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Laying the Groundwork



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Chapter

SISQO | BEANIE S | SEL | JOHN LENNON

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ISSUE #172 MARCH 30, 2000 \$3

Rolling Stone

THE 28-YEAR
ODYSSEY OF
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WEIRD SCENES
INSIDE THE
GLITTER
FACTORY

INTRODUCING
NETBOOK

MUSIC ON THE WEB

A SPECIAL GUIDE



Mass Communication, Culture, and Mass Media

THE CLOCK RADIO JARS YOU AWAKE. IT'S VINTAGE MATCHBOX 20, THE last few bars of "Push." The laughing deejay shouts at you that it's 7:41 and you'd better get going. But before you do, he adds, listen to a few words from your friends at Fry's Electronics, home of fast, friendly, courteous service—"We will beat any competitive price!"

In the living room, you find your roommate has left the television on. You stop for a moment and listen: the Supreme Court has refused to hear an affirmative action appeal, your U.S. representative is under investigation for sexual harassment, and you deserve a break today at McDonald's. As you head toward the bathroom, your bare feet slip on some magazines littering the floor—*Wired*, *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*. You need to talk to your roommate about picking up!

After showering, you quickly pull on your Levi's, lace up your Nike cross-trainers, and throw on a B.U.M. Equipment pullover. No time for breakfast; you grab a Nature Valley granola bar and the newspaper and head for the bus stop. As the bus rolls up, you can't help but notice the giant ad on its side: *Die Hard IX—Kill Before You're Killed*. Rejecting that as a movie choice for the weekend, you sit down next to a teenager listening to music on his headphones and playing a video game. You bury yourself in the paper, scanning the lead stories and the local news and then checking out *Doonesbury* and *Dilbert*.

Hopping off the bus at the campus stop, you run into Chris from your computer lab. You walk to class together, talking about last night's *Survivor*.

It's not yet 9:00, and already you're awash in media messages.

In this chapter we define communication, interpersonal communication, mass communication, media, and culture and explore the relationships among them and how they define us and our world. We investigate how communication works, how it changes when technology is introduced into the process, and how differing views of communication and mass communication can lead to different interpretations of their power. We also discuss the opportunities mass communication and culture offer us and the responsibilities that come with those opportunities. Always crucial, these issues are of particular importance now, when we find ourselves in a period of remarkable development in new communication technologies.

Finally, we discuss the changing nature of contemporary mass communication and its implications for both communication industries and media consumers.

What Is Mass Communication?

"Does a fish know it's wet?" influential cultural and media critic Marshall McLuhan would often ask. The answer, he would say, is "No." The fish's existence is so dominated by water that only when water is absent is the fish aware of its condition.

So it is with people and mass media. The media so fully saturate our everyday lives that we are often unconscious of their presence, not to mention their influence. Media inform us, entertain us, delight us, annoy us. They move our emotions, challenge our intellects, insult our intelligence. Media often reduce us to mere commodities for sale to the highest bidder. Media help define us; they shape our realities.

A fundamental theme of this book is that media do none of this alone. They do it *with* us as well as *to* us through mass communication, and they do it as a central—many critics and scholars say *the* central—cultural force in our society.

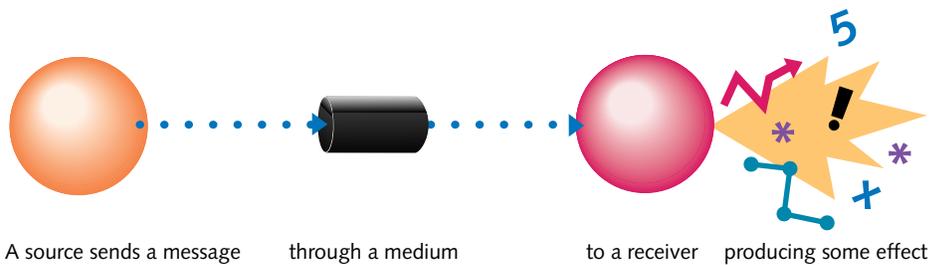
COMMUNICATION DEFINED

In its simplest form **communication** is the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver. For more than 50 years now, this view of communication has been identified with the writing of political scientist Harold Lasswell (1948). He said that a convenient way to describe communication is to answer these questions:

- *Who?*
- *Says what?*
- *In which* channel?

- To *whom*?
- With *what effect*?

Expressed in terms of the basic elements of the communication process, communication occurs when:



Straightforward enough, but what if the source is a professor who insists on speaking in a technical language far beyond the receiving students' level of skill? Obviously, communication does not occur. Unlike mere message-sending, communication requires the response of others. Therefore, there must be a *sharing* (or *correspondence*) of meaning for communication to take place.

A second problem with this simple model is that it suggests that the receiver passively accepts the source's message. However, if our imaginary students do not comprehend the professor's words, they respond with "Huh?" or look confused or yawn. This response, or **feedback**, is also a message. The receivers (the students) now become a source, sending their own message to the source (the offending professor) who is now a receiver. Hence, communication is a *reciprocal* and *ongoing process* with all involved parties more or less engaged in creating shared meaning. Communication, then, is better defined as *the process of creating shared meaning*.

Communication researcher Wilbur Schramm, using ideas originally developed by psychologist Charles E. Osgood, developed a graphic way to represent the reciprocal nature of communication (Figure 1-1). This

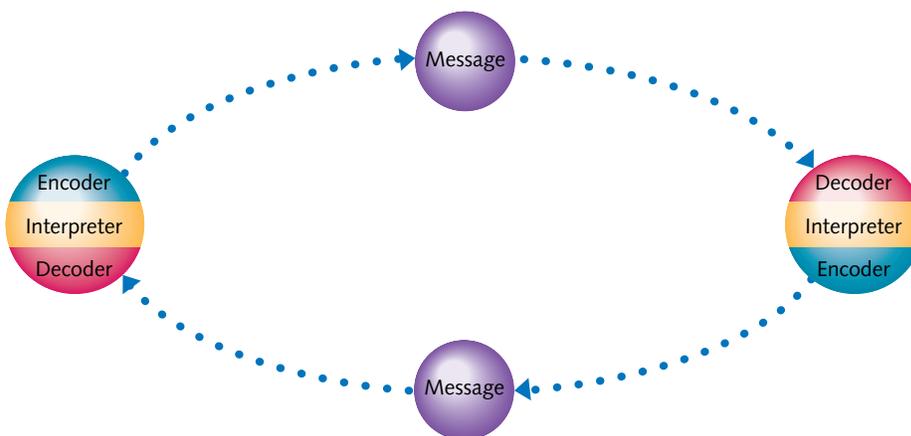


Figure 1-1 Osgood and Schramm's Model of Communication.

Source: From *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Copyright © 1954 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with the permission of the University of Illinois Press.

depiction of **interpersonal communication**—communication between two or a few people—shows that there is no clearly identifiable source or receiver. Rather, because communication is an ongoing and reciprocal process, all the participants, or “interpreters,” are working to create meaning by *encoding* and *decoding* messages. A message is first **encoded**, that is, transformed into an understandable sign and symbol system. Speaking is encoding, as are writing, printing, and filming a television program. Once received, the message is **decoded**; that is, the signs and symbols are interpreted. Decoding occurs through listening, reading, or watching that television show.

The Osgood-Schramm model demonstrates the ongoing and reciprocal nature of the communication process. There is, therefore, no source, no receiver, and no feedback. This is because, as communication is happening, both interpreters are simultaneously source and receiver. There is no feedback because all messages are presumed to be in reciprocation of other messages. Even when your friend starts a conversation with you, for example, it can be argued that it was your look of interest and willingness that communicated to her that she should speak. In this example, it is improper to label either you or your friend as the source—Who really initiated this chat?—and, therefore, it is impossible to identify who is providing feedback to whom.

Not every model can show all aspects of a process as complex as communication. Missing from this representation is **noise**—anything that interferes with successful communication. Noise is more than screeching or loud music when you are trying to read. Biases that lead to incorrect decoding, for example, are noise, as is newsprint that bleeds through from page 1 to page 2.

Encoded messages are carried by a **medium**, that is, the means of sending information. Sound waves are the medium that carries our voice to friends across the table; the telephone is the medium that carries our voice to friends across town. When the medium is a technology that carries messages to a large number of people—as newspapers carry the printed word and radio conveys the sound of music and news—we call it a **mass medium** (the plural of medium is **media**). The mass media we use regularly include radio, television, books, magazines, newspapers, movies, sound recordings, and computer networks. Each medium is the basis of a giant industry, but other related and supporting industries also serve them and us—advertising and public relations, for example. In our culture we use the words *media* and *mass media* interchangeably to refer to the communication industries themselves. We say, “The media entertain” or “The mass media are too conservative (or too liberal).”

MASS COMMUNICATION DEFINED

We speak, too, of mass communication. **Mass communication** is the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences. Schramm recast his and Osgood’s general model of communi-

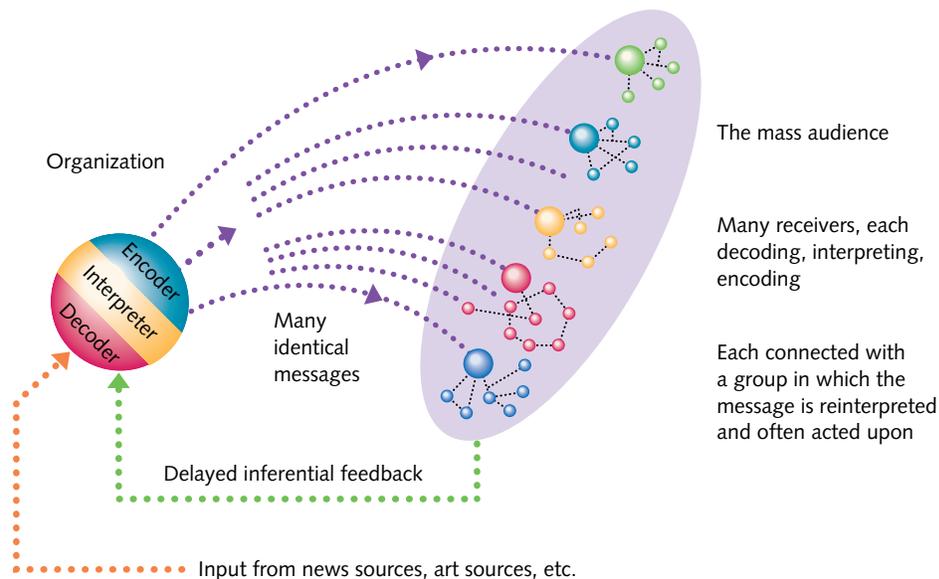


Figure 1–2 Schramm's Model of Mass Communication.

Source: From *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Copyright © 1954 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with the permission of the University of Illinois Press.

cation to help us visualize the particular aspects of the mass communication process (Figure 1–2). This model and the original Osgood and Schramm scheme have much in common—interpreters, encoding, decoding, and messages—but it is their differences that are most significant for our understanding of how mass communication differs from other forms of communication. For example, where the original model has “message,” the mass communication model offers “many identical messages.” Additionally, the mass communication model specifies “feedback,” whereas the interpersonal communication model does not. When two or a few people communicate face-to-face, the participants can immediately and clearly recognize the feedback residing in the reciprocal messages (our boring professor can see and hear the students’ disenchantment as they listen to the lecture). Things are not nearly as simple in mass communication.

In Schramm’s mass communication model, feedback is represented by a dotted line labeled delayed **inferential feedback**. This feedback is indirect rather than direct. Television executives, for example, must wait a day, at the very minimum, and sometimes a week or a month, to discover the ratings for new programs. Even then, the ratings only measure how many sets are tuned in, not whether people liked or disliked the programs. As a result, these executives can only infer what they must do to improve programming; hence the term *inferential feedback*. Mass communicators are also subject to additional feedback, usually in the form of criticism in other media, such as a television critic writing a column in a newspaper.

The differences between the individual elements of interpersonal and mass communication change the very nature of the communication process. How those alterations influence the message itself and how the likelihood of successfully sharing meaning varies are shown in Figure 1–3. For example, the immediacy and directness of feedback in interpersonal communication free communicators to gamble, to experiment with different



Interpersonal Communication
You invite a friend to lunch.



Mass Communication
David E. Kelley produces *Boston Public*.

	Nature	Consequences	Nature	Consequences
Message	Highly flexible and alterable	You can change it in midstream. If feedback is negative, you can offer an alternative. Is feedback still negative? Take a whole new approach.	Identical, mechanically produced, simultaneously sent Inflexible, unalterable The completed <i>Boston Public</i> episode that is aired.	Once in the can, <i>Boston Public</i> cannot be changed. If a plot line or other communicative device isn't working with the audience, nothing can be done.
Interpreter A	One person—in this case, you	You know your mind. You can encode your own message to suit yourself, your values, your likes and dislikes.	A large, hierarchically structured organization—in this case, David E. Kelley Productions	Who really is interpreter A? David E. Kelley? The writers? The director? The actors? The network and its standards and practices people? The sponsors? All must agree, leaving little room for individual vision or experimentation.
Interpreter B	One or a few people, usually in direct contact with you and, to a greater or lesser degree, known to you—in this case, Chris	You can tailor your message specifically to Interpreter B. You can make relatively accurate judgments about B because of information present in the setting. Chris is a vegetarian; you don't suggest a steak house.	A large, heterogeneous audience known to interpreter A only in the most rudimentary way, little more than basic demographics—in this case, several million <i>Boston Public</i> viewers	Communication cannot be tailored to the wants, needs, and tastes of all audience members or even those of all members of some subgroup. Some more or less generally acceptable standard is set.
Feedback	Immediate and direct yes or no response	You know how successful your message is immediately. You can adjust your communication on the spot to maximize its effectiveness.	Delayed and inferential Even overnight ratings too late for this episode of <i>Boston Public</i> Moreover, ratings limited to telling the number of sets tuned in	Even if the feedback is useful, it is too late to be of value for this episode. In addition, it doesn't suggest how to improve the communication effort.
Result	Flexible, personally relevant, possibly adventurous, challenging, or experimental		Constrained by virtually every aspect of the communication situation A level of communication most likely to meet the greatest number of viewers' needs A belief that experimentation is dangerous A belief that to challenge the audience is to risk failure	

Figure 1–3 Elements of Interpersonal Communication and Mass Communication Compared.

approaches. Their knowledge of one another enables them to tailor their messages as narrowly as they wish. As a result, interpersonal communication is often personally relevant and possibly even adventurous and challenging. In contrast, the distance between participants in the mass communication process, imposed by the technology, creates a sort of “communication conservatism.” Feedback comes too late to enable corrections or alterations in communication that fails. The sheer number of people in many mass communication audiences makes personalization and specificity difficult. As a result, mass communication tends to be more constrained, less free. This does not mean, however, that it is less potent than interpersonal communication in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our world.

Media theorist James W. Carey (1975) recognized this and offered a **cultural definition of communication** that has had a profound impact on the way communication scientists and others have viewed the relationship between communication and culture. Carey wrote, “*Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed*” (p. 10).

Carey’s definition asserts that communication and reality are linked. Communication is a process embedded in our everyday lives that informs the way we perceive, understand, and construct our view of reality and the world. Communication is the foundation of our culture.

What Is Culture?

Culture is the learned behavior of members of a given social group. Many writers and thinkers have offered interesting expansions of this definition. Here are four examples, the first three from anthropologists, the last from a performing arts critic. These definitions highlight not only what culture *is* but also what culture *does*:

Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting. (M. Harris, 1983, p. 5)

Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art of museums. (R. Rosaldo, 1989, p. 26)

Culture is the medium evolved by humans to survive. Nothing is free from cultural influences. It is the keystone in civilization’s arch and is the medium through which all of life’s events must flow. We are culture. (E. T. Hall, 1976, p. 14)

Culture is an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and

develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (C. Geertz as cited in Taylor, 1991, p. 91)

CULTURE AS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED SHARED MEANING

Virtually all definitions of culture recognize that culture is *learned*. Recall the opening vignette. Even if this scenario does not exactly match your early mornings, you probably recognize its elements. Moreover, all of us are familiar with most, if not every, cultural reference in it. *Survivor*, *Rolling Stone*, McDonald's, Nike, *Dilbert*, Matchbox 20—all are points of reference, things that have some meaning for all of us. How did this come to be?

Creation and maintenance of a more or less common culture occurs through communication, including mass communication. When we talk to our friends; when a parent raises a child; when religious leaders instruct their followers; when teachers teach; when grandparents pass on recipes; when politicians campaign; when media professionals produce content that we read, listen to, and watch, meaning is being shared and culture is being constructed and maintained.

FUNCTIONS AND EFFECTS OF CULTURE

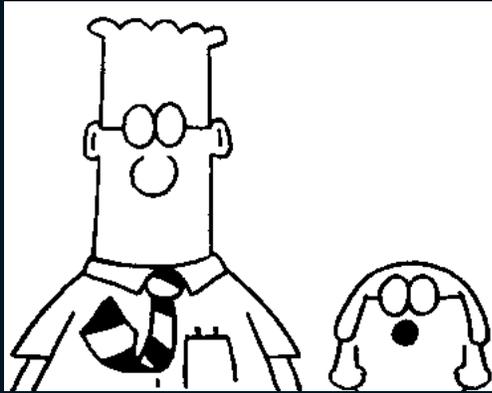
Culture serves a purpose. It helps us categorize and classify our experiences; it helps define us, our world, and our place in it. In doing so culture can have a number of sometimes conflicting effects.



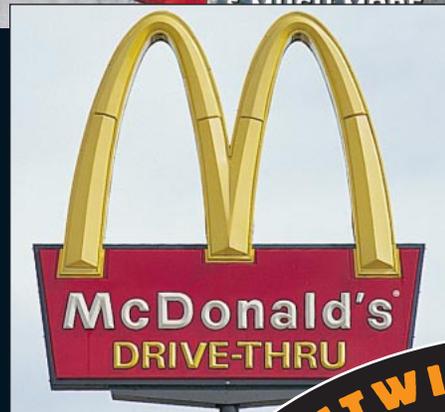
Limiting and Liberating Effects of Culture A culture's learned traditions and values can be seen as patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Culture limits our options and provides useful guidelines for behavior. For example, when conversing, you do not consciously consider, "Now, how far away should I stand? Am I too close?" You just stand where you stand. After a hearty meal with a friend's family, you do not engage in mental self-debate, "Should I burp? Yes! No! Arghhhh. . . ." Culture provides information that helps us make meaningful distinctions about right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, good and bad, attractive and unattractive, and so on. How does it do this?

Obviously, through communication. Through a lifetime of communication we have learned just what our culture expects of us. The two examples given here are positive results of culture's limiting effects. But culture's limiting effects can be negative, such as when we are unwilling or unable to move past patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, or when we entrust our "learning" to teachers whose interests are selfish, narrow, or otherwise not consistent with our own.

U.S. culture, for example, values thinness in women. How many women endure weeks of unhealthy diets and succumb to potentially dangerous surgical procedures in search of a body that for most is physically unattainable? How many men (and other women) never get to know,

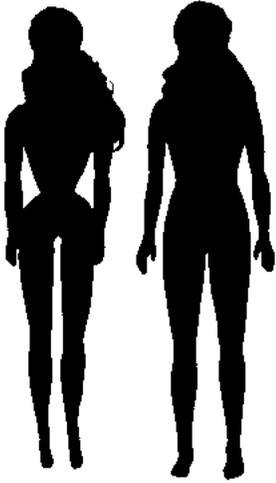


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These images have meaning for all of us, meaning that is socially constructed through communication in our culture. How many can you recognize? What specific meaning or meanings does each have for you? How did you develop each meaning? How closely do you think your meanings match those of your friends? Of your parents? What value is there—if any—in having shared meaning for these things in our everyday lives?





The Barbie doll (*left*) represents an unattainable ideal for American girls. In 1991, a rival, the Happy to Be Me doll (*right*), appeared on the scene. Happy's creator wanted to present a more realistic image to young, impressionable minds. Do you think the American public was ready for Happy?

like, or even love those women who cannot meet our culture's standards of thinness and beauty? Why did 25,000 teenaged girls, "unhappy with their bodies," undergo elective cosmetic surgery in 1999, a 100% increase over 1992 (Gerhart, 2000, p. 1E)?

Now consider how this situation may have come about. Our mothers did not bounce us on their knees when we were babies, telling us that thin was good and fat was bad. Think back, though, to the stories you were told and the television shows and movies you watched growing up. The heroines (or, more often, the beautiful love interests of the heroes) were invariably tall and thin. The bad guys were usually mean and fat. From Disney's depictions of Snow White, Cinderella, Beauty, Tinker Bell, and Pocahontas to the impossible dimensions of Barbie, the message is embedded in the conscious (and unconscious) mind of every girl and boy. Thin is in! In a recent reversal—either because it tired of the controversy or because it finally understood its possibly negative contribution to young girls' self-concept—Mattel, Barbie's manufacturer, announced in 1997 that it would henceforth give the doll more realistic body proportions.

This message—thin is in—and millions of others come to us primarily through the media, and although the people who produce these media images are not necessarily selfish or mean, their motives are undeniably financial. Their contribution to our culture's repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting is most certainly not primary among their concerns when preparing their communication.

Culture need not only limit. That media representations of female beauty often meet with debate and disagreement points up the fact that culture can be liberating as well. This is so because cultural values can be contested.

Especially in a pluralistic, democratic society such as ours, the **dominant culture**—the one that seems to hold sway with the majority of people—is often openly challenged. People do meet, find attractive, like, and even love people who do not fit the standard image of beauty. Additionally, media sometime present images that suggest different ideals of beauty and success. Actress Janeane Garofalo; television star Camryn Manheim; Christine Lahti, who played Dr. Kate Austin on television's *Chicago Hope*; talk show host and influential broadcasting executive Oprah Winfrey; and singer-actress Bette Midler all represent alternatives to our culture's idealized standards of beauty, and all have undeniable appeal (and power) on the big and small screens. Liberation from the limitations imposed by culture resides in our ability and willingness to learn and use *new* patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; to challenge existing patterns; and to create our own.

Defining, Differentiating, Dividing, and Uniting Effects of Culture

Have you ever made the mistake of calling a dolphin, porpoise, or even a whale a fish? Maybe you have heard others do it. This error occurs because when we think of fish we think, "lives in the water" and "swims." Fish are defined by their "aquatic culture." Because water-residing, swimming dol-



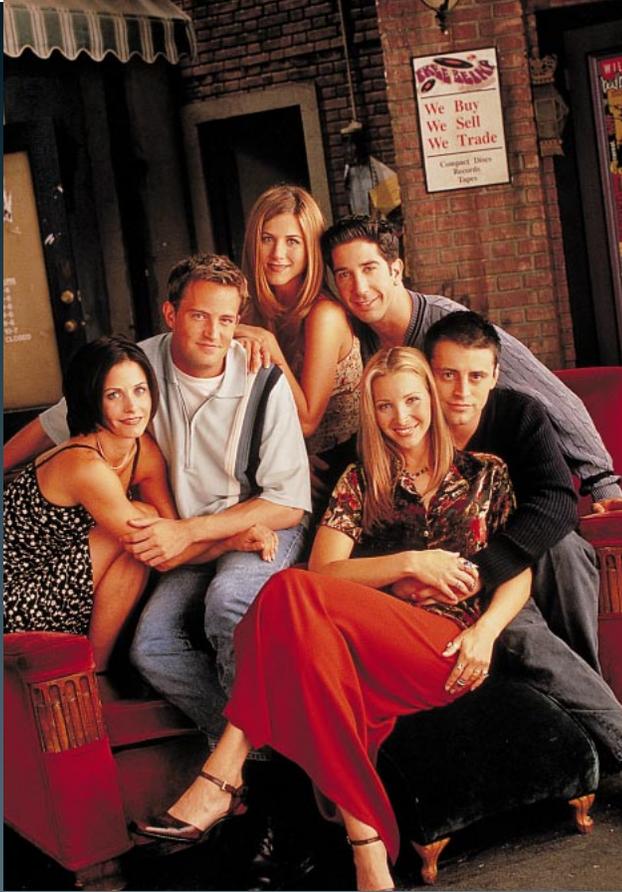
phins and porpoises share that culture, we sometimes forget that they are mammals, not fish.

We, too, are defined by our culture. We are citizens of the United States; we are Americans. If we travel to other countries, we will hear ourselves labeled “American,” and this label will conjure up stereotypes and expectations in the minds of those who use and hear it. The stereotype, whatever it may be, will probably fit us only incompletely, or perhaps hardly at all—perhaps we are dolphins in a sea full of fish. Nevertheless, being American defines us in innumerable important ways, both to others (more obviously) and to ourselves (less obviously).

Within this large, national culture, however, there are many smaller, **bounded cultures**. For example, we speak comfortably of Italian neighborhoods, fraternity row, the South, and the suburbs. Because of our cultural understanding of these categories, each expression communicates something about our expectations of these places. We think we can predict with a good deal of certainty the types of restaurants and shops we will find in the Italian neighborhood, even the kind of music we will hear escaping from open windows. We can predict the kinds of clothes and cars we will see on fraternity row, the likely behavior of shop clerks in the South, and the political orientation of the suburb’s residents. Moreover, the people within these cultures usually identify themselves as members of those bounded cultures. An individual may say, for example, “I am Italian American” or “I’m from the South.” These smaller cultures unite groups of people and enable them to see themselves as different from other groups around them. Thus, culture also serves to differentiate us from others.

In the United States, we generally consider this a good thing. We pride ourselves on our pluralism and our diversity and on the richness of the

Camryn Manheim of *The Practice*, Oprah Winfrey, and Christine Lahti are prominent women whose presentation in the media suggests different cultural ideals of beauty and success. Each represents an alternative to our culture’s idealized standards of beauty. How attractive do you find each woman to be? What is it about each that appeals to you?



Friends, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *Silk Stalkings*—these three television programs are aimed at different audiences, yet in each the characters share certain traits that mark them as attractive. Must people in real life look like these performers to be considered attractive? Successful? Good? The nine people shown are all slender, tall, and young. Yes, they are just make-believe television characters, but the producers of the shows on which they appear chose these people—as opposed to others—for a reason. What do you think it was? How well do you measure up to the cultural standard of beauty and attractiveness represented here? Do you ever wish that you could be just a bit more like these people? Why or why not?





Everyone heard and saw the same evidence in the 1994 O. J. Simpson murder trial. Why then were reactions to the verdict by Whites and African Americans so dramatically different? “Race” is too glib an answer. Can you explain this conflict in terms of culture?

cultural heritages represented within our borders. We enjoy moving from one bounded culture to another or from a bounded culture to the dominant national culture and back again.

Problems arise, however, when differentiation leads to division. Just as culture is constructed and maintained through communication, it is also communication (or miscommunication) that turns differentiation into division. We all know how communication can hurt, how words can convey lack of respect. Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman’s now notorious testimony in the O. J. Simpson murder trial is, sadly, a perfect example. Citing evidence of Fuhrman’s habitual use of derogatory labels for African Americans, Simpson’s lawyers effectively argued that a culture (the L.A. police department) that fostered a man like Fuhrman and allowed him to exist without censure could not possibly have been fair in its investigation of Simpson. The jury agreed; the nation was divided—along racial lines.

Yet, U.S. citizens of all colors, ethnicities, genders and gender preferences, nationalities, places of birth, economic strata, and intelligences often get along; in fact, we *can* communicate, *can* prosper, *can* respect one another’s differences. Culture can divide us, but culture also unites us. Our culture represents our collective experience. We converse easily with strangers because we share the same culture. We speak the same language, automatically understand how far apart to stand, appropriately use titles or first or last names, know how much to say, and know how much to leave unsaid. Through communication with people in our culture, we internalize cultural norms and values—those things that bind our many diverse bounded cultures into a functioning, cohesive society.

Defining Culture From this discussion of culture comes the definition of culture on which the remainder of this book is based:

Culture is the world made meaningful; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and thereby shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.

Mass Communication and Culture

Culture defines our realities, but who contributes to the construction and maintenance of culture? Because culture is constructed and maintained through communication, it is in communication that cultural power resides. And because mass media are such a significant part of the modern world, more and more attention is being paid to the interaction between mass communication and culture.

EXAMINING MASS COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE



Since the introduction of the first mass circulation newspapers in the 1830s, media theorists and social critics have argued about the importance and power of the media industries and mass communication. In their most general form, these debates have been shaped by three closely related dichotomies.

Micro- Versus Macro-Level Effects People are concerned about the effects of media. Does television cause violence? Do beer ads cause increased alcohol consumption? Does pornography cause rape? The difficulty here is with the word *cause*. Although there is much scientific evidence that media cause many behaviors, there is also much evidence that they do not.

As long as we debate the effects of media only on individuals, we remain blind to media's greatest influences (both positive and negative) on the way we live. For example, when the horrific events at Littleton, Colorado's Columbine High School in 1999 once again brought public debate on the issue of media effects, USA Network copresident Steve Brenner was forced to defend his industry. "Every American has seen hundreds of films, hundreds of news stories, hundreds of depictions, thousands of cartoons," he said, "Millions don't go out and shoot people" (as quoted in Albiniaik, 1999, p. 8).

Who can argue with this? For most people media have relatively few *direct* effects at the personal or **micro level**. But we live in a culture in which people *have* shot people or are willing to use violence to settle disputes, at least in part because of the cultural messages embedded in our media fare. The hidden, but much more important, impact of media operates at the cultural or **macro level**. Violence on television contributes to



the cultural climate in which real-world violence becomes more acceptable. Sure, perhaps none of us have gone out and shot people. But do you have bars on the windows of your home? Are there parts of town where you would rather not walk alone? Do you vote for the “tough on crime” candidate over the “education” candidate?

The micro-level view is that televised violence has little impact because most people are not directly affected. The macro-level view is that televised violence has a great impact because it influences the cultural climate.

Administrative Versus Critical Research **Administrative research** asks questions about the immediate, observable influence of mass communication. Does a commercial campaign sell more cereal? Does an expanded Living section increase newspaper circulation? Did *Mortal Kombat* inspire the killings at Columbine High School? For decades the only proofs of media effects that science (and therefore the media industries, regulators, and audiences) would accept were those with direct, observable, immediate impacts. Sixty years ago, however, Paul Lazarsfeld, the “Father of Social Science Research” and possibly the most important mass communication researcher of all time, warned of the danger of this narrow view. He believed **critical research**—asking larger questions about what kind of nation we are

What are the effects of televised violence? The debate swirls as different people mean different things by “effects.” This violent scene is from *Oz*.

Figure 1–4 Calvin understands the difference between administrative and critical research.

Calvin and Hobbes © 1995 Watterson. Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All Rights Reserved.



building, what kind of people we are becoming—would serve our culture better. Writing long before the influence of television and information access through the World Wide Web, he stated:

Today we live in an environment where skyscrapers shoot up and elevateds (commuter trains) disappear overnight; where news comes like shock every few hours; where continually new news programs keep us from ever finding out details of previous news; and where nature is something we drive past in our cars, perceiving a few quickly changing flashes which turn the majesty of a mountain range into the impression of a motion picture. Might it not be that we do not build up experiences the way it was possible decades ago . . . ? (1941, p. 12)

Administrative research concerns itself with direct causes and effects; critical research looks at larger, possibly more significant cultural questions. As Figure 1–4 shows, cartoon character Calvin understands the distinction well.

Transmissional Versus Ritual Perspective Last is the debate that led Professor Carey to articulate his cultural definition of communication. The **transmissional perspective** sees media as senders of information for the purpose of control; that is, media either have effects on our behavior or they do not. The **ritual perspective**, Carey wrote, views media not as a means of transmitting “messages in space” but as central to “the maintenance of society in time.” Mass communication is “not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (1975, p. 6). In other words, the ritual perspective is necessary to understand the *cultural* importance of mass communication.

Consider an ad for Budweiser beer. What message is being transmitted? Buy Bud, of course. So people either do or do not buy Bud. The message either controls or does not control people’s beer-buying behavior. That is the transmissional perspective. But what is happening culturally in that ad? What reality about alcohol and socializing is shared? Can young people really have fun in social settings without alcohol? What constitutes a good-looking man or woman? What does success look like in the United States? The ritual perspective illuminates these messages—the culturally important content of the ad.



The transmissional message in this beer ad is obvious—buy Budweiser. The ritual message is another thing altogether. What is it?

MASS COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Because culture can limit and divide or liberate and unite, it offers us infinite opportunities to use communication for good—if we choose to do so. Carey wrote,

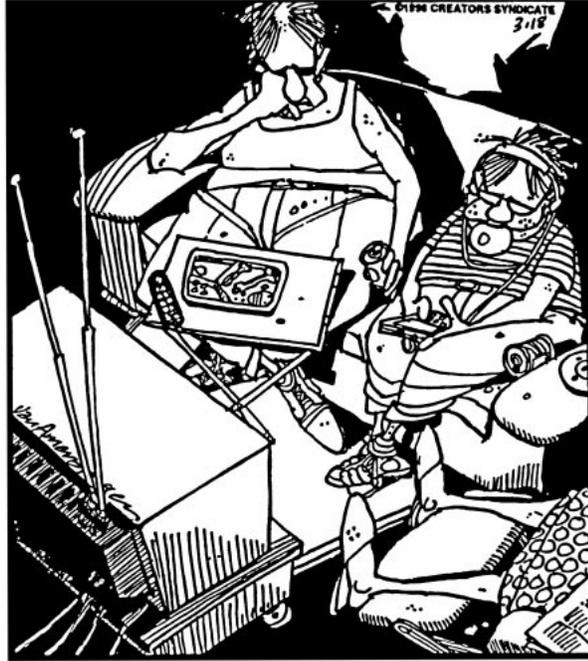
Because we have looked at each new advance in communication technology as opportunities for politics and economics, we have devoted them, almost exclusively, to government and trade. We have rarely seen them as opportunities to expand [our] powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience. (1975, pp. 20–21)

Who are “we” in this quote? *We* are everyone involved in creating and maintaining the culture that defines us. *We* are the people involved in mass media industries and the people who comprise their audiences. Together we allow mass communication not only to occur but to contribute to the creation and maintenance of culture.

Everyone involved has an obligation to participate responsibly. For people working in the media industries, this means professionally and ethically creating and transmitting content. For audience members, it means behaving as critical and thoughtful consumers of that content. Two ways to understand our opportunities and our responsibilities in the mass communication process are to view the mass media as our cultural storytellers and to conceptualize mass communication as a forum.

Mass Media as Cultural Storytellers A culture’s values and beliefs reside in the stories it tells. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? How many of your childhood heroines were chubby? How many good guys dressed in black? How many heroines lived happily ever after without

Figure 1–5 Storytellers play an important role in helping us define ourselves.



There we are, huddled around the tribal campfire, telling and retelling the stories of our people.

marrying Prince Charming? Probably not very many. Our stories help define our realities, shaping the ways we think, feel, and act. Storytellers have a remarkable opportunity to shape culture (Figure 1–5). They also have a responsibility to do so in as professional and ethical a way as possible.

At the same time, you, the audience for these stories, also have opportunities and responsibilities. You use these stories not only to be entertained but to learn about the world around you, to understand the values, the way things work, and how the pieces fit together. You have a responsibility to question the tellers and their stories, to interpret the stories in ways consistent with larger or more important cultural values and truths, to be thoughtful, to reflect on the stories' meanings and what they say about you and your culture. To do less is to miss an opportunity to construct your own meaning and, thereby, culture.

For many years, for example, the makers of Fritos corn chips advertised their product using very brief stories (commercials) that had as the lead character an animated Mexican outlaw, the Frito Bandito. To many he was only a cartoon character, an imaginary spokesperson for an insignificant snack food. What was there to think about, to reflect on? To many others who share our culture, however, the Frito Bandito was the televised personification of the worst stereotype of people of Mexican

descent—small, dark, violent, and sneaky. Only when people began to question and reject the manufacturer’s 30- and 60-second stories of a corn chip-crazed outlaw did the Frito Bandito disappear.

Mass Communication as Cultural Forum Imagine a giant courtroom where we discuss and debate our culture—what it is, and what we want it to be. What do we think about welfare? Single motherhood? Labor unions? Nursing homes? What is the meaning of “successful,” “good,” “loyal,” “moral,” “honest,” “beautiful,” “patriotic”? We have cultural definitions or understandings of all these things and more. Where do they come from? How do they develop, take shape, and mature?

Mass communication has become a primary forum for the debate about our culture. Logically, then, the most powerful voices in the forum have the most power to shape our definitions and understandings. Where should that power reside—with the media industries or with their audiences? If you answer “media industries,” you must demand that members of these industries act professionally and ethically. If you answer “audiences,” you must insist that individual audience members be thoughtful and critical of the media messages they consume. The forum is only as good, fair, and honest as those who participate in it.

Scope and Nature of Mass Media

No matter how we choose to view the process of mass communication, it is impossible to deny that an enormous portion of our lives is spent in interaction with mass media. On a typical Sunday night, 37 million people in the United States will tune in a prime-time television show. Television sets are in 98% of all our homes, VCRs in over 80%. The television set is on for more than 7½ hours a day in a typical U.S. household. Two thirds of all U.S. adults will read a newspaper each day; two-thirds will listen to the radio for some part of every day. Americans spent \$6.1 billion on video games in 1999, and the typical U.S. household today spends more on media than on either clothes or health care. In the first 6 months of 1999, nearly 3 billion MP3 audio files were downloaded from the Internet, or 17 million *every day*. The average person spends 3,523 hours a year—60% of his or her waking hours—consuming mass media content. (Figure 1–6 provides data on several individual media.)



Despite the pervasiveness of mass media in our lives, many of us are dissatisfied with or critical of the media industries’ performance and much of the content provided. A 1995 survey conducted by the Times-Mirror Center for the People and the Press concluded that “two out of three members of the public had nothing good to say about the media.”

Our ambivalence—we criticize, yet we consume—comes in part from our uncertainties about the relationships among the elements of mass communication. What is the role of technology? What is the role of money? And what is *our* role in the mass communication process?

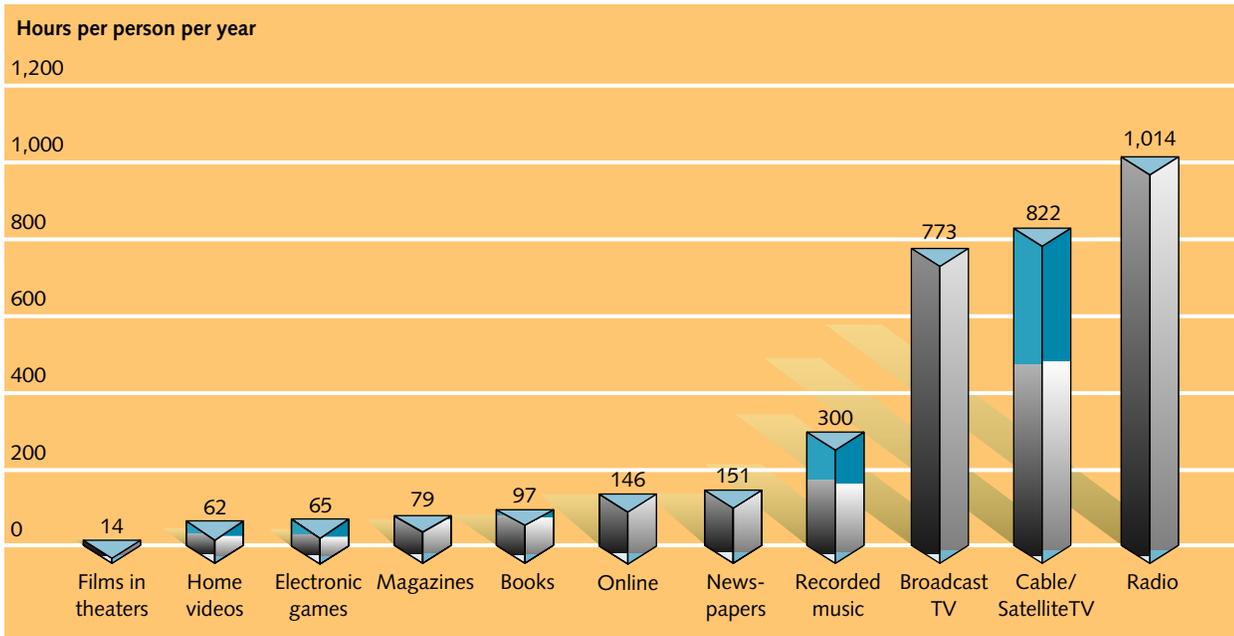


Figure 1–6 United States Media Consumption, 2001.

Source: Veronis, Suhler and Associates, <www.veronissuhler.com>.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

To some thinkers, it is machines and their development that drive economic and cultural change. This idea is referred to as **technological determinism**. Certainly there can be no doubt that movable type contributed to the Protestant Reformation and the decline of the Catholic Church’s power in Europe or that television changed the way members of American families interact. Those who believe in technological determinism would argue that these changes in the cultural landscape were the inevitable result of new technology.

But others see technology as more neutral and claim that the way people *use* technology is what gives it significance. This perspective accepts technology as one of many factors that shape economic and cultural change; technology’s influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it.

This disagreement about the power of technology is at the heart of the controversy surrounding the new communication technologies. Are we more or less powerless in the wake of advances like the Internet, the World Wide Web, and instant global audio and visual communication? If we are at the mercy of technology, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technologies are indeed neutral and their power resides in *how* we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever kind of culture we want.

Technology does have an impact on communication. At the very least it changes the basic elements of communication (see Figure 1–3). What

technology does not do is relieve us of our obligation to use mass communication responsibly and wisely.

THE ROLE OF MONEY

Money, too, alters communication. It shifts the balance of power; it tends to make audiences products rather than consumers.

The first newspapers were financially supported by their readers; the money they paid for the paper covered its production and distribution. But in the 1830s a new form of newspaper financing emerged. Publishers began selling their papers for a penny—much less than it cost to produce and distribute them. Because so many more papers were sold at this bargain price, publishers could “sell” advertising space based on their readership. What they were actually selling to advertisers was not space on the page—it was readers. How much they could charge advertisers was directly related to how much product (how many readers) they could produce for them.

This new type of publication changed the nature of mass communication. The goal of the process was no longer for audience and media to create meaning together. Rather, it was to sell those readers to a third participant—advertisers.

Some observers think this was a devastatingly bad development, not only in the history of mass communication but in the history of democracy. It robbed people of their voice, or at least made the voices of the advertisers more powerful. Others think it was a huge advance for both mass communication and democracy because it vastly expanded the media, broadening and deepening communication. Models showing these two different ways of viewing mass communication are presented in the box “Audience as Consumer or Audience as Product.” Which model makes the most sense to you? Which do you think is the most accurate?

The goals of media professionals will be questioned repeatedly throughout this book. For now, keep in mind that ours is a capitalist economic system and that media industries are businesses. Movie producers must sell tickets, book publishers must sell books, and even public broadcasting has bills to pay.

This does not mean, however, that the media are or must be slaves to profit. Our task is to understand the constraints placed on these industries by their economics and then demand that, within those limits, they perform ethically and responsibly. We can do this only by being thoughtful, critical consumers of the media.

Current Trends in Mass Communication

Today, technology and money continue to alter the mass communication process. There is a growing **concentration of ownership** and conglomeration, rapid globalization, increased audience fragmentation,



Audience as Consumer or Audience as Product?

People base their judgments of media performance and content on the way they see themselves fitting into the economics of the media industry. Businesses operate to serve their consumers and make a profit. The consumer comes first, then, but who *is* the consumer in our mass media system? This is a much debated issue among media practitioners and media critics. Consider the following models.

	Producer	Product	Consumer
Basic U.S. Business Model	A manufacturer . . .	produces a product . . .	for consumers who choose to buy or not. The manufacturer must satisfy the consumer. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Cereal: Rice Krispies as Product, Public as Consumer	Kellogg's . . .	produces Rice Krispies . . .	for us, the consumers. If we buy Rice Krispies, Kellogg's makes a profit. Kellogg's must satisfy us. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Television (A): Audience as Product, Advertisers as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces audiences (using its programming) . . .	for advertisers. If they buy NBC's audiences, NBC makes a profit. NBC must satisfy its consumers, the advertisers. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Television (B): Programming as Product, Audience as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces (or distributes) programming . . .	for us, the audience. If we watch NBC's shows, NBC makes a profit. NBC must satisfy us. Power resides here.

The first three models assume that the consumer *buys* the product; that is, the consumer is the one with the money and therefore the one who must be satisfied. The last model makes a different assumption. It sees the audience, even though it does not buy anything, as sufficiently important to NBC's profit-making ability to force NBC to consider its interests above others' (even those of advertisers). Which model do you think best represents the economics of U.S. mass media?

hypercommercialism, and a steady erosion of traditional distinctions among media—that is, **convergence**. We will return to these themes in later chapters, but here we will discuss them in terms of their impact on the mass communication process.



CONCENTRATION OF OWNERSHIP AND CONGLOMERATION

Ownership of media companies is increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Through mergers, acquisitions, buyouts, and hostile takeovers, a very small number of large conglomerates is coming to own more and more of the world's media outlets. For example, in 1999 Viacom bought CBS for \$37 billion, creating a company owning 34 television stations, 173 radio stations, a national television network, cable television networks such as MTV, USA, Nickelodeon, Showtime, Comedy Central, and the Sundance

Channel, publishing houses such as Simon & Schuster, the world's largest outdoor advertising company, and Paramount Pictures, one of the world's leading movie studios. Three years earlier Disney bought Capital Cities/ABC, and Time Warner bought Turner Broadcasting. News Corporation, owner of the Fox Television Network, reaches 40% of all U.S. homes with its 35 owned and operated television stations and virtually the entire country with its broadcast and cable networks.

Concentration is a reality in nonbroadcast media as well. In June 1998 Disney bought Internet search engine Infoseek, and in 1999 NBC bought a share of search engine Snap! As 1998 closed, AOL paid \$4.2 billion for the Internet's premier browser, Netscape. And just after 1999 opened, @Home, the high-speed Internet access company that uses cable television lines to serve its subscribers, bought Web search engine Excite for \$6.7 billion, both now controlled by major stockholder AT&T.

Media observer Ben Bagdikian reported that in 1997 the number of media corporations with "dominant power in society" was 10 (in March 2000, *Harper's* set the number at just 6), and this "new communications cartel" has the power to "surround almost every man, woman, and child in the country with controlled images and words." This places in their hands, Bagdikian argues, the "ability to exert influence that in many ways is greater than that of schools, religion, parents, and even government itself" (as quoted in Goldstein, 1998, p. 52). To critic Eric Effron, the "serious consequence" of concentration is "the story not told, the questions not asked, the power not challenged" (1999, p. 47). Journalist and social critic Bill Moyers calls this concentration of media ownership "the central issue that faces us as a democratic society" (as quoted in Moore, 1999, p. A11).

Media critic Douglas Dowd explained this threat to our democratic society, writing, "The media giants are . . . at the very heart of economic power—with a handful of companies dominating the main flow of information and entertainment. Their political and economic interests are no different in general from those of General Motors, EXXON, USX, or DuPont. Their two principal sources of income are from advertising, designed and paid for by the latter, and from the major political parties and their candidates. Does this suggest a conspiracy to shape opinion and polls and politics and society? Doubtless such a conspiracy could be arranged, were it seen as necessary. It does not seem to be necessary. There is instead an 'innocent' confluence of interests as when tiny streams pulled by gravity ultimately form a great river" (1997, pp. 26–27). And media legal scholar Charles H. Tillinghast helped identify those tiny streams: "One need not be a devotee of conspiracy theories to understand that journalists, like other human beings, can judge where their interests lie, and what risks are and are not prudent, given their desire to continue to eat and feed the family" (2000, pp. 145–146).

There is no more obvious example of media concentration than what was at the time the largest corporate merger in history, the \$184 billion uniting in January 2000 of the world's largest producer of "traditional" media content, Time Warner, and the world's largest-by-far Internet

provider, America Online (AOL). Speaking specifically of the merger's impact on the Internet, *Washington Post* media writer Howard Kurtz wrote, "The creation of the world's largest media and cyberspace company seems to muddy the original dream of the Internet as a democratizing force that would enable thousands of individual voices to compete with major media organs. But the rapid expansion of newspaper, magazine, and network (television) sites on the Web has given it a decidedly corporate cast" (2000, p. 7). Kurtz quoted Mark Crispin Miller, director of New York University's Project on Media Ownership, "Is there something good about one very large entity being able to reach everybody?" and James Ledbetter, New York bureau chief of *Industry Standard* magazine, "The wonders of the information age are in the hands of very few companies" (2000, p. 7).

Closely related to concentration is **conglomeration**, the increase in the ownership of media outlets by larger, nonmedia companies. "The threat is clear," wrote media critic Steven Brill, "The bigger these conglomerates get, the less important their journalism gets and the more vulnerable that journalism becomes to the conglomerate's other interests. . . . These mega-companies, therefore, present a new, sweeping, and unprecedented threat to free expression, independent journalism, and a vibrant, free marketplace of ideas. Their sheer enormity makes it almost routine that they are covering a subject involving one of their own divisions or some competitor to one of their enterprises. And their involvement in so much other than journalism threatens to water down the values that would assure that they deal with those conflicts honorably" (2000, pp. 26–27).

According to many observers inside and outside the media industries, the true impact of conglomerations was on display in the media's behavior during President Bill Clinton's impeachment crisis, a performance widely assailed as questionable at best. For example, at a 1999 *Columbia Journalism Review* forum titled "How the Press is Shaping (or Misshaping) Politics," historian Arthur Schlesinger argued that the media's failures were "associated with a change in the structure, a competitive structure, of the press." New York University law professor Burt Neuborne concurred. "The press," he said, "has been subsumed into a market psychology, because they are now owned by large conglomerates, of which they are simply a piece. And they (news organizations) are expected to contribute their piece of the profit to the larger pie. You don't have people controlling the press anymore with a fervent sense of responsibility to the First Amendment. Concentrating on who's sleeping with whom, on sensationalism, is concentrating on essentially irrelevant issues" (as quoted in Konner, 1999, p. 6).

There are, however, less dire observations on concentration and conglomerations. Many telecommunications professionals argue that concentration and conglomerations are not only inevitable but necessary in a telecommunications environment that is increasingly fragmented and internationalized; companies must maximize their number of outlets to reach as much of the divided and far-flung audience as possible. If they

do not, they will become financially insecure and that is an even greater threat to free and effective mediated communication because advertisers and other well-monied forces will have increased influence over them.

Another defense of concentration and conglomeration has to do with **economies of scale**; that is, bigger can in fact sometimes be better because the relative cost of an operation's output declines as the size of that endeavor grows. For example, the cost of collecting the news or producing a television program does not increase significantly when that news report or television program is distributed over 2 outlets, 20 outlets, or 100 outlets. The additional revenues from these other points of distribution can then be plowed back into even better news and programming. In the case of conglomeration, the parallel argument is that revenues from a conglomerate's nonmedia enterprises can be used to support quality work by its media companies.

The potential impact of this **oligopoly**—a concentration of media industries into an ever smaller number of companies—on the mass communication process is enormous. What becomes of shared meaning when the people running communication companies are more committed to the financial demands of their corporate offices than they are to their audiences, who are supposedly their partners in the communication process? What becomes of the process itself when media companies grow more removed from those with whom they communicate? And what becomes of the culture that is dependent on that process when concentration and conglomeration limit the diversity of perspective and information?

GLOBALIZATION



Closely related to the concentration of media ownership is globalization. It is primarily large, multinational conglomerates that are doing the lion's share of media acquisitions. The potential impact of globalization on the mass communication process speaks to the issue of diversity of expression. Will distant, anonymous, foreign corporations, each with vast holdings in a variety of nonmedia businesses, use their power to shape news and entertainment content to suit their own ends? Opinion is divided. Some observers feel that this concern is misplaced—the pursuit of profit will force these corporations to respect the values and customs of the nations and cultures where they operate. Some observers have a less optimistic view. They point to the 1998 controversy surrounding the publication of *East and West* as a prime example of the dangers of media globalization.

HarperCollins, a subsidiary of News Corporation, decided not to publish this book from the last Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, even though the publisher had given Patten a hefty advance and early reviews of the manuscript were glowing. Internal memos made it clear that News Corporation executives, including Chairman Rupert Murdoch, thought the text was too critical of the Chinese government because Patten faulted

Beijing for its lack of commitment to democracy. News Corporation had significant business dealings with the Chinese government and had ambitions of even more. In addition, News Corporation had already pulled BBC World Television from its Asian television service because that respected news source had aired a speech critical of China's human rights record.

The world's largest untapped audience again figured in a scenario that frightened critics of globalization. Just weeks after his company bought CBS, Viacom CEO Summer Redstone attended the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Communism in China where he announced, "Journalistic integrity must prevail in the final analysis. But that doesn't mean that journalistic integrity should be exercised in a way that is unnecessarily offensive to the countries in which you operate" (as quoted in Baker, 1999, p. 6B). Globalization's opponents fairly asked the question, What message has the boss just sent his new employees at historically respected CBS News? What stories will go untold, what questions unasked, what power unchallenged?

Yet defenders of increased globalization point to the need to reach a fragmented and widespread audience—the same factor that fuels concentration—as encouraging this trend. They also cite the growing economic clout of emerging democracies (and the need to reach the people who live in them) and the increasing intertwining of the world's economies as additional reasons globalization is necessary for the economic survival of media businesses.

The U.S. media holdings of four multinational corporations are shown in the box "The Globalization of Ownership of U.S. Mass Media." Of which of these were you aware?

AUDIENCE FRAGMENTATION

The nature of the other partner in the mass communication process is changing too. The audience is becoming more fragmented, its segments more narrowly defined. It is becoming less of a mass audience.

Before the advent of television, radio and magazines were national media. Big national radio networks brought news and entertainment to the entire country. Magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* once offered limited text and many pictures to a national audience. But television could do these things better. It was radio with pictures; it was magazines with motion. To survive, radio and magazines were forced to find new functions. No longer able to compete on a mass scale, these media targeted smaller audiences that were alike in some important characteristic and therefore more attractive to specific advertisers. So now we have magazines like *Ski* and *Internet World*, and radio station formats such as Country, Urban, and Lithuanian. This phenomenon is known as **narrowcasting, niche marketing, or targeting**.

Technology has wrought the same effect on television. Before the advent of cable television, people could choose from among the three commercial broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC—one noncommercial



The Globalization of Ownership of U.S. Mass Media

Several international conglomerates have significant holdings in U.S. media companies whose names are quite familiar. Here are the holdings of just four.

BERTELSMANN (GERMANY)

Books		Magazines	Recordings	Multimedia
Bantam	Literary Guild	<i>McCall's</i>	RCA Records	America Online
Doubleday	Doubleday Book Club	<i>YM</i>	BMG Music	Rocket Science
Dell	Crossings	<i>Family Circle</i>	BMG Catalogue	BMG Interactive
Random House	Random House Trade Publishing Group	<i>Fitness</i>	Arista	
Knopf	Random House Information Publishing Group	<i>Parents</i>	Killer Tracks	
Crown	Random House Children's Publishing	<i>Bold Type</i>	RCA Victor	
Ballantine	Random House Audio	<i>American Homestyle</i>	BMG Classics	
Fodor's	Random House Value Publishing	<i>Child</i>	BMG Music Publishing	
Broadway Books	Random House New Media	<i>Computer & Co.</i>	BMG Music Service	
Bantam Doubleday	barnesandnoble.com	<i>rtv</i>	BMG Special Products	
Dell Books for Young Readers	Science Fiction Book Club		Windham Hill Group	
Bantam Doubleday Audio	BOL		Bugjuice	
Doubleday Direct			Peeps Republic	
Dell-Delacorte			Twang This!	
Transworld				

NEWS CORPORATION (AUSTRALIA)

Magazines		Multimedia		Newspapers
Triangle Publications	<i>The Weekly Standard</i>	Delphi	News America Digital Publishing	<i>New York Post</i>
<i>TV Guide</i>	<i>News America Marketing</i>	MCI Online	News Internet Services	
<i>TVSM</i>	<i>In Store</i>	NDS Americas		
<i>TV Total</i>	<i>FSI</i>	News Advanced Technologies		
<i>Cable Guide</i>				
Books				
HarperCollins	HarperBusiness	Zondervan Publishing House	William Morrow Cookbooks	HarperEntertainment
Regan Books	HarperAudio	Quill	Greenwillow Books	HarperInformation
Cliff Street Books	HarperCollins Children's Books	William Morrow	Laura Geringer Books	Access Travel
HarperFlamingo	HarperPaperbacks	HarperTorch	Tempest	Branded Books
HarperPrism	HarperPerennial	Eos	The Ecco Press	Joanna Cotler Books
HarperSanFrancisco	Voyager	HarperResource	Amistad Press	HarperTrophy
HarperEdge			Avon	Harper Festival
Video/Film				
20th Century Fox	f/x Cable Network	KCOP, Los Angeles, CA	WNYW, New York, NY	KRIV, Houston, TX
Fox (Network) Television	35 television stations, including:	KDVR, Denver, CO	WWOR, New York, NY	KSTU, Salt Lake City, UT
Fox Video	KBRC, Birmingham, AL	KFTC, Fort Collins, CO	WGHP, High Point, NC	Fox Entertainment
Fox Cable Network	KTTV, Los Angeles, CA	WFLD, Chicago, IL	WTXF, Philadelphia, PA	Fox Kid's Network
		WFXT, Boston, MA	WHBQ, Memphis, TN	Fox Sports

(continued)

NEWS CORPORATION (AUSTRALIA), continued

Video/Film		Recordings		
Fox Sports Net	Fox Sports Bay Area	FIT TV	TV Guide Channel	20th Century Fox Records
Fox Sports South	Fox Sports Chicago	The Health Network	Fox Filmed Entertainment	
Fox Sports Pittsburgh	Fox Sports Cincinnati	Fox Sports World	Fox 2000	
Fox Sports Southeast	Fox Sports Intermountain West	National Geographic Cable Channel	Fox Searchlight	
Fox Sports Midwest	Fox Sports New England	Golf Channel	Fox Family Films	
Fox Sports Rocky Mountain	Fox Sports New York	The Family Channel	Fox Animation Studios	
Fox Sports Arizona	Fox Sports Ohio	MTM Entertainment	Twentieth Century Fox Home	
Fox Sports Northwest	Fox Sports Southwest	Fox News Channel	Twentieth Century Fox T.V.	
Fox Sports West	FXM	Outdoor Life		
Fox Sports West #2	Echostar	Speedvision		
Fox Sports Detroit	Madison Square Garden Network			

SEAGRAM (CANADA)

Video/Film		Multimedia	
Cinema International	Multimedia Entertainment	Working Title Television	Universal Interactive
United International	USA Networks	Havoc Inc.	Interplay
MCA TV	October Films	Island Pictures	Universal Studios New Media Group
USA Cable Network	Interscope Communications	Egg Pictures	Universal Studios Online
Universal Studios	Propaganda Films	Def Pictures	Universal.com
Universal Pictures	Propaganda Television	Dirty Hand Productions	Universal Digital Arts
October Films	Polygram Films	The Jones Company	GetMusic
V Studios Home Video	Polygram Television	Vision Video	
United International Pictures	Polygram Television USA	Abbey Home Entertainment	
Television Production and Distribution	Polygram Television International	Satellite/Cable TV	
Universal Television Group	Polygram Video	Sundance Channel	
Brillstein-Grey Entertainment	Gramercy Pictures	Time Warner (26.8 million shares)	
Universal Studios Home Video	Working Title Films	Cineplex Odeon Corporation	
	Universal Pay Television		

public broadcasting station, and, in larger markets, maybe an independent station or two. Now, with cable, satellite, and VCRs, people have literally thousands of viewing options. The television audience has been fragmented. To attract advertisers, each channel now must find a more specific group of people to make up its viewership. Nickelodeon targets kids, for example; Nick at Night appeals to baby boomers; Fox Television aims at young urban viewers; and Bravo seeks upper-income older people.

If the nature of the media's audience is changing, then the mass communication process must also change. The audience in mass communication is typically a large, varied group about which the media industries know only the most superficial information. What will happen as smaller, more specific audiences become better known to their partners in the process of making meaning? What will happen to the national culture that binds us as we become increasingly fragmented into demographically tar-

SEAGRAM (CANADA), continued

Recordings

MCA Records	Interscope	Motown	Universal Music International	London
Geffen/DGC	A&M	MCA Records Nashville	MCA Music Publishing	Phillips Classics
Decca	Deutsche Grammophon	Universal Records	All Nations Catalog	Polydor
GRP	Island	Hip-O Records	Universal Concerts	Verve
Rising Tide	Mercury	Universal Music and Video Distribution	Def Jam	PolyGram

SONY (JAPAN)

Video/Film

Columbia Pictures	Wireless Telecommunications	Phoenix Pictures	Sony Online
Sony Pictures Classics	JumboTron	Sony Pictures Entertainment	Sony Play Station
TriStar Pictures	Columbia TriStar	Sony/Loews Theaters	Psygnosis Limited
Columbia TriStar Television	Columbia TriStar Television Distribution	Sony-IMAX Theater	TheStation@sony.com
Columbia TriStar Home Video	The Game Show Network	Magic Johnson Theatres	Jeopardy Online
WEB TV	Jim Henson Productions	Loews-Star Theaters	Wheel of Fortune Online
Digital Video Discs	Mandalay Entertainment	Metreon	Columbia-TriStar Interactive

Multimedia

Recordings

CBS Records	Sony Wonder	550 Music	Soho Square	Masterworks
Columbia Records	Sony Music Products	Epic Soundtrack	Dance Pool	SEON
Sony Music	Sony Music Soundtrack	Shotput Records	Mambo	Sony Music Publishing
Relativity Records	Sony Broadway	Relativity Entertainment	Rubenstein	Columbia House
Epic Records	WORK	RED Distribution	Squatt	Music Choice
Legacy	Crave	Harmony Records	Sony Classical	
Sony Music Nashville	57 Records	Sony Music International	Arc of Light	

What implications do you see for the trend represented by these holdings?

Source: <www.cjr.org/owners> (October, 2000).

geted **taste publics**—groups of people bound by little more than an interest in a given form of media content?

HYPERCOMMERCIALISM

The costs involved in acquiring numerous or large media outlets, domestic and international, and of reaching an increasingly fragmented audience must be recouped somehow. Selling more advertising on existing and new media and identifying additional ways to combine content and commercials are the two most common strategies. This leads to what media critic Robert McChesney calls **hypercommercialism**. McChesney explained, “Concentrated media control permits the largest media firms to increasingly commercialize their output with less and less fear of consumer reprisal” (1999a, pp. 34–35). The rise in the number of commercial minutes

in a typical broadcast or cable show is evident to most viewers. The American Association of Advertising Agencies reported that in 1999 there were 16 minutes and 43 seconds of advertising in an average network television prime-time hour, a 21.8% increase from 1991. ABC's *Norm*, for example, contained 10 minutes and 19 seconds of commercials during its 30-minute broadcast (Jessell, 2000).

The sheer growth in the amount of advertising is one troublesome aspect of hypercommercialism. But for many observers the increased mixing of commercial and noncommercial media content is even more troubling. For example, a January 1999 issue of *Time* magazine was devoted exclusively to "The Future of Medicine." The entire issue had only one advertiser—pharmaceutical company Pfizer—and Pfizer was involved as an "editorial representative" in the production of the issue's editorial (non-advertising) matter ("The Future," 1999). MTV explicitly informs advertisers that it provides editorial coverage and promotional tie-ins only to those movie studios that purchase large amounts of advertising on MTV (Shapiro, 1998). NBC invited its own evening news anchor Tom Brokaw to its *Today Show* four times in 6 weeks to talk about his book, *The Greatest Generation*. NBC's prime-time news magazine, *Dateline NBC*, devoted a full hour to the best-seller. Later, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the network owned a 25% interest in the book. Many radio stations now accept payment from record companies to play their songs, an activity once illegal and called **payola**. It is now quite acceptable as long as the "sponsorship" is acknowledged on the air.

Again, as with globalization and concentration, where critics see damage to the integrity of the media themselves and disservice to their audiences, defenders of hypercommercialism argue that it is simply the economic reality of today's media world.

EROSION OF DISTINCTIONS AMONG MEDIA: CONVERGENCE

Beginning with his 1996 hit "Telling Lies," David Bowie and his label, Virgin Records, have released the rocker's music online before doing so on disc in record stores. HBO produces first-run films for its own cable television channel, immediately releasing them on tape for VCR rental. Both former *New Republic* editor Michael Kinsley and former Republican presidential hopeful Pete DuPont publish political magazines exclusively on the Web. There are more than 4,200 U.S. commercial, nearly 1,200 U.S. noncommercial, and more than 3,000 non-U.S. radio stations delivering their broadcasts over the Web. *Pokémon* is as much a 30-minute TV commercial for licensed merchandise as it is a cartoon.

You can read the *New York Times* or *Time* magazine and hundreds of other newspapers and magazines on your computer screen. Manufacturers now produce WebTV, allowing families to curl up in front of the big screen for online entertainment and information. Cable television delivers high-fidelity digitized music by DMX. *500 Nations* was a television film designed to promote a CD-ROM-based educational package about

Native Americans. Where people once had to buy game cartridges for Sega and other video games, now these games can be played interactively on cable television. This erosion of distinctions among media is called **convergence**.

The traditional lines between media are disappearing. Concentration is one reason. If one company owns newspapers, an online service, television stations, book publishers, a magazine or two, and a film company, it has a strong incentive to get the greatest use from its content, whether news, education, or entertainment, by using as many channels of delivery as possible. The industry calls this **synergy**, and it is the driving force behind several recent mergers and acquisitions in the media and telecommunications industries. In 1997, for example, computer software titan Microsoft paid \$1 billion for a 6% interest in cable television operation US West. Microsoft's goal in this and other similar purchases (it already owned part of cable giant Comsat Corporation and, at the time, was negotiating for a one-third stake in TCI Cable) is to make cable and the Internet indistinguishable.

Another reason for convergence is audience fragmentation. A mass communicator who finds it difficult to reach the whole audience can reach its component parts through various media. A third reason is the audience itself. We are becoming increasingly comfortable receiving information and entertainment from a variety of sources. Will this expansion and blurring of traditional media channels confuse audience members, further tilting the balance of power in the mass communication process toward the media industries? Or will it give audiences more power—power to choose, power to reject, and power to combine information and entertainment in individual ways?

Concentration of ownership, globalization of media, audience fragmentation, hypercommercialism, and convergence are forcing all parties in the mass communication process to think critically about their positions in it. Those in the media industries face the issue of professional ethics, discussed in Chapter 14. Audience members confront the issue of media literacy, the topic at the core of Chapter 2.

Chapter Review

Communication is the process of creating shared meaning. All communication is composed of the same elements, but technology changes the nature of those elements. Communication between a mass medium and its audience is mass communication, a primary contributor to the construction and maintenance of culture. James Carey's articulation of the "cultural definition" of communication enriched our understanding of how mass communication functions in our lives.

As the learned behavior of a given social group, culture is the world made meaningful. It resides all around us; it is socially constructed and is maintained through communication. Culture limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.

Although culture and communication are interrelated, the influence of mass communication has long been in dispute. Still debated are micro- versus

macro-level effects, administrative versus critical research, and the transmissional versus the ritual perspective.

Because we construct and maintain our culture largely through mass communication, mass communication offers us remarkable opportunities, but with them come important responsibilities. As our culture's dominant storytellers or as the forum where we debate cultural meanings, media industries have an obligation to operate professionally and ethically. Audience members, likewise, have the responsibility to consume media messages critically and thoughtfully.

The proponents of technological determinism argue that technology is the predominant agent of social and cultural change. Opponents of this view believe technology is only one part of the mix and that how people use technology is the crucial factor in determining its power. The new communication technologies, which promise to reshape our under-

standing of mass communication, are controversial for that very reason.

Money, too, shapes the mass communication process. Questions arise about the nature of the partnership between media professionals and their audiences when audiences are seen as products to be sold to a third party (advertisers) rather than as equal members in the process. Ultimately, however, ours is a capitalist economic system, and the media, as profit-making entities, must operate within its limits and constraints. Our task is to understand this and demand that, within these limits, media operate ethically and responsibly. This is especially crucial today as technological and economic factors—concentration of ownership and conglomeration, globalization of media, audience fragmentation, hypercommercialism, and convergence—promise to further alter the nature of mass communication.

Questions for Review

1. What is culture? How does culture define people?
2. What is communication? What is mass communication?
3. What are encoding and decoding? How do they differ when technology enters the communication process?
4. What does it mean to say that communication is a reciprocal process?
5. What is James Carey's cultural definition of communication? How does it differ from other definitions of that process?
6. What three dichotomies define the debate surrounding media effects?
7. What do we mean by mass media as cultural storyteller?
8. What do we mean by mass communication as cultural forum?
9. How did the advent of penny newspapers in 1830 change the nature of the mass communication process?
10. What is concentration of ownership? Conglomeration? Media globalization? Audience fragmentation? Hypercommercialism? Convergence?

Questions for Critical Thinking and Discussion

1. Do you feel inhibited by your bounded culture? By the dominant culture? How so?
2. Think about your reaction to the O. J. Simpson verdicts. Can you separate your feelings from your racial or ethnic identity? Why or why not? Have you ever discussed your views on these controversial decisions with a person from a different racial or ethnic group? Describe that experience. Do you see our culture as unified or divided?
3. Who were your childhood heroes and heroines? Why did you choose them? What cultural lessons did you learn from them?
4. Critique the definition of culture given in this chapter. What would you personally add? Subtract?
5. What are the qualities of a thoughtful and reflective media consumer? Do you have these characteristics? Why or why not?

Important Resources

Carey, J. W. (1989). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman. A collection of essays and lectures from the “founder” of the cultural approach to media studies in the United States. Taken together, they present a strong basis for approaching mass communication and technology from the cultural or ritual perspective.

Compaine, B. M., & Gomery, D. (2000). *Who owns the media? Competition and concentration in the mass media industry*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. In its third edition, this comprehensive and data-heavy book provides a thorough discussion of the question posed in its title. The impact of convergence on concentration makes up an important part of this latest edition, and the impact of concentration on culture and society is given full play. Boxes dispersed throughout the text offer profiles of media’s biggest owners.

McChesney, R. W. (1999). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. This important book presents in great detail the threat to democracy posed by media concentration, globalization, and hypercommercialism. The potential of the Internet and public broadcasting to return control of the media to the people is discussed (albeit not optimistically). Bill Moyers said, “If Thomas Paine were around, he would have written this book.”

Real, M. R. (1996). *Exploring media culture: A guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Examines the interaction between popular culture and mass media. Investigates the cultural role of media and content, such as Hollywood movies, the Internet, and MTV, as a means of helping the public become more skilled “readers” of the media.

Culture and the Media Web Sites



Learn more about Ben Bagdikian and the *Media Monopoly*:

<http://cct.georgetown.edu/curriculum/505-98/students/harrison3.htm>

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Media/MediaMonopoly_Bagdikian.html

Conglomeration and internationalization are the focus of Who Owns What:

<http://www.CJR.org/owners/>

This definitive Web portal to information and opinion about mass media—with much attention paid to their cultural impact—is the product of more than 400 affiliated media interest organizations:

<http://www.mediachannel.org>