7   Setting the Media's Agenda: A Power Balance Perspective

STEPHEN D. REESE
University of Texas at Austin

This chapter reviews the burgeoning number of studies seeking to explain what sets the media's agenda, and integrates them within a power balance framework. The concept of power is used in a critical evaluation of the agenda-setting metaphor and its limitations when expanded to include influences on media content. The organizational perspective, taken by much "media sociology" research, has examined power relations within organizations. This approach restricts the power of journalists, who are viewed as constrained by bureaucratic structures. Alternatively, journalists may be viewed as agents of the organization's power in their dealings with other institutions. These power relations between the media and sources can be examined at individual, organizational, and institutional levels and are discussed in terms of interdependency and symbiosis. A media organization may manifest its power through its ability to define a reality through reporting and structuring of information, in spite of efforts by involved sources to dictate a different reality. Other indicators of both source and media power are specified, and the implications of different balances of media-source power are discussed. Treating power as a series of changing relationships helps avoid the tendency to regard media or sources as inherently and statically powerful. The powerful can manipulate the media, but under some conditions media assert their own power and agenda.

IN Roman mythology, the god Janus could look in two directions at once, thanks to his two faces. Appropriately, his name was given to the first month of the year, which stands between the new year and the old. Like Janus, the agenda of issues and events found in the news media assumes a similar forward- and backward-looking stance. This media agenda simultaneously projects forward a powerful structuring effect on audience perceptions, while itself indicating the powerful influences behind its creation.

The media have an indirect, yet powerful and pervasive, effect on public opinion by limiting and prioritizing public perceptions of important issues. By formally conceptualizing and testing this agenda-setting process, McCombs and Shaw (1972) set the research agenda for droves of communication researchers. In their comprehensive review of this research tradition and related policy agenda-setting

studies, Rogers and Dearing (1988) conclude: (a) "The media influence the public agenda"; (b) "the media agenda seems to have direct, sometimes strong, influence upon the policy agenda"; and the media indirectly influence policy as well because (c) "the public agenda, once set by, or reflected by, the media agenda, influences the policy agenda" (pp. 579-580). By focusing on these influences, the agenda-setting approach implicitly adopts the pluralistic values of democratic theory, bringing public opinion to center stage. Assuming that public opinion directly affects public policy makes setting the public agenda an important media effect.

In recent years, communication researchers have begun to look backward as well, toward the origins of the media agenda. Perhaps, as McCombs suggests, having satisfied themselves that media content did have effects, communication scholars felt justified in turning their attention inward, toward the processes creating that content (M. McCombs, personal communication, 1988). Effects on opinion remain important, but in different respects. This shift away from the "public" is perhaps more attuned to an elite-centered view of political influence. The public does not keep up with politics or participate enough to assign it a direct role in the political process. Rather, policy alternatives originate with elites, who seek to manage the climate of opinion in their favor. Elites contend with each other, often through the media, for favorable opinion, as one of many scarce resources (e.g., Paletz & Entman, 1981, pp. 184-195). Focusing on agenda creation highlights these processes.

This chapter picks up where Rogers and Dearing (1988) left off, by reviewing the burgeoning number of studies seeking to explain the media's agenda. These studies are diverse and are knitted together only loosely, if at all, by the agenda-setting metaphor. But then, one strength of the robust agenda concept is its ability to pull together previously unconnected lines of research. For now I use Rogers and Dearing's (1988) term, "media agenda-setting" (as distinct from public and policy agenda-setting), to refer to those studies using the media agenda as a dependent variable.[1] Media agenda-setting includes all of the influences affecting media content.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Power Perspective

In reviewing media agenda-setting, this chapter focuses on power relations as an organizing theme for a diverse set of research studies. Power is central to social analysis, whether openly examined or not. Studies can be compared based on where they look for the exertion of power. A Marxist scholar, for example, typically views the most significant power as ultimately lying in society's economic formations. Studies of individual journalists imply that they have significant power in creating the news product. Organizational analysis, on the other hand, assumes that

individuals are constrained in their power by structures beyond their immediate control. Similarly, we can consider some organizations more powerful than others. Setting the media agenda is itself an exercise in power, as many competing factions strive to get on the agenda and do so in ways favorable to their interests. By recognizing this fact, we can clarify the power relationships within and across social formations that result in the agenda displayed in the media.

Diversity of Studies

The diversity of media agenda-setting studies complicates finding any single theoretical approach. Indeed, Swanson (1988) notes that the very meaning of *agenda* is different at each level of analysis, and that "each level of agenda-setting is likely best understood by theoretical conceptions that are specific to that level" (p. 614). This heterogeneous research ranges across many different levels of analysis and research traditions, unlike the more homogeneous agenda-setting studies. The major agenda-setting variables — the media agenda and some measure of public opinion, with various audience characteristics serving as intervening factors — have been used similarly across many studies. The underlying process is psychological and straightforward. The media manipulate the salience of agenda items, by paying more or less attention to them, thus cuing audience members to their importance in a process mediated by each individual's need for orientation.

When we look for the media agenda's antecedents, however, we are open to the whole wide range of cultural, institutional, and organizational forces, which leads to an equally wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Thus, unlike the public agenda-setting studies, carried out largely by communication scholars, media agenda-setting has received attention from many scholars from as many social science disciplines, bringing their own economic, political, sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives. In addition, media agenda studies lead naturally to normative and ideological questions. Taking the media agenda as problematic and not as a given encourages difficult and power-oriented questions: Whose values are reflected? Whose are suppressed? What values should be on the agenda? Not surprisingly, many media agenda-setting studies have an explicit ideological stance or make prescriptions toward improving media content or revealing its underlying biases.

News Versus Entertainment

Although many studies have examined both news and entertainment content (e.g., Ettema, Whitney, & Wackman, 1987), this chapter focuses on the news agenda. I recognize, of course, that the lines between news and entertainment have become blurred. Many movies are factually based, out of "today's headlines," while news itself, television news in particular, always has been infused with entertainment-style techniques and values. But agenda-setting is at heart a theory of political influence, and this influence is exerted most directly through the news

media, channels that still differ in important ways from entertainment. Both news and entertainment content represent a cultural mapping of sorts, and both are the products of similar organizational logic (e.g., Hirsch, 1977). The fact remains, however, that unlike news, entertainment fare is largely an artistic creation and determined entirely within the media (Elliot, 1972). News producers do not have complete control over the issues and events that form the raw material for their product and depend on powerful, self-interested external sources for that material. This chapter will consider how these sources influence content by dictating and responding to organizational routines.

Social Science Approach Versus Focus on Text

Many scholars from both humanistic and Marxist traditions have focused on the meaning of news media content as a text with embedded cultural and ideological meanings. Examples include rhetorical (Burke, 1945), semiotic (Eco, 1976), and cultural analyses (e.g., Gitlin, 1980). Because I examine those processes acting on the media agenda, I follow the traditional social science approach, which may be considered "more attuned to how symbols are produced than to what they mean and more attuned to industrial and organizational context than to the text itself" (Ettema et al., 1987, p. 749). Finally, while providing a general review of media agenda-setting, I draw many of my examples from the broadcast media — a result of my own scholarly interest, plus the fact that the broadcast industry seems to be undergoing the most rapid change in more obvious ways.

THE MEDIA AGENDA

The Agenda Metaphor and Definitions

There has been no shortage of studies examining the media agenda (taken broadly as news content) as a subject in itself. The "agenda" metaphor makes easy intuitive sense, but is flexible in the definitions that can be applied. A few have predominated in the literature, however. Rogers and Dearing (1988) define the media agenda as a "list of issues and events that are viewed at a point in time ranked in a hierarchy of importance" (p. 565). Shaw (1977) views events as discrete happenings, limited by space and time, as opposed to issues that consist of cumulative news coverage of a series of related events subsumed under some larger category. Funkhouser (1973) makes a similar distinction between issues based on "newsworthy" events (Vietnam, crime, student unrest, urban riots) and others (race relations, inflation, drugs/narcotics, ecology) (p. 534). Practically speaking, it is often hard to differentiate between the two. Many news stories combine both types of information: An event serves as a news "peg" that justifies examining the larger issue, or many separate events may be combined as evidence of a larger issue.

Media Consonance

Comparing agendas across media shows important regularities. Indeed, the degree of similarities in coverage has been one factor leading scholars to examine the powerful organizational and institutional forces behind this standardization. As befits the value placed on diversity, the terms applied to this similarity have somewhat pejorative connotations: *consonance, conformity, duplication, homogeneity, standardization, "three-in-one news,"* and *uniformity.* Several studies have examined print media similarities (Bigman, 1948; Donohue & Glasser, 1978; Gieber, 1956; Riffe & Shaw, 1982), particularly as influenced by the wire services (Cutlip, 1954; Gold & Simmons, 1965; Snider, 1967; Stempel, 1962). Newspapers appear to agree less on selection of specific stories (Stempel, 1959). The three television networks are the most functionally equivalent media and, predictably, the most similar (Altheide, 1982; Buckalew, 1969; Capo, 1983; Dominick, 1981; Foote & Steele, 1986; Fowler & Showalter, 1974; Graber, 1971; Hester, 1978; Lemert, 1974; Meeske & Javaheri, 1982; Riffe, Ellis, Rogers, Van Ommeren, & Woodman, 1986; Weaver, Porter, & Evans, 1984).

Cross-media comparisons also find agreement on the relative categorical, or topical, proportions of news (Lasorsa & Wanta, 1988; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984). Stempel (1985) found a similar pattern in the news "mix" across major media, but, again, much less agreement on specific stories, except among the three-networks. Story similarity may be greater during campaign periods, as Patterson (1980, p. 764) found was the case for 1976 presidential campaign coverage by television, newspapers, and newsmagazines.

Studies like these have examined cross sections of media content, and have found them similar in agenda priorities. Another way to look at media similarities, however, is over time, as the media "converge" on big stories. Intermedia similarities may be the greatest for these big, high-profile, national stories. In this process, the media discover issues and respond to each other in a cycle of peaking coverage, before largely dismissing issues. In 1986, for example, the major national media — elite press, networks, and newsmagazines — discovered the cocaine issue. The media followed each other in a crescendo of coverage, peaking in the summer months (Danielian & Reese, 1988; Reese & Danielian, 1988).

In recent years, media convergence on the big stories seems to have grown: African famine, AIDS, Mideast terrorism (the TWA hijacking and various hostage dramas), and the farm crisis. There is empirical support for this hunch: Merriam and Makower (1988) report that early in the 1980s

> only one or two stories a year commanded 10 percent or more of all national coverage in any two-week period. By 1985, there were 14 such stories. In 1986, there were 23, from the space shuttle and Chernobyl disasters to tax reform and the federal budget deficit. (p. 43)

Have our problems grown so severely in just a few short years, or have the media converged on selected issues with more vigor? More attention is needed as to how

the media converge, not only with increasing quantity of topical information, but also in their angles, slants, and selections of sources.

Sources and Channels

The analysis of news sources takes an important step beyond a strictly "topical" description of content, by identifying "whose" agenda is being promoted. This approach assumes that source selection largely determines how stories are framed, and the tone they will take, whether quoted directly or not. The reliance of news reports on official sources has been well documented. Gans (1979), for example, found that already-prominent people, the "knowns," over half of whom are government officials, dominate network and newsmagazine news, with "unknowns" making up only a fifth of the coverage. Sigal (1973) drew a similar conclusion from his analysis of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*: American and foreign government officials accounted for three-fourths of all news sources. The same pattern held true for these papers in 1979 and 1980 (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1987). Furthermore, information from these sources is gathered primarily through institutionalized, routine channels, such as press conferences, press releases, and official briefings. Few stories are gathered through reporter enterprise and initiative (Sigal, 1973).[2]

Content Versus Objective Conditions

Standardization of media content and volatile convergence on big stories leads us to question how related news is to real events. Political theory has the same problem media scholars have had in explaining how "a previously dormant issue can be transformed into a highly salient political controversy at a specific point when the basis of the grievance has existed for some time; for example the pollution problem" (Cobb & Elder, 1972, p. 9). This phenomenon sets the stage for agenda-setting hypothesis itself. In testing it, three things must be demonstrated: (a) The media and public agenda correlate, (b) the media agenda preceded the public agenda in time, and (c) alternative explanations that both respond to third factors, such as objective conditions, have been ruled out. The third condition must also be satisfied to justify examining what "sets" the media's agenda. If the media simply reflect objective conditions, little room is left for organizational and other factors. This restriction has not been the case, however.

Funkhouser (1973) conducted one of the early studies comparing coverage with objective indicators. He found little correspondence between issue coverage and the underlying conditions, even those event-based issues: American involvement in Vietnam peaked in 1968, whereas news coverage peaked in 1966. Urban riot articles peaked in 1967, while the number of civil disturbances peaked in 1968. (Note the key assumption that underlying statistical indicators picked by Funkhouser are good indications of reality.) In the cocaine issue mentioned above, there was no objective evidence of a drug epidemic at the time of the coverage, as Kerr (1986) notes: "In recent weeks, as the intense attention to drugs has faded,

some have asked if the reaction to drugs was appropriate, and how it is that the press and Congress sometimes suddenly discover and then dismiss a major national problem" (p. 1).

Many studies have compared news coverage with quasi-objective baselines, finding that they do not correspond closely. Violent crimes against people are covered at a rate disproportional to property or nonviolent crimes (Ammons, Dimmick, & Pilotta, 1982; Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Fedler & Jordan, 1982; Roshier, 1981). News overrepresents geographic regions: namely, the two coasts (Dominick, 1977; Graber, 1988). Similarly, in international news, developed countries receive disproportionately high coverage relative to their populations (Larson, 1983). In addition, Adams (1986) found that the severity of foreign natural disasters accounts for less than a tenth of the variation in the attention they are given by the U.S. television networks.[3]

Events and objective reality (such that we can know it) provide a start in predicting the media agenda. If an earthquake destroyed Los Angeles, Californians would think it real enough and the media would no doubt cover it. Events are not nearly enough, however, to help us understand media agenda-setting. Events may be grist for the media mill, but they are events as seen through the eyes of powerful sources and other bureaucratic organizations. Indeed, Molotch and Lester (1974) argue that events themselves are occurrences that sources promote into the news. Perhaps the question of whether media respond to objective reality is moot, given the necessarily subjective way reality is filtered before reaching the press and audience.

A POWER PERSPECTIVE
ON CREATING THE NEWS AGENDA

The standardization of the media agenda, reliance on a few key sources, and convergence on big issues in ways predicted poorly by objective conditions all suggest important power roles being played out behind the scenes. Although many studies have explored influences on the media agenda, few have carried the agenda paradigm over intact from the traditional agenda-setting public opinion studies. That is, few studies identify a specific agenda of issue priorities originating with influential news sources that set, in turn, the media agenda. Exceptions would include Turk's (1986) study of the Public Information Office's public relations efforts in two Louisiana state agencies. She showed that newspapers using those agencies' information featured an agenda of issues that reflected the issue agenda and priorities contained in the information efforts by the agencies. In addition, the reanalyses of White's (1950) gatekeeper study by McCombs and Shaw (1977) and Hirsch (1977) and Whitney and Becker's (1982) experimental test resemble the traditional agenda-setting model, in showing that the agenda established by the wire service influenced the newspaper editor. The remainder of this chapter takes a broader view of influences on the media agenda, considering any forces acting

on news media content, including what does not get into the news media, what does, and how it is presented. These influences may be viewed as coming from within or without the news organization. I will review these two major perspectives with emphasis on the role of power in each.

Power as a Relationship

Before proceeding further, a working definition of *power* is needed. The word is used often in everyday conversation to refer to such traits as strength, clout, and influence. Social analysts use it too, but often without an adequate theory of power to go with it. For example, media are said to be powerful to the extent that they can produce powerful effects in an audience. Powerful media produce powerful effects. But who is actually producing these effects? Often, the media just pass along what they are given by other power centers. Can the media be said to be powerful if they simply serve as a conduit for the power of others? If the president makes a speech, and the media carry it, and the speech has the desired effect, can the media be said to have produced the effect? By not tracing the chain of power far enough, we fail to come to grips with the origins of power. Clearly, the power of the media is a function of their relations with other power centers. How can this relationship be conceptualized?

Both coercive and exchange relations of power may be found in media-society relationships.[4] A newspaper may expose a corrupt politician, in spite of efforts to suppress the story. Or the politician may have enough resources to sue the paper and effectively shut it down. More frequently, the politician uses the media and vice versa in a mutually agreeable manner. In either case, both seek to further their own interests. These are the kinds of relations that will be of particular interest here. More often than not, the relationship between media and society can be described as symbiotic. It is precisely because it is symbiotic that it often does not appear that either party is exerting power over the other.

Many measures can be used to signify power relations. Domhoff (1970), for example, looks for the accretions and correlates of power in his study of social elite classes: Who wins? Who governs? Who has the most of what society has to offer? In exchange relationships, Parenti (1978) notes that those with the most to gain are the least powerful. Thus we should look for what resources each party commands. How dependent is one on the other, and for what? Who has more at stake in the relationship? These questions suggest several indicators of power that can be applied to the media source relationship below.

The Media Agenda and Values

Critical studies of influences on news content generally judge media performance by some value-based standard related to power. They differ according to how political power is thought to be exercised in society. The dominant democratic pluralist model of society values diversity: The more media voices, the better. This pluralistic model of media performance is found in many policy discussions as

well. The Federal Communications Commission, for example, chose to deregulate much of broadcasting during the Reagan administration, reasoning that the number of media outlets made it possible for market forces to ensure diversity. Power is viewed as distributed across many competing interests. These interests act as "veto groups" as they vie with one another to create a more or less stable political equilibrium. Even the elites are viewed as sufficiently divided as to make unlikely any undue concentration of power (e.g., Rose, 1967). As McQuail (1986) 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" (p. 143). Studies based on a pluralistic model of society often do not examine power explicitly. They accept the power relations in society as a given, for power is not considered problematic if the many diverse "veto group" power centers carry on a self-maintaining and balanced political process.

A more critical, radical view of media focuses on top-down control of the media agenda. Power is viewed as much more concentrated, whether in elites or propertied classes, and the media agenda 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. This is particularly so because individuals are viewed as unable to compete effectively against major power centers in society, which use their power to manipulate people in ways contrary to their natural interests. Institutions are not accepted as a given, but rather examined in terms of their implications for existing power structures (e.g., Parenti, 1978, 1986).

The theory of hegemony, as proposed by Gramsci (1927/1971), has been a strong theme running through critical analyses of media. *Hegemony* refers to the means by which the ruling order maintains its dominance, and to the systematic engineering of mass consent. 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 (see also Gitlin, 1980, pp. 252-282). Hegemonic values in news are said to be particularly effective in permeating "common sense," because they are placed there not by coercion, but indirectly, through the interconnections between the media and other power centers. Hegemony may be considered the way ruling elites legitimate their power into authority. Assuming that the media serve a hegemonic function, however, does not in itself explain through what mechanisms this happens. Neither does it explain the variations in hegemonic control — subversive elements do creep in. If hegemony were completely effective, nothing could alter the status quo. A closer examination of the variations in power between the news media and society helps color in some of the underlying processes that contribute to or erode hegemonic control.

Problems with the Agenda Metaphor

The agenda metaphor itself has implications for how power is conceptualized. One problem with metaphors, of course, is that by highlighting one model of

reality, they make it difficult to view a phenomenon in any other way. The agenda metaphor is confined, by definition, to manifest news coverage. This restriction is appropriate for a theory that predicts effects of media coverage, but it becomes problematic when we consider the media agenda itself as the dependent variable. By confining ourselves to those issues that made the agenda, we exclude all those that perhaps should have been there but were not. In addition, as Schattschneider (1960) argues, groups "go public" when they want to enlarge the field of play to increase their power position. We expect issues to emerge when there are internal disagreements among elites — the many other things on which elites agree remain beneath the surface of media attention.

In the related agenda-building tradition in political science, issues are usually defined around contention (e.g., Cobb & Elder, 1972). Issues arise when competing interests vie for distribution of scarce resources. This model does not deal effectively, however, with the problem of nonissues, that is, when contention is not overt and obvious. In critiquing the news agenda metaphor, we can borrow some of the same criticisms made about policy agendas. First, issues and events are clearly not independent "items." As Rogers and Dearing (1988) note, it is important to recognize that one item influences others. Devoting more attention to one item leaves less room for others. Indeed, as community power theorists tell us, by promoting one agenda item, civic activists may drive other issues away (see Crenson, 1971, p. 165). Bachrach and Baratz (1962), for example, criticize pluralists who focus only on overt decisions by governing boards. They suggest examining how the scope of the process is narrowed to only those issues of innocuous nature to A. Just because issues make the agenda (media or otherwise) does not necessarily mean they are the key issues — this ignores the restrictive face of power (their "second face").

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 disagree. Lukes (1974) goes a step further by arguing that traditional community power studies also overlook those nonarticulated conflicts of power that are prevented from even coming up (his third dimension of power). Lukes argues that the most effective power prevents conflict from arising in the first place. The media agenda, too, is confined by definition to those issues that were allowed into the public policy forum, and fails to cover the range of actual and incipient conflicts in society. To understand the range of forces acting on the agenda, we must also come to grips with those items not allowed on the agenda, or those not even defined as potential issues.

Perspective of This Chapter

I assume that the mainstream media do represent the interests of the powerful in society and operate in concert with them. Many critical scholars, such as Parenti (1986), Herman (1986), and Domhoff (1967, 1970, 1979), view the mass media as little more than accessories for the ruling elites. The media are not, however,

simply a conduit for the status quo, but represent a power center in their own right. A complete analysis needs to consider how media interact with other powerful agencies in society, to account for the complexity, tensions, and variations in a mediated society. The connections between elite centers and mainstream media are not always obvious. The task of this chapter is to point out and explicate some of these connections that underlie power relationships, and discuss their implications for media agenda-setting.

POWER WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

The Organizational Approach

Among the most prominent strands of media sociology research has been the organizational, a perspective that views media as complex organizations with their own goals and routines shaping the news product. Taken broadly, this includes all levels of media production, from individual journalists to the larger media industry. Power is clearly defined in an organizational setting. When journalists become members of organizations, they submit themselves to the power of the organization, a form of legitimate power often characterized as authority. In exchange for having a job, the worker conforms to the requirements of the organization (as citizens submit to the authority of the government—most readily when its power is considered legitimate). This approach helps balance the early individual-level analyses, characterized by the original "gatekeeper" study by White (1950). His analysis of "Mr. Gates" focused on an editor's subjective reasons for picking stories for the paper. The large number of autobiographies by journalists is one indication that they certainly would like to believe the romantic image of the crusading reporter. If the early studies gave the individual journalist too much power in determining the news product, the organizational approach has severely limited that power by enclosing journalists within concentric rings of constraining routines and organizational and institutional pressures.

Our understanding of the news-making process has been advanced considerably by research that ties together these different levels of mass media decision making. Three in particular have provided an excellent explication and review of studies at different levels: Hirsch (1977), Dimmick and Coit (1982), and Ettema et al. (1987). I will not attempt to repeat their reviews here, but I will point out their similarities. Although they differ somewhat in labeling, all three reviews conceptualize media decision making as a hierarchy, such that decisions made at one level constrain those made at lower levels. Organizations are viewed as rational, goal-directed entities that structure themselves internally and within industries to maximize their goals. The individual/occupational, intraorganizational, and interorganizational levels may be considered to progress from a closed-system framework, in which the organization is taken as the surrounding environment of system activity, to an open-system perspective, which emphasizes larger units of analysis and activities

at organizational boundaries, and explains change through external causes (Hirsch, 1977, p. 18).

Individual/occupational level. According to Hirsch (1977), the occupational level "focuses on occupational roles, careers, and the interaction of mass media organizations with the individuals fulfilling them" (p. 17), exemplified by White's "gatekeeping" study. These studies attempt to explain variations in news content by variations in the individual, such as ideological slant (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1986), values (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1973; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986), and perceptions of the audience (Pool & Schulman, 1959).[5]

Intraorganizational level. The second level considers the structure of the organization as a whole and how it adapts to its environment. Studies at this level recognize that organizations exert social control on their members and proceed to ask questions concerning "who exercises power and for what reasons" (Hirsch, 1977, p. 26). Journalistic norms and bureaucratic routines of news work are seen as rational ways in which the organization copes with uncertainty. Sigal (1973) and Gans (1979) have produced excellent analyses of the internal workings of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and CBS, NBC, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, respectively. The differences between the individual and intraorganizational perspectives is shown by Bantz, McCorkle, and Baade (1980), who argue that a local television news organization conforms to a "factory" model. The division of labor produces a "product" efficiently, but the process is at odds with a craft tradition, which values worker autonomy and control.

Interorganizational/institutional/industrial level. This level "examines relationships between organizations or professions and the larger societal environment in which they operate" (Hirsch, 1977, p. 17). Studies at this level explain how organizations are affected by other influential media and wire services, as well as by their political and legal environments. The latter focuses mostly on overt influence by the FCC, antitrust law, and the like. Issues of cross-ownership of media and competition are also pertinent here. Industrial analysis examines organizations as but one part of a more complex interrelated industry system. Turow (1985), for example, examines how organizations within media industries depend on one another for scarce resources. One organization may be said to exert power over another by influencing the other's agenda, as elite newspapers often do for television. Conversely, television may be said to have had a powerful influence on the shape of *USA Today*, designed to appeal to TV viewers with its bright colors and brief news items. The wire services have power when they exert a standardizing influence on news content in what Turow (1985) calls their "linking pin" roles.

Problems with Organizational Analysis

The organizational perspective necessarily focuses attention inward, toward the organization, its structure, and goal-seeking processes. Obviously, however, these activities do not take place in a vacuum. By focusing on the organization, we place it at the center of analysis and consider other organizations only as providers of "resources" that the media organization needs to carry on its affairs. The media

organization has power over people within it and also over other organizations. But, in turn, media organizations have power exerted over them. The organizational perspective restricts the power of journalists, who are viewed as constrained by the power of the bureaucratic structure they work in. Alternatively, journalists may be viewed as agents of the organization's power in their dealings with those outside the organization. The organization empowers the journalist. A network correspondent, for example, stands a greater chance of speaking with the president than would the average citizen. These power relations external to the organization take place at the boundaries of the organization, at each of the three levels discussed above, but tend to be obscured by an organizational emphasis.

According to Hirsch (1977), power relations among organizations fall under the interorganizational level, where "open-systems" analysis is most often found. Here, however, we most often find studies of relations among organizations from a single industry. Turow (1985), for example, borrows from industrial sociology in applying a resource dependency model to the mass media industry. He identifies several different organizations within media industries (producers, investors, patrons, creators, unions, distributors) that have power roles in that they control scarce resources needed by others. This "industrial" model, applicable to both news and entertainment, conforms to Hirsch's (1977, p. 13) call to deemphasize the "uniqueness" of news relative to entertainment, arguing that the organizational similarities outweigh the differences. It fails to deal effectively, however, with the most important interorganizational power relation for news organizations — between the media organization and news sources. In Turow's "industry-centric" model, sources are considered just another "resource" necessary for the organization to reach its goals. These resources are not provided by disinterested parties, however, but rather by powerful political and economic forces with their own value-based messages to promote. The resulting content is a direct result of the relative power that these external sources are able to exert.

Organizational analysis naturally impels attention to the center of organizations, but this has the effect of giving low priority to the media source relationship, a key interaction at the "boundaries." In addition, Hirsch (1977) observes correctly that studies at the individual/occupational level theoretically deal with people at all levels of the organization, but, practically speaking, concentrate most often on the most available subjects, front-line journalists. This selection has the effect of ignoring important interactions at other levels, such as between those more elite media decision makers (editors, news directors, and so on) who interact with other powerful elites outside the organization. (Gans, 1979, for example, notes that top newsmagazine editors are expected to circulate with other movers and shakers to get ideas about important issues.) Paradoxically, editors exert significant power over reporters, but studies of them as individuals are still considered part of the occupational (individual) level of analysis. Yet, they act as agents of the power of the organization in their interactions with groups outside their own organization. Consequently, these top-level media workers are often overlooked in organizational studies.

Another drawback of the organizational perspective is shared with functional analysis. Functional and organizational analysts observe enduring structures and patterns of behavior within organizations. From these they work backward, inferring that they are functional for the organization in fulfilling its goals. For a variety of reasons, observed structures may not be functional (e.g., Stinchcombe, 1968). Similarly, not all routines are in the best interests of the news organization, which depends on an audience accepting its product. Accepting public relations video releases may be functional for a television station in that the station gets news content efficiently (conveniently and free), but it may not be functional for the station's long-term credibility.

In his critique of the gatekeeper/organizational paradigm, Herman (1986) observes that it offers "little in the way of dynamics that would show how the media . . . are manipulated (or co-operate) in mobilization by others" (p. 174). Most studies that do examine power relations between news organizations and nonnews industry forces are restricted to the wielding of overt power. For example, Warner (1968) stresses the importance of the Federal Communications Commission as a major concern of network executives. Lowry (1971) found that Spiro Agnew's direct attack on the networks affected their coverage. By concentrating on what behaviors and structures are functional for the organization, we often overlook the fact that these same bureaucratic routines and journalistic views are also highly functional for external news sources. Routines of news work provide levers that power centers on the outside can grasp to influence news content. In the 1988 presidential campaign, Joan Didion (1988) observed how political journalists reported clearly "set-up" campaign events as though they were not: Because reporters like covering campaigns — such assignments lead to prestige and advancement, and get reporters out on the road — they "are willing, in exchange for 'access,' to transmit the images their sources wish transmitted. They are even 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" (p. 21).

Candidates can use the journalistic reward system as leverage to get what they want in the press. A focus on power outside the organization prompts the question: Are campaign coverage routines equally functional for both news and political organizations, or have certain routines been exploited to the greater advantage of the source? In short, finding what makes organizations tick does not provide an adequate understanding of whose interests they serve. The news organization provides many access points for the expression and reception of power, as will be discussed below.

POWER ACROSS ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Defining Terms: Media and Sources

Media are often conceived of as a monolithic structure, although obviously they consist of many individual organizations, ranging widely in resources and, conse-

quently, power. In the discussion below, I refer to media as separate organizations, or classes of organizations (e.g., national, local), when a relationship is referred to. The news media interact with many organizations, including the political system, public interest watchdog groups, and advertisers. No single adequate term exists to refer to these various other power centers that media deal with. As Blumler and Gurevitch (1986) note, the word *source* is ambiguous and has been applied both to organizations and groups and to individuals representing them. I use the term to refer to those many other entities with whom media enter into power relationships, which, in turn, specifically affect content. I will discuss power relations between media organizations to the extent that they increase or undermine an organization's power relative to other sources.

Power as Dependency

Dimmick and Coit (1982) contrast the hierarchical power exercised within organizations to that exercised across organizations where no clear hierarchy exists. This latter form of power is more subtle, perhaps, but no less important to our understanding of the news process. Looking horizontally across boundaries requires viewing media workers as empowered by their organization in their dealings with others and, in turn, having power exerted on them from those outside their organization. This power is most often a function of interdependencies. This notion is related to the dependency theory of DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) and the resource dependency perspective outlined by Turow (1985). Both consider media and other social systems as needing each other for vital resources. Dependency exists to the extent that the satisfaction of one party's goals is contingent on resources controlled by another (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Interdependency means that one party is not completely powerful over the other, although the relationship may be asymmetrical. A media organization, for example, may seek out other sources, with varying degrees of difficulty, while sources may seek other channels for their views. This power can be observed by looking at the ways resources are shared in attaining mutual goals.

Media Power

The media can be thought to have power in two interrelated ways: in relation to sources, and in relation to other media. By being powerful among media, an organization also ensures a more solid power position with sources. Media power can be thought to vary to the extent that an organization has unique resources desired by sources. Under this definition, the power of media, elite media in particular, has certainly grown over the last several decades. As society grows in complexity, a few central elite media may be considered vital for providing a central forum for reporting and coordinating elite opinion (see Lasorsa & Reese, 1989; Weiss, 1974). This high profile and the influence the elite media have over other media mean they have tremendous resources to bestow on or withdraw from sources. Small low-power sources (primary candidates, small corporations, low-level functionaries in government) can benefit enormously if the *New York Times*,

for example, chooses to bestow favorable coverage. One significant way a media organization may manifest its power is in its ability to define one reality through reporting and structuring of information, in spite of efforts by involved sources to dictate a different reality. In the case of the "Pentagon Papers," the *New York Times* may be said to have had power because it was able to dictate its reality in spite of government efforts to prevent it. More often, perhaps, sources are able to dictate the reality. Former presidential spokesman Larry Speakes encouraged favorable coverage of President Reagan by thinking like a television producer, providing photo opportunities with dramatic visuals, while restricting other possible coverage opportunities. Did he have power over the network correspondents? Yes, to the extent that correspondents were obliged to cover a reality dictated by the president. (Note that often TV reporters would try to undermine this power by commenting on the public relations techniques used to manipulate them, but they covered them nevertheless. See Levy, 1981, for an analysis of this phenomenon.)

Media organizations also vary in power relative to one another, with the more powerful helping define reality for others. But this dependency runs both ways. Ownership of one organization by another is an obvious case of intermedia dependency. Additionally, however, weaker media depend on the more powerful media for guidance, confirmation of news judgment, and the news itself, through, for example, wire and other syndicated services. One media organization's power to dictate a reality, however, is contingent on whether other organizations will accept it. More powerful media depend on less powerful ones for financial (e.g., syndication fees), and moral support (many papers did not follow the *Washington Post's* lead on Watergate). Wire services are considered powerful, but they are nevertheless dependent on their clients. UPI, in trying to trim its budget, announced recently that it would focus on fewer stories, but stories having a good chance of being used by clients. It plans to develop a publishability/broadcastability quotient, to determine the level of acceptability of a particular story ("Supply-Side Thinking," 1988).

We generally think of national media as more powerful than local media. Local media have a smaller audience resource (circulation) and are more directly dependent on their own communities for economic support. Editors and producers are intertwined with community economic interests, while national media revolve around national power centers rather than any single community. (Power disparities are particularly apparent when a president is interviewed by a local television news anchor, or when a *60 Minutes* camera crew is sent to do an exposé in a small community.)

Source Power

The power of sources is somewhat easier to conceptualize. We are accustomed to thinking of people and groups as in or out of the "power structure." Officials have the weight of authority behind them, while others develop other resources of value to media, such as specialized expertise (think-tank experts, academicians,

and the like). In recent years, scholars have become more sensitive to the power of sources over the media agenda, rejecting the naive notion of the media agenda as a town meeting. Elite sources, in particular, wield much more power over the media agenda than do individuals and public interest groups. Paletz and Entman (1981) argue that the agenda originates with elites and eventually filters down to the public. Rogers and Dearing (1988, p. 578) found no significant effect of the public's agenda on the media's agenda, which is far more responsive to the policy agenda (they note that congressional action on a 1966 auto safety law caused a jump in the *New York Times* coverage of traffic safety, although auto fatalities had been rising for several years). In spite of this assumption of policy elites' power, little research has examined the impact of the policy agenda on the media agenda (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 583).

A Typology

These variations in both media and source power may be more easily seen in a typology that combines levels of media and source power. The resulting intersections of these two power dimensions offer suggestive ways of considering source/media relations, as well as helping classify typical studies.

High-power source/high-power media. When powerful media encounter powerful sources, the result is often a symbiotic relationship, characterized by close mutual operation, serving explicit and direct benefits for each party not possible if they did not work closely. Both need the other, and take steps to ensure that the relationship will be mutually beneficial. Parenti (1978) characterizes these mutually advantageous relations as "collusive" and contrasts them with "competitive" relations, which feature "asymmetric" exchange and "antagonistic rather than symbiotic" association (p. 20). He notes that collusive, or symbiotic, relations are frequently a response to or an anticipation of competitive ones. The purpose of collusive relations may be to forestall emergence of competing interests. Of course, symbiotic relations also arise in lower-power settings, but the stakes are higher otherwise, and so are the corresponding incentives to work out mutually agreeable terms.

When two equal powers collide, however, a competitive or adversarial relationship may also result. When presidential candidate George Bush was interviewed by Dan Rather on *CBS News*, a well-prepared and prominent source met an equally well-prepared and determined reporter. The result was an aggressive exchange. (However, each recognized that he would be needing the other, in more symbiotic terms, during the remainder of the campaign. Ultimately, there is an adversarial challenging of sources, but within a context of shared, symbiotically important values.)

Few studies explicitly conceptualize coequal media and sources. Some do, however, openly examine the interplay between the two (e.g., Miller, 1978), but more studies are needed on media elite and source interaction at the top levels. Linsky, Moore, O'Donnell, and Whitman's (1986) examination of media impact

on policy may fit here. Largely nonideological analyses like Linsky et al.'s adopt an inside-the-beltway case study approach to the media as simply one elite balancing another. Media are assumed to be largely autonomous and powerful. However, the important role played by media in that study's cases (e.g., Agnew's resignation, the neutron bomb, Love Canal) consisted primarily of connecting elites together, exposing what one elite was doing, or forcing the media to come to grips with public and elite reaction.

High-power source/low-power media. When a powerful source encounters a less powerful media organization, the result is often co-optation and manipulation. By purchasing their own satellite time, for example, presidential candidates are able to offer local television reporters the chance to interview them. The candidate receives free air media coverage, with tame questioning from often underprepared local journalists (who nevertheless accept the exchange to gain credibility by being seen talking with a national figure). Similarly, President Reagan would on occasion meet privately with journalists from smaller papers around the country, bypassing the more difficult Washington press corps. Sources constantly attempt to place media in a low-power position by denying access, claiming media bias, threatening reprisals, and a variety of other ways. Structurally, the radical perspectives predict this relationship, with the media having little independent power compared with sources from the economic and political elite.

Low-power source/high-power media. When a powerful media organization covers a less powerful source, a number of situations result. The media may marginalize a weak source, as the *New York Times* and CBS did the student radicals in the 1960s (Gitlin, 1980). A national medium, like *USA Today*, may choose to provide innocuous life-style reports of average citizens. Ethical abuses may also be found in this context. Powerful media may intrude into the privacy of (low-power) individuals or damage their reputations, leaving the citizens with little recourse. (When CBS tackled General Westmoreland, it encountered a more powerful adversary, who nevertheless still failed to get satisfaction.) The organizational approach (e.g., Altheide, 1976; Epstein, 1973) tends toward this view by perspective, while the more popular accounts of the press predict it by reputation (e.g., Halberstam, 1979).

Finally, the low-power source/low-power media category is the most difficult to find examples for, and contains the desiderata of study. The best example may be the alternative press—relatively low-power media using mostly low-power sources to do relatively inconsequential stories.

Levels of Analysis and Power Implications

These shifting power relationships can also be viewed across the same general levels of analysis discussed earlier. At each level, resources controlled by media and sources that they bring to their interaction vary, placing them in one of the four cells discussed above. Many indicators signify media power at each level. Reporter-source interactions are logically placed at the individual level, and

structures joining organizations (such as syndicated video services) are at a higher level. At the larger social system level, studies may analyze individuals, but as indicators of larger relationships. Studies of interlocking directorates, for example, treat individual board members as proxies for the converging interests symbolized by their presence and are logically place at a larger institutional level of analysis.

Individual level. Few studies have focused explicitly on how individual sources deal with the press, other than highly specialized sources, as in Hess's (1984) analysis of Washington press officers. Journalists are the side of the individual power equation most often examined. If numbers are any measure of power, journalists have certainly increased their ranks, 61% by one account just during the 1970s, mostly in television and radio (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). Linsky (1986) notes that the Washington, D.C., press corp alone has tripled since World War II, to include 10,000 journalists and 3,000 media organizations. The growth of sources, however, has outstripped that of journalists in D.C. — the federal government information staff grew from 146 in FDR's first term to 3,000 in 1964, reaching 19,000 in 1976, a greater percentage rate growth than that of reporters.

Of these journalists, a handful have come under special scrutiny. Perhaps the most notorious critic of journalistic power was former Vice President Spiro Agnew (1969), who was among the first to focus serious attention on journalist power, noting the influence of a "small group of men, numbering perhaps no more than a dozen 'anchormen,' commentators and executive producers," adding that this group has a "free hand in selecting, presenting and interpreting the great issues of our nation." Others, particularly from the conservative side, have picked up this theme. Lichter et al. (1986) claim that a new media elite has risen to take its place among the others, freestanding and accountable to no one. (Their argument that media power has gotten out of whack appear to rest on the rise of high-profile and high-salaried network news personalities.)

Having asserted this "power," they find that the voting patterns and social views of journalists at the elite media differ from both the public at large and a sample of business leaders. Conservative critiques such as these (see also Corry, 1986; Rusher, 1988) have no theory of power as such, however. Media power is presumed (largely by asserting autonomy and arrogance), and the differences between journalists and society at large are said to make that all the more disturbing. The implication is that media should be less powerful and should not interfere with the natural workings of social institutions. The journalistic culture is perhaps more liberal than mainstream America — elite journalists are more liberal than journalists as a whole (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986) — but this may be a functional power posture for reporters, for whom a slightly left-of-center posture may help counter the predominantly conservative institutions they cover. This may empower them by making them less co-optable, and, therefore, may well improve their ability to produce content that the public can accept. Content that conformed totally to the status quo institutional view might be perceived by the public to be lacking in credibility.

In addition to studies of individual reporters' characteristics (e.g., Johnstone et al., 1973; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986), others have examined the ways reporters interact with sources, particularly at the local level. Journalists are either passively reliant or collaborative with sources (Chibnall, 1975; Davison, 1974, 1975; Drew, 1972; Dunn, 1969; Gieber, 1960). Others, like Miller's (1978) analysis of members of Congress and reporters, show that interactions are characterized by symbiosis more often than by adversariness. Hess (1981) found that even the elite Washington press corps lacks institutional memory and a willingness to use documents, forcing reporters to rely on elite sources and each other.

One way to gauge the power of individual journalists in these interactions is by the extent to which they possess personal powerful attributes. These include income and education, certainly. Special expertise is obviously valuable as well from a reporter power perspective. The expertise of specialists like Dr. Timothy Johnson, of ABC News, should allow them to produce a better story on a medical issue than a general assignment reporter could. Powerful individuals in American culture are more often than not older, White, professional, and male, although these are not inherently desirable traits. How do journalists match these attributes? Clearly the general education level of journalists has risen since the Hutchins (1947) Commission called for better-schooled reporters (but, then, the United States as a whole has become better educated since then). Of course, not everyone finds an increased status for journalists desirable. Moynihan (1975, p. 319) claims that in 20 years the upper reaches of journalists in Washington changed from a group typical of other working Americans to today's important social elite, a position he says makes them hostile to American society and government.[6]

Over the last 20 years, however, salaries paid to journalists have not kept pace with the national average (or certainly with those in the important power centers journalists cover — lawyers, Fortune 500 executives, and the like). Journalists are becoming younger: News workers older than 45 are dropping out in greater numbers, no longer able to accept the lower salaries (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, p. 38). They are also becoming more female: 60% of journalism and mass communication students are now women (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, pp. 38-39). Women have gained the most ground in broadcast news (particularly in what remains of radio news). These gains may indirectly represent changes in the profession's status. The "feminization" of news work does not necessarily cause a reduction in the power position of the profession. But the influx of women into news work, in addition to reflecting the legitimate removal of barriers, indicates that its economic status has declined relative to other jobs, causing males to seek higher-status careers. (These concerns apply mainly to the local level. The top positions in national journalism remain attractive to both men and women.)[7]

Another individual-level indicator of power is the revolving door between journalism and public relations. A revolving door is common in fields enjoying a close symbiotic relationship (witness retired generals becoming consultants to defense contractors). To the extent that journalists bring media expertise to public relations, they help manipulate their former colleagues. The power asymmetry is

seen in journalists changing careers for public relations jobs far more often than the reverse. Former journalists, who know the game and the players, are valuable to sources, whether at the national or local level. President George Bush's speech writer, Peggy Noonan, used to be a writer for *CBS News*. Knowing the desirability of the 10-second sound bite, she exploited them in her writing for Bush. *New York Times* diplomatic correspondent (now editor) Leslie Gelb worked for the State Department. Former NBC correspondent Bernard Kalb later worked as a State Department press spokesman. Even the patron saint of broadcast journalism, Edward R. Murrow, ended his career as head of the U.S. Information Agency.

Intraorganizational level. At the intraorganizational level, our attention is drawn to how an organization's (or class of organizations') structure and routines make it more or less susceptible to source power. We may expect that sources may strive to satisfy certain organizational goals to avoid being disadvantaged by others. Collusive relations often supplant competitive ones. Some organizational studies are more explicit than others in recognizing the power implications of organizational structure. Fishman (1980), for example, finds that the dependence of local reporters on the rhythms of local bureaucracies leads them to legitimate the existing political system by disseminating "bureaucratic idealizations of the world and by filtering out troublesome perceptions of events" (p. 154). These "phase structures," according to Fishman, make journalists susceptible to the view of the world suitable to the bureaucracies themselves. Others, like Gans (1979), recognize that sources do the leading on many stories, but do not explore the power implications of this process. Gandy (1982) offers the parsimonious notion of information "subsidy" to describe how source organizations exert power over the news. He suggests that many activities carried out by public relations practitioners influence the media agenda by partially or wholly underwriting the cost of the information for the news organization. From this economic model it follows that the views of the economically powerful will have a better chance of being placed in the media.[8]

Organizational structure effects on power can be seen most clearly, perhaps, when comparing newspapers with television, which appears to lend itself more to manipulation than do the print media. Many books have critiqued the shortcomings of television news (e.g., Altheide, 1976; Epstein, 1973). Compared to newspapers, broadcast journalism has several features that sources often exploit: the need for exciting visuals, desire to go "live," quicker deadlines, smaller staffs, more rapid turnover, and time constraints.

One way that organizations rationalize the news-gathering process is by treating news as a commodity that can be packaged, marketed, purchased, predicted, and controlled. Perhaps this tendency is only more obvious for television news (e.g., Bantz et al., 1980) ("Give me 20 seconds on the governor"). Satellite technology makes it easier than ever for local stations to purchase news in packaged form. These packages range from automotive tips to political interviews. An ad in *Broadcasting* magazine for the Newsfeed Network, for example, features a news director saying, "They [Newsfeed] have a Washington Bureau to go after top

national stories and they'll even get me a 'react' from my Congressman!" To be cost-effective and marketable, packages like these have to be acceptable to many local stations, with the inevitable pull toward the safe story (i.e., not discomfiting to powerful sources).

Public relations firms are among those exploiting commoditized news. KGTV-TV in San Diego was among 23 stations airing a two-minute video story, looking like a locally produced news report, on problems with generic drugs. Unknown to the audience, a brand-name drug manufacturer, Key Pharmaceuticals, paid for the report, which gave it favorable mention. The Food and Drug Administration later labeled the report misleading (Hinds, 1987). Similarly, in early 1985, viewers of the Cable News Network saw an exclusive interview with Morocco's King Hassan II conducted by Meryl Comer (a former news anchor at WTTG-TV in Washington, D.C., which also aired the story). Viewers were not told that the story was an electronic press release, produced by a leading Washington public relations firm, Gray and Co. Nor were they told that Comer, also a regular on two U.S. Chamber of Commerce-produced business programs, worked for Gray (Battiata, 1985). The professional newslike appearance of these free features makes them appealing to stations, but they create serious ethical and power questions because control over content is turned over to self-interested sources.

Organization requirements demand new technologies, and these technologies in turn alter the organization and its power relations with others. Satellite technology, in particular, has seriously altered the power equation between networks and affiliates and between TV news and sources. Local stations can now send their reporters to high-profile national events, like political conventions, in greater numbers than ever before, and beam back their stories. Government figures can project messages to local stations via satellite, bypassing network reporters altogether. Satellite feeds to local stations paid for by political candidates maximize their control over the message. Stations in remote areas (read low power) may justify using these feeds as a means of getting access to candidates. ·

Interorganizational/institutional/industrial level. This last category takes in a broad range of studies, including relations among organizations and between those organizations and the larger elite and capitalistic formations in society. Institutional analyses of media concentrate on linking them to other power centers in society. Pluralist analyses have focused on issues such as monopoly versus competitive ownership in markets, cross and group ownership, and the resulting effects on diversity (Picard & Winter, 1985). These comparative analyses, like those conducted by McCombs (1987, 1988), have found little evidence that competition improves diversity. These studies do not typically link media to other power centers, and concentrate primarily on broad surface features of news, such as proportions of news devoted to various topics. Radical scholars assume that, competitive or not, media organizations are linked to other power centers in ways that further the status quo. From both Marxist and elite perspectives, the media are not seen as having much power independent of these other power centers. In either

case, media are seen as instruments, inextricably tied to and used to further the interests of the powerful.

Murdock and Golding (1979) 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, p. 133). This commodification of culture has important implications for power. Capital in the culture industry seeks out the most lucrative markets, with the most resources going to lucrative nonnews information gathering. Dan Schiller (1986) is one who 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.

Garnham (1979, p. 145) notes that the present stage of industrialization of culture is characterized by a sharpening struggle to increase productivity. Many recent developments in the United States highlight this trend, including several recent high-profile buyouts of media firms by nonmedia corporations (e.g., CBS, NBC). Media firms become just another profit center, and conform more closely to the corporate culture of parent firms. The well-publicized layoffs at the network level and the erosion of the lines between the business and news departments in many newspapers and TV stations are also examples. Laying off employees and closing bureaus are the most obvious signs of power loss. Less apparent is that by integrating themselves into the larger corporate structure, media companies lose their independent power in dealings with other power centers in that same structure.

Earlier in this century, publishers like William Randolph Hearst, Norman Chandler, and Henry Luce personified media power (e.g., Halberstam, 1979). Now this individual Luce-style power has been rationalized and corporatized to the point where, although media still have power, it is less personal and idiosyncratic, less buffered from the bottom line, more impersonal and sensitive to the requirements of capital markets, which favor short-term, high-yield performance. These new corporate values lead to new power relations, but nevertheless remain consistent with ruling elite interests. Now, media are more tied to abstracted elite interests, more subtle in the absence of more overt publisher biases. Ultimately, a political economy approach leads us to expect that economically based media decisions will tend to favor those with economic power.

The other major radical approach to media power is termed by Mosco and Herman (1981) the instrumental approach, as opposed to the Marxist, structural view. 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. These interconnections are found by scrutinizing the ways members of the ruling class come in contact with one

another (prep schools, clubs, boards of directors) and influence policy (stockhold-
ing, policy groups, funding of institutes and think tanks, political action commit-
tees). Elite analysts like Domhoff (1967, 1970, 1979) typically do not give the
media as much independent power. According to Domhoff, media have a complex
role in the opinion-shaping networks, and are merely one dissemination point
among many for elite influence. At any rate, media are viewed as organically
inseparable from elites, and thus as far from autonomous. Obviously, conflicts
among elites are played out through the press, but they are far more instrumental
for elites than they are antagonistic or adversarial to their interests.

Although this form of analysis has been applied less often to the media elite,
many interconnections between media and other institutions present evidence of
convergent interests and coordination. It indicates that, at best, the relationship is
symbiotic. Dreier (1982), for example, examined the interlocks between media
boards of directors and others, finding that the most prominent elite media compa-
nies (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, and so on). This position of elite media firms in the inner
circle of the capitalist structure leads them, according to Dreier, to adopt a
corporate, liberal philosophy. These media may adopt an adversarial tone on
occasion (e.g., in the cases of the "Pentagon Papers" and Watergate), but only as a
corrective, nonparochial action, in the best long-term interests of preserving the
capitalist system.

A similar approach could be taken with other media representatives. Top media
leaders circulate with other elites. Elite reporters spend time at top think tanks
(Hedrick Smith wrote *The Power Game,* 1988, while at the conservative American
Enterprise Institute). Midcareer fellowships, like the Niemans at Harvard, allow
top journalists to spend time at major universities, rubbing elbows with elites and
absorbing elite values. Top journalists, politicians, business leaders, and academi-
cians often appear on panels together, usually without conflict. These are all
avenues for the media elite to circulate with other elites; developing firsthand
contacts, personal bonds, and shared values. It may not necessarily happen, but the
general pattern suggests a symbiotic relationship. Journalists retain their own
power base, but within a context of shared, symbiotic values.

Interorganizational level: intermedia power. Although relations between media
and source organizations could be conceptualized, my major concern at this level
is between media organizations. To the extent that one media organization has
influence over others, it has proportionally greater power in relation to sources. As
discussed earlier, by placing a story in the *New York Times,* a source can amplify
the message manyfold when it is picked up by other media. Media sociologists
have known for a long time that news workers follow other media for help in
guiding their own selections. Breed (1980) describes it as dendritic influence: "The
influence goes 'down' from larger papers to smaller ones, as if the editor of the
smaller paper is employing, in absentia, the editors of the larger paper to 'make up'
his page for him" (p. 195). Timothy Crouse (1972) observed this "intermedia

agenda-setting" process occurring interpersonally among political reporters covering the 1972 presidential campaign. Clearly the elite papers, with the *New York Times* being perhaps the final arbiter (Gans, 1979, p. 181), help set the agenda for the smaller ones.

Most attention has been focused on political pack journalism. Campaigns are highly structured, ritualized, and covered in groups, and the change in the "story" is often ambiguous from one day to the next, leading journalists to rely on each other for help with interpretation. Other nonbeat-based issues show this phenomenon as well, however. For the cocaine issue, referred to earlier, the *New York Times* was able to establish the drug issue early in 1986, followed by the newsmagazines and networks (Reese & Danielian, 1988). Why do news organizations duplicate one another's coverage? As Hess (1981) notes, papers like to have the prestige of having a reporter at the center of events. Nevertheless, they often receive multiple versions of the same event, creating competition among reporters, yet pressures to conform with the common shared wisdom remain. As Sigal (1973) notes, "The consensible nature of news may even impede the breaking of stories that lack corroboration from opinion-leading newspapers. Once they do break, however, big stories will tend to remain in the news as first one news organization and then another uncovers additional information or a new interpretation" (p. 40).

Powerful sources can easily manipulate the pack, most visibly when reporters are herded about by campaign managers. Journalists may not like the system, but they do not want to chance missing a story expected by the editor back home. Candidates may use a divide-and-conquer ploy, by speaking with a few influential journalists at a time in a symbiotically helpful interview. These influentials will report the exclusive or pass a pool report back to the others. Either way, the rest follow their lead. Conversely, the pack may be empowered by its numbers. When the press is in a feeding frenzy, even powerful sources are obliged to respond to the press's agenda. Usually, sources are at the greatest disadvantage against a pack on the scent when factual material will be their undoing — Witness the Watergate case, the Iran-Contra scandal, Dan Quayle's military record, and John Tower's history of drinking. The press in full pursuit can be a powerful information-gathering tool. It is often only a matter of time before someone digs up enough additional material to keep the story in play. Also, the press may have converged on a story, like the drug issue, to such a great extent that even powerful political leaders are obliged to take some action, before their public opinion support base is threatened. Mainstream journalists do not duplicate each other entirely, of course. Particularly in recent years, the greater number of reporters covering campaigns generates pressure for papers to try to outhustle the others, as reporters try to make names for themselves (the *Miami Herald* and the Gary Hart affair, for example). The relationships among news organizations may be symbiotic insofar as they help one another in cross-validating their work. There is safety in numbers. Media are competitive to the extent that they can outdo one another in reporting some new fact or wrinkle, or in doing it faster than the others (the scoop). In this sense, many different organizations can produce content within a common consensual status

. quo framework, differentiating themselves from each other in minor ways. Even though there are more media outlets now than ever before (see Compaine, 1985), intermedia agenda-setting may reduce the diversity that would otherwise be expected. Strong centripetal forces act to standardize ever more diverse media. Following the lead of others lowers the cost by reducing risk. We may think of the national elite press as establishing an agenda to which other media add detail and color. The proliferation of political talk shows, news commentary programs, and other news channels adds to the total content, but often serves more to amplify this agenda than to change it in any structural way. Little research has examined this important issue of intermedia agenda-setting.

THE POWER BALANCE PERSPECTIVE

This chapter has attempted to frame and review a large and diverse body of literature. Because setting the media agenda encompasses so many different theoretical and methodological perspectives, a power framework helps organize these many studies and focuses attention on the key centers of influence, the resources at their command, and the linkages among them. More often than not, the traditional democratic pluralist model has obscured these phenomena by assuming the prevailing power relations as a given, rather than treating them as an object of study. By acknowledging the fact of power, we can address the means by which it is exercised in media-society relationships.

I have sketched a fairly crude picture of media and sources here, making few distinctions among different types of media and their agendas. Clearly the media agenda is not monolithic and varies from one medium to another, although here I have been more interested in similarities than in differences. More attention is needed to the different news media, including the specialized, prestige, and popular presses, and their relationships with one another and their sources. What is the influence of one medium over another? How do they differ in their relationships with sources, with what consequences for content? What are the changing roles of national and local media? Power balances are changing, for example, as local television news carries more national coverage, a traditional function of network news. New communication technologies are also changing the power equation, as they fundamentally alter the ways news is distributed.

By thinking about power relationships, I have directed attention to the interfaces between news and source organizations, giving importance to the ecosystem formed by these two intersecting systems. Whether media or sources have the greater power and where the desirable balance lies depends on one's perspective and theory of society. The performance of the press is often apt to disappoint all sides equally. Conservatives complain that the media are constantly at odds with our social institutions and national values. Clearly, the media adopt, or at least profess, an adversarial posture in many of their dealings with the power structure, although radical theorists would argue that media are still firmly within the

establishment status quo camp. The media may be liberal but not radical in the sense that they do not question basic societal structure and values. I would argue that some independent nonsymbiotic power of media is necessary for them to carry out an aggressive adversarial surveillance function in society and report a picture of reality acceptable to an audience. To the extent that media do have power, it appears to be eroding in significant ways. By conceptualizing diverse indicators, like organizational structure and technological developments, in power terms, we can begin to grasp the implications of such changes for the ultimate power equation. By thinking about power as a series of changing relationships, we also avoid the tendency to think of one institution as inherently and statically powerful. Instead of asserting that media are manipulated by the powerful, we can begin to examine those conditions under which media are able to assert their own power and agenda, independent of other power centers, perhaps to the advantage of the less powerful.

NOTES

1. No single descriptive term has been accepted for this area of research. Closest, perhaps, is *media sociology*, which Davison, Boylan, and Yu (1982) note "seeks to explain why the content of mass communications is as it is" (p. 77). To avoid undue confusion, *media agenda-setting* is used for now, although, like all metaphors, it distorts while clarifying the phenomena to be described. *Agenda-setting* implies a mechanistic, one-directional, linear influence process that tends to place the media in a passive receiver mode. This paradigm may be less applicable to those phenomenological studies treating media as active constructors of reality (e.g., Molotch & Lester, 1974), or to those viewing media as inseparable appendages of the power elite.

2. Sources also have an important message based on how reporters use them in the internal construction of stories. *CBS News* correspondent Bob Faw reported a story on April 25, 1988, on candidate Michael Dukakis's presumed lack of foreign policy experience. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were used as sources critical of Dukakis. Holding these men up as judges of foreign policy expertise makes a subtle statement about the standards against which Dukakis was to be judged. Although both are conservative Republicans, they were presented as "above the fray," and able to represent the foreign policy establishment, even though both presumably supported George Bush.

3. In the counting tradition of media content analysis, quantity is assumed to be an indicator of issue visibility and attention. This assumption is consistent with the agenda-setting paradigm, in which issues are ranked based on amounts of coverage. Because of the limited newshole, devoting more coverage to one issue leaves less room for others, thereby cuing the public to the issues' relative importance. Of course, by emphasizing quantity, content research often overlooks other qualitative, more fine-grained features.

4. Many definitions emphasize the coercive side of power. Max Weber (1958, p. 180) has defined power as realizing one's will in a communal action, even against the resistance of others. Dahl (1961) has a similar definition: A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do. Parenti (1978, p. 20) emphasizes that, while some power relations are competitive, zero-sum games (one wins, one loses), many take the form of an exchange. These exchanges do not require that A coerce B, but rather focus attention on whose *interests* are best served by the relationship. B may have little choice in the exchange if A commands unique resources.

5. Even the prototypical individual-level study acknowledged that organizational pressures entered partially into Mr. Gates's decisions: The editor said he preferred stories slanted to conform to his paper's editorial policy (White, 1950, p. 390), and White (p. 389) questioned whether his Mr. Gates could refuse to play up stories if his competition was doing likewise.

6. It is unclear how membership in a social elite group makes journalists hostile to American values. On the contrary, it 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. A recent survey of 20 top young business journalists, for example, found that all but 5 had attended Ivy League schools (the others were not much less prestigious: Duke, Northwestern, New York University, Trinity, and Williams) ("Meet Tomorrow's Editors," 1988). Journalism school graduates are more likely to populate the ranks below the apex of the profession.

7. Perhaps the argument can better be put thus: In a patriarchal society, the female work force has traditionally been ghettoized in low-status, low-wage occupations (waitress, clerk, data entry operator). Even when women perform work comparable to that performed by men they are often paid less. Conceiving gender as an indicator of power logically leads to the conclusion that advances by women into an occupation represent a pyrrhic victory, to the extent that males have allowed it by gravitating to more advantageous positions. The changing role of women in the mass media is an important but complicated subject that deserves more attention than I am able to give it here.

8. Of course, news organizations do not always acquiesce to being manipulated by sources. In the 1988 campaign, for example, a "Doonesbury" cartoon by Garry Trudeau pictured a Bush campaign "handler" calling a network television producer, telling him what the campaign story for that day was going to be, the "sound bite," and the photo opportunity. Furthermore, he said the network had no choice but to cover the event. Perhaps this unflattering portrait stung ABC, because shortly afterward came the second presidential debate, at which ABC News made a decision not to interview influential campaign representatives, "spin doctors," whose job it was to put a favorable cast on the candidate's performance. In addition, *Nightline*, with Ted Koppel, offered a forum for the two candidates to debate. Furthermore, the time was to be offered to one candidate if the other did not show up, thus preventing one candidate from vetoing coverage of the other.

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