$30 million in added revenues each year" (Bagdikian, 1989, p. 819).

In the United States, where mass media companies are by and large privately or corporately owned, the media audience is up for sale anew on every *day* and for every second. The buyers are advertisers, and they pay a substantial portion of what it costs to run each medium.' Altschull (1984, p. 254) reminds us, "The content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press. The press is the piper, and the tune the piper plays is composed by those who pay the piper." There is substantial evidence that media content is affected—both directly and indirectly—by both advertisers and audiences.

It wasn't always so, however. Advertising played only a minor role in the financing of newspapers and magazines prior to the late 1800s (Peterson, 1981). The trend toward industrialization of the United States in the nineteenth century brought with it a need to sell the new products being produced. Manufacturers approached newspapers and magazines about advertising their products, but nineteenth-century publishers often did not have a strong marketing orientation: Publishers tolerated advertising but did not treat advertising "with the reverence they do today. One nineteenth-century advertising agent had to importune a publisher to reveal the circulation of his magazine. Reluctantly, furtively, the publisher scribbled a number on a scrap of paper and handed it to the agent" (Peterson, 1981, p. 19).

Magazines became the first national advertising medium following the "reinvention" of the magazine by S. McClure, Frank Munsey, and Cyrus Curtis in the early 1890s as a medium for the middle class, which was (not coincidentally) also the target for the consumer goods advertisers wanted to promote (Peterson, 1981, pp. 19-20). These magazine entrepreneurs found that by refocusing magazine content on stories popular with the middle class and by selling subscriptions at a price below the cost of producing and distributing a subscription, the size of the magazine could be dramatically increased, making magazines a desirable advertising medium.

This pattern was quickly repeated in newspapers; when the broadcast media came along, they took this to its extreme—giving away their content to anyone with the equipment to receive the signal. The mass medium became an "adjunct of the marketing system" and "the only industry that normally gives away its wares [to its consumers, the audience] or sells them for less than production costs" (p. 20).

The subscription charge for print media and ultimately for cable and pay-TV channels "became essentially a fee to qualify the reader [or viewer] for the advertiser's interest" (Peterson, 1981, p. 20). Today it costs so much to sell, maintain, and renew subscriptions that in many cases it would cost less to distribute a magazine for free. "At the same time, magazine circulation audit rules restrict the number of issues that can be sent free after a subscription expires; otherwise, advertisers could not be sure that the product was being valued by all of the circulation that the publisher claimed" (Rosse, 1981, p. 41).

Because advertising rates are computed according to how many audience members use the medium—what is often called "cost per thousand"—having more subscribers means more advertising income for the magazine or newspaper. Up to a point, anyway. Some weekly magazines—such as *Life*—that had built a circulation in the millions during the 1950s and 1960s found that there was a limit to how much advertisers were willing to pay for every additional thousand subscribers. As their circulations climbed (and as the competition for ad dollars from television increased), they soon reached a point at which the additional advertising revenue generated by a thousand new subscribers could not cover the cost of distributing the magazines to them every week. The truly mass circulation magazines went out of business as weeklies, later returning with fewer subscribers and a monthly distribution schedule (Mogel, 1979).

### **The Target Audience**

As a result of these experiences, advertisers recognized that not all audience members are equally important—that segment of the mass audience most likely to buy advertisers' products is called the *target audience* or market. Target audiences are defined in terms of *demographics* (such as age, gender, income, and education) or *psychographics* (attitudes and lifestyles). Advertisers buy space or time from media that have the best target audience for their products.

How does a medium capture the "right" target audience for advertisers? It finds out what target audience members want and then gives it to them. For example, as newspaper circulation has declined over the past 20 years (a 21 percent drop between 1970 and 1980 in the 20 largest U.S. cities, according to Leo Bogart, executive vice-president and general manager of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau [1989, p. 49]), publishers have turned their attention more and more toward an "upscale" target audience to ensure a steady stream of advertising income (Fink, 1989, p. 40). Big city newspapers generally reach less than a third of all households in their areas (*e.g.*, 24 percent daily for the *Chicago Tribune* and 32 percent for the *Dallas Morning News*). Newspapers have traded

a wide coverage of all types of households for deep penetration in the target audiences most attractive to advertisers—high-income professionals, whom journalism professor Conrad Fink calls the "champagne crowd." The *Wall Street Journal* may have the highest-income readers, with an *average* subscriber household income in excess of \$107,000. The *Boston Globe* "says it reaches, with a single issue, 53 percent of those with \$100,000-plus household incomes," even though these wealthy households account for only 9 percent of all those in the area (Fink, 1989, p. 40).

Fink says that newspapers have cultivated high-income readers by "intentionally structuring our news content primarily for [them]. We also market selectively, concentrating circulation drives in the right neighborhoods—those predicted to yield high demographics" (1989, p. 40). Similar results have been found for other media. For example, Cantor and Jones (1983) found that a magazine with a working-class target audience published different fiction than a magazine with a middle-class audience. Newspapers in the southern United States have even begun publishing "news from home" for "snowbirds," winter visitors from northern states (Noack, 1993, p. 14).

The assumption is that media workers actually do know (or even want to know) what the desired target audience wants, an assumption that is by no means unanimously supported by the research literature. The process through which a journalist is socialized to the norms and routines of an advertiser-funded medium should draw the journalist's attention toward the audience he or she is writing for. In his work on the creation of television news, David Altheide (1976) makes this point by suggesting that low newscast ratings are often blamed on the news staff, who *may* conclude that the audience is rejecting their work and that they may lose their jobs if they cannot produce content the audience will watch.

The problem is that even if they want to know what the audience wants, journalists may have little knowledge—or incorrect information—about the audience they communicate with. Minority group members often complain that the media would do a better job of covering the minority community if more minority journalists were hired (Greenberg, Burgoon, Burgoon, & Korzenny, 1983); but as Orlando Taylor, former dean of the School of Communication at Howard University, has pointed out, not every black or Hispanic journalist is equally knowledgeable about his or her ethnic group (Taylor, 1989).<sup>1</sup> In some cases, minorities and women may have become acculturated to the predominately white mass media as a strategy for making themselves attractive as employees. They may need to improve their own "cultural literacy" in order to improve their understanding of what their ethnic audience wants from the media.

Smith (1977, p. 179) says that the circulation and advertising sales departments generally provide journalists with a "picture of the audience for which they are writing," but studies of journalists often show that they do not know their audiences very well (e.g., see Wulfemeyer, 1984; Donsbach, 1983). Although Bell (1982) has shown that radio broadcasters' news style covaried with their perception of their audiences' prestige, Flegel and Chaffee (1971) found that

newspaper journalists attribute more influence to their own opinions than to those of their editors or readers.

**Targeting Ethnic Audiences.** The Hispanic audience has become increasingly attractive to advertisers—disposable income of Hispanics grew from \$93 billion in 1985 to \$220 billion in 1993. Projections indicate that by the year 2000, Hispanics' disposable income will reach \$477 billion (Stein, 1994, p. 11).

Recent moves by mainstream print media to produce content attractive to Hispanics has caused Hispanic media to consider how they can improve their own content to retain readership of their primary audience. In Fort Worth, Texas, the *Star-Telegram's* own Latino-targeted newspaper *La Estrella* competes with *El Information* published by Tino Duran, 1994 president of the National Association of Hispanic Publishers. Such competition by media giants could cause the demise of Hispanic publications. "Without our share of advertising revenues, we will shrivel and die," says Duran. "The *Star-Telegram* is trying to strangle us—knock us out of existence. But where were they 15 years ago when we were the only paper addressing Hispanics in Fort Worth? I'll tell you where they were. They were running stories of crimes by Latinos on the front page and anything positive we did wound up in the classified section if it ran at all" (Stein, 1994, pp. 11-12).

Duran urges Latino newspapers to become more sophisticated in their content and market research. Ad agency media director Sandra Miyares says that the key concern of advertisers is whether "the client's image [will] be enhanced by advertising" in the Latino publication—simply being published by Latinos is not enough (Stein, 1994, p. 12).

Some Hispanic publications are entering into joint ventures with mainstream media; for example, *La Rana*, a Chicago newspaper, is jointly publishing a Sunday magazine with the *Chicago Sun-Times*. In Houston, *La Voz* is inserted in the *Houston Chronicle* for Latino neighborhoods (Stein, 1994, p. 11).

**Targeting Female Audiences.** Newspapers have been losing women readers at an alarming rate. Whereas women used to read newspapers more than men, that statistic has reversed and the effect is most pronounced for younger women. A 1991 study by the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain showed that women don't think there's much for them in today's newspaper:

Fashion sections feature clothes that the majority of women can't afford or that only look good on stick-thin models.

Food sections feature recipes that take too much time to prepare and that include ingredients that few have heard of.

Government and education stories are written so as to have little relevance to their lives.

"You must be putting your newspaper out for some man who has got to know this stuff for

his job, because it is like work to read it," said one respondent. "It certainly isn't put out by people like me" (Schmidt & Collins, 1993, p. 39). That women are not putting out most newspapers is, of course, a fact. Women are underrepresented as reporters, sources, and subjects. A 1993 study of 20 newspapers found that only 15 percent of sources cited on front pages were women, and only a third of front-page stories were written by women. About 34 percent of all journalists are women, but less than 20 percent of top editorial managers are women (p. 42).

What do women want?

The Knight-Ridder study found that women are interested in topics such as their children's education and how they learn (not the politics of the school board); time and money and how to save both; safety and health issues; women in the workplace; social concerns, such as homelessness; and family and personal relationships. But women also care about the way newspapers approach news: Women want information to be useful and easy to find. At the same time they want depth. And they don't like it when reporters invade privacy or are insensitive to disaster or crime victims. (Schmidt & Collins, 1993, p. 39)

Many newspapers are making content changes that they hope will attract women readers (pp. 39-42). Some have designed beats that are more relevant to women. Such beats rely less on officials and government and more on things that affect women's daily lives. In stories about government, there is less emphasis on political machinations and more on how government affects people's lives. There are more stories about aging and fewer about the Social Security Administration. In education coverage, there are more stories about what happens in the classroom and fewer on the Board of Education. Newspapers are running more inspirational stories about how women have broken gender barriers, but emphasizing "superwomen" risks alienating many women who feel like second-class citizens by comparison.

***Tailoring the Audience.*** In their search for an ever more efficient method of delivering ads, advertisers have encouraged the media to use new technologies that can "tailor" an edition of, for example, a newspaper so that the ads go only to those readers who are likely to buy the advertised product. The "tailors" in such a newspaper would be the subscribers, who could daily order only the sections of the newspaper that they want to read. George Cashau, Newspaper Association of America senior vice-president for technology, says that "a good software program could easily handle [the sorting of] orders," but "the mechanical and labeling requirements are much tougher" (Conseil, 1993, p. 24).

#### **Advertisers' Muscle**

Whereas marketing studies may keep journalists abreast of their audience's general characteristics, only a small portion of the audience will ever communicate directly with a

journalist. For better or worse, this is not true of advertisers, who are not afraid to "use their financial muscle to protest what they perceive as unfair treatment by the news segment of the mass media" (Jamieson & Campbell, 1983, p. 97). In a survey of 41 newspapers' real estate news staff, more than three-quarters of editors said that advertisers had threatened to pull ads in response to unfavorable coverage. More than one-third said that ads had actually been pulled (Williams, 1992, p. 167). As newspapers worry more about advertising revenues, there has been a move away from independent reporting to a reliance on press releases (Rykken, 1992, p. 19).

Because advertising income is crucial to the survival of commercial mass media, the bigger the advertiser, the more muscle it has: Modern multinational manufacturers and advertising agencies therefore have considerable power "to suppress public messages they do not like." Bagdikian reports that in 1988 Saatchi and Saatchi—"the world's biggest advertising conglomerate"—bought a small ad agency that was servicing antismoking ads for the Minnesota Department of Health. To avoid angering the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company, which was spending \$35 million with Saatchi for the Kool cigarette campaign, Saatchi ordered its new acquisition to drop the Minnesota account before Brown & Williamson dropped Saatchi. There was good reason for such fear. Only three months earlier, R.J. Reynolds had dropped Saatchi because "it had created a Northwest Airlines television commercial showing passengers applauding the airline's No Smoking policy." R.J. Reynolds, one of the world's largest advertisers, markets Camel, Winston, and Salem cigarettes (Bagdikian, 1989, pp. 819-820).

Tobacco companies may have made the most attempts to control, mass media content, although some of the controls may be self-imposed by 'the media' themselves in an attempt to ward off censure by tobacco companies.' For example, Kessler (1989) investigated the editorial and advertising content of six major women's magazines (e.g., *Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping*) to see whether the presence or absence of tobacco advertising would be related to the amount of editorial content about the health hazards of smoking—"the number one cancer killer of women" (p. 319). Although women's health was a major topic in the magazines, there was almost no editorial content about any health hazards of smoking, even in *Good Housekeeping*, which does not accept tobacco advertising. The *GH* health editor told Kessler that plans to do a major story on the health hazards of smoking have been "cut down time and time again by people who make the big decisions;" because the link between lung cancer and smoking is "not very appealing" and "too controversial" (p. 322). As Kessler points out, even though *GH* can't lose tobacco advertising income, it might lose advertising revenue from nontobacco subsidiaries of the tobacco conglomerates.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Whelan, president of the American Council on Science and Health, has noted: "I frequently wrote on health topics for women's magazines, and have been told repeatedly by editors to stay away from the subject of tobacco" (cited in Weis & Burke, 1986, p. 61).

Tobacco companies have a long history of influencing media content, as Weis and Burke point out in their review: In 1957, *Reader's Digest* published an article about the health effects of smoking; ads were subsequently withdrawn by the American Tobacco Company (Bagdikian,

cited in Weis & Burke, 1986). In 1959, the Tobacco Institute threatened to withdraw ads from publications that advertised a competing product, 'tobaccoless smoke'. The institute also "convinced the New York Transit System not to place rail commuter ads promoting an upcoming story on lung cancer in *Reader's Digest*" (Whelan, cited in Weis & Burke, 1986, p. 60).

Other media are just as vulnerable to pressure from tobacco companies. The billboard industry is even more dependent on tobacco advertising than magazines are, getting "up to half its revenue from tobacco advertising and tobacco industry-owned advertisers (soft drink and alcoholic beverage distributors):' Even movies are affected. "Film producers are often paid to display smoking as an appropriate, desirable behavior among socially active adults. Tobacco companies offer to help underwrite filmmaking costs; in return, the filmmaker agrees to portray the key characters in the film as smokers" (Weis & Burke, 1986, pp. 63-64). And although tobacco ads are no longer permitted on television, the tobacco companies spend millions of dollars advertising nontobacco products on television.

More recently, a California group known as Women and Girls Against Tobacco targeted women's magazines and their treatment of tobacco ads and editorial content concerning tobacco. The group tried to place an ad in *Essence*, which has many young, African-American female readers. The ad was titled "Cigarettes made them history" and featured three African-American singers who had died from tobacco-related diseases. *Essence* reserved space for the ad, which was scheduled for the May 1993 issue; but when the ad copy arrived, *Essence* replied that it didn't have sufficient space to run the ad. An attempt to run the ad in the June issue also failed. The ad was deemed by magazine staff to be "very controversial" and was sent to *Essence* president Clarence Smith and chief executive officer Ed Lewis. The ad never ran in *Essence* (Ferris, 1994, p. 17).

At about the same time, a Massachusetts group known as Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco created a newspaper ad entitled "Meet five of America's richest drug pushers" and included photos of "publishers S. I. Newhouse and Rupert Murdoch; Laurence Tisch, president of CBS and chairman of Loews, which owns Lorillard Tobacco; Henry Kravis, a partner in the firm that owns R. J. Reynolds Tobacco; and Michael Miles, chairman of Philip Morris" (Ferris, 1994, p. 17). The ad was accepted by the *Washington Post* but was turned down by the *New York Times*. A *Times* spokesperson suggested that the ad would have been run if it had targeted companies rather than individuals.

The tobacco companies are not alone in their attempts to influence media content. Network television, in the early days at least, was totally dependent on advertising revenues, and advertisers didn't hesitate to give feedback to the young networks. In what is frequently referred to as "the golden age"—the 1950s—"advertisers and their agencies ... regularly read scripts a day or two in advance of shooting. . . . Sponsors who bought whole shows, or major portions, didn't shrink from direct censorship... . At the behest of an ad agency for a gas company sponsor, CBS took out half a dozen instances of the word 'gas' referring to gas chambers in a 'Playhouse 90' drama on the Nuremberg trials:' After the quiz show scandals of 1958,<sup>6</sup> CBS president Frank Stanton "set down an explicit rule: Advertisers would no longer be permitted to read scripts

in advance and intervene if they thought their corporate images at risk. Instead, *they* would be permitted to screen the filmed episodes, and, if they wanted to beg off a particular one, the network would excuse them" (Gitlin, 1985, pp. 255-256). In a more recent scandal, General Motors said that it would pull advertising from all NBC News programs (although not from entertainment or sports programs). The advertising was withdrawn because of a *Dateline NBC* segment in which the producers tampered with a GM truck. The purpose of the segment was to show that certain GM trucks could catch fire if hit by another vehicle. To film a sequence in which the truck was hit and then caught fire, NBC hired an outside contractor, who rigged the truck with an explosive device so that it would catch fire more easily during the filming. GM dropped a lawsuit against NBC in exchange for a 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-minute apology on a *Dateline* show and an agreement that NBC would pay General Motors nearly \$2 million ("GM suspends ads," 1993, p. 3A). Because there are more potential advertisers than there is network advertising time to sell, Todd Gitlin says that "no single advertiser can truly wield a veto power over the network" (1985, p. 254).

Nonetheless, the "bulk of major advertisers" *do* have the power to affect television content, because network executives "take into account whether they think major advertisers in the aggregate . . . are going to consider a show a hospitable setting for their commercials.... To advertisers, the programs amount to packaging for commercials" (Gitlin, 1985, pp. 253-254). The television networks react to their perceptions of what advertisers will tolerate.

Sometimes the media run content that is specifically designed to draw advertisers. *Vanity Fair's* former editor Tina Brown turned around the revived magazine after a 1984 economic slump by running stories on the magazines' major advertisers, people such as Bill Blass, Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Yves Saint Laurent. The April 1989 issue carried 37 pages of ads from people who had previously been given favorable editorial coverage in the magazine (Lazare, 1989). Brown now edits the *New Yorker*.

But the influence of media funders is not limited to advertisers. Ironically, even when there is no advertising in a strict sense, the financial backers of a show—whatever they are called—can definitely influence its content. Some have suggested that this is the case with National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, *Morning Edition*, and *Weekend Edition* news shows. NPR relies on corporate and foundation sponsors to fund its programming, not traditional advertising. But since its founding in 1970, the network's search for corporate funding may have "impaired its objectivity and made it as ratings-conscious as the commercial networks. Others see a gradual erosion of the skepticism that once made NPR's approach almost unique in radio news. They detect an increasingly establishment tone and a heavy reliance on administrative sources" (Fox, 1992, p. 32).

### **Advertiser-Created Television Programming**

The 1980s saw an important change in children's television programming—the advent of advertiser-created shows. Popular characters from children's television shows have for a long



time been turned into toys, along with a mountain of accompanying paraphernalia, "each sold separately." In the late 1980s, however, the deregulatory climate at the Federal Communications Commission and aggressive marketing by the toy industry "together created a favorable environment for children's 'program-length commercials,' whose primary purpose is to sell toys through the shows' heroes" (Kunkel, 1988, p. 90). Instead of being conceived of and sold to the networks based on its entertainment value, a program-length commercial is "originally conceived of as a vehicle to provide product exposure to the child audience, in the hopes of stimulating product sales that in turn may help to sustain program popularity. Moreover, creative control for the program content is typically relinquished to the manufacturer of the product upon which the program is based. The product manufacturers specify how the characters must look, what they can or cannot say or do, and what environments they live in" (pp. 90-91).

Ben Bagdikian (1989) refers to American television networks' children's programming as "that enduring national scandal.... Despite the harm done by this mindless menu of violent cartoons and blatant commercialism—harm that has been confirmed by the Surgeon General's office and others—decades of parents' and educators' complaints have been ignored" (p. 819).

Advertiser-created programming represents a "new stage in the long relation between advertising and the mass media," and it is not limited to children's programming. "Videocassettes, discs, and cable channels are increasingly being filled with content *entirely* produced by advertisers?" For example, JC Penney might produce a video on home decorating, complete with decorating advice, examples of different styles, and prices of the JC Penney merchandise used in the examples. "To prevent viewers from erasing or skipping over advertising messages in these 'advertiser-created programs,' programming is being developed with commercials so skillfully intertwined with other information that they cannot be removed or avoided" (Janus, 1984, pp. 66-67). Moreover, Macy's department stores announced in 1992 that they would start a cable television channel that would be devoted to selling merchandise from their stores (Strom, 1993, p. A1).

Since 1988, television has been increasingly used for 30-minute advertising productions called "infomercials" (Milligan & Bender, 1994). In 1994, infomercials accounted for more than \$750 million of television advertising. Before 1988, very little time was available for such long-form commercials. Now pitches for cosmetics, hair products, kitchen appliances, and much more are made by celebrities and enthusiastic customers in these half-hour ads placed in between regular programming. Orders for the product are taken through toll-free telephone numbers and by using credit cards. The sales job is often low-key, but very effective. Victoria Jackson has sold well over \$150 million in mail-order makeup in this *way*. Celebrities All McGraw and Meredith Baxter sit in an elegant Beverly Hills mansion and talk about Jackson's products:

MEREDITH: "I wanted to tell you that I read in The Los Angeles Times that you have had an absolutely phenomenal *response* to the commercials that you guys have done."

VICTORIA: "It's been incredible! I mean, it's just overwhelming. From the first week we were on TV, we were selling 10,000 kits a week. It's been incredible."

All shares next. How she is stopped in supermarkets and airports by women who tell her, "I've been using Victoria Jackson, and it's great, just like you said it was!" (Maria, 1992, pp. B1, B4)

Sometimes ads are so interesting that they cross the line from advertising to editorial content. Roger Ailes, who orchestrated George Bush's 1988 media campaign, says that the news media are much more interested in political advertising now than they were in previous campaigns. "What's amazing to me is that the network news leads in the evening with the new ads. In the old days you had to buy advertising time. Now you could theoretically run a race and just produce it for the news, get a run, and get a lot of points" (McCarty, 1988, p. 70).

### **GOVERNMENT CONTROLS**

There is little doubt that governments of all countries exert controls over the mass media. In countries where the media are largely privately owned, controls are exerted through laws, regulations, licenses, and taxes. In countries where the media are primarily government-owned, government control is exerted through media financing (Janus, 1984). A study by the Freedom House shows that although 107 governments adopted democratic reforms in 1993, "the personal freedom of nearly a billion citizens decreased" (Sussman, 1994, p. 28). Being a journalist is a dangerous business:

About 1,060 cases of press-freedom violations were reported last year in 101 countries, including the most free nations. Forty-six journalists were kidnapped in 16 countries. About 330 were arrested in 48 nations. Attackers wounded 49 news people in 13 countries. Another 41 were beaten and 64 were otherwise assaulted. Death threats were received by 86 journalists in 28 countries. Other harassment was reported by 112 journalists in 37 countries. Since 1988, an average of 66 journalists have been killed each year, and an average of 960 cases of press-freedom violations have been reported. (p. 28)

In his review of 58 governments' relationships with their mass media, John Merrill (1988) found that the United States, Canada, and Greece have the least inclination toward press control. At the time of the study, those that most controlled their press included East Germany, the People's Republic of China, Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, Cuba, and Peru. Merrill grouped countries into geographic regions and ranked them, with the most inclination to control the press listed first:

Middle East  
Latin America  
Eastern Europe  
Africa  
Asia  
Western Europe and North America

The news media in Eastern European countries are making progress toward more freedom, but the biggest problem is capital funding to support the press. In addition, the governments are reluctant to give up control of television (*Gersh*, 1991, pp. 30-31). Most of 1992 was devoted to defining press freedom. Fifteen of 27 states in the former Soviet Union drafted laws to change monopoly media controlled by the government into a market-driven and freer media (Sussman, 1993, p. 28).

Peter Galliner, director of the International Press Institute, says that there is "a growing trend toward government interference in democratic countries... . This is the most worrying aspect today, because the hopes of nations that are on their way toward more freedom must not be crushed by governments in the free world that should be guardians of press freedom and should not introduce legislation restricting fundamental human rights" (1989, p. 52).

In May 1989, Algerian television and newspaper journalists published information about government manipulation of media content; all Algerian media are government-owned. One journalist said: "There are 1,001 methods of repression. Some journalists were forbidden to write, some to sign their articles, some to travel, some to have passports" ("Algerian journalists rebel, 1989, p. 58). In 1993, eight journalists were killed in Algeria by religious terrorists (Sussman, 1994, p. 28).

Since 1984, the South African government "has clamped increasingly stringent censorship on news media, both domestic and foreign" (Giffard & Cohen, 1989, p. 3). Control of domestic media is aimed at restoring a sense of normalcy, whereas control of foreign media "is intended to force news of the conflict off the front pages of the world's newspapers and from its television screens" (p. 3). The latter effect did not occur. In fact, the censorship backfired: Foreign coverage of South Africa increased, with the news of the attempted censorship being most heavily covered.

In India, "Doordarshan, the nation's only television channel, is run by the government; politicians and civil servants make all editorial and programming decisions" (Pink, 1989, p. 12). When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ran for election in 1989, television coverage only rarely included opposition candidates (p. 12). Journalist Mandu Trehan provides an alternative news source for television outlets called "Newstrack." The government exercises heavy control over the television industry, refusing recently to show a clip provided by Trehan's "Newstrack" showing footage of Hindu militants tearing down a mosque. The march of technology, *however*, has made inroads on the government's censorship,

especially with the combination of satellite TV, cable TV, and videotape. At the start of 1995 there were an estimated 150,000 video rental outlets in India. The Indian government is doing its best to block the new technology. Moreover, a government committee has recommended that privately owned cable companies be prevented from using satellite dishes to capture signals from foreign broad-casters. "The committee says no to AsiaSat and no to CNN," Mahesh Prasad of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting declared in 1991.

In France, although "the press is largely unfettered" (Goldstein, 1989), the government can ban any book or periodical of foreign origin or inspiration. This provision, added to the French press code just prior to World War II, has been used by the government to "harrass" a monthly magazine, *El-Badil*, which is published by émigrés who oppose the one-party government in Algiers. It was banned by the French government seven times between 1986 and 1989.

In 1988, a senior foreign affairs journalist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in Australia, was ordered by the High Court to reveal his sources for a story so that the subject of the story could sue them for defamation (Galliner, 1989).

In Great Britain, one of the most severe cases of peacetime censorship occurred in 1988 when the home secretary banned the BBC and independent radio and television broadcasts of statements by representatives of 11 Irish organizations, including the Irish Republican Army, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, and the Ulster Defense Force. "The order also bars statements by any person supporting or inviting support for the organizations named" (Galliner, 1989, p. 53). The Press Complaints Commission, which oversees British media, called for advertisers to boycott the *Daily Mirror* in 1993, when the newspaper published photos of Princess Diana working out on exercise equipment (O'Connor, 1993, p. 14).

In Israel, the government can censor mass media content if they determine that it could incite violence. In 1988, the Palestinian media were banned and shut down several times. "The most far-reaching sanction was the shutdown of the Palestine Press Service, a prime source of information for the foreign press." In addition, two American reporters from NBC and the *Washington Post* "had their press credentials revoked for several weeks after they filed material about the killing of a PLO leader in Tunis by Israeli commandos without submitting it first to military censorship" (Galliner, 1989, p. 54).

A 1988 free trade agreement signed by the United States and Canada included a provision that Canadian journalists who want to work in the United States must have a college degree and three years of experience. Peter Galliner, of the International Press Institute, says that "all attempts to define qualifications for journalists—attempts frequently resorted to by the authorities in Third World countries—pose a serious threat and are particularly disheartening when they involve a country proudly boasting a First Amendment to its constitution that guarantees its citizens freedom of expression" (1989, p. 52).

In China, newspapers and television news are controlled by the state through the ruling Kuomintang (the KMT, or Chinese Nationalist Party). As far back as 1951, the state banned the establishment of new newspapers, thereby

freezing the number at 31 until 1987, when state censorship sharply declined. KMT also controls all three television channels but has not made an attempt to control political magazines, possibly because of their low level of circulation (Lee, 1993, p. 7).

In the People's Republic of China, newspapers, magazines, television, and radio outlets are all owned directly or indirectly by the government, and some journalists consider themselves civil servants. An editor of the English-language *China Daily* says, "We are like dogs on a leash. A very short leash." There are well-understood, albeit unwritten, rules: "We have to portray even negative things in a positive light;" said one journalist. At the same time, the government now wants the press to support itself financially, resulting in "the rise of lightweight and sensational news, popular but politically unthreatening" (Jernow, 1994, p. 32).

Hong Kong, which will revert from its status as a British colony to part of the People's Republic of China in 1997, has had a free press system; but there are increasing attempts on the part of the government, even before 1997, to intimidate the local media. There is growing self-censorship among the Chinese-language press in Hong Kong, at least partially because of the arrests by Chinese authorities of several Hong Kong journalists (Polsky, 1994, pp. 34-35).

During the October 1993 coup attempt in Russia, "despite a new constitutional draft forbidding censorship, President Boris Yeltsin briefly censored even friendly papers, temporarily banned a dozen others, and closed several anti-Semitic and neo-fascist publications." Seven journalists died during the fighting in Moscow (Sussman, 1994, p. 28).

### **First Amendment Freedoms**

In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution declares:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

It was a reaction to two aspects of English law: "the wholesale system of licensing and censorship of all publications and the draconian criminal law of seditious libel, the theory of which was that virtually any criticism of government was deemed to contain the seeds of disorder and, indeed, of incipient rebellion" (Schmidt, 1981, p. 61).

But the constitutional protections for the print media did not carry over to television and radio. The First Amendment makes the government a laissez-faire reviewer of the print media: "The First Amendment has erected an all hut irrefutable presumption that, as Learned Hand put it, 'right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues, than through any kind of authoritative selection'" (Schmidt, 1981, p. 60). For the broadcast media, the situation is very different. Anyone wishing to broadcast must get a license, and

the "government licenses only those broadcasters it believes will serve the public interest" (p. 60). "Broadcasting is not a second-class citizen, when it comes to First Amendment rights. It is a ninth-class citizen," says Michael G. Gartner, former president of NBC News (1988, p. 4).

Not only are the broadcast media licensed, says Gartner, they are also regularly pressured—far more than the print media—by politicians and government officials who want to influence news content. "The networks have been conditioned," says Gartner, "like Pavlov's dogs, to react when a Congressman calls. Indeed, just the threat of a call—the rumor from an aide that his boss will soon be calling—or a statement or, God forbid, a hearing can sometimes force the broadcast industry into submission on a question of policy, programming, or scheduling. Broadcasting today is essentially a public-policy laboratory in which the Congress feels it can play with impunity. For lovers of the First Amendment, it is a nightmare" (pp. 7-8).

### **Regulations and Laws in the United States**

Regulation of the broadcast industry in the United States dates back to 1927, when Congress created the Federal Radio Commission, later to become the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934 (Killory & Bozzelli, 1988). Three early decisions directly affected the ownership of broadcast media: that the media would be privately rather than government owned, that limited-term rather than indefinite-length licenses would be granted, and that there would be both public and commercial stations (Dyk & Wilkins, 1989).

To protect public interests against media companies' profit-making interests, however, the FCC in 1949 adopted the Fairness Doctrine to ensure that broadcasters "behaved as 'fiduciaries' of the public 'trust'" (Killory & Bozzelli, 1988, p. 65). As Diane S. Killory and Richard J. Bozzelli, formerly FCC general counsel and special assistant for mass media affairs, put it, the FCC "turned the First Amendment's right of free speech into a right of the listening public instead of the right of the speaker" (pp. 67-68). Broadcasters were required to provide time for opposing views, but in 1959 Congress amended the 1934 Communications Act to exempt equal-time regulations for political candidates appearing in regular newscasts.

Throughout the first 50 years of its existence, the FCC introduced more and more controls on the broadcast media, but the result was not more controversy and diversity in content—rather, less. An FCC study showed that the Fairness Doctrine's "net effect was to chill free speech" (Killory & Bozzelli, 1988, p. 65). Some broadcasters even adopted policies to avoid controversial issues, for fear that interest groups would complain to the FCC and therefore put the station's license renewal at risk.

As a result, the FCC entered a period of deregulation in the 1980s, and the Fairness Doctrine and other regulations were repealed. Killory and Bozzelli (1988, p. 71) argue that less government interference in broadcasting will "give far greater assurance to the people of this country, who are the ultimate beneficiaries

of a free press, that the liberties and protections guaranteed by the Constitution will be passed on to the next generation of speakers?' This "absence" of regulation has had a strong indirect influence on media content:

- *Local news programming.* After deregulation, some television stations decided to drop news shows and others decided not to start them. "Deregulation has not resulted in the news diversity for which some hoped" (McKean & Stone, 1992, p. 713).
- *Tabloid TV* Independently produced television shows that emphasize murders, celebrities' personal lives, and sex scandals—such as "A Current Affair;" "This Evening," "The Reporters;" and "Inside Edition"—lack the journalistic "gatekeeper of news standards" that had previously monitored television programs. Philip Weis, a contributing editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, says that "trash TV . . . would never have caught on were it not for this bold, new, deregulated marketplace" (1989, p. 38). The format of tabloid shows is designed to titillate jaded viewers, even at the expense of a guest's humiliation. Such an approach caused the death of a young man who had appeared as a surprise guest on "The Jenny Jones Show" recently. A male guest had been invited on the show to meet an admirer, who turned out to be a gay man. The guest was enraged and later in the week shot his gay admirer dead. With tabloid TV producing profits of \$50 million per year, any human emotion or reaction is grist for the mill ("Television's junk dealers," 1995).
- *No trafficking rule.* The repeal of the no trafficking rule—which required that a broadcast license be held for at least three years—"turned broadcast properties into much more liquid assets" (Rattner, 1988, p. 6). As a result, between 1984 and 1986, 115 television stations were sold less than three years after the previous sale. This compares with only 10 stations sold after less than *three years during the* 1981-1983 period. It is yet to be seen whether frequent shifts in ownership will reduce stations' commitment to public service programming. In 1993, the FCC considered reintroducing the rule requiring an owner to hold a broadcast license for at least three years before resale. This was vigorously opposed by the NAB (National Association of Broadcasting). Subsequently the rule was not reintroduced, but the 1992 Cable Act has a provision against trafficking for owners of cable systems.
- *Public TV editorials.* In 1984 public television stations were given the right to editorialize, but this apparently has not had much effect on content. Lack of editorializing may be the result of "journalistic timorousness" (Kleiman, 1987, p. 713).
- *Children's programming.* The deregulatory "climate" has created a favorable environment for advertiser-created children's shows, "whose primary purpose is to sell toys through the shows' heroes" (Kunkel,

1988, p. 90). Deregulation removed the legal requirement for broadcasters to account for their programming and its service to the community. The only restriction in relation to children's programming is the 1990 Children's Television Act. Bob Keeshan, creator of Captain Kangaroo, says that public television looks to help children and commercial television looks for *ways* of exploiting them (Heffley, 1995).

In late 1993, Congress was considering whether to reenact the Fairness Doctrine (Steinfort, 1993, November/December, p. 12), but little progress was made as of 1995 to reinstate the act.

Rules put into effect under the Reagan administration made it very difficult for reporters to get access to much government information. Many documents were reclassified as "secret" at that time that had not previously been so classified. In April 1993, President Clinton said that the government had been making more things secret than was necessary and ordered the classification system reviewed (Ritter, 1993, pp. 28-29). The Society for Professional Journalists adopted recommendations for the review of Freedom of Information (FoI) rules, including the following: "begin with a presumption of public access and allow keeping information secret only if disclosure causes 'specific, identifiable harm-(p. 28). New rules announced by the Clinton administration in October 1993 supposedly revoked the 1981 federal rule that made it possible for government officials to withhold information if there was a "substantial legal basis" for doing so (Gersh, 1993, p. 18).

Some reporters say that there is little improvement as yet (Culver, 1993, p. 29). The Clinton administration has continued the Bush administration's attempts to keep electronic mail secret. Richard M. Schmidt, Jr., general counsel for the American Society of Newspaper Editors, says, "I think history shows presidents enter the White House as avowed champions of FoI, but few leave with the same enthusiasm" (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 16). Even if a president has changed policy, that policy must be administered by federal employees, who have long-established habits. This includes, according to Paul McMasters, executive director of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, a feeling that "government information belonged to them and not to the public" (Gersh, 1993, p. 18).

### **Government Policies and Actions**

Sometimes government influence on the mass media operates outside of formal laws and regulations. There are more than 3,000 U.S. government workers who primarily produce public information that is designed to give an impression of governmental competence and efficiency. "At every level of government, in every agency, there are information specialists whose responsibility it is to ensure that the nation's public media carry the desired message forward" (Gandy, 1982, p. 74). A less overt influence on media content comes in the form of news leaks, backgrounders, or off-the-record interviews; and these can be used very effectively to set the agenda for the news media—something that U.S. presidents do



not fail to attempt. Gandy (1982) says that the executive branch spends more money on publicity than do the legislative and judicial branches combined.

Sometimes presidents attempt direct control of news content. As the United States entered the Vietnam War in 1961, President John Kennedy urged a meeting of the American Newspaper Publishers Association to voluntarily censor their newspapers' content as the United States fought communism. Kennedy's speech to 1,700 newspaper publishers compared the U.S. media system with that of the Soviet Union:

We are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence on infiltration instead of invasion, on subversion instead of elections, on intimidation instead of free choice, on guerrillas by night instead of armies by day. Its preparations are concealed, not published. Its mistakes are buried, not headlined. Its dissenters are silenced, not praised. No expenditure is questioned, no rumor is printed, no secret is revealed.

In time of war, the government and the press have customarily joined in an effort, based largely on self-discipline, to prevent unauthorized disclosures to the enemy. In time of "clear and present danger," the courts have held that even the privileged rights of the First Amendment must yield to the public's need for national security.... I do ask every publisher, every editor, and every newsman in the nation to reexamine his own standards and to recognize the nature of our country's peril.

Every newspaper now asks itself, with respect to every story: "Is it news?" All that I suggest is that you add the question: "Is it in the national interest?" (Reeves, 1993, pp. 108-109)

There was polite applause. The publishers were not in opposition to Kennedy's view of communism, but they didn't want any president telling them how to run their newspapers. In his book on the Kennedy presidency, Richard Reeves says, "Some of the newspaper owners thought Kennedy was hysterical that night" (1993, p. 109).

The late journalist and press critic I. E Stone commented in 1965 that President Lyndon Johnson "sometimes seems to think the Constitution made him not only commander-in-chief of the nation's armed forces but editor-in-chief of its newspapers" (Boylan, 1989, p. 47). About off-the-record briefings during the Vietnam War, Stone wrote: "The process of brain-washing the public starts with off-the-record briefings for newspapermen in which all sorts of far-fetched theories are suggested to explain why the tiny North Vietnamese navy would be mad enough to venture an attack on the Seventh Fleet [in the Gulf of Tonkin]. ... *Everything is discussed except the possibility that the attack might have been provoked*" (p. 47).

Paletz and Entman (1981, p. 217) report that hundreds of journalists have had secret relationships with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), from

occasionally trading favors with CIA agents to being paid intelligence officers. In this way, the CIA has been able to slip things into the American media, either through tips or by influencing the content of foreign-based English-language publications read by American correspondents. In addition, American media sometimes provided cover for CIA agents (y allowing them to pose as journalists) and gave outtakes of newsfilms to the agency (Paletz & Pittman, 1981, p. 218).

Even general U.S. policy can apparently affect U.S. media content. Chang (1989) found in his study of U.S. policy and coverage of China in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 1950 and 1984 that "the more the government favored U.S.-China relations, the more the newspapers preferred better relations between the two countries" (p. 504). His analysis suggested that newspaper coverage changed in response to government policy shifts.

Government policies have also been used to deny some foreign news sources entry into the United States. For example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1989 wanted to invite presidents Castro of Cuba and Ortega of Nicaragua to address its conference in Washington, D.C. The U.S. State Department refused to allow the two heads of state into the country. When asked about the ruling, Secretary of State James Baker said that the decision was based on policies about diplomatic relations with Cuba and Nicaragua, not censorship: "It would be harmful to our diplomatic efforts to bring those two countries into the community of nations" (Cranberg, 1989, p. 12). Some of those in the audience concluded that Baker "was outlining a relationship in which the government decides what is beneficial for the press, recommends news coverage, and compels the press to shun speakers who happen to be in the administration's doghouse" (p. 12).

Debate over the public's right to know versus the government's need to maintain national security increased during and after the Persian Gulf War. Indeed, the U.S. military effectively controlled information about the war, leaving the world's news media to use pool footage in most cases. The public knew what the Pentagon wanted it to know (Lee & Devitt, 1990:

Journalists had to sign agreements that they would obey press restrictions before they received visas for Saudi Arabia. All photographs, video and battlefield dispatches had to be cleared by military censors. Reporters were allowed only to travel in predesignated "pools" with U.S. military escorts always at their side. Feisty reporters frequently were excluded from the pools. Those who attempted to cover the war independently were sometimes detained and threatened by U.S. soldiers. (p. 15)

Such strict rules were said to be needed to maintain security. But Paul McMasters, National Freedom of Information Committee chair of the Society of Professional journalists, *says* that restrictions imposed on the news media were not all the result of concern over military security: "Early on, for example, the

press was denied access to the Dover, Del., Air Force Base, where honors traditionally are accorded returning soldiers fallen in battle. Bush administration officials had been furious in 1989 when the networks split the screens to show bodies returning from Panama during one of the president's news conferences." Reporters' copy was edited during a security review in the Persian Gulf; "giddy" returning pilots became "proud" and Iraqi prisoners were "rescued" rather than "captured" (McMasters, 1991, p. 7).

But censorship was not all overt. Journalists also censored themselves and showed their own patriotism. "We've destroyed half of the Iraqi Air Force," announced Bob Schiefer on CBS. Peter Arnett of CNN asked about the helicopters flying past, "Are those our choppers or their choppers?" (p. 16). Lee and Devitt, who work for the media watch group FAIR, say that the casual use of "we" and "our" in describing the United States in the war "underscored one of the main weaknesses of American journalism: Far from being too 'liberal,' too adversarial, reporters often are too close to power" (pp. 16-17). In fact, the U.S. news media are owned or sponsored on some level by military contractors. For example, NBC is owned by General Electric, which is one of the United States' largest military contractors. GE also sponsors news programs on ABC and CNN and underwrites programming on PBS.

GE designed, manufactured or supplied parts or maintenance for nearly every major weapon system employed by the United States during the Gulf war—including the Patriot and Tomahawk Cruise missiles, the Stealth and B-52 bombers, the AWACS planes and the NAVSTAR spy satellite system. When NBC correspondents and hired consultants praised the performance of U.S. weaponry, they were extolling equipment made by GE, the corporation that pays their salaries. (Lee & Devitt, 1991, p. 18)

The military was also extremely effective in establishing the language that the media used in their reports. "Soft words" were created for "hard combat":

Enemy aircraft aren't blown up, they're "knocked down." Buildings with people in them don't explode and crumble; rather, "ground positions" are "taken out." Bombs don't send hot shrapnel bursting through the air. "Targets" are "hit" with "all available assets." A battle plan is discussed not in terms of the destruction it will cause but for its "coercive potential" Even seasoned journalists refer to an outpost demolished by attack as having been "neutralized." (Deans, 1991, pp. 10-11)

In September 1992, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) proposed criteria for those who wanted to be included in the National Media Pool, a rotating pool of Washington-based journalists who would be called by the DOD in the case of military activities. The proposed criteria included

familiarity with the military "by maintaining a correspondent who regularly covers military affairs, visits military operational units, attends Pentagon press conferences, and interviews senior military and civilian DOD officials"; maintenance of a Washington, D.C., bureau of "sufficient size" so that a pool member's absence will not jeopardize security; pool members on standby must be ready to deploy, with the proper equipment, in at least four hours; media organizations must agree to abide by a set of ground rules listed in the proposal, as well as any formulated as necessary during a particular mission; and media organizations in the pool must be owned and operated by U.S. companies. (Gersh, 1992, p. 11)

## **THE MARKETPLACE**

In the United States, the mass media operate primarily in a commercial market-place, where each medium must compete with the others for audience and advertiser attention. In this section we will show how characteristics of the marketplace in which a medium operates can influence its content.

### **Competition**

From the newspaper publisher's point of view, the key feature of the marketplace is whether there is another newspaper in town. A competing newspaper requires that the market—readers and advertisers' dollars—be split between the news-papers; in a monopoly market, the publisher has the only (newspaper) game in town. Would the competitive publisher produce a different newspaper than his or her monopoly counterpart? With the number of daily newspapers declining rapidly in recent years, more and more communities are left with newspaper monopolies, causing a number of researchers to turn their attention to this problem.

A common assumption underlying such research is that two newspapers will cover the news in different ways,' but this is not always supported. A study by Weaver and Mullins (1975) showed that there were virtually no differences in the kind of editorial content published by newspapers that compete in the same community, a conclusion that was supported by McCombs (1987). Utt and Pasternack (1985) looked at ten pairs of competing newspapers to determine whether differences existed in the newspapers' use of graphic devices. News-papers with similar circulation sizes showed no difference in their graphics. If, however, one newspaper was substantially smaller than its competitor, the smaller tended to be more modern in design. Lacy (1988) suggests that an increase in *intercity* competition—such as when a metropolitan city newspaper encroaches on a suburban newspaper's market—can cause the suburban news-paper to increase its coverage of local news.

Many studies have looked at diversity—the variety in the content that is offered the audience—because competition is assumed to create a "marketplace

of ideas" that facilitates the free discussion of important issues. When one of the two or more newspapers in a city goes out of business, is the audience left with poorer coverage of the diverse concerns in the community? Apparently not. A number of studies have shown little or no support for such a hypothesis. Entman (1985) compared the content of 91 newspapers from communities with either two competing newspapers, two papers with a single owner, or only one newspaper. He found little evidence to suggest that competition encourages diversity. In another study, of four Canadian newspapers, Maxwell McCombs (1988) found that the surviving newspaper may have actually improved its content following the death of its competitor. In a similar study in Cleveland, McCombs (1987) found only random differences between the surviving *Plain Dealer's* content before and after *the Press* folded.

Unlike newspapers, television stations and networks rarely operate in a monopoly environment—three or four competing local newscasts are not uncommon within one community. To be economically successful, a television station must find its own part of the mass audience and prepare content that will draw viewers. Atwater (1984) says that broadcast editors create diversity in their attempt to position their stations' newscasts differently from their competitors', and therefore that each station in the market does increase the diversity of information available to the audience. Almost half the local news stories in the nine television stations Atwater studied were unique to one station.

The same thing may not be true of nonnews content, however. Gitlin (1985) says that the advent of cable and the expansion of television channels from three or four to fifty or more in many communities has not increased the diversity of content offered to the audience. Most programs on the new channels are supplied by only a few distribution companies—those that already have adopted the typical Hollywood conventions. A large part of cable content consists of reruns of movies or old television series. Yet in late 1993, it seemed that the existing four U.S. television networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC) would be joined by two more. Paramount Communications revealed plans for the Paramount Network, which might include programming such as Paramount's popular *Star Trek* spinoffs. Time Warner has ready-made programming in its Bugs Bunny and Looney Tunes cartoons (Miller, 1993, p. 50).

**Global Competition.** The founding of the Cable News Network (CNN) by Ted Turner in 1980 and its ascendancy as *the* source for international news—beginning with the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, then the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the Persian Gulf War—has created a global market for news. CNN has had few competitors until recently, although the U.S. network ABC has done more than its peers in trying to cover international news for the American market (Auletta, 1993, p. 25).

Several challengers to CNN have recently come to the fore (Auletta, 1993, pp. 25-30). The BBC in 1992 launched the BBC World Service Television, and in March 1993 WST formed an alliance with ABC to share footage and foreign bureaus. But ABC/Capital Cities also owns 80 percent of another global news

network, Worldwide Television News, a video service that competes with ABC. Another challenger to CNN is Reuters Television (formerly Visnews), which serves 80 countries. Reuters primarily acts as a supplier of news stories to other broadcasters, but in June 1993 Reuters joined with the BBC and the Telemundo network to create a 24-hour Spanish-language news service for South America, Spain, and some parts of North America. Rupert Murdoch's Sky News has joined with 12 state-owned broadcasters to form Euronews, which provides news programming in Europe and in five languages. A possible expansion of Sky News into Asia is under way. To combat the competition outside of the United States, in 1985 Turner created CNN International and has agreements with 143 countries to broadcast their news on CNNI. Although CNN does run into stiff competition in certain countries or on continents, it has no single competitor for worldwide transmission of news. However, although CNN has been an English-language service, it is now planning to provide news in other languages to match specific competitors.

### **Market Characteristics**

The kind of community from which a medium operates also affects content. The community is the environment in which the medium must operate, and therefore the community's economy and culture as well as its physical and social layout will affect both the kind of media that set up business there and how successful they are (Phillips, Boylan, & Yu, 1982).

Even the size of the community can have an effect, as Carroll (1989) shows in his analysis of 57 television stations' newscasts. The larger the market size, the more the television station covered spontaneous news events; smaller-market stations relied more on features and other stories that could be preplanned (see also Carroll, 1985). Smaller-market stations also ran less local news than did bigger stations. Carroll speculates that the differences may be due to the lower budgets and small staffs of the smaller-market stations. Essentially the same result came from a study of 114 daily newspapers by Lacy and Bernstein (1988): Larger newspapers were more likely to generate their own content, whereas smaller papers relied more on wire service copy and editorials. Lacy and Fico (1991) found that the higher-quality newspapers tend to have larger circulations. Stone and Morrison (1976) say that the goal of the smaller newspapers is to be the community's voice, which explains their reliance on grass roots copy and legal advertising.

The evidence is far from conclusive, however. Becker, Beam, and Russial (1978) found that community size was not related to newspaper performance. Hynds (1980) found that changes in circulation size were not associated with changes in coverage, such as the number of pictures used or the amount of business news. Hynds did find, however, that larger newspapers are more likely to run exposes. Lacy and Sohn (1990) found only weak support for a hypothesis that the relationship between content and circulation would be the same for metro dailies and suburban nondailies in the same market. They suggest that the two types of newspapers may serve different functions, with metro dailies being more critical than hometown nondailies (pp. 791-792).

McCombs (1972) carries market influence beyond the community level to the social system as a whole, arguing that the amount of economic support available in the United States is a major constraint on the growth of the mass media. He uses Scripps' Constancy Hypothesis—"that the amount of money spent on mass communication is relatively constant"—to hypothesize "that a relatively constant *proportion* of the available wealth—Gross National Product, for example—will be devoted to mass media.' Consumers and advertisers will spend more or less on mass media, depending on how much money they have. In other words, "the media will grow and expand at a rate dictated by the general economy" (pp. 5-6). McCombs shows that over time, spending in new media comes at the expense of the old, such that the proportion devoted to all media remains the same.

In other studies, however, nationwide economic changes are treated as stimuli that cause the media to change their assessment of how newsworthy something is. For example, Erfle and McMillan (1989, p. 127) show that "network news coverage of the oil industry is strongly affected by the market conditions within the oil industry? As the price of oil goes up, the amount of coverage of the oil industry in general increases—not just for the price changes. Apparently when oil is in short supply and therefore costs more, journalists find oil issues to be more newsworthy. Sparkes (1978) found that the coverage of the United States and Canada in each other's press is related to the percentage of foreign trade accounted for by the other country and to the country's gross national product (GNP).

### **Community Relations**

Some publishers of newspapers in small towns say that it is important that they be "community boosters," helping to promote economic development of the town. Jack Fishman, publisher of the *Citizen Tribune*, Morristown, Tennessee, justifies his involvement: "If you've ever tried to publish a newspaper where there's no economic activity, it's pretty difficult" (Case, 1993, p. 15). After a lot of businesses began closing, publisher Diane Everson's paper, the *Edgerton Reporter*, ran stories about the skilled, but currently unemployed, work force in Edgerton, Wisconsin. When a manufacturer inquired about opening a plant, the newspaper was part of the community team that convinced the company to move there.

When certain U.S. military bases were targeted for closure in the early 1990s, many journalists led rallies or otherwise helped campaigns to keep their bases in town. When the Pentagon recommended that 31 bases be closed in March 1992, an analysis of media coverage and interviews with journalists showed that boosterism was also evident in the news. "Several newspaper reporters say their stories were given front page placement when they covered save-the-base rallies, but buried inside the paper if they indicated that a base might close. Other reporters say their suggestions for stories on the potential benefits of base closings were shot down" (Schulte, 1993, p. 28). Some publishers were involved

with base-saving efforts by local Chambers of Commerce, and editorials urged the Pentagon to "save the base." Not everyone was on the bandwagon, however. Steve Campbell, a reporter for the *Portland Press Herald* in Maine, says "Our role is to report the news, not to keep unnecessary military bases alive." A reporter at a West Coast paper says, "An independent press is supposed to take an even-handed look at things. My paper . . . went beyond parochial concerns to cheerleading" (p. 31). Gene Roberts, former editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, says that boosterism has become more common as news organizations put pressure on their editorial departments to help the organization make a profit. The result? The detachment and objectivity that once characterized the media-community relationship has been replaced by a team concept to help make the community more economically viable (p. 43).

Connections between reader preferences and newspaper content are not new. In their analysis of letters to the editor from 1948 to 1978, Pritchard and Berkowitz (1991) found that editorials seemed to be more influenced by readers' concerns with crime than were news stories. Newspaper executives, however, have become increasingly interested in studying how their newspapers cover their local communities, particularly minority populations. A 1993 publication of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) entitled *Covering the Community: Newspaper Content Audits*, says that content audits are "a way to improve local coverage, build ties to the community, and involve the newsroom staff in the changes" (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1993, p. 5). Once the audit is finished, the report recommends giving a copy to everyone in the newsroom. Reporters and editors should be encouraged "to consider diversity in every story, particularly in terms of seeking out diverse sources." ASNE also recommends making "covering the total community a part of everyone's performance standards" (p. 21).

The Gannett newspaper chain now requires its publishers and editors to become more aware of community issues and to change newspaper content to better serve the reader—what has become called "the reader-driven newspaper" (Underwood, 1993, p. 42). Gannett calls this the News 2000 program. How do the 82 Gannett daily newspapers find out what the audience wants? One particularly successful newspaper in the News 2000 program is the *Olympian*, a 35,000-circulation paper in Olympia, Washington. This newspaper ran coupons for readers to send in their ideas, editors held public forums, reader focus groups discussed the newspaper, and reporters surveyed shopping mall customers to find out what they wanted to see in the newspaper. These methods used by the editorial staff to learn more about the community stand in contrast to the traditional market research that the newspaper business staff commissioned and interpreted.

Changes in the *Olympian* include fewer jumps, shorter stories, more graphics, and "news-you-can-use" (Underwood, 1993, p. 43). Critics say that now the newspaper cannot deal adequately with complex news stories, being limited by a story size of about six to ten inches. Ironically, some reporters say that they have less time to go into the community to follow story ideas because they



are spending time in more meetings with editors, who give more direction about which stories are to be followed. Even more ironic, many of these editors are new to the community. Such trends have caused the wall between the editorial and business sides of the newspaper to be lowered, because profit-motivated publishers and owners now draw a direct linkage between how reader-oriented the newspaper is and how much money it makes.

Sensitivity to the community is a way of life with some television stations as well. In February 1993, two CBS-affiliated television stations owned by the Mormon Church stopped carrying the drama "Picket Fences" because of a January episode in which polygamy was used as a defense in court. "These stations have always been incredibly sensitive to content in shows," said Anthony C. Malara, the president of CBS's affiliate relations division. "In this case, there was clearly a policy that guided the station management's decision." (Carter, 1993, p. B3).

### **Institutional Affiliations**

Although research shows that individual journalists are unlikely to be active in community organizations (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972), the same cannot be said for the directors of large media corporations. Directors of the 24 largest newspaper-owning companies in the United States share a "web of affiliations" with those in the U.S. power structure (Dreier, 1983). Such institutional affiliations are accomplished through membership in business and trade associations, activities in nonprofit groups and social clubs, and corporate directorships. Dreier argues that large and influential newspapers—such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Los Angeles Times*—have a common ideology with other large corporations. This ideology—corporate liberalism—is used by those in the capitalist power structure to "forestall changes from below and stabilize the long-term foundations of capitalism by implementing strategic reforms to co-opt dissent" (p. 447). Large corporation leaders differ from those in small and medium-sized companies in their interest in the welfare of the system as a whole. The leaders of small and medium-sized companies have a greater parochial outlook and concern with a single company's short-term interests. The corporate ideological outlook supports unions, social welfare, foreign aid, and government regulations; and Dreier implies that newspapers owned by such corporations tend to reflect a more liberal ideology in their content. Some, such as the *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, have changed from extreme conservatism to a liberal outlook (Dreier, 1983, p. 447). Another effect of the increasing number of corporate affiliations between media and other organizations is an increase in the proportion of newspapers that do *not* make presidential endorsements: from 13.4 percent in 1940 to 25.6 percent in 1976 (Emery & Emery, 1978, p. 483, cited in Dreier, 1983, p. 447).

In his study of 50 publicly held media corporations, Han (1988) found that media corporations' boards of directors are *interlocked* with boards of directors from nonmedia corporations; that is, the boards of directors share members. Most of the 300 directors of the 25 largest newspapers also

serve as directors of leading businesses, banks, and law firms (Dreier & Weinberg, 1979, cited in Han, 1988). Akhavan-Majid's (1991, p. 1006) study of leading newspapers and television stations in Japan shows many interlocking directorships and overlapping social club memberships. Journalists and industrial leaders there tend to have similar educational backgrounds and belong to the same professional clubs.

Media corporations are most often interlocked with financial institutions, and this may have serious consequences for media corporations that are bought out with the cooperation of financial institutions. By varying their stock ownership, financial institutions can control the basic decisions in media corporations. "Interlocking directorate ties with major advertisers, financial houses, law firms, competing firms, and other elite social institutions thus can raise a question of the autonomy of media firms" (Han, 1988, p. 182). Large media organizations may themselves be dependent on resources controlled by these elite social institutions, putting the media potentially under the control of giant corporations. "The greater the dependency of a media firm on the elite institutions, the greater the chance for their control over mass media" (p. 183).

## **TECHNOLOGY**

Media content may be affected by the adoption of technological advances. As Theodore Peterson (1981) points out, the technological revolution that occurred during the 1880s and 1890s revolutionized the mass media. Instead of being primarily local, the new mass-produced newspapers and magazines could cover a wider geographic area. But to appeal to people from a wider area, the newspapers had to standardize their product. Today newspapers across the United States are largely alike, and journalists can move easily from one to another. "One issue of a given magazine is much like every other, for once an editor has hit upon the editorial balance that pleases his readers, he changes it gradually or not at all. And the spin-off of television series is testimony to the inherent sameness of broadcast fare" (p. 26).

Have technological advances in broadcasting changed broadcast news? There is little research to answer this question, but Ostroff and Sandell (1989) suggest that it has not in any important way. They studied election campaigns for Ohio's governor in 1978, 1982, and 1986 to see how changes in technology at three television stations would affect coverage of the elections. The changes included switching from film to ENG (Electronic News Gathering), which allows live coverage of events; use of satellites for newsgathering; and enhanced graphics, which help news staff present complicated information more effectively. Although there was an increase in the number of live stories between 1982 and 1986, coverage remained sporadic and gave audience members little information about the election.

Numerous studies have looked at the effects of computer technology on newspaper content. Randall (1979) found that newspapers that use full electronic editing have fewer errors in spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, hyphenation, and typography. Shipley and Gentry (1981) found that video display

terminal (VDT) editing is more accurate than hard-copy editing. The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* are using satellite technology to transmit national editions of their newspapers to regional centers for printing and distribution (Cranberg, 1988). The technology made a standardized national edition feasible. A 1992 study by Cynthia De Riemer looked at how reporters at four newspapers used the database VU/TEXT, one of several on-line information services. Although nearly all the journalists did use VU/TEXT, they remained unsure about how the database affected their productivity and story quality. Younger journalists were among the highest users, indicating that use is at least partially a function of overall experience and comfort with computers.

A Gannett Company newsletter, *Editorially Speaking*, outlines four ways in which technology has shaped newspaper content: First, computers help editors and artists prepare informational graphics that tell stories better. Second, the Associated Press's PhotoStream has improved the quality of AP photos available to newspapers. Third, reporters use computers to access databases and use this information to prepare better stories. Fourth, as newspapers go to fully computerized pagination, editors have more control over page design, replacing many decisions that were made in the "back shop" composing room ("Technology Improves Newspapers," 1993, p. 1).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a boom in the number of newspapers that put together "computer-assisted reporting" teams, reporters who use large computer databases in much the same way that a social scientist does—to identify a problem, ask a question, analyze the available data, and write up the results. This can involve the use of existing information databases such as NEXIS, but increasingly newspapers are acquiring raw data records from sources such as the National Transportation Safety Board and are producing stories that were not possible when human beings were needed to pore over vast amounts of information. For example, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* took National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) records and showed that contrary to NTSB statements, a DC-9 that crashed had maintenance problems unusual in similar aircraft. In 1989 Bill Dedman won a Pulitzer Prize for an *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* database project that showed widespread discrimination against African Americans by home-mortgage lenders (Corcoran, 1991, p. 30).

Janus (1984) suggests that the creation of a transnational communication infrastructure will facilitate the growth of global advertising campaigns—"one standard message designed at company headquarters and transmitted to all the countries where the product is made or distributed. "Television commercials can be based "around internationally recognized visual symbols to overcome the major obstacles posed by language diversity and illiteracy" (p. 59).

### **The Information Highway**

The 1990s have seen a flood of new communication technologies, some fact and some predictions. In 1993 a federal court in Virginia overturned a ruling that prevented telephone companies from transmitting television programs over their own systems (Andrews, 1993, p. A1). This released a flood of interest in

"converging" communication technologies—newspapers, television, telephone, cellular telephone, cable, fax, computers—the infrastructure for the so-called "information highway" (Leccese, 1994, p. 23; Dale, 1994, p. STC).

But the beginning of the information highway extends back to 1968, when the U.S. Department of Defense created the first network for mainframe computers to communicate with one another. In 1971 Ralph Smith, author of *The Wired Nation*, coined the term *electronic highway* to describe the information flow (Leccese, 1994, p. 23). The federal government got into the computer network business in a big way, when in 1988 then-senator Al Gore proposed a computer network that ultimately became today's National Information Infra-structure. Private and public companies and universities were already networking their computers, and the result is the Internet, a global computer network that today has between 15 and 30 million users, (In 1985 there were only a few thousand users [Leccese, p. 241]. The Internet has been called the "prototype" for the information highway (Cole, 1994, p. 21). Predictions are that our current information media will "merge into some as yet undefined supermedium, and the age of the integrated services digital network, in which geographically disparate communicants are linked into `virtual communities' based entirely on information flow, seem imminent" (Dale, 1994, p. 8TC).

Mass communication companies are already making the connections necessary to establishing the multimedia, integrated corporations and alliances necessary for the growth of the information highway:

- The electronic network Prodigy Services Company has made alliances with the Times Mirror Company's newspapers (including the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Newsday*), Cox Newspapers (including the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the *Palm Beach Post*, and the *Austin American: Statesman*), and Southam Inc, of Toronto. David Easterly, president of Cox Newspapers, says that the alliance will "give us not just the ability to put the newspaper up into electronic form, because that's not, I don't think, the real key to it; I think it enables us to put a lot of information together we don't put in the newspaper because of newsprint costs" (Lail, 1994, pp. 39-40).
- America On-Line (AOL), a rapidly growing electronic service, has cooperated with newspapers to make electronic versions available, including Knight-Ridder's *San Jose Mercury News* (Mercury Center) and the *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago On-line). AOL also plans to offer electronic versions of *Crain's Chicago Business* and *Crain's Small Business* magazines.
- Knight-Ridder Tribune Graphics has created a network called PressLink as a way of selling digital graphics for newspapers and video animations for television stations across the country.

The software firm Oracle Corporation is working with the *Washington Post* and Capital Cities/ABC Inc. to develop interactive, multimedia news and advertising. Oracle is also working with Bell Atlantic to develop software for the Stargazer interactive-media project in Philadelphia. Stargazer is the product of Knight-Ridder and Bell Atlantic Corp.

- Delphi Internet Services Corp. has joined with the Pulitzer Publishing Co. and its *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to produce PostLink, an on-line service for St. Louis residents.
- Also using the Internet is Dow Jones & Co., which provides full text of the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and Dow Jones news services in a new package called DowVision.
- The E. W. Scripps Co. has bought Bagwell Communications/Cinetel Productions, a large producer of cable-television programs.
- Hearst Corp. joined a group that includes five Canadian companies. The purpose is to create an interactive transaction and multimedia network. The Canadian cable company Le Groupe Videotron is also involved.
- Bell Atlantic Corp. planned to acquire Tele-Communications Inc. and to join the Gannett Co. in Interactive Network Inc., a California company that is planning an interactive television program for various *cities*.
- The network CompuServe also makes some newspapers available, including the *Detroit Free Press*, *Florida Today*, and Gannett Suburban Newspapers.
- Other newspapers have started their own electronic versions through subscription and by dial-up services. They include: the *Albuquerque Tribune* (Electronic Trib); the *Charlotte Observer* (Observer Online); the Danbury, Connecticut, *News-Times* (News-Times BBS); the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Star Text); *Kansas City Star* (StarView); *Middlesex* (Massachusetts) *News* (Fred the Computer); *Poughkeepsie Journal* (Poughkeepsie Journal BBS); the *Raleigh News & Observer* (NandO); and the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* (S-R Minerva).
- The Associated Press is planning to establish a video news service for television stations.
- Viacom International and AT&T are testing new interactive services over Viacom's cable network near San Francisco.
- GTE has been testing interactive television (Main Street) with Apollo Cablevision near Los Angeles.
- U.S.S. West is testing video services as part of its installation of a fiber optic network in 14 states.
- Time Warner's Full Service Network (FSN) is being tested over its cable system. CUC International is providing home-shopping services. Hewlett-Packard equipment will allow FSN customers to print out images from their televisions. (Compiled from Shaw, 1993; Glaberson, August 5, 1993; Glaberson, August 16, 1993; Garneau, 1993; Rosenberg, 1993; Gilder, 1993; Keizer, 1994; Lail, 1994; Moeller, 1994; Potter, 1994)

The predicted 500 cable television channels will present more time slots to fill with content, causing good taste to evaporate, according to Howard Stringer, president of CBS/Broadcast group (1993, p. 6). Standards will fall, and the amount of violence on television will increase, he predicts.

**SUMMARY: INFLUENCES OF EXTRAMEDIA FORCES ON MEDIA CONTENT**

In this chapter, we have shown that there is a wide variety of influences on media content that operate outside of the media organization. Sources can stimulate or constrain the diffusion of information according to their own interests, and journalists' choice of which source to interview can color the stories they write. Although interest groups make organized efforts to influence media content (e.g., through press guidelines), their success in influencing content is mixed. Interest groups that can retaliate economically (such as with a consumer boycott of advertisers' products) do apparently affect content. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some media organizations may self-censor the content they produce in order to prevent even the threat of economic retaliation. The creation of pseudoevents is one way in which public relations practitioners can control media content.

Do the mass media give the audience what it wants? Although most journalists are uninformed about their audiences' characteristics and preferences, the marketing departments of some newspapers have provided publishers with enough information to "position" the newspaper so as to draw the desired target audience.

But for most commercial media, audiences are important only because their attention can be sold to advertisers, who provide the bulk of revenues. And advertisers often tell the media what they think and how they believe content should be altered. With new technologies, advertisers are taking the offensive in the battle over media content, with advertiser-created programming for children and videocassette offerings of programming with commercials integrated so they cannot be "zapped" out.

Another frequent influence on media content comes from government. Although some countries have fewer press controls than others, all governments control the mass media to some extent. In the United States, this control takes the form of laws (such as those designed to punish libel) and regulations that determine both who can own a broadcast medium and what kinds of content will be permitted.

Each commercial mass medium operates within a marketplace, and the nature of the marketplace can sometimes affect content. For example, the size of the market and its opportunities for profits affect content, as does the general health of the economy. On the other hand, numerous studies of the effects of competition on newspaper content show that competition does not ensure increased diversity within a market.

**ORGANIZA NOTES**

1. For example, advertising accounts for nearly 100 percent of television and radio broadcasting, 75 percent of newspaper, and 50 percent of magazine revenues (Dunn & Barban [1986], as reported in Weis & Burke, 1986).
2. Population size in these cities also fell during the same period, but by only 6 percent, according to Bogart (1989).
3. The same could be said for women. Those who say that women or minorities will bring something different to media content assume that journalists' individual characteristics will override forces due to job socialization and organizational imperatives. Interestingly enough, these are often the same people who say that journalists' personal attitudes don't affect content.
4. Not only tobacco advertising seems to affect magazine content. In 1982, Tankard and Peirce showed that magazines that accepted alcohol advertising had more favorable editorial coverage of alcoholic beverages.
5. For example, Phillip Morris owns General Foods Corporation; RJR Reynolds owns Nabisco Brands, Inc., and Del Monte Foods (Kessler, 1989).
6. For example, the audience was shocked when it was revealed that NBC's famous "Twenty-One" quiz show was rigged. Contestants had been given answers in advance ("Ask the Globe," 1994).
7. The assumption is almost always that competition will have beneficial effects on content, but Entman (1985, p. 163) suggests that rivalry may have negative effects, such as sabotage, creating bogus scandals, and attacking public officials for minor offenses. "The competitive energies may be spent in childish one-upmanship, with each paper determined to mine the ultimate nugget of trivia so as not to be 'beat' by its rival."

## Chapter 9.

# The Influence of Ideology

In this chapter we consider the ideological influences on media content. By *ideology* we mean a symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in society. We want to know the role of the mass media in propagating this ideology, and the forces that dictate the nature of that ideology. Here we want to know how media people, practices, and relations function ideologically. Hall (1989) argues that having previously ignored ideology, mainstream U.S. communication theory has begun to take it up for two reasons: (1) a greater recognition now of the media's ability to "define situations' and label groups and individuals as deviant," and (2) the breakdown of the social consensus following the political unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, creating greater ideological polarization and focusing attention on the media's exercise of ideological control (p. 309). He adds that ideology focuses our attention on the symbolic influence of media on audiences, the "definition" that prevails, and the legitimation and exercise of symbolic power (p. 309).

### IDEOLOGY

In this chapter we do not presume to cover the burgeoning wealth of perspectives directed toward the study of ideology. These have broadened in recent years to include feminist theory, semiotics, deconstructionism, and other post-modern currents. Instead we try to provide some key concepts and paint a general picture of the kinds of questions that concern scholars studying the media at this level. Rather than try to summarize a vast body of research, we provide two extended examples at the end of this chapter that show how ideological questions can be tackled through the study of media content.



### **Definition of Ideology**

Raymond Williams defines ideology as a "relatively-formal and articulated-system of meanings, values and beliefs, of a kind a-kind that can- be abstracted as a 'worldview'-or 'class outlook" (Williams, 1977, p. 109). According to Samuel Becker (1984), ideology "governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves; it controls what we see as 'natural' or 'obvious' "(p. 69). "An ideology is an integrated set of frames of reference through which each of us sees the world and to which all of us adjust our actions" (Becker, 1984, p. 69).

Questions of ideology center around how diverse groups with conflicting interests hang together in a society. As Gouldner puts it: Ideological assumes special importance as a symbolic mechanism through-which interests of these diverse social strata may be integrated; through the sharing of it the several dominant- strata are enabled to make compatible responses to changing - social conditions" (Gouldner, 1976, pp. 230-231).

### **Ideological Values in Media**

What is the basis for ideology in the United States? Fundamental is a belief in the value of the capitalist economic system, private ownership, pursuit of profit by self-interested entrepreneurs, and free markets. This system is intertwined with the Protestant ethic and the value of individual achievement. The companion political values center around liberal democracy, a system in which all people are presumed to have equal worth and a right to share in their own governance, making decisions based on rational self-interest. These values are articulated and reaffirmed through the media (e.g., Exoo, 1987).

Ideology works through existing values and should not be considered an alien belief system imposed on an inhospitable host culture. What, then, separates ideology from culture? Thompson (1990), in characterizing the interpretive approach represented by anthropologists such as Geertz, defines culture as

the pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experience, conceptions and beliefs. (p. 132)

Media transmission of ideology works as it does by drawing on familiar cultural themes that resonate with audiences. These themes, however, are selectively chosen and constructed into a coherent structure. Thus, both culture and ideology are concerned with meaning; but as we will discuss further, ideology is meaning tied to interests—class and otherwise.

### **Ideological Levels v. Other Levels**

In our sense, ideology is not, as U.S. scholars have typically used it, an individual belief system. Rather, represents a social level in keeping with the European tradition of media studies, in

which ideology is considered a total structure, as opposed to a system of individual attitudes and values. This ideological level subsumes all the others we have been talking about and, therefore, is the most macro of the levels in our hierarchy of influences model (see Figure 9.1). The ideological level differs from the previous levels in that all the processes taking place at lower levels differs from the previous levels are considered to be working toward an ideologically related pattern of messages and on behalf of the higher power centers in society.

Moving to this level also involves a shift in research tradition and perspective compared with our previous chapters. Scholars concerned with ideology typically have adopted a Marxist approach, a perspective also termed *critical*, or *radical*. Their studies have emphasized more general, abstract the theorizing than testing specific hypotheses with empirical data. Indeed, critical scholars typically reject the notion that a traditional behavioral scientific approach, drawn from the natural sciences, is appropriate for the study of society, preferring to take a more qualitative, analytical, and philosophical approach. Becker (1984) notes that although scholars working within British Marxist studies have an aversion to the positivist tradition, they aren't agreed on the proper data to test their ideas.

Studies in this tradition focus on the larger culture and how it manages to hang together, rather than on the operation of any component part. Theories of communication become mixed in with theories of society. In the Marxist tradition, it is an object of faith that no aspect of

**FIGURE 9.1 Ideological** influences on media content in the hierarchical model.

ideological level  
extramedia level  
organization level  
media routines level  
individual level

society can be understood apart from its social and historical context. At this level we ask: In whose interests do routines and organizations ultimately work? As a result, researchers working at this level cannot avoid questions of value and interests and, ultimately, power. As such, studies discussed here provide an important overarching context for those at the lower levels covered previously.

In Chapter 4 we discussed how media content constitutes a rough mapping of power relations in society. At the Ideological level we look more closely at the powerful in society, and expressly how that power is played out through the media. We assume that ideas have links to interests and power and that the power to create symbols is not a neutral force. Not only is news about the powerful, but it structures stories so that events are interpreted from the perspective of powerful interests. The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) has compiled extensive documentation of media content in the book *Bad News*. It shows how labor unions, rather than corporate management, are blamed for industrial disputes in Ireland. The same is true in the United States, where labor positions are termed *demands*, whereas management positions are called *offers*. At the ideological level, we examine specifically how the media function as extensions of powerful interests in society; how the routines, values, and organizational structure combine to maintain a system of control and reproduction of the dominant ideology.

In Chapter 6, for example, we considered how media routines often work to the advantage of powerful sources. At the ideological level we are now in the position of examining how these powerful sources act in their own interest, not as individuals but as a class, transcending any one organization, industry, or place.

From an ideological perspective, advertiser influence, for example, becomes not just the self-interested action of a single firm but a systematic and structural result of a capitalist advertiser-supported media system. One media sponsor made the point directly. When PBS station WNET showed a documentary critical of multinational corporations in 1985, it lost its funding from Gulf + Western. The corporation's chief executive complained that the program was virulently antibusiness if not anti-American (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 17).

At the ideological level we seek to predict when media and political elites will intervene against normal journalistic routines and professionalism. From an ideological perspective, we can interpret many of the interventions in the news process mentioned in Chapter 7. When the story about the Berkeley Rebels (Gitlin, 1980, p. 67) was being produced by CBS News, for example, changes were instituted after the intervention by the Berkeley president, an indication that the story pressed against key ideological boundaries.

## **MEDIA AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

As Stuart Hall indicated, it is the media's ability to "define" the situation that gives them their ideological power. Before we tackle the power behind ideology, we must first appreciate the nature

of ideology as a social integration mechanism, and the related social control function of the media. One of the key functions performed by media is to maintain boundaries in a culture. To integrate societal interests, some views and values must be defined as within the bounds of acceptability, whereas others are read out of legitimacy.

### **Media and Deviance**

**Communicating Deviance.** The sociology of deviance has been of long-standing interest to social scientists. Their work has given us a start in understanding how the media function in that process. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, we view deviance not as an unchanging condition but as continually being defined and renegotiated as the participants interact with each other symbolically. The media are continually coping with new ideas, reaffirming social norms, and redrawing or defining boundaries. Thus, communication is an essential part of defining deviance. Clearly, the media do not just convey the labels created by others. They make their own decisions about tone, emphasis, placement, and portrayal, based on the routines and organizational logic discussed in earlier chapters.

### **Deviance in the News**

Shoemaker and her colleagues have done extensive analysis of the way in which the media communicate deviance. She found, for example, that those political groups perceived as deviant by newspaper editors were typically given less favorable treatment. Although not given less prominent attention, their legitimacy was more likely to be questioned. Indeed, journalists accentuated the differences among groups that could not be considered to differ intrinsically in their legitimacy (Shoemaker, 1984).

News selection criteria themselves may be said to be based on dimensions of deviance, including the controversial, sensational, prominent, and unusual. Shoemaker, Chang, and Brendlinger (1987) found that world events covered by the U.S. media were more deviant than those not covered, in the sense that those events (such as terrorism) threatened the status quo in the country in which they occurred. Similarly, covered events often conveyed normative deviance. That is, they would have broken American norms had they occurred in the United States (Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1987).

World events presented most prominently in the news were deviant events and those with economic or political significance to the United States. The next most prominent events were deviant, but with low significance (Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1988).

**Media Techniques of Communicating Deviance.** As agents of social control, the media must first identify threats to the status quo. As suggested by the Shoemaker research, the media do not screen out deviant ideas but rather portray them in a way calculated to underscore their deviance. The ideological status quo is reaffirmed by ridiculing deviant ideas as, in Miliband's words, "irrelevant" eccentricities which serious and reasonable people may dismiss as-of no consequence "(Miliband, 1969, p. 238).

Earlier in observing patterns of content we observed that the powerful receive news coverage routinely whereas those, with less power must break into the news via deviant acts, such as protests, strikes, or crime; Considered in the context-of deviance and social change, the media-act as a key-control mechanism in society. normal is reaffirmed by being presented routinely and in juxtaposition to the deviant, which competes at the boundaries for attention. Ironically, when many political groups are shut out of the media spotlight, they may become even more shrill and radical, confirming the original deviant label.

In his study of how the media covered the student radical movement in the 1960s, Gitlin (1980) identified a number of specific techniques that were used to make students' actions appear more deviant. These Included trivialization; polarization by showing counterdemonstrations; emphasis on internal dissension; disparagement by undercounting the students' numbers and minimizing their effectiveness; reliance on officials; emphasis on the presence of Communists, Vietcong flags, and violence; and considerable attention given to right-wing opposition.

***Media and the Anarchists.*** In their analysis of radical protest, McLeod and Hertog (1992) examined how local media in Minneapolis covered marches in that city by anarchists, who staged a number of symbolic demonstrations between 1986 and 1988. Several media cues served to delegitimize the group, including one newspaper headline: "Anarchists organize to wreak havoc down-town." The headline did not accurately describe the more typical nonviolent activities carried out by the group. Coverage focused on the appearance of marchers, emphasizing extreme cases, and their actions were framed around criminality. For example, one of the protest actions by the anarchists included the burning of one-dollar bills. A news story failed to discuss the meaning of the event, choosing to remind readers that "burning less than two dollars at once is not a crime," A newspaper photo showed anarchists burning an American flag, which conveyed a completely different meaning than if the photo had showed the entire event. Not only the American flag was burned, but so were a Soviet flag and a McDonald's flag, thus signaling the anarchists' opposition to power of all kinds: capitalist, communist, and corporate.

The media reports gave little coverage to the anarchists' own stated beliefs, but considerable attention to official and police statements, and comments bystanders. Official statements emphasized the deviance of the anarchists, who contrasted themselves to an apathetic society. Television reports often adopted a visual perspective shot from behind police barricades, visually placing the view on the side against the anarchists. Through these and other techniques, local news served an ideological function, managing deviance and reaffirming the social order—an order that required the anarchists' philosophy to be minimized and trivialized to reduce its threat (also in Hertog & McLeod, 1988). Although anarchists admittedly fall far outside the typical two-party political discourse, media treatment of such groups creates and rigidly enforces that same boundary.

The anarchists' extremism is a feature that engages a powerful process of media social control—making it a good illustration here, but that very extremism is in large part media-created. The extent to which this is true is a challenging ideological question.

### **Media and Boundaries**

Media scholar Daniel Hallin (1986) introduces a useful model to help understand the ways in which the news media maintain ideological boundaries (see Figure 9.2). He divides the journalistic world into three spheres: legitimate controversy, consensus, and deviance. The sphere of legitimate controversy is where objectivity and balance are sought: "This is the region of electoral contests and legislative debates, of issues recognized as such by the major established actors of the American political process" (p. 116). At the core is the sphere of consensus, the "motherhood and apple pie" domain: "Within this region journalists do not feel compelled either to present opposing views or to remain disinterested observers. On the contrary, the journalist's role is to serve as an advocate or celebrant of consensus values" (pp. 116-117). Beyond the sphere of legitimate controversy is the sphere of deviance, the realm of people and ideas outside the mainstream of society. Here, says Hallin, journalism casts off neutrality: "It plays the role of

**FIGURE 9.2** Spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance.

SOURCE: D. Hallin, *The Uncensored War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 117

Sphere of Consensus  
Sphere of Legitimate Controversy  
Sphere of Deviance

exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus. It marks out and defends the limits of acceptable conflict" (p. 117).

But who gets to decide what is deviant? It's not that there are limits—there must be—but who gets to set the limits and how are they made to appear "natural"? Here is where we turn to larger forces acting on the media. Who has the power to set boundaries, and how does it work? What are the means through which that power is expressed?

### **POWER AND IDEOLOGY: THE MARXIST PARADIGM**

At the ideological level we must be concerned with the nature of power in *society*. We must ask to what extent media's symbolic content systematically serves to further the interest and power of certain groups—a class, a gender, or a race. John Thompson (1990) sums up this connection well by arguing that

the concept of ideology can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning *serves* ... to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical—what I shall call "relations of domination." Ideology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power*. Hence the study of ideology requires us to investigate the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds ... to investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and employed. (p. 7)

#### **Power and the Marxist Paradigm**

The dominant democratic pluralist model values and assumes diversity in U.S. society. Power is seen as distributed across many competing interests, which act as veto groups as they vie with one another to create a more or less stable, self-maintaining, and balanced political equilibrium. Even the elites are viewed as sufficiently divided so as to make unlikely any undue concentration of power (e.g., Rose, 1967). Thus, questions of power and ideology typically have not been raised, for power is not considered problematic. As McQuail (1986, p. 143) states, the relevant question in media research using a pluralistic model is "whether media offer opportunities for politically diverse audiences and/or audience interests to flourish?"

As we mentioned above, however, research at the ideological level typically takes on a more critical, radical view of media. Power is viewed as much more concentrated, whether in elites or propertied classes, and media content is seen as both expressing and furthering the power of these interests. Critical scholars focus on showing how the restriction of voices furthers class dominance, making power a central concern. Individuals are viewed as unable to compete effectively against major power centers in society, which manipulate people in ways

contrary to their natural interests. Institutions are not accepted as a given, but must be related to existing power structures (e.g., Parenti, 1978, 1986).

In news content, this perspective draws our attention to the issues that don't make it onto the agenda, the alternatives that are not voiced. Radical critics argue that by focusing on those issues that do make the press agenda, pluralists overlook the operation of concentrated power. Bachrach and Baratz (1962), for example, suggest examining how the scope of the political process is narrowed to only those issues that are innocuous to the powerful. Molotch and Lester (1974) make a similar point: By taking decisional "events," pluralists have guaranteed diversity by focusing only on those issues on which elites agree. Lukes (1974) argues that the most effective power prevents conflict from arising in the first place. This, according to Hall (1982), is an ideological model of power. The critical approach to research embraces this broader, more multi-dimensional view of media power—the ability to shape perceptions that make the existing order appear natural and unchanging, with alternatives that are hard to imagine.

From the viewpoint of the media, what was at issue was no longer specific message-injunctions, by A to B, to do this or that, but a shaping of the whole ideological environment: a way of representing the order of things which endowed its limiting perspectives with that natural or divine inevitability which makes them appear universal, natural and coterminous with "reality" itself. (p. 65)

The major strain of research within this critical perspective may be loosely termed a *Marxist* tradition, which regards society as rooted in conflict along class lines between dominant and subordinate groups. The major effect of the media is considered ideological. The point of departure from the pluralist view is the following famous quote from Marx:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 64)

Here Marx directly links ideology to the ruling class, which derives its power from its control of capital. There are clashes of opinion, however, within the Marxist perspective over how completely economics determines ideology. Political economists take the link between economic conditions and ideology to be fairly direct, regarding media content as ultimately determined in the last instance by the economic relations in society. They do not examine the specific



practices or mechanisms through which economic relations manifest themselves in media content. Scholars taking a "cultural studies" approach, on the other hand, do not consider the ruling class ideology to be monolithic and automatically determined. Rather, they see a greater autonomy for media and its messages, which are viewed as containing many contradictory elements, as the ruling ideas struggle to domesticate subversive ideas and retain their privileged status.

### **Political Economy View**

Political economists take the more traditional Marxist approach. Using the Marxist base/superstructure metaphor, ideology is regarded as part of the superstructure, determined by the economic base. As Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott (1982) argue, "The role of the media here is that of legitimation through the production of false consciousness, in the interests of the class which owns and controls the media" (p. 26). To do this, the media must disguise and distort class antagonisms that are at the heart of a Marxist view of society.

Ownership is considered the primary means through which the ruling class exerts control over media institutions. Ultimately, a political economy approach leads us to expect that capitalist owned media decisions; and content will tend to favor those with economic power. From a political economy perspective, changes in media ownership do not greatly alter power relations, because each owner acts in a manner consistent with the interests of capital.

Political economists—Murdock and Golding (1977), for example—argue that a proper analysis of news production needs to focus on the economic context, as well as the class base, of control. Capitalism is said to have a generalized, abstracting drive to reduce everything to the equivalence of exchange value (Garnham, 1979). Media content is a cultural commodity of a capitalist system. In recent years, cultural domains from the Statue of Liberty to the Berlin Wall have been colonized by this capitalist drive to commodity. Capital in the culture industry seeks out the most lucrative markets, with the most resources going to lucrative nonnews information-gathering. Dan Schiller (1986) finds that in the changing structure of the news commodity, the trend is toward ever more sophisticated means of data gathering for large corporations and ever less effective information transmission to the masses.

Another political economist, Nicholas Garnham (1979), observes that the present stage of industrialization of culture is characterized by a sharpening struggle to increase productivity. The high-profile buyouts of media firms by nonmedia corporations (such as CBS and NBC, discussed earlier), the well-publicized layoffs at the network level, and the erosion of the lines between the business and news departments in many newspapers and television stations can be interpreted within this framework.

The political economy approach need not mean that the media simply reproduce the prevailing ideas of their owners. More recently, many within this perspective have rejected the orthodox Marxist view of the media as mere channels of dominant ideology, arguing that the

media are sites of struggle between rival ideologies. In his review of recent changes in critical scholarship, Curran (1990) argues that this new approach to the study of media organizations represents a retreat from former positions.

During the 1980s, even researchers in the political economy tradition began to back off. Thus, Peter Golding, a leading political economist, stressed the importance of ideological management and the individualist values of reporters rather than economic ownership of the press in accounting for the tabloid crusade against "scrounging" welfare claimants. (p. 143)

This view, of course, opens up a number of questions that can draw on the media sociology research we have introduced in earlier chapters, but with special attention given to media ownership.

**Variations in Ideology by Funding Source.** Altschull has proposed a framework for studying variations within owner control of the media. Like the political economists, Altschull starts with the assumption that media reflect the ideology of those that finance them, or "pay the piper." He outlines four sources of media support: (1) under the "official" pattern, media are controlled by the state (such as in many communist countries), (2) in the "commercial" pattern, media reflect the ideology of advertisers and their media-owning allies, (3) under the "interest" pattern, media content reflects the ideology of the financing group, such as a political party or religious group, and (4) in the "informal" pattern, content reflects the goals of individual contributors who want to promote their views. The mix of these financing patterns varies from country to country and over time within countries (Altschull, 1984, p. 254).

This framework reminds us that whether the press is called free or state-controlled, it reflects the ideology of the paymaster. Of course, in the United States the wealthiest paymasters fund the commercial media. Variations in ideology can be introduced through the "interest" and "informal" funding patterns, but these are relatively insignificant in challenging the ruling ideas. These media make up a small percentage of the available content, and their messages must contend on a playing field structured by the dominant ideology transmitted through the commercial media.

Media ownership has become more and more allowing the industry to successfully resist obstacles to greater profit. In addition, the growing integration of media, big business, and government has enabled the media elite to exert increasing control over the means of its own scrutiny, especially through regulatory bodies such as the Federal Communication Commission (e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Wolf, 1991). But elite analysts

**Instrumental Variation of Political Economy.** A major variation of the political economy perspective is termed by Mosco and Herman (1981) the *instrumental approach*.

such as Domhoff (1967, 1970, 1979) give the media little independent power. As in the traditional Marxist view, the media are viewed as organically inseparable from elites and, thus, far from autonomous. Obviously, conflicts among elites are played out through the press, but they are seen as far more instrumental for elites than antagonistic to their interests. Scholars such as Domhoff focus on the means by which the ruling class exerts control. In his case, however, Domhoff rejects the economic as the only basis for ruling class power, as traditional Marxists would claim.

These theorists follow the lead of C. Wright Mills in tracing the pervasive control exerted by the ruling class, or "power elite," on the social structure. In *The Power Elite*, Mills (1956) proposes that the convergent interests of business, economic, and military elites form an apex at the top of the social structure. Class cohesion, assisted by connections and exchange of personnel between these sectors, strengthens and maintains this power elite. Interconnections are found by scrutinizing the ways in which members of the ruling class come in contact with one another (prep schools, clubs, boards of directors, etc.) and influence policy (stock holding, policy groups, funding of institutes and think tanks, political action committees, etc.). The upper class is regarded as having much greater class cohesion than the lower class and can, thus, focus its power more effectively.

Although this form of analysis seldom has been applied to the media elite, the interconnections between media and other institutions present evidence of this same coordination and convergent interests. Top media leaders circulate with other elites. Elite reporters spend time at top think tanks (e.g., *New York Times* reporter Hedrick Smith wrote *The Power Game* [1988] while at the conservative American Enterprise Institute). Mid-career fellowships, such as the Niemanns at Harvard, allow top journalists to spend time at major universities, rubbing elbows and absorbing elite values. Top journalists, politicians, business leaders, and academicians often *appear* on panels together, usually without any adversarial exchange. These are all avenues for the media elite to circulate with other elites, developing firsthand contacts, personal bonds, and shared values.

Some have called today's press corps a new social elite, arguing that it makes them hostile to American society and government (a view expressed in the conservative critiques by Corry [1986] and Rusher [1988]). This elite view bears little in common with the tradition of C. Wright Mills. Far from making journalists hostile to American values, social elite status should link journalists even more strongly to the power elite. Shared elite schooling provides important links between top journalists and other members of the power structure.

In another instrumental approach, Dreier (1982a) examined the interconnections between media boards of directors and others, finding that the most prominent elite media companies (publishers of the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*) were the most strongly interconnected with other power centers (elite universities, Fortune 500 corporations, etc.). This commanding vantage point within the inner circle of the capitalist structure leads these media, according to Dreier, to adopt a corporate liberal philosophy. Thus, they may adopt an adversarial tone on occasion (Pentagon papers, Watergate),

but only as a corrective action in the best long-term interests of preserving the capitalist system.

Under this instrumental approach, media do have a degree of relative autonomy, which allows them to challenge specific people and practices. Such adversarial reporting may arouse the displeasure of elites, who seek to reassert their power. Instrumentalists view these reactions as a class or elite versus individuals or specific firms. Dreier (1982b) argues, for example, that the criticisms of big business have developed out of social movements, governmental responses, and the professionalization of journalism, which all increased the specific criticisms directed at business in the media. He notes several ways in which the business class has mobilized to stave off public opinion and the possible consequences of additional government regulation: funding of think tanks, economic reporting programs, awards and prizes for reporting, conferences and workshops between media and business executives, and advocacy ads, such as those by Mobil Oil. In each case, these strategies take advantage of the professional occupational routines of journalists to further the corporate ideology. These actions represent *ideological* mobilization because they transcend the interests of any single business or industry, addressing instead the needs of the business class in general.

***Elite News Source Structure.*** Reese and his colleagues have applied this perspective to the analysis of news sources on television (Reese, Grant, & Danielian, 1994). Although we have discussed source reliance in earlier chapters, here the ideological approach gives greater focus in analyzing the kinds of patterns found in news coverage. We already know that elites, both governmental and corporate, are given privileged access to news channels (e.g., Herman & Chomsky, 1988), but we can also examine the extent to which the news sources relied on by the national media form an interlocking structure across programs and issues. A large, cohesive, interconnected group of sources spanning a number of issues would support a conception of sources comparable to the "higher circles" notion forwarded by elite theorists. Alternatively, a pluralist view would predict a number of sets of sources, which group with little overlap around specific events and issues. Examining this structure of news sources, helps us better understand their power in the U.S. media as expressed through news coverage. Source selections by news producers mark off the boundaries of political debate and give important insights into the ideological assumptions behind their news judgments.

Reese et al. use network analysis to show how sources are combined and arranged within and across news stories on television. Sources are considered "linked" if they appear together with respect to the same issue or story on programs such as "CBS News," "Nightline," "MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour," as well as the Sunday shows such as "This Week with David Brinkley," "Face the Nation," and "Meet the Press." Thus, one can visualize a "web" of sources that are linked over time, and across issues and programs. For example, if former secretary of state, and frequent

expert source, Henry Kissinger appears on "Nightline" with another guest, and on "MacNeil/Lehrer" the next night with someone else, then his two co-guests (although appearing on different shows) would be linked indirectly via their appearance with Kissinger. Expanding this example, and mapping this structure of sources over a two-month period and over many programs, showed that the sources did form a cohesive central "insiders" group that cut across issues and programs. The group consisted largely of government officials and former officials but also included key journalists and experts from think tanks.

From an ideological perspective, these patterns of sources have other implications. Gitlin (1979) argues that by relying on repeatable formulas, entertainment programs encourage a feeling of social stability resistant to substantial social change. Episodes regularly end with difficult problems solved, allowing the television world to justify itself by "wrapping it all up" (p. 262). Political talk shows function in much the same way: dissenting views are included but are incorporated into a larger framework of ongoing, manageable discussion; this is evident on shows such as "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" and "This Week with David Brinkley." Arguments on such shows rarely include radical points of view, preferring the recurring format of "balancing" commentators or guests that present any disagreement within an adequate comfort zone. Reese et al. conclude:

The media restrict debate by organizing it primarily in relation to the government process, especially in the narrow political range defined by the two-party system. Establishing the middle ground with centrist or conservative experts and "objective" insider journalists further anchors the "conventional wisdom" in a format easily applied across many issues. (p. 104)

**A Propaganda Model.** Two of the more widely known scholars of media political economy are Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. Like other radical media theorists, they start from the assumption that media serve the dominant elite. They argue that this is just as true (although perhaps less obvious) when the media are privately owned without formal censorship, as when they are directly controlled by the state. Carrying out their function is said to require systematic propaganda.

Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, combining elements of political economy and instrumental influence, includes five news "filters": "(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) 'anticommunism' as a national religion and control mechanism" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2).

The ownership and advertising filters link media to economic power and make it difficult for

alternative media to gain a hearing. Source influence and flak are two instrumental links to the media. Media routines cause them to rely on government and corporate sources, both of which have many advantages in gaining coverage for their views, as we've discussed earlier. The government is able to produce great quantities of authoritative news through its vast information staff, and corporations have large budgets for public relations efforts that effectively subsidize the cost of information gathering for the media (Gandy, 1982).

Much of this material does not carry the propaganda label, although one specific government program did. The "White Propaganda" operation was designed by the State Department to plant news in the major media favorable to the Nicaraguan "Contras" and to advance President Reagan's Central American policy to overthrow the Sandinista government. A 1985 declassified State Department memo to White House communication director Pat Buchanan revealed several examples of the program:

A professor secretly collaborated with the State Department office in charge of the operation in crafting an op-ed piece that ran in the *Wall Street Journal*.

State Department "contractors" made a clandestine trip to a "Contra" military camp and consulted with, among others, NBC News reporter Fred Francis to ensure that a favorable picture was presented of the "freedom fighters"

State Department consultants prepared op-ed pieces for the signature of Nicaraguan opposition leaders Alphonso Rubello, Aldopho Callero, and Arturo Cruz to run in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, to counter a piece in the *Times* by Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega.

Through a "cut-out," an intervening person used to hide government involvement, the office coordinated visits by opposition leader Rubello to major media in Washington, and informed major television news programs, such as "MacNeil/Lehrer," of Rubello's availability for interviews.

The memo further emphasized that "the work of our operation is ensured by our office's keeping a low profile" (Miller, 1985).

In the propaganda model, pressure groups (discussed in Chapter 8) also serve an ideological function as an enforcement mechanism. Herman and Chomsky (1988) define *flak* as negative responses to the media, including complaints, threats, petitions, letters, and articles. They view flak as originating mostly from the Right, which is most apt to have the resources to fund it, through, for example, foundations, think tanks, and media monitors. Accuracy in Media is one such monitor; its objective is to harass, intimidate, discipline, and generally keep the media from straying too far from acceptable elite viewpoints.

The conservative critique of media bias grants major power to the journalists who make news decisions, leading right-wing media research to focus on documenting individual political bias among the gatekeepers. Ironically, this critique conforms to how journalists prefer to view

themselves, as professionals with wide latitude in making news judgment. To respectfully consider the critique from the Left, to acknowledge that government and corporate power effectively dominates media and controls coverage, would be for journalists to deny their own freedom. Thus, the news media have given much greater credence and attention to attacks from the Right, for in doing so they reaffirm their own power. As McChesney (1992) observes,

The alternative of a press corps being roundly praised by conservatives for their subservience to the powers-that-be would hardly meet even the rudimentary standards for a profession, and would cast the legitimacy of the entire media structure into doubt.  
(p. 12)

He adds that if right-wing criticism did not exist, journalists would have to create it.

The last filter, anticommunism, is considered a political control mechanism. Because communism threatens the very basis of the propertied class, it is firmly fixed in the sphere of deviance. Herman and Chomsky give anticommunism an instrumental value for elites, who use it (1) to justify military action to suppress it and support for fascist governments to oppose it, and (2) to keep domestic left-wing and labor movements off balance and fragmented.

Herman and Chomsky argue that the operation of these filters allows propaganda campaigns to be mounted with a double standard, against the enemies of the "National Security State" and *for* its friends; against Nicaragua, for example, but not against human rights abuses in Guatemala and El Salvador.

In sum, a propaganda approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on service-ability to important domestic power interests. This should be observable in dichotomized choices of story and in the volume and quality of coverage. (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 33)

This propaganda model, as in the other political economy approaches, presents a direct control over media by elites. The other major Marxist approach we'll take up makes this control more problematic and examines the more subtle and dynamic means through which it is carried out. Clearly, there are ideological variations within a society, and ruling ideas must respond to challenges. To better understand this dynamic process we must turn to another perspective within the Marxist tradition.

### **Cultural Studies View: Hegemony**

The cultural studies approach combines aspects of political economy and the Marxist structuralist perspective, a more literary approach that concentrates on media "texts." It rejects the simple base/superstructure connection, looks more closely at the connections between society and media, and places them in a broader cultural context.

One of the key theoretical approaches within cultural studies is hegemony. The theory of hegemony, as proposed by Gramsci (1927/1971), examines the link between power and practice and has been a strong current running through critical analyses of the media. Gramsci emphasizes the role of ideology, giving it greater autonomy than traditional Marxists, although still linking it ultimately to the dominant structure. Because media have relative autonomy, the ruling powers cannot directly supervise this important cultural apparatus. Thus, ideology serves as a unifying force. *Hegemony* refers to the means by which the ruling order maintains its dominance. Media institutions serve a hegemonic function by continually producing a cohesive ideology, a set of commonsensical values and norms, that serves to reproduce and legitimate the social structure through which the subordinate classes participate in their own domination (see also Gitlin, 1980).

Gitlin defines hegemony as the "Systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order" (p.253). Control must be maintained without sacrificing legitimacy, which ruling power seeks in order to maintain authority. Under hegemony, ideology is regarded as an essentially conflicted and dynamic process, which must continually absorb and incorporate disparate values (Gitlin, 1980, p. 51). In Raymond Williams's words, hegemony "does not passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (1977, pp. 112-113). Existing cultural values are structured and interpreted to best serve the interests of the dominant groups.

Hegemonic values in news are said to be particularly effective in permeating common sense, because they are made to appear natural and are placed there not by coercion but indirectly through the normal workings of media routines and the interconnections between the media and other power centers. Indeed, the relative autonomy of media gives their messages more legitimacy and credibility than if they were directly controlled.

Thus, by not appearing openly coercive, this control is all the more effective. The media "certify the limits within which all competing definitions of reality will contend" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 254). They do this largely by accepting the frames imposed on events by official and by marginalizing and delegitimizing voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles.

***Routines for the Powerful.*** Thus, within hegemony we look to the ideological implications of media practices and institutional arrangements. Routines develop to meet hegemonic requirements, not just organizational needs.

Returning to Hallin's spheres of deviance, consensus, and legitimate controversy (Figure 9.2), we recall that routines are clearly related to ideology. The objective routine of balancing sources, for example, becomes important only within the sphere of legitimate controversy. In the sphere of consensus, Hallin says, journalists act as advocates and celebrants, whereas in the sphere of deviance they expose, condemn, and exclude those outside the political consensus. Miliband draws a similar connection: "the more radical the dissent, the less impartial and objective the media" (Miliband, 1969, p. 224).



The Vietnam period, an era of great social upheaval, provides many good examples of media treatment of political deviance. In his study of media and the New Left, Gitlin notes that when student leaders were caricatured, they were not balanced, but when treated seriously they were. Thus, a respectful CBS News story on the political evolution of "Chicago Seven" member Rennie Davis was cancelled for not "balancing" its treatment with a spokesperson from the House Un-American Affairs Committee (Gitlin, 1980, p. 174).

The routines of media work may require coverage of stressful events, such as political demonstrations. To retain credibility, the media must, after all, not stray too far from what the public knows is happening. Indeed, the images we remember from this period are often the exceptional, hegemonically: the 1968 Chicago riots, or Morley Safer's story at Cam Ne showing a GI igniting a Vietnamese thatched hut with a Zippo lighter. When these events are ideologically threatening, the upper levels of the system must intervene against the normal workings of routines and organizational policy. Thus, both Presidents Johnson and Nixon were active in trying to influence the way in which the news media covered the student antiwar movement (see Chapter 7).

In some cases, the media and government were not of one mind as to where the boundaries between the spheres should be drawn. Gitlin observes that the Nixon White House wanted the line blurred between the militant protest movement against the war in Vietnam and the moderate alternative, painting the entire group as outside the boundary of legitimate controversy ("radiclib"). The big media, in seeking a moderate alternative, tried to keep the lines distinct, creating a clash in frames (Gitlin, 1980).

Normally, though, routines work to the advantage of the dominant ideology. In his study of news coverage of Vietnam, Hallin observes that reporters shared the cold war consensus prevalent in the early years of the war, a consensus reinforced by their routines. Journalists in Vietnam relied on military officials for information and transportation. They became close to the soldiers as they shared hardships and faced risks together. Defending one unit's search and destroy mission, an NBC reporter said in his story: "There was no discriminating one house from another. There couldn't be and there did not need to be. The whole village had turned on the Americans, so the whole village was being destroyed" (Hallin, 1986, p. 140).

In covering the air war, reporters stationed on aircraft carriers saw little of the enemy and had to rely on Defense Department film and interviews with pilots, who, like the journalists themselves, were upwardly mobile professionals. Thus, coverage focused on the technology and professionalism of the pilots and crews. One television report said: "The smoking target gives impressive evidence of just how effective these and similar raids have been." Said another: "This is the shape of things to come for Communist aggression in Vietnam" (p. 137). Reporting focused on individual heroes, American boys in action. The point of view was typically "inside" American policy. Thus, Hallin argues that routines pushed battle coverage toward the sphere of consensus. The ideological frames included "war as national endeavor," "war as American tradition," "war as

manly," and "winning is what counts" (pp. 142-144), effectively purging war of political and moral implications.

Hallin's study shows that the news media are not an ideological monolith. He argues that the power of television or its perceived power, for example, makes television more sensitive to staying within the sphere of consensus as it provides ideological guidance and reassurance for the mass public. The need for television to force news into a unified story line, he says, creates a more unified, ideological worldview. Thus, television reporters' role in covering Vietnam was more active than that of the print media, as Hallin shows in the following excerpts:

NBC, Jan. 21, 1966. DAVID BRINKLEY: As for the peace campaign, the Communist side has repeatedly called it a sham. If it is, they could come to the bargaining table and expose it. But they haven't.

CHET HUNTLEY: The Communists in Vietnam demonstrated today that they attach no more solemnity to a truce than to their politics.

***Ideology in the Persian Gulf War.*** In earlier chapters we have discussed how the government manipulated the media during the Persian Gulf War and prevented reporters from gaining access to key areas of the conflict. Even more important, from an ideological perspective, is the entire structure and pattern of reporting, not just whether specific stories were censored or certain war zones placed off-limits. In this approach to ideology we need not assume that news managers consciously manipulate information, whether as representing an elite class or expressing more personal bias. Our interest is in how the natural working of the media system by yields predictable patterns of content.

This is our special concern with local news, which does not deal so directly with issues of censorship. Indeed, in cities across the country the government need not censor in order to enjoy highly supportive news for its foreign policy. Local television in particular provides an especially important ideological guidance, by helping structure a way of thinking about government policy that is all the more persuasive for being based on familiar local people and organizations. In local television news the media's cultural and economic imperatives of audience appeal are amplified, reaching an even greater height in the new tabloid television formats. If anything, the networks have moved closer to the local news tradition in stories that evoke an emotional response, as opposed to the "public affairs" model of the traditional network news powers. At the local media level, we can more *easily* see how coverage results from the news-gathering system, its routines, and its structured relationships to the audience and community institutions. The interlocking and reinforcing triangle of government, news media, and corporate needs works together to further a culture that is supportive of military adventures, such as in the Persian Gulf.

Reese and Buckalew (1995) examined the coverage of one local television news organization as it reported on the public response to President Bush's Gulf policy, especially after the air war began on January 15, 1991. They show how local news produced an ideologically coherent body

of reporting that was supportive of the Bush administration's actions—or, "meaning in the service of power."

One story in particular, aired on January 17, 1991, exemplified the efforts by local reporters to handle antiwar protest, allowing it to be easily neutralized by pro-war supporters and placing it at odds with more "authentic" patriotic sentiment. Through language, editing, and juxtaposition of images, the conflict angle is played up to create a form of "false balance." In Reese and Buckalew's study, the entire raw footage shot by a photographer of two rallies on the University of Texas campus on January 17, was viewed and compared to the final story package. The pro-war rally was sparsely attended, outnumbered by a 10 to 1 margin by the antiwar group, judging from the numbers of people directly involved behind the microphones. The photographer had filmed one pro-war speech arguing that the Gulf War would lay the shame of Vietnam to rest, and four speeches during the antiwar rally that focused on more specific rationales for their objection: environmental damage, numbers of minorities among front-line troops, and others. Yet the report made the two events sound much more evenly balanced:

REPORTER: On one side of the U.T. campus, several hundred people who are opposed to the war carried on a protest that began last night.

(ANTIWAR SPEAKER): During the war in Vietnam we lost over 58,000 young American lives.

(PRO-WAR SPEAKER): The legacy of Vietnam will die with this conflict . . . REPORTER: A few feet away, supporters of the president held their own rally. (SAME PERSON): . . . because Iraq is not Vietnam.

REPORTER: It was smaller, but feelings ran just as strong. [our emphasis] (CHANTING MALES): USA, USA.

(STUDENT): How many troops do they have compared to ours? REPORTER: With two groups so close together, there was inevitably conflict. (STUDENTS): [Unintelligible argument]

(STUDENT): The sheep can preach the virtues of vegetarianism until hell freezes over, but the wolf isn't listening. You've got to deal with people in a language they're capable of understanding, and Saddam Hussein only understands violence.

This seemingly self-evident metaphor is a voice in favor of the policy and the longest comment from either rally included in the story. Next, the reporter moves the rhetoric beyond this bi-polar frame to reach a consensual voice supporting the troops. The voice selected, however, is implicitly pro-policy:

REPORTER: Some who came here were motivated by a deeper feeling, a sense of commitment. [Said over shots of anthem and flag] Kelly Jones has a brother in the Gulf.

(KELLY): When your family's over there, all you know is to support them.

REPORTER: Students raised during a time of peace are now debating their generation's war. [*Said over shots of signs, peace signs*] Some of the slogans have changed, some haven't. But the emotions raised by patriotism and violence [*Saddam Hussein's?*] run just as strong.

What first seems like a typical balanced story, pitting antiwar and pro-war groups against each other, on closer inspection is seen to be a clearly policy-supporting report. Not only is the numerically and rhetorically stronger antiwar group made to appear equal to the smaller pro-war group (through close-up shots of speakers as well), but it is pitted against the high ground given the family member named Kelly, the one said to have a "deeper commitment" (said over shots of the national anthem being sung to the American flag). Is Kelly meant to carry a neutral, "pro-troops" message? A look at the actual interview with her shows that the reporter sought a pro-troops sound bite within an implicitly pro-war context. Kelly not only supported the troops, she explicitly supported the actual policy and mounted a short rationale in her interview, adding that Bush was doing a "fantastic job." Not satisfied with this, however, the reporter sought Kelly's personal feelings toward the antiwar protestors:

REPORTER: Why are you here today?

KELLY: I'm here to give the troops and the president support because they've done a fantastic job. I think we've had too much protesting and it's very much after the fact and I don't think it does any good not to support them at this time.

REPORTER: Does it hurt personally? I mean, you've got family members over there. Does it hurt you to see such strong antiwar attitudes in the people that are speaking out so much over here?

KELLY: It hurts me to see the ignorance they're talking with because they don't realize Saddam Hussein is a Hitler in the making and that he's ruthless anyone who has pregnant ladies stabbed in the stomach is very ruthless and deserves to die. Somebody's gotta stop him, and I'm glad that we are.

REPORTER: Do you take it personally, though, when you hear what they're saying?

KELLY: I do because my family's involved. How else am I supposed to take it?

When your family's over there all you know is to support them, and President Bush has done a fantastic job. [our emphasis]

Clearly, judging from the reporter's questions and Kelly's answers, to oppose the war is to oppose Kelly and her "family?" Supporting them is implied to be the more patriotic choice. This kind of framing is not done at the personal whim of the reporter. Responding to his own coverage of the antiwar movement, another reporter said, "I might not agree with what they were protesting, but I wanted to be fair" (December 1992). The frame exhibited in the story above is a standard device that is easily applied without needing to know much about the positions involved. The important thing was to present the "form" of balance while finding a presumed consensual middle ground.

In analyzing content for ideological patterns, we must examine how news combines and structures key elements. This requires a close reading of texts as done above, where we see how the pro-war side was positioned favorably relative to the antiwar group. In addition, *many* reports worked to symbolically link the pro-war position to a cluster of positive elements that included "the troops" and patriotism. These linkings are seen in the following excerpts of news coverage:

(Jan. 23) ANCHOR: 150 demonstrators supporting the war effort demonstrated at the University of Texas and listened to people speak about patriotism. As a counterpoint, these five protestors at the State Capitol are all who are on hand for a war protest that began on the 15th. [our emphasis]

(Jan. 19) REPORTER: *[over pictures of flag-waving rally in adjoining town]*: They are the images of Americana ... the pictures of heartfelt pride and support for soldiers in the Middle East. The war in the Middle East has revived patriotism here.

(Jan. 23) REPORTER: There are others who say they don't necessarily want to fight in a war either but will do whatever it takes to protect their country's interests. [our emphasis]

Of course, the unchallenged premise, that the war was in the country's interests, was precisely the point being challenged by policy' critics. In other reports these critics were distanced from patriotic elements, including the potent "families of the troops":

(Jan. 17) ANCHOR: The peace protests are hard for families whose loved ones are in the Persian Gulf. One military wife says she can handle the stress and anxiety of knowing her husband is in the thick of things, but it's harder when she's confronted by scenes of angry protestors demonstrating against the war.

(woman): There are lots of families hanging on to every word that the news is putting out, and I think it's really destructive to them.

(Jan. 17) ANCHOR: The antiwar sentiment is unsettling for families whose loved ones are involved in Operation Desert Storm and for those who back President Bush's decision to go to war.

(Jan. 19) ANCHOR *[over shots of protestors]*: People converge on the State Capitol shouting their pleas for peace while a patriotic group of small-town residents sing their support for American soldiers at war. [our emphasis]

(Jan. 24) ANCHOR *[over video of veterans' rally]*: The U.S. must show 100 percent support for our troops in the Middle East. That's the message from veterans who *say* they are upset over the number of antiwar protests. They say it sends a bad message to the troops in the Middle East, that we don't support them.

In an inversion of H. Ross Perot's admonition to first commit the country and then commit the troops, Bush showed that he could commit the country by committing the troops. "Supporting the troops" proved to be one of the most effective means of managing opposition to Gulf policy, by establishing a clear consensual foundation for community solidarity. As Kaniss (1991) has found, the large and fragmented news audience leads local television to seek means of establishing a sense of community through common symbols and interests. The patriotic, "support the troops" movement allowed local television to restore this community sense threatened by divisive opinion over policy. Combining knowledge of news routines with a close reading of news texts shows how, in local news coverage of the Gulf War, the levels of influence "added up to something" ideologically.

### **THE NEWS PARADIGM AND HEGEMONY**

Samuel Becker notes that although little progress has been made, one of the key questions asked in the British Marxist school of media studies is how the dominant ideology is linked to the norms and practices, or "occupational ideology," of media workers (1984, p. 73). Murdock and Golding (1977, p. 35) argue that scholars must analyze the "link between the general set of values in that culture and the ruling ideology and occupational ideologies." One way to examine these links is to examine the journalistic "occupational ideology" and consider to what extent it serves a hegemonic function. In the remainder of this chapter, we first explore this link and then examine a specific case in point,

#### **The Concept of Paradigm**

One useful concept in considering the journalistic occupational ideology is Thomas Kuhn's (1962, p. 23) notion of *paradigm*, "an accepted model or pattern," that helps to make sense out of the world. The paradigm remains valuable as long as it provides a useful practical guide and practitioners who share its underlying assumptions. Although Kuhn spoke of scientific paradigms, it can be applied to journalism as well. Both science and journalism are empirical information-gathering activities; both have developed learnable routines for their practitioners. Both scientists and journalists are presumed to be dispassionate observers of the world, guided primarily by their observations. The journalistic paradigm, like the others, is validated by consensus.

Although it focuses attention on some problems, a paradigm necessarily excludes from study other questions that cannot be as easily stated using the tools it supplies. By providing a model, a paradigm exerts a powerful influence on our views of the world, by restricting the range of questions deemed appropriate for study. The naturalness of an accepted paradigm is similar to the way we consider hegemony to work. As Kuhn (1962) notes, paradigms provide examples rather

than explicit rules. Thus, one learns the paradigm by engaging in the discipline rather than by learning a set of rules. This means that the defining features of paradigms are not necessarily written down and available for study, nor are practitioners necessarily able to articulate complete rationalizations of them. Thus, the routines that practitioners engage in give us valuable clues about the contours of the guiding paradigm, and a violation of routines becomes a threat to the news paradigm itself. Routines may be invoked as a defense of paradigm violation, particularly by those within the profession. The borders of a paradigm can be revealed by *anomalies*, cases that do not fit comfortably into the defining characteristics of the paradigm. These cases threaten the paradigm by calling into question its limitations and biases, and, therefore, must be "repaired?" If enough such cases accumulate, the paradigm may have to shift to accommodate them.

### **Paradigm and Hegemony**

The news paradigm must conform to hegemonic requirements. A key paradigm feature in this regard is the notion of objectivity, discussed in earlier chapters. In more recent years, journalists have found it increasingly hard to maintain that they are wholly objective and have fallen back on more defensible standards such as "accuracy," "balance;" and "fairness." Even if the world has become somewhat outdated, media workers act as though it weren't, and the underlying principle of reporter detachment remains firmly entrenched. As Hackett (1984) observes, the opposite of objectivity is bias, and conventional evaluations of news bias assume that the fault lies with the individual reporter or editor.

Assuming the biased communicator to be the chief barrier to wholly objective reporting of the facts, journalists operating within the news paradigm do not find strongly held values to be occupationally useful. Of course, journalists hold many values that aren't obvious because they are safely within the range of core societal values. Left-wing journalists, for example, have found mainstream journalism uncomfortable, and Noam Chomsky has noted that he knows of no socialists in the strikingly uniform media (quoted in MacDougall, 1988a). When *Los Angeles Times* publisher Otis Chandler was asked in 1977 about *Times* staffer Robert Scheer, former editor of the leftist publication *Ramparts*, Chandler said: "A radical? If that were true he wouldn't be here" (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 12).

These assumptions fit hegemonic requirements. Thus, journalists are being objective when they let prominent sources dictate the news, but they are considered biased when they use their own expertise to draw conclusions. The press gave Ronald Reagan largely uncritical treatment during his first term because no opposing elites were able to mount an effective challenge and thus make them-selves available as oppositional media voices (Hertsgaard, 1988). Hallin (1986) shows that the media did not become strongly critical of the war in Vietnam until the Johnson administration's elite council of advisors, the "wisemen," changed their opinions. Giving serious *attention* to nonofficial sources is discouraged as unnewsworthy. By accepting valueless reporting as the norm, the media accept the boundaries, values, and ideological rules of the game established and interpreted by elite sources.

The editing process is also compatible with hegemonic requirements. Editors rise to their positions only after fully internalizing the norms of the journalistic paradigm (e.g., Breed, 1955). Although reporters are presumably in closer contact with reality, editors are considered less apt to succumb to bias than reporters, who may get wrapped up in a story and be blinded to the big picture. High-ranking editors, particularly at major papers, are also more directly in touch with the values of official and other elite sources and are reluctant to break from these boundaries. Experiences by reporters during the Vietnam War provide an excellent example of this process. In the early 1960s David Halberstam was a knowledgeable reporter on the scene in Vietnam, yet he often had difficulty getting his stateside editors to accept his pessimistic version of the war. The editors had received a more optimistic version from Pentagon and administration officials and were reluctant to contradict it (Sheehan, 1988).

### **THE CASE OF A. KENT MACDOUGALL**

We conclude this chapter with an actual example of a paradigm violation, which illustrates some of what we've been talking about: a radical who was also a main-stream journalist. The case provides some insight into how hegemony is exercised through the newsroom practices that constitute the journalistic "occupational ideology, or paradigm. Paradigm violations call for repair work, or normalization, particularly when the violations strike at hegemonically sensitive borders of the paradigm.

#### **Background**

A. Kent MacDougall, now on the faculty at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, began his award-winning mainstream press career in 1956 at the *Herald News*, Passaic, New Jersey. Between 1961 and 1972 he worked at the *Wall Street Journal*, followed by ten years at the *Los Angeles Times* beginning in 1977. His two-part memoirs, "Boring from within the Bourgeois Press," published in November and December 1988 in the socialist *Monthly Review*, set off a storm of controversy in journalistic circles. In the article, he said he had written under an alias for radical publications while at the *Wall Street Journal* and had selected story topics based on his radical beliefs. For example, at the *Wall Street Journal* he profiled I. E. Stone and wrote other articles surveying radical economists and historians; at the *Los Angeles Times* he profiled other radical economists and the left-leaning magazine *Mother Jones*. The case generated a strong response, including articles and columns in the mainstream press as well as industry publications.

MacDougall himself acknowledged the ambiguous nature of the paradigm, having used the uneasy relationship between routines and values to his advantage. He learned that "editors would support a reporter against charges by a news source, special interest group, or reader that the



reporter's story was biased or had some other major defect as long as the reporter had gotten all the minor facts right" (MacDougall, 1988a, p. 19).

Knowing that reporters must speak through sources, he said, "I made sure to seek out experts whose opinions I knew in advance would support my thesis.

.. Conversely, I sought out mainstream authorities to confer recognition and respectability on radical views I sought to popularize" (MacDougall, 1988a, p. 23). His writing followed enough attributes of the paradigm to be acceptable, although not without the occasional angry audience response: "Are you a Communist?" said one reader in reaction to his *Mother Jones* piece (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 14). A forestry industry group, critical of his series for the *Los Angeles Times* on "The Vanishing Forests," suggested he was fostering an "anti-private enterprise view" (Benneth, 1989).

MacDougall said his stories contained enough "significance, controversy, color and surprise to satisfy commercial journalistic standards for relevance and readability," and that his "calm, matter of fact, non-polemical tone fit the formula" (MacDougall, 1988a, p. 24). He said the *Los Angeles Times* permitted wide latitude to reporters, valuing diversity as an attention-getter, as long as the reporter "adheres to the readily assimilated professional code of objectivity and impartiality and doesn't violate canons against being shrill and propagandistic or stating a personal opinion" (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 13).

For example, MacDougall's editor made him introduce a conservative spokes-person to balance a story about inequality: "Even though I knew he was wrong, I quoted Gilder as saying that the growing gap between rich and poor was almost entirely demographic" (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 18). In another example of paradigmatic limits, MacDougall's editor allowed him to mention Marx, but only if introduced in a humorous way. MacDougall agreed, to get the story in print (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 17).

### **A Paradigm Violation**

If the case was problematic for the paradigm, journalists should have had difficulty coming to grips with it. Repair work should be observable as the paradigm undergoes defense and reaffirmation. The violation was signified in part by the publicity surrounding the case and the way in which it was characterized. For example, David Shaw, in a nationally distributed *Los Angeles Times* story, said MacDougall's memoirs had "sparked a contretemps in the mainstream journalistic community" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 1). An article in the newspaper trade publication *Editor & Publisher* said

MacDougall had "created a media furor with his revelations" (Stein, 1989, p. 10). The case did present other ample evidence of being problematic, centering on the uneasy relationship between reporter values and objectivity. Journalists who express values threaten the paradigm. A business journalism newsletter called MacDougall's career "exemplary" but questioned his professionalism, particularly the practice of seeking out sources supportive of a thesis and of having preconceived sympathies or antagonisms toward subjects (Rotbart, 1989a;

rewritten as 1989b). It said the case strikes at perhaps the most sensitive nerve: journalistic credibility; how vulnerable is a paper to reporters manipulating the news in pursuing their own personal agenda? ("Recent," 1989).

The case was said to provide a rare glimpse of the fuzzy lines between right and wrong in journalism, where there is often no rule book or final arbiter ("Recent," 1989, p. 1). The same article noted that journalists like to present a united front to the outside world while lacking internally that degree of unanimity in beliefs and behavior (p. 1).

Dow Jones & Company, Inc., parent company of the *Wall Street Journal*, issued a strongly worded reaction:

We are offended and outraged that a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter now claims he tried to pursue a hidden ideological agenda within the pages of the *Journal*. However, this reporter left the *Journal* more than 15 years ago and his importance at the *Journal* or in journalism seems somewhat greater in his own mind these days than it was in fact. We have reviewed articles he wrote while at the *Journal* and we believe our editing process succeeded in making sure that what appeared in print under his byline met *Journal* standards of accuracy, newsworthiness and fairness. Finally, we find it bizarre and troubling that any man who brags of having sought to push a personal political agenda on unsuspecting editors and readers should be teaching journalism at a respected university. (Austin, 1989)

The ambiguity of the case is also revealed through MacDougall's editors' reactions to his work. At the *Los Angeles Times* one editor liked a series on economic inequality enough to write a glowing Pulitzer Prize nomination statement, which noted that MacDougall had backed up his research with "interviews with scores of economists, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists"; the page one feature editor downplayed the series, declining to run it on consecutive *days* (as was the custom) and to run one of the four stories on page one (MacDougall, 1988b, p. 19).

The notion that MacDougall fell outside the boundaries maintained by the news paradigm is supported by the language used to describe him. Throughout the case, the rhetorical content is filled with terms that set limits. MacDougall himself said, "What I was and wasn't able to report in two of the nation's most enlightened dailies indicates the limits within which socially conscious journalists can practice their craft in mainstream media" (MacDougall, 1988a, p. 14). He admitted that he had been "pushing against the limits set by the *Wall Street Journal's* standardized news formula" (MacDougall, 1988a, p. 24). Columnists referred to MacDougall's "subterranean antics" (Cheshire, 1989) as representing a "clandestine Marxist" (Morris, 1989).

The predictable attack from the conservatives—what Herman and Chomsky (1988) would term *flak*—zeroed in on this idea of violated boundaries. Accuracy in Media, for example, started a letter-writing campaign to media heads, asking,

among other things, if NBC "has adequate safeguards against similar abuses by other media moles" (Kincaid, 1989, p. 7). Elsewhere it was said to have raised concern "about the ability of Marxist agents to penetrate the mainstream media," and that the case made it harder for the *Wall Street Journal* to defend itself against charges of liberal bias (Kincaid, 1988, p. 4).

Assuming the MacDougall case represented a paradigm violation, then repair work should be observable. Given that the stories themselves written by MacDougall were beyond repair, several post hoc repair strategies appear to have been followed: (1) disengage and distance threatening values from the reporter's work, (2) reassert the ability of journalistic routines to prevent threatening values from distorting the news, and (3) marginalize the man and his message, making both appear ineffective.

**Disengaging Values.** Here, radical values are asserted to not have affected news judgment. In response to the attack on him, MacDougall mounted some of the repair work himself through a vigorous defense, reaffirming the distinction between values and his professional work. He contended that he was "a journalist first and a radical second throughout my career. . . . I stuck to accepted standards of newsworthiness, accuracy and fairness" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 15).

Others also reaffirmed, although uneasily, the distinction between values and reporting, claiming that reporters should not seek to promote their own agenda. Berkeley dean Tom Goldstein, a former *Journal* reporter, praised MacDougall's teaching, saying, "We have no ideological litmus test at this school" and adding that MacDougall's personal beliefs were his own, "not ours, and he scrupulously keeps ideology out of the classroom" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 16). An unsigned editorial in the *Columbia Journalism Review* summed up this disengagement repair, asking: Is there a place for socialist reporters in the capitalist media? It contended that a reporter should be "judged not on the basis of his political beliefs but by the integrity of his work," maintaining that MacDougall's work did have integrity ("Comment," 1989, p. 16).

This disengagement repair work was neither completely successful nor possible. The counter paradigmatic, yet appealing, notion of free expression of diverse opinion kept intruding. *Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times* editors said they valued diversity. Frederick Taylor, *Journal* managing editor during MacDougall's last two years there, accepted that MacDougall would choose some stories over others because of his views, as would others with more conservative values (Shaw, 1989a, p. 16). A *Seattle Times* ombudsman's column similarly argued that reporters with divergent views "can help broaden and enrich" political discussion, while of course being held to the same "rigorous standards of fairness" MacDougall followed (Wetzel, 1989).

**Reasserting Journalistic Routines.** The primary defense within the journalistic community was to reaffirm the effectiveness of news routines. The editing routine was said to have worked to perfection, succeeding in wringing any bias out of the news. The *Columbia Journalism Review* senior editor told a reporter:

"The safeguards worked, the editing system is in place" (Vick, 1989). The Dow Jones letter had made the same point: "We believe our editing process succeeded" (Austin, 1989). If that was true, why was Dow Jones so upset? Indeed, journalistic consensus was not perfect.

*Los Angeles Times* editor at the time, John Lawrence, explicitly stated that he had edited out any hints of MacDougall's bias (Shaw, 1989a, p. 16). Elsewhere, Lawrence expressed ambivalent statements about MacDougall's reporting, saying that "being a Marxist doesn't necessarily have to detract from his journalistic integrity. Every reporter comes to a story with some level of bias. The question is: Are they capable of rising above that bias to write a fair story?" Lawrence concluded that MacDougall was capable, and he went on to contend that radicals might make better journalists by being more objective ("Recent," 1989, p. 8). And yet, he said, he would not have allowed him to write about a Marxist economist if he knew he was "as strong a proponent... as he now claims to have been" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 16).

MacDougall was largely supported by his former editors. Of course, they could hardly do otherwise in reaffirming the editing process. They were the ones, after all, who had approved his stories. Michael Gartner, former head of NBC News, edited MacDougall at the *Wall Street Journal*. He said he assumed that MacDougall was liberal but that it didn't affect his reporting: "I judge journalists by one thing, whether they are fair, thorough and accurate" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 15). Gartner agreed that the strict *Wall Street Journal* editing process would have filtered out *any* bias before it got into print ("Recent," 1989, p. 8). Former editor William F. Thomas, of the *Los Angeles Times*, affirmed the ability of a reporter to keep values separate from professional duties. He said he knew MacDougall was left of center but praised him, saying he "met every journalistic standard. He was a professional" (Shaw, 1989a, p. 15).

**Minimizing Man and Message.** The third repair technique involved minimizing MacDougall and his message. This included, as in the Dow Jones letter quoted above, questioning his role in carrying on the paradigm by teaching journalism. In the first apparent media mention of the case and official response, the December 15 *New York Post* carried a blurb quoting *Journal* corporate relations spokesperson Charles Stabler: "He said in the story that he spent his weekends writing about CIA dirty tricks and restrictive immigration laws. If he had been doing that for us, he'd have had a more successful career." Stabler added that "no one cared" that MacDougall was using the *Journal* to spread his ideology, concluding that "he wasn't taken that seriously" ("Radical," 1988).

Others continued this theme. Columnist Donald Morris (1989) quoted an anonymous *Los Angeles Times* editor saying, "If he slipped any messages through, they were so oblique that nobody got it," concluding that there are easier ways to get messages across than being a closet Marxist. Others attempted to marginalize MacDougall and deemphasize his contribution by referring to him in derogatory terms. *Times* editor William Thomas said the name that came to mind was "Walter Mitty" (Gomes, 1989). Paul Steiger, deputy managing editor

of the *Journal*, said MacDougall was "more a secret agent in his own mind" (Shaw, 1989a). *Los Angeles Times* editor Tim Rutten explained, "You know, there's something concocted about this. I catch the odor of rationalization for personal dissatisfaction with his life. . . . I don't find any politics in this man's pieces" (quoted in Cockburn, 1989). Frederick Taylor, *Journal* editor, also took this tack (having also supported the diversity value), saying he's "madder than hell. I think it is gutless of him to confess now. He's like a lot of liberals. They want their cake and to eat it too. Why didn't he *say* so up front if he believes it so strongly?" ("Recent," 1989, p. 8). Taylor said he would not have fired MacDougall for being a Socialist but would have had he known of his extracurricular writing. He said he was especially upset about defending him against conservative attack, and then finding he was a Leftist after all ("Recent, 1989, p. 9).

Three columns labeled MacDougall a "Marxist" (Cheshire, 1989; McCarthy, 1989; Morris, 1989), a term not used by MacDougall in describing himself and one with more negative connotations than "Socialist?" One of these writers said MacDougall had "insinuated his flaky politics into news stories" (Cheshire, 1989). One article used a loaded term in saying, inaccurately, that MacDougall claimed to have worked to *popularize* "Marxist dogma" (Vick, 1989). An article in *Time* termed MacDougall's career "shadowy" and featured a picture of Karl Marx with the caption "his favorite newsman" (Zuckerman, 1989). (MacDougall had said Marx was his favorite journalist in his two-piece *Monthly Review* contribution, the only mention in the 27 pages.)

### **The Paradigm, Repair, and Hegemony**

This case helps us understand how the news paradigm upholds hegemonic boundaries. By crossing the lines of hegemonic acceptability, the MacDougall case required repair. Different people within the media engaged in different kinds of repair work. Certainly, MacDougall's immediate editors had less problem with his work than did the *Journal's* top editor, Taylor, and its corporate office, which issued the denunciatory letter. These higher levels in the media system are more concerned with protecting the paradigm at the institutional level.

The MacDougall case prompted more attack from the Right than from the Left; not surprising, perhaps, given his value system. One right-wing attack charged that in addition to MacDougall, the *Journal* sheltered other "left-wing" reporters, including Jonathan Kwitny, a writer often critical of U.S. foreign policy (Kincaid, 1988). An Accuracy in Media report noted that the MacDougall case "explodes the myth that our media have effective safeguards to screen out propaganda hostile to our country and our system" (quoted in "Comment," 1989, p. 16). On the other hand, MacDougall found support in a *Washington Post* column: Coleman McCarthy (1989) criticized writers and reporters for often being glorified dictationists, supporting MacDougall's avocation that journalists improve their vantage point by stepping outside the system.

MacDougall maintained that radical journalists may be even more objective than "bourgeois" journalists, who are often not conscious of the hidden presuppositions that they bring to their reporting on capitalist institutions (MacDougall,

1988b, p. 22). Radical journalists, by taking the system itself as problematic, may be better equipped to address the structural causes for social ills. The *Columbia Journalism Review* article supported this claim that socialist perspectives can contribute to robust journalism, hearkening back to the muckraking socialist journalists at the turn of the century who called the country's attention to the Beef Trust, child labor, and urban poverty ("Comment;" 1989). (For a fuller discussion of the case, see Reese, 1990.)

## **SUMMARY**

Like ideology, a paradigm is not static but is continually being renegotiated. Like ideology, the news paradigm contains self-contradictory oppositional values, such as diversity in the newsroom versus valueless reporting. These values must be managed and adapted to the ideological requirements of the society. A recent case illustrates the same process. In the fall of 1993, Mike Meadows, a photographer for the *Los Angeles Times*, captured an image of a fireman splashing himself with water from a swimming pool. In the background, flames engulfed a large home. Unfortunately for the photographer, his editor found that the image had been "staged"; Meadows had suggested to the fireman that he kneel down by the pool and splash water over his head. For this "firing offense" Meadows was suspended without pay and publicly humiliated by his paper. In his editor's words, "When you manipulate the situation, you manipulate the news" (Lewis, 1994, p. 11). Why did the journalistic organization react so strongly to such a harmless manipulation, which conveyed the essential features of the event? Lewis argues,

The photograph challenges a crucial news-gathering conceit: that respectable journalism is a passive exercise in fact-gathering that conveys to the reader an unadulterated slice of reality.... This piece of propoganda is a far greater threat to the truth than anything in the photograph. (p. 12)

Of course, reality is altered by the very nature of reporting it with words and images. The over-reacting *Times* had to locate and punish a perpetrator in order to preserve the larger institutional myths about journalism in society.

Both the Meadows and MacDougall cases help us appreciate that neither paradigms nor ideologies are imposed directly, but are constituted by the institutional, occupational, and cultural practices that make up the mass media. In neither the political economy nor cultural studies view are ideological influences considered conspiratorial. Ideology is not directed behind the scenes by a top television anchor, a publisher, or a board of directors. Rather, ideology happens as a natural outgrowth of the way the system operates, making it a true, societal, macrolevel phenomenon with which to conclude our hierarchy of influences.

## Chapter 10

# Linking Influences on Content to the Effects of Content

**W**e began this book with a close look at media content, and we return to it now. Content is the common element to two main bodies of research: the *influences* on mass media content and the *effects of content* on people and society. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, research and theory in mass communication have focused *on* media effects or, even more often, the effects of media *use*. In this chapter, we suggest how linking influences on content with the effects of content can help build theory and improve our understanding of the mass communication process.

### DOMAINS OF MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Figure 10.1 identifies five general groups of variables that have been used in mass communication research, each of which can be dealt with singly (just domain B) or in combination (the B-E link), creating eleven other domains of research.<sup>1</sup> We will discuss these twelve domains in three groups—those that involve content, do not involve content, or suggest new ways to integrate studies of content with studies of effects.

#### Current Research Involving Content

- *Media Sociology.* Domain A covers the material outlined in this book—media sociology studies that look at how mass media content is shaped by the characteristics of the media, media workers, and the environment in which the media exist. These influences on media content are outlined in depth in Chapters 5 through 9 of this book.

**Factors in the media environment that may affect content:**

**FIGURE 10.1** Domains of mass communication research.

- *Marketing Media Content.* Domain B includes studies of how changing the nature of media content can affect the audience's use and evaluation of the content. This is largely a marketing domain, with primarily a theoretical studies of content's effects on newspaper and magazine circulation and discussions of how to improve television program ratings. For example, Smith (1989) studied the extent to which the use of color and graphic design influenced readers' evaluations of a newspaper.
- *Direct Effects of Content.* Domain C involves directly looking for content's effects on the audience without directly examining the audience's use of content. This use may be considered an intervening stage, which the researchers assume is taking place. Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) is an example of this: The more the media emphasize an



issue, the more important people will think the issue is? Domain C also includes experimental research in direct effects, such as whether violent television content can make children more aggressive. In such experiments, media use is generally not *assumed* to take place; rather, it is under the control of the experimenter and is often an integral part of the study.

- *Direct Effects of Content, with Influences on Content as Contingent Conditions.* The combined domain A-C involves studies of how the direct effects of content on the audience (e.g., agenda setting) may be contingent on the characteristics of the media, media workers, and the other environmental forces that shape that content. For example, Palmgreen and Clarke (1977) have shown that the agenda-setting effect on local issues may be more likely with content from newspapers than with local television news, whereas on national issues network television may be more effective than a local newspaper in setting the national agenda.
- *Effects of Content, with Audience Use Intervening.* The combined domain B-E involves studies of how the audience's use of content intervenes between the characteristics of the content and its effects. Although the cultivation analysis research done by George Gerbner and his colleagues (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) has included content analysis studies to establish the level of violence in television drama, cultivation hypotheses generally involve measures of overall television exposure (e.g., how many hours a day do you watch television?) instead of exposure to specific violent content.

#### **Current Research That Does Not Involve Content**

The right side of Figure 10.1 (domains D, E, and E-D) describes research areas that are by and large content free—they do not incorporate an important theoretical or empirical role for mass media content.

- *The Active Audience.* Domain D includes those theoretical approaches that look at how and why people use the mass media. This domain represents an enormous body of research, incorporating both the uses and gratifications approach (Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985) and studies of the diffusion of innovations and messages (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). More recent research shows how a family's communication patterns affect parents' and children's media use (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973; Meadowcroft, 1986).
- *Direct Effects of Media Use.* Domain E includes traditional effects studies, such as investigating the role of the media in political socialization of children (Atkin, 1981) or the effects of media reliance on political knowledge and attitudes (Reese & Miller, 1981; Miller & Reese, 1982). In such studies, media content is generally not addressed; only exposure to the media is measured. This domain is frequently crossed with domain D, as shown below.

- *Direct Effects of Media Use, with Audience Characteristics as Contingent Conditions.* Domain D-E includes media effects studies that commonly control for audience demographic, life-style, and environmental characteristics as alternative explanations for the observed relationship (e.g., Clarke & Fredin, 1978). Such studies assume that audience characteristics mitigate the effects of media exposure.

### **Integrating Content and Effects Studies**

The following domains suggest ways in which media content and media effects research can be combined to help our understanding of the role that the mass media play in society.

- *Marketing Media Content, with Media Characteristics as Contingent Conditions.* The combined domain A-B could add to our understanding of the marketability of *specific* media messages. For example, although a domain B study might tell us that television programs about detectives get better ratings than do westerns, we might be better at predicting ratings if we factor in our understanding of which production company was responsible for creating the shows. Some production companies may do a better job than others of producing westerns (or a worse job of producing detective shows).
- *Effects of Content, with Audience Use Intervening and Media Characteristics as Contingent Conditions.* Domain A-B-E involves studies that look at both (1) how characteristics of the media environment operate as contingent conditions for the relationship between content's characteristics and its effects, *and* (2) how the audience's use of content intervenes in the same relationship. For example, we might add an investigation of the production companies that make violent television shows (see domain A-B above) to cultivation analysis research (see domain B-E above). Perhaps we would find that although two shows have the same amount of violence according to the Gerbner violence index (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979), the show produced by company #1 had more of an effect on the audience's conceptions of social reality than the show produced by company #2. As a result of a qualitative difference in the type of violence portrayed, *one* show might make viewers more fearful about being the victim of a crime. Why might the two shows differ? Perhaps because of differences in the values and goals of the producers. By understanding the differences between the production companies, we improve our ability to explain and predict the effects of the content.

- *Effects of Media Use and Media Content, with Media and Audience Characteristics as Contingent Conditions.* Domain A-B-D-E adds to domain A-B-E another set of contingent conditions—characteristics of the audience and its environment. Domain A-B-D-E involves studies that look at (1) how characteristics of the media and their environment operate as contingent conditions for the relationship between content's characteristics and its effects, (2) how characteristics of the audience and its environment operate as contingent conditions for the relationship between the media use and its effects, and (3) how the audience's use of content intervenes in the content-effects relationship. For example, we might add to the domain A-B-E example above an investigation of the socioeconomic status of the audience members. Perhaps we would find that although two shows have the same amount of violence according to the Gerbner violence index (1979), the show produced by company #1 made people more fearful than the show produced by company #2, and that the effect is heightened for people of low socioeconomic status.
- *Direct and Inferred Effects of Content, with Influences on Content and Audience Characteristics as Contingent Conditions.* Domain A-B-C-D-E is the fully elaborated model of mass communication research. It adds to domain A-B-D-E the possibility that some content may have an effect on people directly, without media use as an intervening variable. This kind of effect could occur when people talk a lot about what they've seen or heard in the media, thereby causing an effect of the content above and beyond (or instead of) a given individual's media use.

#### **WHY INTEGRATE CONTENT AND EFFECTS STUDIES?**

Integrating content and effects studies will facilitate the growth of mass communication theories. Given that most theories used in mass communication studies are derived from other disciplines—psychology, sociology, and political science—the emphasis often is on social and psychological processes, not on the processes through which media content is first formed and then affects people and society. As a result of our reliance on these disciplines, we have in many cases ignored two of the most important elements of the mass communication process—media content and the factors that shape it.

When our media effects studies include only those variables that neatly fit theories developed by other disciplines (and thus ignore media content and media characteristics), we oversimplify the mass communication process and hamper the development of mass communication theories. This may result in conclusions that the media have little effect (as has been the case from time to time), it may minimize the strength of the effects, or it may result in an incomplete understanding of their social significance.

We believe that the development of mass communication theories is stuck on a plateau. We have borrowed theories from other disciplines and created a few of our own (e.g., agenda setting, uses and gratifications, cultivation analysis), but we will not see much more theory development specifically dealing with mass communication until we start integrating media content and the factors that shape it into our studies of media effects.

Such an integration will reveal more about the process through which the mass media shape social reality. There is ample evidence to show that media content does not always mirror reality and that different media produce different content. These content differences are a function of a network of influences, ranging from communication workers' personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, media organizational structure and culture, the relationships between the media and other social institutions, and broad cultural and ideological forces.

The media are not just channels. Information that passes through them is changed in a variety of ways before ultimately offering a specific view of social reality to the audience. We cannot fully understand the effects of that version of social reality if we do not understand the forces that shape it. For example, is the large amount of violence on television the result of hegemonic forces that are striving to control audience members by making them feel afraid and defenseless? Or is it the result of market forces that give the audience what it wants? The effect in either case may be the same—fear—but our response to that fear may differ substantially if we know what created the violent content in the first place.

Another reason for identifying the influence on media content involves our need to develop precise and valid measures of content. The factors that shape media content may result in two messages that appear identical, using our current measures for content, but actually vary in important ways. For example, applying Gerbner's (1979) television violence index to two television shows may result in the same violence score. But does this necessarily mean that the violence in the two shows is identical? Could there be other attributes of these shows that are related to the amount of violence? Lacking a more sophisticated awareness of content and media environment can prevent us from developing measures that are sensitive enough to detect important differences between content. That is why these domains are so important in understanding the overall mass communication process.

#### **SUMMARY: HOW WE CAN INTEGRATE CONTENT AND EFFECTS STUDIES**

First, we need more information in our effects studies about what a person has been exposed to, Although mass communication researchers have become adept at identifying, measuring, and statistically controlling for variables that express individual differences between audience

members, we have not been as good at doing the same for media content. We must recognize that exposure to a *medium* is not equivalent to exposure to specific *content* within that medium. When Gerbner and his colleagues (1979) ask respondents how many hours a day they watch television, they assume that there is a positive relationship between overall television viewing and the amount of violence seen. Although their content analyses of prime-time television show a stable and substantial amount of violence in most dramatic shows, the amount of violence in prime-time content can vary substantially. In fact, with the multiplicity of channels available to cable customers today, it would be possible for a heavy viewer of television to totally avoid violent content.

Likewise, communication researchers often measure exposure to public affairs content by asking people to report how many days a week they read a newspaper. But a person who says that he or she reads a newspaper every day may be selecting only the comics or sports news and may not be paying any attention at all to public affairs content. When we measure exposure to a medium instead of exposure to specific content, we effectively equate all content within the medium with the kind that is of interest (e.g., that all newspaper stories provide public affairs information or that all television shows are equally violent).

The same problem occurs when we assume that media content on one day is equivalent to content on another. Mass communication content occurs in cycles that we can easily identify and control for. For example, the number of pages in a newspaper varies day by day, with midweek issues being larger than those on Saturday. Television news programs also vary day by day. Although the amount of news presented doesn't vary, the amount of news available to be reported does. As Stempel (1989) points out, business and governmental sources account for much of the news, and these sources are least available between noon Friday and noon Monday, cutting the volume of potential news items.

Second, we need to develop content analysis measures that are reliable and valid across many kinds of content.' Standardization of content analysis measures lags behind standardization in survey or experimental research. Consequently, content analysis results are often not comparable and the measurement schemes may not be valid in other studies.

Third, along with treating the audience's exposure to the mass media as a variable intervening between content characteristics and media effects, we need to assess the extent to which the audience may be aware (correctly or not) of factors that influence media content. If a newspaper publisher has substantial ties to the business community, readers may interpret everything the newspaper does as being favorable to business. If the newspaper supports a candidate for an election, some may vote against the recommendation precisely because they think the newspaper is influenced by business.

Fourth, we need to assess the relative importance of factors that influence media content and identify those that are crucial contingent conditions for the effects being studied. Not all influences on content will be equally important for the study of media's effects. Media routines or the idiosyncratic behaviors of individual communicators may not be the decisive influence on

content in every instance. In many cases influences on media content may best be understood within the context of broad social and institutional forces. These broader forces are thus vital to our understanding of the overall social significance of the effects of media content. By and large, news media workers produce content routinely, according to the professional norms of their employers. When the ideological stakes are high, however, media owners and managers intervene to keep content within appropriate bounds, and they can override normal professionalism and routines. In any case, linking organizational factors to larger power centers in society helps us understand the wider origin of media content. By integrating this "hierarchy of influences," we have shown the variety of perspectives that can be applied to the mass communication process and the relationships between them in hopes of better understanding the media, media content, and society.

#### **NOTES**

1. Studies could also be done within each group of variables, such as looking at how ideological or cultural influences affect the nature of social institutions.
2. This is the case with agenda-setting studies at the social system level; studies at the individual level may or may not include exposure as intervening variables. Agenda setting can be studied in four basic ways (McCombs & Gilbert, 1986). The social system level studies, including the original (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), fall within domain C. The individual-level studies would fall within domain E.
3. We are indebted to Dr. Barbara Brown, University of Texas at Austin, for this idea.

## Chapter 11.

# Building a Theory of News Content

**A** first step toward understanding the many and complex factors that influence media content is identifying those factors. A second step is reviewing studies that examine these factors and that may test related hypotheses. Our book has tried to accomplish these two goals.

But a third step is also needed—synthesizing what is known about influences on media content into a more systematic set of interrelated statements about the relationships between media content and the influences on it—a *theory*. In this final chapter, we will sift through the many studies presented earlier and establish a series of representative hypotheses and assumptions to guide future research in this area. By this process, we hope to improve our ability to describe media content, explain why it takes on the characteristics it does, and predict the direction that media content will take in the future. An *assumption* is something taken for granted. A *hypothesis* is a statement about the relationship between two or more concepts or ideas. We will also provide propositions—statements that describe the current state of media content.

Although the majority of the hypotheses are derived from empirical research, we also provide some that have been inferred from our knowledge of the topic. The following list of assumptions, propositions, and hypotheses is not intended to be comprehensive, but it is a beginning for our ongoing search for understanding media content.

### ASSUMPTIONS

- *Mass media content is a socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality.* Although the stimulus for a story might be a real-world event or problem, measurable through other sources of social information, there are many factors that determine what will be transmitted and how it will be treated.

- *Some influences on content are intentional and others occur as a result of other actions.* For example, a bias in favor of certain types of sources may occur because these sources (such as corporations) are more readily available to the journalist.
- *Understanding the nature of media content is crucial in understanding the nature and importance of content's effects on people and society.* Knowing what media content is like helps us predict its effects on the audience. When we avoid content-specific measures in our effects studies, we run the risk of ignoring important causal connections between exposure to content and its effects.
- *From media content we can infer many of the factors that shaped it.* For example, the language used may tell us something about the writer's attitudes, and the editor's selection of stories tells us something about his or her *priorities*.
- *The general forces operating to shape news content also shape entertainment content.* Both types of content are influenced by individual media workers, media routines, media organizations, extramedia factors, and ideology.
- *Influences on media content can be ranked hierarchically, from the ideological and other macrosystem-level factors to the more micro characteristics of individual media workers.* Each level has its own *range* of influence but is subjected to and has limits set by each hierarchically superior level. What explains the role conceptions of journalists? Their socialization to the routines of the workplace. Why do such routines exist? In order to meet organizational standards and goals. What is the source of these standards and goals? Pressures from advertisers and audiences, sources, the market economy, and so on. Why do these extramedia factors relate to the media in the *way* they do? Because of ideological and cultural imperatives on the role that the mass media should play in society.
- *Not everything "eligible" to be mass media content actually gets into the media.* The gatekeeping process involves selection of items from the universe of possible ones. Not every film idea becomes a film; not every event is covered in the news.
- *Media routines developed as a way of making the media worker's job more efficient.* The media operate under certain expectations about the nature of content from the audience and work under constraints imposed by sources.
- *The ultimate power in a media organization comes from the owner.* Although lower-level employees exert influences over media content, the owners set the direction and the ultimate policies.



- *All mass media are controlled in one way or another.* Control is exerted through media financing. Where the media are government-owned, this control is direct. Where the media are primarily privately owned, control is exerted through laws, regulations, licenses, taxes, and other more indirect forms of ideological direction.

#### **PROPOSITIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF MEDIA CONTENT**

- *Television content (both news and entertainment) contains a high level of violence that is consistent over time.* Although year-to-year and program-to-program fluctuations do occur, the overall picture is one of substantial violence. When crimes *are* depicted, they are more likely to be violent than nonviolent.
- *In media content, women and the aged appear less often than men and younger adults, and they are presented differently.* About two-thirds of television characters are males, and when women are presented with men, the women are generally shown as younger and in inferior roles. Women are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence, and they are more likely to be portrayed as mentally ill. The aged are treated stereotypically, so that age is their primary attribute.
- *Most news is about people who are already prominent.* For a nonprominent person to be covered often requires that he or she do something deviant (such as demonstrating or breaking a law).
- *Most news comes from "official" (primarily governmental) channels, but journalists will use other sources when they are available.* Governmental and business sources are most accessible to journalists, often preparing events or information specifically for journalists. Individual sources or representatives of small groups are less accessible to journalists and may not be as skilled in getting their messages out.
- *In the United States, news coverage of a state is not related to its population.* States along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts are overcovered, relative to their population, whereas states in the Midwest are undercovered.
- *Among television characters, there are more people with high-status than low-status jobs.*
- *Minority characters and newscasters are generally underrepresented and portrayed stereotypically.* In the United States, white characters are shown as being more powerful. The more a minority newsmaker has acculturated to white society and the higher his or her socio-economic level is, the more prominently he or she will be covered. *In general, portrayals in media reflect the power relations of the general society.*

**HYPOTHESES ABOUT INFLUENCES ON MEDIA CONTENT**

**Individual Media Workers**

- *Media workers who have a "communication" college degree produce content with different characteristics than do those with other majors.* Some media employers believe that journalism majors are preferable; others want liberal arts (especially American Studies) graduates. Such preferences are based on assumptions about the kind of educational experience that makes the best journalist.
- *A journalist's background and personal characteristics will affect media content in proportion to the amount of power the person holds within the media organization.* A major exception is when assignments are made on the basis of ethnicity, for example.
- *People who are similar to a journalist will be covered differently from people who are dissimilar.* The demographic characteristics of the communicator may affect the content he or she produces, especially when communicating about others within the demographic group. Women write about women differently than men do. Hispanics cover the Hispanic community differently than Anglos do. Sexual orientation may influence the way in which a story is framed.
- *Media workers' personal attitudes affect the content they produce, contingent on their having the power sufficient to influence the production of content and on the lack of a strong routine covering the task.* Journalists have substantial leeway in the selection of words and visuals to include in a story, and therefore their personal attitudes may translate into selections that undermine the political legitimacy of the covered person or event. Sports announcers may select words or phrases based on their racial prejudices. Filmmakers' personal attitudes and values may influence their choice of projects and the ways in which the projects are accomplished. Publishers and media owners may make decisions against the interests of their organization or class if they have strongly held personal views.
- *Journalists' role conceptions affect content.* Whether journalists see their roles as interpreting what others do, disseminating information, or serving as an adversary of the powerful, these roles may determine how they define their jobs, the kinds of things they believe should be covered, and the ways in which they cover them.
- *The more unethical media workers think an action is, the less likely they are to take part in it.* Because there is no required ethical code for communicators, however, they do not always agree about what is ethical.

**Links between Influences from Individuals and Those from Routines**

- *The longer people work for a media organization, the more socialized they are to the policies—stated and unstated—of the organization.* Media workers learn what their organizations want by observing others, by receiving feedback from their superiors, and by observing what makes it into the finished communication product.
- *Media workers are less likely to insert their own value judgments or opinions into straight news accounts than in other types of content (such as features or entertainment).* The journalistic routine of objectivity overrules an individual's tendency to communicate his or her opinion.
- *The more media workers follow the routines of their organizations, the more likely their content is to be used.* The routines by which the mass media collect, shape, and disseminate information affect media content. For example, gatekeeping involves the selection, shaping, and repetition of information. Deadlines may prevent the communication of "truth." The inverted pyramid arrays the information in a story according to how important the journalist thinks it is. The routine of objectivity provides journalists with a set of standard procedures for covering people and events. If the routines were different, media content would be different.
- *The more media workers learn the routines associated with their jobs, the more professional they are rated to be by co-workers.* The communicator's job requires the handling and manipulation of a lot of information. Those who follow established procedures for dealing with the information will be positively reinforced. Communicators learn these procedures through a process of socialization to their jobs.
- *On stories or subjects without established routines, in early stages of an issue, for example, individual factors will be relatively more influential, compared with routines.* Routines provide a way for handling a story that transcends the individual media worker and that therefore also supersedes an individual's influence.

**Routines of Media Work**

- *Events that are congruent with media routines are more likely to be covered than discongruent events.* News that is off the beaten path (e.g., not on the journalists' beat) may go unreported. Issues and events that don't include good film/video footage may not be included in television newscasts. A press conference held just before a newspaper's deadline is more likely to be included than one just after. Events that fit an organization's definition of news are most likely to be covered.

- *Events are more likely to be covered than issues.* Journalists can more easily defend covering events than issues, which by definition are more ambiguous. Covering events is so common in journalism that covering events has itself become a routine.
- *The closer an event is to the media organization's routine definition of newsworthiness, the more likely it is to be covered.* News organizations value consistency in their coverage over time.
- *The more journalists cover an event, the more similar their coverage will be.* "Pack journalism" results in sharing of ideas and confirmation of news judgments and the observation of other journalists. Editors tend to question coverage that is different from that of other news organizations. *The more journalists read (or view) each others' stories, the more similar is their subsequent coverage of an event or issue.* Journalists often read or view each others' stories, at least partially looking for confirmation that their own decisions have been correct.  
*The more powerful or successful people or groups are, the more negative news coverage of them will be.* Coverage of political candidates is more negative toward front-runners and incumbents than toward the underdog. Looking for flaws in potential winners and in the powerful has become a routine part of investigative journalism. Journalists may feel they can be magnanimous toward losers.

#### **Link between Routines and Organizational Influences**

- *The larger and more complex a media organization is, the less influence professional routines will have on content and the more influence larger organizational forces will have.* The more layers of bureaucracy that exist between reporters and top management of media organizations, the less sensitive the top managers will be to the professional concerns of these lower-level workers. As bureaucracy increases, the problems of the reporter become more abstract to top management. Instead of making most decisions on the basis of professional considerations, top management will base decisions on economic concerns. Top management will not normally intervene against professional routines unless they threaten the larger organization's goals. As the organization's resources become more limited, routines will be followed that enable the organization to best gather content from sources and distribute it to audiences as efficiently as possible.

#### **Organizational Influences**

- *The more elite a medium is, the less similar its workers will be to the general population.* Research shows, for example, that journalists at elite news organizations are more liberal

than journalists are on the average. Elite organizations tend to hire people from more elite backgrounds.

- *The extent to which the organization's need to make a profit affects media content is contingent on the overall economic health of the organization.* Media organizations that are making a satisfactory profit are more likely to permit professional influences to win over economic ones. If, however, the organization is economically at risk, the need to make a profit may win out over professional considerations.
- *Television and radio are more sensitive to the need to make a profit than are newspapers and magazines.* Virtually all television and radio income derives from advertisers, and these media compete head to head against similar products in the same market. Virtually every programming decision has economic ramifications.
- *Upper-level media management personnel whose background is on the business side of the organization are more likely to make decisions based on economics rather than on professional considerations.* Their backgrounds have sensitized them to economic concerns as primary.
- *Middle-level media management personnel are more closely attuned to the organization's goals than are lower-level personnel, who are more attuned to their sources.* Editors may be more sensitive to the business side of the organization, thus bringing reporters and editors into constant conflict over the direction that content should take.
- *When editorial routines conflict with the organization's need to make a profit, if the editor controls both the business and editorial sides of a newspaper, the editorial side will be given a lower priority than the business side.* The business concerns may seem more concrete and immediate to editors, thus taking precedence over editorial concerns.
- *The higher an individual is in a media organization, the more likely he or she is to have connections with nonmedia organizations.* Although reporters are cautioned against getting involved in community organizations, publishers often serve as board members of businesses and may serve as officers in local civic groups.
- *The personal attitudes and values of news media owners may be reflected not only in editorials and columns but also in news and features.* Not only can owners hire and fire editors, columnists, and reporters according to their stated political beliefs, but they can also cause subtle "slants" in coverage as the employees try to anticipate what the owner wants.
- *The further the owner of a news organization lives from the organization, the less local news, editorials, and features the organization transmits.* Absentee ownership is common among companies that own more than one media organization, and absentee

owners may be less likely to adopt aggressive coverage in the local community and more likely to follow policies that will aid the overall corporation.

- *Media workers from organizations owned by chains form weaker attachments to the local community than do workers for independent organizations.* The employees' loyalty may be more toward the corporation than toward the local community. Chain employees may move from organization to organization and never develop strong ties to any one community.
- *Chain organizations are more likely to endorse presidential candidates than independent organizations, and the endorsement is generally homogeneous throughout the chain.* This may be the result of a convergence toward similar views among editorial writers in the chain, rather than overt collusion to stress one political party or issue. Promotions and salary increases go to employees who perform their jobs well; and the higher workers are in the organization, the more likely their promotions and raises are to be affected by administrators of the chain.

### **Links between Organizational and Extramedia Influences**

- *The more sources know about and adapt to the media organization's routines, the more likely they are to get favorable coverage.* For example, sources that can deliver news releases in the form generally used and at the time preferred by the media are most likely to get coverage.
- *The more advertising a newspaper or magazine has, the more pages it will devote to editorial (i.e., nonadvertising) content.* Print media generally work on the assumption that a certain percentage of their overall pages will be advertising content and that the remainder will be editorial. If advertising pages increase, there is more room available to run stories.
- *The more connections there are between extramedia organizations and media organizations, the more influence extramedia firms will have.* Pressure can be put on media organizations through connections made at upper-level management between media and nonmedia companies.

### **Extramedia Influences**

- *The more economic or political power a source has, the more likely he or she is to influence news reports.* Such sources generally have accessible staff members who keep regular office hours assigned specifically to get information out to the media in a quick and concise manner.

- *Although "official" sources (e.g., government officials or police) dominate nearly all news content, the percentage of official sources will be higher in stories about issues than in those about events.* Issues are more likely than events to involve the vested interests of official sources, who will seek out journalists to get their points across.
- *The more critical of media coverage an interest group is, the more likely the media are to self-censor.* Criticisms from interest groups do have an influence on media content, both through their own publicity-generated efforts and because interest groups often target advertisers for boycotts. The media may make a specific change asked for by the interest group, but they may try to anticipate the group's complaints and influence content accordingly.
- *The slower the news day, the more likely media content is to be generated by public relations practitioners.* When no big issue or event dominates a day's news coverage, journalists are still obliged to put out a preset amount of news content. Public relations practitioners and interest groups provide media events and new information for the media to cover.
- *The more coverage the opinion-leading media give an issue or event, the more likely other media are to give subsequent coverage to the issue or event.* Journalists read each others' stories and watch each others' newscasts. Elite media organizations, such as the *New York Times*, serve as agenda setters for other media.
- *The more a media organization promotes itself within a target audience, the more its content will reflect the interests of that audience.* Some newspapers have abandoned the mass audience for deep penetration in audiences most attractive to advertisers, with content that appeals most to the preferred audience members. Television programming is often dependent upon ratings, which show not only how many people are watching but also their characteristics. Programming with an unattractive (to advertisers) audience may be abandoned for content that attracts the preferred sort of audience.
- *Advertisers influence media content.* The more advertisers support one kind of media content, the more of that *type* of content the media will offer. In addition, some advertisers work directly to delete or shape the nature of media content by specifically withdrawing advertising support from objectionable content or by letting it be known that they do not want to support media that run certain types of articles. Advertisers have also created media content specifically to showcase their products.
- *The more the mass media criticize a country's government, the more the government will try*

*to control the media.* Controls can take place through media financing, laws, regulations, court cases, licenses, taxes, manipulation of the release and availability of information, and direct communication of a government official to a (generally high-level) manager of a media organization.

- *The more sources and interest groups criticize the mass media, the more the government will try to control the media.*
- *The characteristics of the community within which a medium operates may influence its content.* The larger the market, the more the media will cover spontaneous news events and local news. The presence of a competing newspaper, however, apparently does not increase diversity in newspaper content.
- *The wider the geographic area a medium covers, the more standardized its content will be.* Messages must be broadened to appeal to people with varying interests and tastes. Such content will take few chances and make few innovations.

### **Ideology**

- *The more deviant people or events are, the more likely they are to be included in media content and the more likely they are to be stereotyped.* The media help maintain the boundaries of social order by showing what is approved and not approved. Deviant people and events may be trivialized or shown as dangerous. This is apparently true of the U.S. media, regardless of whether they are covering people or events in the United States or in another country.
- *The more political, economic, or cultural significance one country has for another, the more the former will appear in the latter's mass media.* Such social system-level attachments between countries affect priorities in media coverage. Although the same news values *may* apply for domestic and foreign news coverage, measures of political, economic, and cultural significance affect what is considered important, one of the main criteria for establishing newsworthiness.
- *Journalists will not use objective routines, such as balance, when subjects are outside the area of legitimate controversy and in the areas of consensus or deviance.*
- *Elites will respond to media as a class when core ideological principles are threatened.* Actions of business, for example, will be more unified and coordinated, transcending the actions of any given company or industry, as more capitalist values come under attack.
- *The more closely media are connected to other elites, the more media content will be consistent with those elite ideological view-points.* Examples of elite connections include board interlocks and club memberships.



- *Violations of occupational paradigms—anomalies—must be repaired in order to preserve the paradigm.* This repair is most evident when the violation crosses important ideological boundaries.
- *On a given issue, television coverage will be more ideologically charged than the print media.*

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although many more such hypotheses could be derived, these examples should give readers an idea of the many studies that are waiting to be mined from this rich vein of theory. In particular, many more connections could be made between these various levels, and development of interlevel links is an important topic for future research.

The hierarchy of influences model is useful for research in two important respects. First, by approaching media studies from several levels, we can better appreciate the different perspectives that are possible. Any single perspective does not present a complete picture, and *any* given study cannot address all these levels at once. But an awareness of these multiple perspectives helps keep our thinking open. Many studies make observations at one level of analysis and interpret those findings at a higher level. For example, many scholars have examined individual journalists and then drawn conclusions about media organizations as a whole. Individual bias, however, does not translate automatically into media bias. Similarly, ideological analyses may yield elegant theories of media and society, but individuals still have latitude in their behavior. Their actions, although constrained, are not automatically determined by higher-level social forces.

Second, combining these multiple levels of analysis draws our attention to the connections between them. Indeed, this may be one of the most fruitful areas of future research. Occupational routines are related to larger ideological requirements. Personal values of journalists cannot be separated from their routines. Organizational structure is related to media routines, and so on. Ideological forces must work through people and practices, and finding out how that happens is important.

Until recently, in mainstream U.S. media research, the greatest theoretical and methodological precision has been found in the studies of mass communication processes and effects. We hope that the same kind of precision and systematic study can be directed at media content and the influences on it. Organizing theory and research is an important start. In addition, we hope that even studies at the lower levels of analysis will be informed by the theories of power and society developed at the higher levels, and that ideological-level studies will be conditioned by an understanding of individuals and their practices. By combining our insights and observations in this *way*, a more complete understanding of the mass media's role in society will be possible.

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