

HOW "PUBLIC OPINION" IS PERCEIVED AND PRODUCED BY U.S. NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS

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The electronic democracy envisioned for the 21st century is similar to the representative republican ideal of a pre-industrial era in that both depend on informed citizens who make collective decisions on the basis of their own rational self-interest.¹ The press, broadly defined, offers much of the information and the arena for the public debate about self-interest and collective interests. Despite repeated demonstrations of the increasing concentration of ownership of transnational media corporations including newspaper ownership by Bagdikian (1992) and others (Picard et al. 1988), futurologists like Naisbitt (1982) and the Tofflers (1995) seem to blithely predict the withering away of the centralised and hierarchical control over information, entertainment and mediated discourse. The "dominant ideology" thesis argues, to the contrary, that an upper class establishes and maintains control of the political economy most of the time by creating and reproducing a hegemonic ideology accepted by subordinate class and ethnic groups (Gramsci 1971). Even those who argue against the thesis recognise that upper class ideology may penetrate subordinate groups more easily and completely at the end of the 20th century than in the past (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980; Kornhauser 1959). The media are central to creating and reproducing what might variously be called a hegemonic, dominant or mainstream ideology, which becomes the common sense and "public opinion" of subordinate groups.

A key component missing in this argument, however, is evidence of how upper class interests are incorporated into news organisations and translated into media discourse. This paper addresses the issue of how perceptions by media owners about the public tend to lead to newsroom policies that influence and produce public opinion.

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Communication researchers have convincingly established that the news media tend to set the agenda of topics that receive prominent public attention and to frame the issues of public policy debate (e.g., Entman 1991; Iyengar 1991; *Journalism Quarterly* Winter 1992; McCombs and Shaw 1993; Rogers and Dearing 1988; Shaw and McCombs 1977). Indeed, a body of research on mediated messages has sought to establish multitudinous audience effects, which include studies of priming, gatekeeping, social usage and cognitive processing. Thirty years of cultivation research (Gerbner et al. 1994) has demonstrated that the mainstream media produce and disseminate a common set of relatively coherent images and messages.² In addition, the thrust of much critical cultural scholarship is to show that media discourse reinforces the background assumptions and expectations of public discourse and reproduces the unnoticed arrangements of public practice (Altschull 1984; Fishman 1979; Hall 1977; Rachlin 1988; Parenti 1993; Tuchman 1978).³ Admittedly, even having produced substantial and detailed evidence, researchers and scholars have yet to show definitively that media images and messages have cumulative and enduring effects on everyday life and on public opinion.

Newspaper publishers and broadcast owners may be seen as a fragment of the upper class in each city and, depending upon their corporate connections, may be members of an “inner circle” of a national upper class. Certainly, the publishers and broadcasters are not the only agents of ideological management. My argument is that by looking at publishers, we can see how they make the rules for those who write the news, which, in turn, has long-term, cumulative effects on the background assumptions embedded in public opinion. The primary objective of this study is to trace the connection between the perceptions and practices of publishers and the taken-for-granted biases and newsroom norms that publishers institutionalise. I leave to others the task of showing that media images and messages taken together constitute a “dominant” narrative, discourse or ideology.

Publishers of daily newspapers in the United States usually have a local monopoly in their own media market, which means that newspapers have an impact on public opinion that national magazines and local broadcast properties do not enjoy. Fewer than 2 percent of U.S. cities have competing daily newspapers (NAA 1997, 24). Nor do suburban weeklies and ex-urban community newspapers compete with metro dailies for readers (although they do compete for advertisers). In addition, circulation figures and media-use surveys disclose that about 60 percent of adults read a newspaper daily (NAA 1997, 4-5), that the majority of those who regularly watch television news shows supplement such headline coverage by reading the newspaper and that newspaper readers constitute the so-called “attentive public” who are politically informed and active and a disproportionate share of those who vote.

Publishers have an ownership stake in their firms though few are majority proprietors. At least 82 percent of American newspapers are part of chains, that means publishers are increasingly middle managers. Even at independently owned papers, publishers are often hedged in by fiduciary and managerial responsibility to other family members who have ownership rights, pecuniary interests and sometimes shared supervisory authority. As managers without majority control, they have to be responsive to the corporate and broader class interests of other owners. Furthermore, as a stake holder in a key urban institution, a publisher is a member of a local upper class in the city or town where he or she usually has near-monopoly control of the local

print media industry. Because many papers are part of major oligopoly media corporations, some publishers constitute a high-level fragment of a class whose influence is national and sometimes transnational. Publishers were chosen because they constitute a fragment of that upper class. Newspapers were chosen because they constitute one institution of ideological management and consensus building.

Given all these facts, my question is: do the perceptions of publishers about their readership influence the representation of public opinion and public life presented in their newspapers? This pilot study is based on structured interviews with 11 newspaper publishers. The findings presented here are preliminary, part of a national study using a random sample of newspapers, stratified according to chain holdings. There are four parts to my demonstration. I shall describe (1) the class status of the publishers, (2) their conscious typifications and taken-for-granted expectations about the public, (3) their news strategies and standing instructions to the newsroom and (4) their news and editorial policy. I will have to leave to others the task of showing the cultivation effects of news content on public opinion.

Social and Class Careers of Publishers

Biographies of American publishers and monographs about their individual newspapers and media empires usually treat publishers as self-made individualists or self-sufficient super-stars (e.g., Angelo 1984; Casserly 1993; Davis 1991; Goulden 1988; Maier 1994; Meeker 1983; Pulliam 1984; Robinson 1991; Whited 1988). Few of these profiles of men (and a few women) and organisations argue that the successful publishers become members of an upper class or that they use their influence in their own class interest in large part because the American social science establishment that has never accepted the theses of ideological and class domination (Dreier 1982; McChesney 1992). Even so, a few American academics in each decade seem to rediscover the structure and importance of the upper class in dominating society (e.g., Baltzell 1958; Domhoff 1970, 1979; Dye 1995; Hunter 1953; Lundberg 1937; Mills 1956; Mizruchi 1982; Schwartz 1987; Useem 1984; Veblen 1899/1962). There are three preliminary criteria for "upper class" membership: (a) having a management and/or ownership position in the largest and wealthiest firms or institutions in the city or country; (b) being mutually recognised by members of the class; and (c) being among the top 0.5 or 1.0 percent of the population in terms of combined family wealth. The last criterion is a rough indicator based on previous work (Kolby 1987; Kolko 1962) that suggests that this group mainly depends on income from family wealth and that its members are qualitatively unlike the rest of those in the labour force who mainly depend on income from wages and salaries.

I have categorised the 11 publishers I interviewed in three types: Three of them are local notables who own family-owned papers they inherited. Six others are publishers in papers in middle-sized cities and occupy essentially middle-level positions in national media corporations. Two publishers have careers that tie them to the inner circle of corporate and class power and put them in charge of the largest dailies in the two largest cities in my sample. Let me illustrate the difference in the three types of publishers with examples.

Table 1: Class Status of Publishers and Characteristics of the Newspapers in the Sample

CLASS POSITION	PUBLISHER	CITY	STATE	CHAIN	SIZE	CIRCULATION
LOCAL UPPER CLASS	Bill Block Jr.	Toledo	Ohio	Independent	Large	148,000
	Frank M. Snyder	Celina	Ohio	Independent	Small	6,000
	Joel (H.) Walker	Troy	Ohio	Independent	Small	11,000
MANAGERIAL UPPER CLASS	David F. Lyons	Odessa	Texas	Freedom	Medium	26,000
	Stan L. Miller	Xenia	Ohio	Thomson	Small	11,000
	Bill Power	Lima	Ohio	Freedom	Medium	35,000
	Peter Selkove	Carbondale	Illinois	Lee	Medium	30,000
	Glenn R. Thompson	Chillicothe	Ohio	Freedom	Small	16,000
	—	—	Ohio	—	Large	163,000
NATIONAL UPPER CLASS	Richard J.V. Johnson	Houston	Texas	Hearst	Large	541,000
	John P. Zanotti	Cincinnati	Ohio	Gannett	Large	203,000

William Block Jr. is the co-publisher of the *Toledo Blade* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, he is also president of Blade Communications Inc., which owns the two papers, plus four television stations and three cable television systems.

In 1993, Blade Communications bought the *Pittsburgh Press* for \$100 million from E.W. Scripps Co. after an eight-month strike. The smaller 167,000-circulation Post-Gazette — with Block money — became a local print-media monopoly when Blade Communications bought out and shut down its 230,000-circulation rival. Disregarding vaunted market-place respect for public preferences, here is a classic illustration of how capitalist corporations have become dominant in their own markets.

In terms of social class connections, Block expressed what may be a view of those dependent upon a local upper-class network about taking positions on the boards of directors of interlocking corporations,

I'm not on boards of banks. We're supposed to help every advertiser out there. So, we can't be seen as competitors. Neither my father [chairman of the board] nor cousin [John Robinson Block, who is co-publisher and editor-in-chief] are on bank boards.

Block seems to represent one upper class option. He has chosen to work with non-governmental, non-profit and philanthropic organisations. He became a director in the Toledo Museum of Art, the Toledo Symphony and the Maumee Valley Historical Society and was president of the Read for Literacy campaign. Nevertheless, he is able to express class-wide interests as a leader in the Toledo Chamber of Commerce board, a director in the Ohio Newspaper Association and one of the officers of the Inland

Press Association, which is a co-operative of small and medium-sized newspapers formed to purchase newsprint (wood-pulp paper). Block was also a member of the Toledo Country Club and the Toledo Club. Finally, in terms of family wealth, *Forbes* magazine (Barrett 1993) said Blade Communications was worth \$300 million.

Francis William "Bill" Power is typical of a second kind of publisher who spends his entire career as a loyal employee and middle-level manager at one American media corporation. He shares a background of patriotism, certified by his service in the U.S. Navy Reserve during World War II. He came up the usual way through the business side to be advertising manager, general manager, business manager and, after 17 years, publisher. He started as an advertising sales representative at *The Orange County Register* in conservative Santa Ana, Calif., moved to three different papers in South Texas and eventually became a senior publisher in Lima, Ohio, with authority over four newspapers.

All the papers that he worked for are owned by Freedom Communications Inc., which is staunchly libertarian; its founder opposed public education as socialistic and opposed the right of unions to organise at his newspapers. When the Freedom chain bought the Lima paper in Ohio where I interviewed him, it refused to bargain, forced a strike and decertified the union. Most of the editorial and shop staff formed another rival paper, which eventually failed leaving *The Lima News* as the only paper in the city. As part of its free-market philosophy, the chain customarily offers its publishers a share of the paper(s) they manage. In terms of the source of his income, although Power came from a small town in rural South Dakota and went to a public university, Power became a share-holding publisher with regional authority and remained a vice president of the chain until he retired in 1991. He was a member of the Shawnee Country Club and civic business associations (the Rotary and Elks).

John P(eter) Zanotti represents a third type of publisher who is mobile within upper class institutions and plays a class-wide role. He graduated cum laude from the private University of Southern California and *magna cum laude* from law school at the major land-grant public university in Phoenix, Ariz. He returned to Los Angeles to practice law for five years and then became general counsel for Harte-Hanks Communications Inc., a chain with nine daily newspapers based in San Antonio (Texas) and listed on the N.Y. Stock Exchange. When Zanotti masterminded the acquisition of a number of printing, mailing and direct marketing operations, Harte-Hanks asked him to run the biggest piece of three divisions. Zanotti became president of Harte-Hanks Direct Marketing -Central and a vice president of the company. In 12 years, he had moved from being a smart corporate lawyer to vice president for legal affairs and secretary of the parent corporation. In 1984, Zanotti moved to Gannett, the largest-circulation chain in the country, to become assistant to the president of its newspaper division. Within a year, he was named publisher of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, one of the largest papers in the chain. Foreshadowing his class-wide role, Zanotti also became the president of the Joint Operating Agreement with the *Cincinnati Post*, owned by the Cincinnati-based Scripps Howard chain. The JOA was a legal exception to the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890). The JOA allows a failing newspaper to form a local monopoly with its rival to "preserve" competition among the last two surviving dailies in a market. The JOA combines purchasing, printing, delivery, advertising, circulation and general administrative operations of the two papers, which continue to exist as separate and competitive editorial units for up to 17 years. In 1990 after six years as president/publisher in Cincinnati and 13 years of corporate climbing and combining with Harte-Hanks and hugely profitable Gannett, Zanotti moved to Phoenix

to be publisher of an even larger, independently owned, morning-evening newspaper combination. He became chief executive officer and executive vice president of the Phoenix Newspapers Inc. More recently, he moved to be president and chief operations officer of Greater American Broadcasting Co. and then president and CEO of Citicasters Inc., based in Cincinnati.

Zanotti is a director of the National Association of Broadcasters as well as of the Association for Mexican Service Television Inc. and the Television Operations Caucus, Inc. He belongs to the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Cincinnati Country Club, Commonwealth Club and Queen City Club. He did not limit his broad business connections (as the family-owned newspaper publishers do) and apparently has used his personal and local relationships in Los Angeles, Phoenix and Cincinnati to promote himself. He did not remain dependent upon and upwardly mobile within one newspaper corporation but jumped from one corporation to the next as opportunities arose. Because of the industry-wide ties that he has established, he seems to be the sort of upper class person who, the structuralists say, represents and pursues class-wide interests (Domhoff 1970; Mizruchi 1982; Useem 1984).

Publishers' Perception of Readers

I have listed five key publisher perceptions, that is, their conscious typifications and taken-for-granted expectations of the public, who are readers and consumers of the news as well as the sources of the news and its subject matter.

1. Primary Concerns of Readers. Reflecting a consensus view, David F. Lyons, publisher of *The Odessa American* with circulation of 29,000 in sparsely populated oil-rich west Texas, describes the primary concerns of his readers: "Well, just like most papers that do not have a heavy, a major metro competition, [it's] local — local and regional — local, local, local, more local." The local focus is a strategy to deal with cross-media market competition since there is effectively no print-media competition for most metro dailies. According to publisher Bill Power, *The Lima News*, located in north-west Ohio with circulation of 44,000, must compete with other media for the time and attention of its audience.

Well, I think what's happening now, I think, it's not only here but everywhere, where the young couples, both the husbands and wives are working, which means they don't have as much time for either reading the newspaper, watching television, or anything else.

The Odessa and Lima papers are in middle-sized cities and both are part of Freedom Newspapers, Inc., a chain headquartered in California, which owns 29 dailies, three weeklies and five television stations. But a publisher of a larger paper that is part of a more liberal, east coast newspaper chain, who wanted to remain anonymous, saw that same cross-media competition driving reader interests and changing his definition of news:

Obviously TV and radio have substantially affected the types of news that we have. Breaking news is not as important to newspapers as it was 20 or 30 years ago....There is less emphasis probably on government and process kinds of news and more emphasis on news that would be useful to the reader [and] help the reader to make sense of what is going on.

Glenn R. Thompson, publisher of the *Chillicothe Gazette*, a Gannett paper with circulation of 16,000 in a blue-collar town in south central Ohio, described local concerns as lifestyle concerns.

Probably the concerns of our readers are that they like this life style and this type of area to live in, so I think that they are probably concerned about everything that goes on in this area and as the local newspaper that's why we have very, very heavy emphasis on local reporting....So, whenever something pops up out of Washington over the wire services, we'll run in and we will also chase it and follow it up locally. So, I think the people are just really, their concerns would be to make sure that Chillicothe and Ross county and this whole area stays a nice place to live and grow up and raise children and retire.

In his book by the same title, Doug Underwood (1995) calls it "MBA journalism." Newspapers are run by those with masters of business administration who treat the news as a product and decide on the news values of that product in terms of its sales value to advertisers and consumers. John McManus (1994) described the growing importance of entertainment values over information values in the news. McManus calls it market-driven journalism as opposed to normative journalism, defined in numerous codes of ethics with fiduciary responsibility to raise the level of understanding of ordinary citizens on the most significant issues and development in their communities and countries. Here's Thompson, the publisher from Chillicothe, again:

I think, if the focus changed at all, it was probably just to be more aware of what's coming across the wire and try to find the things that really pertain to our readers or that our readers are going to want to read. Keep the reader in mind more, I guess rather than just trying to fill the space. Find something that's good human interest type stuff or something that pertains to Ohio if you can and that kind of a thing. Greater reader awareness probably is a real key that came into play over the past few years. [Awareness] of readers. You know, I hear a lot in the industry from people that look at your paper for the reader and not for editors.

The industry term is reader-centred or consumer-oriented coverage.

Only two of the 11 publishers offered a minority view that substantive regional, national and international news is as important as local coverage. Both were from independently owned papers in small towns. Joel Walker, publisher of the *Troy Daily News* (circulation 11,000), says:

We realise that we can't be, we can't fully inform everybody on every topic, but we try to give them as broad a base as we can, starting with the local news and information and doing as much for them as we can, regionally, state wide, nationally, internationally....[W]e are going to give them a pretty good sampling of what's going on.

The newspaper's local print-media monopoly is more complete in small cities than in large metropolitan regions where competition comes from local broadcast media. Variety coverage is often a response by a dominant media channel to accommodate diverse audiences. The small-town independent may be less able but more motivated to provide rounded coverage than the large metropolitan papers, which have the large staffs. Walker again:

What our philosophy is sort of well, wait a while and we will take care of you. We will hit your interests somewhere along the line, and maybe you say this...you know in some cases it's, we'll take care of you this week and in some cases it's well, later this month and in some cases it's later this year; and we sort of operate like that....Our coverage varies, I guess, just because our space hasn't increased any, but there are more people, more activities, varied activities, but our space hasn't grown.

2. Discretionary Income and Age Cohort Emphasis. Among the 59 percent of American adults who read paper at least once a week (NAA 1997), the concerns of readers with more discretionary income are given preferential attention. Obviously, age cohorts typically have differential access to income and wealth, such that middle-

aged and older adults are usually better off. Publishers' perceptions and strategies are often based on readership surveys. Again according to Power,

Well, I would say that [the readership is] a broad cross-section. ...I guess the higher the income probably the higher the ratio of [newspaper] customers. Some of the minorities that may not be as strong [in terms of buying the paper]....Well, typically in this part of the country, probably those aged 35 and over are probably more likely to take [the paper] than those 35 or younger.

The significance of income level and age factors is that newspaper advertisers want stable consumers. Readers of the *Chillicothe Gazette* had a median age of between 32 and 33 years, according to Thompson, publisher of the Gannett paper in south central Ohio.

It's a good age, I think. Put it that way because at that age I think most people who have been out in the work force for at least 10 years or so; they are somewhat secure in what they are doing. It's a good age for advertisers and good age for newspapers to put out a good product people will read.

Zanotti made a similar point about his target readership:

[The] 25 to 49 people have jobs, typically located, you know, housing, whether it be permanent or rental, and they're the ones who will stick with you once you show them the benefits of the paper.

Another big city publisher, Richard Johnson of the *Houston Chronicle*, used what has become common knowledge in the industry to displace the *Houston Post* as the leading newspaper in the city and eventually to force his competitor out of business. The Chronicle switched from only afternoons to all day; and once it overtook and beat the Post, it switched to only mornings. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the bulk of the labour force changed from blue-collar manufacturing and oil extractive industries to white-collar service industries. The morning Post was comfortable with its more affluent readers; the Chronicle supplemented its afternoon readers with those in the morning to gain a greater number of readers and lure advertisers away. According to Johnson,

The morning readers are more affluent and older. The afternoon readers are younger and more blue collar....When the Chronicle was totally p.m., it had more blue collar and younger readers.

The bottom line seems to be disposable income, said Peter Selkove, when he was publisher of the *Southern Illinoisan* in Carbondale with 28,000 circulation. The paper is part of Lee Enterprises, Inc., which has 18 newspapers and five television stations in the Midwest. The chain is headquartered in Davenport, Iowa, with most of its papers in Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Montana.

In terms of economic class, the readership of the paper is higher than the economic base of the county....[We] have a lower percentage of those under \$15,000 income and higher percentages of higher income people as you go up the scale. I think that is normal.

The publishers are explicit about wanting a preferred segment of the population as readers. From the point of view of advertisers, newspaper are delivery devices to gather an audience and to expose it to promotional messages. Bagdikian (1992) emphasises that for media advertisers the least desirable segment of the public are those with little or no discretionary income who constitute a quarter to a third of all adults. Those at the other end of the class structure are the affluent top 20 percent who have discretionary income and to a lesser extent discretionary time. Block Jr., co-owner of the *Toledo Blade* (circulation 154,000), makes the point:

The hardest to reach are the poorest and those who do not read well. Also some minorities and the youngest segment....We're competing for readers' time. Other media like TV take up time.

3. Consumer Economy and Local Boosterism. A publisher's perception of his audience is closely linked to his perception of advertisers and their economic and social conditions; and publishers develop both a news content strategy and a market strategy. With 70 to 80 percent of newspaper revenue generated by advertising, publishers are keenly aware that the survival and financial fortunes of a paper depend on the well being of the local consumer economy.

Lyons (Odessa, Texas) expresses a common sentiment among publishers that the fortunes of the newspaper are bound up with the prosperity of the local economy and with the work and leisure-time opportunities the city can offer.

[W]e try and say, look there is culture here. You just have to, so we cover the reviews. We review everything that is going on. Oh, yes, what we've just instigated, and this is daily, except for Monday, a full oil-energy page with a full-time daily columnist. And that was very important.

According to Lyons,

Actually the latest sales management figures shows that Odessa ranks fourth in the nation per family in retail sales. Now that does not necessarily mean that Odessa is fourth in the nation per capita income, but we're the type of economic strata that these people spend everything they make. They are not much in the way of putting, of saving it away for a rainy day. They're a mind set of that type of people who [have] known in booms and busts that they are transient. When the bust hit, the last bust in 1986, we lost about 16,000 [out of a 90,000] population. They just got in their cars and left, [and the newspaper lost readers and advertisers].

Some communities may already have a "mind-set" to spend what they have. In others, the news content can establish a buying mood among readers. Selkove included himself as one in a line of publishers taking the lead in Carbondale (about 540 kilometres south of Chicago) to improve the business climate and devoting editorial effort to business promotion when he said:

The only thing [advertisers have] led us to do on occasion is to tailor some special section aimed at what I would call, business climate improvement. We've tried to be leaders in job creation....[B]oth previous publishers have tried to vitalise, revitalise and form organisations of businessmen coalitions looking to work with government agencies and try to get improvements in the business climate. [We] try to work to produce the kinds of brochures and videos that will attract new businesses; try to work with government to produce the kinds of grant programs that would help existing businesses. We have devoted some of our editorial effort to business promotion.

Selkove seems to speak for those publishers who see their own ideological role as expressing the rationality of business elites in their communities, the so-called pro-growth downtown business coalitions (Feagin 1988). Preparing occasional promotional sections and sponsoring trade fairs may be less important than making sure that the routine news-editorial content of the newspaper promotes consumerism and materialism among readers, fostered by leisure-use features, how-to items and decontextualised news.

At another large Midwestern metropolitan daily, the publisher who wished to remain anonymous said,

I think our readers are concerned with making ends meet. Economic issues have an impact with them, first and foremost. Quality of life issues in their community and that can

range from anything from environment to drugs and crime to race relations to housing. I think they are interested in events outside of their immediate community but in direct portion with how they perceive them impacting them. I think they are also interested in getting as much help as they can get in dealing with and conquering the trials and tribulations of modern life, if you will...Every survey I have ever seen shows that. And I use the term economics not in the academic sense but consumer sense.

4. Reader Feedback and Advertiser Interests. Publishers consciously redesign and reformat their papers to adapt to market demand as they understand it. Newspapers are at the centre of a two-way feedback process: the papers tell the public what is happening in the public and surveys tell the papers what the public perceives is happening in the papers. The two-way surveillance of the public is a self-conscious strategy that allows the press to claim that it gives people what they want. In fact, the popular desirability of a topic may be necessary but not sufficient for coverage, whereas advertiser interest is the sufficient condition to promote a topical area. When I made this point, Zanotti of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* suggested it was an obvious part of managerial rationality.

Heck, yes, [our method is to find out what our market is and adapt accordingly]. Heck, yes. Well, you know, there's two trends going on out there. There's one: what do readers want to know more about, and the second trend is: what are the advertising categories that are trying to drive consumers into their businesses. I think what we do a good job of is listening to both those groups and packaging information along with advertising information to work both audiences well...[W]e've focused on four categories: women, heart, ageing [and] wellness because those are key categories that the readers want to know. But they're also key categories that the health providers are concerned about right now...You know that the readers are dying for it, OK? And you also know that one of the growing categories is health providers, so what you do is you put together well done editorials sections that have advertising support that you can sell.

The primacy of the interests of advertisers rather than readers is just as clear in small papers. The *Troy Daily News* (11,000 circulation) does not have the page length for regular daily specialised sections, but when it comes to occasional topical sections, Tom Thokey, general manager, was explicit:

Our interest, nine out of ten of our special sections are what they are because of what we think we can get from advertisers and not from readers. I mean, let's be honest, that's the truth. Your typical home fix ups and your fashions sections and your auto repair tabs,...typical sections are not driven by readerships. In fact, whenever, we do one that is done primarily because we feel it is a readership need, we usually don't do well in advertising in that section.

In an ex-urban or satellite city like Troy (population 20,000 located 18 miles north of Dayton with 600,000 people), interests of local retailers usually win out over those of regional merchandisers. Again, Thokey comments:

Oh, we do the usual, what people call [a] progress edition...It's usually an annual review of business and industry and where it's been and where it's going and that sort of thing. The reason that doesn't get much retail support either, but you can usually get all the manufacturers to buy an ad in that and, therefore, it pays for itself.

5. Managerial and Male Point of View. Many expectations by publishers about the public are taken for granted as part of their common sense (Gans 1979; Schutz 1962-71). For example, if local boosterism is seen as part of the newspaper's self-interest, publishers see social reality from a managerial and male point of view that also supports the publisher's class interests. Lyons saw that most of the population is blue collar and recognised that at least two-thirds of workers were female, but the paper

covers the economy from a business point of view with a daily energy page and on Sundays a business section, but never a labour or a woman's page.

We are a blue collar town The demographics are that most of the people work are in the oil fields or in [oil] well-service businesses. And the latest survey that we had was that 67 percent of the wives also work. And that percentage is much higher today than it was [in the early 1980s] because of the economy. As things got tighter the women went back to work....Well, the [business] section is Sunday, but we'll include the business into that daily energy page because most of the business that we're talking about out there is oil oriented.

Thompson's managerial point of view is assumed and foregrounded, and economic issues are framed in terms of owner interests and the point of view of up-market consumers. Workers are literally part of the background; assigning a reporter to cover the labour point of view is explicitly rejected.

And I'm not sure what you would do with that [a labour] type of reporter or page. You know, in our business report we try to make sure we cover [labour] because we try to make sure we cover anything that is new or progressive at all at the plants; such as, when Mead [Corporation] went through their expansion, we covered that pretty much wall-to-wall....[Our reporter] just rode [along in] a new type truck within the past few weeks. He went out and had a picture of that with some of the workers standing around him and did a story on why it was developed and what it was designed to do and how many they expect to sell and that kind of a thing.

Management Decisions

The publishers mentioned seven news strategies and standing instructions to the newsroom.

1. Add Soft News. Bagdikian (1992) describes a new category of news called "soft news" as fluff items that promote a buying mood. Public controversies, the political context of social conflict and the personal relevance of business deals tend to weight the reader down with serious considerations. Thompson (Chillicothe, Ohio) may reflect Gannett's news management strategy and a direct application of its perceptions about what the public wants:

We try to make sure that they [our reporters] are in constant contact with their sources and continually developing their source list[s], so that we don't get beat on anything. We don't shy away from anything. We don't shy away from the tough issues and we don't look to go too far with the hard news, or sensationalise things. We don't want to do that. We also cover the soft news as well....We don't want to weight our cover page one way or the other when it comes to hard news and soft news. And when we try to make sure we have a good mix out front every day as well. Four or five good readable stories on the front page, and not all hard news and not all soft news.

2. Add Topical Content. One publisher who requested anonymity and who seemed to be speaking for the chorus in the industry said his paper's primary focus is on material success and boosting consumerism — the orientation toward life that emphasises the pleasures and value of consumption as a primary end in life. Two topical areas, in particular, warranted added attention and coverage: (1) Stories are sought to address the business, career, financial and investment interests of readers. An expanded re-definition of news includes infomercials about opportunities/risks for upper middle class persons to invest their excess disposable income. (2) The second area is lifestyle and entertainment news — the play side of life. Included here is running regular items on health, fitness, nutrition, ageing and so-called women's issues as well as making sure consumers are informed about entertainment products is part of the news.

Yes, I think, I hope all of the changes that we've made in the paper have been driven by what we perceive as our reader's interests and needs....For instance, we have substantially expanded our business coverage in recent years, added Datanet [a business information network], because of a perceived need and interest there....[W]e are right now studying a new entertainment section that would meet what we see as a reader interest in entertainment kinds of news and also, frankly, would help us some with our younger readers.

Publishers' assumptions about their audiences are often based on readership studies and consumer surveys that they repeatedly but irregularly commission. Zanotti, the then 40-year-old publisher of the Gannett's large, profitable metro daily and president in charge of the joint operating agreement with the *Cincinnati Post*, translated his quest for more readers into a series of directives that re-set the agenda of topics and issues for newsroom staff.

There are four [areas]....they [researchers] tell us they [readers] want. The reader likes the newspaper. The readers like the whole of the newspaper. In fact, they like the whole better than the sum of the parts, which means they're satisfied with the image of what the newspaper is and those who read it. But the four categories that you hear, and we're not unique to this, is that they want more health-fitness-nutrition news. They want more business-finance news. They want more local news. When they say that, the local news means schools, and if it's governmental action, what does it mean to them and not just [that the school] board did this, but who is doing what and help me [the reader] understand it. You know, digest it more for me [the reader]. And [fourth], science-technology, what's happening, I guess you'd throw environment in there as part of that. Those are the four key categories.

Here Zanotti almost prioritises the primary areas of major topical interest.

3. Add Special Sections and Special Pages. The local emphasis has led to adding more sections and more specialised pages or sections focusing on food, automobiles, travel, real estate, local entertainment, etc.

In Odessa, the paper added a section devoted to elderly, who Lyons said were the fastest growing segment of the population.

So we've added a section of two pages [called Prime Time] in the Living Section on Sunday devoted to elderly and I understand that one of the syndicates, the Associated Press is now going to be sending via wire demographics and things, specialising. [T]his thing made us [the publishers] all very happy because that's becoming, that's the fastest growing segment of our population, and we have many, many retirees from the oil companies that took early retirements who are still very active and [who we find] things for them to do....They've got time to read a paper. They are our most loyal people....[W]e are trying to get a lot of people who worked in the oil patch years ago that might be living some place else to come back to Odessa and retire....[W]e are trying to get the people to come on back....We are very active in support of that thing.

Here then, a publisher's perception of his audience leads directly to a market strategy to protect one of the most loyal segments of readers. Lyons is also aware of the need to protect his long-term franchise by catering to and soliciting those segments with low readership.

We have a [new] youth and teenage section every Sunday. We call it Youth and Education....that will be at least an 8-page standard-sized section. At least where we try to recognise excellence in academics because [in each school there's] a couple of hundred [students] that are in academics and so we are stressing this and giving it as much play as we possibly can as we do in sports....I would say over the course of the year [academic excellence gets as many column inches as sports].

The *Cincinnati Enquirer* offers four quarterly health sections and runs a health/science page almost daily.

[Stories in special sections and pages are] specifically designated, flagged and indexed, you know, stories combined in [a] package for the reader. The local pages have been changed and localised more.

4. Add Zoned Editions and More Local Features. The call for more local stories has almost become an article of managerial ideology among chain publishers and a standing newsroom directive to change the story mix in the main news section. The perceptions by publishers about their readers seems to have produced a strategy by chain-owned papers to protect their media niche by supplementing local coverage with soft non-controversial features. Most of the metro papers have also created zoned editions as a way to improve local coverage. The decision to cater to the perceived market demand by readers for more local coverage may reflect a strategy to adapt to and to counteract the trend (Bagdikian 1992, 174-178) toward fewer and fewer newspapers for more and more urban places. The number of American newspapers has declined from its peak in the 1920s while the number of urban areas has steadily increased, so each paper now covers more municipalities. Since the end of World War II, readers have moved increasingly to the suburbs and out of central cities. As the metro dailies eliminated their competitors and achieved regional print monopoly, they still found competition from neighbourhood and community dailies and local-produced television news.

In Cincinnati, which is among the few cities in the United States with competitive metro papers, one of the first changes Zanotti made was to institute zoning.

Well, I'm here but we put the zones in right away in February of '86. We redesigned the paper in '86 and in October of '87 we added a Business Monday and I think we did the reader.

An editor from a different chain emphasised the competitive market-driven entertainment value of the newspaper, saying,

We strive for a mix of news in the newspaper. We look for news that is of interest to a wide range of readers. We look for news that people will turn to their newspaper, primarily.... We have always had a very strong feature section for the 20 years I have been here. And, I think we are probably more open to what we define as news. Now, probably we have a broader definition of news than we did 20 years ago. And I think that is driven, in part at least, by what we see the reader is asking for. Part of that is driven by the nature of newspapers today. With the electronic media dominating the headlines, the print media have to concentrate on the whys and wherefore of what this means.

5. Circulation and Marketing Strategy to Target Readers in Upscale Zip Code Areas. Publishers are explicit about seeking preferred readers, and publishers used both circulation policies and news policies to target readers. Wealthier and better educated people tend to live in the geographically concentrated neighbourhoods. Regardless of changes in news-editorial content, newspapers target their sales strategy. Zanotti noted that with a 192,000 circulation the Enquirer penetrated less than a third of the 600,000 households in Cincinnati.

We put a program in two years ago on five [postal area] zips and increased penetration in those zip codes at a rate greater than the rest of the market place. We expanded to 10 others this year, so we had 15 and we're doing the same thing there. Next year we'll go to another 15, so we'll be at 30 zips that we're sampling and telephoning into and providing the latest final editions of the newspaper to. We will, we've identified those zip codes that have populations and demographics that are what we would rate as the A-type reader who'd want the newspaper, and go after those markets first. Then we'll go after the next group [in terms of] demographics....If you're gonna go mine the field, you go mine where the ore is to begin with.

Self-promotion and gimmicks (like puzzles, prices, give-aways, stunts, comics and photos) have always been part of newspapering from the early penny papers in the 1830s to the “yellow press” of the 1890s to the undeclared cross-media circulation war of the 1980s and 1990s.

6. Reformat and Redesign. Circulation figures for newspapers have remained stagnant since the early 1970s even though net earnings continue to be two or three times the national average for non-financial corporations. Many highly profitable independents with low equity to earnings ratios were bought up in the 1980s, and so a new push came from corporate headquarters for scientific market research and rational management strategies. In 1982, Gannett corporation founded *USA Today* aimed at the non-newspaper reading public, typified as Generation X, the visually oriented 20/30-something segment born after 1964 who are nationally mobile and who have short attention spans (Prichard 1987; Coupland 1991). Many publishers have imitated the model by redesigning and re-formatting their newspapers to compete visually with television.

Thompson, a Gannett publisher in small-town Ohio, spoke of the switch:

[On page one,] we try to have some nice art there every day and a good story or two that's local. So we think that has been a nice addition and something that our readers like....Photos is another area that has greatly improved this year. We added a second full-time photographer position. That's a good example of wire vs. local. We ran, probably from this year to last year, a lot more wire photos from what we are running now....So, by beefing up that staff we've been able to correct that. And now, every day, on the local page as well as page one, you're about 99 percent assured that you are going to have a local photo and good photos. Some good action shots and stuff that is really attractive to the eye and catches people's attention.

7. Newsroom Practices Regulating Content. Publishers issue standing instructions on the size of the news hole and the space and prominence given to specific sorts of stories. Typically, the ratio of ads to news is about 60:40. The metro daily publisher who requested anonymity explained how perception of the public's interests translates more or less directly into newsroom rules:

[T]here is a news hole that is guaranteed every day. Even if we sold no ads, there would be a minimum amount of space guaranteed for the news sections of the newspaper. Just in terms of purely metro news, of course, page 3 is guaranteed every day. But in addition, virtually a rule that there will always be a local story on the front page. Then there is space throughout the newspaper that is devoted to local news, also—ranging from digest to the weather page.

Gans (1979) stresses the importance of newsroom socialisation that decentralises and institutionalises an organisational culture and that is sanctioned by the most senior managers hired by the publishers. Publishers give their staffs standing instructions, a management philosophy, about what sort of material they want in their papers. The same anonymous publisher comments:

I don't think you can manage without a management philosophy....I think all of us operate under a certain philosophy....[T]he elements, I would say, are to push decision making down as far as possible, involve people at the operational level in setting of goals and monitoring them. I believe strongly in consultative management, but I also, believe in the end I have to make a decision no matter how much consultation there is. I think that the organisation works best when we stay focused on our customers.

In the words of Walker, publisher in Troy (Ohio):

[H]ow do we help our readers thrive and survive? If I had a philosophical statement to make, that would be it.

When asked if the newsroom staff had standing instructions, Chillicothe's Thompson reluctantly admitted that a set of priorities existed, noted their unwritten taken-for-granted nature and pointed to the expectations and agenda implicit in the AP wire budget:

Well, yes and no. I mean we don't have anything formally in writing, at least not that I know of....But they are instructed pretty much the type of things we are looking for.

Thompson also noted the headline coverage of broadcast news could set his newspaper's agenda:

We covered the whole China [Tiananmen Square] incident. We covered that very well. We actually had an additional page every day. Because again, that's something that people were hearing about on the radio and looking at every night on TV and we felt that was something that had to be in our paper because the people were going to want it. If we didn't provide it, then we were going to force them to go make another buy somewhere else to get it.

Stan L. Miller, publisher of a Canadian-based Thomson newspaper, the *Xenia* (Ohio) *Daily Gazette*, circulation 11,000, enforced oversight to avoid offending taken-for-granted expectations of readers:

[W]e had one column that we got a lot of hollering on. [One employee] went into a column about women and their relationship to men and I think he was heading toward something, a conclusion, that didn't make it. Anyway, he ended up offending women and I got lots of letters and calls on that....I discussed that with [the managing editor]. Take a better look at those. That one went a little too far.

8. Upper Class Interests. In all these management strategies and practices, there are underlying upper class interests that go beyond the organisational rationality of an individual newspaper or its parent corporation. Selkove, a small-chain publisher, makes explicit the stake and the agenda that newspaper owners have in business per se as compared to editors who don't have a stake. He admits his own managerial policy in the newsroom but minimises or fails to acknowledge his own class interests. His policies are major components in an organisational culture that plays up or de-emphasises stories. His views, of course, prevailed over those of newswriters:

Only in the sense [of making the newsroom] aware of how important the business climate is, about how important job creation is to the region's health. [That view] has certainly convinced the newsroom that stories impacting on that—stories of major new developments in business—are important news. You know, it's only been in about the past three years that we've created a business reporter, and it's only been, I'd say since I became publisher that we started putting some of these stories on the front page where they deserved to be all along but where traditional copy editors who don't have a stake in business haven't really felt they belonged. Copy desks are younger, are poorer, unconnected, if you will, don't necessarily understand the kind of agenda a newspaper should have, don't understand the importance of...playing some of these stories as they should be played. We had a copy desk that believed if it happened in a country you couldn't spell, it was important, and if it happened locally, it probably wasn't important. And we've tried to turn that around, you know.

News and Editorial Policy

Lastly, publishers' views and practices have policy implications. Media scholars and critics have described the news as having its own ideology with its own values and political perspective (e.g., Bagdikian 1972; Gans 1979; Goldman and Rajagopal 1991; Hallin 1986; Schiff 1996). Scholars who have examined the industry historically

or evaluated its performance in terms of fairness and balance have largely debunked journalistic claims to objectivity (Hackett 1984; Schiller 1981; Schudson 1978). To whatever extent a presumed external reality is bracketed or unavailable to direct naturalistic perception, some notion of representation or correspondence seems necessary. Indeed, McManus (1994) insists that the normative standard of journalistic responsibility requires that stories be factual and in context.

Objective News Values. The stance of most publishers and working professionals is that what goes into their news pages is based on objective news values, such as timeliness, proximity, unusualness and impact. Power expresses an opinion common among publishers about the role of the press:

I think to inform the public of what the issues are and let them judge how to react....I think on our editorial page that's our right. We own that page. I think our subscribers own the rest of the newspaper.

As Fishman (1979) have shown, covering local news means covering the established bureaucratic institutions of the society. Thompson defines local news in just such terms:

[We] always make sure that we cover all the bases: government, schools, business news, the medical centre hospital.

The news routinely uses officials as sources, and most authorities express the point of view of middle-class, middle-aged, white males. The news tends to create public opinion by assuming and presenting the mainstream view of the authorities and marginalising points of view of sources who are outside established institutions.

News/Editorial Policy and Oppositional Community Opinion. Periodically, an oppositional stance toward established institutions arises out of a social movement. Commercial newspapers do not generally reproduce such alternative belief systems. A few "alternative" weeklies and fewer metro newspapers adopted that orientation in the late 1960s and early 1970s and promoted a public opinion of protest and resistance. None of the publishers spoke in favour of such a news-editorial orientation.

Let me offer one deviant case as an example. Thokey, the general manager (significantly, not the publisher) of an independent small-town paper in Ohio, is the only respondent who recalls the existence of what is now illegitimate. Thokey describes the cost of doing stories on what readers' want to read as opposed to what advertisers want written.

I call them the hippie years when we were so hung up on shining. I called it the Watergate syndrome. [Journalists] were out to, they had to, expose everybody. They were all hung up on exposing something. And we used to do features and outrage the advertisers....We were out to find [stories that said] we know business is trying to screw the consumer. Let's devote our energies to that. We don't do that anymore. Yes, if there is an obvious one and I commend them if they do that, and yes if Sears or K Mart was found to be exploiting the public....I would not be against our newsroom doing it. Probably, we may lose. You know, Sears spends about \$180,000 a year with us. I would hate to lose that. But on the other hand, if they do something outrageous, as long as we deal with it in proper perspective, I don't have any problem with that.

News/Editorial Policy and Publisher Control. When publishers are in effective control over their newspapers, they describe the way the news frames issues as objective and neutral. The Celina newspaper was the only one in my sample, however, where control was divided; again, the deviant case is the best example. Frank M. Snyder

Jr. was the associate publisher and adopted only son of the elder liberal publisher of the *Celina Daily Standard*, a family-owned independent founded in 1848 in northern Ohio with circulation 10,000. Snyder Sr. recalled that men from nearby St. Mary's tried to burn the newspaper down for its active abolitionism during the Civil War and the paper was unpopular for its pacifist stance against World War I. Shouting matches, tension and disrespect punctuated the relationship between Snyder Jr. and the long-time liberal editor, hired by his father. Conflict between the 30-something adopted son and the older, long-resident editor made the news ideology and its political consequences visible. Such an open ideological split is possible in a family-owned independent but would not occur in a corporate-owned newspaper where the publisher's point of view usually remains unchallenged and unnoticed. Snyder Jr. characterised his readers as conservative and the paper's news and editorial columns as far more liberal. Before he inherited the full powers of publisher, Snyder saw the need to conform to community opinion as he perceived it.

Yes, the people do like to think, but they don't like to be provoked. And some people simply do not like [our] editorial stance. [S]imply to create a controversy for controversy's sake is not the purpose.

He said there is normally enough controversy anyway, so the newspaper does not have to raise the level or intensity of public discourse. He said there should be a limit to stimulating reader response and political activism to legitimate controversy. He said there is no unqualified or primary responsibility to serve as the people's tribune, as an advocate before public officials or as an adversary to the powers that be. Lastly, Snyder said the editor should not be a free agent but rather the representative of the publisher.

Being like the community tends to give the newspaper power in deciding what the community's opinion is and to legitimate its role in speaking for the community. Contrary to corporate publishers who often describe an invisible barrier between the business side and the news-editorial side of the newspaper as a positive professional arrangement, Frank Snyder Jr. saw the news as biased because he couldn't influence the topical agenda and issue frames of news stories: "I would like to see them [the reporters] be more business oriented." The conflict extended to the way issues were framed, and Snyder Jr. said that editorial biases entered the news:

[I]f you read our first-page stories written by one of the staffers, if I didn't know better, I'd say it was written by a public relations person, cause there was no negative to it; it was all positives....We rarely have any feature story of anyone's accomplishments.

Since Snyder Jr. is now publisher and there is a new editor, readers might expect to see more advertising friendly stories and enhanced coverage of civic accomplishments with a point of view more consistent with his own herited local upper class position.

Conclusion

The increasing corporate concentration of media industries is well documented, but in the United States where class and ideological domination is so illegitimate that its existence is denied, the facts regarding class ownership of media corporations and the pre-eminent influence of upper-class interests on mediated messages has yet to be established. In short, those who own and manage newspapers perceive their readers in terms of their own commercial interests, and they influence mediated content in favour of upper-class interests. To a significant degree, because of their relatively large staff size and

local monopoly market situation, the newspapers are leading media institutions, setting the agenda and framing issues for the rest of the mainstream media, which in turn cultivate, and in the long-term produce, public opinion. A qualitative examination of a small sample of the newspaper publishers in the United States yields three conclusions and an interpretation: (1) publishers are members of the upper class, (2) publishers perceive the public opinion of their readers in terms of their own commercial and class interests, (3) publishers establish organisational policies and taken-for-granted practices in their newsrooms that influence what kind of news content is produced for whom. Furthermore, my interpretation is that, if the enormous amount of research on the effects of cultivation, framing, priming, agenda setting, gatekeeping, social usage and cognitive processing is correct, (4) mass-mediated news and entertainment produce the master narratives, which have long-term effects on public opinion. These initial findings need to be verified and replicated, and so I have begun a study with a national sample of publishers. The larger task is to describe the ideology of the media-owning elite within the upper class, to show systematically the ideological nature of news media discourse and to detail the range of corporate policies, organisation cultures and newsroom policies that seruptiously translate upper class interests into news content. Eventually, a single large-scale, comparative, panel study is needed to show the combined multitudinous, cumulative and long-term effects of the news and media content in producing public opinion. If my conclusions and interpretation turn out to be valid, then there is a practical political implication, to wit: Just as the struggle for pre-industrial representation meant a fight for a press free from governmental censorship, the achievement of a more democratic post-modern society will require a struggle against concentrated corporate control and upper-class ownership of the media.

Notes:

1. I would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Dayton and the University of Houston in providing financial assistance that enabled me to gather the interviews and prepare the protocols for this study.

2. Traditional media effects studies concern short-term changes of attitude and behaviour, whereas the cultivation research focuses on how the media reinforce existing opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Much of the debate about major vs. minimal effects can be understood in terms of short-term changes rather than the long-term socialisation effects. Gerbner and his colleagues (1994) argue that entertainment as well as news and editorials convey underlying and unchanging images and messages across a variety of program types. The dominant narrative of a culture may be conveyed across a variety of media (television, film, radio, recordings, newspapers, magazines and books). The findings of cultivation effects is compatible with the notion of a dominant ideology. The dominant ideology thesis is two-fold: expectations, relevances and background assumptions are taken for grant and embedded in fiction and non-fiction material and such expectations are routinised and usually unnoticed in everyday practice. The dominant ideology thesis argues that the mediated portrayal and representation of established arrangements have performative effects.

3. These studies directly contradict the perspective of the pluralists (Bell 1960; Dahl 1961; Rose 1967), who claim that countervailing special interests lead to natural compromise and consensus, that there is an open mobility into the upper class and a circulation of governing elites, and that the business elite does not have an overriding or enduring concentration of power and so cannot be the dominant elite. The democratic thinkers who framed the U.S. Constitution (Madison 1788/1961) argued that the multiplicity of competing and cross cutting factions and the regional diversity of a continent-sized country would provide a self-regulating balance of power. Contemporary publishers often claim that the U.S. press is the freest and most diverse in the world, that (because of the wide choices available) the consuming public gets what it wants in news and information products, and that (because the newspapers are constrained by the public and because they are staffed by responsible professionals) the newspapers offer factually accurate, unbiased and balanced coverage.

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