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## Sociology of Mass Communications

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## Sociology of Mass Communications

### Abstract

The study of mass communications is a broad, multidisciplinary field to which sociology has made major contributions. Some of these contributions have been reviewed in earlier works by Riley & Riley (1959), Larsen (1964), Janowitz (1968), McQuail (1969), Davison & Yu (1974), & Ball-Rokeach (1975), and Wright (1975a). Several chapters in *Annual Review of Psychology*, although not explicitly sociological in orientation, report on communication studies of sociological relevance. Schramm(1962) reviews the social psychology of mass communication from 1955 through 1961. Tannenbanm & Greenberg (1967) update that review through 1966, and W. Weiss (1971) brings it up to 1970. Lumsdaine & May (1965) focus on educational media, a topic beyond the scope of this review. (For an account of recent developments in media of instruction, see Schramm 1977.) And a recent review by Liebert & Schwartzberg (1977), which focuses the effects of the mass media, also presents data on patterns of media use, media content, and transmission of information and cultivation of beliefs-- all of which are topics of sociological concern.

Current statistics on the distribution, structure, and uses of mass media are available in Frey (1973) and in a recent comprehensive review and guide American communication industry trends by Sterling & Haight (1978). In addition, the reader can find useful sociological materials on the mass media in the *Handbook of Communication*(Pool *et al.* 1973) and in *Communication Research--A Half-Century Appraisal* (Lerner & Nelson 1977).

Here we review sociological developments in five areas of mass communications research, concentrating on the period from 1972 through mid- 1978 but also including some earlier research. First, we examine studies of mass communicators, media organizations, and the processes by which mass communications are produced. These studies relate to sociological interests in occupations and professions, complex organizations, and the phenomenon of work--placing the communicator in the context of the social system, a sociological development in communications research foreseen by Riley & Riley (1959) two decades ago. Second, we consider research on mass media audiences, especially research oriented toward interests in social differentiation and in the social psychology of media uses and gratifications. Third, we review studies that relate interpersonal communication and mass communication - opinion leadership, communication networks, and diffusion of news. Fourth, we consider studies of mass media content that touch upon changing social norms and upon the public presentation of social roles. Finally, we review recent research on mass communication effects, especially studies attempting to determine the media's effects on public beliefs, knowledge, and concepts of social reality, but also those considering the media's roles in socialization and social change.

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# SOCIOLOGY OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of mass communications is a broad, multidisciplinary field to which sociology has made major contributions. Some of these contributions have been reviewed in earlier works by Riley & Riley (1959), Larsen (1964), Janowitz (1968), McQuail (1969), Davison & Yu (1974), DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach (1975), and Wright (1975a). Several chapters in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, although not explicitly sociological in orientation, report on communication studies of sociological relevance. Schramm (1962) reviews the social psychology of mass communication from 1955 through 1961. Tannenbaum & Greenberg (1967) update that review through 1966, and W. Weiss (1971) brings it up to 1970. Lumsdaine & May (1965) focus on educational media, a topic beyond the scope of this review. (For an account of recent developments in media of instruction, see Schramm 1977.) And a recent review by Liebert & Schwartzberg (1977), which focuses on the effects of the mass media, also presents data on patterns of media use, media content, and transmission of information and cultivation of beliefs—all of which are topics of sociological concern.

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Here we review sociological developments in five areas of mass communications research, concentrating on the period from 1972 through mid-1978 but also including some earlier research. First, we examine studies of mass communicators, media organizations, and the processes by which mass communications are produced. These studies relate to sociological interests in occupations and professions, complex organizations, and the phenomenon of work—placing the communicator in the context of the social system, a sociological development in communications research foreseen by Riley & Riley (1959) two decades ago. Second, we consider research on mass media audiences, especially research oriented toward interests in social differentiation and in the social psychology of media uses and gratifications. Third, we review studies that relate interpersonal communication and mass communication—opinion leadership, communication networks, and diffusion of news. Fourth, we consider studies of mass media content that touch upon changing social norms and upon the public presentation of social roles. Finally, we review recent research on mass communication effects, especially studies attempting to determine the media's effects on public beliefs, knowledge, and concepts of social reality, but also those considering the media's roles in socialization and social change.

## SOCIOLOGY OF THE MASS COMMUNICATOR

One of the most promising recent developments in mass communications research is the study of the social processes by which mass communications content, especially news and entertainment, is produced. Hardly any such research was available as recently as twenty years ago. Riley & Riley (1959), reviewing research on mass communication and the social system, called for a sociological view of the mass communication process that placed the mass communicator within the social context of group memberships, reference groups, and the larger social structure. They found, at that time, very few sociological studies of mass communicators, mass media organizations, and processes of production. Today we have a substantial body of research at hand.

Some of this research has focused on mass communicators—their backgrounds, social characteristics, training, career patterns, and other social factors presumed to affect role performance—in the tradition of the sociology of occupations and professions. However, since the production of mass communication content is essentially an organized collective activity rather than the result of individual effort, any sociological analysis of the people who perform the role of mass communicator must of necessity con-

sider, at least to some degree, the social structure within which these persons function.

A recent major study of American journalists is a good example of this line of research (Johnstone, Slawski & Bowman 1976). Based on interviews with a national probability sample of 1,313 print and broadcast journalists, this work constitutes a broad overview of the journalism profession and its members' social characteristics, education and training, career patterns, job functions, political affiliations and professional statuses, orientations, and behavior. The organizational structure of the profession is examined at length, including analyses of both the control of newswork within organizations and the prestige hierarchy among organizations within the industry as a whole. The study also includes an overview of alternative journalism (i.e. "underground" press) during the early 1970s.

The authors find that the great majority of American journalists are employed within the print media, that they are disproportionately concentrated within large urban settings and along the Eastern seaboard, and that they tend to be young, male, and middle or upper-middle class. There are two major career tracks in the profession—an "administrative path," which involves close integration of the journalist within the organization; and a "professional path," which tends to lessen rather than strengthen integration into the organizational structure. A few predominantly Eastern-based organizations are seen to dominate the field, and journalists within the more "elite" organizations differ from those in other parts of the industry. A value cleavage is found within the field, with two occupational "segments" existing—one based on espousal of a "neutral" journalistic style and the other advocating a more "participant" style, most clearly differentiated along lines of education and training. The field is also marked by a high level of internal occupational mobility and by a high attrition rate, with the most qualified young journalists frustrated by the apparent incompatibility of professional ideals and organizational realities.

Cantor's (1971) study of Hollywood television producers deserves mention as one of the few systematic studies of mass communicators outside the field of journalism. In an attempt to account for the type of television content commonly produced by these professionals, Cantor examines the interrelationship of the producers' social background and training, the nature of their roles and role-set relationships, their reference groups, and the organizational and occupational demands and constraints with which they must deal. Central to her analysis is the construction of a typology of producers based upon their personal backgrounds, training and career histories, and their occupational goals and values. Organizational and work pressures are seen to elicit different kinds of response and role adaptation from these different producer types.

Additional examples of research on mass communicators include studies

of specialist correspondents for the British national news media (Tunstall 1971), foreign affairs journalists in the American broadcasting industry (Batscha 1975), presidents and board members of the country's major media institutions (Weston 1978), producers of children's television programs (Cantor 1972), women in public broadcasting (Isber & Cantor 1975), and Hollywood studio musicians (Faulkner 1971).

Other recent studies have analyzed the nature of the work involved in the production of mass communications and the organizational structure within which such work proceeds as the major determinants of the finished product. Elliott's (1972) case study of the planning and production of a British television documentary series focuses on the role of various "chains" or sets of interlocking work procedures and requirements (the research chain, the production chain, the presentation chain) in successively limiting the kinds of content that could be selected for inclusion. Time and budget constraints were found to further contribute to the tendency of the production staff to select "experts" for the program from among their own contacts or from already existing mass media sources, and to limit the treatment of the issues involved to the level of "conventional wisdom" on the topic.

Sigelman (1973) has extended Warren Breed's (1955) classic study of the socialization processes in the newsroom, whereby reporters learn to conform to newspaper policy (as well as strategies for circumventing policy on occasion). In his case study of two papers with antithetical political orientations, Sigelman indicates that prospective newspaper employees are aware of newspaper policy even before they begin work and tend to seek employment within those papers whose apparent ideological position is closest to their own. Thus, employee self-selection and the organization's hiring, socialization, and control mechanisms are seen to function together in such a way that news content will tend to be consistent with organizational policy.

Sigal's (1973) study of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* examines the symbiotic relationship between reporters and the government officials on whom they report as a major factor in shaping news about government activities. Reporters' constant need for news and officials' need for publicity and positive news coverage combine to make the resulting news coverage reflect the viewpoint of the officials who serve as reporters' sources. Sigal's analysis illustrates how the consensual nature of mass-communicated news is due to the institutionalized relationships among newsroom personnel, between reporters and their sources, and even among competing reporters on the same beat.

In a series of studies, Tuchman (1972, 1973a, b, 1977) provides further insight into how the routine demands of work result in the use of certain conventionalized procedures among news reporters that affect the selection and presentation of news. Journalistic objectivity is seen to consist of a set

of "strategic rituals" or normative work practices that reporters utilize to protect themselves from the many risks their work entails—risks of libel suits, public complaints, and internal criticism. In order routinely to process unexpected events, newsmen have developed a set of news classifications or "typifications" that establish the context in which social phenomena are perceived and defined. According to Phillips (1976, 1977), daily newswork fosters a particular preconception of social reality among reporters that is structured by the style and format of journalistic expression as well as the organizational and professional norms that guide reporters' work. Altheide's (1976) observations of two local television newsrooms lead him to conclude that broadcast journalists, in response to the organizational and technological constraints within which they work, have developed a particular "news perspective" that fundamentally transforms the reported events. Molotch & Lester (1974; 1975) present another conceptualization of mass-communicated news as a reflection of the social organization that produces it. According to their analysis, in order to become news an occurrence must pass through a series of different "agents"—news "promoters," "assemblers," and "consumers"—each of which helps construct, through a distinctive set of organizational routines, what the occurrence will be reported to have been. Studies by Danzger (1975) and by Snyder & Kelly (1977) address the issue of the extent to which the reporting of local civil conflicts is related to the presence of wire service offices and/or the characteristics of the events themselves. Cohen & Young (1973) have edited a collection of work on various issues in the production of news.

One of the few sociological studies of organizations engaged in the production and mass distribution of cultural items other than newspaper and television content is Hirsch's (1972) analysis of entrepreneurial organizations in the book publishing, phonograph recording, and motion picture industries. Hirsch examines some of the adaptive strategies used by these organizations to minimize dependence on an uncertain environment, and he proposes the concept of an "industry system" as a frame of reference for analysing the filtering processes by which new products and ideas flow from producer to consumer.

Additional examples of research on the nature of work in mass media organizations include studies of the news production process in the BBC (Schlesinger 1978) and newsgathering practices and organization within American journalism (Bailey & Lichty 1972; Roshco 1975; Pekurny & Bart 1975; Lannus 1977).

As a result of such research on mass communicators at work, it has become increasingly clear that a psychological model of the human communication process—i.e. of a communicator (sender) deliberately engaged in the transmission of a message that he or she hopes will be received, understood,



and acted upon by another person (receiver)—is inappropriate for describing the process of mass communication. The studies cited above document, time and again, that many of the persons playing key roles in mass communication production are not solely or even primarily intent upon “communicating” with the audience. Rather, they are preoccupied with doing a job—meeting deadlines, keeping within budget, coping with “office politics,” making money, or any of a number of job-related tasks and goals. Further, the relevant reference group for their work is often not the public or ultimate audience at all but an occupational or professional reference group of others doing similar or related work, whose judgments are of practical or psychological significance to the communicator. Thus the communicator’s activities are governed more by craft norms and professionalism than by immediate or even delayed “feedback” from audiences. We need to know more about the role of reference groups in mass-communication production, distribution, and exhibition.

The time may be at hand when our understanding of the social construction of mass communications needs to be enriched by explicit comparisons with social processes at work in other institutional and organizational settings. As Hirsch (1977) has argued, much is to be gained from moving away from concern with the unique features of mass communication organizations and processes and towards concern for their similarities to other large-scale organizations. We need, in short, a comparative sociological framework within which to examine the organizational and institutional features of mass communication production, distribution, and exhibition. Easier said than done, no doubt, but therein lies the challenge.

## SOCIOLOGY OF MASS MEDIA AUDIENCES

As noted above, recent developments in the study of mass communicators derive their general orientations from the sociology of occupations and professions, complex organizations, and work phenomena. By contrast, most of the research on mass media audiences is more closely linked to the sociology of social differentiation and stratification and to a social-psychological concern with individuals’ needs and gratifications. This research includes, among others, studies of the demographic and other social characteristics of mass media audiences, the uses to which individuals put the media and the gratifications they may derive from such use, the selective communications behavior of individuals within various social categories, and the relationship between individuals’ mass communication behavior and their interpersonal communication or other types of behavior patterns. Bauer’s (1973) review of the research literature on audiences illustrates the changes in the conceptualization of the audience during the last few years—from that of an aggregate of passive individuals to that of an interactive social system.



Most studies show, unsurprisingly, that mass media behavior differs among persons of various social characteristics. The most common and pronounced differentiation occurs between persons having varying amounts of education. Differences in media behavior of persons classified by other social characteristics, such as race or ethnicity, are also evident, although these are usually documented through local rather than national surveys. However, the exact patterns of media behavior by race, age, sex, or other social statuses are difficult to generalize.

Much of the recent research on mass media behavior is related to "traditions" in audience research going back at least thirty years in American sociology. Bower's (1973) study of television and the American public, for example, continues a tradition of national sample survey research on communications behavior and public attitudes toward the mass media that can be traced back to the early works of Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his associates at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research (see as examples Lazarsfeld & Field 1946; Lazarsfeld & Kendall 1948). Specifically, Bower's 1970 national survey of Americans' views about television is a replication and extension of a study by Steiner conducted ten years earlier (Steiner 1963). Bower found that, of twelve background variables examined, race and education, followed by region of country and age, were significantly related to respondents' attitudes toward television, though not necessarily to their viewing behavior. When analysis was limited to weekend and evening hours when "everyone" could watch, the twelve social background variables combined, explained less than 5% of the variance in overall amount of television viewing. Opportunity for television viewing, in the form of available free time (which might be associated with educational or other social statuses), seemed to Bower to be the major factor affecting television-viewing rates among the American population.

In a major study of Americans' use of leisure time, however, J. Robinson (1977) found that an individual's level of education was a powerful predictor of mass media use, including use of television. Robinson's data came from diaries of one day's activities kept by a national sample of American urban adults in the mid-1960s; thus the method differed from the usual sample survey interview. He found that individuals with more education spent more time reading books and magazines, listening to the radio, and going to the movies, and less time watching television than did the less-educated (and they selected different types of content in all these sources). Furthermore, this relationship could not be attributed to differential amounts of available free time between the more-educated and the less-educated.

Data on American audiences for public television are presented by Lyle (1975). A variety of surveys and other studies on television viewing among American adults and children can be found in Volume IV of *Television and Social Behavior* (Rubinstein, Comstock & Murray 1972).

Studies of mass media audiences in many countries have become available during the past decade or so. Some examples are a national survey of Canadians' attitudes towards and uses of the mass media (*Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media* 1970), a variety of studies in Japan (e.g. Kato 1974), and research on Swedish radio and television audiences (Sveriges Radio ab 1975/76). Cross-national comparisons of television viewing are given in J. Robinson (1977).

Analyses of media behavior among persons of minority, ethnic, or other special groups are often based on small local samples and therefore provide limited grounds for drawing generalizations. There are some exceptions, however. For example, on the basis of a secondary analysis of data from a national sample, Bogart (1972) suggested that television may play a different role in the lives of black and white Americans at similar income and education levels. Examples of research on the media behavior of other minorities and special status groups include Dervin & Greenberg's (1972) review of findings on the urban poor, Dunn's (1975) study of Mexican Americans in San Antonio, and Wenner's (1976) and Davis et al's (1976) on television viewing patterns among older adults.

Wright (1975b) has examined the extent to which individuals' use of mass media may be related to patterns of multiple-status characteristics, such as intergenerational occupational and educational mobility, patterns of educational statuses between spouses, and combinations of aging and retirement, and aging and loss of mate. Similarly, he presents data on patterns of multiple media exposure. Other researchers also have looked at overall patterns of mass media use among individuals with different social characteristics and lifestyles. For example, in a study of media behavior of persons living in an American community between two large metropolitan centers, Shipley (1974, 1976) found consistent patterns of communication behavior, both interpersonal and mass media-oriented, among the community residents studied. Studies of media avoiders (e.g. Penrose et al 1974; Jackson-Beeck 1977) provide another view of audience self-selective behavior.

In a rare twenty-year longitudinal study of 246 British males from middle and working-class homes, Himmelweit & Swift (1976) sought explanations of "media usage and taste" in the interaction of four factors: media characteristics (e.g. skills required to use them); user's "environment" (e.g. socializing experiences through job); characteristics of the user (e.g. education and personality); and his past media uses and habits. In general, education and social class were found to be of greatest importance in understanding media behavior. Heavy use and enjoyment of the popular media of the day—cinema in 1951, television later—were most characteristic of males of lower ability, education, and social background, while the opposite held true for reading. The authors conclude that television viewing and reading had

different functions for those with different class-related lifestyles. They also found that media tastes developed during adolescence had considerable continuity, regardless of subsequent educational attainment and occupational status.

The uses to which individuals put various mass media and the gratifications that they receive from these media have long been matters of sociological interest. Recently they have received renewed research attention. A collection of studies and essays within this tradition has been edited by Blumler & Katz (1974). McQuail, Blumler & Brown (1972) have constructed a typology of satisfactions gained or sought from television by British viewers.

A major study continuing this line of research on uses and gratifications focuses on leisure and cultural activities in Israel (see Katz & Gurevitch 1976; also Katz, Gurevitch & Haas 1973). The authors report the extent to which a national sample of Israelis felt that various mass media helped to satisfy each of some thirty-five posited social and psychological needs. Newspapers were cited as the most helpful of the mass media in satisfying nineteen of the thirty-five needs, television in satisfying only three needs. Although the rankings of the mass media by helpfulness did not differ greatly among persons from different educational levels, nevertheless the print media tended to be seen as most helpful by persons of higher education, and television was regarded as especially helpful by persons with less education. Dotan & Cohen (1976) analyzed differences in the uses and gratifications derived from various media among a panel of Israeli housewives under conditions of war and peace, i.e. during and following the 1973 Middle East War. Examples of more recent studies of uses and gratifications are two studies among American students (Lometti, Reeves & Bybee 1977; Rubin 1977) and an examination of the satisfactions and dissatisfactions Americans derive from the viewing of television news programs (Levy 1977). An unconventional and interesting approach to the study of how individuals use mass media and the information the media convey in making decisions about pressing social problems is presented by Edelstein's (1974) comparative study of citizens in Yugoslavia and the United States.

The role of interpersonal communication and primary group relationships in affecting a person's mass communication behavior has also been analyzed in recent studies, thus continuing a strand of research identified by the Rileys twenty years ago (Riley & Riley 1959). For example, Chaffee & Tims (1976) examined the extent to which the social context of adolescents' television viewing (i.e. viewing with parents, siblings, friends, or alone) and types of interpersonal communication relationships with family and friends affected these adolescents' selection and perception of television content. Atkin (1972), in a secondary analysis of two surveys supplemented by an experimental study, concluded that there was a positive association between

anticipated interpersonal communication about a topic and mass media exposure on that topic. Clarke (1973) has analyzed the relationship between teenagers' interpersonal coorientations and their seeking of information about popular music. Dominick (1974), in a study of sixth grade students in New York City, found a relationship between the amount and purposes of their radio use and the extent of their peer group membership (as measured sociometrically). Young persons with low peer group membership listened more to radio and listened more for information rather than entertainment than did students higher in peer group membership. A special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* (Chaffee & McLeod 1973) reports some of these and other studies relating interpersonal and mass communication behavior. It is clear that this area of research deserves further sociological attention.

Finally, we wish to underscore the observations made by one of us several years ago (Wright 1975a: 110–111). Most of the research in this area does not address a *sociological* analysis of the audience. There is little or no consideration of the normative and organizational components of audiences per se. What are the folkways, mores, and laws that determine who should be members of a particular audience, how they should behave while playing the role of audience members, and what their rights and obligations are in relation to others in the audience, to the performers, and to members of the society not in the audience? What is the social structure of assembled audiences? How, if at all, are audiences organized? What is the larger social and cultural context within which an audience occurs?

## OPINION LEADERSHIP, INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE, AND DIFFUSION OF NEWS

Since they all involve examination of the relative roles of interpersonal and mass communication processes, studies of the diffusion and adoption of innovations such as new farming or medical practices and devices, the diffusion of information such as that contained in news stories, and opinion leadership and personal influence in general have frequently been grouped together in reviews of the mass communication research literature. Although there are some similar concerns shared by these research areas, it is useful sociologically to distinguish among them. The diffusion of innovations (involving the adoption of an unfamiliar and potentially risky practice or device) is a social phenomenon very different from the diffusion of information about an event or person (which need not result in any behavioral change at all). By the same token, a change in opinion about an issue or a decision about purchasing need not involve the same degree of personal commitment or potential social impact as the adoption of a practice affecting one's liveli-

hood or health. Furthermore, the diffusion of influence is not the same as the diffusion of information.

Our review concentrates on sociological studies of opinion leadership and interpersonal communication networks. We also cite several recent studies of news diffusion. Readers interested in the diffusion of innovations will find comprehensive reviews in W. Weiss (1971), Rogers & Shoemaker (1971), and Rogers (1977).

While early sociological studies of personal influence utilized a conception of opinion leadership as a relatively stable role that different persons filled for particular topics, several later studies viewed opinion leadership as an activity frequently involving both opinion-giving and opinion-seeking, essentially an opinion-sharing process among interested persons actively engaging in both mass and interpersonal communication on various topics (Trodahl & Van Dam 1965; Wright & Cantor 1967). In a secondary analysis of a national voting survey, J. Robinson (1976) found opinion-giving and opinion-receiving to be highly intercorrelated. Among opinion givers and receivers, the flow of information and influence seemed to be a multi-step process in which the mass media were one source among many. For those persons outside such networks, a one-step flow of information and influence directly from the mass media seemed to occur. Robinson notes, however, that when interpersonal sources and mass media sources are compared or are in conflict, interpersonal sources seem to be more influential. A study of communication about war and the armed forces (Segal 1975) also indicates that a one-step flow of information directly from the media to the public may be the more appropriate model under some circumstances.

Interest in opinion leadership within the general public seems to have decreased lately, being replaced somewhat by research on specific social circles and communication networks (see Rogers 1977). For example, in a pilot study of opinion formation among women within social networks of varying density, Beinstein (1977) found that those within more loose-knit networks and those living in urban areas were more likely to report being influenced by the mass media than by friends.

Several recent opinion leadership studies have turned attention to communication among members of elite social circles and persons strategically located in the social structure. Barton, Denitch & Kadushin (1973) have reported on a study of opinion-making elites in Yugoslavia, one of a series of cross-cultural comparative studies of national elites and the power structure undertaken by Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research. A sample of formal leaders within six major institutional sectors of Yugoslavian society were interviewed to determine the extent to which they communicated with each other and with the public, made policy proposals, and tried to influence decisions. Formal and informal opinion leaders within

these institutional sectors were identified and studied, both as the wielders of influence and as the recipients of influence. The authors concluded that the kind of influence possessed by members of the Yugoslavian elite was significantly related to their use of and contributions to the mass media.

Kadushin (1974) has studied the flow of ideas and influence among circles of American intellectuals and between intellectuals and persons in positions of power in this country. Elite intellectuals were sampled from among authors whose work was frequently published or reviewed in the country's leading intellectual journals and persons that these writers designated as influential intellectuals. The intellectual elite were found to be influenced by others through the writings published in these intellectual journals. In the same fashion, "men of power" tended to be exposed to the thoughts and opinions of the intellectual elite not so much by direct contact as by their reading of many of these same journals. It seemed that intellectuals may exert an indirect influence outside their own sphere through a "trickle down" effect in which their ideas are passed along through the mass media by top persons in the mass communications sector who are frequent readers of intellectual journals. Intellectuals may in this way help to create a general climate of opinion within which social problems are defined and policies formed.

C. Weiss (1974) studied the communication behavior of a sample of American national leaders in the public and private spheres. Most leaders cited information sources within their own institutional sectors as being most valuable in contributing to their thinking on national issues of concern to them. At the same time, almost half of the sample considered the mass media as valuable sources for this purpose. Weiss concluded that the mass media serve as a link among the leaders of the different sectors, transmitting news, ideas, opinions and even purposeful leaks, especially when other more specialized or interpersonal communication channels are closed or inadequate.

Since 1960, a considerable amount of mass communication research in the United States has dealt with the diffusion of information about news events throughout the public. Studies have examined the initial sources of such information—the mass media or interpersonal communication; the role of interpersonal communication in the diffusion process; the rates and amounts of diffusion, often plotted into various diffusion-time curves; characteristics of the event that may affect the above; and characteristics of the persons who become aware of the event at various points throughout the diffusion interval (see W. Weiss, 1971). More recently, Schwartz (1973/74) reported on a study of the sources of information and rate of diffusion of news about George Wallace's shooting among a sample of New York City residents. Hanneman & Greenberg (1973) found that for news of papal encyclicals, the



perceived personal relevance and salience of the information was more predictive of diffusion patterns than the stories' "news value." Gantz, Trenholm & Pittman (1976) examined the roles played by salience and altruistic motivations in the interpersonal diffusion process. In a more theoretical article, Rosengren (1973) systematically reviews and analyzes a number of news diffusion studies, focusing on the relationships among the event's importance, rate and amount of diffusion, and the role played by the mass media and by personal communication in news diffusion.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS

Systematic analyses of mass media content continue to comprise a substantial portion of mass communication research. Content analysis is a research technique, however, not a substantive research area or theoretical framework, and studies utilizing this technique vary widely in terms of theoretical orientation and research goals. Many content analyses are essentially descriptive studies, aimed only at a fuller and more accurate specification of the parameters and characteristics of mass media programs and portrayals. Content analyses have also been conducted in order to make inferences about the nature of the content's source and production processes or to make inferences about the possible effects of various types of content on the mass media audience. Content analysis data alone, however, cannot form the basis for any firm conclusions about either mass media organizations and production processes or audience effects. Here we focus on analyses of mass media content that might either reflect or affect social norms and roles.

For obvious social reasons, the inclusion and depiction of blacks and other minorities in television programming and commercials and in newspapers and magazines has for some time been the frequent subject of content analysis studies. More recently, television news programs have served as the focus for this concern. Pride & Clarke (1973) found that the three major networks differed in the emphasis given to race issues in their news coverage from 1968 to 1970, while Roberts' (1975) analysis of two three-week periods of network newscasts in 1972 and 1973 indicated that while blacks appeared in 23% of news segments, they were usually seen but not heard.

Social relevance has of late also prompted considerable interest in the depiction of women in mass media content. Several articles on the portrayal of women in print and broadcast media can be found in recently published collections on this subject (See *Journal of Communication*, 1974, 1978; Tuchman, Daniels & Benet 1978). These and other studies (Long & Simon 1974; Miller 1975; Poe 1976) indicate that women have continued to be portrayed in a relatively stereotypical manner unreflective of recent changes in their status and roles. Still others (Busby 1975; Smith & Matre 1975;



Miller & Reeves 1976; O'Donnell & O'Donnell 1978) have analyzed the depiction of both male and female sex roles in the mass media. Lazer & Dier (1978) analyzed the labor force portrayed in magazine short stories from 1940 to 1970. A study of "lonely hearts" advertisements in a national weekly tabloid provides some insight into the types of things that persons offer to potential dates or mates, the types of things they require of them in turn, and how these vary with sex and age (Harrison & Saeed, 1977).

Other researchers have carried out comparative studies of the mass media's depictions of both women and blacks (Northcott, Seggar & Hinton 1975; O'Kelly & Bloomquist 1976; Culley & Bennett 1976; Lemon 1977). The portrayal of old people (Peterson 1973; Aronoff 1974) and of children (Dennis & Sadoff 1976) has also been analyzed recently.

Because of the potentially greater susceptibility of children to the possible effects of mass media content, television programs and commercials aimed at children have been studied extensively (see Liebert & Schwartzberg 1977, and the symposium in *Journal of Communication*, 1977a). Television depictions of sex and violence continue to be a subject of examination (see the symposium in *Journal of Communication*, 1977b, and Fernandez-Collado et al 1978).

Since 1967, Gerbner & Gross and their associates (see Gerbner et al 1978) have conducted a series of "Cultural Indicator" studies of television dramatic content. Besides providing a "violence profile" measuring the incidence of violent acts broadcast on the three major networks, these content analyses provide information on the general patterns of life presented in television drama. The project also involves the analysis of survey data on the public, aimed at discovering the extent to which their views about social facts correspond more to the television presentation or more to "reality."

Another area of mass media content that has been the subject of recent analysis is that of televised sports. Real (1975) and Williams (1977) have both examined the structure of televised football in terms of the underlying values and ideology that the game appears to represent.

As noted previously, in some cases content analysis data are also interpreted as a reflection of mass media policy or organizational structure and of the intentions and possible biases of mass communicators. Studies of news content and public affairs programs, particularly those dealing with national election campaigns, have frequently been conducted from this perspective. Recent additions to this literature include a cross-media comparison of the differential coverage given to the two major candidates in the 1972 presidential campaign (Meadow 1973); a replication of a previous study of the television coverage of the 1968 campaign (Stevenson et al 1973); a cross-network comparison of television coverage of the "Eagleton affair" (Einsiedel 1975); an analysis of television news coverage of the 1976 campaign prior to

the New Hampshire primary (M. Robinson & McPherson 1977); and a comparison of television and newspaper campaign news in the 1968 and 1972 presidential elections (Graber 1976).

The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) has published a content analysis of industrial news on British television in 1975. Becker (1977) has analyzed the relationship between the *New York Times'* coverage of the 1971 Indian-Pakistani War and changing US policy on the war. A comparative analysis of "hawk" and "dove" newspapers' coverage of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in 1965 and 1967 indicates that "hawk" papers gave smaller crowd estimates than did "dove" papers (Mann 1974). Trends in television news coverage of the Vietnam war from 1965 to 1970 have been analyzed by Bailey (1976). Schmidt (1972) examined a sample of newspaper editorials and accounts of the racial riots of the summer of 1967. An analysis of the kinds of government officials appearing as guests on Sunday television interview shows like "Meet the Press" is presented by Adams & Ferber (1977).

## MASS COMMUNICATION EFFECTS

Research on the effects of mass communication continues to be an active and varied field of study, far too large for comprehensive review here. Fortunately, several additional sources are available. Two extensive reviews are provided by W. Weiss (1969, 1971). Liebert & Schwartzberg (1977) provide a review of research on psychological effects of mass media. Comprehensive guides to the research literature on television and human behavior have been prepared by Comstock & Fisher (1975) and Comstock and associates (1975, 1978). A set of studies and interpretive papers on the effects of television appear in the five volume work *Television and Social Behavior* (1971). Some theoretical frameworks for the study of mass communication effects also are discussed in Schramm (1973) and Wright (1974, 1975a).

Mass communication effects have generally been demonstrated in psychologically oriented experimental research dealing with immediate or short-term individual-level effects following upon brief exposure to a discrete and limited mass media stimulus. Studies of the effects of exposure to violent or erotic mass media content in terms of subsequent aggressive or sexual behavior has often followed this research paradigm. The generalizability of the findings of such studies beyond the laboratory situation remains problematic, however, and they are not covered in the present review, which will focus instead on more sociologically relevant research on the effects of mass communication on public beliefs, knowledge, and concepts of social reality, and on socialization and social change.

The apparently contradictory findings and conclusions that have charac-

terized studies of media effects can, to a large extent, be explained by differences in the conceptualization and specification of (a) the phenomenon under study—the mass media in general or a particular medium, the extent of exposure or use, the nature of the content, and so on; (b) the unit or locus of effects—the individual, the group, or the society; (c) the time span involved—immediate, short-run, or long-term; (d) the “form” of the effect—changes in information level or knowledge, in opinions, in attitudes, in beliefs, in behavior; (e) the processes leading to the claimed effects—socialization, imitation, stimulation, and so on; and (f) the theory, if any, subsuming and explaining the hypothetical integration of these various elements. Recent theoretical treatments of the social effects of mass communications have focused less on direct persuasion, opinion conversion, and immediate individual behavior (often the subject of earlier studies of media effects) but have tended to focus instead on knowledge gains, the formation of people’s concepts of social reality, and on broader societal and cultural-level effects (e.g. Chaffee, Ward & Tipton 1970; Clarke & Kline 1974; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur 1976).

### *Public Beliefs, Knowledge, and Concepts of Social Reality*

Learning about public affairs from the mass media is one type of mass media effect that has been a frequent topic of inquiry. Recent studies in this area have examined the relationships between mass media exposure, black militancy, and public affairs knowledge among black high school students (Tan & Vaughn 1976) and the impact of mass and interpersonal communication behaviors on the public affairs knowledge of older people (Kent & Rush 1976).

One group of researchers has conducted a number of studies dealing with the relationship between patterns of mass media use and public opinion at the community level (e.g. Donohue, Tichenor & Olien 1975; Tichenor et al 1977). Noelle-Neumann (1974) has advanced a “spiral of silence” theory on the role of the mass media in the development of broader public opinion trends. Individuals depend upon the mass media for information about the course of public opinion and subsequently use this information in forming their own opinions and in deciding whether or not to voice them.

One of the more active areas of research on the role of the mass media in the development of public opinion and beliefs is that of “agenda-setting.” The basic proposition is that the perceived salience of a public issue will be directly related to the amount of coverage given that issue by the mass media. The concept can be seen as an extension of the “status-conferral” function of the media posited by Lazarsfeld & Merton (1948). Agenda-setting studies have usually attempted to correlate the amounts of media coverage given to various issues with the salience rankings accorded these

issues by samples of respondents. In a study of agenda-setting during the 1968 Presidential election campaign, McCombs & Shaw (1972), using a sample of undecided voters in Chapel Hill, present data that suggest a strong positive relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the mass media and voters' judgments about the salience and importance of these issues. Funkhouser (1973) compared the amount of coverage given to a number of social issues from 1960 to 1970 by three weekly news magazines with Gallup poll figures on public ratings of "the most important problem facing America" and with published statistics taken as reflective of the actual seriousness of these issues during the same time period. Bowers (1973) has suggested that, in the case of newspaper political advertising, a circular relationship may exist among the issue agendas of the candidate, the media, and the public. McLeod, Becker & Byrnes (1974) have proposed several qualifications to the agenda-setting concept. Several studies have attempted to identify contingent conditions affecting the agenda-setting process and to further specify and define the concept itself (Gormley 1975; Tipton, Haney & Basehart 1975; Benton & Frazier 1976; McClure & Patterson 1976; Palmgreen & Clarke 1977; Greendale & Fredin 1977).

A more sociologically oriented area of research related to the agenda-setting studies has dealt with the potential effects of mass media reports and portrayals on people's conceptions of social reality. This orientation has been especially significant in the work of certain British sociologists interested in the mass media. Murdock (1974), for example, argues that the mass media serve as a source of the meaning systems people use in framing their accounts of general features of social structure and social process. Other British research using this orientation has examined the relationship between viewers' knowledge and interpretations of an anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London and media coverage of the event (Halloran, Elliott & Murdock 1970) and the differential roles of experientially derived and mass-media-derived information about minorities in the formation of whites' conceptions and definitions of the racial situation in Britain (Hartmann & Husband 1974).

In the United States, Warren (1972) analyzed the relationship between residents' perceptions of a racial incident in Detroit and both mass media and interpersonal information sources, finding that, in terms of both immediate and long-term effects, different media-use patterns were associated with different perceptions of the incident by both whites and blacks. Hubbard, DeFleur & DeFleur (1975) suggest that the mass media play a role in defining social problems during their emergent stage but not so much once they have become institutionalized. Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976) present a theoretical reconceptualization of how the media can affect audience beliefs, feelings, and behavior to the extent that members of the society are

dependent upon mass media information resources and lack other strong bases for constructed social realities.

Recent research on political effects of mass communications has shown some of the same trends in direction noted above, away from a focus on persuasion, attitude change, and immediate behavioral effects (such as voting) and towards a renewed interest in effects of mass communication on political cognitions, socialization, campaigns, and the political system (e.g. see McClure & Patterson 1974; Chaffee 1975; Kraus & Davis 1976; Carey 1976; Atkin, Galloway & Nayman 1976; M. Robinson 1976; Abrams & Settle 1977; Clarke & Fredin 1978). Just as the televised Kennedy-Nixon debates were extensively studied in the 1960s, researchers have taken advantage of the unusual opportunity to investigate the effects of the televised Ford-Carter Presidential election debates of 1976 (e.g. see Lang & Lang 1978; Wald & Lupfer 1978; Bishop, Meadow & Jackson-Beeck 1978). For a recent review of political communication theory and research, see Nimmo (1977).

### *Mass Media and Socialization*

The role of mass communications in the socialization process has been a matter of considerable theoretical concern. We have reviewed above research relating mass communications to the acquisition of knowledge and beliefs, some of which might be regarded as relevant to socialization. More research, however, needs to be addressed directly towards questions about the role of mass communications in socialization to values, social norms, social roles, and other matters central to socialization theory.

Active interest followed Hyman's (1959) coining of the concept of political socialization. Recent examples are studies of the socializing effects of viewing television news (Rubin 1978; Atkin & Gantz 1978), and a cohort analysis of the use of several mass media for political information during early adult years (Danowski & Cutler 1977).

Along other lines, Hyman (1974) draws attention to neglected problems in the study of mass communication and socialization, noting especially the need for studies of the media's impact on the social sentiments and in anticipatory socialization. Recent research on the social impact of "Roots," a nationally televised "docudrama" on slavery in America, has investigated the program's effects on the racial attitudes of both blacks and whites, as well as on their emotional responses to the events depicted (Hur & J. Robinson 1978; Howard, Rothbart & Sloan 1978; Hur 1978; Balon 1978; Surlin 1978).

A study of the role of mass communications in the process of acculturation of immigrants (Korean) in the Chicago area—the seat of much sociolog-

ical research on communication and assimilation of immigrants during the earlier part of the century—is presented in Kim (1977).

### *Mass Communication and National Development*

During the 1950s and 1960s there was a great deal of interest in the role of the mass media in fostering change at the societal level and especially in the potential effects of the mass media in the modernization of “developing” countries (see Lerner & Schramm 1967). More recently a reconceptualization of the old paradigm of the national development process and of the possible role that mass communication might play in this process has been called for by some of the scholars in this field (e.g. Hornik 1977). For a review of these and other new directions in the field see Schramm & Lerner (1976), Rogers (1976), and Lerner (1977).

## CONCLUSION

In our review, we have touched upon some of the major areas of research on mass communication within the last half-decade either conducted from or relevant to a sociological viewpoint. Throughout, we have attempted to indicate both the directions such research has recently taken and some directions in which future research might beneficially proceed. Although considerable progress has been made in placing the analysis of mass communication—its production, reception, and effects—within a broader social context, the field of mass communications continues to offer many challenges for sociological theory and research.

Recent case studies of mass communicators and mass media organizations have begun to examine systematically the organizational structure of various components of the communications industry as a significant determinant of mass media content. More must be done to place these research findings within a larger framework of institutional and organizational analysis.

Much descriptive information has been gathered on the demographic composition of mass media audiences and the patterns of mass and interpersonal communication of various audience sectors, and on the reasons cited by audience members for their use of certain media and types of content. There has been little work done, however, on the normative, organizational, and cultural bases underlying the behavior of persons in the role of audience members.

While studies have consistently shown that interpersonal communication and the use of mass communications are interrelated, more research must be done to determine the nature and direction of this relationship.

Content-analysis studies continue to proliferate. Some of these studies provide descriptive data on the media's portrayal of social norms and social roles. But sociological interpretation of these data will remain problematic until the cultural and organizational factors accounting for the production of mass media content and until the effects of various types of content are better understood.

Research on the effects of mass communication has expanded its focus to include the investigation of new variables and the examination of effects beyond the level of the individual. However, much remains to be known about the role of the mass media in socialization and in social change.

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