

# Rethinking Media Reforms to Improve Treatment of Women and Minorities

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## Abstract

Media scholars, practitioners, and activists who share a concern for responsible treatment of women and minorities in news and entertainment programming have relied on a limited set of reform strategies over the years. The most common of these strategies is the increased hiring of women and minorities in all aspects of media production. This paper reviews the dominant reform strategies and points out flaws in them based on both empirical and theoretical research. Empirical studies comparing minority producers and media content demonstrate that the relationship between producers and products is more problematic than acknowledged by scholars in this area. Similarly, the theoretical research from the areas of political economy and postmodernism provide numerous reasons for understanding why the mere addition of players of color is unlikely to change mediated texts. Following the critique of traditional reform strategies, a new approach-- pluralistic procedures--is introduced, explained, and promoted as an option for future exploration and development.

## Introduction

For nearly 50 years, major social institutions and researchers have criticized mainstream U.S. media for their lack of diversity and concomitant inability to report issues and create programming that is reflective, accurate, relevant, and germane to marginalized segments of a multicultural society (Commission, 1947; United States, 1968). Attached to these criticisms have been mandates for reform aimed at connecting media professionals to marginalized populations, diversifying homogeneous content, and correcting stereotypical representations of various segments of society. By and large, suggested remedies to improve media performance have been premised on a fairly straightforward reform strategy--that of hiring more women and minorities as media practitioners and owners. Nevertheless, the relationship between increased female and minority practitioners and owners and improved news and entertainment products has not been established either empirically or theoretically. Indeed, the mixed findings of researchers who have examined both employment/ownership patterns and media portrayals suggest that mainstream news and entertainment practices suffer from the same shortcomings identified by the Hutchins and Kerner commissions.

The persistence of these problems is not surprising and, in fact, is predictable given political economic and postmodern contributions to media studies. The chosen method of reform--merely hiring more women and minorities--will continue to fail if used by itself as a strategy of diversifying media content because it disregards larger issues of structure (ownership patterns, industrial production requirements) and obfuscates the primary theoretical issue, which is not the challenge of incorporating marginalized actors but of dealing with social and cultural realities characterized by difference. Solutions and strategies for constructing a media practice that is responsive to fragmented, multiple, and pluralistic realities (the postmodern condition) and is able to cope with overdetermined relations of production (the political economy of mainstream media) must turn its focus away from the *whos* and *whats* of media producers and products to the *hows* of media

practice. In this paper we will briefly present the persistent criticisms of mainstream media and the proposed reforms advanced by researchers, policy makers, and professionals. We will then examine those proposed reforms using basic concepts from political economy and postmodern theories. Finally, we will suggest a way to reconceptualize media reform, providing examples from alternative program producers who are struggling with the challenge of creating practices that are responsive to diverse populations.

### The Critique of Mainstream Media

The claim that media institutions and products are in the control of a narrow range of class, ethnic, and gender groups (wealthy white males) who have a biased impact on programming is well documented. Our purpose here is not to survey in a comprehensive way all the studies that have critically analyzed the conditions and consequences of this narrow control of mainstream media. Rather, we are solely interested in establishing persistent themes and patterns in ownership, control, and impact on content of mainstream media. Early milestones in mass communication research, including the reports of the Hutchins Commission on press freedom (1947) and the Kerner commission on civil disorders (1968), have criticized the restrictive patterns of ownership and employment in U.S. media and have noted the negative consequences of such structural patterns on programming. Kerner, especially, noted the dominance of white males in the gathering of news, but both commissions stressed the appalling lack of cultural and ideological diversity in media reports. The Kerner report implicated the media in the racial tensions surrounding the urban riots of 1967, not only faulting riot coverage but faulting the media's overall blindness "to the conditions that led up to the rebellion and distorting the picture of America long before the urban riots" (Dodson, 1993, p. 16). Both of these reports contended that the structural limitations of mainstream media actually constituted a threat to democracy, a theme that has been picked up in recent examinations of ownership and content patterns (Chomsky, 1989; Keane, 1991; Kellner, 1990; Raboy & Bruck, 1989).

Normative theories of media performance engendered by these studies, such as the social responsibility model, attempted to address this state of affairs, ascribing to media outlets an outright obligation to meet "the informational, social and moral needs of society" (McQuail, 1987, p. 116). Industry response to this sort of highly publicized criticism from the "white, moderate, responsible Establishment," as well as to vocal pressures from minority and women's organizations, has taken three forms (Dodson, 1993). The first remedy calls for increased portrayals, storylines, and coverage of ethnic minorities, women, and other marginalized groups. The second remedy invokes professional, ideological frames that ensure "balance" and "fairness" in news coverage and public affairs programming. Both of these prescriptions hinge on the most prevalent remedy: the call to hire ethnic minorities, women, and other marginalized groups to produce programs.

#### *Industry remedies*

One type of liberal media reform aimed at being responsive to multiple experiences takes the direction of producing more programs about those people who have been subject to a kind of "symbolic annihilation" in the past (Tuchman, 1972, 1979). This sort of remedy was often nothing more than a numbers game, principally concerned with boosting the frequency of women, blacks, or single-parent families in sitcoms, news

features, and interviews. The social agenda implicit in high-profile research programs--"cultivation analysis" of fictional TV programming, for example--was usually aimed at statistically improving the representations of minorities as professionals, of working class people, of the elderly, and so forth (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979). Such an approach, as adopted and adapted by actual programmers, often had less than ideal results, as dominant (largely white, male, upper-middle class) structures and industries tended to stereotype and/or trivialize the experiences of the Other, even when key occupations were held by minorities. An analysis of local television news in Chicago, for example, concluded that the way in which the media represent blacks, especially in crime and politics, inadvertently feeds "modern racism," despite the visibility of black broadcasters and the decline in "old-fashioned" racist framing and vocabulary (Ettema, 1990). Likewise, the major commercial magazines owned by and targeted at people of color--*Essence*, *Hispanic*, *Asian Business*, etc.--largely promote white, Protestant work ethic images and narratives that portray individual success resulting from hard work (Salomon, 1993).

Another strategy for reforming media content has been to switch the explicit discursive frames toward achieving more balance and variety in the ideological positions that attain expression in the cultural field. This prescription for reform held particular appeal as it was bolstered by liberal-pluralist notions, such as the free marketplace of ideas, choice, and the self-righting principle that form the mythical undergirding of U.S. media practice (Keane, 1991). Indeed, in the first half of the 1990s, entities such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting hinged station, network, and program service funding on issues of "objectivity." Objectivity in public broadcasting for the most part is conceptualized as providing statistically equivalent opportunities for conservative and liberal viewpoints on any issue or event. This liberal-conservative division is not even as inclusive as a right-left dichotomy, since the "liberal" viewpoint actually translates into a centrist-moderate position. Leftists are virtually never heard or covered in this balance-driven programming. Similar approaches to the manifest content of fictional programming has been concerned with the provision of more instances of *positive* portrayals of minorities, working class, elderly, and so on. Yet such portrayals have been found to mask social problems and inequities, thus potentially deferring political reform. Jhally and Lewis (1992) demonstrated this paradox in the case of *The Cosby Show*, where the trend-setting, positive portrayals of black protagonists fed the myth of the American Dream (i.e., individuals can "make it") in an era when black poverty, unemployment, and incarceration were increasing.

Both of the remedies noted above are premised on a third reform--the one of interest in our presentation--calling for a switch of the key players in media production. The rationale of this strategy is simple: by adding new players in media industries to proportionally reflect local or national populations of women and minorities, the cultural diversity reflected in media texts will be expanded. The point of this strategy is to spread power around, to reallocate power, but with the understanding that minorities or women will "naturally" produce programming that is more sensitive and realistic than is currently the case. This strategy and rationale undergird such concrete proposals as ASNE's racial parity in the newsroom by the year 2000 plan and the FCC's preferential licensing policies.

This strategy and rationale contain a great deal of appeal due to the concrete direction given to reform efforts and to the naive seductiveness of the egalitarian rhetoric framing this approach. We say "naive seductiveness" because this approach has not been

justified empirically or theoretically. In fact, most studies that promote more inclusive hiring policies in the media do so without demonstrating much evidence regarding the relationship between media producers and media products (Foote, 1993; Guimary, 1988; Haws, 1991; Shafer, 1993; Stone, 1988a & 1988b). By and large, these studies either advocate blind prescriptions for hiring or issue mournful condemnations of the status of female and minority employment in the media. Rarely are these prescriptions and/or condemnations justified by anything more than a simplistic invocation of the findings and declarations of either the Kerner Commission, the FCC, or ASNE. Only a few scholars examining minorities and media actually acknowledge the problematic and complex relationship between producers and their products (Kleiman, 1991; Schement & Singleton, 1981; Singleton, 1981).

Indeed, the mixed results of empirical studies of the industry suggest that scholars reconsider the very rationale supporting the hiring reform agenda. Despite the raised awareness of inequities in the media industry, the relentless advocacy by professional and minority organizations, and the slight gains in employment statistics, portrayals of women and minorities are persistently problematic in that they are variously stereotypical, negative, or missing altogether. The problematic nature of minority portrayals is evident at various levels (university training, professional practice) and across media.

In the training of journalists, for example, college reporting textbooks have been slow to address minority affairs as a traditional blindspot of U.S. news organizations (Burd, 1988). Specific needs and approaches to the reporting of minority affairs have not been developed or explored sufficiently in most reporting texts. Rather, authors make occasional references to the Kerner Commission and the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, and they suggest that journalistic errors of the past can be remedied readily by traditional newsgathering techniques.

Recent content analyses of newspapers, film, radio, and television also indicate slow changes. A comparative study over three decades in four nationally prominent newspapers yielded mixed findings--some improvement, some worsening, and persistently low attention to black issues generally (Martindale, 1990). Similar mixed findings resulted from a study of a midwestern daily newspaper (Pease, 1989). Likewise, lukewarm changes in radio content were noted in cases where minority owners actually had taken control of commercial stations (Schement & Singleton, 1981; Singleton, 1981). Finally, the television industry constitutes the most problematic case of demonstrating the relationship between minority producers and media products. Studies suggest that minority employment and improved content may actually exist in an inverse relationship. For example, Atkin (1992) found that improved minority portrayals on network television "peaked during the 1970s and after 1985," (p. 346) which he attributed to market forces--not employment gains resulting from the civil rights struggle. This attribution is bolstered by studies of television and radio news employment trends that show declining minority employment during the same periods when improved minority portrayals were on the rise (Stone, 1988b).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, both Shafer (1993) and Ziegler & White (1990) present evidence demonstrating that minorities often experience on-the-job

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the Atkin (1992) and Stone (1988b) studies did not examine equivalent data sets. Yet their studies overlap sufficiently to alert scholars to the problematic nature of the relationship between minority producers and actual content.

discrimination that results in the perpetuation of stereotypes of the sort observed by Enema (1990) and reported by the National Association of Black Journalists (Clark, 1993). The relationship between the producer and the product, alas, is not intuitively transparent.

Why don't the typical reform strategies--hiring parity among them--engender satisfactory success in terms of media content? Why aren't mass media celebrating difference, recognizing multiple voices, and expressing many-sided perspectives? We contend that two theoretical streams--political economy and postmodernism--are helpful at beginning to answer these questions.

### *Critique of political economy*

The explanations from political economy offer provocative ways of seeing state-corporate structures and communication technologies as "authors" of programming. Structural mechanisms and numerous relations of production (e.g., concentrated corporate ownership and licensing requirements) prevent media products from being much more than the ideological expressions of the class that controls the media through direct title, sponsorship, or regulation (Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1980). Likewise, political economists note that communication technologies--the hardware itself--stifle and limit potential liberating uses because they emerge from and are embedded in military-industrial contexts.

Commercial and government influences on newsgathering procedures and on Hollywood storylines are well documented, as are market forces and other capital "facts," including industry ownership and integration trends (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Koch, 1990; Parenti, 1986; Schatz, 1993; Schiller, 1989). To put it plainly, media are businesses, beholden, in several industries, to their client advertisers and intimately related to their regulators. This is perhaps most evident in the case of local radio, which has a long history in the United States. One might assume that local control would result in a variety of aesthetics, expressions, and organizations from city to city. Yet, the radio spectrum is configured exactly the same from city to city (market to market) due to concentrated ownership and the paradigm of rationalization (i.e. scientific marketing and programming and economies of scale), with the corporations' national programmers and market researchers actually determining the possibilities and limits of choice.

Political economy also illuminates the limits of subjectivity once individuals enter the dominant media system. Virtually all practitioners--females and ethnic minorities included--but especially those destined to rise into management, are hired and promoted because they conform to the production values, political beliefs, and knowledge claims of the power-brokers of the dominant system:

Those who occupy managerial positions in the media, or gain status within them as commentators, belong to the same privileged elites, and might be expected to share the perceptions, aspirations, and attitudes of their associates reflecting their own class interests, as well. Journalists entering the system are unlikely to make their way unless they conform to these ideological pressures, generally by internalizing the values; it is not easy to say one thing and believe another, and those who fail to conform will tend to be weeded out by familiar mechanisms. (Chomsky, 1989, p. 8)

Meeting affirmative action guidelines seems to be a question of image-management for organizations more than anything else. Real change is thwarted as newly hired women and minorities quite often become incorporated into and coopted by the media elite. As

critic Ed Diamond (1992, in Ramer) commented: "The new boys in the newsroom now include women. But why do the girls act a lot like the boys?" They do so because the fundamental bases for relationships with the people--knowledge, values, beliefs--are not changed.

Political economists also tend to be technological determinists to varying degrees, pointing to inherent elements of technology that determine its use. An extreme line of thinking posits that essential properties, or "biases," of media preclude alternative uses; technologies that master distance, for example, are conducive to empire-building, and in the cultural realm, one can think of an empire of consciousness (Innis, 1951, 1972). Less deterministic thinkers stress that point-to-multipoint configurations, such as broadcasting, locate the power of communication in the area of distribution (Garnham, 1990). Marginalized populations may be gaining access to newly developed inexpensive production technologies, but the configuration of the broadcast distribution system effectively hobbles efforts to communicate on anything but a very small scale. Because of its capital-intensive, network structure, modern broadcast practice cannot be organized in liberating or empowering ways. Rather, it responds to grassroots efforts at self-expression by either shutting out, dominating, or co-opting them (e.g., *America's Funniest Home Videos*).

Following these lines of thinking in the 1990s, the possibilities for democratic and/or grassroots uses of electronic media appear unlikely. Not since the first broadcast networks were founded in the 1920s and 1930s has this country seen such consolidation of broadcast properties and capital as we have today. The conglomerates are pervasive and powerful, their media systems high tech and capital intensive. The expense of competitive technology in a saturated and privileged society makes local origination and control of media unlikely. As people's daily lives become increasingly media-saturated and they are bombarded with all sorts of high-tech wizardry and special effects, low-tech formats will be unable to effect democracy or other social change.

The positions outlined by political economic analysis range from macro factors (social structural/technological criticisms) to micro elements (individual traits in organizations). While this analysis is provocative, it is limited by its dismissal of both textuality and subjectivity. Both of these areas, however, have been usefully theorized in the wide-ranging body of work known as postmodernism. We will now turn to some key notions that have emerged from this body of scholarship.

### *The critique of postmodernism*

At the risk of oversimplification: Postmodernism is a cultural/aesthetic condition and a philosophical paradigm. In the latter sense, Lather (1991) has explained postmodernism as a philosophical expression of "profound uncertainty" over the picture of reality that has held sway in our culture, a picture that has rendered the nature of reality as ordered, progressing linearly (at least in terms of identifying discrete causes of things), and directly accessible if we could only refine our instruments of observation and analysis. The postmodern aesthetic arising from this ontological uncertainty is one marked by fragmentation, multiplicity, and radical pluralism.<sup>2</sup> Media praxis is a site

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<sup>2</sup> The topic of media and postmodernism has generated a plethora of books and articles. We have found Calinescu (1991), Lyotard (1984), and Baudrillard (1983) particularly relevant in thinking about the postmodern narrative.

where the aesthetic and philosophical values engage each other in an exciting way.

The postmodern approach is useful for pointing out that traditional journalistic practice has been constructed out of presuppositions of an existent, stable, ordered, "modern" reality. Unsurprisingly, the experts employed in news and entertainment organizations, the standard production routines (e.g., the beat system), and the resulting products all reflect a white male bias. The case of women in the media workforce illustrates this claim. In the production of entertainment programming, for example, women comprise only about 15 percent of producers, 25 percent of writers, and 9 percent of directors (Steenland, 1991). The few women who have made inroads on the visually-oriented professions are operating in a system and discursive practice which they, for the most part, did not help to create. As CNN anchor Mary Alice Williams said of television news, "Men got in at the birth of television in 1949--women got in en masse in 1971" (Nash, 1989, p. 312). Numerous feminist rhetoricians have suggested the possibility of a feminine communicative approach, which cannot find expression within the male-cast forms (Dobris, 1989; Foss & Foss, 1989). Similar ideas have been theorized about African-American communicative styles (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991). The postmodern position holds that the dominant, modern forms and techniques deployed in commercial media cannot celebrate difference, recognize multiple voices, and express many-sided perspectives.

Furthermore, postmodern textual theories and criticisms demonstrate that the traditional journalistic narrative is antithetical to our contemporary cultural and aesthetic condition. The many problems related to the mediated forms we've come to know and love are important to recognize because, at the very least, textual features play an active, political role in cultural relations of power. Both news and entertainment narratives, for example, represent the logic of controlled time and evolution--a logic that does not mesh with the postmodern ontology (the world is non-linear, discontinuous, indeterminate, cyclical, etc.). News and entertainment narratives as we know them tend toward univocality and an inevitable sense of conclusion, or at least ending. Studies of the symbolic comprehension perpetuated by the practice of journalism, for example, have identified the kinds of narrative modes (Morse, 1986), binary oppositions (Hartley & Montgomery, 1985), metaphors (Nelson, 1990), and ascriptions of authority (Bybee, 1990; Koch, 1990; Rachlin, 1988) characteristic of newswriting. In journalism, writers often resort to reducing complex issues and events to categories of binary oppositions, especially constructs such as us-them, home-foreign (Hartley & Montgomery, 1985). Journalism education traditionally has taught a geometry theory of practice, complete with inverted pyramids and "sides" to a story, as if complex issues could be flipped and manipulated for expert examination. Even the so-called New Journalism of the 1960s featured a style whereby reporters treated "sides" of issues, events, and experiences as if they could be observed and documented without problematizing or raising to a level of consciousness the reporters' own acts of interpretation (Eason, 1984). Complexities, specificities, and discontinuities thought to characterize our postmodern world are glossed over or rendered invisible.

A major point emerging from this perspective is that women and minorities cannot put new content into old forms. Morse's textual analysis, for example, raises a number of dramatic possibilities about how producers generate and construct knowledge. In print journalism, the standard, "objective" approach makes stories seem to come from nowhere, while the profession traditionally has suggested that the subjective mode in news detracts from its validity. Morse notes how the subjective narrator was suppressed

in the mass press, which could also be said of the documentary form. In electronic media, the booming voice-over narration is homogenized (and also disembodied). Traditionally, "the authority of what the reporter has to say is overdetermined by the use of the third-person narrative voice, by his maleness, by his professional role, by the use of statistics (the currently hegemonic way of knowing in contemporary U.S. society)" (Bybee, 1990, p. 211). In cases where subjectivity does enter into play in television, it is reserved for the host or "anchor" or other authorized speakers. The anchor and various stand-up reporters are allowed to look into the camera, and thus are authorized to speak the truth, whereas interview subjects are generally not shot looking at the camera, which undermines their subjective authority.

As we noted, the typical nod to issues of difference would involve creating a news "team" of various minorities that would be poured into these conventional molds. If this is a shift toward the subjective, it is likely a phony shift, since the journalistic form is rigorously structured, and the terms of discourse and the horizon of all possible content are severely constrained.

### Beyond Hiring "Others"

We have argued that the primary strategies used by mainstream media to diversify programming were destined to fail based on what we know theoretically from political economy and postmodernism. Yet we do not want to diminish the importance and urgency of creating openings in the media system that will allow marginalized voices to be heard. In fact, we assume that knowledge and power are inseparable, and that the knowledge/power concept is realized in communication practices (Foucault, 1984). Marginalized discourses should not be overlooked or underutilized, then, as important tools in challenge and resistance efforts (Bybee, 1990). Furthermore, communication technologies can be put to work for social change despite the indelible impression made on them by their industrial origins. As Raymond Williams (1989) explained, there is nothing inherent in a technology that makes it impotent to effect change. "For those who aspire to democracy in public life, our greatest challenge is transforming the media into a tool for democratic change" (Adams & Goldbard, 1990, p.71). The point we are making in this paper, however, is that the traditional means of incorporating "other" voices have served the status quo as they have created the appearance of difference without leading to substantive change. In order to incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse voices into media in a meaningful way, practitioners must attend to the procedures by which programming is constructed. This calls for a shift away from the *whos* and *whats* of programming, toward the *hows* of production.

Important epistemological contributions focusing attention on something called "communication procedures" have come from a variety of scholars. Foucault (1984) is helpful when he focuses on the problem of living with a political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. Social change is "not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault, 1984, pp. 74 - 75). The intellectual, then, is called less to "criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology," but more to ascertain "the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (Foucault, 1984, p. 74). The position of the intellectual may be a dubious one when it comes to social change. However, what Foucault said that is so useful here, is,

simply put: Truth is a system; so change the system.

Freire (1989) contributes to this point by focusing on pedagogical practices, which have clear implications for media practice. He explains that common pedagogical practice perpetuates feelings of inferiority and states of asymmetrical relationships. This status quo is perpetuated by a pedagogy of the oppressed, which is based on a model of transfer or deposit of information (knowledge, facts, understanding) from the oppressor to the oppressed. It is a pedagogy based on an informative practice rather than a communicative practice; at best it might be called "vertical communication" (Beltran, 1980). A pedagogy--and media practice--for freedom and social transformation cannot be based on the transmission of information produced by women and minorities, but must be grounded in democratic communication procedures that respond to cultural differences.

Truly democratic communication practices would facilitate the introduction of multiple perspectives and marginalized voices, what Freire (1989) calls the multicultural "revolution." He describes revolution figuratively as a dialogue, saying, in effect, that a revolution lacking dialogue with those being liberated is merely a casting change, an imposition of a new set of actors over the old, with ordinary people remaining, ultimately, dependent. Therefore, radical structural changes--such as a huge influx of marginalized employees into the media system--are insufficient for accomplishing egalitarian communication practices. No amount of "regime" overhaul will be able to change a person's reality without a corresponding change in the "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1984, P 74).

Communication is the focal point of Freire's pedagogy for liberation. He makes important epistemological claims and recognizes communication as a perpetual sense-making process. For Freire, dialogic discourse is truly communication, that knowledge-generating process by which humans necessarily name their world (and change it). Dialogue is an encounter among many. It does not occur "between those who deny other men [sic] the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression. . . . It must not be a situation where some men name on behalf of others" (Freire, 1989, pp. 76 - 77). If we are to understand our discursive practices as the sites of the production and reproduction of culture in every sense of the word, if we understand that it is through communication that people come to know their world, that it is "only through communication [that] human life hold[s] meaning" (Freire, 1989, p. 63), then we must not fail to ask the questions: "Who speaks? What gets said? Based upon what authority?" (Bybee, 1990). To these questions, we would add the procedural dimension: "How are routine aspects of media products--such as sources, topics, and language--determined?" In other words, what are the procedures by which dialogue is set in motion?

Communication-as-procedure--the systematic focusing on *how* humans make and unmake, reinforce and resist social movements, cultures, and structures communicatively--is not a widespread way of conceptualizing media design, journalistic practice, or human interaction. Within the communication discipline, numerous scholars have proposed a process view of communication phenomena, but few have been able to develop models that move beyond the static rendition offered to our field by Harold Lasswell at mid-century.<sup>3</sup> The focus on process and dynamics, however, has been

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<sup>3</sup> Berlo's (1960) Sender-MessageChannel-Receiver model is the dearest example of this.

theorized usefully by Dervin (1991, 1993) and Dervin and Clark (1989, 1993), on whom we rely in developing the notion of communication-as-procedure.

### Communication-as-Procedure

Communication procedures can be thought of as having three components: human communication *action* being embedded in *situation* and *consequence*. Human communication actions are conceptualized as processes that are grounded in specific contexts, that make and remake social structures (defined broadly as including constructs such as race, class, gender, media institutions, and the like)--which often end up being the target of communication research (as in the case of political economy)--and that derive some sorts of consequences. Consequences should not be misread as "effects," but as outcomes generated with and in a sequence of complexities. Unlike "effects," which are often conceptualized as separate and discrete from "causes," consequences are understood as a part of a dynamic process. Holding onto this entire procedural chain--situation-action-consequence--is posited as a way of centering on communication processes without losing touch of contextual particularities or real-world consequences. It also provides a template for guiding practices aimed at centering on and teasing out differences in media products.

Dervin and Clark (1989) conceptualize communication actions as both iterative behaviors and invented tactics. They argue that these aspects are important for different reasons. Understanding actions as iterative behaviors (repeated communication routines) suggests that communicatings recur in patterns, which help to sustain social structures and forms (Dervin & Clark, 1989). Yet these patterned behaviors were at one time invented in response to situational exigencies demanding attention. Communication procedures, therefore, are not immutable but are subject to modification and reinvention, in addition to blind reinscription and reification.

Dervin (1993) and Dervin and Clark (1989) have suggested that by focusing on human communication action--what they call the "hows" and the "verbs" of communication--researchers can begin to address many of the pitfalls identified by political economists and postmodern theorists. Verbs are posited as standing "in-between" issues such as structure and agency, macro forces and micro processes, hegemony and resistance, rigidity and flexibility. Verbs also constitute the symbolic and material expressions--the communicatings--that deconstruct and reconstruct multiple discourses in both new and old forms. Verbs arise in historically and materially grounded time/space contexts, and they generate a variety of consequences. The situation-action-consequence chain, then, represents the dynamic cycle of communication procedure.

We believe that adopting a procedural template can be useful in strategizing media practices that seek out, honor, and celebrate diversity. We will present a few examples of practice that illustrate this notion of procedures.

### Media Procedures for Diversity

Scholars from around the world are increasingly interested in developing media practices that are governed by democratic procedures that are responsive to issues of

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Even Beltran's metaphor of "horizontal" vs. "vertical" communication immediately renders a static portrait of how communication takes place.

diversity.<sup>4</sup> In the remainder of this paper we will focus on several media practices from Latin America, which has a rich tradition of scholarship focusing on production procedures that place diversity at their center.

The most systematic project to emerge from Latin America and to reflect a procedural approach has been Reyes Matta's attempt to wed studies of the political economy of transnational communication to journalistic practice (1983, 1986a, 1986c). Transnationalization of communication has acted as an informative, contextual backdrop on which he has placed questions of journalistic practice, including: (a) What forms of organization, production, and participation lead to structural change? and (b) What communication forms provide efficiency and efficacy in transforming society? (Reyes Matta, 1983).

Even though this work foregrounds the transnational context, what emerges as most powerful is the push toward understanding the forms--the hows--of communication. This direction shines in Reyes Matta's analysis of alternative projects and his recommendations for future research:

It could be promising to analyze the *ways* in which this project [a micromedia project in Peru] *acts* in turn with the concrete reality of those it wants to awaken; to examine through which *methodology* a self-renewing communication process can be effected within a popular, social dimension [emphasis added]. (1986a, p. 367)

Placing communication ways, acts, and methodologies at the center indicated a reach toward understanding the range of communication procedures in a specific media practice.

Furthermore, Reyes Matta's work calling for a renewed journalistic practice has focused on procedural aspects of how news sources and article language are selected (1986b, 1986c; Collyer, 1986). For example, he suggested that journalists should seek diversity in choosing words and naming reality to avoid language determined by bureaucracies (such as the Associated Press and other stylebooks) and to steer away from dogmatism in the use of terms. In choosing news sources, journalists should introduce new actors such as women, youth, urban popular organizations, unions, and guilds. Reyes Matta's work has emphasized the importance of youth, and this indicates that these procedures should also be relevant to the context in which they operate. "This is where journalism's constant theme appears: ways of making the news, modes of making information" (1986c, p. 30).

In addition to Reyes Matta, scholars focusing on communication as social praxis (i.e., communication projects working in tandem with unions, women's groups, or other popular organizations) have identified procedures that can be used within existing structures to facilitate marginalized discourses. Numerous empirical studies have documented clear examples of communication procedures that accommodate multiple perspectives (Alfonso, 1983; Kaplun, 1986; Lozada & Kuncar, 1983, 1986; Pareja Herrera, 1987; Schulein & Robina, 1983; Unidad, 1986; Valdeavellano, 1989a & b). Rather than listing all of the activities that illustrate the procedural aspect of communication, we will focus on two examples that illustrate this concept most clearly.

The first example is a practice known as *video registro*, where camcorders are

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<sup>4</sup> A list of individual studies is wide-ranging and too numerous to review in this paper. A sampling of this research is included in recent collections such as Dowmunt (1993), Girard (1992), Schneider & Wallis (1988), and Thede & Ambrosi (1991).

used with popular education organizations that videotape small group meetings and then replay the tapes to the group at the conclusion of its meeting (Valdeavellano, 1989a). The author found that this procedure (immediately replaying events) produced several results: (a) it unleashed reactions favorable to bringing to consciousness the problem or struggle under study; (b) it generated a more integrated vision of the collective action necessary to transform social conditions; and (c) it demystified the medium, opening up video as a popular tool (p. 109). Replaying a meeting appeared to be a valuable procedure in unleashing important, multiple experiences and perspectives that exposed issues, clarified problems, and reinforced goals.

A second example that illustrates procedural aspects of communication is from the Bolivian tin miners' radio literature. Research on several miners' radio stations indicates that popular participation is intensified in times of crisis, such as during military coups (Lopez Vigil, 1984; Lozada & Kuncar, 1983, 1986). Two participatory procedures developed during military crises were the emergent speaker (*parlante emergente*) and chain broadcasting between stations. Both practices emerged in response to the closing down of information resources and networks by the military.

The emergent speaker was basically an open microphone policy at stations, which incorporated the testimonials of people who shared anecdotes, feelings, and inspirations in the face of coercion. Chain broadcasting linked emergent speakers through the use of rudimentary equipment. Stations created information chains by having one radio station tune in the signal of its nearest miners' station on a portable radio receiver. The station then held the appliance next to the broadcast microphone, which retransmitted and boosted the signal to a more distant station, which repeated the process. This technological procedure of chaining contained human communication procedures, such as connecting with other listeners, sharing information, building solidarity, multiplying experiences, and opening one's air space to another. These practices have been described in detail but have never been conceptualized as procedures that might be used in other places with completely different substantive form (Gumucio Dagron, 1989a, 1989b; Lopez Vigil, 1984; Lozada & Kuncar, 1983, 1986).

What these different exemplars demonstrate is that practitioners can move within institutions in ways that do not extend power, reproduce subordination, nor replicate oppressive forms. What they all have in common is an intuitive understanding that media practice is accomplished via many procedures that can be informed and guided by notions of diversity and inclusion. An increased awareness that media practice is implemented procedurally can result in programming that is responsive to the persistent criticisms of a narrow and homogeneous mainstream media.

### Conclusion

Scholars who are interested in reforming media practice regarding the treatment of women and minorities have ample reasons to rethink the traditional strategies for change advanced by advocates. Neither empirical studies nor theoretical contributions justifies the singular fixation on increasing the number of women and minorities working within the industry as a remedy for inadequate and unfair media portrayals. The preceding review of both empirical and theoretical literatures suggests that scholars not only question traditional reform strategies, but it demands that we reconceptualize the problem plaguing mainstream media in the United States. The central theoretical challenge facing the media is not incorporating marginalized actors but of dealing with

social and cultural realities characterized by difference.

Reconceptualizing the challenge of pluralism as noted above necessitates a refocusing away from the *whos* and *whats* of media production toward the *hows* of everyday practice. Such a refocusing does not demand the abandonment of industry head counts (i.e., how many blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans are working in newsrooms and appearing in products), but it does suggest that a more rigorous dimension be added to industry evaluations. That is, media reformers should begin asking whether or not media outlets implement pluralistic production procedures in the assignment, development, presentation, and evaluation of products. It is not enough to point to female and minority writers, editors, and directors. Rather, media scholars should question whether or not the incorporation of women and minorities results in placing the notion of difference at the center of production.

We have tried to demonstrate the practices and consequences of media productions that place difference at their center through the presentation of specific exemplars. Reyes Matta does this by emphasizing both local and global contexts in evaluating and determining media topics, language, and sources. His is a journalistic project marked by diversity of perspectives, intense participation, and efficacious forms in terms of effecting social change. Valdeavellano does this when she introduces video techniques that operate heuristically to spark ideas and encourage collective action. Finally, Bolivian tin miners' radio practice does this when they take portable equipment to public spaces where they facilitate "emergent" speakers.

All of these practices suggest, not an abandonment of traditional reform strategies, but an expansion of them. Media reformers should continue to monitor the status of women and minorities in the workplace, but they should also begin evaluating media products along the lines of the criteria suggested by the exemplars noted above. This heralds a significant shift away from criteria that attempt to compare media representations with the truth or stable reality. More suitable criteria by which to judge media practices would be notions of multiplicity, fragmentation, variety, self-generation, and flexibility. Postmodern or poststructural media will succeed at dealing with social and cultural realities marked by difference not by trying to accurately portray those realities, but by adopting procedures that actively seek out and construct multiple perspectives, diverse realities, and a variety of truths. Such media practices represent both a radical departure from news and entertainment production routines as we know them and a turn away from the reform strategies that accompany them.

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